

## **A study on the Livelihood and Income pattern of Kanikkar Tribe, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to study the different livelihood means, income source, pattern of expenses, and saving habits of the Kanikkar tribe. Kanikkar is one of the 36 tribes listed in the Gazette of India. They live in the Western Ghats of southern Tamil Nadu and commonly known as Kanis. They are a jungle tribe inhabiting the hills of Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli Districts of Tamil Nadu and Trivandrum district of Kerala State.

The area selected for the study is Kanyakumari district; there are 7282 people in all, distributed among eight blocks and four municipalities. Among those Tiruvattar block, which has a significant population of 38% of the total tribal population in seven panchayats, Peechiparai panchayat, with 93% of the Kani population, resides is chosen for this study. The villages of Maangamalai, Mudavanpetrai, and Mothiramalai provided 144 samples for this study.

In order to obtain the analysis effective, the data was analyzed from the primary and secondary data source that was gathered through structured interviews. Multistage sampling is adopted in different stages, like purpose and random sampling. In the statistical design, descriptive statistics like percentage analysis are used to compare one quantity against another.

**Keywords** – Kani, Kanikkar, Livelihood, Financial Status, Western Ghats.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the state of Tamilnadu, Kanyakumari district is the moderately populated with Kanikkar tribes spread in 45 panchayats of eight blocks and 4 municipalities. These tribal people have different social structures, marriage customs, dietary practices, and other customs from the rest of the population in the state. The Kani speak a dialect that is similar to the Dravidian language of Malayalam. There is no script for Kani. In addition to speaking their native

dialect, they also have proficiency in Tamil and Malayalam. Words from Tamil and Malayalam are prominent in their language. They write in Tamil and Malayalam scripts. This report discusses diverse methods of subsistence and the distribution of income among tribal communities using data from field surveys and secondary sources.

#### **1.1 Definition of Tribe**

According to Bogardus, “The tribal group was based on the need for protection, on its blood

relationship and on the strength of a common religion.

Sociologist D.N. Majumdar defines a tribe as "a collection of families or groups of families sharing a common name, occupying the same territory, speaking the same language, and adhering to particular taboos about marriage and profession or occupation."

## 1.2 The Schedule Tribes in Tamil Nadu

The scheduled tribes are constitutes 1.1% (0.79 million) in the total population of 72.14 million of Tamil Nadu as per census 2011 which represents 0.76% in the total population of India and it constitutes 36 castes. Among the 36 STs, five STs are sharing majority of 80.32% in the state ST population namely Malayali, Irular, Kattunayakan, Kurumans and Uraly.

In the study area the Kani people are found in Tamil Nadu, in southwest India, among the forests of Kanyakumari and the Tirunelveli district. They make up about 0.39 percent of the district's total population, or 7282 people, as of the 2011 India Census.

## 1.3 Kani Settlement in Kanyakumari District

According to the 2011 Census, there are 18,70,374 people living in the Kanyakumari District, with 9,26,345 men and 9,44,029 women. The District's tribal population is 7282, consisting of 3554 men and 3728 women. There are 1684 people per square kilometre of land. The table below provides information on the Kani tribe's gender distribution by block and municipality.

Sl.No	Name of the Blocks/ Municipalities	ST Population		
		Persons	Male	Female
1	Agastheeswaram	463	232	231
2	Rajakkamangalam	122	69	53
3	Thovalai	389	198	191
4	Kurunthancode	107	56	51
5	Thuckalay	51	19	32
6	Thiruvattar	2798	1,361	1,437
7	Killiyoor	136	67	69
8	Munchirai	142	75	67
9	Melpuram	2688	1,310	1,378
10	Nagercoil Municipality	381	165	216
11	Padmanabhapuram Municipality	1	0	1
12	Colachel Municipality	0	0	0
13	Kuzhithurai Municipality	4	2	2
Total		7282	3,554	3,728

## 1.4 Scope of the study

Tribal communities are socially and economically disadvantaged as well as isolated from the general populace. There have been

previous efforts to find studies on the Kaani tribes and their use of medicinal plants, socio cultural and economic but no special focus on their employment, expenditure and savings in the study areas. As a result, the goal of the

current study was to learn more about the Kaani tribes' employment, income and savings.

### 1.5 Objectives of the study

- To study the primary and secondary occupation.
- To analyze the annual income of the households.
- To examine the spending and saving practices.

## 2. Review of Literature

As we are aware, tribal people live a life in isolation without access to public or social services, according to Chatterji (1953, pp. 57–59). They lack resources, staff, and leadership to organize and mobilize the local resources to satisfy their needs. They are poor, exploited, uneducated, uneducated, and unaware that a better life is possible.

Income, wealth, and employment are the three main measures of quality of life, according to Schneider (1976).

Small-scale harvesting of minor forest products is normal for the indigenous people, who depend on it for a significant portion of their income. Very few adult women were employed in agriculture, despite the fact that it was thought to have the most jobs available.(Velvizhi & Mohankumar, 2021)

Due to relocation for development projects, tribal people have lost their homes, lands, and woods, which provided much of their sustenance. They have to travel further than before in order to get food and fodder today. Development programmes have had a significant impact on the socioeconomic and cultural life of tribal women.(MEKALA, 2015)

Since tribal communities in India are among the poorest, it is crucial to encourage income growth there. We must comprehend how to encourage saving in indigenous communities.(Viswanath, 2021)

Forest items are seen as divine gifts by the Kani people. Thus, they must be used judiciously. Their economies have traditionally been organized to provide their necessities. Their minimal demand for forest resources, which only goes towards personal use, is another crucial aspect of their financial system. Such requirements can also be easily addressed. Although all resources are freely available, usage is not common.(Thangam, 2022)

The younger tribes are emerging from the forest in search of a remedy for their illnesses because they anticipate an immediate cure. The Mobile Outreach Programme for the Tribes is a special facility set up to take care of the indigenous peoples' health needs.(Parvathy, 2020)

A recent NSSO survey found 37 percent of Scheduled Tribe households' primary occupation is agriculture and non-agricultural self-employment is the lowest (7%) (NSSO Survey, 2012).

## 3. Study Area

This study has been conducted among the Kani tribes of Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India. 144 samples are collected from the Maangamalai, Mudavanpetrai, Mothiramalai villages of Peechiparai panchayat.

## 4. Study Methodology

In this study, a multi-stage sampling method is used. In the first stage, the district is chosen by purposeful sampling. In the second, third and fourth stages, the block and village are chosen by the same method. In the fifth and final stage, the households are chosen by random

sampling. At every stage of the sample, the selection process is based on the Kani tribe's maximum population.

In order to get a good analysis, data are collected through structured interviews, secondary data from government websites, and different published and unpublished materials. In the statistical design, descriptive statistics like percentage analysis are used to compare one quantity against another.

## 5. Study result and Suggestions

### 5.1 Occupation

Table No. 5.1 Classification of Occupation							
Sl.No	Work Nature	Regular		Occasional		Seasonal	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Agriculture & allied	110	76%				
2	Collecting honey					16	11%
3	Collecting medicinal herbs					8	6%
4	Rubber Plantation					120	83%
5	Fishing			65	45%		
6	Construction work	34	24%				

Data: Primary source

Table 5.1 reveals the classification of the 144 Kani tribes. Out of 144 respondents, 110 (76%) work in agriculture and related fields on a regular basis, followed by 34 respondents (24%), who work in the construction industry. The samples included 45% who occasionally engaged in fishing and 83% who worked seasonally on rubber plantations.

According to the analysis, agriculture and related occupations are significant and frequent among the respondents. Occasional finishing work and seasonal work in rubber plantations are also included in this category.

The Kanis, who were formerly nomads, now have made their home in the forest. They relied heavily on farming and subsistence farming, either as cultivators or laborers and their traditional occupations are handicrafts and seasonal gathering of minor forest products. Additionally, they cultivate edible plants like tapioca, bananas, and millets as well as profitable crops like rubber, pepper, coconut, rubber, and areca nuts. Despite being primarily farmers, they enjoy hunting and fishing more than other activities. Bows, arrows, and spears are their main weapons.

### 5.2 Annual Family Income

Based on the income, the standard of living is determined. The amount of wages they receive depends on how many days they spend working in the field. Wild animals destroying the cultivation due to the erratic monsoon makes the income unstable. The total incomes earned by all respondents are divided into four categories in this family annual income analysis: less than INR 50,000, INR 50,001 to 1,00,000 INR 1,00,001 to 1,50,000, and above 1,50,000. Following is a table with the respondents' distribution.

Table 5.2 Classification of Annual Income			
Sl. No	Annual income	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Less than 50,000	3	2.08%

2	50,000 to 100,000	25	17.36%
3	100,000 to 150,000	101	70.14%
4	More than 150,000	15	10.42%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Data: Primary source

Table 5.2 shows that 116 respondents (80.56 percent) earn more than INR 1,00,000, followed by 25 respondents (17.36 percent) who earn between INR 50,000 and INR 1,00,000, and only 3 respondents (2.08 percent) who earn less than INR 50,000. The average yearly income of the Kani tribe is between INR 1,00,000 and 1,50,000.

### 5.3 Monthly Consumption and Non Consumption Expenditure

In the modern society, there is constantly an imbalance between earnings and expenditures. Various things, such as education, food, health, rituals, entertainment, substances, and gadget maintenance, are the reasons people spend money. The family's spending behavior and the primary source of income are displayed in the following table.

<b>Table 5.3 Consumption and Non consumption Expenditure</b>			
<b>Sl.No</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Average monthly Expenditure</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Food	6,000.00	60.00%
2	Education	1,000.00	10.00%
3	Rituals & others	500.00	5.00%
4	Medical Treatment	1,000.00	10.00%
5	Entertainment & others	500.00	5.00%
6	Substances	1,000.00	10.00%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>10,000.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: Primary data

According to table 5.3, 60% of the total of respondents spent just under INR 6,000 per month on their family's food needs, 10% of respondents spent less than INR 1000 on their children's education, their family's healthcare needs, and substance use. The next 5 percent spent less than 500 INR on entertainment, functions and festivals respectively.

The analysis's key finding is that the respondent's families spend 60% of their own income on food.

### 5.4 Monthly Saving Pattern

Savings is the difference between current income and current expenses kept aside for future investments, purchases, or emergencies. The older generation, do not instill the habit of saving money because they are by nature reliant on the forest for everything they need to survive. So they did not have the habit of saving. The younger generation is aware of the significance, but finding a way to save even a small amount of money each month. As a result, due to unstable employment and income saving is challenging for them.

<b>Table 5.4 Classification of monthly savings</b>			
<b>Sl.No</b>	<b>Monthly savings</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Nil savings	43	30%
2	INR. 100 to 200	66	46%
3	INR. 200 to 300	32	22%
4	INR. 300 to 400	03	2%
5	INR. 400 to 500	00	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Data: Primary source

According to table 5.4, 43 (30%) did not have the habit of savings, 66 (46%) of respondents save between 100 and 200, followed by 32 (22%) who save between 200 and 300, 03 (2%) who save between 300 and 500, and nobody in the saving category of 400 and 500.

The majority of respondents, according to the analysis, save no more than INR 200 per month.

## 6. Observation and Suggestion

### 6.1 Observation

- **Occupation and Challenges:** Agriculture and using traditional farming techniques are important components of the Kani way of life. Due to the failure of the monsoon and excessive rain during the off-season, they either failed to produce any crops or were completely destroyed.

Humans and wild animals have lived and shared the same natural resources. However, poor ecosystem management deprives the dependent biota of food, water, and other resources. The destruction of wildlife habitats and the increasing fragmentation of forests have led to conflicts between humans and wildlife. Due to the conflict the yield is destroyed, which causes the tribe yet another sizable financial loss. They didn't receive a consistent income from agriculture throughout the year, either. Kanis who are working as an

unskilled labour in the construction sector, which provides them less income than the skilled.

- **Alcohol & Substances Expense:** The Kani tribes have alcohol consumption as part of their tradition that indicates drinking may be more socially acceptable among tribes than it is among the general population. Both young people and the adult men and women consume alcohol, local fermented liquors, also use betel leaves and smoke beedis. Cultural reasons rather personal characteristics, account for the high alcohol use among tribal people. For young men in this cohort, having a good time with friends, social pressure, and feeling like one belongs to a group were cited as significant factors in alcohol use. When the Tamil Nadu government changed its stance and became the exclusive retailer of alcohol in the state in 1983, such traditional brewing was outlawed.

- **Health Care Expenses:** The Kani tribes consume imbalanced and unhygienic diet that causes them several health issues. The spread of some health hazardous among them is due to lack of basic health awareness. Their lack of confidence in their traditional medical treatment, and prefer to use a private hospital for medical care than to rely on their own traditional healing techniques for the treatment of simple illnesses. The Kani people do not practice sound financial management due to

their lower income, higher medical expenses, and high alcohol consumption rates.

- **Education Expenses:** An integrated Tribal Development Program (ITDP) is being established in tribal regions to satisfy the constitutional mandate. It is believed that elementary education is crucial for the general development of tribal communities. The establishment of residential schools for boys and girls within the tribal territory, as well as the free distribution of books, notes, uniforms, and other educational materials, are the government's initiatives to enhance tribal literacy. Due to the state government's initiative, parents now have less financial responsibility for their children's education, and the average monthly cost has decreased.

- **Savings Pattern:** The propensity to save is directly related to total family income. We explain this in terms of the interaction between the two saving motives: the precautionary motive, which entails setting money aside for the future as part of a risk management strategy, and the common savings motive, which entails wanting to spread consumption over time or over a lifetime. Savings habits have an impact on the majority of Kanis, it is clear from this study that there are many other factors at work. Due to lower incomes, a propensity to spend a lot of money on alcohol, the younger generation's use of Android mobile devices for communication and entertainment that incurs costs as well as attendance at rituals and functions. As a result, we would anticipate that total savings would be decreasing as income at low income levels. Given that a sizable portion of our population consists of low-income tribal households.

## 6.2 Suggestions

- The Kani's agricultural land can be protected from the wild with the support of the

forest department, helping to end the conflict between the wild and human.

- A coordinated effort from the government and NGOs is needed to train men and women to take up new venture on agriculture-related activities in order to improve the status of income. Through Govt. tribal welfare schemes, financial support can be provided.

- Tribals entering into the forest to gather Minor Forest Products (MFP) are subject to a number of restrictions from the forest department. Legal restrictions prevent all tribal households from entering the forest to collect MFP. They need the government's and the forest service's support to enter the forest with the appropriate protocols and a valid certificate.

- The Kanis who chose to work in the construction sector as their source of income are employed as unskilled laborers. Therefore, they need to receive training in specialized fields like masonry, electrical work, plumbing, tiling, etc. In order to train the youth and other interested individuals, a skill development centre can be established in the tribal area.

- The study's main finding is also that Kanis spend equally (second highest monthly average expenditure after food) on both medical costs and substances use (alcohol, and tobacco). Without a doubt, all stakeholders involvement need to work together to increase public awareness of the harmful effects of substance use. Also, awareness on the ill effects of using substance has to be given through the SHG and youth association. People who are alcoholic needs to be treated through de-addiction centers.

- The Kanis' traditional knowledge of collecting herbal plants and conventional medical practice is dwindling. The survey

clearly shows that a very small percentage of people are engaged in this work. An effort should be made to locate knowledgeable elders in the community to pass on to the younger generation through them. As a result, traditional knowledge about gathering herbal medicine and using traditional medical techniques will be restored and that will lead to reduce their monthly expenses on Allopathic treatment.

- More people not showing importance to save money due to the low income. Their ability to save money will be improved by awareness and increasing the income. That is possible by providing skill on alternative or agriculture-related livelihoods, access to the forest for MFP collection, awareness of and use of tribal indigenous health knowledge, reduction of alcohol consumption, and entertainment costs, all of which will have a significant positive effect on their economy.

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