

Status of Tribal Women in Tamil Nadu, India

V. Karthihai Selvi¹ and Muthupandi²

¹Assistant Professor of Commerce, ²Project Assistant, ICSSR-IMPRESS Project
^{1&2}Ayya Nadar Janaki Ammal College (Autonomous), Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, India
E-mail: smpanjac@gmail.com

(Received 22 January 2021; Revised 13 January 2021; Accepted 19 February 2021; Available online 28 February 2021)

Abstract - In Tamil Nadu, there are six tribal communities according to the Tamil Nadu forest department website, namely, Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irulur, Paniyan and Kattunayakan. They are identified as Primitive Tribal Communities. These six tribal groups are natives to the Nilgiris. The members of this community are short, have black skin, and have protruding foreheads. They are hunting and collecting forest produce for their means of living. They usually never mix with other tribal groups. They still follow black magic and sorcery. They speak mixture of Dravidian languages. Kattunayakans are experts in collecting honey. The Paniyas worked as agricultural labourers. The Paniyas have only a crude idea of religion. They worship deity 'Kali' and banyan tree. They speak Paniya language, which belongs to the Dravidian family. They used to marry more than one woman provided if they can afford them. Another tribes, Irulas are collecting minor forest products. Some of them are also involved in looking after the cattles of others. They speak Irula, which belongs to the Dravidian family. Irulas are involved in healing practices and they are specialists in traditional herbal medicines. Traditionally, Irulas involved in snake and rat catching. Education and economic empowerment of tribal women can be measured through the power they have over financial resources to earn income and their per capita income, access to education, access and availability of professional opportunities and participation in economic decision making and their access to political opportunities. In Tamil Nadu, nearly 50% of the tribal population are illiterate. Among the literate groups, women constitute more percentage compared to men. This shows the positive turn towards the efforts on tribal women education. But efforts must be taken to make the entire population literate. Hence, it is essential for the central and state governments to concentrate their efforts more towards the illiterate group of the tribal population for ensuring overall development of the economy.

Keywords: Tribal Women, Tribal Population, Tamil Nadu

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the State has been divided into five physiographic divisions, Kurinji (mountainous area), Mullai (forest), Palai (arid zone), Marudham (fertile region) and Neidhai (coastal area). Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu separate the state with Kerala State and Eastern Ghats of low rocky hills. In Tamil Nadu, Jawadhu hills, the Elagiri hills, the Kalrayan hills, the Pachamalai hills, Kollimalai, the Yercaud hills, the Anamalais, the Sitteri hills, the Palani hills, Elamalai and the Varshanad hills are popular. Cauvery river flows through the State and other major rivers are Palar, Pennar, Vaigai and Tamiraparani [1]. As per the

constitution of the country all including tribal women are having equality. Tribal women play an important role in their social and economic aspects in their society and they are treated as an important economic asset of the society. Though they play an important role in their society, compared to other sectors of the society they are still lagging behind them in various aspects like, education, employment and empowerment etc.

Tribal women contribute equally with tribal men in all kinds of work participation in forests, fields, markets and others. But regarding all monetary and non monetary benefits, tribal women are subject to discrimination compared to tribal men. Communication media have also neglected the tribal women due to several reasons in the post-independence era in India [2].

In Tamil Nadu, there are six tribal communities according to the Tamil Nadu forest department website, namely, Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irulur, Paniyan and Kattunayakan. They are identified as Primitive Tribal Communities. These six tribal groups are natives to the Nilgiris. The members of this community are short, have black skin, and have protruding foreheads. They are hunting and collecting forest produce for their means of living. They usually never mix with other tribal groups. They still follow black magic and sorcery. They speak mixture of Dravidian languages. Kattunayakans are experts in collecting honey.

The Paniyas worked as agricultural labourers. The Paniyas have only a crude idea of religion. They worship deity 'Kali' and banyan tree. They speak Paniya language, which belongs to the Dravidian family. They used to marry more than one woman provided if they can afford them. Another tribes, Irulas are collecting minor forest products. Some of them are also involved in looking after the cattles of others. They speak Irula, which belongs to the Dravidian family. Irulas are involved in healing practices and they are specialists in traditional herbal medicines. Traditionally, Irulas involved in snake and rat catching.

Food gathering like honey and forest produce is the traditional occupation of Kurumbas. Kurumbas are known to possess keen eyesight, gained possibly from constant watching of the honey bee to the hives. They used to involve themselves in hunting by using bow and arrow. Kurumbas are specialists in doing painting and black magic.

Kotas are blacksmiths by profession and they are also making agriculture equipment and weapons for war. Kotas speak a unique language which is also belonging to Dravidian language family. Kotas worship fire, moon and peepal tree. Kotas are mastery in pottery and carpentry [3].

The Todas are fair skinned, ruddy with constant exposure to sunny to rainy weather. They are featured with light eye colored varying from brown to grey. The Toda language

also belongs to the Dravidian family. They are traditionally pastoralists and are mastered in embroidery.

II. TRIBAL POPULATION IN TAMIL NADU

In the previous section, the details of tribal population of the country were discussed. Here the tribal population in the state of Tamil Nadu is analysed. Table I shows the details of district wise tribal population in Tamil Nadu.

TABLE I DISTRICT WISE TRIBAL POPULATION OF TAMIL NADU

Sl. No.	Districts	Total	Male	Female
	India	104,281,034	52,409,823	51,871,211
	Tamil Nadu	794,697	401,068	393,629
1	Thiruvallur	47,243	23,692	23,551
2	Chennai	10,061	5,207	4,854
3	Kancheepuram	41,210	20,605	20,605
4	Vellore	72,955	36,663	36,292
5	Thiruvannamalai	74,859	37,570	37,289
6	Viluppuram	15,702	7,943	7,759
7	Salem	90,954	45,956	44,998
8	Namakkal	119,369	60,489	58,880
9	Erode	57,059	29,383	27,676
10	The Nilgiris	63,044	32,130	30,914
11	Dindigul	21,880	11,024	10,856
12	Karur	28,342	14,245	14,097
13	Tiruchirappalli	32,813	16,091	16,722
14	Perambalur	3,561	1,739	1,822
15	Ariyalur	3,756	1,847	1,909
16	Cuddalore	3,034	1,466	1,568
17	Nagapattinam	18,198	9,414	8,784
18	Thiruvarur	575	297	278
19	Thanjavur	2,584	1,292	1,292
20	Pudukkottai	1,283	647	636
21	Sivaganga	11,096	5,622	5,474
22	Madurai	1,835	954	881
23	Theni	8,064	4,095	3,969
24	Virudhunagar	1,105	559	546
25	Ramanathapuram	2,294	1,182	1,112
26	Thoothukkudi	790	394	396
27	Tirunelveli	10,270	5,109	5,161
28	Kanniyakumari	4,911	2,466	2,445
29	Dharmapuri	7,282	3,554	3,728
30	Krishnagiri	22,388	11,419	10,969
31	Coimbatore	10,722	5,274	5,448
32	Tiruppur	5,458	2,740	2,718

Source: Census India 2011

From Table I, it is revealed that the tribal population is high in the districts of Namakkal (1,19,369), Salem (90,954), Thiruvannamalai (74,859), Vellore (72,955), The Nilgiris (63,044), Erode (57,059), Thiruvallur (47, 243) and Kancheepuram (41,210). It is also revealed that tribal population is very low in the districts of Thiruvallur (575), followed by Thoothukudi (790). It is further noted that tribal

women population also follows the same order. It is high in the districts of Namakkal, Salem, Thiruvannamalai, Vellore, The Nilgiris, Erode, Thiruvallur and Kancheepuram. Tribal women population is low in the districts of Thiruvallur and Thoothukudi as compared to other districts of Tamil Nadu. The details of high populated districts of Tamil Nadu in terms of tribals are depicted in the following figure.

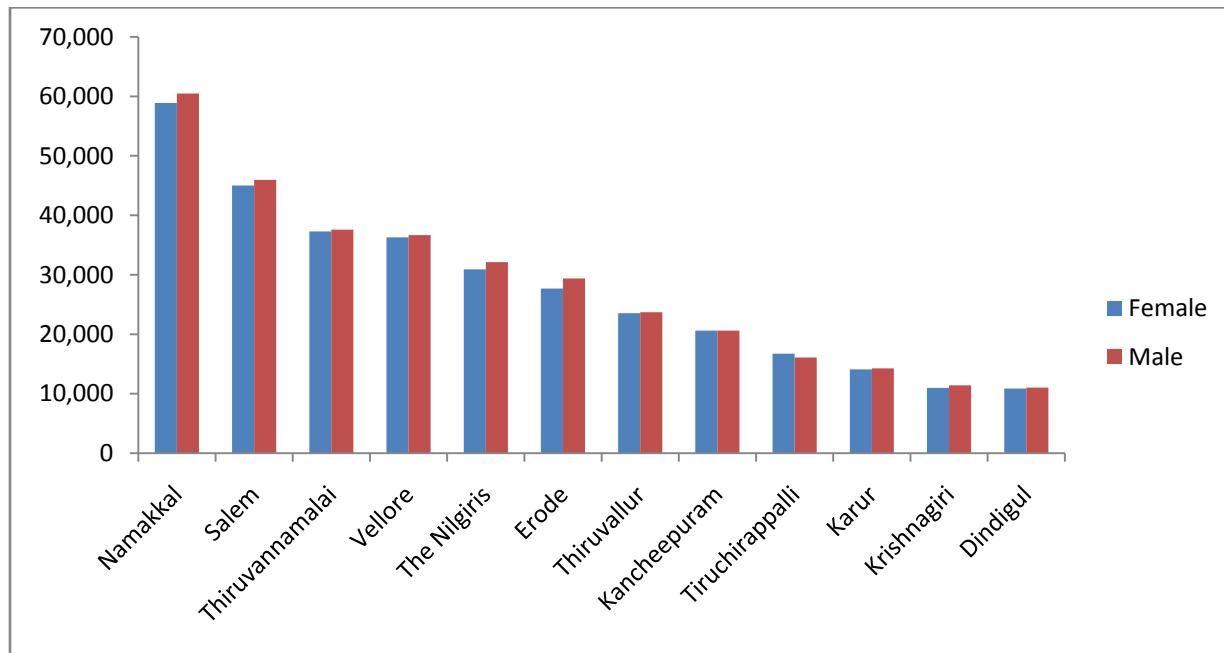


Fig. 1 Tribal Population in Tamil Nadu

III. SCHEDULED TRIBES IN TAMIL NADU

The following is the list of different categories of scheduled tribes in Tamil Nadu.

1. Adiyar
2. Aranadan
3. Eravallan
4. Irular
5. Kadar
6. Kammara (excluding Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) (c)
7. Kanikaran, Kanikkar (in Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) (a)
8. Kaniyan, Kanyan
9. Kattunayakan
10. Kochu Velan
11. Konda Kapus
12. Kondareddis
13. Koraga
14. Kota (excluding Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) (c)
15. Kudiya, Melakudi
16. Kurichchan
17. Kurumbas (in the Nilgiris district) (b)
18. Kurumans
19. Maha Malasar
20. Malai Arayan
21. Malai Pandaram
22. Malai Vedan
23. Malakkuravan
24. Malasar
25. Malayali (in Dharmapuri, North Arcot, Pudukottai, Salem, South Arcot and Tiruchirappalli districts) (d)
26. Malayekandi
27. Mannan
28. Mudugar, Muduvan
29. Muthuvan
30. Palleyan
31. Palliyan
32. Palliyar
33. Paniyan
34. Sholaga
35. Toda (excluding Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) (c)
36. Uraly

IV. TRIBE WISE POPULATION IN TAMIL NADU

According to the 2011 census, Table II shows the details of tribe wise population in Tamil Nadu. Totally there are 37 categories of tribes in Tamil Nadu.

Their population details and gender classification tribe category wise are presented in the following table.

TABLE II TRIBE WISE POPULATION IN TAMIL NADU

Sl. No.	Tribe	Male	Female	Population	Percentage of total Tribal population
1	Adiyan	2247	2179	4426	0.56
2	Aranadan	72	66	138	0.02
3	Ervalan	1438	1433	2871	0.36
4	Irular	94521	95140	189661	23.86
5	Kadar	325	325	650	0.08
6	Kammara	537	515	1052	0.13
7	Kanikaran,Kanikkar	1879	1958	3837	0.48
8	Kaniyan, Kanyan	1042	1095	2137	0.27
9	Kattunayakan	23360	23312	46672	5.87
10	Kochuvelan	4	3	7	0.0009
11	KondaKapus	265	256	521	0.07
12	Kondareddis	5028	4819	9847	1.23
13	Koraga	61	40	101	0.01
14	Kota	155	153	308	0.04
15	Kudiya,Melakudi	36	30	66	0.008
16	Kurichchan	3181	2919	6100	0.77
17	Kurumbas	3380	3443	6823	0.86
18	Kurumans	15949	15016	30965	3.90
19	MahaMalasar	43	34	77	0.01
20	MalaiArayan	75	97	172	0.02
21	MalaiPandaram	710	729	1439	0.18
22	MalaiVedan	3701	3514	7215	0.90
23	Malakkuravan	10013	9632	19645	2.47
24	Malasar	3259	3172	6431	0.81
25	Malayali	181704	176276	357980	45.05
26	Malayekandi	107	103	210	0.03
27	Mannan	99	112	211	0.03
28	Mudugar & Muduvan	661	589	1250	0.16
29	Muthuvan	200	190	390	0.05
30	Palleyan	114	117	231	0.03
31	Palliyan	1146	1106	2252	0.28
32	Palliyar	2643	2645	5288	0.66
33	Paniyan	4898	5236	10134	1.27
34	Sholaga	3066	2899	5965	0.75
35	Toda	957	1045	2002	0.25
36	Uraly	6491	6495	12986	1.63
37	Generic Tribes*	27701	26936	54637	6.87
	Total	4,01,068	3,93,629	7,94,697	100

*Generic Tribes, i.e. those who returned as Anusuchitjan-jati, Girijan, Adivasi etc. Source: Census of India 2011

Table II reveals that among the tribal categories, Malayali tribes are abundant in number in Tamil Nadu. They constitute 45.05 per cent of the total tribal population in Tamil Nadu. It is found that out of 3,57,980 malyalis in

Tamil Nadu, 181704 are male and 176276 are female. Malayalis are residing at Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Pudukottai, Salem and Tiruchirapalli districts form the largest tribal community. It is followed by Irular tribes.

They constitute 23.86% in the total tribal population in Tamil Nadu. It is also found that out of 189661 Irular tribes in Tamil Nadu, 94521 are male and the remaining 95140 are female. Kattunaicken form the third largest tribal community in Tamil Nadu. They represent 5.87 percent (46,672) of the tribal population in the state as per 2011 census.

It is followed by Kurumans, Malakuruvan, Uraly and Generic tribes as they constitute more than 1 % of the total tribal population in Tamil Nadu.

Figure 2 shows the details of majority categories of tribal people in Tamil Nadu.

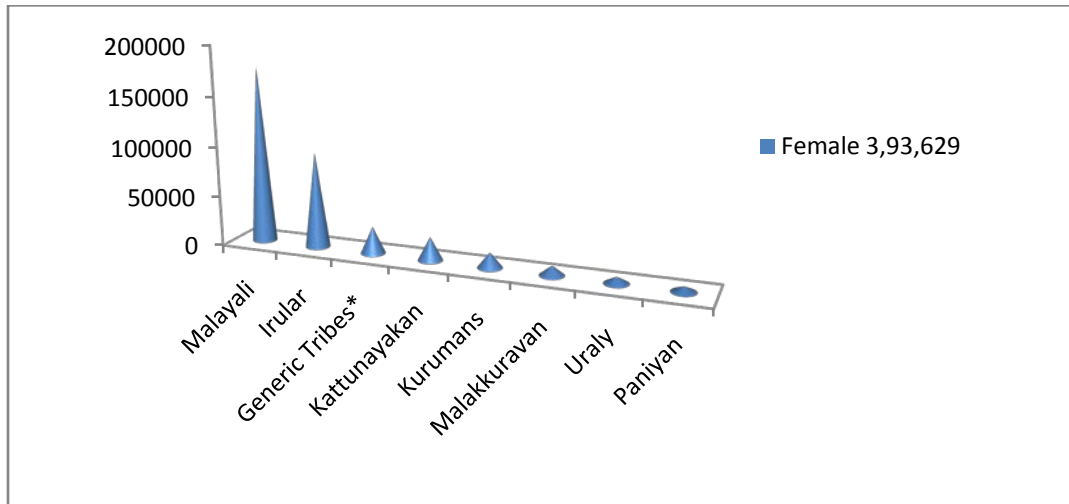


Fig. 2 Major categories of tribal people in Tamil Nadu

V. EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE TRIBAL WOMEN

Education is very important for both men and women. It changes the life style, living conditions, economic and social status. It is very important to know about the literacy rates of tribal women in Tamil Nadu. Education is needed for uplifting the community.

So education in tribal community will definitely improve their economic and social status. Particularly education of women is much important for the betterment of the community. Because they are the creators of next generation. Education given to women definitely helps in bringing up the next generation in a better way. Table III depicts the details of literacy rate of tribal women in Tamil Nadu.

TABLE III DISTRICT WISE TRIBAL LITERATE AND ILLITERATE IN TAMIL NADU

Sl. No.	Districts	Literates			Illiterates		
		Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1	Tamil Nadu	419354	186651	232703	375343	214417	160926
2	Thiruvallur	25423	11614	13809	21820	12078	9742
3	Chennai	2458	1092	1366	7603	4115	3488
4	Kancheepuram	21970	10021	11949	19240	10584	8656
5	Vellore	41220	17982	23238	31735	18681	13054
6	Thiruvannamalai	54296	23932	30364	36658	22024	14634
7	Viluppuram	46420	21144	25276	28439	16426	12013
8	Salem	64692	28396	36296	54677	32093	22584
9	Namakkal	26467	11690	14777	30592	17693	12899
10	Erode	12819	5773	7046	9061	5251	3810
11	The Nilgiris	15450	6682	8768	17363	9409	7954
12	Dindigul	4434	2067	2367	3630	2028	1602
13	Karur	153	68	85	422	229	193
14	Tiruchirappalli	5864	2556	3308	12334	6858	5476

15	Perambalur	1063	470	593	1521	822	699
16	Ariyalur	6019	2641	3378	4703	2633	2070
17	Cuddalore	8219	3710	4509	7483	4233	3250
18	Nagapattinam	1749	818	931	2007	1029	978
19	Thiruvarur	1196	524	672	1838	942	896
20	Thanjavur	1463	643	820	2098	1096	1002
21	Pudukkottai	535	249	286	748	398	350
22	Sivaganga	315	125	190	475	269	206
23	Madurai	4172	1709	2463	6924	3913	3011
24	Theni	1117	557	560	718	397	321
25	Virudhunagar	1037	457	580	1257	725	532
26	Ramanathapuram	514	245	269	591	314	277
27	Thoothukkudi	2183	952	1231	2728	1514	1214
28	Tirunelveli	4191	1819	2372	6079	3290	2789
29	Kanniyakumari	2073	884	1189	5209	2670	2539
30	Dharmapuri	31261	13850	17411	31783	18280	13503
31	Krishnagiri	13440	6341	7099	8948	5078	3870
32	Coimbatore	14284	6433	7851	14058	7812	6246
33	Tiruppur	2857	1207	1650	2601	1533	1068

Source: Census India 2011

Table III reveals that out of the tribal population, the literacy rate of tribal women are more than literacy rate of tribal men almost in all the districts of Tamil Nadu. It is a surprising fact that tribal women are a step ahead than tribal men in terms of education. Tribal women are much interested in education and they are coming forward to face the hurdles and take up the education for the betterment of their family. Most importantly, only 50% of the total tribal population is literate and the remaining 50 % is illiterate. Considering the illiteracy rate also, the rate of illiteracy is high among tribal men compared to tribal women. It is noteworthy that the illiterate rate is much high compared to any other social groups.

VI. CONCLUSION

Education is an essential tool for empowerment of women with knowledge, skills and self confidence. It will lead to higher productivity, efficiency and socio – economic empowerment of tribal women. Economic Empowerment of Tribal women through education will contribute a lot to national development. It is necessary to increase the literacy rate of tribal women which is a challenging issue in the present scenario. Without education of tribal women, meaningful, inclusive growth of the country is not possible.

Education and economic empowerment of tribal women can be measured through the power they have over financial resources to earn income and their per capita income, access to education, access and availability of professional opportunities and participation in economic decision making and their access to political opportunities. In Tamil Nadu, nearly 50% of the tribal population are illiterate. Among the literate groups, women constitute more percentage compared to men. This shows the positive turn towards the efforts on tribal women education. But efforts must be taken to make the entire population literate. Hence, it is essential for the central and state governments to concentrate their efforts more towards the illiterate group of the tribal population for ensuring overall development of the economy.

REFERENCES

- [1] Census of India 2011.
- [2] Retrieved from <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/women-empowerment-programmes-1322720937-1>
- [3] Retrieved from <https://www.lopol.org/article/list-of-tamil-nadu-scheduled-castes-sc-and-scheduled-tribes-st>
- [4] Policy Note, Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, Demand No. 4, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2014.