

Housing and Social Habitation of the Elderly among the *Kanis*, a Tribal Community in Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT The paper describes the meaning of home for older people among the *Kanis*, a tribal community in southern Tamil Nadu, India. It uses the data from an ethnographic study of *Kanis* in Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve. Participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used. House for the elderly in this community is not merely a shelter, but a place for intensive family interaction and extending hospitality, thus sustaining family and community ties. Tribal as they are, the home gets its meaning only in its symbiotic relationship with the environment, especially with certain species of trees. The striking finding is that the older people are central in the house both structurally and socially; they view sociability, and not privacy, as an important aspect of living arrangement. Privacy is not regarded as a privilege, but as isolation.