

## Original Research Article

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

### ABSTRACT

Adiyas form the major part of workforce in the cash crop economy of Wayanad district of Kerala. Despite their significant contribution as labourers towards the agricultural economy of Wayanad, they continue to be excluded from the mainstream activities of the society. This study examined the extent of social exclusion of Adiya tribal community in Mananthavady taluk of Wayanad district. Primary data collected from 90 respondents using structured questionnaire in three villages of Thirunelli and Panamaram panchayats were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Social exclusion was measured using five indicators namely – geographical exclusion, economic exclusion, service exclusion, socio-cultural exclusion and political-legal exclusion. Results revealed that Adiyas were socially excluded to an extent of 66.38 per cent and half (50.00 %) of the respondents felt medium level of exclusion. Economic exclusion was felt to an extent of 74.54 per cent followed by political-legal exclusion (69.89 %). Adiya tribe experienced geographical exclusion to an extent of 69.76 per cent followed by service exclusion (67.96 %) and socio-cultural exclusion (48.92 %).

*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, the 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 was popularized by the French Government. 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). Public goods in this context, is defined as goods, services, attainment, capability or freedom, that is 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 also needs to be recognized and addressed.

The tribal communities in Kerala continue to be deprived of many basic facilities which have led to their marginalization in social, economic and political domain. Adiyas of Wayanad district engaged as agricultural labourers, in this sense are among the most vulnerable sections of the tribal communities. Their status is far below the other tribal communities. They perform worst on human development indicators like health and education. Basic infrastructural facilities like good housing, better roads, electricity etc. are denied to them. Though the work participation rate is high among Adiyas, they have not become a demanded labour force in Kerala. They have been undergoing a process of passive exclusion due to the vicious cycle of poverty that keeps them away from the mainstream activities of the society. The present study investigated the extent of social exclusion of Adiya tribal community and the main factors contributing towards the social exclusion of this community.

53 **2. METHODOLOGY**

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55 Mananthavady block of Wayanad district of Kerala has been purposively selected for the  
56 study as highest concentration of Adiya tribal settlements is found there. 30 respondents each  
57 were selected using simple random procedure from Thirunelli and Thrissilery villages of  
58 Thirunelli panchayat and Panamaram village of Panamaram panchayat respectively. Thus the  
59 sample consisted of 90 respondents. Ex post facto research design which is very commonly  
60 used in social research was employed for the study. Social exclusion was operationalised as the  
61 extent to which Adiyas were deprived of having access to public goods like education, health  
62 care facilities, infrastructural facilities, credit facilities, employment and participating in  
63 decision making activities of the society. This variable was measured using five indicators  
64 namely geographical exclusion, economic exclusion, service exclusion, socio – cultural  
65 exclusion and political – legal exclusion. Statements were developed to identify how they felt  
66 about their extent of exclusion by depriving them of their rights and scores were given for their  
67 levels of feeling ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Statistical measures like  
68 frequency, percentage, mean ,standard deviation and t - test were utilized for data  
69 interpretation.

70  
71 **3. RESULTS**

72 A close perusal of Table 1 revealed that Adiyas were socially excluded to an extent of 66.38 per  
73 cent. Social exclusion was measured using five indicators, the results of which is presented under  
74 following sub sections.

75 **3.1. Geographical exclusion**

76 Adiyas faced geographical exclusion to an extent of 70.60 per cent as shown in Table 1. The  
77 extent of geographical exclusion faced by Adiyas in Thirunelli and Panamaram panchayat were 73.13 per  
78 cent and 68.07 per cent respectively. Normal infrastructural provisions were denied to this tribal  
79 community due to their remote residency in Thirunelli panchayat. These settlements could be reached  
80 only by foot. Mud roads in these hamlets made transport facilities very difficult for the residents living  
81 there. Other reasons which contributed to their geographical exclusion included lack of a primary health  
82 centre, school and a market within their reach. They had to traverse long distances to go for work as most  
83 of them were employed as estate labourers in Coorg in Karnataka. This clearly depicted the fact that  
84 Adiyas faced difficulties in gaining employment and access to basic health and education facilities due to  
85 their remote residency.

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

91  
92 **3.2. Economic exclusion**

93 Adiya tribe forms the major part of the workforce in the cash crop economy of Wayanad and  
94 Coorg. The agrarian crisis which has affected this economy, has in turn affected the livelihood of Adiyas,  
95 who are already deprived on many terms. The extent of economic exclusion (74.54 %) felt was high  
96 compared to all other indicators of social exclusion. Most of them were engaged as agricultural labourers.  
97 As a result, the lean agricultural season falling between July and November was the season of extreme  
98 poverty for them. Since this community was not equipped with skills that the local market demand, they  
99 did not have ample employment opportunities. Moreover, impoverization of the region owed to crashes in  
100 agricultural prices which resulted in the entry of non-tribals in the labour market, further reducing  
101 opportunities for the communities in question (3).

102 In day to day financial transactions tribal identity was not considered as relevant and important.  
103 Shop keepers and other service providers did not discriminate between tribes and non-tribes provided  
104 they had adequate money. Adiyas living in Panamaram had better access to employment opportunities,

105 than those living in Thirunelli. This was the main reason for lesser extent of economic exclusion in  
106 Panamaram compared to Thirunelli.

107

### 108 **3.3. Service exclusion**

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

116 Educational infrastructure is a decisive factor in determining the educational attainment of the  
117 tribes. The schools in the tribal areas lacked the basic necessities. There is shortage of teachers. Even  
118 the majority of available teachers were not 'tribal sensitive' leading to structural problems in tribal  
119 education.

120 Adiyas, when compared to the other tribal communities performed the lowest on health indicator.  
121 Health care services were not extended to these communities, due to their poor economic status and  
122 doctor's unavailability. Formal credit facilities were not utilized by this section of the society due to the  
123 cumbersome procedures, discriminatory attitude of the officials and their inability to pledge security for  
124 loan. As a result they relied on the money lenders which further aggravate their misery.

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### 126 **3.4. Socio – cultural exclusion**

127 Socio-cultural dimension of social exclusion was not perceived as an important dimension of  
128 social exclusion based on the survey result. Efforts for reformation of Kerala society and fighting against  
129 casteism by great people viz., Sri Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Chattampi Swamikal and thereafter peasant  
130 struggles by communists contributed significantly to raise the social consciousness of Kerala society to a  
131 higher level regarding equality, social justice and other liberal values. This social engineering transformed  
132 Kerala society to become more just, liberal and humane which is the reason why the tribes in Kerala  
133 particularly the Adiyas did not perceive any socio-cultural exclusion.

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

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### 140 **3.5. Political – legal exclusion**

141 The extent of political – legal exclusion was found to be 74.22 per cent and 65.56 per cent in  
142 Thirunelli and Panamaram panchayat respectively accounting for an overall political – legal exclusion of  
143 69.89 per cent. Negligence of officials and pending with panchayats were the two major reasons reported  
144 for not availing the benefits by the households in the interior (74.22 %) and exposed (65.56 %)  
145 settlements. It is worthwhile to note that most of them responded that no government officials visited their  
146 settlement during previous 365 days prior to the survey and that the officials failed in providing adequate  
147 information regarding the schemes for the tribe. Corruption and bribery was evident in these tribal  
148 hamlets. Ignorance of Adiya tribes about their constitutional rights, callous attitude on the part of  
149 bureaucracy and law conferring mechanisms to protect them against the exploitation, especially their  
150 women, resulted in a relatively high level of politico-legal exclusion (4).

151

152 There was a significant difference in the extent of social exclusion experienced by the Adiyas in  
153 Thirunelli and Panamaram panchayats as revealed by the t – value in Table 2.

154 Based on the extent to which the Adiyas faced social exclusion, they were categorized into those  
155 facing low level of exclusion (23.33 %), medium level of exclusion (50.00 %) and high level of exclusion  
156 (26.67 %). The results are depicted in Fig. 1.

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161 **Table 1. Extent of Social Exclusion**  
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(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>
	<i>** - significant at 1% level</i>			

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164 **Table 2. Comparison of social exclusion in two panchayats**

(n=90)

Sl. No.	Panchayat	Mean	SD	t value
1.	Thirunelli	70.90	11.23	3.97**
2.	Panamaram	61.87	10.45	
	<i>** - significant at 1% level</i>			

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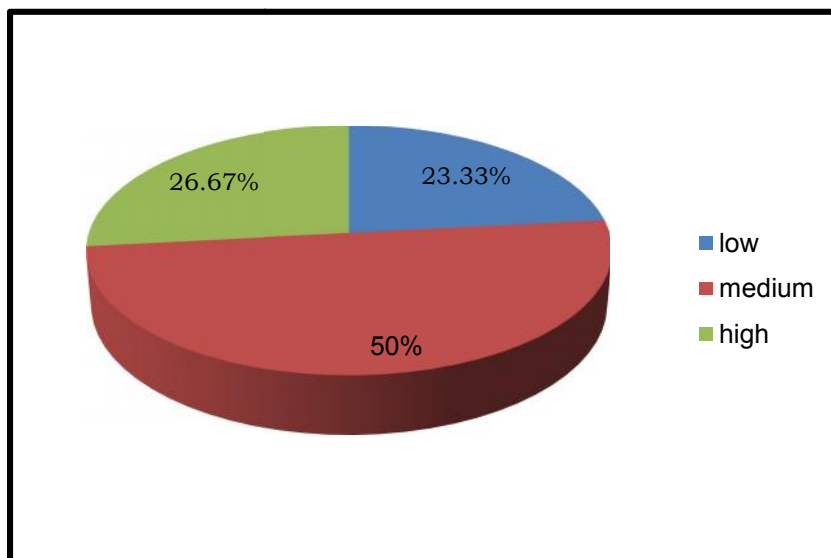
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180 **Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents based on extent of social exclusion felt**

#### 181 **4. CONCLUSION**

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

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