

Living Conditions of Kota Tribal Women in Nilgiris District

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Abstract: All over the world women occupy an unenviable position. They are denied of opportunities to develop their potentialities or to utilize them. The study of social status of women is important because it forms one of the most trustworthy and reliable indices of the state of society, and indicates the nature and direction of social change. In tribal society of India also, women were found to have been occupying a prominent place as a critical variable to understand the changing phenomenon. To work among the tribal's is more challenging and difficult. Probably, these led social researchers avoid studying tribal women. As the tribal women are no less important and as many of them have already started toeing the line of caste Hindu women, the researchers have decided to study the Kota women of Nilgiri District with the objectives of knowing the demographic profile, socio economic status and Human Development Index.

Keywords: *Tribal Women, Human Development Index, Socio economic status*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute the silent half of the world population. All over the world women occupy an unenviable position. They are denied of opportunities to develop their potentialities or to utilize them. Empirical studies on women started only during the 19th century. Thus the women's issues have attracted the attention of social scientists very late and there are many unexplored areas of research. The study of social status of women is important because it forms one of the most trustworthy and reliable indices of the state of society, and indicates the nature and direction of social change. In tribal society of India also, women were found to have been occupying a prominent place as a critical variable to understand the changing phenomenon.

The existing anthropological and ethnographic literature does not give sufficient insight into the world of tribal women. There is hardly and well researched empirically sound study dealing exclusively with the anthropological perspective on the tribal women of India. Of late, social scientists have attracted the unexplored problems of women for research. Anthropologists and in particular, sociologists have undertaken the task of conducting the systematic research to examine the changes that are taking place in the status and position of women. To work among the tribal's is more challenging and difficult. Probably, these led social researchers avoid studying tribal women. As the tribal women are no less important and as many of them have already started toeing the line of caste Hindu women, the researchers have decided to study them.

In TamilNadu, the state in which Nilgiris district is situated has 36 scheduled tribes with a combined population of 6.51 lakhs (Census, 2001) representing 1.04 percent of the total population in TamilNadu. Among the 36 scheduled tribes, the Government of India has identified six communities as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs). They are Todas, Lotas, Lurumbas, Irulas, Paniyas and Kattunayakas. All these six PTGs live in Nilgiris District. Recently these PTGs are renamed as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Women (PVTW).

The name 'Kota' is spelt differently by different anthropologists and scholars such as Kota, Kuof, Kotar, Koter and Kohatar. They are believed to be the primary aborigines of the hills next only to Todas. They received the name Kota as a derivati on of Johata/Gohata that means the killer of the 'Cow'.

1.1 Structure of the community

Kotas are living in seven settlements in Nilgiris district. The names of the settlements are Thiruchigadi, Sholur – Kokkal, Aggal (New Kotagiri), Kollimalai, Kundah, Kotagiri, Kil Kotagiri and Gudalur – Kokkal. They numbered around 1800. The kotas provided all artisanal services and smithy to the Todas and badagas until about half of the century ago. Unlike the Todas past time, Kotas cultivated their own lands. The Kotas provided the essential pottery and carpentry for their Badaga and Toda counterparts in a very systematic manner until the advent of the modern commercial market system. They are an artisan community, who engaged themselves in pot making, making iron implements and making jewels of silver. They are known for their music. They play the instruments for their community and for the other tribal communities as well. The women of the community are bold, courageous and hard working. Whenever a stranger visits their settlement, the

woman faces the visitor first while her husband hides himself inside the house. The women approach the Government officials and even contractors with boldness to solve problems.^[1]

The Kota women are of the moderate height of fair built body and not nearly so good looking as the men. Most of them have prominent fore heads, with more of a snub nose and somewhat vacant expression the status of women among the Kota women is very high when compared to their men. In this context an attempt has been made by the investigator to study the ‘**Status of the Kota Tribal Women in Nilgiris District**’.

Objectives

1. To know the Demographic profile of the selected respondents;
2. To study the socio economic condition of the selected respondents and
3. To construct and analyze the Human Development Index for the selected Kota Tribal Women.

Hypotheses

To support the objectives the following hypotheses were tested.

1. Sex ratio is in favour of males.
2. Dependency ratio is high for females than males.
3. There is no significant difference in the Human Development Index of the Kotas in two different blocks.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Arulsevam and Maheswari^[2] (2011) in their study on 'Demographic Profile and Living Conditions of Tribal Population' studied about the educational status, health status, infrastructure facility and living conditions of the tribal people such as Sc's Tribes, OBC's and some minorities especially in rural areas. They study found that the self-employment activities were quite low due to poverty, illiteracy, lack of knowledge and infrastructure facilities in rural areas. The author suggested that it would be appropriate to improve educational and developmental programmes to improve their living condition among the tribal communities.

Sinu^[3] (2013) in his article on 'Living Conditions of Irula Tribes in Gingee Taluk, Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu' studied about the socio-demographic profile, occupational profile and the living conditions of Irula tribes. The study found that there were no schools nearby for higher secondary education; they have to travel nearly about 14 km for higher secondary education. The author also added that 46 percent of the respondent's children had dropped out from school and they go for work, start earning and become economically contributing member of the family. It was also observed that men and women enjoy equal status and there was no female feticide and dowry system reported. The author concluded that majority of the Irulars' living conditions was marked by illiteracy, poverty, poor housing conditions and indebtedness and they need necessary psychosocial intervention and suitable alternative rehabilitation measures.

Emmanuel and Rajan^[4] (2013) in their study on 'Social Status of Conjugal Womanhood: A study with the Irula Tribe at Kunjapannai, Nilgris Region' studied the socio- demographic details like age, family types, income level and education level of married women in Irula Tribe at Kunjapannai. The authors found that the 46.7 percent people had less social status, 36.7 percent had high social status and 16.7 percent had only moderate level of social status. The authors concluded that SHGs are working very hard to bring in decent revenue and to make up the fallen status. It is just like a farmer waiting for the precious fruit of the earth until it receives the rain.

Pallavi and Kusugal^[5] (2013) in their article on 'Economic Status of Tribal Women: A Case Study' studied about the educational status, occupational status, income and saving pattern. The study found that the 36.6 percent were working in agricultural sectors and others were engaged in different kinds of jobs. The authors concluded that the tribal women require awareness in all aspects. Women are deprived of equal access to education, health care, capital. There is a strong need of economic empowerment through education, employment.

Rao^[6] (2013) in his article on 'Educational Status of Scheduled Tribes in Andhra Pradesh: A Study in Visakhapatnam and West Godavari Districts' identified the educational characteristics of the sample households like literacy levels, dropout rates, and reasons for dropouts. The study found that the literacy levels of the respondents in the study area were higher in Visakhapatnam than in the West Godavari district. But the literacy rates to total population were more in West Godavari (56.6 percent) than in Visakhapatnam District (53.8 percent). The dropout rates in the age group of 6-11 years of sample households were almost negligible in both the districts. The author concluded that availability of educational facilities was more favourable in Visakhapatnam than in West Godavari district.

Dhevi and Mani^[7] (2014) in their study on "Demographic Profile of Selected Irular Tribes of Coimbatore District" studied the infrastructure facilities like network of roads, water and electricity, drainage, hospital, housing pattern, sources of income and school facilities. They also studied that the cultural and traditional values of Irular tribes. They concluded that the irulars are virtually cut off from the main stream of society. They are totally ignorant about the happenings in the external world.

III. METHODOLOGY

Multistage sampling technique was followed in the selection of the sample households. In the first stage Nilgiri district was selected. Based on proportionality sampling technique, with sample size a 500, the number of households to be surveyed was selected from seven settlements located in six taluks.

**TABLE 1
HOUSEHOLDS DECIDED TO BE SURVEYED**

Taluk	Settlement	Population	Selected households
Udhagamanadalam	2	989	200
Kotagiri	2	509	100
Kundah	1	257	90
Coonoor	1	202	90
Gudalur	1	28	20
Pandalur	-	-	-
Total	7	1985	500

Source: Tribal Research Centre (TRC)

The required data for the study was collected using an interview schedule. The study pertained to the period October 2015 to June 2016. Human Development Index was applied to study the Demographic profile of the households. Since the study depends on primary data the limitations of primary data is applicable to the current study.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic profile of the family members

The demographic profile of the selected sample households is presented in table 2.

**TABLE 2
AGE AND SEX WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS**

Age (Yrs)		Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
<5	N	34	42	76
	R	44.7	52.2	100
	C	2.5	4.7	3.4
5 - 14	N	229	100	329
	R	69.6	30.4	100
	C	16.8	11.2	14.5
15 - 59	N	1038	655	1693
	R	61.3	38.7	100
	C	76.0	73.3	74.9
60 +	N	65	97	162
	R	40.1	59.9	100
	C	4.7	10.8	7.2
Total	N	1366	894	2260
Sex Ratio		654.5		
Young Dependency Ratio (%)		25.3	21.7	23.9
Old Dependency Ratio (%)		6.3	14.8	9.6
Dependency Ratio (%)		31.6	36.5	33.5
Size of family				
No:of Households		<4	306	
		>4	194	
Total		500		

Source: Primary Data, 2015 N- Number; R- percentage to row total; C – percentage to column total

Age has an important bearing on the limit, above and below which a person cannot be expected to work for economic benefits. The people of the sample households are classified into four groups in terms of age. The first group (<5 years) includes infants, the second group (5 – 14 years) includes the family members who are supposed to study. The persons falling in the third group (15 – 59 years) are available for gainful economic activities and form the working group. The members falling in the lat group (60+ years) are old dependents.

76 percentage of men and 73 percentage of women fall in the working age category of 15 – 59 years. The sex ratio reveals the imbalance among the males and females in the total population. **Sex ratio is in favour of males.** It ranges from 654 females per 1000 males. Dependency ratio for Kota males is found to be less 31.6 per cent. **Dependency ratio is high for females than males.** Kotas are characterized in following a small family norm in a greater percentage. About 61 percent of the Kotas have less than 4 members in their families.

4.2 Literacy

About 67.4 percent of the males and 35.5 percent of the females have completed high school education. 9.3 percent of the females and one percent of the males are found to be dropouts. The analysis reveals that the Kotas are educationally much ahead of the other tribes. During the interview it was observed that the tribals avail facilities provided by te government in the form of books, free education, uniforms etc.

4.3 Marital status

All the Kotas above 21 years of age are married.24 percent of the respondents however refused to reveal whether it was their first marriage or repeated marriage.

4.4 Years of living in the hamlet

All the selected sample households are settled in their hamlets for more than 200 years as their ancestors have stated them about their living.

4.5 Housing

80 percent of the tribal households live in their ancestral houses. And a minimum of four and six percent live in the houses provided by HADP (Hill Area Development Programme) and NAWA (The Nilgiris Adivasis Welfare Association) respectively.

4.6 Occupation

The Kota households do self cultivation on their own lands by growing vegetables, tea, coffee etc. a small percentage of them are engaged in central and state government jobs. 2 percent of the people are engaged in making pots.

4.7 Income

The average annual income of the Kotas is Rs. 2,18,256. Based on the average annual income of the households it is observed that the Kotas are in a better position.the income from the livestock supplements them to a greater extent.

4.8 Expenditure

It was found that one fourth of their food expenditure is on tobacco and alcohol. The average amount spent on these two items is Rs.1371.6. the major share of the non food expenditure is spent on conducting social ceremonies (Rs.2031.8).

4.9 Savings and Debt

About all the Kotas have their savings in Post Offices and LIC. The average amount saved by the Kotas is rs.1440. 72 percent of them save for children’s education. The Kotas do not adjust with their life cycle rituals ot recreational activities in accordance with actual income which took them to the door steps of the money lenders.

4.10 Human Development Index

The current study has adopted the Conglomerate approach of quantifying human development. Human Development Index (HDI) shows the overall development. It measures the average achievement of a region in basic human capabilities. According to the UNDP methodology, three indicators are used to construct the HDI. They are health, educational status and standard of living.

For health, Life expectancy at birth is taken as an indicator.

For educational status, adult literacy and school enrolment ratio are the proxy variables.

For standard of living per capita income is the indicator. The formula used for the construction of an index is given as

$$\text{Dimension Index} = \frac{\text{Actual Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}{\text{Maximum Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}$$

The following table gives the maximum and minimum value for calculating Human Development Index.

TABLE 3
MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM VALUES FOR CONDUCTING HDI

Indicator	Maximum Value	Minimum Value
Life Expectancy at birth (years)	85	25
Adult literacy rate (%)	100	0
Gross enrollment ratio (%)	100	0
Per capita income (Rs)	40,000	100

Source: Human Development Report 2007/2008

To construct the HDI for the tribals, the actual values have been converted into an index form. Based on the maximum and minimum values given in Table 3, the required index is calculated as follows.

Life expectancy index measures the relative achievement of a family in life expectancy at birth.

Education index measures family's relative achievement in both adult literacy and combined primary, secondary and literacy gross enrolment.

$$\text{Adult Literacy Index} = \frac{\text{Actual Value} - 0}{100 - 0}$$

$$\text{Gross Enrolment Index} = \frac{\text{Actual Value} - 0}{100 - 0}$$

$$\text{Education Index} = \frac{2}{3}(\text{adult literacy index}) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{gross enrolment index})$$

The income index is calculated using the adjusted per capita income. In the HDI, income serves as a surrogate for all the dimensions of development not reflected in a long and healthy life and in knowledge. Income is adjusted because achieving a respectable level of human development does not require unlimited income. Accordingly the logarithm of income is used.

$$\text{Income Index} = \frac{\log(\text{Actual Value}) - \log(100)}{\log(40000) - \log(100)}$$

Once the dimension indices have been calculated, determining the HDI is straight forward. It is a simple average of the three dimension indices.

$$\text{HDI} = \frac{1}{3}(\text{life expectancy}) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{education index}) + \frac{1}{3}(\text{income index})$$

The Kota tribal households included in the HDi are classified into one of the three clusters of achievement in human development; high human development (with a HDI of .80 or above), medium human development (with a HDI of .50 to .799) and low human development (with a HDI of less than .50).

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BASED ON LIFE EXPECTANCY INDEX

Life expectancy Index	.80 and above	.50 - .799	<.50	Average Life Expectancy Index
Kotas				
Block I	60 (20.0)	69 (23.0)	171 (57.0)	.506
Block II	53 (26.5)	36 (18.0)	111 (55.5)	.550

Source: Estimates based on field survey; Block I – Udagamandalam. Kotagiri; Block II – Kunda, Gudalur, Coonoor

Table 4 reveals block II have the highest life expectancy index of .550 when compared to Block I (i.e .506). The following table gives the distribution of the tribal households based on their educational index.

TABLE 5
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BASED ON EDUCATION INDEX

Education Index	.80 and above	.50 - .799	<.50	Average Education Index
Kotas				
Block I	138 (46.0)	144 (48.0)	18 (6.0)	.810
Block II	92 (46.0)	108 (54.0)	0 (0)	.780

Source: Estimates based on field survey; Block I – Udagamandalam. Kotagiri; Block II – Kunda, Gudalur, Coonoor

The education index for Block I households is maximum with .810 and minimum among the block II households with .780.

The following table gives the distribution of households based on income index.

TABLE 6
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BASED ON INCOME INDEX

Income Index	.80 and above	.50 - .799	<.50	Average Income Index
Kotas				
Block I	390 (96.7)	2 (0.7)	8 (2.7)	.978
Block II	195 (97.5)	4 (2.0)	1 (0.5)	.983

Source: Estimates based on field survey; Block I – Udagamandalam. Kotagiri; Block II – Kunda, Gudalur, Coonoor

The average income index is highest for Block II households (.983), closely followed by Block I (.978).

Combining the life expectancy index, education index and income index, the Human Development Index (HDI) is calculated for Block I and Block II of Kota households.

TABLE 7
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BASED ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Kotas	HDI	.80 and above	.50 - .799	<.50	Average HDI
Block I		121 (40.3)	179 (59.7)	0 (0)	.765
Block II		91 (45.5)	109 (54.5)	0 (0)	.779

Source: Estimates based on field survey; Block I – Udagamandalam, Kotagiri; Block II – Kunda, Gudalur, Coonoor
Based on the calculated HDI, Block II stands first with .779 followed by Block I households with .765.

V. CONCLUSION

Despite the developments that have taken place in the independent India tribal areas are still cut off from these developments. The income of the Kota women is meager not even substantial to meet the basic needs. There are some social and cultural conventions which compel even the poorest women to spend more money on social ceremonies. Kota men on the other hand spend more on intoxicants which make the situations much worse. Thus recognizing that the tribal women constitute the most deprived and marginalized section of the society a host of welfare and developmental measures has to be initiated for their social and economic development without disturbing their cultural practices.

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