

An Overview of the Socio Economic Conditions of Paniya Tribal Community in Kerala

Liya Joy, SaranyaAjithkumar

FIP Substitute, Department of Economics, Fatima Mata National College (Autonomous) Kollam 691001 Kerala India Mob.9495993966

Guest Faculty, Department of Economics, NSS Hindu College Changanacherry, 686102 Kerala India Mob.9605538167, 8921164506

Abstract:

Tribals, the original inhabitants of India have contributed much to the nation's culture, history and heritage. Under the constitutional provisions of Directive Principles, the States' major concern for tribes has been their welfare and development. It is ironical that despite a large number of well meaning constitutional provisions aimed at protecting and safeguarding the welfare and interest of the tribal communities, the process of marginalization of the tribal's has gone on unabated. In this context, the paper has made an overview on the socio-economic conditions of tribals belonging to the Paniyas (Paniyas), which has the lowest standard of living, even though being the bulk of the tribal populace in Kerala.

keywords:- Socio economic conditions, Paniya, Kudumb, Original inhabitants

I. INTRODUCTION

The detailed information about the origin of the Paniya tribe is still unclear, but some details relating to this tribal community signify a little about the extraction of this tribal group. Thick lips, dark complexion and curly hair are the physical appearance of the Paniya people. There is a resemblance between the Paniya people with the people of Africa. According to some scholars Kapiri (Africa or Cape) is the land of origin of the Paniya tribes. Totally there are 48 tribal communities in Kerala. Among them thirty six are scheduled tribes and some others are unnoticed tribal communities. *Paniyas* are the most important tribal community in Kerala among these sections. The *Paniyas* has very limited wants. Food, shelter and clothing are the only important wants of *Paniyas*. Better education facility, modern health system and variety of commodities in the market are not familiar to this community.

The Paniya tribal community have developed a special style for the making their own houses. A Paniya village consists of different rows of huts which are all constructed from cane with thatched roofs. These houses are called Colonies.

During the time of showery season, *Paniyans* migrate to nearby rivers and cold regions and at the end of the season, these tribes return to their original village homes ie, colonies. These colonies are situated in remote areas of forests, where transport and communication facilities are nil. This is because of the reason that the social awareness of the tribals is very low.

The main profession of the *Paniya* tribe is to work as farmers in the field of soil owners. In the olden period they are called as bonded laborers. Another important conclusion of the study is that majority of the tribals are below the poverty line. Unemployment and seasonal employment are frequent among the tribals and their pay rate is comparatively low. The low wage and seasonal employment cover the way for poverty and deficiency.

This study reveals that there is a marked difference between the size of the present tribal families and those in older days. Now families are become more nuclear compared to the older days. Tribes prefer two or three children. Traditionally there was male domination in the tribal families. Majority of the head of the households are in economically active age group.

Even now *Paniyan* tribal community has a negative attitude towards saving. They are primarily spending their entire income for consumption. They never save anything in cash or in other assets. At present almost all the banks have introduced many schemes for ensuring the financial inclusion in rural area. Financial inclusion branches have started in rural areas. But the tribal beneficiaries of these services are very limited in number. Tribes have only less awareness regarding the banking services.

Just like the saving pattern the consumption pattern among the tribes is also unique. Consumption and expenditure pattern of the tribals gives a dismal picture regarding the standard of living of the tribes.

It is found that they are not in a position to consume nutritious and different varieties of food. Major portion of their income is spent for food items, liquor, pack and entertainment. Electronic equipment, motor vehicles and basic furniture items are rarely included in the consumption baskets of the tribes. Generally tribals are addicted to drinking, pan chewing and smoking. They are highly superstitious, oppression, discrimination and gender problems are common among them.

Paniyas give very little importance to education. Most of them are not yet conscious about the benefits of education and consequent economic gains. And also they believed that the educated young generation is reluctant to take up their traditional occupations. It is found that the problem of illiteracy is acute among the *Paniyas*. This low literacy is considering as the root cause of their socio-economic backwardness. Dropout rate is high among the tribes. Tribal parents always have a negative attitude towards the education of their children. Students are also not interested in studies. They prefer to spend their life in their own colonies. Educated women are the asset of every society. But the educational attainment of the tribal women shows a dismal picture. More than 60% of the female respondents are uneducated.

Generally the tribals are not much concerned about their health. They seek medical treatment only in the last stages. The common diseases among the *Paniyas* are fever, cold and infectious diseases. Skin diseases are also common among the tribes. Their life style and living conditions are the major reasons behind it. The active working of the Public Health Care System among the tribes is very helpful in controlling health issues and major diseases.

One of the noticeable points of this study was that the maternal mortality rate is zero among the paniya households. This is only because of the door to door program of the National Rural Health Mission among the respondent households. Hundred percentage immunizations are also found among the respondents. The health indicators like birth rate, death rate and infant mortality rate are showing a sound picture of the health care among the tribes. Birth rate is higher than that of the death rate. But there is only a slight difference between the two. This is also because of the active intervention of the Public Health centers in the tribal colonies. They are providing awareness regarding the health related issues weekly.

In order to solve the land problems of tribes' government have introduced many measures. Aralam Farm Project for the *Paniyas* is an example for this. Under this program selected tribal households will get one acre of land in Aralam Farm. But the

beneficiaries of this project are not ready to migrate to the farm. Tribes always prefer colony life. So major portion of their land is remaining as unproductive.

Since very few among the tribals make use of any kind of media, their general awareness is limited and most of them are ignorant about the day to day socio economic and political development around them.

Even though both the government and non-government agencies are working for the upliftment of tribals, even today a large number of tribal families in Kerala are not yet been benefitted by these agencies.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The tribals, the original inhabitants of India have contributed much to the nation's culture, history and heritage. The principles entailed development along the lines of their own genius, respect of tribals rights in land and forest, training and building up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development, to their social and cultural institutions. It is ironical that despite a large number of well meaning constitutional provisions aimed at protecting and safeguarding the welfare and interest of the tribal communities, the process of marginalization of the tribals has gone on unabated. In this context the researcher has made an attempt to examine the socio-economic conditions of tribals belonging to the Paniya community with special reference to Kannur district.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To ascertain the unique lifestyle of *Paniyas*.
- To study the economic status of *Paniyas*.
- To look in to the social condition of *Paniyas*.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The Study was intended to examine the socio-economic development of the Paniya community, the major tribal community in Kannur district. The work is based on primary and secondary data. The researcher selected 50 Sample households from 3 colonies in Ayyankunnu village by employing purposive random sampling. The data was collected with the help of a well structured schedule. The secondary data is obtained from the various published sources of PHC, Tribal Welfare Department.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Paniya tribes are the largest Scheduled Tribes of Kerala. Even though Paniya form the leading tribal community in Kannur, they are the

most backward in every respect. They are the downtrodden group holding very little land and having little amenities of life. The researcher has taken Paniya tribe as the main focus of the study.

A. Family Size

The size of the family is a crucial factor in determining the well being of each and every individual. There is a marked difference between the size of the present tribal families and those in older days. Distribution of the sample respondents by the family size are shown in the table 5.1

Table 5.1 : Distribution Of Sample Respondents By The Family Size

FAMILY SIZE	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS
2-4	21	42%
4-6	20	40%
6-8	6	12%
ABOVE 8	3	6%
TOTAL	50	100%

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

The table 5.1 shows that 42 percentages of the sample respondents have a small family size with two or three children. 40 percentages have family size up to six. Only 6 percentages of Paniyas have big family size. It is observed that most of the respondents don't have knowledge regarding the family planning measures.

B. Occupational Distribution

Occupational mobility is considered as a major factor which provides tremendous change in the socio-economic profile of the people. The occupational distribution of the sample respondents are shown in the table 5.2

Table 5.2 : Occupational Distribution of the Sample Respondents

JOB	% OF PEOPLE
OWNER CULTIVATING	-
CASUAL AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS	94%
SELF EMPLOYED AND PRIVATE JOB	6%
	-

Source: Primary Data

Above the table 5.2 shows the dismal picture of the occupational distribution of the Paniyas. It is observed that 94% of the respondents are casual agricultural laborers who depend on low wages and seasonal work. Majority of the Paniyas are landless. No owner cultivator could be identified among the respondents in the survey. 6% of the respondents were employed in the private sector jobs. No Paniya household could be identified in the government job. This may be due to their low educational standard.

C. Wage

Wage is an important factor in determining the purchasing power and living standard of the people. To analyze the income level of sample households, their average weekly wages are taken into consideration as the sample respondents are not permanently employed and they are getting employment for 3 or 4 days in a week. They are basically unskilled workers.

Table: 5.3 : Distribution of the sample respondents on the basis of their average weekly wage

AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERCENTAGE OF THE HOUSEHOLDS
200-400	33	66%
400-600	13	26%
600-800	2	4%
800-1000	2	4%

SOURCE: PRIMARY DATA

It is observed from the table 5.4 that most of the respondents receive low remuneration per week. It is found that tribal wage pattern is much below than the main stream counterparts. About 66% of the sample respondents are earning average weekly wage

between 200 and 400. Only 4% of the sample respondents are earning wage between 800 and 1000.

D. Financial Inclusion

Among the fifty sample respondents only 8% have saving habit. But among them only few have bank transactions. It shows their limited awareness about the banking facilities. The following table shows the distribution of sample respondents on the basis of the use of banking facilities.

Table: 5.4 : Distribution of the Sample respondents on the basis of their Banking Transactions

BANK TRANSACTION	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS
YES	2	4%
NO	48	96%

Source: Primary Data

The above figure shows a dismal picture of the banking awareness of the sample respondents. Among the fifty sample respondents only two respondents have bank transactions. All the banks have introduced many measures to reach their services in the remote areas. But even after the introduction of these measures only 4% of the sample respondents have bank transactions.

E. Consumption Trend

The parameter of consumption explains the relation between consumption expenditure and income. From the above analysis of saving pattern it is clear that the saving tendency among the tribes is very less. It means that they spend their entire income for consumption purposes. The consumption pattern among the tribes is also unique. A picture of the consumption trend among the sample respondents can be shown in the table

TABLE 5.5 : Distribution of the Sample Respondents on the Basis of their Consumption Pattern

ITEM	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS SPENDING	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS NOT SPENDING
FOOD ITEMS	50	0
LIQUOR/ TODDY	46	4
ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT	14	36
BASIC FURNITURE	7	43
MOTOR VEHICLES	0	50
ENTERTAINMENT	47	3

Source: Primary Data

From the table it is clear that all the sample respondents are spending a part of their income on food items. But the magnitude of this amount is comparatively less. Because tribes are depending leaves and other food items collected from the forest for their food. In the sample survey the researcher could find out that 92% of the sample respondents are alcoholic including women. Another interesting fact about their consumption pattern is that more than 25% of the sample respondents have television, but they don't have a single coat or chair in their house. Only 14% of the sample respondents are spending for basic furniture. During the sample survey the researcher couldn't find out a single household with any kind of motor vehicles. 94% of the sample respondents are spending for entertainment. The one and only entertainment among the respondents is films.

F. Housing

Habitation and housing condition would provide a better understanding of the social life of Paniyas. It is observed that due to the proximity to the forest most of the Paniyas live in rural areas. In order to get a clear picture of the habitation of sample respondents the researcher has classified the households according to the habitation namely rural, remote and very remote. This classification is based on the mode of transport available (rural by bus, remote by jeep and very remote by foot alone.) Distribution of the sample respondents by the habitation is presented here.

Table 5.6 : Distribution of the Sample Respondents by Habitation

HABITATION	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS
RURAL	8	16%
REMOTE	22	44%
VERY REMOTE	20	40%

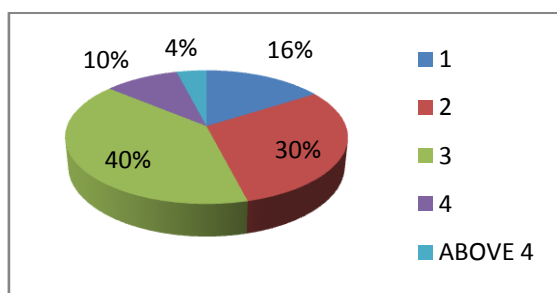
Source: primary data

Only 16% of the sample respondents have bus facilities. 44% live in remote area with limited transportation facility. About 40% live in very remote area without any transport facility. This alienation is one of the main reasons behind their backwardness.

G. Structure of House

Paniya houses consist of two or three rooms. Majority of the respondents didn't have separate kitchen facilities. They use a part of the bedroom as kitchen. The following pie diagram shows the distribution of sample respondents on the basis of the structure of their houses.

Figure 5.1 : Distribution of the Sample Households by the number of rooms in their house



Source: Primary Data

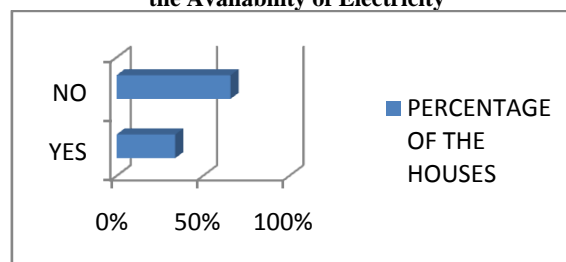
From the figure 5.1 a normal structure of the sample respondent's houses can be traced out. 40% of the respondents have houses with three rooms. Only 4% of the respondents have houses with more than four rooms. About 16% of the respondents are living in houses with one room. They are very much comfortable with these types of houses.

H. Basic Amenities

Infrastructure can be defined as the supporting services which are essential for the normal life of all the economic units. For analyzing the infrastructure availability of sample households 3 essential facilities required for the better living of the households are taken into account. They are electricity,

roads, and water. The following diagram shows the electricity availability of sample respondents

Figure 5.2 : Distribution of the Sample Respondents by the Availability of Electricity



Source: Primary Data

From the figure 5.2 it is clear that more than 66% of the sample respondents don't enjoy electricity. Only 34% have electricity facility in their houses.

I. Health (Common Diseases)

Health is an important determinant of community's living status. Health determines the mortality rate of different groups. Generally the tribals are not much concerned about their health in the initial stages of diseases. They seek medical treatment only in the last stages. Health among the sample respondents are analyzed by considering 3 variables: diseases, depending institutions, and vaccination. The common diseases among the tribes are fever, cold and infectious diseases. Apart from these a minor percentage is affected by some other diseases. The following table shows other diseases generally affecting the tribes.

Table 5.9 : Distribution of the Sample Respondents on the basis of common diseases

DISEASES	NUMBER OF AFFECTED PEOPLE	PERCENTAGE OF AFFECTED PEOPLE
ASTHAMA	8	3.16%
ALLERGIC	20	7.9%
CANCER	3	1%
TUBERCULOSIS	0	0
SKIN DISEASES	40	15%

Source: Primary Data

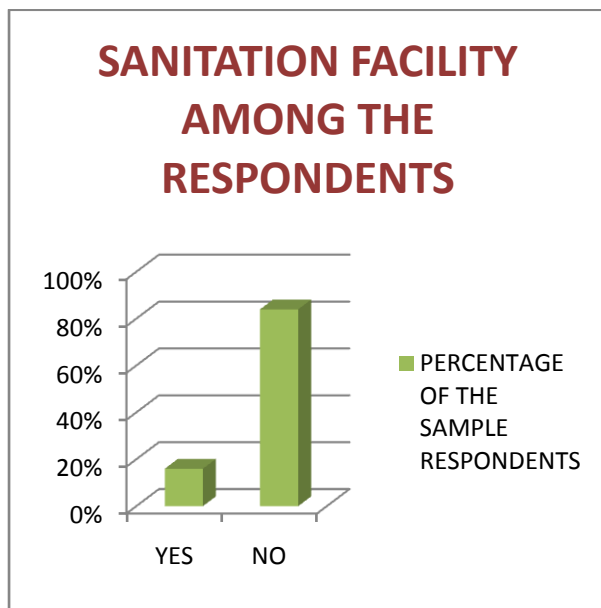
From the table it is clear that only a few percentages of the sample respondents are affected by the diseases like asthma, allergic, cancer and tuberculosis. This is mainly due to their life style. The active intervention of the Primary Health Care centers among the tribes is also help in controlling these kinds of diseases. Among the sample respondents there are only 3 Cancer patients. Skin diseases are

common among the tribes. 15% of the sample respondents are suffering from skin diseases.

J. Sanitation Facilities

For better and healthy living, sanitation and personal hygiene is a must .Lack of proper sanitation facilities will create many health problems. The following diagram shows the availability of sanitation facilities among the sample respondents.

Figure: 5.3 : Sanitation Facility Among The Sample Respondents



Source:Primary Data

Figure 5.5 show that more than 80% of the sample respondents didn't have proper sanitation facilities. Only a smaller portion of the respondents are enjoying hygienic and neat sanitation facilities. This unhygienic sanitation facility is the main reason behind the widespread of infectious diseases among the respondents.

K. Education

Education enables to enhance human resources in a nation. Every child has the right to education. In broader term, education refers to all forms of human learning. In narrow sense, it refers to the process that occurs in specialized institutions. The following table shows distribution of all the concerned persons in the respondent houses on the basis of their education.

Table: 5.13 : Distribution of Sample Respondents on the basis of Educational Standards

AGE	PRIMAR Y	SECONDAR Y	HIGHER SECONDAR Y AND ABOVE
6-26	51	9	-
26-36	48	7	-
36-66	12	-	-
66-86	0	0	-

Source: Primary Data

The table shows a dismal picture of the educational attainment of the respondents. No one from the respondents have studied higher secondary and above. Between the age group of 6 and 26, among the 72 respondents 60 are educated. But the notable thing is that among them only 9 respondents has secondary level education. In the age group of 26 and 46 among the 89 persons 55 are educated. Among them 48 have studied at primary level and 7 have studied at secondary level. Between the age group of 36 and 66 among the 58 persons only 12 are educated. They have studied at the primary level. Among the 27 sample respondents between the age group of 66 and 86, no one have educational standard.

L. Democratic Consciousness (Participation in the Voting Process)

A democracy is a society where the people have a voice or vote in the decision making. In a democracy the people vote for who they want to run the country and make the laws for that country. The following table shows the distribution of the sample respondents on the basis of the participation in the voting process.

TABLE: 5.17 : Distribution of the Sample Respondents on the basis of Participation in Voting

PARTICIPATION	NUMBER OF HOUSE HOLDS	PERCENTAGE
YES	42	84%
NO	8	16%

Source: Primary Data

The table: 5.17 show that among the 50 sample respondents adult members from the 84% of the sample respondents are participating in the voting process. The researcher couldn't conclude that this shows their democratic consciousness. All the political parties are considering this group as their weapon at the time of voting.

M. Political Interest

In all the democracies citizens should have a clear political ideology. This will reflect in their interest towards a particular political party. The following table shows the political interest of sample respondents.

Table: 5.16 : Distribution of the Sample Respondents on the basis of Political Interest(Source: Primary Data)

SPECIAL INTEREST TO A PARTICULAR PARTY	NUMBER OF HOUSE HOLDS	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS
YES	17	34%
NO	33	66%

The table shows that among the 50 sample respondent houses only 17 households are shown interest to a particular political party. About 66% of the respondent households don't possess any special interest to a particular political party. Educational backwardness and lack of awareness about social happenings are the main reasons behind this.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Forests have been the lifeline for the survival and sustenance of the tribal population from the time immemorial. They are known as the children of forest. It is a generally accepted fact that the tribals are one of the suffering communities in our country. Most of the tribals in our state are found backward and oppressed, by others in various ways. For this reason

the state government is giving them special status for their development and welfare. They are been categorized as Scheduled Tribes for the administrative purpose. In the Constitution of India they are given much considerations and assurances. But it is really regrettable that the implementation of the constitutional rights is very poor.

There are 48 tribal communities throughout the state, out of which thirty six were scheduled tribes and the rest are unnoticed tribal communities. Among the tribal communities in Kerala, the most numerically dominant are Paniyas. The tribal communities of Kerala not only differ from the non tribals but also from one another.

Every district in Kerala has some tribal population. They are finding significantly in the districts of Wayanad, Kannur, Kozhikode, Palakkad and Idukki. These districts are having 80% of the tribal population in Kerala. In Kannur district also numerically large tribal community is Paniya. The main economic livelihood of the Paniya tribal community is their manual labour and there is not much diversity in their employment pattern and source of income. Their earning capacity is very low. Their income and standard of living too are correspondingly at very low level.

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