

## Demographic Profile of an Autochthonous Tribe: The Aranadan of Kerala

Seetha Kakkoth

### INTRODUCTION

Demographic features of a population have direct relationship with both the social and biological environment. Different factors like economy, life style, fertility, mortality, morbidity, both inter and intra community interactions etc., affect the population structure of any community in general and that of a diminutive community in specific. An attempt is made in this article to understand various factors affecting a small tribal community of Kerala viz., the Aranadan.

Aranadan is a diminutive Scheduled Tribe community of Nilambur Valley, Malappuram district, Kerala State. Aranadan are considered to be the autochthonous tribe of Ernad taluk (currently Nilambur taluk) and hence they are also known as *Ernadan* (Thurston,1909; Luiz,1962; Iyer,1968; Fuchs,1973; Viswanathan,1990; Usha,1992;). The Aranadan subsist on food gathering, hunting, n.w.f.p collection, forest labour and wage labour. Their language is a mixture of Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada (Luiz,1962; Usha,1992).

Aranadan is wrongly spelt as *Arandan* in the list of Scheduled Tribes and in Census records. They numbered 254 persons in 1995 (survey by the researcher) consisting of 128 males and 126 females. There are 56 couples among them. Of these sixteen are Aranadan non-Aranadan couples and the rest forty are Aranadan spouses. The average family size of the Aranadan is only 4.03, which is much lower than the State average tribal family size i.e., 5.3.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Aranadan population is distributed in 63 households coming under Karulai and Kalikavu ranges of Nilambur south forest division and Vazhikkadavu range of the Nilambur north forest division of Nilambur taluk in Malappuram district. Since the population is too small i.e., 254 in number, the entire population was taken for the study. Household survey was carried out covering the entire population for gathering name,

age, sex, marital status, education, place of origin, birth, death and other demographic particulars. Interview schedule was also used. Genealogies of the entire population were prepared to study the kinship and distribution.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Population Trend in Earlier Census Records

The analysis of the Aranadan population figures of the last century i.e., from 1891 to 1991 is given below (See Fig.1).

Year	Male	Female	Total	Sex Ratio
1891	87	79	166	908.05
1901	56	59	115	1053.57
1911	94	88	182	936.17
1921	59	60	119	1016.95
1931	33	27	60	818.18
1941	-	-	489	-
1951	-	-	-	Not recorded
1961	22	21	43	954.54
1971	1	-	1	-
1981	37	58	95	1567.68
1991	94	102	196	1085.11

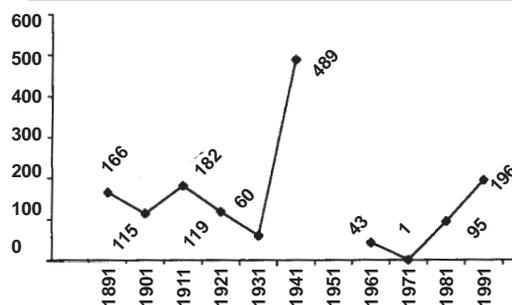


Fig. 1. Aranadan - Population trend from 1891-1991 Census Figures

In the year 1891 the population recorded was 166 constituting 87 males and 79 females. The sex ratio was 908 females per 1000 males. The Census in 1901 recorded only 115 persons, but the sex ratio was 1053. In 1911 Census the population recorded was 182. In 1921 the population of Aranadan declined to 119. In 1931 it further declined to 60. However, the 1941 figure

was given as 489, which is 800 per cent more than the 1931 figure. 1971 census recorded only one Aranadan. The above Census figures are unreliable, but it provides us a picture of the smallness of the community.

**Age, Sex and Marital Status**

Age, sex and marital status among the Aranadan is given in Table 1. The population figure in the age groups 0-4, 5-9 and 10-14 are 6.3 per cent, 7.09 percent and 9.06 per cent respectively. Thus, the population below the age of 14 constitutes only 22.45 per cent and the population between 15-34 comes to 50.40 per cent.

The Aranadan population base has shrunk (Fig. 2). One of the reasons for this may be the adoption of permanent family planning measures by females and males as early as 1980s. The low percentage in the lower age group is alarming. Within twenty years, the population may further decline causing serious threat to the very existence of the society. The population above 60 years is only 3.15 per cent. The total dependent population comes to 25.5 per cent.

The Aranadan females have relatively low marriage age. In the age group 15-19, out of 20 females, six got married. In the age group 20-24 only two females remain single whereas seven got married. Females are considered eligible for marriage after attaining menarche. In the case of

males the marriage age falls mainly between 20-24. In this age group out of 26 males, 12 got married. No female remained unmarried above 25 years.

In this population, the divorce rate is abnormally high. Among the population of 254 persons, there exist 14 female divorcees and 8 male divorcees. There are two female divorcees in the age group 15-19, one in 20-24, three each in the age group 25-29 and 30-34. The female divorcee per 1000 population comes to 55.12. Similarly the number of widows and widowers (18 and 6) are also high. Both men and women are not keen on maintaining the family life. Prolonged widowhood and desertion can affect the fertility.

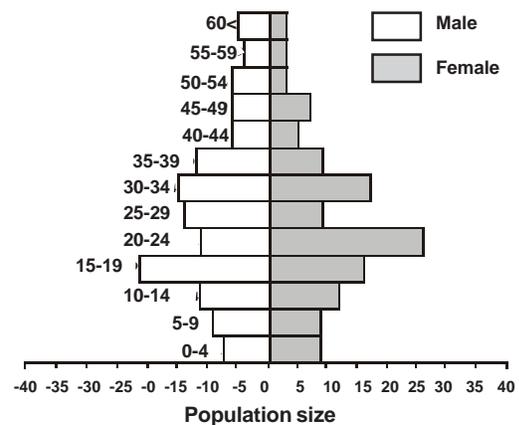


Fig. 2. Age and sex structure.

Table 1: Age, sex and marital status among the Aranadan

Age group	Male					Female					G.T.	%
	S	M	W	D	T	S	M	W	D	T		
0-4	9	-	-	-	9	7	-	-	-	7	16	6.3
5-9	9	-	-	-	9	9	-	-	-	9	18	7.0
10-14	12	-	-	-	12	11	-	-	-	11	23	9.06
15-19	16	-	-	-	16	13	6	-	2	20	36	14.17
20-24	14	12	-	-	26	2	7	-	1	11	37	14.57
25-29	2	5	-	2	9	-	11	-	3	14	23	9.06
30-34	-	15	-	2	17	-	10	2	3	15	32	12.6
35-39	-	7	1	1	9	-	8	2	2	12	21	8.27
40-44	-	4	-	1	5	-	4	2	-	6	11	4.33
45-49	-	4	3	-	7	-	3	1	2	6	13	5.12
50-54	-	1	-	2	3	-	2	4	-	6	9	3.54
55-59	-	3	-	-	3	-	1	2	1	4	7	2.76
60+	-	1	2	-	3	-	-	5	-	5	8	3.15
GT	62	52	6	8	128	42	52	18	14	126	254	100%

### Sex Ratio

Table 2 gives the sex-ratio according to broad age group. The sex ratio among the Aranadan is 984.38 females per thousand males. Below 44 years, the males (112) outnumber females (105) and sex ratio is 937.5. But, above 45 years females (19) outnumber males (13) and sex ratio is 1312.5. The low sex ratio in the lower age groups affects the population growth. The women in marriageable ages are less and hence comparatively older men marry girls immediately after puberty. The high sex ratio in the later age groups points out that the life expectancy of females is higher than males as elsewhere.

**Table 2: Aranadan: Age-wise sex ratio**

Age group (in years)	Male	Female	Sex ratio
0-14	30	27	900.00
15-44	82	78	951.22
45& above	16	21	1312.5
Total	128	126	984.38

### Educational Status

Literacy rate among the Aranadan is only 21.26 per cent. Out of 254, 54 people have attended school, 37 became drop-outs and only 17 are attending schools now. It is observed that 27 drop-outs took place at the L.P. School level. Now only 6.69 per cent population attends schools. Of the 57 literates, fourteen are offsprings of the Aranadan- non Aranadan couples.

Among the Aranadan, four have passed the school final examination. Of them three were girls. It is significant to note that one of the parents of these three girls is a non-tribe. There is only one girl among the Aranadan, who have passed Teacher's Training Course (T.T.C). She is not yet employed anywhere.

Out of 185 illiterates, 97 (52.43%) are males and 88 (47.57%) are females. The reason behind their low literacy status is the apathy of parents to send their children to schools. The school going children also join their parents while roaming in the forests.

### Dependency Ratio

Dependency ratio measures the impact of age composition of the population on economy. It is

the ratio of number of persons who are economically dependent upon the number of persons who are economically independent and active. Dependency ratio consists of both child and aged dependency ratio. Among the Aranadan child dependency ratio is 33.10% and aged dependency ratio is 3.45%. Thus total dependency ratio comes 36.55%.

### Economic Status

Economic pursuits vary from family to family. Males are mainly engaged in non-wood forest produces (n.w.f.p) collection and forest labour. A few occasionally do timber loading, coconut plucking etc. The females do major part of gathering. 90% females are engaged in the collection of fire-wood and medicinal plant matter. For collection pursuits husband and wife proceed together to the forests in the morning and return to the camp-site or colony in the evening.

During summer, collection of n.w.f.p is the major activity. They exchange n.w.f.p with the Tribal Co-operative Society of the area. The main n.w.f.p collected by the Aranadan include: *thenu* (*Apis sp*), *thenmezhuku* (honey wax.), *cheenikka* (*Acacia concinna*), *marottikuru* (*Hydnocarpus pentandra*), *mullilakkay* (*Zanthoxylum rhetsa*), *nellikka* (*Phyllanthus emblica*), *kurumulaku* (*Piper nigrum*), *maramanjil* (*Coscinium fenestratum*), *katinji* (*Zingiber zerumbet*), *kanchirakkuru* (*Strychnos nux-vomica*), soap nut etc.

During the rainy season, few men work as agricultural labourers in the fields of the neighbouring communities. For this, they are paid Rs50/- or above a day. They are also given mid-day meal and tea. They work along with members of Scheduled Caste communities such as Kalladi, Cheruman, Kanakkan etc. Recently, a few Aranadan youths are found attracted to coconut plucking and this is an emerging opportunity, which stem from traditional skill in tree climbing.

### Family Planning

Among the Aranadan, there are 13 married females who have adopted permanent measures for limiting family size. These women fall within the reproductive age group of 15-49. Out of the thirteen female adopters of family planning, the maximum number falls within the age group of 25-29(6), followed by the age group 30-34 (3);

and 20-24 & 35-39 (2 each). The distributions of acceptors are more wherever the Aranadan are living side by side with non-tribals. It shows the spread effect of family planning campaign is more among the Aranadan living in colonies rather than the hamlets.

Another analysis shows that out of thirteen females who underwent laparoscopy, eight fall within the age group 20-29. This reveals that the fertility of young females is affected. During 1970s vasectomy was popular and a number of acceptors were reported among the elderly males. A few unmarried males also undergone vasectomy. Intensive campaign coupled with cash incentives are luring the Aranadan to queue up for undergoing vasectomy or laparoscopy. Coupled with this, wide spread prevalence of protein calorie malnutrition result in adolescent sterility and early onset of menopause.

The reproductive functions of the Aranadan women are now very adversely affected by the family planning measures adopted by them. In this situation there exists grave risk in adopting family planning, as the overall health of the population is very poor by any standard.

#### **Crude Birth Rate, Crude Death Rate, Morbidity, Mortality**

During 1992 to 2000, 27 births had occurred among the 254 persons. Of them fourteen were boys and thirteen were girls. Although the data do not permit us to estimate crude birth rate reliably, a rough estimate is provided here. The crude birth rate among the Aranadan is 10.63. It is stated elsewhere that adoption of permanent family planning measures by a substantial number of males and females considerably caused the lowering of the birth rate. It is also observed that there occur pregnancy wastages and still births due to the poor health of women.

As the population size is very small, it may not be important to calculate the crude death rate. Within a period of eight years (1992-2000), nineteen deaths have taken place among them. Of these eleven were males and eight were females. Out of nineteen deaths, three were due to old age and associated illness, five neo-natal, one suicide, four accidents, one murder, two due to rheumatic fever; and one each due to scorpion sting, chest pain and swelling all over the body.

It is noted that one suicide, four accidental deaths and one murder in a population of 254

within a span of eight years is very high. Similar is the case with mortality owing to rheumatic fever, neonatal deaths etc. It is seen that neo-natal mortality marks twenty five per cent of the total deaths. It shows poor health of mothers, unsanitary condition etc.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Aranadan is one of the smallest Scheduled Tribe communities in the State and are considered to be the autochthones of Nilambur Valley, Malappuram district. They subsist on food gathering, small scale hunting, non-wood forest produces collection, medicinal plants collection and wage labour. This population has only 254 people with 128 males and 126 females. The sex ratio is 984.38 and average family size is 4.03. Literacy rate is 21.26 % and dependency ratio comes 36.55%. Crude Birth Rate is 13.29. The community is politically acephalous and nuclear family is the basic socio-economic unit. Out of 56 couples 16 are Aranadan- non Aranadan couples. The low sex ratio and difficulty in finding suitable girl of accepted relationship and age perhaps drive Aranadan males to marry from outside. Their health status of the community is below average when compared to the general population. The family planning adopted by both males and females affected the population size. As the population size is below replacement level, special attention should be given to this community from further declining.

**KEYWORDS** Aranadan. Autochthones. Fertility. Mortality. Morbidity. Diminutive. Dependency. Ratio. Crude Birth Rate. Crude Death Rate.

**ABSTRACT** This article analyses the demographic aspects of a diminutive tribal community viz., the Aranadan tribe of Kerala, having a population of 254. The population structure is highly influenced by different factors like fertility, mortality, morbidity, non-tribal influences etc. It is hoped that the demographic characteristics will be helpful to planners and administrators for micro-level planning for the development of this community.

#### **REFERENCES**

- Bogue, D.T.: *Principles of Demography*. Willey, New York (1969).  
 Fuchs, Stephen.: *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*. Macmillan Co. of India, New Delhi (1973).  
 Kakkoth, Seetha: *Three Tribes of Nilambur Valley: A Study in Interrelationship Between Habitat, Economy, Society and Culture*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the

- University of Calicut, Kerala (2001).
- Luiz, A.A.D. : *Tribes of Kerala*. Bharatiya Dimjati Sevak Sangh, New Delhi (1962).
- Sharma R.D., Koshi, A.K., Murthy, M.S.R. and Viswanathan, N., Anthropology and population studies. pp. 269-288 In: *Methodology for Population Studies and Development*. Kuttan Mahadevan and Parameswara Krishnan (Eds.). Sage Publications, New Delhi (1993).
- Singh, K.S.: *The Scheduled Tribes*. Anthropological Survey of India. Oxford University Press, New Delhi (1994).
- Usha. S.: Keralathile Aranadanmar, (Malayalam) in *Vignanana Kairali*, **23**,(8): 583-590 (1992).
- Viswanathan, Nair N.: *The Aranadan*. KIRTADS Publication, Kozhikode (1990).
- William, C.: *The Dictionary of Demography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1985).

**Author's Address:** **Dr. Seetha Kakkoth**, *Research Officer* (Anthropology), KIRTADS (Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes), Chevayur P.O., Kozhikode 670017, Kerala, India  
*E-mail:* ammusagarika@sanchar.net.in