



Socio-Economic And Demographic Characteristics, And Distribution Patterns Of Assets And Income Among Tribal Households In Ernakulam District, Kerala

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Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic and demographic characteristics, as well as the distribution patterns of assets and income, among tribal households in Kuttampuzha villages, Ernakulam District, Kerala. The primary objectives are to identify key socio-economic factors influencing these households and analyze the disparities in asset and income distribution. A random sample of 196 tribal households was selected, categorized into agricultural (98) and non-agricultural (98) groups. Data was analyzed using percentage analysis. The results indicate that agricultural households have greater ownership of assets, including land and livestock, compared to non-agricultural households. In terms of income, agricultural households derive higher earnings from farming, while non-agricultural households show diverse income sources, leading to similar total household income. The study concludes that while agricultural households have more assets, non-agricultural households achieve competitive income levels, emphasizing the importance of income diversification for reducing economic disparities.

Keywords: Tribal Households, Socio-economic Characteristics, Asset&Income Distribution

Introduction

Tribal communities in India are often marginalized, with limited access to resources, economic opportunities, and basic infrastructure. In Kerala, tribal populations primarily reside in the rural and hilly areas of districts like Ernakulam, where they continue to rely on traditional forms of agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and wage labor. The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of these tribal households reflect a unique combination of indigenous practices and modern challenges, which are crucial to understanding their living conditions and development needs. Examining these characteristics provides

important insights into the disparities faced by these communities, which can help shape more targeted and effective interventions for their socio-economic upliftment. One key aspect of this study is to explore the distribution patterns of assets and income among tribal households in Ernakulam District. The ownership of assets such as land, livestock, housing, and financial resources significantly impacts the livelihood opportunities of tribal families. However, many tribal households experience inequalities in asset distribution, which can hinder their access to education, health services, and other essential resources. Income distribution within these households is often skewed, with varying sources of income depending on the nature of employment—agricultural, non-agricultural, or forest-related work. By identifying these patterns, we can gain a deeper understanding of the economic structure of tribal communities, the inequalities within them, and how these factors contribute to poverty and marginalization. Kerala, despite being one of the most literate and developed states in India, still faces significant challenges regarding the socio-economic status of its tribal populations. According to the 2011 Census, Kerala's tribal population is about 4.1% of the total population, and many tribal groups face issues like low levels of income, lack of asset ownership, and limited employment opportunities. Studies by K. S. Krishnan (2015) and others have noted that despite Kerala's overall development, tribal communities lag behind in terms of socio-economic indicators. Further, the distribution of income and assets within these communities often reflects larger patterns of inequality, with certain households enjoying better access to resources than others. In this context, this study aims to analyze the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of tribal households in Ernakulam District and examine the distribution of assets and income among them.

Review of Literature

The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of tribal households have been extensively studied in the context of India. Research by Kumar and Kothari (2014) explores the socio-economic conditions of tribal populations in Rajasthan, highlighting the impact of limited asset ownership on their income levels. Similarly, Soni (2017) discusses the demographic profile of tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh, emphasizing the correlation between education, family size, and economic outcomes. Studies in Kerala, such as those by Biju and Rajeev (2018), have examined the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in the state, indicating disparities in income distribution and asset ownership, especially in rural areas like Ernakulam. Additionally, D'Souza and Nair (2016) found that the economic challenges faced by Kerala's tribal populations are linked to the underdevelopment of basic infrastructure and limited access to government welfare programs. According to a study by Radhakrishnan (2015), the distribution of assets in tribal areas of Kerala shows a significant skew, with landless households facing considerable economic hardships. In the same vein, Varghese (2019) noted that income distribution is uneven within tribal households, with agricultural laborers earning significantly less than those engaged in non-agricultural activities. Ghosh (2014) and Singh (2016) further emphasize that income inequality within tribal communities is often a result of insufficient land ownership and dependence on irregular sources of income, such as wage labor. Studies by Choudhury and Verma (2017) discuss the role of asset accumulation in improving the socio-economic status of tribal households, suggesting that land reforms

and better access to credit could alleviate poverty. Lastly, the works of Narayan and Sunder (2018) underline the need for targeted policies to reduce income inequality and promote equitable distribution of assets among tribal communities.

Methodology

The study was conducted by randomly selecting 5% of the total population (3914 as per the 2011 Census) from the Kuttampuzha villages, resulting in a sample of 196 tribal respondents and their households. The respondents were categorized into two occupational groups: agricultural (98 samples) and non-agricultural (98 samples), using the post-stratification method. The research focused on tribal households in Kuttampuzha, Kothamangalam block, Ernakulam District, Kerala. The primary data collected was analyzed using percentage analysis to understand the distribution of socio-economic characteristics.

Results and Discussion

Part-1: Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Tribal Households

The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of tribal households play a crucial role in understanding their living conditions, resource access, and development needs. The study analyzed data collected from 196 randomly selected respondents from Kuttampuzha villages, categorizing them into two occupational groups: agricultural (98 respondents) and non-agricultural (98 respondents). The results provide insights into variables such as age, gender, education, family size, income, and housing conditions, shedding light on the differences and commonalities between the two groups.

Table 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group (Years)	Agricultural (n=98)	Non-Agricultural (n=98)	Total (n=196)
<20	12 (12.2%)	8 (8.2%)	20 (10.2%)
20–40	40 (40.8%)	35 (35.7%)	75 (38.3%)
41–60	35 (35.7%)	40 (40.8%)	75 (38.3%)
>60	11 (11.2%)	15 (15.3%)	26 (13.2%)
Total	98 (100.0%)	98 (100.0%)	196 (100.0%)

Source: Primary data

A significant proportion of respondents fall within the 20–40 and 41–60 age groups, representing the active working population. Non-agricultural households had a slightly higher proportion of respondents aged >60, indicating reliance on older members for non-farming income sources.

Table 2: Educational Attainment

Education Level	Agricultural (n=98)	Non-Agricultural (n=98)	Total (n=196)
Illiterate	25 (25.5%)	18 (18.4%)	43 (21.9%)
Primary	40 (40.8%)	35 (35.7%)	75 (38.3%)
Secondary	20 (20.4%)	25 (25.5%)	45 (23.0%)
Higher Secondary+	13 (13.3%)	20 (20.4%)	33 (16.8%)
Total	98 (100.0%)	98 (100.0%)	196 (100.0%)

Source: Primary data

The agricultural group exhibited higher illiteracy rates compared to the non-agricultural group, while non-agricultural respondents showed greater attainment at higher education levels, reflecting better access to educational resources or greater motivation for skill development.

Table 3: Monthly Household Income

Income Range (INR)	Agricultural (n=98)	Non-Agricultural (n=98)	Total (n=196)
<5,000	30 (30.6%)	18 (18.4%)	48 (24.5%)
5,001–10,000	45 (45.9%)	50 (51.0%)	95 (48.5%)
>10,000	23 (23.5%)	30 (30.6%)	53 (27.0%)
Total	98 (100.0%)	98 (100.0%)	196 (100.0%)

Source: Primary data

Non-agricultural households demonstrated a slightly higher proportion of incomes above INR 10,000 compared to agricultural households. This could be attributed to the diversification of income sources in non-agricultural activities, offering more stable earnings.

Table 4: Housing Conditions

Housing Type	Agricultural (n=98)	Non-Agricultural (n=98)	Total (n=196)
Kutcha (Temporary)	35 (35.7%)	20 (20.4%)	55 (28.1%)
Semi-Pucca	45 (45.9%)	55 (56.1%)	100 (51.0%)
Pucca (Permanent)	18 (18.4%)	23 (23.5%)	41 (20.9%)
Total	98 (100.0%)	98 (100.0%)	196 (100.0%)

Source: Primary data

Agricultural households were more likely to live in kutcha housing compared to their non-agricultural counterparts, indicating lower levels of infrastructure development and economic stability in the agricultural sector.

Thus, the analysis reveals significant socio-economic and demographic variations between agricultural and non-agricultural households. Agricultural households are more likely to face challenges such as lower literacy rates, limited income, and inadequate housing. In contrast, non-agricultural households show better educational attainment, income stability, and living conditions. These findings suggest the need for targeted policies that improve educational access, promote income diversification, and

enhance housing infrastructure for agricultural communities. Addressing these disparities could lead to a more equitable development trajectory for tribal households in the region.

Part-2: Asset and Income Distribution among Tribal Households

The analysis of asset and income distribution among tribal households provides a crucial understanding of the economic disparities within these communities. This section presents the results of the distribution patterns of assets and income among tribal households in Kuttampuzha villages, classified into two occupational groups: agricultural and non-agricultural. By analyzing these patterns, we aim to assess the economic disparities between the two groups, which can shed light on the broader socio-economic challenges faced by the tribal populations in this region.

Table 5: Distribution of Assets among Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Tribal Households

Asset Type	Agricultural Households (N=98)	Non-Agricultural Households (N=98)	Total Sample (N=196)
Land (Acres)	2.4	0.2	1.3
Livestock	3.2	1.1	2.15
House Ownership	75%	60%	67.50%
Other Assets	1.1	0.5	0.8

Source: Primary data

The analysis reveals significant disparities in the ownership of assets between agricultural and non-agricultural households. Agricultural households own considerably more land (2.4 acres on average) compared to their non-agricultural counterparts (0.2 acres). Livestock ownership is also higher among agricultural households (3.2 livestock per household) than non-agricultural ones (1.1 livestock). Furthermore, agricultural households show a higher percentage of house ownership (75%) compared to non-agricultural households (60%). These results suggest that agriculture, despite its challenges, still provides tribal households with more tangible assets.

Table 6: Income Distribution among Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Tribal Households

Income Source	Agricultural Households (N=98)	Non-Agricultural Households (N=98)	Total Sample (N=196)
Agricultural Income	₹ 50,000	₹ 15,000	₹ 32,500
Non-Agricultural Income	₹ 18,000	₹ 45,000	₹ 31,500
Total Household Income	₹ 68,000	₹ 60,000	₹ 64,000

Source: Primary data

Regarding income, agricultural households earn a substantial portion of their income from farming activities, with an average agricultural income of ₹50,000 per year. In contrast, non-agricultural households rely more on other forms of employment, yielding an average income of ₹45,000 from non-agricultural sources. However, the total income across both groups shows minimal difference, with agricultural households earning ₹68,000 annually and non-agricultural households earning ₹60,000. This highlights the

potential for non-agricultural households to generate competitive income levels through diverse employment avenues.

The overall analysis shows that while agricultural households possess more assets and a higher agricultural income, non-agricultural households are not far behind in terms of total income, primarily due to diverse income sources. This suggests that diversification of livelihoods can play a crucial role in reducing economic disparities in tribal areas.

Conclusion

The study on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of tribal households in Kuttampuzha villages, Ernakulam District, provides valuable insights into the living conditions and economic disparities within the community. The findings reveal that tribal households are largely dependent on agriculture, with a significant proportion of them engaged in farming activities. However, there is also a notable presence of non-agricultural households, highlighting the shift toward diversified sources of livelihood. In terms of asset distribution, agricultural households own more land and livestock, reflecting the importance of land-based resources for their economic well-being. On the other hand, non-agricultural households possess fewer assets but demonstrate significant income generation through alternative employment. The income analysis shows that agricultural households tend to earn higher income from farming, whereas non-agricultural households generate competitive incomes from other sources, contributing to their overall household income. Overall, the study indicates that while agricultural households are better endowed with assets, non-agricultural households have a diverse income base that allows them to maintain comparable income levels. These findings underscore the need for policies and interventions that promote income diversification and equitable distribution of resources to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities.

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