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Understanding the social, economic and communication characteristics of the tribal livestock farmers: A case study from Attappadi tribal belt of Kerala

¹Nisha A and ²N Vimal Rajkumar

¹VIT School of Agricultural Innovations and Advanced Learning, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India

²Farmers Training Centre (DEE-TANUVAS, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

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Corresponding Author: Nisha AN

Abstract

Attappadi block of Palakkad district in Kerala is one of the largest tribal settlements of Kerala with a considerable livestock population. This study was formulated with an Ex post facto research design. The research sample comprised of 120 tribal livestock farmers as respondents (n=120), selected with the aid of key informants. The respondents belonged to three different tribal communities viz., Irulas (92.5%), Mudugas (5.83%), and Kurumbas (1.67%). The data showed that more than one-half of the tribal farmers (64.17%) were female whereas 35.83 percent were males and it could be observed that the majority of the tribal livestock farmers (67.50%) were illiterate. More than half of the tribal farmers (66.67%) consider government veterinary institutions as their primary source of information for livestock extension activities. Pertaining to the mass media, no respondents were using radio and none subscribed to daily newspapers.

Keywords: Attappadi tribal belt, livestock, tribal farmers, communication behaviour, socio economic profile

Introduction

The livestock sector is an important wing among agriculture and allied activities. It provides livelihood to millions of small, marginal farmers and land less labours in India (Thorat, 2016) ^[18]. Livestock adds to the improvement of tribal people of India too (NIASM, 2017) ^[12].

In Kerala, there are 36 tribal communities consist of a total population 4, 84,839 (Population census, 2011) ^[14]. One among the largest and diverse tribal concentrated districts of Kerala, Palakkad has 10.1 percent of the total tribal population of the state. Attappadi is the largest tribal settlement area of Palakkad district with three tribes viz., Irulas (84 percent), Mudugas (10 percent), and Kurumbas (six percent) who are conventionally engaged in agricultural activities. Livestock rearing is the chief employment source for livelihood and an essential part of the cultural heritage of the tribes of Attappadi. In recognition of the significance and potential, livestock development was viewed as a crucial strategy for the overall development of the tribal economy (Mazumder *et al.*, 2014) ^[10]. In line with this, Yadav *et al.*, (2014) ^[19] have opined that the increasing demand for food products of animal origin generates significant opportunities for the poor to escape poverty through diversifying and intensifying livestock production. Livestock keeping generates a continuous stream of income and employment, makes it an inevitable component of tribal development. The increasing contribution of livestock is very well recognized whenever crop farming faced challenges. Thus livestock farming acts as the catalyst that transforms subsistence farming into income-generating

enterprises, allowing poor households to join the market economy. In the Indian scenario, a large proportion of the tribes depend on agriculture, livestock, and forest for their survival. Considering the above facts, the present study was undertaken with the following objective:

To study the socio-economic profile of tribal farmers in livestock activities and the communication behaviour of tribal farmers in different livestock activities.

Methodology

The present study was conducted purposively in Attappadi block of Palakkad district in Kerala as this is one among the largest tribal settlements with considerable livestock population. Attappadi block comprised of three panchayats, Agali, Pudur, and Sholayoor. A total of 40 tribal livestock farmers from each of the three panchayats, thus a total of 120 tribal livestock farmers were selected randomly as respondents for the study with the help of key informants. Ex post facto research design was employed. Personal interviews by pretested interview schedule and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach were used to serve the purpose of data collection.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic profile of the tribal livestock farmers

According to their age, the tribal livestock farmers were categorized into three groups, viz., young, middle, and elders. The data presented in Table 1 reveal that majority of the tribal livestock farmers (76.66%) belonged to the elder age group, while 16.67 percent of the respondents were

from the middle age group and 6.67 percent were young. This might be due to the lack of interest among youth in crop farming and livestock rearing. Henceforth, while planning programmes in livestock sector more attention should be given to attract vibrant and enthusiastic young age groups to livestock farming. Regarding community, 92.5 percent of respondents belonged to Irula tribes, whereas, only 5.83 percent and 1.67 percent belonged to Muduga and Kurumba tribes respectively. Majority of the respondents were female (64.17%) and 35.83 percent were male. It could be observed that majority of the tribal livestock farmers

(67.50%) were illiterate, followed by 24.17 percent could read and write, 3.33 percent were educated up to primary and only 1.67 percent respondents were educated up to secondary school level and none of the respondents was graduate and above level. Similar findings were reported by Gour *et al.*, (2015) ^[1]. Thus, to popularize the scientific animal husbandry practices among tribal farmers, it is essential to develop extension programmes and promote the use of teaching aids that are easily understood by the farmers and that tends to motivate the farmers to change and adopt.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents according to socioeconomic profile

n = 120

Variable	Category	No.	%
Age	Young (< 36 years)	8	6.67
	Middle (36 – 45 years)	20	16.67
	Elder (> 45 years)	92	76.66
Tribal community	Irulas	111	92.50
	Mudugas	7	5.83
	Kurumbas	2	1.67
Gender	Male	43	35.83
	Female	77	64.17
Education	Illiterate	81	67.50
	Can read	4	3.33
	Can read and write	29	24.17
	Primary	4	3.33
	Secondary	2	1.67
Family type	Nuclear	0	0
	Joint	120	100
Landholding	Landless (No land)	53	44.17
	On lease	5	4.17
	Marginal (Upto 2.5 acres)	46	38.33
	Small (2.5 to 5 acres)	13	10.83
	Large (> 5 acres)	3	2.50
Annual income	Low (Rs. 12000 - 30000)	20	16.67
	Medium (Rs.30000 - 40000)	58	48.33
	High (Rs. 40000 – 1,25000)	42	35
Occupation	Crop Enterprises	4	3.33
	Animal husbandry	4	3.33
	Agriculture Labour	1	0.84
	Daily Wages	105	87.50
	Others	6	5
Experience in livestock farming (years)	Low (5 – 15 years)	16	13.33
	Medium (15 – 20 years)	31	25.84
	High (> 20 years)	73	60.83

Further, all the respondents (100%) were in a joint family system. A perusal of Table 1 points out that 38.33 percent of respondents were marginal farmers, the majority of the respondents (44.17%) were landless while, 4.17 percent of the respondents had land on lease, where 10.83 percent were small scale farmers and 2.5 percent were large scale farmers. The average landholding of tribal livestock farmers is less due to fragmentation of land, forest buffer zone issues, and population explosion. Regarding annual income, majority of the respondents (48.34%) were earning between Rs. 30000-40000 followed by 35 percent had an income between Rs. 45000-75000, while 16.67 percent had an

income of less than Rs. 28000 per annum as they rely on temporary jobs. The main occupation of tribal livestock farmers was daily wages job (87.50%) however almost all the tribal households kept livestock as subsidiary occupation, which corresponded to the finding of Rao, (2013) ^[15]. Both crop enterprises and animal husbandry were the primary livelihood source to 6.66 percent of the respondents, whereas, 0.84 percent of respondents earned through agricultural labour. Majority of the respondents had high experience in livestock farming (60.83%), followed by medium (25.84%) and low (13.33%). This evidences that the tribal farmers have rich experience in livestock farming.

Communication behaviour

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents according to communication behaviour,

		Type of Institution			n = 120
Purpose		Government Veterinary Institutions	Self	EVM (Ethnoveterinary Medicine Healers)	Total
Treatment					
Frequency		62 (51.67)	44 (36.66)	14 (11.67)	120 (100)
Extension					
Frequency		80 (66.67)	6 (5.00)	23 (19.16)	120 (100)
Marketing					
Frequency		59 (49.17)		61 (50.83)	120 (100)

(Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage)

As Table 2 explains about half of the respondents (51.67%) contacted government veterinary institutions for getting the information on animal health care and also for the treatment of their animals, whereas 36.66 percent of the tribal farmers were practised self-treatment for animals and 11.67 percent of the respondents depended on ethnoveterinary medicine healers for treatment. More than half of the tribal farmers (66.67%) consider government veterinary institutions as their primary source of information for livestock extension activities. This was in accordance with the results of

Khuman *et al.*, (2014)^[4]. Local leaders acted as the source of information for 19.16 percent of the respondents whereas 9.17 percent and 5.00 percent of them depended on local government agencies and dairy co-operative societies respectively to get information on extension activities. For marketing purposes, dairy co-operative societies are the major source of information for one – half of the respondents (50.83%) while 49.17 percent relied on family members and relatives.

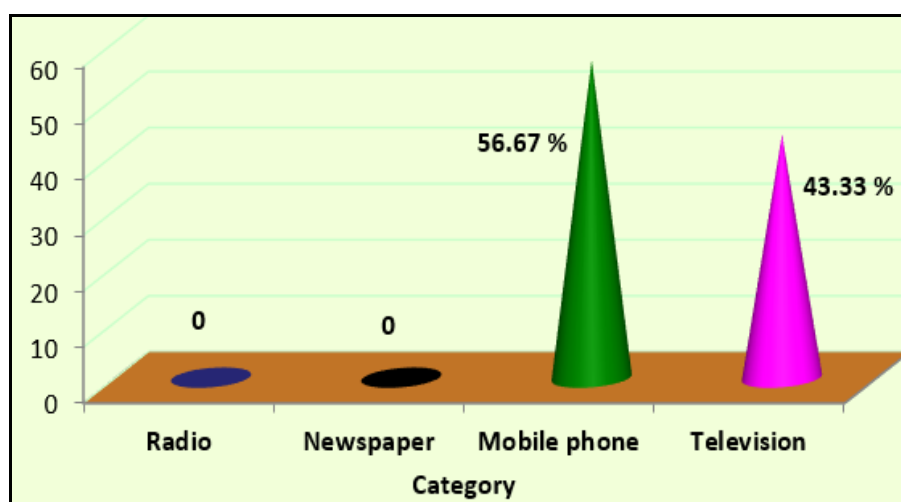


Fig 1: Distribution of the respondents according to mass media usage

Concerning mass media possession about 56.67 percent of the respondents had mobile phones with 2.5 percent using social media WhatsApp. This could be positively related to the medium annual income of the respondents. A proportion of 43.33 percent had television in their homes. None of the respondents in the study area were subscribed to daily newspapers and to the radio (Figure 1) which could be due to more respondents depending on daily wage labour where the time becomes a limiting factor in accessing these mass media tools.

Implications and Conclusion

Tribal farmers being the root cause of all evolved farming activities in mankind need to be brought to the mainstream scenario of developing society. In a country like India, where 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture and livestock allied activities, upliftment of the resource-poor farmers could be made possible through agriculture and livestock production. To increase the potential of tribal livestock production it is very essential to understand the

resources they possess, which would help to blend with the scientific innovations shaped according to the area-specific and time needed practices. Farmer's training and awareness programmes on scientific livestock farming should be initiated to attract more youth to farming enterprises. Communication strategies for the tribal farmers need to be augmented with motivation and more ICT enabled technologies. The role of mass media and the user-friendly applications on livestock activities need to be introduced to the farming community for boosting their livelihood.

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