

# Intra-Tribal Differences in Social Progress of the Tribes in Kerala: Realities and the Need for Inclusive Actions

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## Abstract

The tribes in Kerala are continuously encountering threats of development due to lack of ownership and control of the means of production, illiteracy, occupational immobility etc. They form the most deprived and vulnerable group, engendering indelible dark spots in the glorified development experience of the state, widely known as 'the Kerala model'. Situate this community from the outliers level to the central tendency stage is of outmost necessity both in terms of equity and inclusive standpoints. This is because the notion of development has changed dramatically from just material attainment to human development which is about enlarging people's choices and enables them to live long qualitatively and creatively in every walks of social life in the society. The article is linked to the theoretical framework of social exclusion and poverty as there has a culture of poverty among the tribes that influences all aspects of their life including social, economic, cultural, educational and developmental. The article is based on primary data using stratified random sampling method encompassing 300 samples collected from 5 clusters from Wayanad and 3 clusters from Palakkad. The article tries to explore development of the community based on the methodological framework proposed by Social Progress Imperative groups in a dichotomous framework of tribal and intra-tribal levels using Social Progress Index (SPI) embedding three basic areas of 'Basic Human Needs', 'wellbeing' and 'Opportunity'. The empirical results obtained from the study shows that there is marked differences in the social progress levels of different tribal sub-groups of Kerala.

**Keywords:** Tribes, Social Progress Index, poverty, social exclusion, SLI

## 1. Introduction

Exclusion of the tribes in Kerala is a part of the hoary history as they mostly dwell in the dense forest and thereby cut off from the main frame of the society without having any unique monolithic culture. They are backward in the social and economic spheres very difficult to earn and survive which makes them to use their labour to eke out their living either in the rudimentary agrarian set up or with the open access resources with their traditional skill encountering with the horrors of the animal kingdom and the vicious darkness and climatic conditions of the forest. They know the be all and end all of the forest and its biodiversity and the importance of its resources for their sustainable livelihood. Though they faced exclusion, they were happy with their forest milieu as they had been masters of the virgin land capable of producing the basic output for their sustenance with crop and place shifting to keep the original and indestructible powers of the forest soil. But the blow to the self-sustained tribal economy happened with the state proliferated large scale migration of the non-tribes in the prime abodes of the tribes to juggle with the new fortunes of the forest land. The image of this exclusion works in myriad forms and mostly reflected in three important visages of social, economic and cultural; thereby begetting the tribes entrapped in poverty, malnutrition, ill-health and low material and educational attainment. This finally leads to shocking inequality intensity in income distribution and associated outcomes in the tribal pockets.

Because of these, the tribal community in Kerala perceives weakly about their future. To lift the community from the present haunted stage of hopelessness several whole hearted measures on the part of the policy makers are inevitable. As a policy option uplifting the tribes the government introduced the Integrated Tribal Development Project, popularly known as ITDPs in the 1970s in the tribal hubs of Kerala. Subsequently to include the scattered tribes elsewhere in the development process the Tribal Development Department was started retaining the seven ITDP schemes in the tribal dominated centres. Further revival in the development schemes as part of the decentralization nearly 50 percent of the tribal development funds have been allocated through the local self government to ensure their participation in the development process. Most of the policies and programmes targeting for the upliftment of the tribes are lackadaisical not only on the part of the politicians but on the part of the bureaucrats and hence not generating the livelihood-linked income multiplier, though there have been plethora of central and state targeted schemes and special allocations through Tribal Sub Plans (TSP). In spite of all these the agony of the tribes is still unabated.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

There exists a culture of poverty among the tribes that influence all aspects of their life including social, economic, cultural, educational and developmental aspects. Due to low educational level, people are detained in low profile jobs; this will lead to less access to land and other productive assets. This leads to low income and high material deprivation of the household. This poverty is in turn transmitted over generations. It is not necessary that each block or village within the poverty trap follows a linear passion; instead it is reinforcing and interlinked. Simultaneously, there is countering forces of discrimination and intergenerational transmission of poverty. These indicators reinforce one another in multi-dimensional way, imposing severity on each factor. All these will work effectively for generating a clear cut social progress achieved by the community and thereby adopting corrective measures in the three areas of basic human development, index of well being and index of opportunity to make these community at par with the social progress achieved by other social groups in Kerala.

Review of tribal literature in Kerala gives a tangled picture of under development marked with low education profile and literacy, livelihood issues, landlessness, socio-cultural backwardness and food and nutritional insecurity. While estimating the poverty and inequality situation of different Indian states, Panagaria and More (2013) identify that tribes are the poorest social category in Kerala. Though other social groups in Kerala have reduced their poverty levels in the last decade, the tribes' poverty levels show acceleration. There exist several factors like land alienation, demise of the traditional tribal agriculture and lower wage rate etc in the tribal area, which are considered as the major reinforcing factors affecting their livelihood (Kunhaman, 1982). CSSEIP (2009) extensively explores the tribal situation in Kerala in the three major aspects such as income, education and health. Communities like Kattunaikan are still in the primitive stage of development earning their living by gathering forest produces. Paniyar and Adiyar are landless wage labourers who do not have sustainable livelihood options. Increasing social inequity (Haddad et, al., 2012), development of private health care system (Thresia, 2013), socio-cultural and other difficulties in accessing healthcare (Levesque, et, al., 2007) and the deterioration in the quality of public healthcare sector are responsible for the poor health status among the tribes. (Rajaenan, 2010) points towards the evidence of huge perception-reality gap in health status and hence it is difficult to assess their health status and healthcare needs.

The article is based on primary data amassed from the districts of Wayanad and Palakkad. For the purpose of collecting 300 samples, 5 clusters from Wayanad and 3 from Palakkad have been identified based on stratified random sampling method. Three prominent tribal communities of Wayanad, such as Kurumar, Kattunaikan and Paniya form the Wayanad samples. Likewise, from the Attappady region of Palakkad two predominant communities like Irular and Kurumbar form the samples.

The study tries to explore development of the community based on the methodological framework proposed by Social Progress Imperative groups in a dichotomous framework of tribal and intra-tribal levels using Social Progress Index (SPI) embedding three basic areas of 'Basic Human Needs', 'wellbeing' and 'Opportunity'. These three values are constructed independently at the first stage and subsequently combined to construct the social progress value of the tribes and also in intra-tribal levels. Development of these values is a necessary addition to the conventional method, as these are not proportionally correlated with human development or income. Hence the basic idea of the article is to look into how household and village level characteristics influence individual outcomes and in that way the role of state in building asset base to the tribal communities.

## 3. Social Progress of the Tribal Community

Social progress of the tribes demonstrates that they are the most vulnerable social group in Kerala society. But within the tribe itself there are marked differences in their socio-economic profiles. Some tribes are still in the primitive stage with poverty and associated problems, some others are getting tuned to the social development achieved outside the tribal hubs and a few have attained a little from the development tempo of Kerala. It is this marked diversity that provide ample scope for exploring the intricacies of social development indicators of the tribes in an intra-tribal level, which in turn helps to highlight the extent of difference of the inequality of the tribes itself. Also, it will help to aid in effective planning and implementation of various government policies targeting the most deprived community under the gamut of development. A brief sketch of the socio-economic level of the tribes helps in this respect to know the deepness of the tribal issues.

Poverty of the tribes based on per-capita income shows that more than one-third of the households come under the critical mark of poverty. Inter-tribal poverty levels prove that it is the lowest among the Kuruma community, while more than 50 percent of Kurumbar and Kattunaika households are below the threshold of poverty. Poverty based on the Monthly Per Capita Expenditure shows that 30.7 percent of the sample households are below the critical levels of poverty. Kuruma has the lowest poverty level with 8.8 percent. The temporal evaluation of households' poverty highlights that the backward tribes like the Kattunaika is still in the clinches of poverty as the level of poverty has not shown a considerable decline compared to the forward tribes (Figure 1).

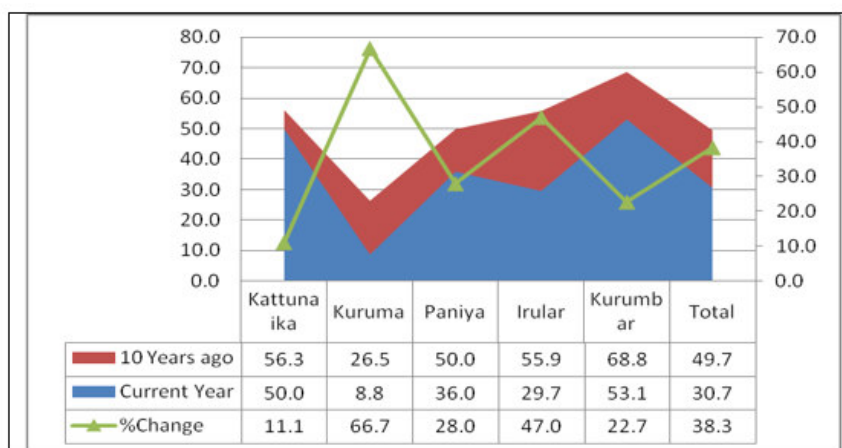


Figure 1. Temporal Poverty

Source: Survey data

The occupational profile (Table 1) of the tribes also explains inter-tribal differences, Kurumans mainly engage in farming in their own land or work as labourers in the farming sector, whereas the primitive tribes like Kurumbar and Kattunaika engage mainly in farming. Majority of the Kattunaikans works as labourers in the nearby cardamom and coffee plantations. Paniyans are mainly labourers in the nearby farm or are non-farm labourers.

Table 1. Employment Particulars

Name of the Tribe	(a) Main Employment										Total
	Self employed farming	Self employed off farm	Animal husbandry	Wage employed farming	Wage employed off farm	Plantation/Estate labour	Private job	Public job	MNREGS	Others	
Kuruma	25.8	1.5	5.3	25.8	16.7	1.5	6.1	7.6	9.1	0.8	100.0
Kattunaika	34.2	2.6	0.0	15.8	5.3	23.7	0.0	13.2	5.3	0.0	100.0
Paniya	3.5	0.0	2.3	55.8	31.4	1.2	0.0	0.0	5.8	0.0	100.0
Irular	12.5	1.3	1.3	28.8	25.0	0.0	1.9	4.4	22.5	2.5	100.0
Kurumbar	27.5	2.5	0.0	17.5	22.5	0.0	0.0	12.5	17.5	0.0	100.0
Total	17.8	1.3	2.4	30.9	21.9	2.6	2.4	5.9	13.6	1.1	100.0

Name of the Tribe	(b) Subsidiary Employment										Total
	Self employed farming	Self employed off farm	Animal husbandry	Wage employed farming	Wage employed off farm	Plantation/Estate labour	Private job	Public job	MNREGS	Others	
Kuruma	21.7	0.0	16.7	21.7	8.3	13.3	0.0	0.0	18.3	0.0	100.0
Kattunaika	39.1	0.0	4.3	21.7	8.7	8.7	0.0	0.0	17.4	0.0	100.0
Paniya	20.0	0.0	10.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	100.0
Irular	11.6	7.2	2.9	21.7	21.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	34.8	0.0	100.0
Kurumbar	26.3	0.0	0.0	31.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	42.1	0.0	100.0
Total	20.4	2.8	7.7	24.3	12.2	5.5	0.0	0.0	27.1	0.0	100.0

Source: Survey data

Community-wise evaluation of the average income of the household members also gives marked difference (Figure 2). The backward tribe like Kattunaika community has the lowest average individual income, whereas the forward tribal group, Kuruma, has the highest average individual income.

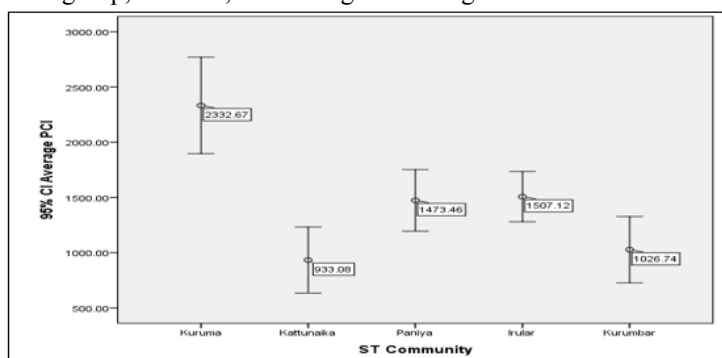


Figure 2. Average Individual Income

Source: Worked out from the Survey data

Inter-generational employment pattern exhibits differences as in other cases (Figure 3). Most of the 1st

generation households are engaged in farming/allied activities in their own land or working as wage earners in the agricultural sector. The second and third generation members are mainly wage earners in the farm and off-farm sector.

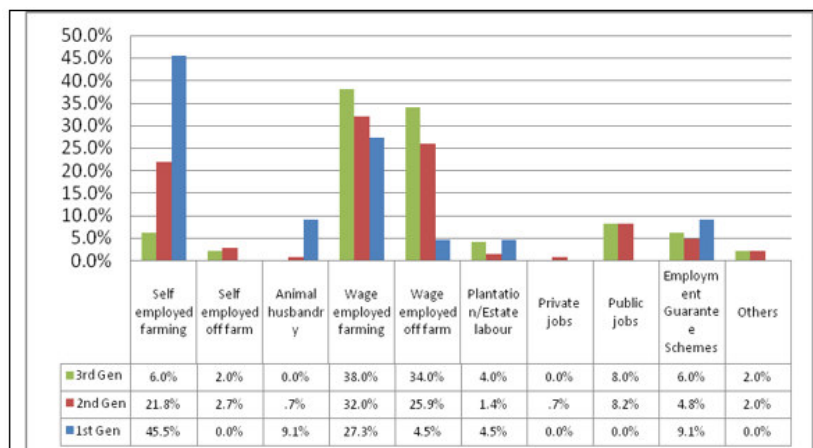


Figure 3. Inter-Generational Livelihood and Employment  
 Source: Survey data

Inter-community difference is also recognised in the standard of living indicators (see Figure 4). The tribes mostly belong to either medium SLI or low SLI categories. Kuruma community mainly features in the medium SLI category, whereas other tribes are in the low SLI group with high intergenerational differences.

Tribal land holding pattern has declined considerably over the generations with an average of 2.77 acres to 1.30 acres and then to 0.66 acres during the three generations. This impacts their livelihood and nutritional security. Food consumption and health are the two inter related components which need immediate attention. Morbidity and mortality levels are high. Education-wise tribes are in the rudimentary stage with high dropouts.

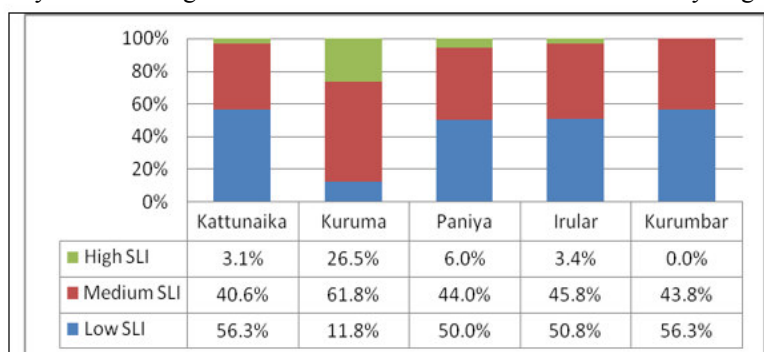


Figure 4. Tribe and SLI  
 Source: Survey data

#### 4. Results and Discussions

With the pioneering works of Porter et. al (2015), Marlier and Atkinson (2010), Corr (2013), Kanter (2013), Malik (2013) and Ura et. al (2012) of measuring social progress becomes a new agenda in computing economic development. Presently the world is moving forward with these new indicators replacing the conventional method of measuring development with the aid of per-capita income prone indicator and thereby indexing countries as developed, developing and less developed. But it is incomprehensible with respect to several aspects of underdevelopment which forms sporadic issues in modern economic development like growing inequality and exclusion. In this respect mere statistical indicators do not help to draw an elegant picture depicting the nature of underdevelopment.

Social Progress study and its indexing is a macro indicator suitable to connect to an economy based on 54 factors explained in three dimensions based on factor analysis with secondary data. Analyzing social progress in a micro dimension and again with respect to tribes of Kerala based on their perception is tiresome and complicated. The major challenge in developing this is the data issue, though the questionnaire is framed in such a way to elicit the perception of the tribes about 50 factors, a workable data structure is obtained only for 32 factors in the three broad areas. These factors are generally recognized as factors that the government provides for the community in the form of social security measures, development linked measures and others for socially acceptable living of the tribes. Hence this explains the capacity of the government to meet the basic human needs

of the tribes and thereby allows the tribals to develop to their full potential with quality living as given in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Social Progress in a component framework

Source: Adapted from Porter et, al. 2015

Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity have been given equal weights for working out the overall social progress of the tribes and each of these basic components is worked out with four sub-components and also is based on equal weights. Finally, each component is based on a varying number of individual indicators of social progress within that component. The component scores are calculated using a procedure called principal component factor analysis, which allows calculating an aggregate score from multiple indicators related to a common concept. Social progress of the community is an average of three dimensions independently like Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity. Each dimension is made up of four equally-weighted individual components scored on an intentional scale from 0 to 100. Higher scores mean higher social progress, and lower the reverse. The scale is determined by identifying actual performance on each indicator, and using these levels to set the maximum (100) and minimum (0) bounds.

#### 4.1 Evaluating Social Progress of the Tribes

The 32 variables connected to the social progress of the tribes are categorized into three main attributes, viz. Basic Human Needs, Foundation of Well Being and Opportunities. Factor Analysis (FA) is performed in each of the three categories to identify sub factors influencing the social progress of the tribes. Variables that have factor loadings of more than 0.70 are used for further analysis.

##### 4.1.1 Basic Human Needs

Table 2 shows the FA results for the Basic Human Needs. The result is obtained from three components. The Basic Human Needs has 10 variables, of which 8 factors have loadings of more than 0.70. The first component is named as “Housing and Electrification” which has high factor loadings in housing, electricity, affordable housing and uninterrupted electricity. The second factor comprises of variables relating to water and sanitation. The third factor is related to “Health and Nutrition” of which two variables viz. healthcare facilities and cure of infectious diseases have high factor loadings. The variables like political interference and undernourishment have low factor loadings and hence these variables do not have any significant role in determining the social progress.

Table 2. Basic Human Needs

Factor Name	Variable	Component		
		1	2	3
Housing and Electrification	Proper Housing	.756		
	Accessible Electricity	.748		
	Affordable housing	.712		
	Uninterrupted Electricity	.700		
Personal Safety	Political interference			
Drinking water and Sanitation	Availability of Drinking water		.794	
	Sanitation facilities		.794	
Health and Nutrition	Undernourishment			
	Health care facilities			.825
	Cure for infectious diseases			.812

##### 4.1.2 Foundation of Well Being

The second major component of the social progress is foundation of well being. Factor analysis is performed to identify pertinent variables from among 10 variables related to foundation of well being and this has helped to extract 5 variables which have a factor loading of more than 0.70 (Table 3).



Table 3. Foundation of well being

Factor Name	Variable	Component		
		1	2	3
Source of Information	TV/Cable	.785		
	Mobile Phone	.709		
	News Paper			
	Internet users			
Literacy	Adult literacy			
	Primary school enrolment		.791	
	Gender equality in education		.735	
	Higher education enrolment			
Resource Sustainability	Externalities			
	Availability of Natural Resources			.900

Among the four variables related to “Source of Information”, TV/Cable and Mobile Phone have high factor loadings and hence appeared as factor 1. The second factor features two variables relating to literacy. Availability of natural resources has high factor loading in the third component.

#### 4.1.3 Opportunities

Major opportunities include personal rights, personal freedom of choice, access to education and tolerance and inclusion. Out of the 12 variables linking opportunities, 9 factors have loadings of more than 0.70 are used to extract four components (Table 4).

Table 4. Opportunities

Factor Name	Variable	Component			
		1	2	3	4
Personal rights	Political Rights	.745			
	Freedom of Speech	.743			
	Possession Right	.701			
	Freedom of Movement				
	Land Acquisition Rights				
Freedom and choice	Early Marriage		.770		
	Freedom over life choices		.729		
	Choice of Segregation		.720		
Access to Education	Access to Schooling			.811	
	Years of Schooling			.798	
Tolerance and Inclusion	Religious Tolerance				
	Community Safety Net				.948

The first component features variables relating to personal rights like political rights, freedom of speech, possession right, etc. as there is lack of freedom to move outside the hamlet and lack of ownership rights for the land, the two variables seemed to be insignificant. The second factor includes three variables related to personal freedom and choice. Access to schooling and years of schooling are the two variables extracted so as to generate the third factor. While the religious tolerance is identified unimportant, community safety net has emerged as the fourth factor with a high factor loading.

#### 4.1.4 Evaluating the Social Progress of the Tribes in Kerala

The results of the factor analysis for the three major sub-indicators of social progress have identified 22 variables with high factor loadings, which are crucial in shaping the social progress of the tribes. To work out the social progress of the tribal communities in an intra-tribal framework, the scores of the 22 variables have been recorded into a scale of 0-100, with 0 for the least score and 100 for the highest score.

The overall social progress value for the sample based on the perception of the tribes is 34 (Figure 6). Irula and Paniya Communities shared a social progress value of 34 each, whereas for the primitive tribes, viz. Kattunaika and Kurumba, the values are 29 and 28, respectively. The Kuruma community has the highest value of social progress, i.e. 40 and the values of all the three sub-indices are relatively high for this tribal group. Kattunaika and Kurumba have underperformed in comparison to other communities in terms of Basic Human Needs, Foundation of Well Being and Opportunities.

The social progress values are further categorized in a five point scale viz. low, medium-low, medium, medium-high and high social progress and a Correspondence Analysis is performed to understand its groupings as given in Figure 7. Though none of the tribal group under the study has a social progress grouping value of medium-high and above, which in turn is a clear tribe-wise difference from the correspondence chart. The forward tribal group like Kuruma is closer to the Medium social progress level. Also, the percentage of Kuruma community in the low social progress category is very less. Paniya and Irula communities are closer to Medium-low and the

two primitive tribal groups (Kurumbar and Kattunaika) are closer to the low social progress levels.

The social progress values worked out for the tribal community in an intra-tribal framework is only a kick start to stimulate new development thinking in Kerala. As this is the first of its kind it may have several lacunae. Hence expects to deal with several critical comments connected to primary data and its use in developing the social progress value and also concern relating to the calculation of social progress at the very micro level like the tribes and even in an intra-tribal category.

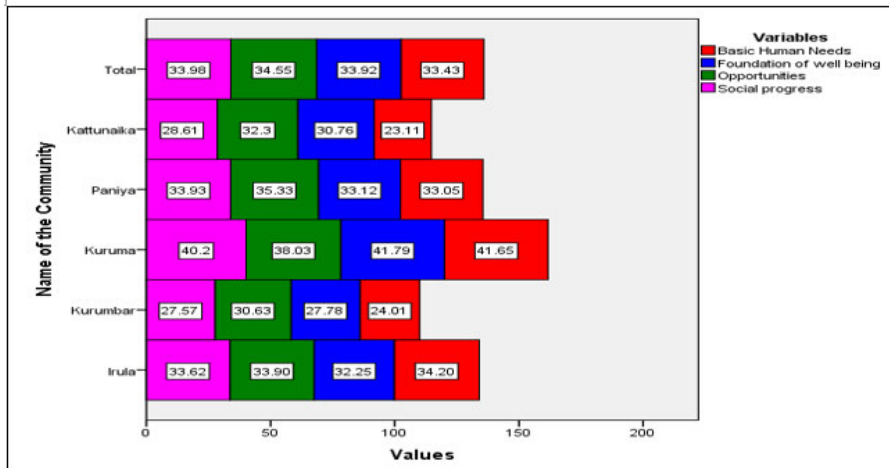


Figure 6. Tribe-wise Social Progress

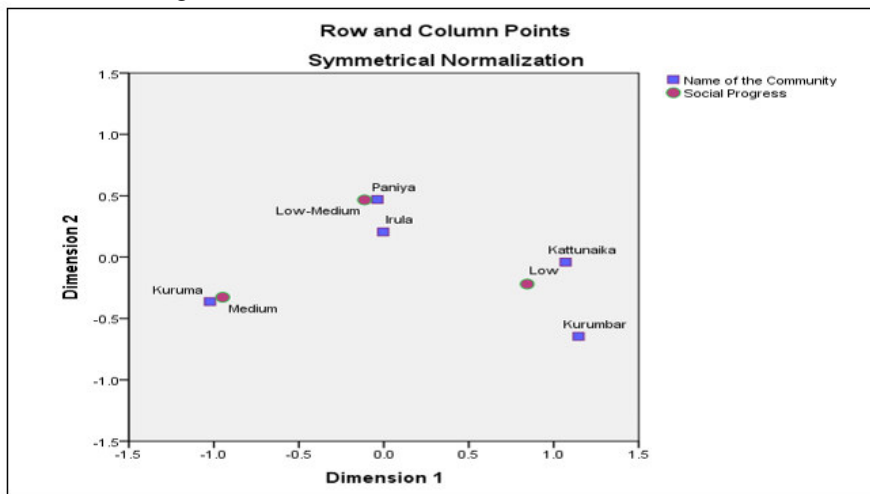


Figure 7. Correspondence Chart-Tribe wise Social Progress

### 5. Conclusion

The social progress indices of the tribes show that Irula and Paniya Communities shared identical values with middle position, whereas for the primitive tribes, viz. Kattunaika and Kurumba, the values come to the low level and the Kuruma community features well above the average level. This shows that Kattunaika and Kurumba have underperformed in comparison to other communities in terms of Basic Human Needs, Foundation of Well Being and Opportunities.

When the self-sufficient tribal food economy was collapsed they have no other means than the availability of basic food grains allotted through the public distribution system. This endows them with the basic provisions but they had to change their traditional food habits, which in a way is distressingly endangering their nutritional security. Several measures have been done in this area by the government like community kitchen, food and nutrition programme for the school going children and special package for the primitive tribal communities; however most of them remain in the half way. Medical facility in the tribal hubs is appallingly low. But by considering their settlements in the highly excluded terrains with increased difficulty in accessing the healthcare facilities, that in turn results in high mortality and morbidity rates. Education profile of the tribes shows their vicious nexus of underdevelopment. Though Kerala economy is cited important in the knowledge based era, the tribes have become an outlier group with rampant educational exclusion both regional and community angles. However, dropouts from schools and abstaining from accessing the health care provisions are still grave areas of concern when the tribal health and education are evaluated. Drinking water, sanitation and infrastructure facilities

in the tribal hubs are pitifully poor to make their life vulnerable and hence intricate to attain any level of social progress.

Though there exists a plethora of housing and livelihood schemes fit for allocation under the TSP and other state funds the housing condition and livelihood of the tribes are horrible. The implementation ineffectiveness of the government mechanism leads to half-fulfilled promises in the housing schemes as many of the houses constructed under these schemes remain incomplete. The tribal perception regarding the development schemes illumines that despite several schemes implemented for the supply of drinking water to the tribal households; it remains ineffective in most of the cases as safe drinking water is not available within the tribal clusters.

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