



# **Social Discrimination of Tribal Agricultural Labourers of Wayanad District: A Critical Gender Analysis**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This investigation has been done on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data collected from primary sources and explored the social discrimination experienced by tribal agricultural labourers and differential perception of social discrimination by men and women tribal agricultural labourers in a descriptive manner. Tribal agricultural labourers, especially women, fall prey to high order of discrimination by the rest of the society. Tribal communities face socio-cultural, economic, political and gender discrimination from others. Among the tribal communities, *Kattunaikars* experience a high level of social discrimination than the *Paniyas* and *Kurichiyas*. *Kurichiyas*, who enjoy a better socio-economic status among the tribal communities, could defend the discrimination from others, while, *Kattunaikars* and *Paniyas*, who are considered as down-trodden, fall behind the mainstream society. While comparing the tribal men and women, the women experience a higher order of social discrimination, owing to their lower self-confidence, educational status, mass media exposure, political orientation, health and nutrition status and in addition to these, a lower level of awareness about the development programmes. Even though many government initiatives are taken for the welfare and upliftment of tribal people, the reality is that the benefits of these programmes do not reach the intended population.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The tribal population of in Kerala account for about 0.47 per cent of the total population and among its districts, Wayanad has the largest tribal population (Census, 2011). Among the main tribal groups, *Kurichiya* community enjoys a higher social status. *Paniya* community comprises mostly the labourers and thus, are a medium-level status community [1,2-5]. *Kattunaikan* community, who live an isolated life, are considered as low-status people among the tribal communities [6-8]. Majority of the tribal population are socially marginalized, economically deprived and their access to education, health, employment and income generation opportunities are finite [9,10].

Nithya [11] reported that the tribals continues as one of the most marginalized community within the state, the post-globalized developmental projects and developmental dreams of the state has again made the deprivation of the tribals of Kerala and the developmental divide has increased between the tribals and non-tribals in the state. Social taboos, superstitions and traditions, indebtedness, lack of awareness about credit sources, insufficient credit facilities, lack of awareness about the tribal developmental schemes, less importance to actual needs, fear of social security, lack of adequate communication skills and gender bias were the constraints faced by the tribal women [12].

Social discrimination is operationally defined as the ill- treatment of a person based on the group, class, caste or category he/ she belongs to. According to PACS [13], social discrimination is a state when physical isolation from non-tribal communities and a lack of cultural understanding between the two has led to the negative stereotyping of 'Adivasi' groups as primitive, uncivilized and unskilled. Tribal communities face discrimination in cultural, health, economic and educational aspects.

Thus, this study aims to bring into light, the discrimination suffered by the tribal agricultural labourers and have a comparison of the discrimination experienced by three tribal communities, i.e, *Kurichiya*, *Paniya* and *Kattunaikkan*.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mananthavady block of Wayanad district and from the block, three

grama panchayats having highest population of *Kurichya*, *Paniya* and *Kattunaikan* communities respectively, were purposively selected. From each community, 60 agricultural labourers (30 women and 30 men) were randomly selected for the study, thus making a total of 180 as sample size.

Pretested interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents. Observation methods and a structured questionnaire were used. Frequency, mean, percentage, Kruskal-Wallis test and Mann- Whitney U test were used for the analysis. Social discrimination was measured using the Everyday Discrimination scale developed by William and co-workers (1997) with suitable modifications. Social discrimination was measured by developing a scoring procedure with a three- point continuum using an interview schedule, which was structured and pretested after consultation with the experts and social workers in this field. Statements were developed to identify what they feel about their extent of discrimination by denial of their rights and scores were given for their levels of feeling.

Social discrimination was studied under 4 sub-components viz. socio-cultural discrimination, economic discrimination, political discrimination and gender discrimination, each consisting of 8 statements. Hence a total of 32 statements were used. The statements were scored under a three-point continuum of always, sometime and never and scores of 3, 2 and 1 were given.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Total social discrimination was calculated by adding the scores of 4 sub- components viz., socio-cultural discrimination, economic discrimination, political discrimination and gender discrimination. The social discrimination ranged from 32 to 96 with an average score of 83. The total score was classified into low (32 to 54), medium (54 to 76) and high (76 to 98) and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that, the *Kattunaikan*, irrespective of the gender, all the men and women agricultural labourers experienced high level of social discrimination. The high extent of social discrimination owes to the poor socio-economic status of *Kattunaikan* community, being the lowest order among the tribespeople. While considering the *Paniya* community, 73.33% of

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on social discrimination score**

Category Score range	<i>Kattunaikan</i>				<i>Paniya</i>				<i>Kurichiya</i>				Overall (N= 180)			
	Male (n= 30)		Female (n= 30)		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Low(32 to 54)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3.33	0	0	1	1.11	0	0
Medium (54 to 76)	0	0	0	0	8	26.67	3	10	9	10	6	20	17	18.89	9	10
High (76 to 98)	30	100	30	100	22	73.33	27	90	20	66.67	24	80	72	80	81	90
Meanscore	126.68				92.88				51.95							

*Kruskal- Wallis statistics,  $\chi^2 (2, 0.05) = 62.251, P \text{ value} = 0.00$*

the men and 90% of the women agricultural labourers faced high order of social discrimination. In the case of *Kurichiya* community, 66.67% of the men and 80% of the women experienced high level of social discrimination, followed by 10% of the males and 20% of the females facing medium level of discrimination and 3.33% of the males experiencing low level of social discrimination. A comparative study of tribal and non-tribal population in Odisha conducted by Rout [14] observed that the Scheduled Tribes experienced economic and social marginalization, geographical isolation and educational backwardness. Other problems such as acute poverty, malnutrition and starvation death also existed. Moreover, the trade union opposes any sort of tribal recruitment in the executive and non-executive posts.

To test any significant difference between social discrimination experienced by tribal agricultural labourers of three communities, Kruskal- Wallis test was undertaken and results of the test revealed that there was significant difference in social discrimination experienced by tribal agricultural labourers. The estimated P- value in the Tables 1 and 2 which is smaller than 0.05 indicates that there is significant difference in social discrimination experienced by tribal agricultural labourers of three communities at 1% as well as 5% levels of significance.

The *Kattunaikan* community experienced a high order of social discrimination as compared to the other two communities. This might be due to the poor socio-economic status and less bargaining power of those in this community. Among the three communities, the least order of social discrimination (51.95) was experienced by the *Kurichiya* community. This is probably due to their comparatively better financial, socio-economic status, political orientation, health and nutrition, mass media exposure, self-confidence, political orientation and awareness about the developmental programmes. They occupy the highest rank among the tribal communities, hence experiencing the least extent of social discrimination. Kurichiyan community considers themselves superior to other communities and follows a set of practices that could be called as untouchability with other tribal communities indicating stringent inter-communal disparity among the tribes [15].

To find the difference in the social discrimination experienced between male and female tribal agricultural labourers, Mann-Whitney test was

conducted and the results of the test revealed that there was significant difference between the social discrimination experienced by male and female tribal agricultural labourers. The estimated P- value in the Table 2 which is smaller than 0.05 indicates that there is significant difference between the social discrimination experienced by male and female tribal agricultural labourers at both 5% and 1% levels of significance.

From the above Table 2, we can observe that the mean score of female respondents (109.37) was found to be more than that of males (71.63). It is very clear that, women face a high order of social discrimination from the mainstream society than men. This might be due to the strict stereotyping and gender roles that exists even now in our society. In a study conducted by Sharma and Pukkalla [16] explored the gender discrimination among the tribes of Andhra Pradesh. It was reported that the gender discrimination resulting in lower sex ratios had many implications for the societal structure. This not only delayed marriages of men as a sort of first adjustment, but also increased pressure for early marriage of girls and increased spousal age differences. According to Balakrishnan [17], the females of 'Adiya' community in Wayanad experienced high level of social discrimination. They were treated as if they were not capable of doing things and forsaken from government policies.

Thus we can conclude that there exists strict gender disparity among the tribal communities, leaving tribal women suffer from numerous social evils viz. social discrimination, exploitation, unwed motherhood, communicable diseases and the likes.

**Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on gender wise difference in social discrimination experienced by Tribal Agricultural Labourers of Wayanad district**

Gender	Social discrimination Mean score
Male	71.63
Female	109.37
MW (0.05)	-4.872164
P value	0.00000110382

#### 4. SUGGESTIONS

- Provision of minimum wages as per the recommendations of Ministry of Labour

and Employment to the tribal agricultural labourers, irrespective of gender.

- Ample representation of tribal people from all the communities in political and social organizations.
- Creating awareness among the tribespeople about the importance of education and health and creating adequate infrastructural facilities for the same.
- Strict supervision of transfer of tribal lands into the hands of non-tribals.
- Granting the title of land ownership to landless tribal people.
- Creation of more employment opportunities within the tribal locality.
- Ensuring quick and security-less loans through formal credit lending institutions.
- Provision of timely issuing ration cards to all the tribal communities.
- Frequent visit of social workers to the tribal settlements.
- Appropriate initiatives for curbing exploitation and discrimination of tribal people especially, females.
- Conducting awareness programmes among the tribal people about their rights, provisions in law and development programmes.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Tribal communities face discrimination in cultural, health, economic and educational aspects. Regardless of government initiatives and developmental projects, the existing socio-economic profile of the tribal communities is low compared to the mainstream population. Majority of the tribal agricultural labourers experienced a higher order of social discrimination. Among the communities, Kattunaikans experienced a higher scale of social discrimination. Women experienced a higher order of social discrimination than men. High social discrimination resulted in the lower socio-economic status of women. The government should take steps towards developmental activities in all tribal settlements, in consensus with the tribal representatives. It must also be ensured that the benefits of these development projects reach the intended population.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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