

# A Qualitative Analysis on Socio-Economic and Health Background of the Elderly Tribes in Pachamalai Hills of Tiruchirappalli District of Tamilnadu

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## Abstract

*In tribal societies, senior people commonly act as a storehouse of knowledge such as family lineage, religious rituals, lore and myth which indicate tribal origins, their identity as well as in-depth knowledge about the environment and how to exploit it for survival. The area of the study is Pachamalai, located in the North western part of the Tiruchirappalli district in Thuraiyur taluk which was separated from the Salem district. This is only important hill in the district inhabited by the Malayalee (hillmen). The hill range is about 2000 feet above the MSL and certain peaks are about 3400 feet high. The people live in this hill are called Malayalees and they are scheduled as the tribal people. Most of the Malayalees are poor. The Pachamalai hills are inhabited only by the Malayalees and others are not allowed to migrate to this place. People here seem to live in union and in co-ordination with each other. This study is an attempt to portray the socio-economic and health background of the elderly tribes. The study was conducted with specific focus on their Utensils, Ornaments, dress, food, ornaments, their style of workshop and their customs related to marriage and property. To sum up, the study finds that there is only a partial development in the socio-economic conditions of the tribes in the Pachamalai hills.*

**Keywords:** Tribal, Family Lineage, Religious Rituals, Lore and Myth.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Older people make up a large and increasing percentage of the population throughout the world. Studies about elderly began in early 1960's. The recognition of longevity as one of the major social problems by the World Assembly on Aging in Vienna, 1982 and the International Plan of Action on Aging by the UN General Assembly provided a great motivation for aging research in India. Further, the Assembly selected October 1<sup>st</sup> as the International Day for the Elderly in 1990 and the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 with the theme 'towards a

society for all ages' and an objective to increase the awareness of the fast changing demographic trends of the elderly, promote action policies and encourage research and information exchange. Over the years, interest in the area of aging has increased involving multidisciplinary efforts and innovative strategies to deal with the increasing problems of the elderly within the changing society.

Today, the elderly population is the main focus of the various social planners and service providers. Due to the impact of industrialization and modernization, there is a simultaneous monitoring of the growing population with the study of aging in the terms of socio-economic impact, family relations, health, living conditions and productivity. This phenomenon is more evident in the well developed countries, but recently it has been on a rapid rise in the developing countries. One of the major features of demographic transition across the world has been the considerable increase in the absolute and relative numbers of the elderly people. It is especially true in the case of developing countries like India. About 60% of the elderly live in the developing world, and it will rise to 70%. Further, the older population itself is ageing, with the Oldest Old (80+) constituting more than 10% of the world's elderly.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Background Population ageing is one of the most important global trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the issue has started receiving much attention from the public, media and policy makers. While the 21<sup>st</sup> century is widely being considered the century of elderly persons, the 22<sup>nd</sup> century is expected to witness the phenomenon of the 'ageing of the aged'. The increase in life expectancy has resulted in a major shift in the age group of 80 years and over, known as the 'oldest old'. This emerging trends call for tremendous efforts to cope with new demands and challenges economic, emotional and health related.

Age group (years)	Year 2011* (million)	Year 2016* (million)
60–69	56.8	68.9
70–79	32.0	35.8
80+	9.6	13.2
All ages	1192.5	1268.9

10 Million = 1 Crore \*Nearest population projection available from government sources used instead of the year 2012 and 2017

In 2011, there were 98 million senior citizens in India, and the number is expected to swell to 143 million by 2021, with 51% being women.

Source 1: Population Projection Report for India and States 2001-2026; Report of the Technical Group on Population Projection, Govt. of India, 2006

Source 2: Textbook of Geriatric Medicine, Indian Academy of Geriatrics. Chapter 156 by Mathew Cherian

### III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tribes are facing a lot of problems than non-tribes, in this context, researcher has chosen this study to find out the socio-economic and health background of old age people in tribal community in Pachamalai hills in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamilnadu. The Malayalis are illiterate and highly ignorant and gullible. They are ignorant as well as unaware of the day-to-day happenings and they are not being assertive enough to grasp the opportunities given by the Government. They evade assimilation and joining the mainstream of society. Their occupations are seasonal and occasional job, so they earn meager income. They are not in a position to give education to their children and are not able to avail themselves of better medical facilities. They have to work day and night to earn their daily bread. A scientific method of study is necessary to gain knowledge of the problem of a study. In order to make the present study a scientific one the researcher followed certain research procedures. The present study is an attempt to analyse what are the health problems existing among the aged tribal persons and how the socio economic background of the member of the society affect the old age people.

### IV. DEFINITION OF TRIBE

Anthropologists use the term tribal society to refer to societies organized largely on the basis of kinship, especially corporate descent groups. Some theorists hold that tribes represent a stage in social evolution intermediate between bands and states. Other theorists argue that tribes developed after, and must be understood in terms of their relationship to states. The target group of the present study mostly concurs with the latest view and deals with a hill tribe which is not primitive but is in the evolutionary process closer to the society in the plains.

### V. TRIBAL IN INDIA

In India, tribal are designated by many names which convey the meaning of forest dwellers. Sociologically, the term 'tribe' refers to distinct social groups the members of which live in a common territory and have a common dialect, uniform social organization and possess cultural homogeneity, having a common ancestor, political organization and religious pattern. Anthropologists define tribe as a group that centres around kinship units and common-interest groups that cross-cut kindred boundaries. D.N. Majumdar and T.Madan add more dimensions to the above and state that "A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes without any social obligation attached to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethic and territorial integration" (Majumdar and T.Madan 1989, p. 29). There are more than 700 Scheduled Tribes notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India (Ministry of Tribal Welfare, Government of India).

### VI. DISTRIBUTION OF THE TRIBES:

In terms of geographical distribution about 55% of tribal people live in central India, 28% in west, 12% in North-East India, 4% in South India and 1% elsewhere. The tribal communities are rich in their culture, tales, songs and folklore. Compared with the literacy rates of 29.34% for the general population, literacy among tribal people in India is at most 6%. The Union and the state governments have spent considerable sums of money for tribal youths' education, but the results are far from satisfactory. The Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes asserts that unless exploitation of the tribals is combated and eliminated through education, no improvement in tribal welfare will occur.

#### A. Tamil Nadu: The Scheduled Tribes

The total population of Tamil Nadu, as per the 2001 Census is 62,405,679, of this 651,321 (1.04 per cent) are Scheduled Tribes. There are thirty six (36) Scheduled Tribes have been notified in Tamil Nadu by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 1976.

#### B. Tribal Setting in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu can be broadly classified into three geographical regions, namely, the Eastern coast line region, the central plain area and North and west mountains regions where the majority of the tribal people are living. The important hills of Tamil Nadu are the Jawadhu hills and Elagiri hills of North Arcot district, the Kalrayan hills of south Arcot district, the

Pachamalai, the Kollimalai and Yergadu hills of Salem district, the Anamalai of Coimbatore district, the Sitteri hills of Dharmabari district, the Palanimalai of Dindigul district, Elumalai (cardamom hills) hills and Varshanad hills of Theni district. The tribal population of Tamil Nadu was 5.74 lakhs, where as the total general population was 5.58 crores as per the 1991 census. The percentage of tribal population in Tamil Nadu is very low. The percentage of tribal population to the total population was 1.03 per cent. There are 36 tribal groups in the state of Tamil Nadu.

### **C. Area of the Study - Pachamalai Hills**

Pachamalai is located in the North western part of the Tiruchirappalli district in Thuraiyur taluk which separates the district from the Salem district. This is only important hill in the district inhabited by the Malayalee (hillmen). The hill range is about 2000 feet above the MSL and certain peaks are about 3400 feet high. This hill in the shape of an hour-glass, the length is about 20 kilometers. Through the Ghat road, which is about 31 kms length from Shobanaburam which is at the foot of the hill, we can reach the top of the hill. It has many hairpin bends (11 in number) and the roads are well maintained one. Three kilometer below the top of the ghat road, high way division authorities have displayed a notice board at valley view point and put up a small raised platform from which one can have a beautiful view of the valleys in the slopes and the hill below. At the end of the ghat road on the top of the hill, we are having two travelers' guest houses, on which, one is maintained by the local Panchayat Union and the other by the forest department. The isolated nature of the tribal people in Pachamalai hill made their generation illiterate and derived them to become obsessive to modern medical system. They are living in simple huts in un electrified villages with traditional dresses during the pre- colonial period. Hize Faine, in his manual of Salem district (1887) has given an account of their tribal culture, illiteracy, the native doctors and their day-to-day manual labour and also the house types and dressing pattern of the tribal people. After the independence, the government of India legalized their status through various acts of the constitution, Directive Principles of State Policies as well as by many welfare measures were scheduled to promote their socioeconomic conditions. A separate wing, Tribal Welfare Department was established for taking necessary steps for the state of tribal communities and their livelihood. Other departments were also instructed to give first preference and importance to tribal people for their growth. Thus under various scheme, the Malayalee tribes of Pachamalai hill have to come across the socio-economic and cultural changes. Tribal groups in the hills area continued to speak differently in a variety of tribal languages. The Tamil race came into exist as soon as the mountains were found above the surface of the sea. As far as it is

concerned, the ancient Tamil literature clearly reveals that the Tamil speaking tribal group is one of the ancient human races and Tamil language claims its antiquary. The hills area is fully covered with so many herbal plants. There are 8 residential schools for the benefit of the tribal students. There are four branches of post office set up for their communication; further one government hospital, one veterinary sub centre, ten public distribution centers and a co-operative society are functioned for their regular use. The people those who live in this area are called Malayalees and they are belonged to a scheduled group of people. The Pachamalai belonged to the Uppiliyaburam Assembly constituency which is reserved for the return of a Scheduled Tribe member to the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu legislature. Most of the Malayalees are poor. The Pachamalai hills are inhabited only by the Malayalees and others are not allowed to settle down in this place. It seems that the tribal community set up a different form of habitat. It is an evident from the fact and the social pattern of the society that their president and ward members are being elected unopposed and unanimously from the previous year's till now.

### **D. Objective of the Study**

To study the socio-economic and health background of elderly tribes of pachaimalai hills

### **E. Research Design**

In order to gain insight; explore the depth, richness, and complexity inherent in the phenomenon about real impact of the subject matter the researcher chooses the qualitative research design. It helps to provide complex textual descriptions of how the college students experience in a given research issue. The research conducted Focus groups discussion to obtain detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions of the participants.

## **VII. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Gurumoorthy and Thirumalraja (2015) conducted a study on Status of Aged People in Tribal Community. The study reveals that Problem of ageing is appearing as a major issue in modern age because the improvement of medical science has raised the life expectancy of the people. As a result, the number of old age people is increasing all over the world. According to UNESCO estimate the number of old people aged above 60+ in the world is likely to go up from 350 million in 1975 to 590 million in 2005. About half of them are in the developing countries. In the advanced countries like Norway, Sweden and Japan the population of the aged above 60 is 20 per cent. However, the percentage of the aged in other advanced countries in the West is in the neighbourhood of 14 Per cent. So far as India is concerned as a result of the change in the age composition of the population over time,

there has been a progressive increase in both the number and proportion of aged people. The proportion of the population aged 60 years or more has been increasing consistently over the last century, particularly after 1951. In 1901 the proportion of the population aged 60 or over of India was about 5 percent, which marginally increased to 5.4 percent in 1951, and by 2001 this share was found to have risen to about 7.4 percent. About 75% of persons of age 60 and above reside in rural areas. The Status of the aged not only differ between younger and olds but also from country to county on the socio-cultural background. Venkoba Rao (1979) has indicated that as to how the prevalent cultural conditions are affecting or contributing to the problems of the aged. Ghosal (1962) has observed that the problems of old age tend to be multiple rather than single. Due to the multiple natures being observed in the old age causes different problems. Based on these types of problems vary between tribes and non-tribes.

Thirumalraja (2013) presented a article on “The Problems of Elderly Tribal Women in Kodaikanal Hills: A Sociological Perspective”. The present study is an attempt to analyse what are the problems existing among the elderly tribal women and how the attitudes of the member of the society affect the elderly women. The study portray that elderly paliyan tribes are illiterate and highly ignorant and gullible. They are ignorant as well as unaware of the day-to-day happenings not being assertive enough to grasp the opportunities that are offered by the Government. They continue to cling to their domicile and maintain the pattern of life sticking to the age-old customs. They evade assimilation and joining the mainstream of society. The lack confidence and they have competitive spirit. The occupations they engaged in are seasonal and fetch meagre income. They are not in a position to provide education to their children and are not able to avail of better medical facilities. They have to labour day and night to earn their daily bread. Further, the study found that Psychological problem is most common among elderly. Loneliness in old age is a common problem found in many of the developed and developing countries. Some old persons who are practically alone because they remained single after death of spouse (or) were widowed early and do not have any son or a daughter. But children are also thinking that the aged parents are a burden to them and treated as unwanted one. 13.3 per cent of the respondents stated that they have the feeling of isolation.

Santhosam and Samuel (2013) conducted a study on the Health Status of Elderly Irular Tribal Women in Kancheepuram District. The study specifies that Indian tribals are a heterogeneous group; most of them remain at the lowest stratum of the society due to various factors like geographical and cultural isolation, low levels of literacy, primitive

occupations, and extreme levels of poverty. The present paper attempts to study the health problems of the elderly Irular women in three villages of Kancheepuram district. A total of 30 elderly tribal were interviewed using a pre-tested Interview schedule. Around 66% of the women belonged to the age group of 60-69 years old. A majority of them had health problems such as hypertension followed by arthritis, diabetes, constipation etc. The results of the study showed that there is a need for geriatric clinics that can take care of their physical and psychological needs. It further stressed accessibility of health services as a main reason for the elderly not availing the health care services. The study also suggested provision of mobile clinic to cater to the needs of the community every month on a selected date on a regular basis.

Gautam Kumar Kshatriya (2014) presented a article on the title Changing Perspectives of Tribal Health in the Context of Increasing Lifestyle Diseases in India. The article specifies that the total Scheduled Tribe population of India stands at 104,281,034 as per 2011 census and accounts for 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country. In spite of the concerted efforts by the Government of India, the tribal population groups are lagging behind Indian National population in most of the demographic and social and economic indicators. Similarly, a large number of these tribal groups also show prevailing dismal health conditions. The major focus of various studies related to health issues among tribal populations of India has been on malnutrition or under nutrition. Like all other developing countries, large scale urbanization/modernization has been taking place in India with effective changes in the lifestyles leading to appreciable increase in the prevalence of chronic metabolic conditions like cardio vascular diseases (CVD), diabetes, metabolic syndromes. The benefits of development in education, health and income generation have resulted in a significant amount of mainstreaming of Indian tribes. A number of tribal groups are capitalizing on economic opportunities that are available to them, with a desire to acquiring a better life style with modern life comforts. And thus many of the tribal populations of India are becoming susceptible to various metabolic risk factors that may be related to their dietary profile and physical activity. Therefore, it is worth investigating the changing perspectives of health among the tribes of India in the context of increasing life style disease in India. Precisely for this reason present paper highlights not only the prevalence of under nutrition and malnutrition among the Indian tribes, but, also tries to implicate the association of age, sex and Body Mass Index (BMI) with the different metabolic health risk factors using data among six tribes in Birbhum district of West Bengal and Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, India. Results of the present study indicate that young tribal males are showing increasing



tendency towards growing body weight, against the traditional wisdom, which in turn has been found to be strongly associated with metabolic risk factors. Tribal females are in more danger of developing metabolic risks at lower BMI, irrespective of age, clearly indicating an increasing tendency towards a double burden of disease among the Indian tribal populations. Therefore, this changing pattern of health among Indian tribes needs to be addressed immediately before the situation becomes too alarming.

### VIII. SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE TRIBES

The majority of the tribes of the Pachamalai hill set up a nuclear family system as it are the main consideration of privacy in life. The economical conditions of the tribes mainly depend upon the agriculture, forest and daily labour. Similarly, it is observed that more than (50%) of the people do agriculture and 25 percent of them are engaged in the forest work like collecting firewood. It was found that majority of the people earn a very meager amount that ranges between Rs.2000 and 3000. Only a very small percentage of the total population get assistance from the government and it is due to the fact that most of the tribes are not well aware of the governmental schemes and policies. The health, nutrition and medico-genetic problems of diverse tribal groups have been found largely to be unique and remain a challenging task at all the levels, for which appropriate solutions have to be made. Further, it indicates that significant percent of the people suffer from typhoid and small percent of the people suffer from other complaints like chicken pox, malaria and whooping cough. Their source of taking treatment is government hospital and using medical plants. Their nature of dwelling is huts. The tribal people set up their hut by making use of mud, wooden stick, hay and grasses. It is to be noted that they have granary individually at each hut, in which they happen to store a little amount of goods from their collections daily. Once, in the past hut was their residence; but at present tiled and terraced houses have been built in some of the villages.

### IX. QUALITATIVE RESULTS OF SOCIO – ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF PACHAMALI TRIBES

#### A. Utensils

The tribal community people mostly make use of earthen material and at the minimum level; they use rarely aluminum, brass and other artificial metals. Firewood is collected in plenty as it is a hill region and they utilize for cooking.

#### B. Ornaments

Even though they are forest dwellers, isolated from the rest of the country, they are not behind the screen of aesthetic sense. Both men and women wear ornaments made of gold as well as other

metals. The tribal women customized to wear golden ear-ring, bracelet, a golden kappu, whereas, tribal men are wearing golden kadukkan.

#### C. Dress

Though the way of dressing may be something different from region to region, the tribal women learnt to wear sarees and other trendy dress like chudi etc., and tribal men also wear dress normally and they appear mainly in dhotis, shirt with turban. **Food** They eat three times a day like common people of plain. They prepare their own usual food such as kali or gruel and they eat the residue of the rice prepared in the previous night which is rare. They prefer mostly kali and gruel with greens and vegetables as lunch. They take meal at the night time, which is prepared by using ragi, jowar or maize, generally eaten with some side dish, like pickles and greens.

#### D. Worship

In pachamalai hills, the tribal people happen to worship only their traditional gods and goddess, as in the plains. The community people thought that, the area was originally inhabited by Vedans (hunters). Therefore, at the time of marriage, they are firing a gun, which is used for hunting, to get reminded of the death of the Vedan. The Malayalees do regularly puja to their own traditional gods. They also worship the deities such as Mariamman, Droupathi and many other minor deities. Some of temples seemed to be very old as they were built in the ancient period. Giving promise before their duties in the temple is very common to solve their small disputes among them and individually, they assure their action in the presence of the deity, by holding some burning camphor in the hand. After having made this settlement he blows out the flame to signify that if he had lied, god would have snuff out in the same manner.

#### E. Customs Related to Marriage and Property

Marriages are not common between the people of these hills and those on the plains in the Thuraiyur taluk. For sometimes, they find it very difficult due to a long distance from other hills area. The Malayalees are short and sturdy. Marriages take place either before or after puberty. The Jagirdars' (local village headman) permission is to be sought after paying certain fee to him. For getting married, Malayalees usually pay some amount as bride price to the bride's party, that is, a minimum of Rs.10 to 50, which is known as 'parisom'. The bridegroom has to bear the marriage expenses and the bride has to give a few 'kalams' (measures) of cereals, pulses and vegetables. As a rule, the marriage ceremony is celebrated during the night only. All the people are invited to take part in the feast on the day of marriage by the bridegroom's party. As per their culture, they spend much amount for marriage, even by borrowing

debt at abnormal rate of interest. In rare cases a young boy is married to a woman who lives with immature childhood husband until her husband gets matured to occupy his place as her husband. Formally, when the husband dies even before removing the corpse, the widows are permitted to remarry to another man. One of the strange customs is that a married woman with children could live with a person than her husband and the children born to her by the other man are also entitled to have a share in the property of her legal husband. On the other hand, it is to be noted highly, some of the disputes raised in the case of elopement are solved simply by collecting a sum of rupees from the person with whom she eloped and the fee is paid to the husband of the lady. But according to their tribal custom, only men inherit property. Now because of the advancement of civilization these customs are slowly disappearing. In the past child marriage was prevalent in the community. Even now, 15 years old boy marries to a girl of 13 years. And widows are permitted to remarry. In addition, polygamy is sanctioned by the tribal customs and it is still in vogue, but polygamy is not allowed among the Malayalees. The fact that the man who married for many times, will never hurt or cause any damage to the social prestige.

The important festivals celebrated invariably by the people are 'pongal' and 'deebavali' which fall during the month of January and November respectively. The people also celebrate Mariamman, Pallikondaraman, Karuppasamy and Hariraman as their festivals ceremony. The Mariamman and Hariraman festivals are being celebrated in the month of April every year. In the days of Pongal festivals, the villages turn out in the large numbers and conduct games like hunting. It is considered inauspicious if no animal or bird is shot. They also look after some cattle in the separe fold to conduct a bull fighting on the day of festival celebration. At this point, the bulls are released one by one until they get tired or they are caught by bull-fighters. Nowadays, this kind of bull-fighting is conducted by non-tribals in the rural areas also.

## **X. CONCLUSION**

In view of these facts, an attempt was made to study the socio-economic characteristics of tribes in Pachamalai Hills in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu. To sum up, the study brings out the state of tribal that there is only a partial development in the socio-economic conditions of the tribes in the Pachamalai hills. The in-depth analysis of the study of the social and its extent faced by the elders revealed that tribal elders are more prone to be affected by physical, economical and psychological problems. It is taken into account that the nature of geographical location of the target area and their way of life, sources of livelihood have forced the poor

elders to lead miserable life in the rest of their lives. As there is no alternative employment their increasing age and other social factors have become instrumental problems for their suffering towards poor economical life Problems of the aged anywhere is unavoidable by nature, Of course some of problems can be solved with utilization of medical advancement and increasing economic position. Eventhrough, the life of elders in the hill area and their ever increasing natural problems always exist as same throughout the nation; we the responsible people and the government should take necessary steps accordingly for the benefit of elderly tribes and for their betterment of social pattern in order to meet their basic needs.

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