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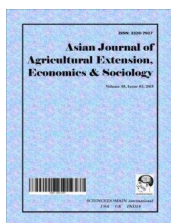


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# Social Exclusion of Tribal Agricultural Labourers: The Case of Adiya Tribal Community of Wayanad District

error in authors: C. Aswathy must be A. Chandrakumar  
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### Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author CA designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors SD and BV managed the literature searches and analyses of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

The tribal communities in Kerala constitute 1.4 percent of the general population. Despite, Kerala's remarkable social sector development, it is observed that the tribal communities still remain the most vulnerable community in the state. Hence, the present study was an attempt to study the extent of social exclusion of Adiya tribal communities of Wayanad. Social exclusion was measured using five indicators and primary data was collected from 90 respondents, using structured questionnaire. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed that Adiyas faced an overall exclusion of 66.38 percent. Analysis of extent of social exclusion indicator

wise showed that economic exclusion was felt to the extent of 74.54 percent followed by political-legal exclusion (69.89%). Also, Adiya tribe experienced geographical exclusion to the extent of 69.76 percent followed by service exclusion (67.96%) and socio-cultural exclusion (48.92%) respectively. Further 50.00 percent of the respondents felt medium level of social exclusion. Considering the significant level of social exclusion faced by this tribal community, developmental interventions for the empowerment of Adiyas in social, economic and educational spheres for ensuring food and livelihood security and for defence against exploitation is the need of the hour.

*Keywords: Adiyas; Wayanad; social exclusion; indicators.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of development and well-being has undergone significant changes from the time of its inception during the past century. The notion of well-being has shifted from just material attainment or physical means of development to outcomes that are either desirable in themselves or desirable because of their role in supporting better opportunities for people. Income is clearly only one option that people would like to have, though an important one. But it is not the sum total of their lives. Income is also a means, with human development, to an end. Thus, the latest notion of development assumes that human development is the end and economic growth is just a means to this end [1].

It is in this context that the term social exclusion gained popularity. Social exclusion is defined as the process by which individuals and population groups face barriers in relation to their access to public goods, resulting in inequitable social attainments, capabilities, development, justice and dignity outcomes [2,3]. Public goods in this context is defined as goods, services, attainment, capability or freedom, that are essential for every human being to be able to live a life of dignity. There are several barriers that may arise from a number of causes, including social or state neglect, social or state discrimination, tacit or active social or state denial, social or state violence and dispossession, customary practices and cultural norms, and or by faulty design and implementation of state laws, policies and programmes, or a combination of all of these. The exclusion of the poor from participation in and access to opportunities and activities is a major non-material dimension of poverty that needs to be recognized and addressed [4]. It is both a process and an outcome that leads to disempowerment and isolation [5]. Social exclusion can be viewed as a relative problem with people remaining disconnected from others and from social, economic and political structures around them [6].

The identity-based form of discrimination which is common among the tribal communities is a form of social exclusion which has resulted in the cultural devaluation of these groups and has led to an institutionalized form of inequality. Such social inequalities passed on from one generation to another [7] has further led to isolation, shame and humiliation and in turn to self-exclusion [8]. The inability of tribes to actively participate in the economic, social, cultural and political life due to the remoteness of their hamlets, coupled with the failure of the society to extend economic resources and social recognition, has led to their isolation from major societal mechanisms [9].

India is home to more than 533 tribal communities. Almost 90 percent of them live in difficult terrains like interiors of forests or remote areas, which are less accessible to the mainstream population. This has led to the socio-economic backwardness of these communities [10]. Studies have shown that tribals are deprived of a regular supply of food [11], and face high degrees of education exclusion due to their peculiar habitation [12]. Besides, the poor access to financial resources especially from the banking sector has made these communities more vulnerable to the exploitations by the money lenders [13]. Coming to Kerala, there are 36 different tribal communities which constitute 1.4 percent of the general population of the state [14]. Though, Kerala has achieved remarkable social sector development, celebrated as 'Kerala Model of Development', it is observed that the development process fell short to encompass tribal communities in its development process [15], which makes them outliers in the Kerala model of development [16]. The tribal communities in Kerala are considered to be the most vulnerable community in the state. Against this background, the present study investigated the extent of social exclusion of tribal communities of Waynad district in Kerala.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Wayanad district of Kerala was purposively selected for the study owing to the highest proportion of Scheduled tribe in the district (18.53%). Since reports suggest that the level of development differs within the tribal communities as some communities seem to be better off than the others [17], Adiyas was purposively selected to study social exclusion. Their status is far below the other tribal communities and they perform worst on human development indicators like health and education [18]. Considering the highest concentration of Adiya tribal settlements in Mananthavady block of the district, this block was purposively chosen for the study. 30 respondents each were selected using the simple random procedure from Thirunelli and Thrissilery villages of Thirunelli panchayat and Panamaram village of Panamaram panchayat respectively. Thus the sample consisted of 90 respondents. Ex post facto research design which is very commonly used in the social research was employed for the study. Social exclusion was operationalised as the extent to which Adiyas were deprived of having access to public goods like education, healthcare facilities, infrastructural facilities, credit facilities, employment and participating in decision-making activities of the society. In order to measure this variable, five indicators were selected using principal component analysis [19]. Statements were developed to identify how they felt about their extent of exclusion by depriving them of their rights and scores were given for their levels of feeling ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Statistical measures like frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test were utilized for data interpretation.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social exclusion was measured using five indicators. Mean score of each statement was computed to measure the extent to which Adiyas felt they were excluded from the society. The results obtained are explained in detail in the following subsections.

### 3.1 Geographical Exclusion

A close perusal of Table 1 clearly shows that this tribe strongly feels that infrastructural facilities (MS=4.87), employment opportunities (MS=4.52) and educational facilities (MS=4.48) are not

available to them on account of the location of their settlements which is a clear indication of geographical isolation. Health facility (MS=3.98) which is an important factor was also not easily accessible to this community due to the remoteness of their location.

Adiyas faced geographical exclusion to an extent of 70.60 percent as shown in Table 2. The extent of geographical exclusion faced by Adiyas in Thirunelli and Panamaram panchayat were 73.13 percent and 68.07 percent respectively. Normal infrastructural provisions were denied to this tribal community due to their remote residency in Thirunelli panchayat. These settlements could be reached only by foot. Mud roads in these hamlets made transport facilities very difficult for the residents living there. Other reasons which contributed to their geographical exclusion included lack of a primary health centre, school and a market within their reach. They had to traverse long distances to go for work as most of them were employed as estate labourers in Coorg in Karnataka. This clearly depicted the fact that Adiyas faced difficulties in gaining employment and access to basic health and education facilities due to their remote residency.

The situation in Panamaram panchayat was quite different, as the tribal hamlets here were exposed settlements. The Adiyas in these settlements lived along with the mainstream of the population where there were normal infrastructural provisions. Moreover, the distance of this Panchayat from the city was less compared to Thirunelli panchayat. Adiyas living in these panchayats had better access in terms of roads, schools, hospitals, public gathering places and other infrastructural connectivity.

### 3.2 Economic Exclusion

Adiya tribe forms the major part of the workforce in the cash crop economy of Wayanad and Coorg. The agrarian crisis which has affected this economy, has, in turn, affected the livelihood of Adiyas, who are already deprived on many terms. The extent of economic exclusion (74.54%) felt was high compared to all other indicators of social exclusion. The difficulty to get a suitable job to sustain their livelihood (MS=4.63), and even when they get employed it was difficult for this tribe to get equal wages as others (MS=4.02). Also, there was no choice of employment for this tribe (MS=3.74), and they had difficulty in getting land for agriculture

(MS=3.25). As a result, most of them were engaged as agricultural labourers and many agreed that they didn't get reasonable wages for the job they did (MS=3.86). The lean agricultural season falling between July and November was the season of extreme poverty for them. Since this community was not equipped with skills that the local market demand, they did not have ample employment opportunities. Moreover, impoverization of the region owed to crashes in agricultural prices which resulted in the entry of non-tribals in the labour market, further reducing opportunities for the communities in question [18].

In day to day financial transactions, tribal identity was not considered as relevant and important. Shopkeepers and other service providers did not discriminate between tribes and non-tribes provided they had adequate money. Adiyas living in Panamaram had better access to employment opportunities than those living in Thirunelli. This was the main reason for lesser extent of economic exclusion in Panamaram compared to Thirunelli.

### 3.3 Service Exclusion

The extent of overall service exclusion was observed to be 67.96 percent while it was 73.02 percent in Thirunelli and 62.90 percent in Panamaram respectively. The study revealed that majority of Adiya tribes in Panamaram panchayat had access to school within the reach of five kilometers, while the schools in Thirunelli were located more than five kilometers from the tribal settlements. Though Model Residential Schools have been established in Wayanad district, geographical isolation remains an acute problem. Inaccessibility is highly visible with regard to higher education as the majority of all tribes did not have access to colleges.

Educational infrastructure is a decisive factor in determining the educational attainment of the tribes. The schools in the tribal areas lacked the basic necessities (MS=3.29). There is shortage of teachers (MS=4.61). Even the majority of available teachers were not 'tribal sensitive' leading to structural problems in tribal education.

Adiyas, when compared to the other tribal communities performed the lowest on health indicator. Health care services were not extended to these communities, due to their poor economic status and doctor's unavailability and a

shortage of medicines (MS=4.72). Formal credit facilities were not utilized by this section of the society due to the cumbersome procedures, the discriminatory attitude of the officials and their inability to pledge security for loan (MS=4.05). As a result, they relied on the money lenders which further aggravate their misery.

### 3.4 Socio-cultural Exclusion

Socio-cultural dimension of social exclusion was not perceived as an important dimension of social exclusion based on the survey result. Though the level of socio-cultural exclusion was perceived as low by the tribal community, they still feel that they are denied of gaining social recognition in public functions (MS=4.32). However, practices like discrimination in the name of caste (MS=2.92), denial to make personal and family decisions (MS=2.85), and denial to interact with the non-tribal population (MS=2.45) was given low scores by the respondents indicating that Adiyas did not perceive any socio-cultural exclusion.

The figures in Table 1 revealed that the extent of socio-cultural exclusion in Thirunelli (55.58 %) was more compared to Panamaram (42.26 %). The plausible reason for this is the exposure of Adiya settlement in Panamaram to the non – tribal population. The continued exposure to non – tribal population has resulted in changes in their culture and way of living which attributes to their low level of socio-cultural exclusion compared to those in Thirunelli.

### 3.5 Political-legal Exclusion

The extent of political-legal exclusion was found to be 74.22 percent and 65.56 percent in Thirunelli and Panamaram panchayat respectively accounting for an overall political-legal exclusion of 69.89 percent. Negligence of officials (MS=4.86) and difficulty in availing the benefits extended to them by the Government (MS=4.95) were the two major reasons contributing the political-legal exclusion. It is worthwhile to note that most of them responded that no government officials visited their settlement during previous 365 days prior to the survey and that the officials failed in providing adequate information regarding the schemes for the tribe. Corruption and bribery were evident in these tribal hamlets. The level of participation of Adiyas in political and societal mechanisms (MS=4.37) and the restricted

freedom to choose candidates (MS=3.42) mechanisms to protect them against the have led to the ignorance of Adiya tribes about exploitation, especially their women, resulted their constitutional rights. Callous attitude on the in a relatively high level of politico-legal part of bureaucracy and law conferring exclusion [20].

**Table 1. Measurement of indicators of social exclusion**

		(n=90)
Sl. no.	Statements	Mean score
<b>I. Geographical exclusion</b>		
1.	Deprived of good infrastructural facilities due to remoteness of your residency	4.87
2.	Deprived of availing good educational facilities due to remoteness of your village	4.48
3.	Deprived of availing employment opportunities due to remoteness of your residency	4.52
4.	Deprived of availing good health facilities due to remoteness of your residency	3.98
<b>II. Economic exclusion</b>		
6.	Difficulty in getting a suitable job for your sustainable livelihood	4.63
7.	Difficulty in getting equal wage for the same job as that of others	4.02
8.	Difficulty in getting a reasonable wage for job	3.86
9.	Difficulty in acquiring land for agriculture	3.25
10.	No choice of livelihood/ employment options	3.74
<b>III. Service exclusion</b>		
11.	Difficulty in availing health care facilities on account of doctor's unavailability and shortage of medicines	4.72
12.	Difficulty in availing educational facilities on account of unavailability of teaching staff	4.61
13.	Difficulty in availing educational facilities on account of unavailability of teaching aids and other equipments	3.29
14.	Difficulty in availing credit/ loan facilities due to the cumbersome procedure, discriminatory attitude of officials or inability to pledge security for loans	4.05
<b>IV. Socio-cultural exclusion</b>		
15.	Denied of personal and family's decision making and needs	2.85
16.	Denied of getting social recognition by your presence during public or social functions and meetings.	4.32
17.	Discrimination in name of cast which prevents integration with the society.	2.92
18.	Denied while interacting and mingling with others.	2.45
<b>V. Political-legal exclusion</b>		
19.	Difficulty in availing the benefits and protection extended to you by the Govt. as scheduled tribe.	4.95
20.	Negligence on the part of Govt. officials at local level due to your poor economic status and illiteracy.	4.86
21.	Difficulty in participating in the political and societal decision making	4.37
22.	Denied of freedom of choice of candidate to votes	3.42

**Table 2. Extent of social exclusion**

		(n=90)		
Sl. no.	Indicators of social exclusion	Panchayat		Overall exclusion in both the panchayats
		Thirunelli	Panamaram	
1.	Geographical exclusion	73.13	68.07	70.60
2.	Economic exclusion	78.52	70.56	74.54
3.	Service exclusion	73.02	62.90	67.96
4.	Socio – cultural exclusion	55.58	42.26	48.92
5.	Political – legal exclusion	74.22	65.56	69.89
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70.90</b>	<b>61.87</b>	<b>66.38</b>

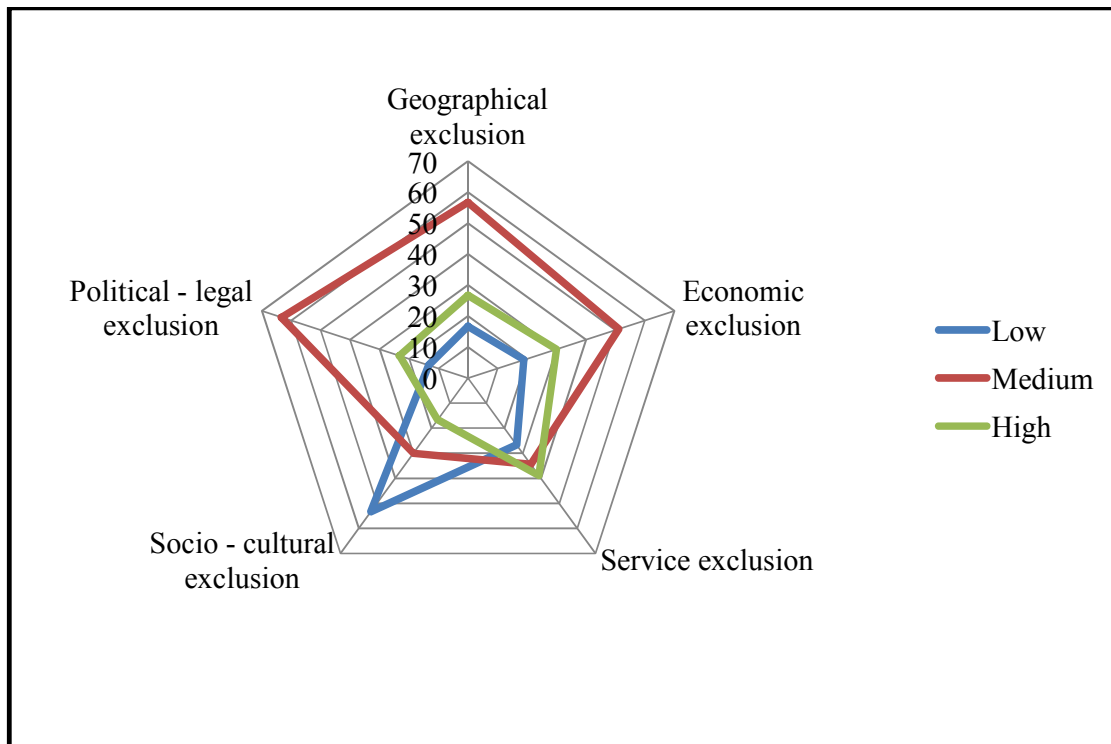
**Table 3. Distribution of respondents based on the extent of social exclusion**

(n=90)				
Sl. no.	Dependent variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Social exclusion	Low	21	23.33
		Medium	45	50.00
		High	24	26.67

Based on mean  $\pm$  ½ SD, the respondents were classified into 3 categories, i.e., those facing high, medium and low level of social exclusion as indicated in Table 3.

A critical analysis of Fig. 1 shows the extent of exclusion felt on the five indicators of social exclusion. Slightly more than half (56.67%) of the respondents in the study area felt medium level of geographical exclusion, followed by high (26.66%) and low (16.67%) level of geographical exclusion. A close perusal of the table further reveals that 51.11 percent of the Adiyas felt medium level of economic exclusion. Slightly less than one third (30.00%) of the respondents felt high level of economic exclusion while less than one fifth (18.89%) of the respondents in the study area faced low level of economic exclusion. Slightly greater than one third (34.44%) of the respondents faced medium level of service

exclusion followed by 38.89 percent of the tribes facing high level of service exclusion. Slightly more than one fourth (26.67%) of the Adiyas faced low level of service exclusion. A critical analysis of the table further reveals the distribution of respondents based on socio-cultural exclusion. It is evident that 53.33 percent of the respondents felt low level of socio-cultural exclusion while slightly less than one third of the respondents in the study area felt socio-cultural exclusion at a medium level. Only 16.67 percent of the Adiyas faced high level of socio-cultural exclusion. More than half (63.33%) of the Adiyas faced medium level of political-legal exclusion while slightly greater than one fifth (26.67%) of the respondents reported that they faced high level of political-legal exclusion. Only 13.33 percent of the respondents from the sample area reported that they faced low level of political-legal exclusion.



**Fig. 1. Comparison of extent of exclusion felt on each indicator**

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the Adiya tribal community remains as an excluded group even though exposure to non-tribal domain at different period of ethnic history has earmarked numerous changes in their tribal cultural component. Lack of adequate support, inappropriate implementation of developmental plans, pilferage of funds and exploitation has often been the reasons for the social exclusion of Adiya tribal community. Few developmental interventions for the empowerment of Adiyas in social, economic and educational spheres are listed below for ensuring food and livelihood security and for defence against exploitation.

1. Education should be promoted among the tribals for their development. Organizing night schools for adults, employing tribal sensitive teachers, starting schools exclusively for tribal children and providing facilities that are on par with that of non – tribal schools are some of the interventions that can be introduced to improve the literacy level of tribals. Strengthening the facilities at Model residential school can encourage the tribal students to excel in the studies.
2. Improvement in the quality of healthcare facilities provided to them will help in improving their health status. This can be ensured through organising frequent health camps, upgrading the facilities in nearby primary health centres, and ensuring the availability of doctors.
3. Most of the enabling and empowering efforts carried out successfully in the mainstream society either do not succeed or do not find a place among the tribes. An example in point is the central government funded the project on training for skill development of students in association with core groups (core groups here means registered youth clubs affiliated to National Yuva Kendras). Future initiatives should be organized taking this into consideration.
4. The study highlights the importance of providing better infrastructural facilities in their hamlets, like metalled roads, quality housing, electricity, etc. which will help improve the living conditions of Adiyas.
5. Adiyas with high level of education can be selected as opinion leaders. Development interventions can be implemented in these hamlets through them. This would also

facilitate formulation of developmental plans based on their needs.

6. Strengthening of Oorukootams can improve their decision making power. The Oorukootams should be empowered to function as the vital agency for formulation and implementation of all programmes meant for them.
7. Policy interventions focussing on the implementation of wage generating activities, like MGNREGA, Kudumbashrees (SHGs) need to be emphasized. This will serve as a livelihood sustenance option for the tribals and help reduce their dependency level on Govt. subsidies.

#### CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, written consent has been collected and preserved by the authors.

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#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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