

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THALAMALAI TRIBES

Dr. Thangamani

Associate Professor of Economics, NDA, Khadakwasla, Pune, Maharashtra

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of socio-economic conditions of sathyamangalam tribes. The tribal population of Tamil Nadu have a special significance because of their extreme level of social and economic backwardness and they reside in remote isolated areas away from any other kind of human Interaction. They are the first to receive the wrath of nature, in ways like drought, heat stroke, infectious diseases, heavy rainfall etc. Special attention and care is required for them to lead normal lives like others. Scheduled Tribes population in Tamil nadu was 651,321; they constitute 1.04 percent of the total population. Among these, 36 Scheduled Tribe communities in the State, six tribal communities have been identified as Primitive Tribal Groups; these are the Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irular, Paniyan and Kattunayakan. They form 31.49 per cent of the total tribes in Tamil Nadu. While Kota, Toda, Kurumba and a majority of Paniyans are found in Nilgiris hills, Irular and Kattunaikan are scattered over a wide area. The Irula, the largest primitive tribe, is found in all northern and western districts of the state. Ever since the Fifth Five Year Plan, Government of India has introduced a number of special development programmes and interventions which are being extended for this vulnerable section of the community. Therefore it is essential to understand the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of these Tribal groups. Though they are grouped often together they differ in their language, culture and religion. Thus, it is necessary to implement particular programmes concerning their specific wants and needs. This can only be achieved through vital research concerning their socio-economic conditions and the problems associated with them. The purpose of this study was to explore socio-economic conditions of the sathyamangalam tribes. The research conducted during the course of the study was unique in bringing out the difficulties of these tribals and it provides an emphasis on their upliftment as citizens of India.

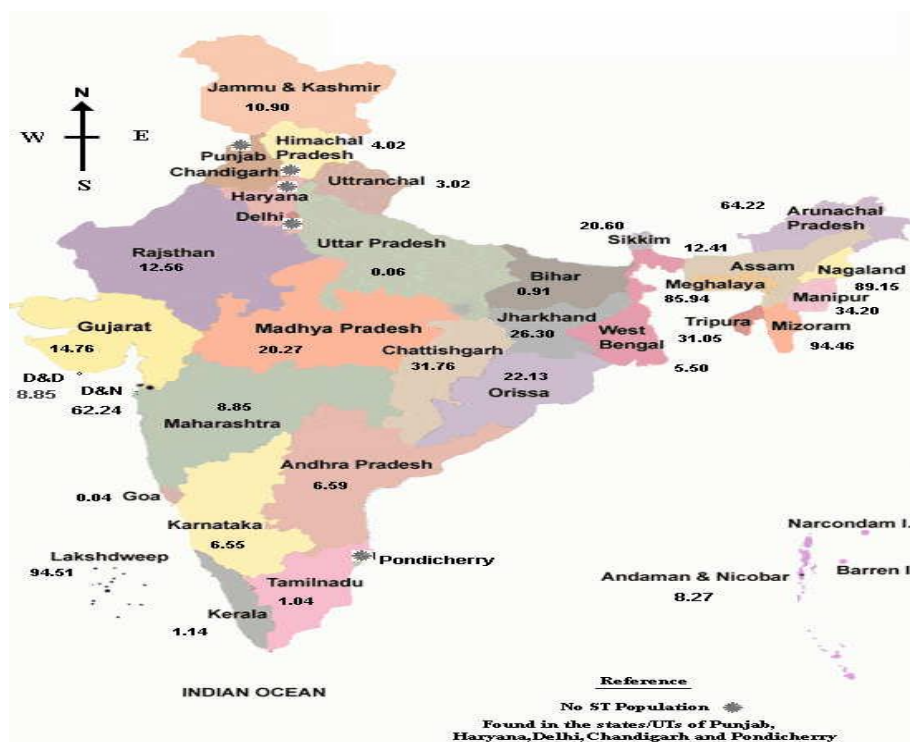
**Key words:** Socio-economic conditions of Tribes.

### Introduction

The tribes are closer to nature. They occupy around 18.7 percent of the total geographical area of the country. Looking at the various Census report since 1891, we can say that the tribal population varies from Census to Census. After division of the country in 1947 the tribal population, as determined by the constitutional order, 1950 was 1787300 in 1951 (Census-1951) their number rose to 19116498, which was around 5.36 percent of total population of India. During the 1961 Census Presidential orders were taken into consideration, which automatically resulted in an increase in the number of tribal communities, thereby increasing the tribal population which stood at being 29879249 (6.87 percent). In 1971, by the consultant presidential orders again resulted in an increase in the number of tribal communities consequent their number rose to 38015162 (6.94%). By 1981,

the population of Scheduled Tribes rises to 5162638 (7.85%) of the total population of the country. According to 1991 Census, Scheduled Tribe population in the country was 67758380, constitutes 8.08 per cent of the total population. According to 2001 Census, the population of Scheduled Tribes in the country was 84,326,240, constituting about 8.20 per cent of the total population.

**Map 1: explains the concentration of ST population of the States/Union territories (2001)**



Source: Census 2001

The above map reveals the concentration of Scheduled Tribes of the States/Union territories. The concentration of scheduled tribe population is highest in Mizoram (94.5 %) and Lakshadweep (94.5 %) followed by Nagaland (89.1 %), Meghalaya (85.9 %). Within the major states Chhattisgarh (31.8%) has the highest percentage of Scheduled Tribes population followed by Jharkhand (26.3%) and Orissa (22.1%). These proportions are lowest in Uttar Pradesh (0.1 %), Bihar (0.9 %), Tamil Nadu (1.0 %) and Kerala (1.1%). Out of the total population in the country, 91.7 per cent were living in rural areas, whereas, only 8.3 per cent from urban areas.

### **Distribution of Tribal Population in India**

India is one of the few nations in the world with a thriving tribal population in different parts of the country. India ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in the World and comes next only to Africa. There are 537 different tribal communities spread all over India. According to 2001 census, tribal people constitute roughly 8 percent of the nation's total population. As per official data, only 258 tribal communities speaking about 106 different languages are notified as Scheduled Tribes. They live mostly in isolated villages or hamlets. Very less percentage of this Population has settled in permanent villages / town / cities.

In India different tribal groups live in various degrees of socio economic backwardness. There are no communications facilities between the various isolated tribal groups, as well as between the tribal and the world at large. The anthropologists have studied the socio-cultural system and taboos of the tribal's and have produced volumes of literature. There are many socio economic measures to uplift the tribal's were initiated by India. The efforts of various commissions and legislative measures have reached the tribal's marginally, a no of development activities intended for protecting the tribal's from exploitation and to improve their socio-economic development. Only few areas have been benefitted so far.

The Scheduled Tribes have been specified, as per Article 342 of the Constitution, in all States and Union Territories except Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Pondicherry and Punjab, about 80 per cent of tribal populations are to be found along the Central belt, starting from Gujarat, Maharashtra, running through Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The rest 20 per cent populations are in the North-Eastern States, Southern states and Island groups.

### **Literacy Rate of Tribal Population**

Literacy and human development are keys to any quantitative social change and those two factors influence demographic behavior. The educational system in India is the second largest in the world with 10.4 lakhs schools, about 17,000 colleges and about 329 universities including institutions demanded to be university (Tilak, 2006: 33-34). The number of students in educational institutions in India out numbers the total population of united Germany, England and Canada together. Also enrolment in all educational institutions have increased eight times from 2.4 crores in 1950-01 to 21 crores in 2002-03, as per official statistics (Ibid :33). Of late, schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-Day Meal have proved to be highly beneficial for providing access to children to elementary schools and retain them up to class VIII (Joshi 2009: 30-31).

The Crude Literacy Rate (defined as percentage of literates among the total population) of Scheduled Castes increased from 10.27 in 1961 to 45.20 in 2001 registering an increase of 34.9 percentage points in the last forty years. The crude literacy of Scheduled Tribes was 8.53% in 1961, which increased to 38.41% in 2001 registering an

Increase of 29.88 percentage points in the last forty years. A comparative position of literacy rate has been explained in the following table.

The literacy rate for the total population in India has increased from 52.21 percent to 64.84 percent during the period from 1991 to 2001; the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes has increased from 29.60 percent to 47.10 percent.

Among ST males literacy increased from 40.65 percent to 59.17 percent and among ST female literacy increased from 18.19 percent to 34.76 percent during the same period. The ST female literacy is lower by approximately 21 percentage point as compared to the overall female literacy of the general population. However, the increase in total as well as female literacy among STs is significant.

The present study is conducted in the Thalavady block of Sathyamangalam taluk in Tamil Nadu in India. Tamil Nadu is one of the major states of southern India; According to the census of 2001, the scheduled Tribe population in Tamil Nadu is 651,321, constituting 1.0 percent of the total population. As like other states and union territories, Tamil Nadu Tribals are also facing the problems of hunger, malnutrition, poverty, poor literacy, poor health facility and deprivation from basic amenities. The extreme economic and educational backwardness of the 36 Scheduled Tribal communities are living in this state, among them 6 Tribal Communities have been identified as Primitive Tribes (i.e.,) Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irulur, Paniyan and Kattunayakan, these communities are considered as very poor than the other tribal communities in the country therefore they have drawn the attention of the state and Central Governments and the NGOs. The efforts of various commissions and legislative measures have proved futile. A number of developmental activities intended for protecting the tribal's from exploitation and meant for helping them to further their socio-economic development have not yielded fruitful results as expected. This may be due to many reasons; The Anthropologists have studied the socio-cultural system and taboos of the tribal's and have produced volumes of literature. There are a few studies made particularly in Tamil Nadu by the government agencies that have evaluated the impact of poverty eradication programmes and its impact on the tribal population, but no study has been focused on socio economic aspects on the tribal population of this block. Therefore, this study made an attempt to evaluate the actual socio- economic conditions of the tribal people and find out the solutions to improve their standard of living.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows

- To analyse the socio-economic characteristics of tribal respondents.
- To examine the factors influencing income and expenditure conditions of the respondents.
- To identify the crucial factors affecting their standard of living and come at par with the rest of the people
- To suggest suitable corrective and remedial measures.

### Hypotheses to be tested

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses have been framed to test their validity.

- High rate of literacy enables the individuals to exhibit better knowledge about the Government facilities and rights.
- Income is influenced by Multi forest product than the other kind of employment
- Ecological relationship dominates the socio economic conditions of the tribal people

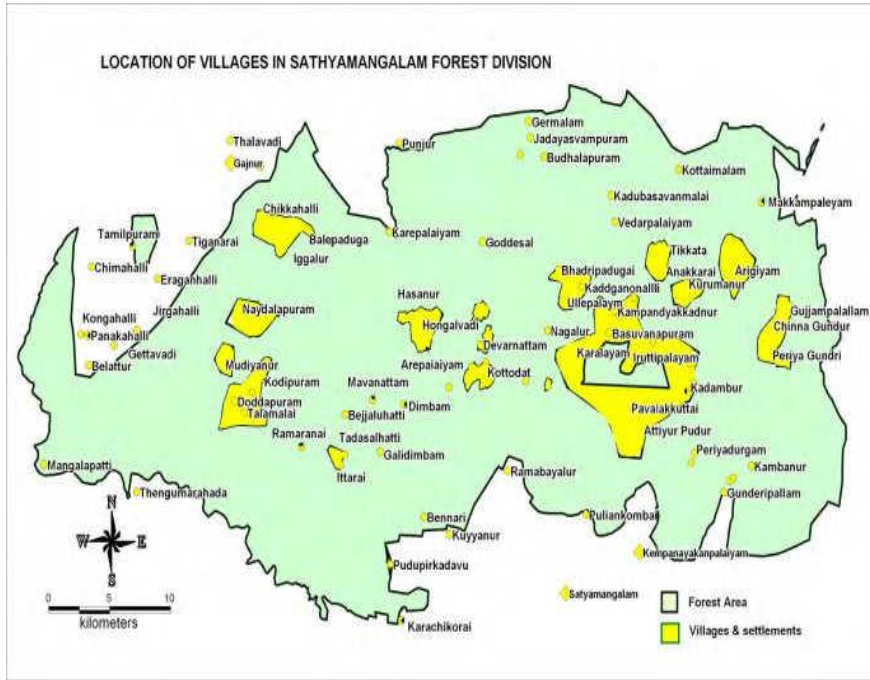
### Methodology

This study tries to understand the socio-economic conditions of sholaga tribes of Thalaimalai village. The village Thalaimalai comes under the Thalavadi panchayat union /block of the sathyamangalam taluk in Erode district. The Thalaimalai village consists of 12 hamlets, Out of these 12 hamlets, six hamlets are tribal hamlets (Ramaranai, Bejjalati, Ittarai, Thadasalatty, Mavanatham and Galidimbam), they have been chosen for the present study. which accounts for 196 tribal houses, Lack of time and resources hampered studying all the households in the selected hamlets. Therefore, it was decided to study 49 households in 6 hamlets. They consist of Agricultural labourers, Marginal farmers, Small farmers, big farmers and other categories of people. These 49 houses were selected based on systematic random sampling, among them 45 houses were investigated through interview method by using specific information schedule consists of information regarding family size, age, gender, educational qualification, economic status, life style, nature of occupation and consumption etc.,. The study used both the primary as well as secondary source data in its findings.

The selected six hamlets are surrounded by thick forest. All types of wild animals inhabit in the forest.

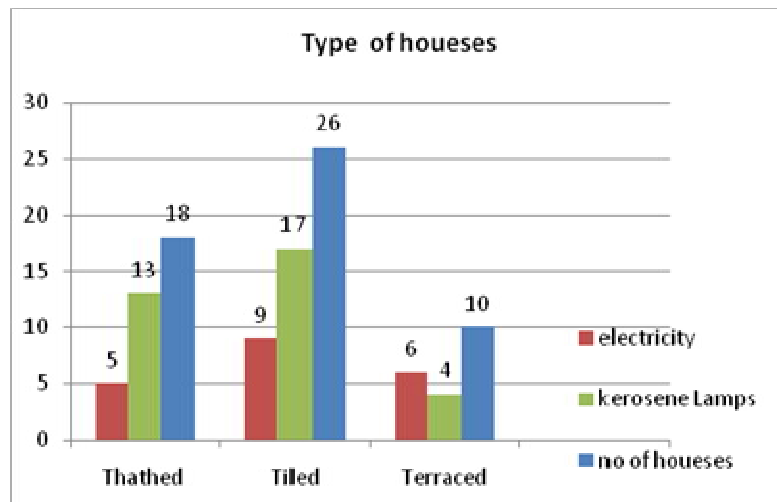


Map 2: The selected hamlets can be identified in the given map



**Housing condition of the sample respondents**

The housing conditions of the sample respondents are explained in the following figure.



Source: Field Survey

Among the 54 houses 18 houses are thatched, 26 are tiled houses and the remaining houses are terraced houses. Among the total houses about 36 percent of the houses have got electricity facility. The tiled houses were built by the IRDP scheme in which some of them were totally damaged and few houses were repaired by MYRADA (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency) a non-governmental organization. Also Terraced roofs are partly damaged. Since these people live in thick forest, they should be given proper housing facilities which enable them to be away from acute problems which crop up from their surroundings.

#### Tribal Household with no infrastructural facilities





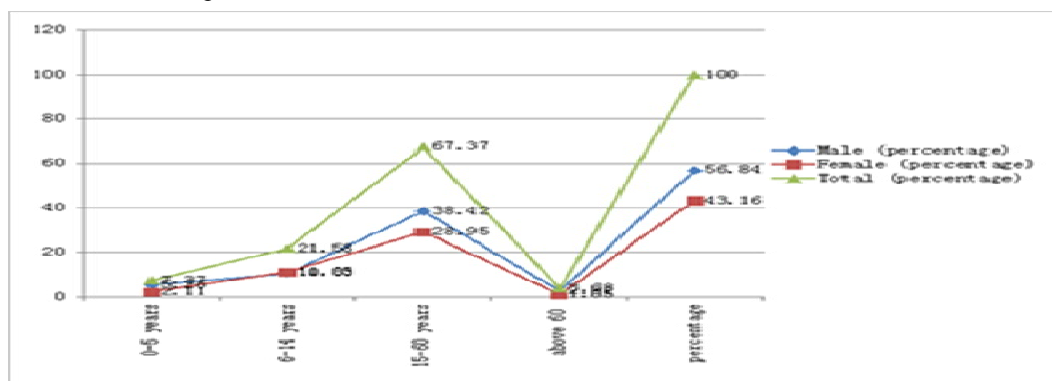
Moreover their entire housing structure consists of a single room which serves as a kitchen, hall, and bathroom all in one. Also they utilize firewood as a chief source of fuel for cooking, this results in huge quantities of smoke to be released leading to various breathing disorder which always goes unnoticed and untreated.



Drinking water is available throughout the year except in the summer months when they are forced to search for alternative water sources which are unclean and contaminated. Consumption of such water only aggravates the spread of infectious diseases which if not treated in time, causes an endemic to breakout leading to loss of many lives.

**Populations by Sex and Age Group**

The following figure reveals the age group and sex of the tribal hamlets of Thalaimalai village.



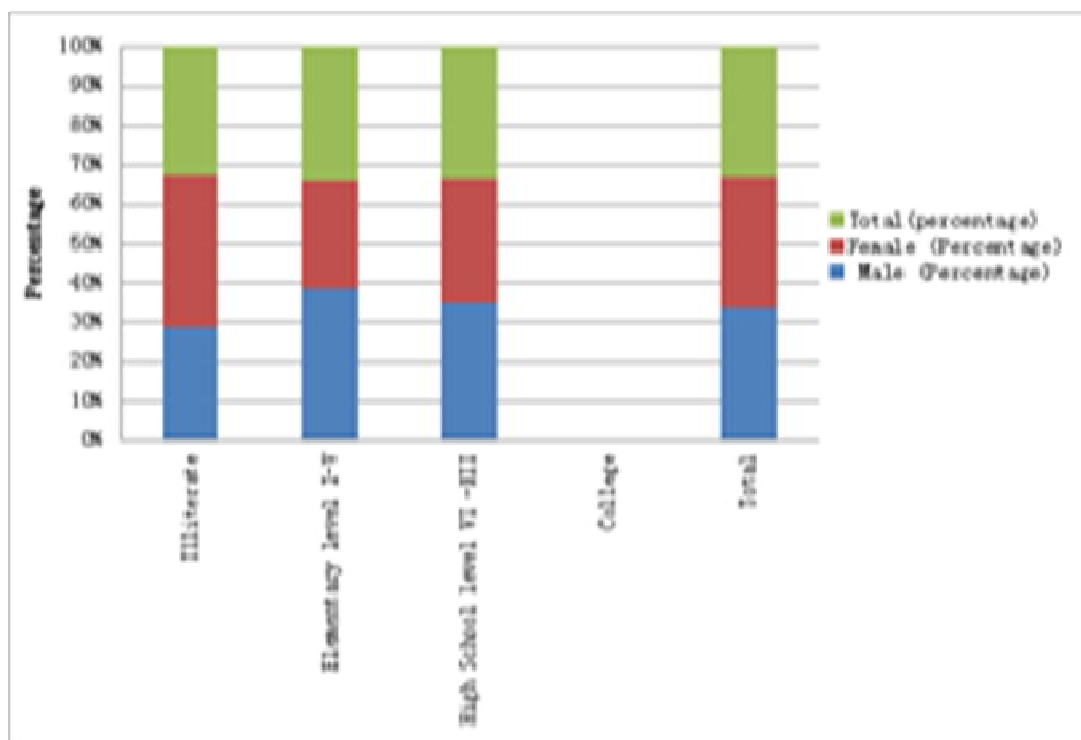
Source: field survey



The percentage of male population is higher than the women population. Besides, it is also expressed that working population size is more in men i.e., 38.42 percent than the women's population (28.95 percent). It is well known that the productive age group population is very high in both sexes in this village than the nonproductive population. It is important to note that majority of the men smoke beedies and consume liquor frequently in order to escape the cold which leads to development of lung, liver and other ailments. The household survey indicates that the average size of the household is 4.22 percent, and also the old age group is 2 percent, which is very poor compared to 8 percent of the State's old age group. many a times it is observed that natural death due to old age is uncommon and majority of the times death occur due to living in close proximity of wild animals like leopards, tigers, elephants , snakes, scorpions etc . Because these tribals reside in secluded areas even primary medical assistance is unavailable in desperate situations like these.

#### Education Particulars

Since education is one of the important factors in achieving rapid rural development, it helps in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and opportunities. As per the census records, a person is considered literate if he can both read and write with understanding in any language



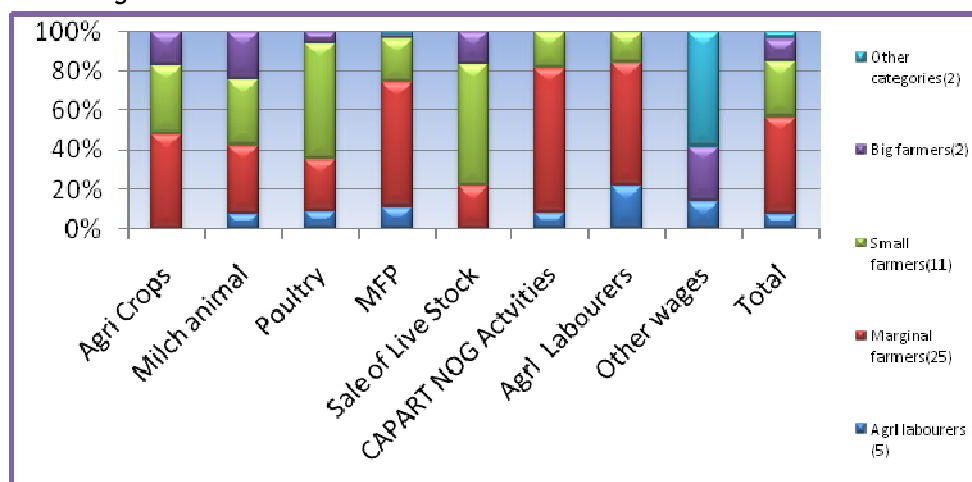
### The Literacy level of selected sample respondents

The above figure explains the literacy level of tribal people of Thalaimalai village. Almost 55 percent of the females are illiterate and 41 percent of the males are illiterate, it is observed that the people have studied up to primary education (almost 74 percent), whereas, 27 percent of the people have studied up to high school level. No member in all the six hamlets has studied at college; it has been observed that tribal community in the study area, Have studied only up to primary education, they are not interested in pursuing higher education.

After primary school, they have been advised to look after the domestic work rather sending them to higher studies. It is evident that lack of education leads to ignorance at all levels causing them to still blindly believe in age old customs and traditions. Lack of education also humiliates to them using unsafe medical practices like midwives, fake imposters etc who have no knowledge in the field of medicine.

### Income particulars

Income plays a vital role in improving the standard of living, education and health status of the people. The major cultivation of the people includes maize, ragi, jowar, gingelly and also vegetables to a limited extent. The tribal people also resort to supplementary occupation such as broom making, collecting minor forest products like kalpasam, tamarind ,grasses, shikakai, soap nuts neem seeds and pungam seeds etc., There is no canal irrigation in these area.



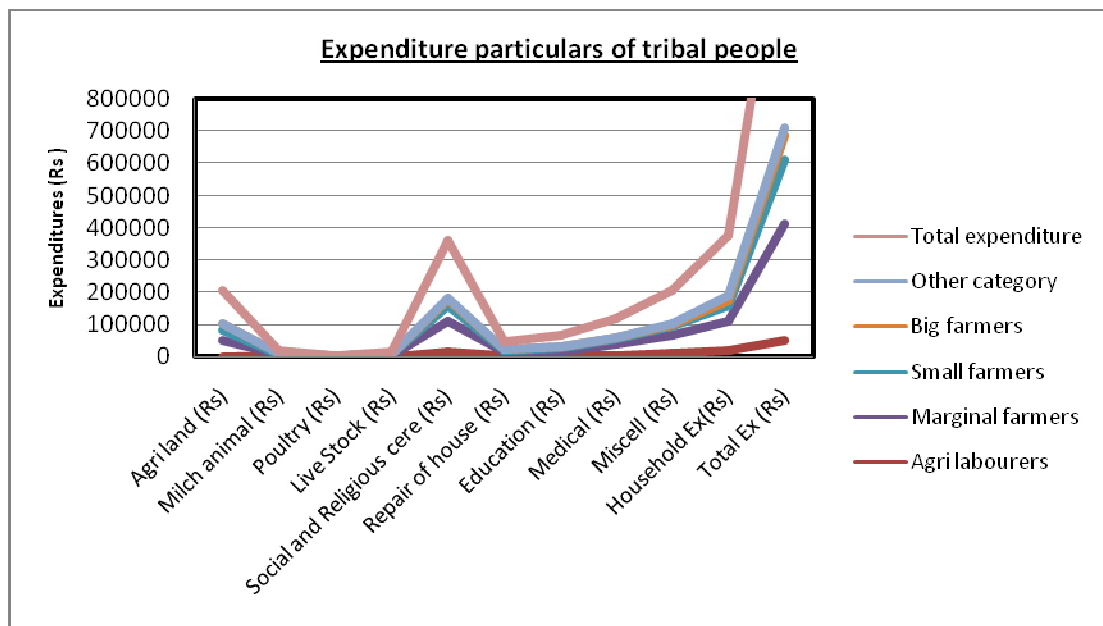
Source: field survey

The above figure reveals that the main sources of income of the tribal people are Agricultural crops, Milch animal, Poultry, Minor forest products, Sale of livestock, CAPART and NOG activities, Agricultural labour etc. The tribal group is divided into Agricultural

labourers, Marginal farmers, Small farmers, big farmers and other categories. It is important to note that among the various sources of income; only MFP has contributed maximum income to the tribals than the other sources of occupation. i.e., (34.05) Next to MFP agricultural crops gives 33.41 percent income to tribal farmers. The other main subsidiary income of the tribal community in the study area is Milch animal and agricultural wage, which holds 9.21 percent and 7.94 percent respectively. The other sources of income is from poultry, sale of livestock, CAPART, NOG activities and other activities, i.e., about 15 percent of the total income. Therefore we can conclude that the tribal people mainly depend upon collecting the minor forest for their main income. but marginal and agricultural labourers tend to pick up any kind of job available to them. As they have a meager income it is taken for granted that little or no amount of money on any kind of medical expenses.

**Expenditure Particulars of Tribal households**

The figure below reveals that expenditure incurred by the tribal people on various aspects such as expenditure on agricultural crops, expenditure on Milch animals, house tax and land tax, social and Religious ceremonies, medical and educational expenses etc.



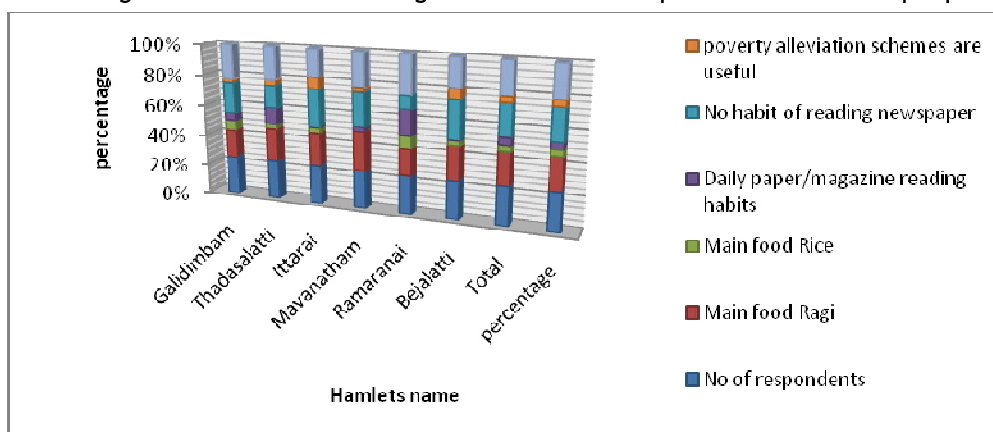
Source: Field Survey

It is understood that expenditure incurred by the tribal people (all categories) on social and religious ceremonies are much more than the other expenditures. Almost 25.40

percent of expenditure goes to only ceremonies and the next important item of expenditure goes to household expenditure i.e., 26.37 percent and the miscellaneous is 14.41 percent. It signifies that they believe in old customs and traditions when it comes to curing of diseases rather than visiting or taking any doctoral advice

### General information particulars

The figure below contains the general information particulars of tribal people.



Majority of them consume only Ragi, it has been considered as inferior food compared to rice. The reason is that they cultivate only ragi and jowar in their field. Because of their insufficient diet these tribals are usually victims of malnutrition, anemia, and are immune compromised which in turn leads to infection of the least pathogenic diseases which has resulted because of poor immune system. Since they live inside the thick forest they can hardly get the News dailies and other things. It is important to note that only 17.78 percent of the tribal people read news paper. Majority of the tribal community in the study area, i.e., 82.22 percent of the people never read regional news papers at all and there are no library facilities inside the tribal area where almost 1000 people are living. It signifies that tribal people are so illiterate and ignorant about outside activities.

Educational development is a stepping-stone to economic and social development, and the most effective instrument for empowering the tribal; but it is not very much successful in tribal areas due to lack of transport facilities and lack of infrastructural facilities.

The above objectives and the hypotheses have been proved with the help of the above concepts.

The study reveals that socio economic status of the Thalaimai area is a cause of major concern as these individuals are residing in inhuman conditions and steps must be taken to provide them with better living conditions.

1. As we have seen in the case study of tribal population, it is proved that the living conditions of the tribal population is not favorable compared with the plain area population.
2. The existing socio economic conditions are not adequate enough to bring them above the poverty line.
3. Government of India has introduced various welfare programmes for the welfare of the tribal community in the study area. But the implementation is very poor due to backwardness of the people and their ignorance.
4. There is a considerable distance between one hamlet to another and there is no transport facility available to them, as a result they keep crossing wild animals even during day time. They have to cross a big stream to go to the Fair price shop in Bejaloty but there are herds of elephants which are always gathered over there, hence it is difficult for them to cross that area without putting their life at risk.
5. Their customs and traditions are totally different from that of the plain area people; therefore they maintain a distance between the outsiders. The government should take adequate steps to make them friendly with the plain area people by interaction so that they can learn other languages making them comfortable in turn helping them to modify their standard of living.
6. The tribal population in the study area are creating problems to the wild animals and nature so wild animals keep coming to the living area and destroy the crops and properties which results in frequent deaths of wild animals in this area.
7. They have been misused by the money lenders and officials easily due to their backwardness and illiteracy. Therefore government should take steps to introduce tribal oriented developmental activities to enhance their ability as individuals and making them comfortable to lead normal lives like that of the plain area people.

Therefore the study concludes that isolation remains the main cause of social, economic and moral backwardness of any kind of tribal area. The given area of study also exhibits the same causing them to lead lives of disparity and poverty. People's development issues cannot be tackled in isolation, other infrastructure like roads, transport, schools, hospitals etc need to be strengthened to ensure tribal development, since the area is predominantly agricultural, focus can be made to develop agriculture and allied sectors, like horticulture, plantation and social forestry. As the potential for these activities is high, each of them will create sizeable demand for regular labour force. However, minimal infrastructure has to be developed for the programmes in agriculture and allied activities which includes construction of roads, godowns and other facilities. It is felt that a substantive and sustainable developmental programme in agricultural and allied sectors can strengthen the tribal economy. But above all it is important that official

machinery has to be sensitized to deal with tribal development problems not merely as 'paid jobs' but 'service' to community and nation building.

Change is the heartbeat of growth. In the past few years there has been a significant growth and change in these rural tribal hamlets resulting in their prosperity to a certain level

***“Educate one man, you educate one person, but educate a woman and you educate an entire civilization”.***

***- Mahatma Gandhi***

### **References**

- *Adi - Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, GOTN, 2000.*
- *Annual Report (2006-07). “Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, New Delhi.*
- *Annual Report (2006-07). “Ministry of Tribal Affairs Govt. of India, New Delhi.*
- *Accord, Report of ‘The Study on Tribal Land Alienation’, In the State of Tamil Nadu’, The Nilgiris, 1998.*
- *Alock Kumar, Tribal Culture and Economy, Inter India Publications, New Delhi, 1986.*
- *Government of India, ‘Annual Report 1996-97’, Ministry of Welfare, Delhi.*
- *Government of India, ‘Draft Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)’, Vol. II.*
- *Government of India, ‘Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)’, Vol. II.*
- *Planning commission report 2003 Impact of the Tribal Sub-Plan Implementation in Improving the Socio-Economic Condition of the Tribal People with Special Focus on Reduction of Poverty Level covering the States of Assam and Tamil Nadu*
- *Planning commission report 2008 - Planning commission report 2012 on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in andhra pradesh, maharashtra, orissa and tamilnadu: an evaluation study*
- *Census of India, 1991, Series - 1, India, Part II - B (III), Primary Census Abstract, Scheduled Tribe Population, Office of the Registrar General of India, New Delhi, 1995*
- *Menon, P.S.K., ‘Tribal Development Policies, Plans and programmes’. Yojna, April 2002.*
- *Majumdar, D.N. and Madan, T.N., 1956. “An Introduction to Social Anthropology”, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.*
- *Majumdar, D.N., 1937. “A Tribe in Transition: A Study of Cultural Pattern”, London.*
- *Vidyarthi, Indian Anthropology in Action, Ranchi University Press, Ranchi.*
- *Roy Burman, B.K., 1997. “Tribal and Indigenous people: A Global Overview”, The Eastern Anthropologist, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 17-26.*
- *B.K. Roy Burman, “Some Dimensions of Transformation of Tribal Studies in India.”-Journal of Social Research, Vol. xxiii, No. 3, 1979.*
- *Alock Kumar, Tribal Culture and Economy, Inter India Publications, New Delhi, 1986.*