

ROOTS AND REALITIES :CULTURAL TRADITIONS, EDUCATION, HEALTH, AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES IN KERALAM

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ABSTRACT

Tribal communities constitute an integral part of India's cultural heritage, preserving unique traditions, indigenous knowledge system, and traditional lifestyles across generations. In Kerala, scheduled tribes predominantly inhabit hilly and forested areas, where they have managed to preserve their unique cultural identities in spite of the demands of modernisation and socioeconomic marginalization. The current study focuses on the indigenous sports, traditional art forms, and general well-being of scheduled Tribes in Kerala. The study also explores their cultural practices, level of education and health. With over 537 tribal clans living mostly in hilly and woodland areas, Kerala offers a distinctive socio-cultural landscape that merits through scholarly research. The study uses secondary data from the Indian census of 2001 and 2011, as well as pertinent academic publications, and tribal committee reports. Twelve tribal communities were selected for this study which includes Eravallur, Irular, Kurichyar, Paniyar, Malayarayar, Urali, Muthan (Muthuvan), Ulladan, Parayan, Kadar, Kannikkar, Malapandaram. The findings reveal that Kerala's scheduled tribes continue to experience significantly lower literacy rates compared to the general population, recording 75.8% against the state average of 94.0% as per the 2011 census. At 71.08%, women's literacy among scheduled tribes is still extremely low. Despite these obstacles, tribes have historically maintained their physical and mental health through lively cultural traditions. The study concludes that enhancing the general standard of living for Kerala's scheduled tribe communities requires focused governmental initiatives that address healthcare, education, and cultural preservation.

Keywords : Scheduled Tribes in Kerala, Cultural practices, traditional Tribal sports, Educational Disparities, Tribal health and well-being.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Indian Constitution, a portion of the Indian population is categorised as a tribe. Tribes have been referred to as Adivasi, or Indigenous people, in official usage. In anthropology, a "tribe" is a geographically isolated or largely isolated community with unique traditions and ways of life in different places. (Chitra devi.k, 2018) There are many tribes in India, some of which are huge, and the majority of them maintain their distinctive cultures and customs. (Chauhan 2007) Various anthropologists have attempted to explore the ethnic components of the Indian people at various points

in time.(Jana, Sakti Pada, 2002) During the pre-British era, tribal people in India had nearly free lives of "gotra." With unique languages and cultural customs, each tribal community shared a standard territorial division and was typically geographically remote. They do not need to rely on outside legal and order institutions because customary laws govern their political, social, and religious organization. For plenty of reasons, the British authorities who first oversaw India refrained from meddling in the internal affairs of the people who lived in the tribal territories. (FOURTEENTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN 2002)For this Constitution, "ethnic group" refers to the tribes or communities of those ethnic groups and the areas or groups within those tribes or communities designated as Scheduled Ethnic Groups under Article 342. In India, the word "Scheduled Tribes" refers to a political and administrative notion used to "administer" historically underprivileged communities that are granted certain constitutionally granted benefits. (Narain JP 2019). To assert the State's constitutional authority over forest land, the British colonists strengthened the Indian Forest Act of 1865 in 1878 by registering the area under the Protected category and other categories. The expulsion from their homeland, the limitation of access to forest resources, and the restriction of livelihood possibilities all had a significant impact on indigenous populations' rights to forest land. (Narain JP 2019). After India's independence, the country's leaders worked hard to lift the tribal communities out of poverty and isolation, which led to several anti-poverty programs aimed at raising the income of tribal communities and improving their standard of living. The National Extension Scheme (NES) was implemented in 1951, and the Tribal Block Development Scheme (1962) followed. The growth of the tribal population in India has become a significant concern for the government, voluntary agencies, NGOs, social reformers, social scientists, and others. (CHITHRA DEVI.K 2018) During the pre-British era, tribal people in India had nearly free lives of "gotra." With unique languages and cultural customs, each tribal community shared a standard territorial division and was typically geographically remote. They do not need to rely on outside legal and order institutions because customary laws govern their political, social, and religious organisation. For plenty of reasons, the British authorities who first oversaw India refrained from meddling in the internal affairs of the people who lived in the tribal territories.

The present study aims to examine the cultural customs, educational attainment, and health conditions of scheduled Tribes in keralam, with particular emphasis on their indigenous sports and traditional art forms. The study seeks to achieve three primary objectives. 1) To identify and profile the diverse tribal communities residing across keralam's geographical regions; 2) To assess the literacy levels and educational participation of tribal populations by comparing census data from 2001 and 2011, while identifying structural barriers that hinder access to quality education and healthcare; 3) To analyse the cultural significance of indigenous games, martial arts, and traditional dance forms-including kalaripattu, silambam, kurumbar Nirtham, and Gadhika dance-as vital instruments through which tribal communities preserve their physical fitness and cultural identity across generations.

1.2 Keralam

Keralam is located in the southwest corner of India and is a short strip of land. Keralam is separated into three distinct geographical areas. Lowlands, Midlands, and Highlands. It is incredibly possible that a significant portion of Keralam was underwater in the past (Aerthayil, M, 2000). According to the findings, the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Megalithic periods are when Keralam's society and culture first emerged. (Shibu, B, 2017)Thurston claims that the term "Malayali," which refers to the people who live on hills, is derived from the words "malai," which means hill, and "al," which means people. The words "malai" (hill) and "Ali" (people) are the etymological roots of this word. The long-standing desire of all Keralites is to form Keralam from three states where Malayalam is spoken, namely Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar. November 1, 1956, was the definitive fulfillment of the long-awaited wish. The creation of a single state, Keralam, is supported by the public in all

three areas since Malayalam is the only language its citizens speak. (Shibu, B 2017). Keralam is also home to hundreds of Kammara tribes, and their jewellery and attire appropriately represent their culture and customs. The Janakula, Mahipala, Paidipaala, Raghukula, Kasyapa, Dhanunjaya, or Kondareddis tribes in Keralam contribute to the distinctive and exquisite tribal culture of the State. The Ku State tribe is renowned for its Hindu customs and magical knowledge. (D.Princy, 2020)

MATERIALS METHODS

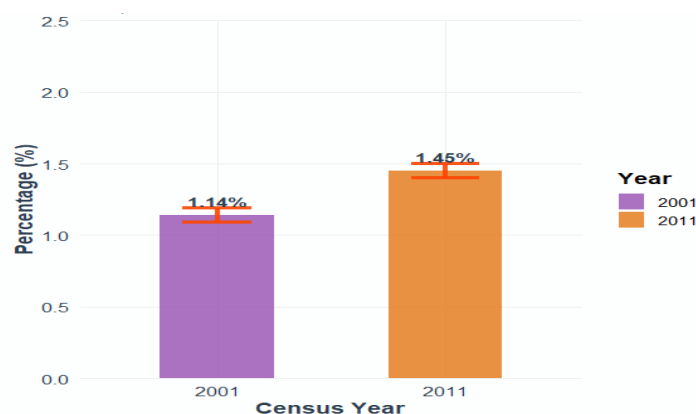
The current study adopt a descriptive research approach with the goal of methodically investigating the helath,educational attainment, and cultural practices of keramlam's scheduled tribes. A qualitative technique based solely on secondary data gathering and analysis was used because the study was exploratory in nature. The census of India (2001 and 2011),government tribal welfare reports, state planning board documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, published books,journals,and other e-resources were among the many secondary sources from which the data for this study obtained. Based on their applicability to the goals of the study, a total of 23 suitable articles were carefully chosen from35 different books and ,magazens.articles that specifically addressed tribal education,health,culture,or indigenous activities in keralam were included; sources that lacked academic credibility or specificity were not. Norder to compare tribal literacy,population,distribution,and educational engagement across a ten-year period and find quantifiable trends and patterns in tribal development, the 2001 and 2011 census years were carefully chosen.however,it is acknowledged that one of the study's limitations is the lack of more recent census data. For this study, twelve native groups were specifically chosen namely Eravaller, Irular, Kurichyar, Paniyar, Malayarayar, Urali, Muthan (Muthuvan), Ulladan, Parayan, Kadar, Kannikkar, Malapandaram.4,84,839 tribal people were living in Keralam as per the 2011 Census, making up about 1.45% of the State's total state population. To provide sufficient regional representation, these communities were chosen based on their geographic distribution through keralam's main tribal disticts,such as Wayanad,Idukki and Palakkad. Tribal health,education,cultural customs, and indigenous sports was methodologically categorized and compared to accessible statistical indicators using content analysis and descriptive interpretation.

To assess differences between the tribal and general populations in important development metrics including literacy rate, school enrolment, and health care access, comparative analysis was also used.in terms of ethical considerations, this study does not directly involve human individuals and only uses secondary data that is publicly available.inoreder to avoid misrepresentation or cultural bias In the interpretation of findings, extra caution has been made correctly and respectfully depict tribal cultures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Total population vs Tribble population in Keralam

year	Total population of Keralam	Tribal population	Percentage of ST population
2001	~31.8 million	~364,189	~1.14%
2011	~33.4 million	484,839	1.45%



Source : Census of India.2001 &2011

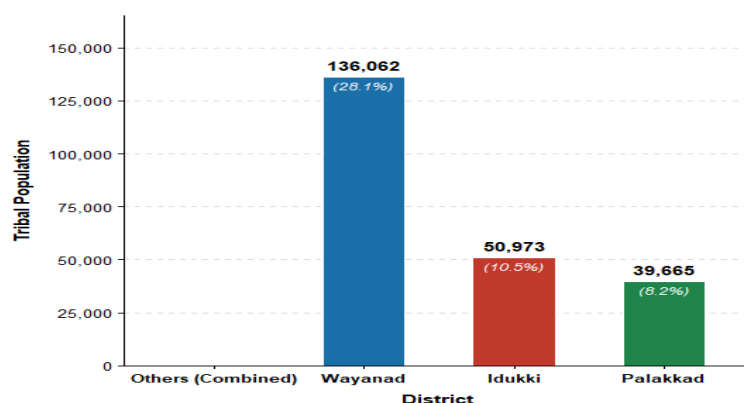
Figure 1 :Comparison of Total and Tribal Population in Keralam

3.1Tribal areas

Scheduled Tribes" are those tribes or tribal communities, or portions or groups within such tribes or communities, that are considered Scheduled Tribes under Article 342 (the Constitution of India). Arularasan, G. S., & Narayanaswamy, B. K. (2011)India is home to about 537 tribal groups. Twenty-fifth on the list of scheduled tribes are the Malayali people. The hilly regions are home to the majority of them. Some of the tribal communities in Keralam are the Eravaller and Irular from the Palakkad districts, the Kurichyar and Paniyar from Wayanad, and the Malayarayar and Urali from Idukki. and Muthan (Muthuvan), Ulladan, Parayan, Kadar, Kannikkar, Malapandaram, etc. (Nishamol M. 2021). Keralam's entire tribal population, as reported by the 2011 Census, was 484,839, approximately 1.45% of the State's total population. In Keralam, the majority of the tribal population resides in Wayanad District (136,062), Idukki District (50,973), and Palakkad District (39,665). One of Keralam's most impoverished districts is Wayanad. This one lags in socioeconomic metrics compared to other districts in India. Only 56.3% of homes in Wayanad have access to safe drinking water, compared to 87.9% of households throughout India. (D.Princy, 2020) Keralam's tribal culture is a persistent, isolated, and distinctive way of life. Through their artistry, tribal artists demonstrate their pride in their culture. Every village has distinctive crafts, musical instruments, and dance customs; you can encounter diverse cultures with various hat styles and drum sounds while visiting the villages in Keralam's wooded mountains.

Table 2: District-wise Distribution of Tribale Population

District	Tribale population
Wayanad	136,062
Idukki	50,973
Palakkad	39,665
Others (combined)	Remaining population



Source : Census of India, 2011

Figure 2 : District-wise Distribution of Tribal Population

3.2 Tribal culture and Indigenous activities

They speak Malayalam and are usually referred to as "Kadar." The Wayanad tribe inhabits India's forests. People live various lifestyles in Wayanad, India's largest tribal colony. The tribes' customs and culture cohabit peacefully. Namboothiri, D. (2006). The Wayanad tribes work in a variety of professions. Some are hunters, gatherers, and small basket builders. In Wayanad, the tribes that possess land grow various crops, including rice, mangoes, millet, jackfruit, ginger, and others. Nonetheless, a few tribes have managed to land positions in both the public and commercial sectors. Major festivals like Makam (the Prophet's festival), Onam (the harvest festival), and Vishnu (the primary Hindu deity) are celebrated with great vigor by the predominantly Hindu Wayanad tribe. (D.Princy 2020).

- **Kurumbar Nritham Dance:** The **Kurumbar Nritham** is one of the most cherished tribal dances in Wayanad. This vibrant dance is integral to wedding celebrations, performed by both the bride's and groom's families, often before the main event.
- **Gadhika Dance:** The Wayanad District's Adiya tribe performs the Gadhika dance, which promotes healthy delivery and provides medical attention to the ill. A dancer first calls upon Lord Shiva's assistance **to heal sick people**.
- **Kaanikkar Nritham Dance:** The Kanikkar tribe's dance. The sound of the drum's blends in perfectly with the dancers' steps, arm and hand motions, and overall rhythm.
- **Elelakkaradi Dance:** The Irular tribe frequently performs the traditional dance known as Elelakkaradi. Both men and women, as well as children, participate in this communal dance. The battle against wild bears, which frequently attack their tribal villages, is simulated in the dance.
- **Kaadar Nritham Dance:** It is categorized as a primitive dance and is well-liked by the Kadar tribe in the Cochin jungles. The dancers were arranged semi-circular to perform the elegant yet essential kaadar nritham.
- **Paravalli Kali Dance:** An ancient tribal dancing form from Keralam is called Paravalli Kali. Both men and women participate in this blend of tribal dancing forms from Travancore's forest districts.
- **Thavala Kali Dance:** In this dance, numerous men jump one after the other, like a frog.

- **Man Kali Dance:** This tribal dance brings us to a Ramayana scene. It narrates how Maricha, dressed as a deer, enchanted Sita. (Reji, P. K. 2010).

3.4 Indigenous activities

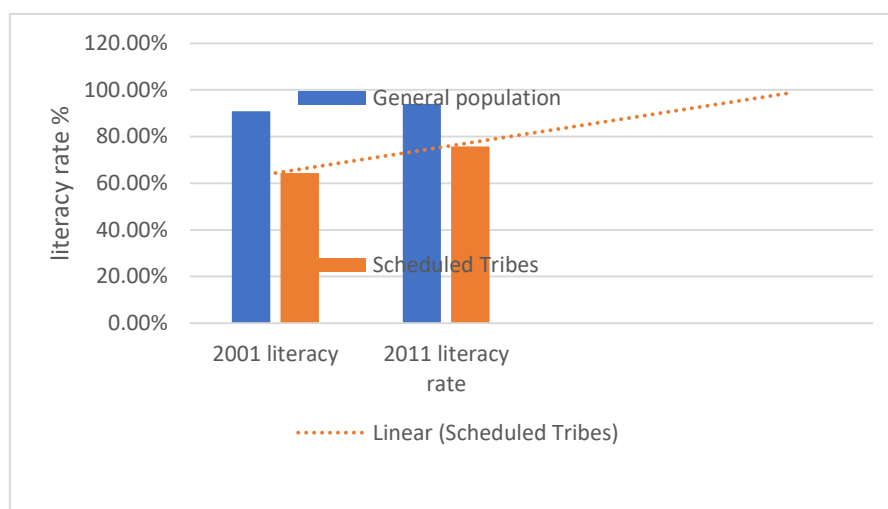
Silambam: An ancient stick-fighting martial art. Practised by tribal groups as a means of self-defence. Kambala (Buffalo Race): A traditional sport where buffalo race on muddy fields, played by farming and tribal communities in South India. Kalaripayattu: One of the oldest martial arts in the world, practised by various tribal and non-tribal communities in Keralam. Includes armed and unarmed combat techniques. Kayyankali: It is a traditional one-on-one combat sport. Played mostly among male tribal members to test physical strength. Vadamvali (Tug of War): A competitive team sport requires strength and teamwork. Played during tribal festivals and celebrations. Kuttiyum Kolum: Similar to Gilli-Danda, they played with two wooden sticks. Requires hand-eye coordination and precision. Thala Panthu Kali (Head Ball Game): It is a unique game where players pass a ball using their heads. Requires balance and coordination. Chaturangam (Tribal Chess): A tribal version of chess played with local variations in rules. Encourages strategic thinking and decision-making. (The oldest martial arts in the world, 2023)

3.5 Education system

Tribes comprise 0.43% of the nation's ST population and 1.14% of Keralam's population. Several measures, including literacy, enrollment, dropout rates, retention rates, and so on, can be used to evaluate the empirical State of education. Therefore, scheduled tribes' literacy rates are always much lower than those of the non-tribal population. In 2001, the overall literacy rate in Keralam was 90.4%, while the tribal literacy rate was 60.4%. It was 57.22% in 1991, while the national literacy rate was 89.81% Arun, S. (2008). Keralam's total literacy rate was 93.91%, which was still below the state average, while the tribal literacy rate was 74.44%, according to the 2011 census. Keralam's Scheduled Caste education data show that the proportion of tribal students enrolled in postsecondary education programs is low when compared to the tribal students' passing rates in the Senior High School exam and SSLC (Economic Review, 2018). Public school student enrolment is significantly dropping, particularly in tribal areas. Between 2006-07 and 2007-08, the total number of students enrolled dropped from 47.19 lakh to 46.26 lakh. The lower and upper secondary sessions maintained this development proportionately.

Table 3: literacy rate comparison (general vs tribal population in keralam)

Category	2001 literacy	2011 literacy rate
General population	90.9%	94.0%
Scheduled Tribes	64.4%	75.8%



Source : Census of India, 2011

Figure 3 : literacy rate comparison

Regarding SC/ST students, in 2007, the SC community accounted for 10.74% of the overall enrolment, while the tribal community registered 1.46, (Arun, S. (2008). With a tribal student dropout rate of 4.18%, Wayanad has the highest rate of any of Keralam's 14 districts. It implies that the State has made an effort to ensure equitable educational distribution and that children from marginalised groups, like scheduled tribes, are virtually excluded from school. Arularasan, G. S., & Narayanaswamy, B. K. (2011) 58,540 women from Scheduled Tribes are illiterate in total. Compared to the general literacy rate of 75.81 % among Scheduled Tribes, women's literacy is 71.08 %. Compared to 1,96,132 women over five, 1,10,507 have qualifications below SSLC or 10th. 56.34 % of women from the Scheduled Tribe have studied below SSLC. (Keralam State Planning Board Fourteenth Five-Year Plan 2022-2027). For tribal kids, there are numerous other barriers to efficient educational functioning. This covers the way the school system is set up, the type of textbooks used, problems with dorm adjustment, administration, monitoring, and conflicts in different stages of the service delivery system, among other things. The high dropout rate can also be attributed to several problems, including inadequate school building infrastructure, a shortage of qualified and motivated teachers, an imbalanced teacher-student ratio, etc. (PRADHAN 2004)

3.6 Health

At the national and State levels, the State ST community in India has inadequate overall health outcomes and less access to healthcare than other social groups. (Narain j.p 2019) Tribes in India have poor health, which is indicative of a global pattern where indigenous groups have poorer health. (Chandran Vipin, K.P. 2010). Despite an overall improvement in population health across Indian states, a thorough meta-analysis of health outcomes in a global tribal population of 104 million people revealed that health, education, and development indicators for the Indian tribal population are consistently worse nationwide. (Anderson I, Robson B, Connolly M, *et al* 2016) The tribe's State of health is also poor, according to health statistics. The nation's population is based on data on sickle cell anemia, child malnutrition, elevated maternal mortality, low child weight, and other factors. Extremism, poverty, and social fragility are the leading causes of low health, inadequate qualifications, and poor education. Das, P. K., Naik, I. C. et al (2021). At the national and State levels, the StateST community in India has inadequate overall health outcomes and less access to healthcare than other social groups.(Sarkar Sampa., and Paul Asish. 2015). However, Through the traditional sports,

physical activities, and indigenous customs that support mental and physical fitness, the ancient tribal communities have preserved their health and well-being. These pursuits are frequently closely related to their survival needs, culture, and surroundings.

CONCLUSION

This study analyses the health, education, and cultural practices of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala, India, home to approximately 537 tribal groups, most of whom live in hilly areas. Moreover, The crafts, musical instruments, and distinctive dance traditions of various tribal communities, such as the Kurumbar Nritham Dance and the Gadhika Dance, are examined in this study along with Indigenous activities practiced by tribal groups, such as Silambam and Kalaripayattu, etc.

When compared to the non-tribal population, the literacy rate among Kerala's Scheduled Tribes is significantly lower, and obstacles are preventing tribal children from receiving an adequate education. The 2001 and 2011 censuses showed increased literacy rates among Kerala's scheduled tribes. However, it was still less than the State's overall literacy rate. The Women's literacy among Scheduled Tribes is 71.08 percent, whereas the overall literacy rate is 75.81 percent. Overall, 1,10,507 women have qualifications below SSLC or 10th, compared to 1,96,132 women over five. 56.34 percent of Scheduled Tribe women have completed education below SSLC. Although it develops in population health throughout Indian states, the Scheduled Tribe Group's health status in Kerala demonstrates generally low healthcare outcomes and insufficient access to treatment as compared to other social groups. However, traditional sports, physical exercises, and indigenous customs that support mental and physical fitness have helped ancient tribal societies worldwide preserve their health and well-being. These pursuits are frequently closely related to their survival needs, culture, and surroundings.

The Tribal Department must take the initiative to restore the Scheduled Tribes' conventional system of government with contemporary ideas. Additionally, duties in the tribal hamlets should be divided among other sectors, such as livelihood, health, and education. The government should prioritize the empowerment of poor tribal communities depending on their poverty level in programs at the state and district levels.

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