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# Role of Women in Decision Making; a Study among Kani Tribes, Podiyakala

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### Abstract

Men and women in society is a desirable factor. Men and women have equal status in society. There is an equal position in the family as well. But sometimes women are confined to their homes. Women follow their passions socially and economically It has started to rise in recent times. However, many women stay confined to the kitchen and remain aloof in their families and many other matters. What hold them back are age-old admonitions that women are confined to the kitchen. But this is a new era. Women have freedom of personal development, education, health and expression of opinion and also government introduced so many programmes and project for improving the life of womens. Marginalized women are still around us today. Among them, tribal women are an important group. Even though tribal women are advancing in studies and good jobs, many are left behind in making important decisions in the family. Tribal women play a major role in the family. But decision making is often male-centric for many reasons. Every woman has the right to make decisions in the family. The decision making in family is one of the ways of women empowerment. This study contains the role of women in family decision making process among kani tribal community, Trivandrum district Kerala. This study is quantitative and descriptive in nature.

**Keywords:** Kani tribe, women, decision making

### Introduction

Tribal or Adivasis, as they are popularly known as a symbol of self-assertion, comprise of around 8.2 per cent of the national population. The tribal are concentrated mostly in the central belt of India and parts of the North-East. The status of women in the tribal societies is comparatively better than that of the women in general society-apparently so. The sex ratio of the tribes in India during 1991 showed 971 females per 1000 males while it was 927 females among the general population. Mitra and Singh (Internet) write that discrimination against women, occupational differentiation, and emphasis on status and hierarchical social ordering that characterize the predominant Hindu culture are generally absent among the tribal groups. Bhasin (2007) also writes that though tribes too have son preference, they do not discriminate against girls by female infanticide or sex determination tests. The status of tribal women can be judged mainly by the roles they play in society. Their roles are determined to a large extent through the system of descent. The families try to pass their property by the line of descent. The family surnames too are traced on the basis of the system of descent. In a unilineal system the descent is traced either through the male or female line. When the descent is traced through the mother's line, it is called a matrilineal system and when it is traced through the father's line, it is called a patrilineal system. Most of the tribes in India follow a

patrilineal system. There are exceptional cases like the Khasi, Jaintia, Garo and Lalung of Meghalaya in the North-East who follow the matrilineal system. The Mappilas of Kerala too are a matrilineal community. There are very rare cases of bilineal descent.

The position of a woman to a large extent depends on the kind of family one is placed in. In a joint family system the eldest woman usually enjoys a prerogative in the decision-making process. The type of family differs to a large extent with the type of marriage prevalent in the community. The nuclear family formed through monogamy is the most common type of family prevalent in the tribal communities in India. The extended type of family is also quite a common norm wherein the daughters leave the natal home after marriage to distant places. The status of the tribal women usually depends on the economic roles they play. The tribal in the past were usually forest dwellers and their livelihood to a great extent depended on the food-gathering economy. The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as their roles within the family, the community and society. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. They constitute about half the total population but in tribal society women are more important than in other social groups, because they work

harder and the family economy and management depends on them. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Tribal women have been particularly badly affected in recent times. They are discriminated against not only because of their sex but also because of religious, social and cultural structures which have given them the lowest position in the social hierarchy. The stigma of untouchability makes them especially vulnerable victims of all kinds of discriminations and atrocities. In areas of health, education, housing, employment and wages, application of legal rights, decision-making and political participation, and rural development, tribal women have been almost entirely excluded from development policies and programs. The national population policy, which is geared to population control and in the process targets tribal women for family planning programs, does so on the grounds that they are the cause of the population 'explosion' and of poverty. No change has been made in the attitudes of society towards these women and they continue to be oppressed, marginalized, violated and all but forgotten. In the expression used often in development policies and plans they are: 'women in extreme poverty'.

Kani is the tribal group occupying the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve area traditionally for more than 100 years. Biosphere Programme (KFRI Research Report No. 397; 2010). Most of the areas in and around which the Kanis live have been declared as Reserved Forest under the Indian Forest Act, 1927. Peringammala Panchayat is the largest tribal populated Panchayat in Vamanapuram Block in Trivandrum district. There are 1317 Kani Tribe families spread over seventeen Oorukkuttams in this Panchayat. 'Kanikkars' (Kani Tribe) are the largest number of tribal people in Kerala. Women and men are an essential resource of all nations and societies. Women have been playing a key role, not only in the improvement of family wellbeing, but also in the development of the economic, political, and ecological environments. However the role and social status of women in the past were limited by tradition, law, religion, etc. Therefore, women have less opportunity to play their role in the society in comparison to men. The role of women and men in the relationship pattern of decision-making and division of labor in the family, are determined based on the gender status of men and women. The gender role is one of the important factors of interrelationship between husband and wife in the family. Women's fundamental role is a housewife who has to be responsible for house caring and child rearing. The decision-making in family is one of the ways of the female empowerment. Participation in decision-making process in household matters considers that a female is accounted for in the family. In all societies, the issue of women's participation and how they participate economically, socially and culturally is considered to be important. Family decision-making has changed over the last several decades. Changing roles of women, increasing women's education, and increasing participation of women in the labor force are important keys for family decision-making changes. This study consist of the role of women in decision making in a family among kani tribes in Trivandrum.

### Review of Literature

Khan (2001), says that women's role in decision making process is an important factor and needs to be considered for woman empowerment. Mainstreaming of women through

gender specific policies is a necessary precondition for meaningful development. There is a lacuna between gender specific policies and reform agenda. He pointed out that government policies like reservation of seats, can promote empowerment and women access to development projects numerically but not practically. The main reason behind low participation and decision making process are illiteracy, patriarchy, lack of clarity in government policies for empowerment. The meaningful participation can be ensured through awareness; monitoring of woman status on regular basis; research activities on woman participation in social sphere, their voting right. Importance should be given to qualitative participation rather than quantitative representation.

Arun Kumar (2003), stated that even if government is undertaking various development programs, it fails to reach its goal. Lack of awareness, control of economic resources, family problems, traditional values are various factor hindering the women empowerment.

Awias, Aslam and Asif (2009), stated that tribal women have major role in co-management of their natural, social and economic resources. But still they suffer a lot; they are backward due to a traditional outlook, illiteracy, superstition, and submissive role in decision making, social evils and many other cultural factors.

Aparna Mitra (2010), The scheduled tribes constitute about 8.2% of the total population in India. Although there is a large volume of anthropological literature describing the characteristics of and differences among the various tribes in India, little inter-disciplinary research has been done to uncover the status of women among the tribal population in India. This paper will analyze the status of women among the scheduled tribes in India. Frequent comparisons will be made to the social and cultural practices of the scheduled tribes, mainstream Hindus, as well as the scheduled caste population. Through this analysis, we will show the distinctiveness of the tribal cultures and the fact that many women from the scheduled tribes face less discrimination than Hindu women and those from scheduled castes.

### Methodology

#### Statement of the Problem

Marginalization of tribes and the lack of socioeconomic progress among tribal communities is one of the major drawbacks of Kerala's development. There are many studies about the socio economic condition of tribes in Kerala in general. The tribal women's are also marginalized in Kerala, also in kani community. The women's have the power to take decision according to their behalf. But the male dominations take them back in family decision making process. So the study contains the role of women in decision making in family process. And also the general features of kani tribe, Podiyakala.

#### Significance of the Study

Our existence is played out through the choices we make-some of which can be life changing. We can never be certain that a particular decision will give us what we want; but we will know that it will change lives, for better or for worse. Skillful decision making increases the likelihood that it will be for the better. In our society women have important roles in decision making. But there is a doubt in utilizing their roles in family. Mostly a dominated male in a family taking decisions without the permission or opinion of a woman in

their family. This study contains how much importance or role has a women in family decision making process.

**Objectives of the Study**

- To understand the socio-demographic profile of kani tribe in Podiyakala.
- To analyze the role of women in decision making among men headed and women headed families.
- To know the opinion of women about decision making among kani tribe.
- To give suggestions and recommendations from this study.

**Research Design**

The study is quantitative and descriptive in nature. Because the researcher aims to identify the characteristics, frequencies for meeting the research objectives.

**Population**

The population of the study is selected from the tribal peoples of Kani, Podiyakala tribal colony, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The 400 is the total population of kani tribe in Podiyakala.

**Sampling**

50 women in the age group of 20-60 years were selected from above mentioned population using simple random sampling.

**Source of Data Collection**

**Primary data**

The questionnaire is the instrument which is mainly used by the researcher for collecting data from the required population. Self-structured questionnaire is used for collecting the data from women in Kani Tribe, Podiyakala.

**Secondary data**

Secondary data of the study were collected from reports and study related from the Kani tribe, different study related to tribal peoples, website visits, journals, WHO reports, Government reports, Newspaper articles related to tribes.

**Tool of Data Collection**

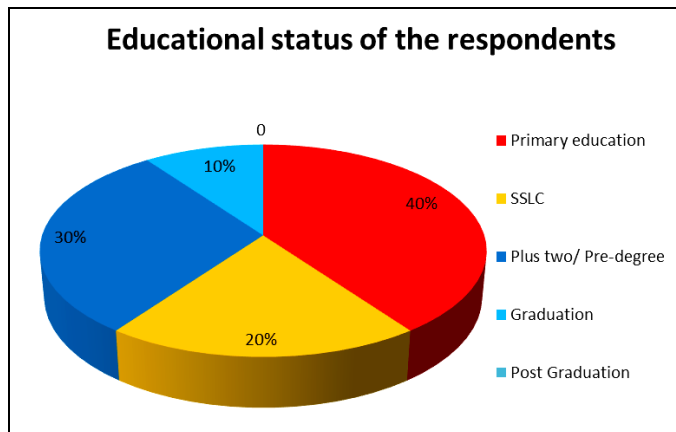
Self-prepared questionnaire is the major instrument which is used by the researcher for collecting data from required population. The questionnaire consist two parts. The first part, which includes the questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the next part includes the questions related to meet the objectives of the study.

**Results**

**Table 1: Age of the respondents**

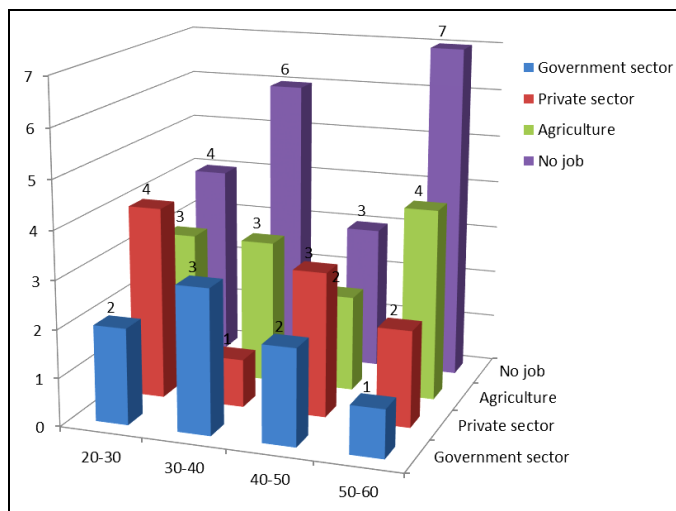
Age group of the respondents	Frequency	Percentage of the total
20-30	15	25%
30-40	20	33%
40-50	10	17%
50-60	25	25%

Table 1 above shows the age category of selected women in this study. Total 50 samples are selected in this study, which include the women's of 20-60 age group. About 25% of total sample belongs to 20-30 age category 33% of total sample belongs to 30-40 age category. 17% of total sample belongs to 40-50 age category. 25% of the total sample belongs to 50-60 age categories.



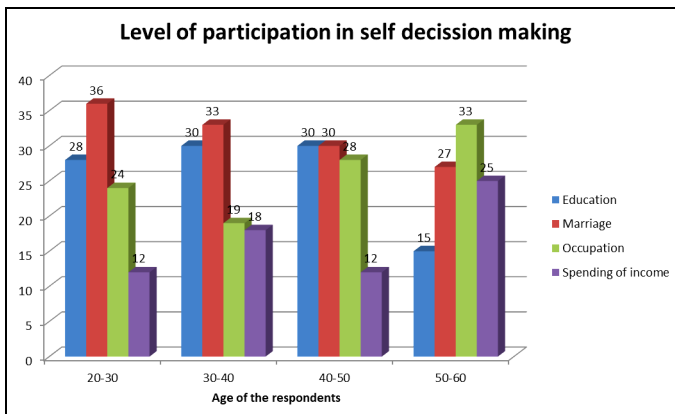
**Fig 1: Educational status of the respondents**

The figure 1 shows the educational qualification of the respondents of this study. More than one third of the respondents about 40% in this study have only primary educational qualification. A considerable proportion of respondents about 20% in this study qualified SSLC. More than one fourth of the respondents approximately 30% qualified plus two or Pre degree. Least number of the respondent's only 10% is graduated.



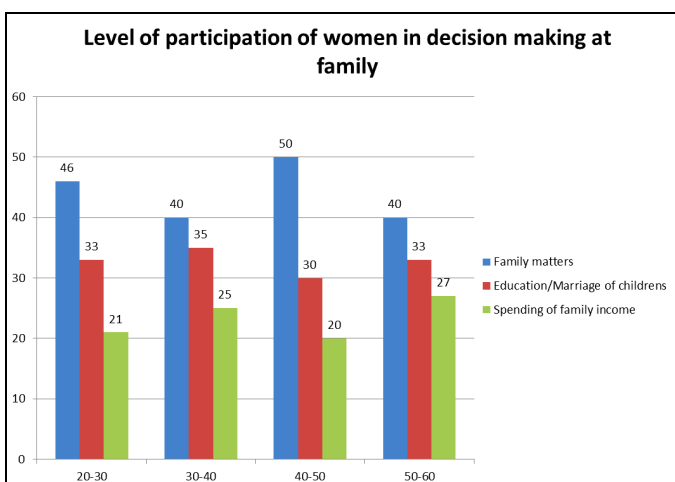
**Fig 2: Occupational Status of the Respondents**

The diagram above depicts the job sector which belong the respondents selected in this study. The age category of 20-30 years to respondents belongs to government sector. Then 4 respondents belongs to the private sector, 3 respondents related to agriculture and allied activities. Remaining respondents are here no job. Under the age category of 30-40 years 3 respondents each belongs to government and agricultural sector. Majority of the respondents in this age category working in private sector or belongs to private sector. The next age category 40-50 years half of the respondents belongs to government and private sector. 3 respondents related to agriculture and allied activities, remaining respondents have no job. In the last age category 50-60 years only one respondents belongs to government sector, two respondents belongs to private sector, 4 respondents belong to agricultural and allied activities. Majority of the respondents in this age group have no job.



**Fig 3:** Level of participation in self decision making among women

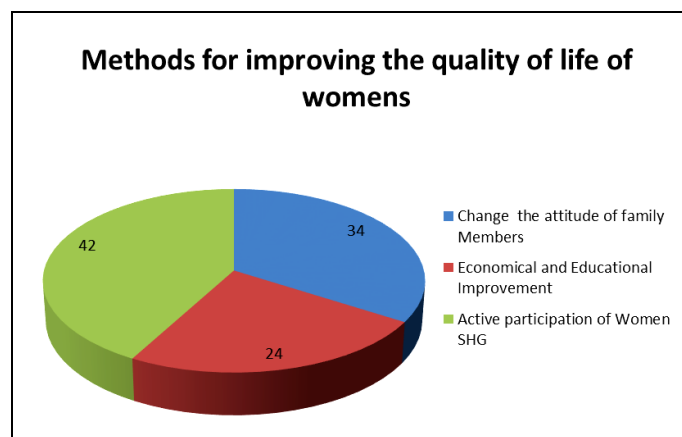
The figure 3 above shows women’s level of participation in decision making. 20-30, the first category of age group 28% of women have enough capacity to take self-decisions regarding their education. 36% of women in this category is able to take self-decisions regarding their marriage. 24% of women in this category doing their passionate job. Only 12% of women in this category can able to spend their income independently. The second age categories, 30-40 about 30% of women have enough capacity to take self-decisions regarding their education. 33% of women in this category is able to take self-decisions regarding their marriage. 19% of women in this category doing their passionate job. Only 18% of women in this category can able to spend their income independently. The third age categories, 40-50 about 30% enough capacity to take self-decisions regarding their education. 30% of women in this category is able to take self-decisions regarding their marriage. 28% of women in this category doing their passionate job. Only 12% of women in this category can able to spend their income independently. The last age categories, 50-60 about only 15% of respondents have enough capacity to take self-decisions regarding their education. 27% of women in this category is able to take self-decisions regarding their marriage. 33% of women in this category doing their passionate job. Only 25% of women in this category can able to spend their income independently.



**Fig 4:** Level of participation of women in decision making at family

The figure 4 shows the level of participation of women in decision making at family. In the age category of 20-30 years less than half of the respondents (46%) have complete participation in decision making in family matters. Exactly one third of the respondents in this category (33%) have complete participation in decision making about

education/marriage of their children in family. Less than fourth of the same category (21%) have satisfied of spending family income. In the age category of 30-40 years more than one third of the respondents (40%) have complete participation in decision making in family matters. More than one third of the respondents in this category (35%) have complete participation in decision making about education/marriage of their children in family. More than one fourth of the respondents in the same category (25%) have satisfied of spending family income. In the age category of 40-50 years exactly half of the respondents (50%) have complete participation in decision making in family matters. More than one fourth of the respondents in this category (30%) have complete participation in decision making about education/marriage of their children in family. A considerable proportion of the respondents of the same category (20%) have satisfied of spending family income. In the age category of 50-60 years nearly half of the respondents (40%) have complete participation in decision making in family matters. More than one third of the respondents in this category (33%) have complete participation in decision making about education/marriage of their children in family. More than one fourth of the same categories (27%) have satisfied of spending family income. In this study the researcher find that about 42% of respondent’s family, major decisions in family are taken by parents. 35% of respondent’s family, major decisions are taken by their husbands. Only 23% of respondent’s have major role occurred in family for decision making. Majority of the respondents in this study didn’t completely satisfy that were the decisions taken by the members in family. They couldn’t get enough opportunity to discuss important family decisions.



**Fig 5:** Methods for improving the quality of life of women’s

The figure 1. 6 shows the methods for improving the quality of life of women. The 34% of the respondents in this study opinioned that changes of the attitude of family members towards women in this community should be helpful for the improvement of quality and status of the women. 24% of the respondents of total sampling in this study believed that economic and educational improvement more helpful for women to the rise of quality and status of women in society. 42% of respondents in the study strongly agreed that the influence of women’s organization and active participation of women’s SHG will be more helpful for them to sustain economic stability and rise of status in society and family.

**Major Findings**

- Equal number of younger respondents and elder respondents were selected from the required population



from this study. It will be more helpful for obtaining and the interpretation of data more accurate.

- The respondents in this study have literate. Nearly half of the respondents have primary educational qualification
- No one in this study has acquired Post Graduated. Among the population none of has the Post-Graduation degree.
- Most of the respondents in each category of the study have no job
- Compare to old generation to new generation in the population, now women has more freedom to take decisions regarding their marriage in recent decades.
- Nearly half of the respondents in every age category have enough capacity to take decision regarding family matters especially children education, marriages etc.
- Only least number of respondents have only able to spend the family incomes as their own wishes
- Majority of the women in the community have not possible to make a complete decision regarding matrimonial matters and family planning.
- Major decisions in family were taken by parents or husband in family. The women has limited scope to comment the opinion in the community

### Suggestions

- The parents in the community sent their daughters to be married at an early age. It adversely affects the educational and job opportunity of girls. The government and organizations should be promoting the late marriage of girls.
- Under the control of government organize awareness classes, seminars, workshops related to women empowerment and follow up the activities under the guidance of an expert team.
- The majority of the respondents in the sample opinioned that kudumbashree and other women SHG will be more helpful for the empowerment and change the status of women in the society. Therefore formulate more kudumbashree neighborhood groups and SHG in this community.
- Provide more welfare services and awareness classes for adolescent girls through ICDS.
- The government should provide financial assistance to new tribal women entrepreneurs to start new ventures in the tribal settlement. The NGO's and related organizations aware the peoples in the community various schemes provide for tribal women.
- Provide counseling services for girls from the school level.
- Make available the benefits and services of SABLA Scheme to the required population.
- The NGOs and local bodies ensure that the community should be got the benefits and services by central government and state government.
- Provide more job opportunities and educational reservation to the ST community and ensure that it will be report on time.
- Provide better and friendly family atmosphere to women through family members.
- Nearly half of the respondents opined that the active participation of the women's SHG and its influence more helpful to the women for improve the quality of life especially economic and social status.
- Majority of the women in the community cannot have the membership in any organizations.

### Conclusion

The power to take decisions is extremely important from the view point of empowerment of women because it is often seen that their voice is not properly listened. The decision making power of women should not be ignored. The real development cannot take place without active participation of women. So in the present study, the involvement of women in decision making in the economic and social spheres, both at household and community level was examined. The opinion of women in this study stated that the active participation of the women in SHGs and Kudumbasree neighborhood groups helpful to the women for improve the quality of life. Majority of the women in this community cannot have the membership in any organization. The increase of the female participation at the community level and to give more decision making power it is needed to understand the existing traditional pattern of tribal community in more details which would help in formulation of more effective developmental policies and it will also help to bring out the lacunae lying within present policies.

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