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## The Socio-economic Status of the Urali Tribal of Tamil Nadu in India Using Tribal Composite Index

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**ABSTRACT** The present study is the outcome of an in-depth fieldwork analysis with 1128 Urali tribal families in Erode district of Tamil Nadu. The selection of the study area was purposive and was based on the population of the Urali people, who are concentrated in the hilly terrain of these tribal districts, the selection of the sample units was done randomly. The study attempts to understand the outcome of development intervention practices and document the change in socio-economic frontiers accrued in favour of beneficiaries and the impact on their livelihoods, if any. This paper also attempts to explore if there is any association between educational status (those who are still studying/those who have discontinued) and level of education (primary/middle/high/higher secondary/college). The data was analysed using multi-stage stratified random sampling via face-to-face interviews, phone calls, and structured questionnaires, as well as statistical techniques such as Chi-Square and Composite Index. The composite indices show that illiteracy, indebtedness, lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, poor health care, unemployment, unfriendly development policies, etc. pose major challenges to tribal development. The Land and Economic Index lends credence to claims that the Urali community with low landholdings suffers from the extortion of rich and influential settlers. The study concludes that to fully integrate the tribal group into the national mainstream, action must be taken not only to strengthen socioeconomic activities but also to address the enduring issues of poor literacy and high dropout rates.

### INTRODUCTION

The state of tribal communities post-independence goes to show that the “Policy of Integration” and “Drift” amounted to nothing more than maintaining the status quo. The constitution of India contains numerous clauses for scheduled castes and tribes in order to support and safeguard them by improvising their socioeconomic interests and integrating them into the national mainstream, but the socioeconomic situation of the tribes is a cause for serious concern. Tribes have their own traditional beliefs, rich culture, diverse indigenous knowledge, and distinctive ways of life, which leaves very little room for socioeconomic development or change. They typically have a morality, religion, and worldview that are in line with their interpersonal relationships (Mandelbaum 1970).

The biggest hurdle to the sustainable development of tribal communities is their lack of knowledge of the policies and programmes intended for them, as well as the exploitation of middle-level agencies that stand between decision-makers and the intended beneficiaries. Another study also found, through analysis of the tribal population in Odisha’s Sundargarh district, that tribal residents of Naxalite-prone communities are particularly susceptible to ideological interventions that have no discernible impact on development indicators. The tribal people who were taken into account for this field study showed negative attitudes toward government policies and programmes for tribal development as a result of their continued backwardness for decades following independence (Dungdung and Pattanaik 2020).

Scheduled Tribes, as described in Article 342 of the Constitution, are groups of people with defining

characteristics, such as primitive characteristics, geographic isolation, different cultures, shyness, and economic adversity. Due to their traditional values, culture and beliefs, the tribal people are, unfortunately, the most vulnerable segment of the society. The Government of India has designated 75 particularly vulnerable tribal groups out of the 573 tribal groups. They are socially and economically backward, with pre-agricultural technology, low literacy rates, and declining or stagnant populations, and some of the groups are on the verge of extinction. Tamil Nadu has a 7.94 lakh tribal population as per the 2011 census, and there are 36 tribes and sub-tribes in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, tribals constitute 1.10 percent of the total population in Tamil Nadu. About 85 percent of the tribal people live in rural areas. Tamil Nadu is ranked sixth in the country for having the highest percentage of Adi Dravidar or tribal population. These tribes dwell in hillsides and dense forests far from modern amenities. The majority of tribal families are under-resourced and have limited access to opportunities for employment, education and other sources of income. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the stress that the tribal people are experiencing as a result of the contemporary lifestyle and the new legal, administrative and economic systems, in addition to integrating them into the new technology-driven economy and production system. This could be accomplished by implementing the assimilationist paradigm of the tribes, which calls for structural links between tribes and non-tribes (Ray 1972).

The government of Tamil Nadu has implemented several welfare programmes for the socio-economic development of the tribals. The objective of these programmes is to facilitate the socio-economic development of the tribals with various welfare measures, particularly in their education, to end their social and economic deprivation and help them integrate into the national mainstream. Despite a large number of development plans undertaken by the Government of India to ensure a better quality of life for the tribal people, these tribals are still facing problems of poverty, malnutrition, hunger, a poor literacy rate, poor health care facilities, and deprivation of natural resources. The majority of the tribal population is economically backward and socially marginalised. The literacy level of the tribal population is 41.53 percent, which is much lower compared to the state's overall literacy level of 73.45 percent.

Their social, economic and educational levels are below the state average. The problem of survival has become a major concern for tribal communities in the current scenario. Agriculture constitutes the majority of household occupations in many tribes. The educational needs of the scheduled tribes must receive more attention, as only this will inspire them for the future (Jayakumar and Palaniyammal 2016). Another prominent aspect of tribal life in India is the problem of debt, which is a natural outcome of tribals being exploited. It was tried to identify the various facets of tribal indebtedness and find the level of intervention by institutional creditors that perpetuates their indebtedness. The majority of the tribal population lives below the poverty line and depends on borrowings to finance their budget deficit. With negative outcomes like exploitation through bonded labour, the loss of assets, the transfer of land ownership, etc., this debt has the propensity to become everlasting (Devi and Palit 2019). The caste-based discrimination, atrocities, harassment and untouchability prevail in society despite various regulations of the government. Hence, free higher education, awareness campaigns against atrocities and social injustice, etc. should be encouraged (Apparaya 2015).

India's tribal people are still socially, economically and politically the most disadvantaged groups, hence, the regular assessment of the development status of tribals is important to take suitable corrective measures and implement targeted programmes for tribal upliftment. The socio-economic status of the tribal communities, such as health issues, shelter problems, financial issues, cultural isolation, a lack of education, etc. along with the government schemes of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are responsible for the welfare of tribal communities (L Lakshmi and Paul 2019). The institutional interventions can help tribal people learn and use new technology, businesses and skills. The tribal territory has great potential for producing food, including fruits, grains, vegetables, fowl and medicinal plants, but the tribal people are exploited because of market imperfections (Ballabh and Batra 2015). Indigenous agrarian civilisation has a rich history of technical expertise (Keerthana and Divakaran 2021). In the livelihood issues of the Urali tribes in Tamil Nadu it was found that most of the community members were working as agricultural labourers, depending on their daily wages. The current occupation is not sustaining their livelihood status. Therefore, alternative occupations with sustainable

development for the Urali people's livelihood has been suggested (Actovin and Kumar 2019).

The study attempted to review the key works on tribal development in the preceding paragraphs. One significant finding from the review is the lack of consensus over how the issues are perceived, how to solve them, and how well the current developmental activities have worked. Tribals have their traditional values, profound culture and indigenous knowledge and a unique way of life, which provides very little scope for any socio-economic change or development. Therefore, it is important not only to understand their perception and philosophy of life but also to document their history and indigenous knowledge. Understanding their perception of problems will help in the formulation of various targeted development programmes and improve sustainable livelihood practices. For this, the present study has structured an integrated approach, which includes an in-depth field survey, observations and in-depth interviews to get a detailed and holistic picture of the Urali people. The study brings forth several relevant questions, problems and challenges, which uniquely provide solutions and responses. It would help planners, decision-makers, non-governmental organisations, self-help groups, and social organisations in effectively executing welfare and development programmes for tribal upliftment.

### Objectives of the Study

The study's primary goal is to evaluate the extent to which the basic needs and amenities of the Urali Tribes are being met. The study attempts to comprehend the socioeconomic position of the Urali tribals in order to identify the characteristics and factors that have contributed to the Urali tribe's primitive and acculturating condition. The study makes an effort to review the current situation of livelihood, education, health, basic amenities and employment, among other things, in tribal areas in order to develop locality-specific, tribe-specific, and need-based strategies that are acceptable, accessible, and affordable for the tribal population.

The second objective is to identify factors that have stimulated and acted as barriers to programme implementation, as well as to identify critical gaps and suggest corrective measures for tribal development programme formulation and implementation.

## METHODOLOGY

The study would use both primary and secondary data. The secondary data would be collected from various sources published in books, journals, the internet, etc., highlighting the overall socio-economic status of the tribal people. For the primary data, both qualitative and quantitative analysis can be done through a sample survey, depending on the type of data.

### Sample

The sample size for the study included 1128 *Urali tribal families* from 5 Panchayats located in the Satyamangalam block of Erode district in Tamil Nadu. The Urali tribal communities selected for the study are highly concentrated in the Erode districts. Out of the 12,986 Urali tribes, 12,546 of the study's sampled tribal communities are concentrated in the Erode regions. Thus, a sample size of 1128 will be sufficient for drawing valid conclusions. The researcher collected data from April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

Regarding sample design, in the present study, multi-stage stratified sampling has been used. The sampling procedure has been carried out in three stages. The first stage consists of a selection of districts. The Erode district of Tamil Nadu has been selected for the study, keeping in view the maximum concentration of Urali Tribe members. The second stage consists of the selection of panchayats. Here, five panchayats were selected from Erode district, namely, Koothampalayam, Gundry, Guthiyalathur, Thingalur, and Germalam. The third stage is the selection of households. The number of families has been selected randomly, resulting in a total of 1128 households.

### Tools of Data Collection

The following tools were used for data collection. For the quantitative data, the study used both simple random sampling and stratified random sampling (village and household). The primary data was collected from a field survey via face-to-face conversations, phone calls, and structured questionnaires to analyse the status of the various factors influencing the Urali economy. For the qualitative data collection, key informants, such as tribal leaders, tribal research experts, and elderly tribal community

members, were interviewed. Focus Group Discussions with women, youth, students, men, and other categories like unemployed youth were devised.

The households were selected at regular intervals (sampling intervals) from a random starting point. There were both closed-ended and open-ended questions on this schedule. This section covers socioeconomic data, such as occupation, income, family size, age, gender, and literacy of members, as well as health and sanitation, loan and borrowing, monthly consumption, and assets owned by households, etc.

Key Informant Interviews (KII) were employed to gather more detailed qualitative information that is difficult to gather using traditional survey techniques. Households should be targeted in each District. There were representatives of households with high, middle, and low incomes, with high-income that own lands and livestock, middle-farmers who own lands and have lower income, and poor, landless households who farm in others' lands, work as farm labour, and have bare subsistence level.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to acquire qualitative data that is difficult to obtain by conventional survey methods.

### Techniques

Some of the descriptive statistical techniques that have been used are Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) Statistics, Composite Index and Proportion.

#### *Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) Test*

The Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) Test is a statistical procedure for determining the difference between observed and expected data. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) can also be used to test whether two variables are related or independent of one another in the data.

$$X_c^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$$

Where, c denotes degrees of freedom, O denotes observed value, and E denotes expected value.

#### *The Composite Index*

Principal component analysis-based approaches frequently overlook (or poorly weigh) certain component indicators or variables that do not strongly correlate with the Composite Index, even though they are significant both theoretically and practically.

Therefore, it is necessary to build a Composite Index (CI) of a more inclusive nature. A composite index combines the scores of several indicators into a single score that is taken into account when making decisions. It finds the indicators' relative relevance. The CI method does not compute the variance-covariance matrix or correlations between two sets of indicators. It avoids the need to calculate weights. The Composite Index is unaffected by scale changes.

### RESULTS

This field survey is classified into five parts:

1. Educational needs
2. Household needs (ownership of house, possession of house, availability of toilet, electricity, usage of toilet, cooking fuel)
3. Government documents (ration card, possession of government certificates and documents)
4. Land and economic needs (possession of land, amount of land, possession of *patta* for the land, irrigation facility land, preference of crops, debts and source of debts, bank account, widow)
5. Social needs (membership in groups, forest right committee, religion)

To get a clear picture of the raw data, the accessibility of 24 different variables, including education, *patta*\* ownership (house), ration card, voters' identification, an Aadhar card, a community certificate, 100 days of work, an irrigation facility, land ownership, *patta* ownership (land), the source of debt from a bank, and *Kandhu Vatti*\*\* were taken into consideration when estimating the composite index analysis (see Table 1). The main advantages of a composite index are that the indicators make comparing different performance over time easier and can more easily explain complex multidimensional issues. From the perspective of policymakers, it will also be simpler to watch the evolution of a small number of composite indicators than to investigate a sizable number of statistical datasets. The indices that are formed from the Composite Index technique are grouped as: access to basic amenities, access to government documents, land and economic needs, sources of debts, and membership of social groups (see Fig. 1).

The availability of electricity, toilets and LPG as well as the quantity of *patta* houses in possession,

**Table 1: Percentage of people showing the accessibility of various socioeconomic parameters according to the survey**

Answer	Possess (%)	Don't possess (%)
Patta house	71.4	28.6
Availability of electricity	66	34
Availability of toilet	39	61
Availability of LPG	53	47
Ration card	92	8
Voters ID	90	10
Aadhar card	88	12
Community certificate	47	53
100 days work	15	85
Old age pension	81	19
Irrigation facility	4	96
Possession of land	53	47
Possession of patta	55	45
Bank source for debt	18	82
Kandhu vatti	59	41
SHG	17	83
Bank account	65	35
Membership in social group	5.6	94.4
Forest right committee	38	31
Household needs	57.35	42.65
Government document	68.83	31.17
Land and economic needs	37.33	62.67
Source of debts	39.75	60.25
Membership social group	21.8	62.7

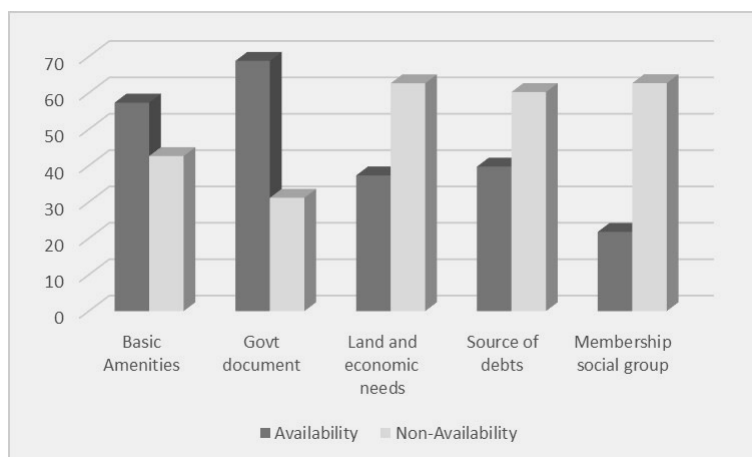
all capture the accessibility of basic amenities. Ration card availability, Voter ID, Aadhar Card, Community Certificate, and 100 days of employment under MGNREGA, and pensions for older people include the accessibility aspect of official documents. Possession of *patta* for land and possession of land represent the accessibility aspect of

**Table 2: Possession of government certificates and documents**

S.No.	Certificates	Frequency	Percentage
1	Voters ID	2786	90
2	Aadhar Card	3990	88
3	Community Certificate	2106	47
4	100-day work	479	15
5	Old age pension	344	81
6	Birth Certificate	734	16
Total		10439	

land and economic needs. Bank accounts, *Kandhu Vatti*, self-help groups and sources for debt all indicate sources of debt. Social group membership is represented by the membership of the Forest Right Committee and by participation in the respective social group's activities.

The best-performing index is the 'availability of government documents' (see Fig. 1), as most of them possess the necessary government documents and certificates. The survey identifies the tribal members' access to the required papers and credentials. Voter identification (90%) and Aadhar Cards are at the top of the list (88%). The government makes a lot of effort, and in a way, exerts pressure on residents to obtain voter ID cards and Aadhar cards because they are indirectly important to the administration and parliamentarians. Tribals are valued as members of the electorate. Community certificates are only held by 47 percent of the population (see Table 2). To exercise any of their rights, tribal members must show this community certificate. The findings show that only 16 percent of the tribal population as a whole has a



**Fig.1. Tribal composite socio-economic index**

Source: Authors' calculation based on survey data

**Table 3: Ownership of the house**

S.No.	Ownership of the house	Frequency	Percentage
1	Own	991	87.9
2	Rented	137	12.1
	Total	1128	

birth certificate. If the children are born in a hospital, the hospital takes the responsibility for providing birth certificates. But in the tribal area, even now, many children are born in the houses. This phenomenon makes it difficult to get birth certificates.

The Basic Amenities Index (Fig. 1) of the Urali community looks slightly better because 88 percent of the people dwell in their own houses (Table 3). However, 29 percent of them do not have *pattas* for their houses (Table 4). Generally, tribal people remain impoverished and have limited access to basic household amenities due to illiteracy, ignorance, a lack of sanitation facilities, inadequate shelter provisions, and unavailability of electricity and LPG, among other factors that create a vicious circle leading to poverty and indebtedness. People who live close to streams have not donated *pattas*. However, they have lived here for many generations. They have a right to a *pattas* for their residences. Though, through government schemes, a few tribal people have built houses, one needs to look into two important issues regarding this. According to government regulations, the money is given in three instalments. For every instalment, the individual families have to spend their money, produce bills, and claim it from the government. It is possible that the government came up with this plan to make sure the funds are used exclusively for the house. However, the issue is that the tribal members lack savings. Therefore, they either avoid applying for government housing or obtain financing from lenders who charge high-interest rates. As a result, they are trapped by lenders for the rest of their lives. For the tribals, the government can suggest a different plan of action. The fact that non-tribals can acquire homes that are intended for tribals through the assistance of local panchayat members and political figures is certainly a major concern in this situation. Similarly, with regard to access to electricity, the

**Table 4: Possession of house patta**

S.No.	Patta	Frequency	Percentage
1	Patta holders	708	71.4
2	No patta	283	28.6
	Total	991	

**Table 5: Cooking fuel**

S.No.	Cooking fuel	Frequency	Percentage
1	LPG	172	53
2	Wood	947	47
3	Kerosene	9	

study identified that among the respondents, 66 percent have electricity for their houses (Table 1). It is incredibly unfair that so many families still have to live in the dark. In addition, just 39 percent of respondents' residences have toilets (Table 1). Until 2017, almost all of them lacked toilets. The government began paying INR 12,000 for each toilet in 2017. However, this is not enough to construct a functional toilet. Trash from the home is kept in 95 percent of toilets. Because it is a woodland region, people still opt to do their morning chores there. The water shortage is yet another argument for not using the restroom. The report states that 84 percent of the tribal members still use wood for cooking. LPG is barely available to 15 percent of them (Table 5).

According to the Land and Economic Needs Index (Fig. 1), the performance of the Urali tribal people is atrociously bad. It shows that 53 percent of tribal people own land and 47 percent do not (Table 1). The Land and Economic Index supports arguments that the *Urali* community with low land possession suffers from the extortion of rich and influential non-tribal settlers. Many of the tribal lands are in the hands of these settlers. Tribals, for their urgent needs, take money from the settlers. When they are not able to return the money and the interest, they have to give away their lands. Since almost all the tribals were illiterate and had little exposure to land transactions, it was easy for the settlers to cheat the tribals. Only 18 percent of them have more than 4 acres of land, and only 55 percent of them have *pattas* for their land, according to the survey results. 45 percent of them do not have *Patta* (Table 6). Among those who possess the land, 96 percent depend on rainwater for their cultivation. Only 2 percent of them use

**Table 6: Amount of land**

S.No.	Acres of land	Frequency	Percentage
1	0-2	299	50
2	2-4	190	32
3	4-6	68	12
	Above 6	36	6
	Total	593	

Note: Out of 1128 only 593 data are captured

**Table 7: Irrigation facilities for the land**

S.No.	Water source	Frequency	Percentage
1	Well	11	2
2	Bore	14	2
3	Rain water	568	96
Total		593	

well irrigation and 2 percent of them manage to have a bore well (Table 7). Thus, one finds the pathetic state of the tribal people and their lands. The government should offer interest-free financing for the tribal people to drill boreholes in their farms. The construction of rainwater harvesting ponds in tribal members' fields may also be funded. The government needs to allot land to any landless tribals because they were the original occupants of the forested areas.

Table 8 shows the three most cultivated crops in this area by tribals. 43 percent grow ragi, 27 percent grow tapioca, and 30 percent grow corn. Out of these three foods, ragi is the one that the local tribal people can depend on. They eat "Kali", a dish made from ragi, both in the morning and at night. Growing ragi thus becomes their top priority. Ragi is not typically sold. The entire ragi crop is preserved in storage for their use.

**Table 8: Preference for crops**

S.No.	Preference of crops	Frequency	Percentage
1	Ragi	253	43
2	Tapioca	166	27
3	Corn	177	30

The Tribal Debt Index (Fig. 1), which is also performing unfavourably, reveals that 31 percent of the tribals are in debt. One can understand why it should be even greater than this. At least 25 percent of the populace would not have been willing to accept responsibility for their debt. Only 39 percent of the Urali community has access to banks and other sources of borrowing debt. The survey's findings (see Table 9) indicate the various sources of debt from which they accumulate money. Banks provide funding to 18 percent of them. The Self-Help Group

**Table 9: Source of debt**

S.No.	Source	Frequency	Percentage
1	Bank	63	18
2	SHG	61	17
3	Kandhu Vatti	209	59
4	Others	22	6
Total		355	

provides financial support to one-seventh of the tribal members (SHG). There used to be a large number of SHGs run by various NGOs. The bank provided loans to many SHGs. However, due to insufficient follow-up, many SHGs were unable to make loan repayments to the bank, and 95 percent of the SHGs ceased operations. 59 percent of the debts are owed to high-interest local moneylenders. Many tribal members have lost their lands to moneylenders as a result of their inability to repay the money they borrowed. 65 percent of the local tribe members have bank accounts in their names. The government exclusively makes payments to banks for the old-age pension, 100 days' worth of wages, and other welfare and educational programmes. They are therefore required to open a bank account. Apart from that, none of them consistently deposit money into their accounts. The money they earn is not even enough to meet their basic needs.

Their Political and Social Empowerment Index (Fig. 1) is also relatively poor, because of a lack of awareness and participation. This study tried to find the social involvement and awareness of the tribes. The study excluded the political parties here. It was found that only 5.6 percent of them are members of some social group (Table 1). This shows the poor social involvement of the tribe.

According to the 2006 Village Act<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, each forest area must set up a Forest Rights Committee (FRC). This committee has a significant amount of power. This committee has the power to control even the operations of the forest department. Unfortunately, the villagers are not given a thorough explanation of the FRC's power. The survey indicates that 38 percent claim to have a village FRC (Table 1). They might have misunderstood the Forest Committee for the FRC. The Forest Committee's only objective is to provide the forest rangers with financial support. However, because of the FRC, local indigenous people have a lot of influence over decisions, while forest officials have little influence. Among the respondents, 86 percent were Hindus and 14 percent were Christians. The majority of the Urali Christians in Gundry Panchayat are Roman Catholics, and they all reside there. Even if the remaining 86 percent identify as Hindus, they do not adhere to traditional Hinduism. They have the Gods of their tribe. Their approach to worship differs greatly from traditional Hinduism. They place little value on Hindu holy texts like the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, among others.

### Educational Needs of the Urali Tribal Population

Education is the kingpin of social development and is a powerful instrument for development by removing inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances. This study attempted to assess the current educational state of the Urali tribe because research on tribal education suggests that illiteracy is a significant contributor to multi-dimensional backwardness.

**Table 10: Educational status (those who discontinued)**

S.No.	Education	Frequency	Percentage
1	Illiterate	2290	54
2	Primary	874	21
3	Middle School	599	14
4	High	274	6
5	Higher Secondary	127	3
6	College	44	1
7	Diploma	28	1
Total		4236	

Table 10 shows that the bulk of the surveyed population, that is, 54 percent, is illiterate. 21 percent of them have stopped at the primary level. 14 percent of them have reached the middle school level. Only 6.6 percent have passed class ten and 3 percent have studied in class twelve. Only 1 percent of people have attended college. 96 percent of the tribal people of the Kadambur Hills are first-generation students. Just recently, they began slowly enrolling in schools and universities. Table 11 shows that 33 percent of children attend elementary school, according to the education status of those who are still enrolled in school. One-third are in the middle class. Eight percent are in higher secondary education, while 18 percent are in high school. 3 percent are enrolled in college, and 3 percent are pursuing diploma programs. The study indicates that there is still much to be done in terms of educating the tribal people living in the Kadambur hills.

The study tried to explore if there is any association (relation) between educational status (of those who are still studying/those who discontinued) and level of education (Primary/Middle/High/Higher Secondary/College/Diploma).

To test whether there is a significant association between the educational level and the educational status of the respondents, a Chi-square analysis was carried out. Table 12 shows the difference

**Table 11: Educational status among literates (those who are still studying)**

S.No.	Education	Frequency	Percentage
1	Primary	298	33
2	Middle School	311	35
3	High	161	18
4	Higher Secondary	73	8
5	College	26	3
6	Diploma	25	3
Total		894	

between observed and expected counts of the variables. The first row corresponds to the observed count, the second row to the predicted count, and the third row to the raw residual.

The study set the null and the alternative hypotheses as follows:

#### *H0 (Null Hypothesis)*

No association exists between the two attributes, educational level and educational status, that is, the two attributes are independent (not related).

#### *H1 (Alternative Hypothesis)*

An association (relation) exists between the attributes of educational level and educational status.

#### *Results of Chi-square Test (see Table 13)*

According to the Pearson Chi-square statistic,  $\chi^2=38.57$  and the significance value is 0.000 (Table 13), which is less than 0.05, that is, the observed data have a very small probability of falling under the null hypothesis of no relationship. As a result, the *null hypothesis is rejected* since  $p<0.05$  (in fact  $p<0.001$ ).

It implies that there is a *relationship between the respondents' educational status and their degree of schooling*. Education level and educational status appear to be associated ( $p<0.001$ ). This suggests that the dropout rate is increasing as the level of classes' increases.

## DISCUSSION

Despite all of the efforts made by the government, the region has not yet seen an improvement in the status of the ST populations, as can be seen from the above discussion. ST communities in India have largely remained underdeveloped with

**Table 12: Chi-square Test (Status \* Education cross tabulation)**

		Education							
		College	Diploma	High	Higher secondary	Middle school	Primary	Total	
Status	Drop Out	Count	44	28	274	127	599	874	1946
		Expected count	48	36.3	298.1	137	623.5	803.1	1946
		Within status (%)	2.30	1.40	14.1	0.50	30.80	44.90	100
	Studying	Count	26	2.5	161	73	311	298	894
		Expected count	22	16.7	136.9	63	286.5	368.9	894
		Within status (%)	2.90	2.80	18.00	8.20	34.80	33.30	100
Total		Count	70	53.0	435.0	200	910	1172	2840
		Expected count	70	53.0	435	200	910	1172	284
		Within status (%)	2.50	1.90	15.3	7.00	32.0	41.3	100

negative attitudes toward the government's tribal development policies and programmes (Baiju 2011; Dungdung and Pattnaik 2020). Tribal people confront a multitude of issues, including those relating to their health, housing, finances, cultural isolation, and education (Lakshmi and Paul 2019). According to the survey, the Urali tribes of Tamil Nadu are still struggling with issues including poverty, starvation, a lack of basic infrastructure, low literacy rates, subpar health care facilities, and a lack of natural resources. There were severe deficiencies in the areas of food, clothing, electricity, roads, clean drinking water, education, health, and sanitation. Focus must be given to the educational aspects in order to raise their future status (Dungdung and Pattnaik 2020). However, the study reveals that 54 percent of the population is illiterate, and 96 percent of the tribal people of the Kadambar Hills are first-generation students. The tribal school's facilities and the availability of qualified subject teachers in the hills are both quite subpar. The result is consistent with the findings that literacy has only recently been introduced to Indian tribes and that in India, 65 percent of tribal people are illiterate and tribal women experience bias due to caste and gender (Raza et al. 1990; Shah et al. 2006). Education becomes a luxury for the tribal family because of the desperate need for survival (Pradhan 2011).

**Table 13: Chi-square test results**

	Value	Degrees of freedom	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	38.573 <sup>a</sup>	5	0.000
Likelihood ratio	38.666	5	0.000
No. of valid cases	2840		

<sup>a</sup>0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.68.

Health is another factor that is the result of not only receiving medical care but also of society's total integrated development on all fronts: political, social, cultural, and economic. Hence, a comprehensive assessment of the cultural aspects of a community's health is required. The present study found that health and sanitation issues should be dealt with sensitivity. This is so because pregnancy, child growth, puberty, and related issues are intrinsic to their various traditional practices. According to the survey, children and women both experience anaemia, malnutrition, and underweight conditions. Lack of safe water supplies, poor sanitation, and poor hygiene, which the survey found, not only increase the likelihood of illness and death but also raise health care costs, reduce labour productivity, lower the enrolment and retention rates of girls in school, and perhaps most importantly, deny everyone the right to live in dignity (World Health Organization 2011). Education and monthly income are important for the inclusive development of tribal women (Malyadri 2020).

Urali communities with minimal land ownership suffer from the extortion of wealthy and powerful settlers. Tribal people were exploited by officials, who were mostly non-tribals and non-locals (Dungdung and Pattnaik 2020). Villagers oppose outside interventions that change leadership patterns for the sake of development (Satpathy 2017; Rout 2005).

The survey found that village resources alone have not been able to provide food, safe drinking water, and livelihood security for the tribal households, which has resulted in seasonal migration. The majority of the Urali community work as agricultural labourers for daily wages, and the number of tribes that depend on the forest for their survival is quite low (Actovin and Kumar 2019). Sometimes, when

a forest is designated as a biosphere reserve, national park, sanctuary, etc., access to and usage of the forest may be legally prohibited. As a result, they manage their livelihood through wage work and subsistence farming (Sadual 2014). However, natural resources usually have an impact on sustainability and the livelihoods of the local population (Whittingham et al. 2003; Fisher and Maginnis 2005).

An important turning point in tribal peoples' long struggle was the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA). The Act not only grants forest rights but also gives forest people a significant say in how the forests are managed. The survey indicates that only 38 percent claim to have a village FRA. However, the FRA is too theoretical in its vocabulary and fails to acknowledge the various uses of forest areas (Sadual 2014).

### CONCLUSION

The overall situation and the living conditions in India's tribal regions are deplorable. The results of planned developmental interventions in the tribal communities after independence did not significantly improve their situations. In this study, the socioeconomic circumstances of the Urali Tribe in Tamil Nadu's Satyamangalam block of Erode district were investigated. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this study calculated the Tribal Composite Socio-economic Index for the first time. According to the various economic indices, illiteracy, debt, lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, poor health care, unemployment, unfriendly development policies, a lack of leadership, etc. pose major challenges to tribal development. These indices would give a true picture of the tribal population and help identify issues with resource allocation, the implementation of development policies, and the distribution of government welfare programmes.

Internal hurdles\*\*\*\*, including a lack of leadership abilities and understanding, kept them isolated and prohibited them from getting involved in any persistent issues. The primary external impediments were a lack of government infrastructure, bad administration, and subpar operation of government institutions. Schools, *Anganwadis*, ration shops, and clinics offering primary healthcare are just a few of the many government-run organisations that are understaffed or frequently inoperable. Malnutrition, being underweight and diseases like

anaemia, tuberculosis and skin conditions are all common in women and children. The educational environment in the hilly areas is appalling. Few children can pursue higher education, and very little is known regarding professional education. The tribal school's infrastructure is very poor, and it has a serious shortage of subject-area experts. The study shows that the Scheduled Tribes are lagging in terms of access to basic amenities, such as housing conditions, irrigation facilities, sanitary facilities, the type of fuel used, electricity and the percentage of households with *patta* and landholdings. A significant portion of migration, more than 60 percent of people, migrate for a variety of jobs. This has seriously impacted these communities' overall development, especially the well-being of the tribal children.

### LIMITATIONS

The present study had certain limitations in terms of human and capital resources. The human resources in the research team were inadequate, and hence, larger coverage could not be made. The period was also very short to cover the interior habitat villages in the different panchayats. The field researchers had trouble getting enough access to the respondents. It was difficult to reach the villages as intended because the terrain was hilly and secluded. All the villages are situated in the thick forest. So, problems like the risk of meeting wild animals, the lack of proper connectivity to reach the villages, and poor transport facilities did create problems in reaching out to remote villages.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The tribal population should have access to all necessary amenities, including housing projects, drinking water facilities, roads, street lights, ration shops, *Anganwadis*, basic health care centres and libraries. The government should immediately open all the basic health care centres, sub-health centres, etc., and appoint nurses and NGOs. It is important to preserve and record tribal people's medicinal expertise. The government schools in tribal communities need to be better in terms of both quality and amenities. In the Kadambur Hills, government housing that is intended for tribals is instead given to other individuals. The government ought to step in and put an end to this and provide them with

free government housing and land. Tribes should have the authority to make decisions in the forest. Forest rights committees should be properly formed and strengthened. To stop migration and reduce poverty, more job opportunities should be created in the Kadambur hills. There is a need for imparting skill-based training to rural youths. The people's movements should be strengthened since there is a great need for social awareness in the hills.

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. A. Thomas: Conceptualisation: Development of broad research goals and aims.

Dr. Bernard D' Sami: Project management and coordination: Planning coordinating and implementation of the research activity.

Father G. Philip Kumar: Field Researcher and data interpreter: Development of the research work, original draft preparation, and data curation.

Vani Archana: Writing, editing, and reviewing manuscripts as well as applying formal methodologies for data analysis, such as mathematical, computational, and statistical procedures.

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#### DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHORISATION AND DECLARATION

The article has not been published or sent for publication elsewhere.

#### FOOTNOTES

\*Patta is a revenue record maintained at the office of the Tahsildar. The issuance of Patta signifies the lawful possession over the property issued in the name of the owner or the case of joint holdings, in the name of the joint owners.

\*\*Kandhu Vatti is a local money lender, which will mean having to pay an interest rate higher than that fixed by the Government under section 7 of the Moneylenders Act.

\*\*\*Forest Right Act, 2006 (FRA) was enacted by the parliament in 2006 to recognise the claim of the tribal on forest resources and ownership of land.

\*\*\*\*Internal hurdles mean some of the natural or acquired characteristics and habits of the tribal in this area that directly or indirectly become a hurdle in their holistic growth.

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