

# Socio-economic problems of Irula tribes in Attappadi area

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** In India, the first tribal block established in Attappady one of the most backward blocks in Kerala. Even after the fifty years of formation, Attappady is still suffering from extreme starvation and malnourishment. Hence it is important to study the demographic profile and socio - economic problems of Irula tribes in Attapadi Block, Palakkad District of Kerala.

**Methods/Statistical Analysis:** Both primary and secondary data are used in the study. The sampling technique that was adopted for the study was convenience sampling a type of non-probability sampling. A structured questionnaire was prepared and one hundred households were interviewed who belonging to Irula group.

**Findings:** The study reveals that socio economic background of Irula community is in a very pathetic situation. Poverty, malnutrition, Family liability, lack of interest in studies, lack of hostel facilities, ignorance of the parents, early marriage, inadequate transport facilities, insufficient educational facilities, poor medical facilities, social exclusion and discrimination etc. are the major livelihood issues of Irula community.

**Application/Improvements:** In order to uplift their situation initiative from the government is the needed step for improving their socio-economic condition.

**Key words:** Starvation, Malnourishment, Vulnerable community, Tribes, Outlier, Irulagroup.

## 1. Introduction

Scheduled tribes are considered as the most vulnerable community in the state. The term Outlier was first introduced in 90's into the discussion of Kerala Model. The outliers are population groups who have been left out of the domain of public action and the capability building process. Among the Outliers, Scheduled castes, Scheduled tribes are the historically marginalized communities. Tribal communities delay behind other communities with respect to attainment of income, schooling, wellbeing and other basics for good community nutrition. Scheduled tribes are distributed throughout the country apart from Pondicherry, Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh and Delhi. For a community to be identified as scheduled tribe; it should fulfill the following criteria; primitive traits, unique culture, introversion of contact with the community at large, geographical separation and backwardness- social and economic [1]. The tribes in Kerala form an important part of the total population and it represents an element in society which is incorporated with the culture mixture of our nation.

In Kerala, there are 36 communities listed as scheduled tribes spread over all the fourteen districts of the State. Their total population according to 2011 census is 4, 84,839 which accounts for 1.45 percentage of the whole population of the state. Each community is so heterogeneous in terms of culture, belief, livelihood strategies, social organization, economy and developmental perspectives. Wayanad district has the highest number of tribal population with 1, 51,443 people and accounting for 31.24 percent of the total ST population of Kerala. The second largest tribal concentration is at Idukki with 11.51 percentage. Palakkad remains as the third largest tribal concentrated district of Kerala as 10.1 percent of the tribes are located here. Scheduled Tribe population of the Palakkad district is 48,972 in this, 24,314 are males and 24,658 are females [2].The Scheduled Tribes of the district constitute only 1.74 percent to the total population of the district.Other significant concentrations of tribes are in the districts of Kasaragod (10.08 percent),Thiruvananthapuram(5.52 percent), Kannur (8.53 percent), Malappuram (4.74 percent) and Kottayam (4.53 percent). Alappuzha district has the least tribal concentration with 0.31 percent of the total STs in Kerala. It can be further noted that tribes are more concentrated in hilly areas of the State [3].

The three tribes in Attappadi area are Irula (84%), Muduga (10%) and Kurumba(06%) these three groups are traditionally engaged in agricultural purposes. Irula tribe is the largest group of three tribes in Attappadi [4].The literacy rate of tribes is only 38.62%. A vast majority (above 80%) of tribal group are below poverty line. Each tribe

has its own vernacular language for communication. But there is no association or closeness between tribes. Kurumbas are the most primitive and they are still in the interior forest areas and they are considered as shifting cultivators. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of Adivasis in Attappady area.

Table 1. Demographic profile of adivasis in Attappady

Name of the Tribe	Number of Families	Men	Women	Total
Irula	7616	13160	13361	26521
Muduga	1274	2225	2443	4668
Kurumba	543	1128	1123	2251

Source: Attappady Comprehensive Tribal Development and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal -Group Development Project [5]

### Importance of the study

Attappady is a backward revenue block of Palakkad district has an area of 745 sq.km and encompasses three panchayats: Agali, Puthur and Sholayur. It has a population of 64,318 (2011 Census). Tribes forms almost half of the population (27,627) and is represented in three sects called Irula, Muduga and Kurumba they live in a group in and around the hills of Attappady [6]. In this Irula tribe is the largest family group compare to other. The constitution has formally designated all the tribal societies as scheduled tribes, and it does not take into account the fact that the tribal societies are separate and different each other in many aspects like traditions, health, communications and education, conventional practices and way of life. Therefore an attempt was made here to study what is the socio-economic condition of Irula tribal people in Attappadi areas. This became the core of the present study entitles the socio- economic conditions of Irula tribes in Attappadi area.

### Objectives of the study

1. To make an assessment of demographic profile of Irula community in Attappady area.
2. To analyze the socio economic problems faced by Irula community in Attappady

### Methodology

Selection of Project and study area

Both primary and secondary data are used in the study. The sampling technique that was adopted for the study was convenience sampling a type of non-probability sampling. A structured questionnaire was prepared and one hundred households were interviewed who belonging to Irulagroup. The secondary data for the study was collected from annual reports of Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP), Attappady tribal block, District census hand book, Report of Attappady Hill Area Development Society (AHADS) of Attappady. Palakkad District various Census Reports, Population enumeration data, Journals and internet.

## 2. Results and discussions

In order to evaluate the socio- economic profile of the project, a thorough investigation has been conducted as per the methodology and objectives outlined in the Tables 2 to 6.

Table 2. Gender wise classification of tribal community

Gender	Population	Percentage
Male	80	33.33
Female	160	66.67
Total	240	100

Source: Primary data

Table 3. Population of Irula community on the basis of age

Age	Population	Percentage
0-6 years	10	4.16
7-14 years	115	47.92
15 – 20 years	60	25.00
21-50 years	20	8.33
50 and above	35	14.59
Total	240	100

Source: Primary data

Table 4. Distribution according to Family size

Family size	Number of persons	Percentage to total
2-3	2	4.00
4-6	28	56.00
7-9	20	40.00
Total	50	100

Source: Primary data

Table 5. Educational status of Irula community

Qualification	Distribution of the respondents	Percentage
Illiterate	25	50
Lower primary	8	16
Upper primary	7	14
High school	7	14
Higher secondary	4	8
Degree	3	6
Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 6. Reasons for non-enrolment and dropouts from schools

	Reasons for dropout	Ranking
1	Financial problems	3
2	Increased household Responsibilities	2
3	Distance from home to school, Poor health	1
4	Lack of interest in studies	4
5	Lack of awareness of parents	7
6	Lack of hostel facilities	5
7	Early marriage	6

Source: Primary data

### Gender Wise classification of tribal community

The table clearly highlights out of 240 members, 160 are females. Each family includes only one or two males and all others are females. Majority of the respondents behaved very well and showed a positive approach to the investigator and only 14 percentage unwilling to respond.

### **Population of irula community in Attappadi area**

In Attappadi area out of 50 kudies, 240 populace belonging to different age group. One of the striking features is that the number of children within the age group of 0-6 years is very low when comparing with other age groups. The reasons behind this are infant mortality rate, poor health of mothers, malnutrition, unsanitary condition, lack of health care facilities etc.

### **Size of family**

Each family is divided into three categories, small, medium and large. From the analysis it is found that the family size of the community is large.

### **Educational condition**

In Attappady, 50 per cent of the respondents are still remaining illiterate that is age group of above 30, out of the total illiterates majority are women. But their children acquire education at least secondary level. Only 6 per cent of the total members have education above plus two. Higher educational options are very limited in this group

### **Reasons for non-enrolment and dropouts from schools**

On the basis of ranking majority of the respondents reveals that primary reason for drop out is lack of accessibility or distance from school and poor health. Followed by family responsibility, financial problem, lack of interest in studies, lack of hostel facilities, ignorance of the parents and early marriage. All these reasons are the root cause of the alienation of tribal in education and the dropout.

The demographic profile of the Irula community clearly highlights that out of 240 members, 160 are females. Each family includes only one or two males and the family size of the community is large. One of the striking features of the community is that the number of children within the age group of 0-6 years is very low when comparing with other age groups. The reasons behind this are infant mortality rate, shortage of food as per nutritional requirement, unsanitary condition, lack of health care facilities etc [7]. This clearly shows that malnutrition and infant mortality rate exists still in this community.

In the case of the status of education, it is observed that 50 percent of the respondents are still remaining illiterate that is age group of above 30. Out of the total illiterates, majority are women. But their children acquire education at least secondary level. Only 6 per cent of the total members had schooling above plus two. Since the educational institutions are very limited and far away from their colony, their children have to depend on hostel facilities. The Government is providing them all the hostel expenses like food, tuition fee, text book charges and uniform charges. But majority of the students are not taking higher education very seriously due to lack of interest.

Another major finding is that respondents highlighted the reasons for discontinue of their studies. On the basis of ranking majority of the respondents reveals that primary reason for drop out is the lack of accessibility or distance from school and poor health. Followed by family responsibility, financial problem, lack of interest in studies, lack of hostel facilities, ignorance of the parents and early marriage. All the reasons are the root cause of the alienation of tribals in education and the dropout.

Cattle-breeding is the major source of income. Wild resources like honey, firewood, fruits and nuts, vegetables, fish medicinal plants, resins, essences and a range of barks and fibers are collected and sale in the local market. Only minor number is engaged in government job. Majority of the houses are electrified and constructed by the AHADS (Attappadi Hill Area Development Society) with the aid of Japan. For electricity purpose, they are using battery and solar lamps. Most of the dwelling units are mere huts, some houses built in brick walls and thatched roof with sheets and bamboo. Only a minor number is residing in houses with concrete roof.

Another major socio- economic problem highlight is that most of the hamlets lack basic facilities for maintaining sanitation and environmental hygiene. This is also a reason for the health problems in the hamlets [8]. Majority of the respondents depend on jeep and roads are very narrow and no other facilities are available here. Work- related travel is very limited to tribals as nine out of ten tribals surveyed reported that their work place is within 3 Kilometers of the residence.

Majority had a poor opinion about the supply of essential commodities through ration shops. What is more shocking is that some tribal households do not even have ration cards, Some hold APL (Above Poverty Line) ration cards, and rest of them hold BPL (Below Poverty Line) ration cards.

Shortage of drinking water continues to be the number one misery in Attappadi. Due to poor service delivery in the water supply sector, most of the families are depending on tanker Lorries which was filled from the Bhavani river and the

Varagayar without even proper purification. Other respondents depend on nearby streams or river, wells and public tap. Majority of the respondents had a poor opinion about accessibility to the institutions. 80 percent of the tribal households surveyed reported that the nearest college/ institution of higher education was at least more than 20 Kilometers away from the colony. Good quality education which is available to the other sections is not offered to the poor tribals.

Another major finding is that majority have a pitiable opinion about hospitals. Primary health centers are far away from the places and advanced checkups and services are very poorer not available. For medical assistance, they have to travel 20 km to reach the nearest hospital, from there the children of the colony are getting immunization vaccines. They don't get any health education and proper sanitary amenities are far from them.

### 3. Suggestions

Following suggestions seen feasible for strengthening the development of Irula tribes in Attappadi areas. Nutritional food facility should be given to pregnant ladies and the children with the age of below 6 years. Special facilities will be provided to assess their health condition frequently and functioning condition of primary health centers. Government should develop new project and programmes like training and health classes, a literacy program where they teach even the older members to write with Malayalam script.

### 4. Conclusion

From the study, it is obvious that poverty, malnutrition, exhaustion of natural resources, inadequate transport facilities, insufficient educational facilities, poor medical facilities, social exclusion and discrimination etc., are the major livelihood issues of Irulatribal. For the complete development of the tribal people, a bottom-up approach is needed and government must take keen initiative for the upliftment of Irula tribe in Attappady.

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