

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION AND MALNUTRITION AMONG THE TRIBAL WOMEN: A COMPARITIVE STUDY

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Abstract: Though Kerala has achieved outstanding progress in human development, however is that, all areas, all sectors and all sections of people have not evenly experienced the gains accruing from this progress. Despite the mind blowing achievements in human development index of mainstream communities, conditions of the everyday life of tribal people in Kerala is disheartening. The objective of the study was to understand the socio-economic conditions of the primitive tribes in Kerala and also to understand the disparities in poverty levels between primitive tribes and non primitive tribal groups. The study used two primitive tribes koraga, Kattunaikans and also two non primitive tribal groups Paniya and kurichiya. The area of study was tribal colonies of Kannur, Kasargod and Waynad district of Kerala state. The study found out that there exists a high inequality between primitive and non primitive tribal groups even though government had implemented many programmes to uplift the primitive tribes. The study also found that the intensity of poverty is very high among Paniya tribes even though they don't fall under the primitive tribal community.

Keywords: Tribes, Malnutrition, Women, Socio-Economic deprivation

Introduction: Poverty is the state of one who lacks a certain amount of material possessions or money. Absolute poverty or destitution refers to the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly includes food, water, sanitation, clothing, shelter, health care and education. The World Bank estimated 1.29 billion people were living in absolute poverty in 2008. Of these, about 400 million people in absolute poverty lived in India and 173 million people in China. Relative poverty is defined contextually as economic inequality in the location or society in which people live. According to United Nations poverty is defined as, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

Poverty in India is widespread, with the nation estimated to have a third of the world's poor. In 2010, World Bank stated, 32.7% of the total Indian people fall below the international poverty line of US\$ 1.25 per day while 68.7% live on less than US\$ 2 per day. According to 2010 data from the United Nations Development Programme, estimated that 37.2% of Indians live below the country's national poverty line. A 2010 report by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) states that 8 Indian states have more poor people than 26 poorest African

nations combined which totals to more than 410 million poor in the poorest African countries.

Though Kerala has achieved outstanding progress in human development, however, is that all areas, all sectors and all sections of people have not evenly experienced the gains accruing from this progress. Despite the mind blowing achievements in human development index of mainstream communities, conditions of the everyday life of tribal people in Kerala is disheartening. Tribes in Kerala present a fascinating panorama with its rich cultural heritage and love for nature on one hand and disturbing spectacle on the other. The tribal populations are socially marginalized and economically vulnerable in the socio economic structure of the society. The high rate of poverty, inadequate health resources, ignorance and traditional practices among the tribal communities contributed to the vulnerability of this section.

The rate of change in tribal society is very slow. That is why they have been poor and backward in comparison to other people. Since they have been materially backward and economically poor, attempts have been made by the government to develop them. Primitive tribal group is a government of India classification created with the purpose of enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development indices. The Dhebar Commission stated that within Scheduled Tribes there existed an inequality in the rate of development. During the fourth Five Year Plan a sub-category was created within Scheduled Tribes to identify groups that considered to be at a lower level of development. This was created based on the Dhebar Commission report and other studies. This sub-category was named "Primitive tribal group". The features of such a group include a pre-agricultural

system of existence that is practice of hunting and gathering, zero or negative population growth, extremely low level of literacy in comparison with other tribal groups. Today, as the governments of all places in the world are paying special attention towards the development of the tribal people, one finds the existence of induced or planned change in tribal society. The socioeconomic conditions of scheduled tribes are key indicators of their developmental problems. The knowledge about the socio-economic and cultural conditions is needed for understanding the health and living conditions of the tribes.

Women’s health and nutritional status is linked with social, economic and cultural factors and has a direct bearing on nation’s development. It has long been recognized that poverty is associated with poor health. Nutritional status of mother is an important issue of concern since it has a great impact on the health status of children. Only if she consumes healthy and nutritious food she can have a healthy child. So it is necessary that mother’s health should be given prime importance. She should intake nutritious and healthy food at regular intervals. Health of the mother directly affects the health of the child if she lack proper intake of nutritional diet it will result in malnourishment. Improvement in the health and nutritional status has been one of the major thrust areas for the social development of the tribes. There are frequent reports in the media on the various cases of exploitation faced by this vulnerable group. They are deprived of basic amenities of life. It is observed that they are caught in the vicious circle of poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

The objective of the study was to compare the socio-economic conditions of the primitive and non primitive tribes in Kerala and also to understand the malnourishment status prevailing among the tribal women. Out of the five primitive tribal groups in Kerala the study uses two primitive tribes Koraga, Katunayika; and also two non primitive tribal groups Paniya and Kurichiya. The area of study is confined to be tribal colonies of Kannur, Kasargod and Waynad district of Kerala state. The data for the study is collected through primary data. The primary data for the study are collected through a comprehensive schedule for that twenty households of each tribal communities has been visited. The sample size of twenty households for each tribal community is selected through the method of random sampling and the study uses simple descriptive statistics for the analysis of data using the Microsoft Excel software.

Household economic status: The level of annual income of the family is considered as an index of economic status and one of the most important determinants of poverty. The income mentioned here includes the earnings of respondents and their husbands and children. The monthly income of different tribal households in the study as shown in table 4.1 shows that 60 per cent of the selected tribal population comes under the very low income group i.e. they earn less than Rs. 1000 per month. Nearly 38 per cent of the above group earns only less than Rs. 500 which means that these people have no proper intake of nutritional food and sometimes even no intake of food. It is to be noted from the table that no Kurichya households comes under this category, indicating that there is not any condition of extreme poverty present among these tribal groups.

Table 4: Distribution of Sample Respondents According to Economic Status

Source: Survey data

Caste	Family monthly Income								Total
	0-500	501-1000	1001-1500	1501-2000	2001-2500	2501-3000	3001-3500	>3500	
Paniya	9(45)	8(40)	2(10)	1(5)	0	0	0	0	20(100)
Kurichya	0	0(0)	3(15)	4(20)	5(25)	4(20)	1(5)	3(15)	20(100)
Kattunaicka	11(55)	6(30)	3(15)	0	0	0	0	0	20(100)
Koraga	13(65)	4(20)	3(15)	0	0	0	0	0	20(100)
Total	33(37.5)	18(22.5)	11(13.75)	5(6.25)	5(6.25)	4(5)	1(1.25)	3(3.75)	80(100)

From the study it is found that one third of Kurichya, and paniya households depends on agriculture as their primary occupation, while the primitive tribes Kattunaicka and Koraga engages themselves in other activities like collection of forest products, hunting and self employment activities it should be noted that only 4 per cent of the tribal population are government employees that too only from the kurichiya community which implies that

majority of tribal households belongs to unstable income group.

Clean drinking water is an important civic amenity required for a healthy living. The importance of clean drinking water and its connection to morbidity are well known. Many communicable diseases are waterborne. As such, non availability of clean drinking water is a fundamental health hazard. The study showed that none of the primitive tribes such as koragas and kattunaikkans do not possess any own

well. They rely on public wells and other source to carry out their various needs. The situation of paniya tribes is also dismal as out of the 20 sample households only two of them has got own wells. Most of them depend on the same source of water, pond, lake or stream for drinking, cooking, washing, bathing etc. results in the contamination of water.

The study also found that 42.5 percent of the tribal families are deprived of proper sanitation facilities. They have no access to public or own toilets, which means that they resort to the open ground. The conditions of the primitive tribes are the worst when compared to other tribes. Among these tribes 95 percent of the kattunaicka have no accessibility

towards toilets. None of the primitive tribes as well as paniya tribe has got toilets attached to their house. Women are the real victims of this elementary human need in the tribal areas. The outbreak of many communicable diseases in the tribal hamlets is mainly due to inadequate sanitation and non hygienic environment. More than 60 percent of the tribal households do not have electricity. Among the primitive tribes only 2 Kattunayika households has got electricity connection and none of the Koraga households have electricity connection. This itself shows the disparity between primitive and non primitive tribal community.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Respondents according to Employment Status

Caste	Employment status								Total
	No job	Agricultur e	Govt emplo y	Cooli	Self employ	Collectio n of forest pdts	Huntin g	Others	
Paniya	5(25)	3(15)	0	1(5)	0	4(20)	4(20)	3(15)	20(100)
Kurichya	1(5)	8(40)	4(20)	2(10)	3(15)	0	0	2(10)	20(100)
Kattunaicka	5(25)	0	0	1(5)	2(10)	5(25)	4(20)	3(15)	20(100)
Koraga	4(20)	0	0	1(5)	8(40)	2(10)	2(10)	3(15)	20(100)
Total	15(18.75)	11(13.75)	4(5)	5(6.25)	13(16.25)	11(13.75)	10(12.5)	11(13.75)	80(100)

Source: Survey data

From the above table we can see that around twenty percent of the women heads in the family does not have any job. And among the rest of the population only four kurichya women have government jobs and rest of the population is dependent on other jobs which mean that majority of the women do not have a proper stable income source. It is to be noted that women’s employment enhances the household’s accessibility to income, which improves their nutritional status and thus results in the reduction of poverty.

Education is one of the most important resources that enable women to provide appropriate care for their children, which is a vital determinant of children’s growth and development. Studies have shown a decreased incidence of poverty and malnutrition among young children with an increase in the level of mother’s education (Engle, Menon and Haddad. 1996).

It is observed that, about 49 percent of female heads are uneducated and illiterate. The higher rate of literacy prevails among the kurichiya community that is almost 90 percent. Whereas higher rate of illiteracy exists among the primitive tribal group such as koraga(65 perecent) and kattunaicka (70 percent). They give least

importance to education attainment and hence they have a poor standard of living. Lack of accessibility towards educational institutions and lack of awareness about the benefits of education are the main causes of poor educational status. The table reveals that among educated tribes only Kurichyas and paniya shows educational attainments of class 10 and above none of the primitive female heads of the family haven’t attained educational qualification of 10th standard and above.

Women’s health and nutritional status is linked with social, economic and cultural factors and has a direct bearing on nation’s development. It has long been recognized that poverty is associated with poor health. Nutritional status of mother is an important issue of concern since it has a great impact on the health status of children. Only if she consumes healthy and nutritious food she can have a healthy child. The study found out that about 61 percent of the tribal women are malnourished, whereas only 33.75 percent maintain normal nutritional status. Among malnourished women, the share of primitive tribe is large when compared to non primitive tribes. Around 75 percent primitive tribal women are malnourished where as

it is around 50 percent in the case of non primitive tribes. The major issue of malnutrition prevailing among the tribal mother shows the poor nutritional status of the tribal mothers which also have an adverse impact on the children's health condition. The lack of nutrient content diet results in this severe malnourishment. Most of the tribal are unaware of the nutritional food items and of course sometimes the poor economic condition prevents them from the intake of nutritious food.

Conclusion: The study found out that most of the tribal communities are deprived of many of the socio-economic factors, and there exist a high level of inequality between primitive and non-primitive

tribal groups. Primitive tribal groups are highly deprived of many of the socio-economic indicators and the level of malnourishment among the women is also very high compared to the non-primitive tribal group. Among the non-primitive tribal group Kurichiya tribes are better off than all other tribal communities in all aspects but whereas the situation of the Paniya tribe disheartening, their situation is much worse as that of primitive tribes. The study has got much significance for future research especially among the primitive tribal group which is the most deprived community.

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