



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A STUDY ON SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
TRIBES IN NILGIRIS

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ABSTRACT

Tribal people are living in different parts of the Nilgiris district. The tribal people differ in their social organizations and marital customs rites and rituals, foods and other customs from the people of the rest of the state. Most of the tribal people speak in their own languages. This paper presents a current socio – economic conditions of the tribal groups on the basis of the data collected through field survey and secondary data. The survey covered a random sample of 6 taluks. This paper reveals that the tribal people of the Nilgiris tribes' socio economic status behind with respect to their income level, GDP, health issues, social status, expenditure pattern and life style.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Nilgiris, one of the oldest mountain ranges, located at the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Nilgiris is a part of the Western Ghats. Ooty the "Queen of Hill Stations", Coonoor 19 kms from Ooty and Kotagiri 31 kms from Ooty, are the three hill stations of this district.

Nilgiris is India's first biosphere. It has been declared as one of the 14 'hotspots' of the world because of its unique biodiversity.

Rolling grasslands, dense shoals, waterfalls, streams, lakes, vast expanse of tea plantations, interspersed with vegetable gardens, spectacular view points, an amazing variety of flora and fauna, fabulous trekking trails, innumerable heritage sites, spell binding sunrises and sunsets, magical light, pollution free atmosphere, mist, clouds, fog, star studded skies, serenity etc.

The Name 'Nilgiris' means Blue hills (Neelam - Blue and giri - Hill or Mountain) the first mention of this name has been found in the Silappadikaram. There is a belief that the people living in the plains at the foot of the hills, should have given the name, the Nilgiris, in view of the violet blossoms of 'kurinji' flower enveloping the hill ranges periodically. The earliest reference to the political history of the Nilgiris, according to W.Francis relates to the Ganga Dynasty of Mysore.

Tribal Population In The District

This district is divided into four regions in accordance with the different habitants. Thus are Poranganadu, Todanadu, Merkundu, and Kundeyseemey. The Todas claim to be the most ancient inhabitants of this area. The original inhabitants of these areas are tribals. The early Britishers who came to the area paid money and brought land from them. Along with the Todas many other tribal groups are also found here. They are Kothas, Kurumbas, Paniyas, Badagas, and Irulas etc. Once Badagas were included in the list of Scheduled Tribes, but now they are regarded as one of the advanced tribes of the state. The main tribal communities found in the District are Todas, Kothas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyas, Mullukurumbas and Kattunaikkans. These tribal communities are not evenly distributed in the six taluks of this district. There is as heavy concentration of about 50 percent of the tribes in Gudalur Taluk followed by Kotagiri Taluk with 25 percent of the Tribal population. Ooty (Ottagamandu, Udhagamandalam), and Coonoortaluks have with 16 percent and 9 percent of the tribal population. It is interesting to note that "Paniyas" and Mullukurumbas live on the lower western slope of the district up to an altitude of 1200 m. In Gudalur Taluk, whereas Kurumbas and Irulas mainly live in tracts between an elevation of 1200 m and 1500m. On the Kotagiri Taluk the Kothas are living in places at an elevation of about 1800m. This geographical distribution has invested the different tribes with district characteristics and mode of living. These groups together with the peasant community of the Badagas, who migrated to these hills from Karnataka probably in the 16th Century, have lived ritual, economic and social

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symbiosis. The Badagas which is the major people group in the District worship mainly the Lord Shiva.

### **Badagas**

The Badagas (locally known as Badugaru) are an indigenous people in the Nilgiris Hills of Tamil Nadu, India. They speak the Badaga language. They are the one of the social group in Nilgiris.

The Badagas are the largest aboriginal Tribal people among the native tribes of The Nilgiris District. Unlike any other region in the country, no historical proof is found to state that the Nilgiris was a part of any kingdoms or empires. It was originally a tribal land. The Badagas live in nearly 350 villages, called "Hatty", throughout the district. Baduga people speak the language called "Badugu", with no script. Many wrongly claim that badaga language is a dialect of Kannada. Badaga is not a dialect of Kannada it's a unique language claims French Linguist Christian Pilot raichoor.

"Today, it is recognized as a separate language," said Pilot-Raichoor, who has been working on the linguistic heritage of the Baduga language for the past two decades. According to her, there are too many important differences in the phonology and the grammar, differences in gender system, case system, and verb classes.

Badugas belong to Paleolithic period(20,000 B.C. - 35,000 B.C.). Baduga Tribe inhabited Nilgiris thousands and thousands of years ago even before Lord Christ was born. They are inhabiting in Nilgiris over 10,000 B.C. Precious Stone Trade was carried on between Indus Valley civilization(5000 B.C) and the Nilgiris.

In 1116 A.D. a Baduga King called Kalaraja was ruling Nilgiris. Vishnuvardana of Hoysala Kingdom of Karnataka was the first king to invade Nilgiris, sent his army and tried to threaten the Badugas and ordered to obey him.

The Brave Baduga King, Kalaraja refused his order and fought with him. In his second invitation, 1142 Hoysala army killed Kalaraj's son, in spite of his son death Kalaraja refused to obey Vishnuvardana. In third invasion, 1162 King kala was killed by Hoysalas. Three inscriptions refers to Kala's rule from his fort in Kukal Village. It testified that King Kala was ruling from 1116 AD and implied that his ancestors had been living here centuries earlier. King Kala was killed in a "Dhandu(war)" Nilgiris was called as Baduga Nadu or Baduga Country. Even before Britishers arrived to Nilgiris, a Portuguese Priest called Rev. Jocomo Fierier visited Nilgiris in 1602. He did not stay in Nilgiris. He returned back and informed that he found a group of Tribal people called Badugas

Some of the main villages (Hatty's) are: Horanally, thangadu, Kanneri, manthanai, yedakkadu, Mulligoor, Sholur, Meluru, Ithalar, Bembatty, Belithala, Tudur, Kukal, Tudagai, Nundala, Ebbanad, Nedugula, Meekeri, Balacola, Melkunda, Kilkundha, Ketti, Thambatty, Thanthanadu, Milidenu, Nandatti, Achanakal, Aravenu, Thinniyoor, Iyooru, Jakatha, Jackanarai, Sundatty, Kannerimukku, Beragany, Pethuva, Jakkatha and Thuneri

### **2. TODAS**

The Toda are known by several names like Todas, Tudavans, and toward. They are found only in Nilgiris district. The Government of India has identified the Toda as one of the six Primitive Tribal groups of Tamil Nadu. The name Toda is supposed to be derived from the word 'tud', the sacred tud tree of Todas. The Linguist Emeneau(1958: 47 - 50) said that, "Toda dialect is an independent language of the Dravidian family affiliated with Tamil - Malayalam. The uniqueness of the half - barrel shaped houses given speculations regarding their origin ranged from Rome to Sumeria. The Toda village is called a mandu, means a herd or a cattle - pen. It is usually a collection of three or five half barrel shaped huts each 18 feet by 9 feet by 10 feet high with a small doorway measuring only 32 inches by 18 inches. Besides the huts, the mandu has another hut with a smaller doorway, called 'Tirierl' or dairy temple. In the vicinity of the mandu the cattle - pen. Toda people are white (fair) in colour, being tall, strong built and well-shaped. The striking feature of the women is the arrangement of their hair which is dressed in ringlets and flows waving down to the shoulders. The traditional garment of a Toda is known as pitu - kuli, is of thick white cotton cloth with red and blue stripes which is embellished further embroidery by the Toda women, is thrown around the body by the men and women like 'Roman toga'. Jewelry is worn by both men and women.

### **Kothas**

The Kothas live in seven settlements, generally known as Kotagiri or Kokkal. They are village artisans, who are good in carpentry, black smithy and pottery. But only a few families are engaged in these skills as a means of living. Most others are engaged in cultivation. Happily, most of the Kota families in all the settlement have their own patta land. Unlike Todas, they do not shy away from personal cultivation and are generally hard working people. In the field of education also they have stolen a march over other tribal communities. Today, many of them are working in the Government and non-Governmental departments.

### **Kurumbas And Irulas**

The **Kurumbas** houses known as "GUDLU" are temporary constructions in the forests. The traditional occupation of the Kurumbas is food gathering, like collection of honey and forests produce. They are also cultivating millets like ragi and samai on a small scale of mainly on hill slopes and mountain ridges. Honey fetches considerable remuneration for the Kurumbas. It is released much by public. Honey is collected mostly in the summer months from the cliffs, rocky crevices and the branches of giant trees. The supplement their usual diet with ample quantity of honey. Kurumbas are known to possess keen eyesight, gained possibly from constant watching of the honey bee to the hives. Now, they are mainly engaged in agriculture and those who do not own lands work as casual agricultural laborers. The Kurumbas are hardworking people.

**Irulas** with a few subsets among them are living in Masinagudi area, and in parts of Kotagiri and Coonoor Taluks. They are generally engaged in Collection of minor forest products. This is a seasonal operation and they work as casual agricultural laborers on local estates. Some of them are also engaged in looking after the herds of cattle belonging to others. Some are engaged in agriculture in the patta lands, conditionally assigned

to them, where they have raised tea, coffee, jack trees, guava etc. However, due to their poor maintenance of their land due to lack of finance, the return from these lands is meager.

The Mullukurumbas of Gudalur are a Distant group and are believed to belong to a pre agricultural tribe, since they still use bow and arrow for occasional hunting.

They live in nine settlements in Erumad area and Cherangodu village. They are mainly agricultural laborers. They are hard working people.

#### **Objectives of The Study**

1. To identify a current socio economic conditions of tribal population in the Nilgiris district.
2. To Suggest possible solutions to improve the percapita income, GDP, social status, expenditure pattern and life style.
3. The primitive tribal groups being small, the saturation approach towards the economic development of the entire group is not possible. Thus the individual family as the base should be adopted.
4. Special measures are to be taken for improving education, health, nutrition, drinking water supply, transport and communication.
5. Incentives should be granted as special allowance to government staff who are deputed to work in the primitive tribal areas.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The current study uses secondary data for analysis. The data were collected from the reliable sources like Census of India, Times of India Newspaper, BPL survey 2002 etc. The researcher has used simple statistical tools for the analysis.

#### **Economic status of badugas**

It is very important to highlight the socio-economic aspects of badugas. According to their present status they are considered to be the BC. So their social and economic activities must be remarked. As being BC, they stand to be unique in their way of living and their standard of living. As said, there are a lot of controversies regarding their status – whether they should be included under the Tribal sections or not. Legislations have denied their status to be tribes but political influence and revelations of new stories about their origin, is still like a ray of hope, what could be their actual status. Despite of all these, still the village imparts various distinguishing features, as follows • Being a backward community, they totally exhibit the role of a tribal society. • There is high prohibition on the mixing of races of different communities or religion. • They, as they remarked, maintain a pure and common blood race, i.e. they believe in endogamous relationship, i.e. marriage or interbreeding within their community. • They are fully blended with the nature and do not exploit the resources too much. They are in perfect harmony with the nature. • The people of the village are well acquainted with each other and live with the feeling of equality and fraternity. • They share their views and conducts meeting in the common community hall in the village, where they discuss their problems and grievances. • Badaga women, as history marked, had a glorious past, but now the position is not so prestigious. Women, since a few years back, were imparted with only the primary education.

Higher education to the common is not permitted as per the community rule, but a few have struggled for so. • The male in the community are well received with education. Majority of them are graduate and many have post-graduation degrees. • The total literacy rate of is 70%, where the male literacy rate is about 83% and the female about 70%. • 40% of the total population has received primary education while that of Graduation and Post-Graduation is 10% each. Secondary and Higher Secondary Education is 20% each. • The main occupation of the people is agriculture. About 60% of the total population is related to the cultivation of crops while another 20% of the population is engaged as workers in the agricultural field. • About 70% of the land use is under agricultural activities. Irrigation is mainly done through wells and tube well about 75%. Double cropping techniques are used where vegetables and other food crops like wheat, etc, are grown. Tea and Eucalyptus plantations are noticed throughout the village. Eucalyptus plantations are mainly adopted under the social forestry schemes of arresting soil erosion.

#### **Economy of kotas**

The Kotas, being agriculturalists, usually grow enough beans, potatoes, and carrots to suit their needs. Other vegetables and rice are purchased in the market. In earlier days the Kotas cultivated millet or relied on their Badaga neighbors for regular supplies of grain in return for their services. Now most Kotas own some land—even if they live in a nearby city—even cultivate tea, a commodity that fetches more than four times the price of any other cash crop. The Kotas, like most of India's cultivators, use chemical fertilizers with little concern for the effects on their health or the environment. Kotas keep buffalo and cows for producing milk, butter, and curds, but they no longer keep buffalo and never keep cows for meat or sacrificial purposes. Domestic dogs and cats are not uncommon and chickens can be seen about the village. Other animals used for food are usually purchased. Sheep raising and beekeeping have also been reported. The Kotas' traditional staple was a type of millet known as *vatomk* (Italian millet).

**Industrial Arts.** Kota men have traditionally specialized in blacksmithing, silversmithing, roof thatching, basket making, wood-and leatherworking, and musical-instrument making.

**Division of Labor.** In agricultural tasks the women ordinarily weed the fields, then the men till the soil, both sexes harrow and furrow, and finally women usually sow the seeds. Wood-and metalworking and the playing of musical instruments are the exclusive domain of men.

#### **Economy of todas**

The Toda Tribe of Nilgiril Hills are pastoral people. They rear buffaloes and produce different milk products, like ghee, cheese, butter, curd which they sell or exchange with the different products of the neighboring tribes to procure the things of their day-to-day use. Thus, they are involved in “socio-economic symbiosis” with the neighboring tribes, as mentioned above.

The dairy works are absolutely the males' business. Females are debarred from entering the dairy house even. Previously, males were engaged in cooking but now this duty has been shifted to the female inmates of the house. They are also assigned such

duties like, the rearing of children, fetching of drinking water, and fuel from the jungle. Milking, churning, etc. are males jobs. They milk their buffaloes twice a day i.e. in the early morning and also in the evening. The lifestyle of Todas are mainly pastoral. In recent times, they are also engaged in other economic activities (such as agriculture) to subsidize their pastoral economy

The most important domestic animal of the Toda is the buffalo. They generally classify two types of buffaloes – ordinary and sacred buffalo herds. The former type is being owned by individual Toda family while the latter type is supposed to be the property.

**Economy of irulas**

Traditionally, the main occupation of the Irulas has been snake and rat catching. They also work as laborer’s (coolies) in the fields of the landlords during the sowing and harvesting seasons or in the rice mills. Fishing is also a major occupation.

Rats destroy a quarter of the grain grown on Tamil Nadu-area farms annually. To combat this pest, Irula men use a traditional earthen pot fumigation method. Smoke is blown through their mouths, which leads to severe respiratory and heart problems.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Agriculture and Horticulture**

In Udhagamandalam Taluk, 28.46% of the Irulas have land, whereas 71.54% are landless. In Kotagiri Taluk 31.85% of the Irulas have land and landless Irulas make up 68.15%. The land held by Irulas is situated near forests. The grass and woodland type of vegetation makes it suitable for the cultivation of tea, coffee and fruit trees such as guava, jack, orange, lemon, papaya soil erosion. a few vegetables like bitter gourd, cucumber, pumpkin etc.

**Wage Labor on tea estates**

The Irulas acquired knowledge of tea cultivation from the British planters. After independence, with the transfer of power from the British to local landlords, most of the neighboring Badagas became tea estate owners. The Badagas engaged Irulas to work on the estates. In Kotagiri Taluk, most Irulas work as labourers on Kilip, Kotada, Biredi and Glenburn Estates as long as they are physically fit to work.

Both men and women work on estates. Irula women prepare the nursery beds, transfer nursery plants to the field, plant the seedling, and in the final stage, do the work of pruning and plucking of leave. The men prepare the land into terraces, plant and also manure the field. The Irula men and women work from 9 A.M to 5 P.M. and get paid weekly. Daily wages are Rs. 95 per day for permanent labour and Rs. 5 per day for temporary labour.

**Selling of milk**

Most of the Irula families own milk animals like cow and buffaloes. The men graze the animals; mostly outside the settle men the women milk them in the morning and evening. They have started selling milk to the Co-operative Milk Societies; a few of them regularly supply milk to the non-tribal houses.

**Modern employment**

Among the Irulas of Kotagiri and Udhagamandalam Taluks, the Irula male literacy rate is 23.07% and female is 11.30%. The Irula girl child dropout rate is 31.08 % (6, h to 91’ standard) and 26.55 % (10” standard and above). There are six male graduates and two women graduates. Because of the low literacy, the Irulas are confined to the Nilgiri District. As for modern employment in the government or private sector, a few Irula men can be found working in tea factories, in Government Services like the Railways, the Post and Telegraph Department and the Public Works Department. Some Irula women work as domestic servants, a few of them have been trained in healthcare and work in hospitals and private clinics. Yet others work as cooks in private as well as government run schools. Udhagamandalam Taluk has 12% of the Irulas engaged in modern forms of employment where- s in Kotagiri Taluk only 3% of the Irulas have abandoned their traditional forms of occupation.

**Economy of kurumbas**

The Kurumba houses known as "GUDILU" are temporary constructions in the forests. The traditional occupation of the Kurumbas is food gathering, like collection of honey and forests produce. They are also cultivating millets like ragi and samai on a small scale of mainly on hill slopes and mountain ridges. Honey fetches considerable remuneration for the Kurumbas. It is released much by public.

**Table1 Tribes Population**

The following schedule depicts the number of ST population in different blocks of the district

Sl.No	Scheduled Tribe	House holds		Population				Area of Concentration	
		No.	%	Male	Female	Total	%		
1	Toda	418	6.39	785	695	1480	4.98	Udhagamandalam Kotagiri	
2	Kotas	491	7.50	1009	976	1985	6.68	Udhagamandalam Kotagiri, Kundah, Coonoor	
3	Kurumbas	2076	31.71	5196	5157	10353	34.86	Kotagiri, Kundah, Pandalur and Gudalur	
4	Irulas	1913	29.22	4219	4495	8714	29.34	Kundah, Coonoor, Kotagiri	
5	Paniyas	1197	18.28	2795	2746	5541	18.65	Pandalur, Gudalur	
6	Kattudayakan	452	6.90	824	805	1629	5.49	Pandalur, Gudalur	
	Total	6547	100	14828	14874	29702	100		

Source: -Nilgiris Adiwasi Welfare Association (NAWA) Census- 2011.

Honey is collected mostly in the summer months from the cliffs, rocky crevices and the branches of giant trees. The supplement their usual diet with ample quantity of honey. Kurumbas are known to possess keen eyesight, gained possibly from constant watching of the honey bee to the hives. Now, they are mainly engaged in agriculture and those who do not own lands work as casual agricultural laborers. The Kurumbas are hardworking people.

**Irulas**

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**Current Socio – Economic Conditions**

The socio – economic conditions of the tribes usually covers the areas like as size of population, education, income of the people, expenditure part of the people etc.

**Population of The Nilgiris District**

The total population of the Nilgiris district as per the census 2011 is 7, 35,394. Out of the total population of the district the male and female proportion is about 3, 60,143 and 3, 75,251 respectively. When compare to the total population of the district in the year 2001, there is a sharp fall in the size in the year 2011. The population size has declined to 26,747. In percentage terms, it is 3.51 percent. The tribal population in India is about 8.43 Million as per 2001 census. It constitutes about 8.2 percent of the total population of the country. In the year 2004 – 05, the proportion of SC and ST population has jumped to 25.4 percent (NSS 61st Round). The SC and ST population of Tamil Nadu shows an increment over the years. The recent data depicts that the size of SC population in the state has jumped from 144 million to 206 million with the growth rate of 21.8 percent. The size of the ST population in the state is estimated to be 104 lakh with the growth rate of 22 percent over the previous calculation. Out of the total ST population, about 6.6 Lakh people are living in rural areas of the state. The following table depicts the size of population (SC and ST) in the Nilgiris district as per the census of 2011.

**Table 2** Distribution of st population in the district: The following schedule depicts the number of ST population in different blocks of the district.

S. No.	Block	Percent
1	Pandalur	32.08
2	Kotagiri	24.10
3	Gudalur	14.33
4	Kundah	13.16
5	Ooty	9.27
6	Coonoor	6.96
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Tribal Education Status Documentation (2010-11).

**Analysis And Findings**

The following are the important findings of the study.

1. It is found that among the ST population in various blocks of the district, Pandalur block has more ST population (32.08%) and Coonoor block has the less ST population (6.96%).
2. In the tribal group, women are more literates (63.51%) than the men (36.49%).
3. As far as the GDP of the district is concerned, it is Rs. 5,130 Crs. as per 2011 census and the highest GDP is found in Chennai with Rs. 91,749 Crs.
4. It is found that the percentage of people under poverty is more among ST population. It is about 40 percent in the case of ST and 32 percent among SC community
5. The term „tribe“ has been widely used in anthropological, but there is no general consensus as to its precise definition or appropriate application. In the sense of a pre-political or pre-contract society, the term Tribe has passed into general usage as a synonym for a primitive social group. Among the social sciences the cultural anthropology is identified as the study of primitive people and is distinguished from other disciplines such as Sociology, Political Science and Economics because its focus is on primitiveness of the peoples societies.
6. In Tamil Nadu, the Government has identified out of 36 Scheduled Tribes, six Scheduled Tribes as Primitive Tribal Groups They are TodasKotasKurumbasIrulasPaniyas and Kattunayakans. Surprisingly, all these six PTCs live in Nilgiris district.
7. The government expenditure on Social Welfare and Social Security has increased between the two time periods (2008-09 and 2009-10).

**Suggestions**

**Suggestions to the government**

1. Restoration of Toda lands already encroached by the Forest department as well as by tribal landlords.
2. Construction of community halls in all seven Kotasegments in Nilgirisdistrict.
3. Alukurumbas want a monitoring authority to regulate NGO activity, particularly with reference to sale of honey and forest products collected by the alsokurumbas. Further they do not want the alukurumbas name to be used as brand name or trade mark for honey selling.
4. The Irulas priests needs training in priest hood by the government.
5. 5.Most of the men need jobs in forest department because they do not want to be away from the forest and wild life.
6. Most of the tribes live in “paady” or colony, where at least one health officer, social motivator and a career guider could be appointed.
7. Access to schools and colleges are less among paniyas, kurumbas and todas. Giving awareness is the only way of providing them education. Active measures must be taken both by government and by NGO’s.

8. Health care is an important matter of concern. Opening Health centers and clinics for tribal welfare is the call of the day.
9. People in most of the tribal communities are completely trust in agriculture labor. They must be also guided in vocational training and industrial training.
10. Most of the tribal cultures are in the verge of extinction. Steps must be taken to preserve these traditions and cultures.
11. Most of the tribal people are completely addicted to alcoholism, smoking and pan masalas.
12. Di- addiction centers and counseling centers should be allotted.
13. Panchayat level supportive body separately for tribes can be formed. This can help and support the growth of their community.
14. NGO's must be promoted to do the service for the betterment of the tribal community.
15. Tribal people in many remote areas, still live in grass huts and bamboo houses. Active steps for building good houses ought to be initiated.

#### Suggestions to the public

1. Dominant communities should not treat paniyan or any other tribe people as inferior community.
2. Equal treatment to them helps them come out of the nut shell of the inferiority complexes and make them feel better socially.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite of all the efforts taken by the government for the improvement of the socio economic status of the SC and ST population, active welfare measures are not being done in the district. Illiteracy and Poverty (even though more among in the ST population) are still prevailing and the government spending on the welfare of the SC and ST population is unreached. Badagas are to be developed economically as well as educationally. There is a need for a separate organization to look into the requirement of the SC and ST population for the equalitarian growth of the society, improve the schooling and higher level education for the tribes, particularly for kurumbas, irulas, and paniyas.

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