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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE SELECTED TRIBAL POPULATION

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ABSTRACT

The Adivasis (original inhabitants) is the collective name used for the many tribal peoples of India. The number of main Scheduled Castes has increased from 1221 to 1241 and the number of main Scheduled Tribes from 664 to 705 during the last decade. The term 'tribe' means a group of people who have lived at a particular place from time immemorial. India is home to a large number of tribes with population of about 84.4 million. Tamil Nadu constitutes one percent of total India's tribal population. One of the largest tribes in Tamil Nadu is Irular, they are Dravidian tribe found in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra (Chittoor) and Karnataka. The word 'Irular' derived from Tamil word called "Irul" which means 'darkness'. 'Irular' means those who are in darkness. Curly hair and dark complexion is their prominent feature. Now there are only 23,116 Irula households in Tamil Nadu (Census, 2011). The maximum tribe settlements are found at the foot hills of Tholampalayam Panchayat of Karamadai block which is 51 kilometres away from Coimbatore and at an altitude of 372 meters above mean sea level were selected for the study. To study the socio-economic profile out of 19 tribal settlements 12 tribal settlements which are easy to reach and convenience were selected. Among the 12 tribal settlements all the 705 tribal families with a total population of 2665 from Tholampalayam Panchayat, Karamadai Block, Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu State were selected. The socio-economic profile of 705 families of Irula tribes were collected using a well framed interview schedule. The details related to age and gender, religion, type of family, size of the family, educational status of the family members, occupational status of the families, monthly income, basic amenities and facilities available for the selected tribal families, mean monthly expenditure pattern and on kitchen garden, vaccination, medical facility and hygiene were studied. The sex ratio is 950 female / 1000 males, out of 705 tribal families 88 percent were Hindus and only nine percent were Christians and three percent were Muslims. Joint family were of 11 percent and 89 percent were nuclear family. Medium size family with 4-6 members were of 51 percent. Literacy level is low and majority of the respondents adopted farming and labour as their occupation.

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INTRODUCTION

India being the second largest tribal dominated area after Africa is one of the most fascinating Nations of World from anthropological point of view. According to the 2011 census the tribal populations group form 11.3 percent of the nation's total population in rural (9,38,19,162) and in urban 2.8 percent (1,04,61,872). India is the home to large number of indigenous people, who are still untouched by the lifestyle of the modern world. With more than 84.4 million. These tribal people also known as the adivasi's are the poorest in the country, who are still dependent on hunting, agriculture and fishing and have their own culture, tradition, language and lifestyle (www.ecoindia.com/tribes).

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Constitutionally a tribe is he who has been mentioned in the schedule list of Indian constitution under Article 342(i) and 342(ii) (The Constitution of India, 2012). Over time, unlike the terms "aborigines or "tribes", the word "adivasi" has developed a connotation of past autonomy which has disrupted during the British colonial period in India and has not been restored (Louise Waite, 2008). Tamil Nadu constitutes 1% of total India's tribal population. One of the largest tribes in Tamil Nadu is Irular, they are dravidian tribe found in the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala Andhara (Chittoor) and Karnataka. The word 'Irular' derived from Tamil word called "Irul" which means 'darkness'. 'Irular' means those who are in darkness. Curly hair and dark complexion is their prominent feature. Irulars speak Tamil dialect. They are socially, economically and politically backward. Their socio-economic living conditions have been marked by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and lack of social and economic security. They struggle hard for their bare necessities. Since most of them are illiterate they

have not been able to come out of pathetic living conditions. Overall the living conditions of Irulars are unstable and pitiable. It is of great importance to find out the major cause for their under development. According to Tamilnadu government there were 36 identified tribal communities; Irulars form the largest tribal group. Total population of Scheduled Tribes in Tamilnadu is about 6.5 lacs in 2001. There is decrease trend in population of the Irula tribes. Now there are only 23,116 Irula households in Tamil Nadu (Census, 2011). Irulars were mainly concentrated in north-eastern part of Tamilnadu— Chengalpattu, Kanchipuram, Thiruvannamalai, Thiruvallur and Villupuram district. Beside Salem and Dharmapuri, few Irula found in Western Ghats of Nilgiri hills; art, music, dance and religion are essential parts of their lives. These Irulars were adept in handling snakes and work as guides in the forest. Early 20th century anthropological literature classified the Irulas under the Negrito ethnic group.

The Irular, scheduled tribal community of south India has been facing several socio-economic problems since last two decades. Earlier the Irula tribes were hunters and they have known for their special expertise in snake trapping. They earned their livelihood by catching the snake, snare, rats, selling firewood, honey and its bee wax. Indian Government banned the export of snake skins in 1976, under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 due to that Irula tribe lost a major source of income and their occupational life has been affected and they forced to work as agriculture 'coolie'. Their life-style is slowly changing from their original forest dweller existence to the mainstream. Jahanara (2008) reported that 73 percent of Irula tribes in Pondicherry live in below poverty line, less than one-third were of lower socio-economic status, three percent were belong to middle socio-economic status. 83 percent were illiterate, five percent middle and primary school respectively, two percent high school and only one percent completed intermediate.

One important characteristics is that wherever they live, they are at the bottom of economic and social ladders, they are among the disadvantage groups in any society and are the poorest, most marginalised, oppressed and deprived people in the country (Scaria *et al.*, 2010). It is in this context, an attempt was made to study the 'Socio-Economic Profile of the Selected Tribal Population'.

Objectives: To

- Study the living conditions of the Irula tribes
- Find out the housing conditions, family, occupational, economic, community and social life.

Methodology

Selection of venue and sample

A multi-stage sample is one in which sampling is done sequentially across two or more hierarchical levels such as first at the country level, second at the census track level, third at the block level, fourth at the household level and ultimately at the within-household level (www.srmo.sagepub.com/view/encyclopedia-of-survey-research.../n3111.xml). In selecting the venue multistage sampling method was followed.

In the first stage, Tamil Nadu, second stage district level Coimbatore, third stage block level Karamadai, fourth stage Panchayat level Tholampalayam and finally at fifth stage out of 19 tribal settlements 12 tribal settlements which had easy access and convenience were selected. Coimbatore District in Tamil Nadu geographically occupied by hilly areas and popularly known as "Manchester of South India" was chosen as the area for conduct of the study. Coimbatore is the district head-quarters of Coimbatore district. It is one of the largest cities in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring state of Kerala, named after the Rishi Koyam Pattur as Coimbatore and holds the fourth highest population of Irula today. The maximum tribe settlements are found at the foot hills of Tholampalayam Panchayat of Karamadai block which is 51 kilometre away from Coimbatore and at an altitude of 372 meters above mean sea level were selected for the study.

According to Khan (2008) sampling method is the process or method of drawing definite number of individuals, cases or observations from a particular universe, selecting part of a total group for investigation. When dealing with people, it can be defined as a set of respondents (people) selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey. Mode of transport by road was accessible only for few settlements but for other settlements, it was only by walking through narrow passages. Tribal personnel in the settlements were accompanied to have a proper and better rapport, communication and to study the situation effectively. A census is the procedure of systematic acquiring and recording information about the members of a given population and it is a regularly occurring and official count of a particular population. Sometimes the entire population will be sufficiently small, the researcher can include the entire population in the study (<http://www.statpac.com/surveys/sampling.htm>).

Among the 12 tribal settlements all the 705 tribal families with a total population of 2665 from Tholampalayam Panchayat, Karamadai Block, Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu State were selected by following census method. The name of the selected settlements and number of families in each settlements were Neelampathi (71), Gopnari (59), Seenguli (92), Anakadavu (46), Uggayanur (58), Kuliur (41), Ukkapathi (55), Alankandi Pudur (37), Colony pudur (78), Senguttai (59), Mortiyur (55), Alankandi (54).

Collection of data

The purpose of data collection is to obtain information to keep record, to make decisions about important issues and to pass information on to others. Primarily, data is collected to provide information regarding the specific topic (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). A schedule may be defined as a proforma that contains a set of questions which are asked and filled by an interviewer in a face to face situation with another. It is a standardised devise or tool of observation to collect the data in an objective manner (Depak, 2006). The background information of 705 families of irula tribes there were of total 2665 members in which 59 infants (0-1 year), 72 pregnant and nursing mothers and 161 elderly (above 60 years of age) were excluded from the study group. Thus the number of subjects selected for the study were 2373.

Socio-economic profile

A pretested, structured interview schedule designed by the investigator was used as a tool for the conduct of the study at tribal settlements. Personal interviews are those in which an interviewer obtains information from respondents in the face to face contact and is generally filled out by the research worker or enumerator who can interpret questions when necessary. The information obtained by this method is likely to become more accurate because the interviewer can clear up doubts, cross examine the information and thereby obtain correct information (Kothari, 2004 and Gupta, 2007). Thus by direct household interview and by observation, demographic and socio economic particulars like age and gender, religion, type of family, size of the family, educational status of the family members, occupational status of the families, monthly income, basic amenities and facilities available for the selected tribal families, mean monthly expenditure pattern and on kitchen garden, vaccination, medical facility and hygiene were elicited.

Analysis of data

Data are the basic input to any decisions making process. The process of data gives statistics of importance of the study. After data are collected, proper tools and techniques should be used for classification and analysis of data (Ader, 2008). Data collected were classified, tabulated and analysed and the results were interpreted.

RESULTS

A. Socio-economic Profile of the Selected Tribal Population

The tribal population is an integral part of India's socio fabric. The socio and economic profile of the tribal population will facilitate to promote them and bring them in the mainstream of the nations. In all the dispersal areas, scheduled tribes constitute less than one per cent of the general population in their respective districts (Soundarapandian, 2004). The main tribes in Tamil Nadu are Toda, Kurumba, Paniya, Irular, Kattunayakkan, Kanikar, Palaiyan, Sholagar, Kadar, Veddar of which Toda, Kurumba, Kattunaikkar, Paniya and Irular are primitive tribes (Thirunavukkarasu, 2006). So the details related to age and gender, religion, type of family, size of the family, educational status of the family members, occupational status of the families, monthly income, basic amenities and facilities available for the selected tribal families, mean monthly expenditure pattern and on kitchen garden, vaccination, medical facility and hygiene were studied and presented below.

Age and gender

The selected subjects were grouped under various stages of life, age and gender and the details are shown in Table I. Among the 705 tribal families the total population was 2665 in which 292 subjects belonging to infants, pregnant and nursing mothers and elderly were excluded, as a result the number of study population was 2373. Socio-economic survey evinced that among the population, young adults were predominant with 21 per cent each male and female which is followed by

adults with 17 and 14 per cent male and female subjects respectively. Similar percent of children and adolescent group comprised of six each both in male and female group were observed. Preschool children were minimum proportion with 1.6 per cent each male and female. On the whole the population of children and adolescents were only 12 per cent each. The gender status among the 2373 selected subjects revealed that 51 per cent were male and the rest 49 per cent were female. It shows that both the gender were more or less in equal proportion among tribes which is similar to the study reported by Chakma *et al.* (2009).

Table I. Age and Genderwise Distribution of the Selected Subjects

Stage	Age group (years)	(N:2373)			
		Male		Female	
		N	%	N	%
Preschool children	1-3	40	2	38	2
	4-6	38	2	27	1
School children	7-9	53	2	53	2
	10-12	62	3	59	2
	13-15	68	3	58	2
Adolescents	16-18	59	2	88	4
	19-30	280	12	277	12
Young adults	31-40	219	9	232	10
	41-50	221	9	235	10
	51-60	177	7	89	4

Type of family

It is found that 11 percent of the subjects belonged to joint family and 89 percent were of nuclear family. Swastik (2011) opines that the factors responsible for the disintegration of joint family in India are rapid industrialization, impact of western culture and civilization, enlighten of women and impact of new social legislation.

Size of the family

Fifty one percent of the families had medium size family with 4-6 members and more than one fourth had small family size with 1-3 members. Since the nuclear type of family is identified among 79 per cent of tribal families, size of the family of 79 per cent was not exceeded 6 members. It is confined with the study of Parimalavalli (2012) who stated that 93 percent had a family size of 2-7 members.

Educational status of the family members

Realising the need to improve the overall status of tribals, as a basic component of human development free education is offered to tribes. Educational status of the selected subjects is presented in Table II. It is clear that 10 percent of males and 8 percent of females completed their primary education level, 8 percent and 6 percent of males and females respectively completed their sixth and ninth standard at school level. Tenth standard school education was completed by three percent of both male and female children. Illiteracy was noted among 28 percent and 29 percent of males and females respectively. Selected tribals were found to be low literates which indicate a need for more holistic support for higher education. Verma *et al.* (2008) reviewed that in India against 51.7 percent of literacy rate among the general population, the literates are

only 29.6 percent in tribal community. Also the literacy rate is still lower at 18.9 percent among tribal women.

Table II. Educational Status of the Family Members
(N:2373)

Educational status	Male (N:1217)		Female (N:1156)	
	N	%	N	%
Illiterate	657	28	677	29
1 st -5 th Standard	226	10	179	8
6 th -9 th Standard	190	8	146	6
10 th Standard	86	4	74	3
12 th Standard	42	2	70	3
College	16	1	10	1

Occupational status of the families

It is true that widespread illiteracy exists among tribal population, since the educational attainment of tribes were limited to school level, their employment status is limited to labour level. So occupational status of both male and female subjects are projected in Table III.

Table III. Occupational Status of the Families

N=1730

Occupation	Male (N:897)		Female (N:833)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agricultural Labour	230	26	262	31
Carpenter	78	9	—	—
Mason	65	7	—	—
Electrician	91	10	—	—
Fitter	37	4	—	—
Coolie	168	19	117	14
Driver	58	6	—	—
Industrial Labour	68	8	—	—
Brick klin workers	44	5	—	—
Fire wood collection	—	—	280	34
Household maid	—	—	28	3
Animal husbandry				
Cattle	256	37	58	6
Goat	171	24	146	18
Sheep	62	7	78	9
Cocks	127	18	—	—
Duck	151	21	82	10

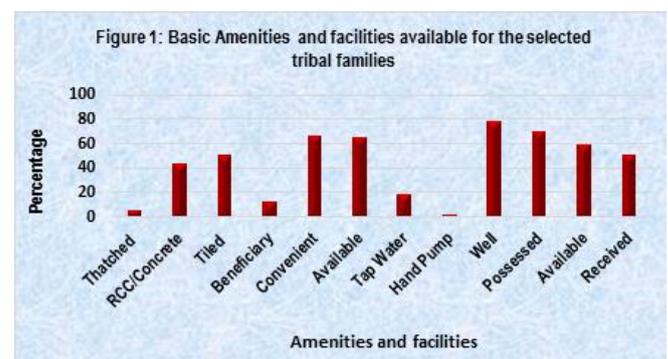
All the 705 families were doing animal husbandry in which 37 percent had cow, 24 percent had goat and none of the families had pigs. With regard to birds, 21 percent had ducks and only 18 percent had cocks. These facilitated them to add income for their living. Male occupational status of tribal families showed that 26 percent were agricultural labourers, 19 percent of males were coolies, while 10 percent tribal families were employed as electrician. Less than eight percent were involved in building construction and as labourers in industries. Kodavanti *et al.* (2006) stated that as tribal economy is predominantly agriculture, majority of tribals were agriculture cultivators or labourers. This is in tune with the present study. Since the income of male family partner is insufficient to support the family, female sought for a job. It is evident that 34 percent of females involved in collection of firewood and 31 percent engaged in agricultural work. Besides this, they were coolies involved in daily wages and household maids. This result is confined with the findings of Rekha *et al.* (2006) and Riji (2008) in which majority of the respondents adopted farming and labour as secondary occupation.

Monthly Income of the families

It can be inferred that major population of tribes engaged as labour in agriculture, industry and household work, their minimum and maximum income ranged between less than `1000 and 5000. This kind of work for both male and female may be regarded as crucial for their survival. Majority of 64 percent of the families had an income range of `1001-2500 per month. The low literacy level and the type of job among the tribes accounted for low income. The community with low literacy and low level of work participation recorded low economic status as per Roy (2012). This trend was noticed in the present study also.

Basic amenities and facilities available for the selected tribal families

Safe shelter was available for all the families, except five percent who had thatched house. It is observed that half of the families had tiled house and 44 percent had RCC/concrete house. Patta land was possessed by 13 percent of the tribal families. Investigation of various housing characteristics of Santhals suggests that majority of them (97%) own single storied Kaccha (House build up of straw and mud, instead of cement and brick). Only few can afford to have pucca (when house is built up of cement and brick) – single storied (2.2%) or pucca-double storied houses (0.8%). Most of the houses have a room and kitchen (79%). Sometimes, when they donot have a separate kitchen, they use the space outside their living room (14.7%) or a corner inside their living room (6.3%) for cooking purposes (Deka, 2011) Out of 12 selected settlements, eight settlements constituting 67 percent of families had road facility. It is encouraging to observe that electricity was available for 65 percent. Health care centre facility was available at all the selected settlements (100%). It is very clear that basic need of drinking water was available for all, in which 79 percent had the well water, 19 percent had water facility through water tap and two percent collected drinking water from hand pump. Ration card was possessed by 70 percent which can be used for their livelihood. More than 50 percent were facilitated with voters and tribal ID card.

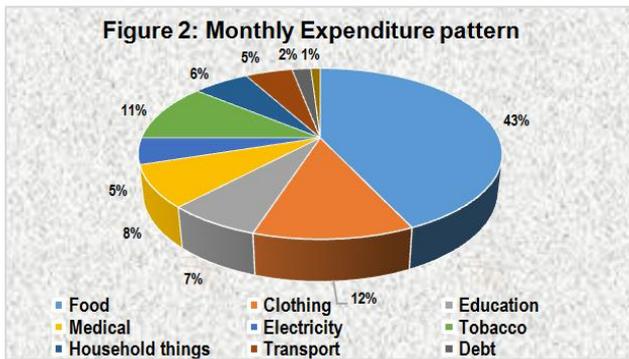


Mean monthly expenditure pattern

Table IV and Figure 2 depicts the mean monthly expenditure pattern of the selected families. Lower the income higher the percent of income spent on food. It is vivid that maximum of 43 percent of the income was spent on food. Followed by this 12 percent and 11 percent of income were spent on clothing and tobacco.

Table IV. Mean Monthly Expenditure Pattern of the Selected Families
(N: 705 families)

Criteria	Mean expenditure (₹)	Percent
Food	877	43
Clothing	239	12
Education	144	7
Medical	156	8
Electricity	138	5
Tobacco	218	11
Household things	124	6
Transport	105	5
Debt	45	2
Savings	10	1



Though education and medical services are free of cost, seven percent had a mean expense of ₹144 towards education. One percent of the family had the habit of saving while two percent paid ₹45/- per month towards debt. It is a common practice to note that tobacco was used by 11 percent who had been spent ₹218/- per month.

Kitchen garden

The housing condition was really very poor and the area of the houses was also very small where they could not have the separate space of kitchen garden. Only countable number of families had space for kitchen garden. Nine percent of the families had kitchen garden and the remaining 91 percent families did not raise kitchen garden. Those who had kitchen garden produced coriander leaves, green chillies, tomato, greens and brinjal and used themselves. With the help of organic farming experts, community leaders and volunteers, training may be arranged to local tribes to start up small vegetable / fruit garden in their house premises.

Vaccination, medical facilities and hygiene

With regard to vaccination 31 percent had the vaccination whereas 69 percent were not vaccinated and also benefits of educational programme was availed by only 38 percent of the total families. Lack of medical facility is another problem for them. The poor tribals do not get food regularly so they fall sick. The tribals are deprived of all these basic needs. Due to mosquitoes bites, skin diseases, jaundice, natural calamities, they suffer and to not get any treatment on time. Hygiene problem is very common in tribal areas. Due to unhygienic conditions their children suffer from many diseases like measles, mumps, polio, tetanus and whooping cough. This is in tune with the study conducted by Deka (2011). Prevention of

disease is an important part of medical care. Parents should make sure that their children receive immunization against diphtheria, German measles, measles, mumps, polio, tetanus and whooping cough. But tribal parents are ignorant of these things.

Conclusion

Thus it can be concluded that the socio-economic status of Irula tribes calls for concern. The Irular schedule tribe community of South India has been facing several socio-economic problems since last two decades. This is due to poverty, illiteracy and poor occupational living conditions and also backwardness of Irulas. Suitable rehabilitation programmes can be organized in order to improve the socio economic status of the Irula tribes.

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