

# Distribution and Demography of Kadar Ethnic Community Endemic to the Western Ghats

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the actual distribution and demography of the Kadar ethnic community endemic to the Western Ghats. There was no comprehensive assessment prior to this including official records. This study finds Kadar are distributed in a total of 21 settlements within Kerala (15) and Tamil Nadu (6). Among the 15 settlements within Kerala, nine are confined to Thrissur, and six colonies are within Palakkad districts. The total population of Kadar is 2266 within 686 families in the 21 settlements.

**Key Words:** Kadar, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), Anamalais, Western Ghats, Indigenous community, Tribe.

## 1. Introduction

The Kadar Indigenous people are known as the original inhabitants of the Anamalai hills of Western Ghats mountains in India. The term 'indigenous' or 'native' or 'aboriginal' is coterminous with the Indian term 'Adivasi' meaning "a member of any of the aboriginal tribal peoples living in India before the arrival of the Aryans in the second millennium BC or generally to the native people before the colonial period". India, one of the megadiversity countries of the world, has a lot of endemic ethnic communities in its territory. India holds nearly 28% of the world's indigenous people. There are 5635 distinct indigenous communities in India of which 700 are noticed as scheduled tribes (STs) including 75 as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Kerala has five PVTGs i.e., Kattunaikar, Cholanaikar, Kurumbar, Kadar and Koraga. The criteria used for identification of PVTGs are: i. Pre agricultural level of technology, ii. Remote isolated enclaves, iii. The smallness of number, iv. Stagnating or diminishing population and v. low levels of literacy. The earlier terminology 'Primitive Tribal Group' has been changed and now it is known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (The draft National Tribal Policy, 2006).

Kadar are the food gathering, seasonally nomadic and forest dwelling community endemic to the Anamalai hills of Southern Western Ghats. Thurston (1909) describes them as the 'King of Anamalais'. The Kadar are short structure, dark skinned, curly haired primitive tribes with thick hairs and platyrhine noses. Men and Women have their teeth chipped. Women wear a bamboo comb in their black hair. They are considered to belong to Negroid tribal and inhabit the Anamalai of Elephant hills (Thurston, 1909) within the Southern Western Ghats. Kadar tribe possess some genetic affinity with earliest groups of people to have migrated and settled in the Indian subcontinent (NCF, 2006).

Kadar settlements consist of neatly constructed huts made of bamboo deftly split with a bill-hook in their long access thatched with the leaves of the teak tree and bamboo and divided into the verandas and compartments by means of partitions. But Kadar is essentially nomad in habit, living in small communities, and shifting from place to place in the jungle (Thurston, 1909). Children are also clever in catching fish with their hands, especially in enlarged ponds, surrounded by artificial dams (Ehrenfels, 1952). Religious taboo of Kadar about the bison or the Wild gaur is a unique case; they consider killing them as bad omens. Similarly, they are not allowed to kill tigers or use any part of it. It is a common belief among the forest tribes that the tiger is sent by the High god to punish bad people (Hermanns, 1995). Fishing forms one of the important livelihood and nutritional diets for the Kadar apart from forest resources (Bachan, 2003). Around 25 varieties of fishes are usually caught by the Kadar. *Tor khudree*, *Puntius debsonii*, *Barbodes carnaticus*, *Osteoichthys longidorsalis*, *Thilapia mossambicus*, *Gonoproktopterus* spp. (Dinesh, 2010). A study conducted by Yesodaran and Sujana (2009) shows that 67 plants species are identified with ethnobotanical importance used by Kadar tribes in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve. This paper elucidates the present distribution and demography of the Kadar indigenous community in the Western Ghats of India.

## II. Methodology

Secondary data on demography and distribution of Kadar Indigenous communities were collected from Thurston (1909), Iyer (1909), Ehrenfels (1952), Bachan (2016). The collected data were cross-checked with latest updates from Grama Sabha / Oorukootam of each village. The data were updated involving Grama Sabha members during field visits to the nine settlements and with meeting members of other 15 settlements. The data pooled into a table to prepare actual demographic information on each village. Recent secondary information was pooled from the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) report for 3 settlements in Tamil Nadu and Hornbill Foundation for 9 settlements in Kerala. Nine settlements (two in Tamil Nadu and seven in Kerala) were visited during October 2016 – July 2017 periods with the help of Kadar members associated with the Hornbill Foundation. The location of each settlement was geocoded on location data (GPS) and the location data were collected using Garmin Etrex 10 GPS. The data were plotted in GIS software QGIS 3.1 for preparation of distribution map of Kadar.

## III. Results and Discussion

### a. Distribution of Kadar

According to Sankaran Menon as cited in Ehrenfels (1952), the Kadars are “the tribe numbering about 1300 is ethnologically one of the most typical and relatively pure jungle tribes of the country, though racially differing from the other, more wadded people, by its markedly Negroid type. The Kadar were few in number and confined to a small territory. They roam in the hilly tracts of the Eastern Division of Chittur Thaluk in Cochin State and the forests immediately adjacent to its Western border, where the South Malabar and Coimbatore Districts meet the border of Cochin”. According to Ehrenfels, (1952) “The Kadar territory proper lies just on the edge of their eastern slopes and at an elevation of roughly 2,000 ft., above the sea level. These forests are very rich in timber and other Minor Forest Produces. At the beginning of the century, the forest administration of Cochin opened a small gauge tram line for timber transport, which was gradually extended until, some forty years ago; it had reached the heart of the Kadar colony and Karimala hill, where Kuriarkutty forest station has been erected. These facts have changed the entire pattern of Kadar life and economy (Ehrenfels, 1952). Bachan (2003) describes them as confined chiefly to the rainforest and has great affinity towards river habitations.

According to earlier estimates of the Tribal Department Government of Kerala, the Kadar tribe was distributed in the 15 settlements of Kerala. Bachan (2016) describes them in 23 settlements in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. A study by NCF (2006) identifies four settlements in the Valparai part of Tamil Nadu. The state government reports also vary in the number of settlements as well as their population. Bachan (2016) describes the Kadar as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Community endemic to the Anamalai part of Western Ghats within the rainforest formations and almost confined to the Chalakudy River basin.

The small hamlets of Kadar were described as colonies or settlements in the post-independence period since they haven't had proper title as a village until commencement of the Forest Right Act (FRA) 2006. All these hamlets were recognized as Forest Village as per section 2 (p) iii of FRA (2006). Here we use the nomenclature as Villages, may be first time since the inception of FRA (2006) taking into account of actual spirit of the act as described in its preamble “In order to mitigate the historical injustice happened to the community even after the consolidation of the state”. The study affirms that the Kadar are distributed in 21 forest villages within the Anamalai part of Western Ghats, of which 15 are within Kerala state and 6 in Tamil Nadu. Among the 16 villages in Kerala, nine are in Thrissur district of which eight are completely within the Athirappilly Grama Panchayat. The five villages in Tamil Nadu are within the Valparai part and the Erumapara Kadar Village is in the Topslip area and all are within the Coimbatore district. The study refines the earlier observation (Bachan, 2003) that the Kadar villages are within the Chalakudy River basin to majority of the villages (14) are within the Chalakudy River basin whereas two are in Periyar river basins and five within the Bharathapuzha basins. The distribution (Table 1, Fig. 1) indicates them confined chiefly into the rainforest bioclimate of the Anamalai hills of Western Ghats in tune with Thurston's (1909) statement as the ‘Kings of Anamalais’.

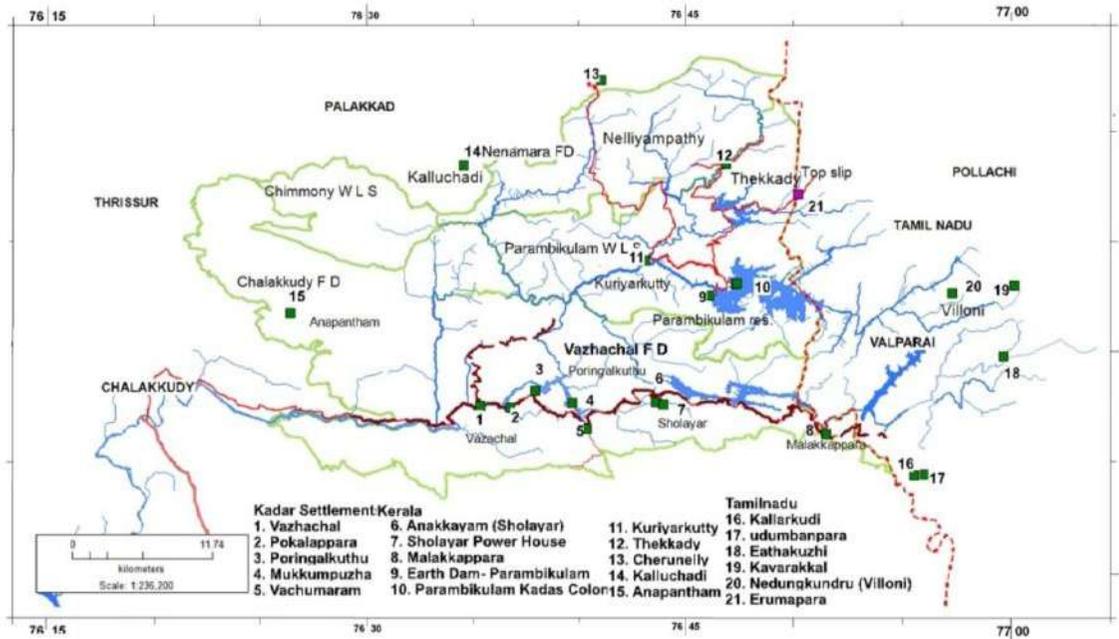


Fig. 1. Distribution of Kadar Villages

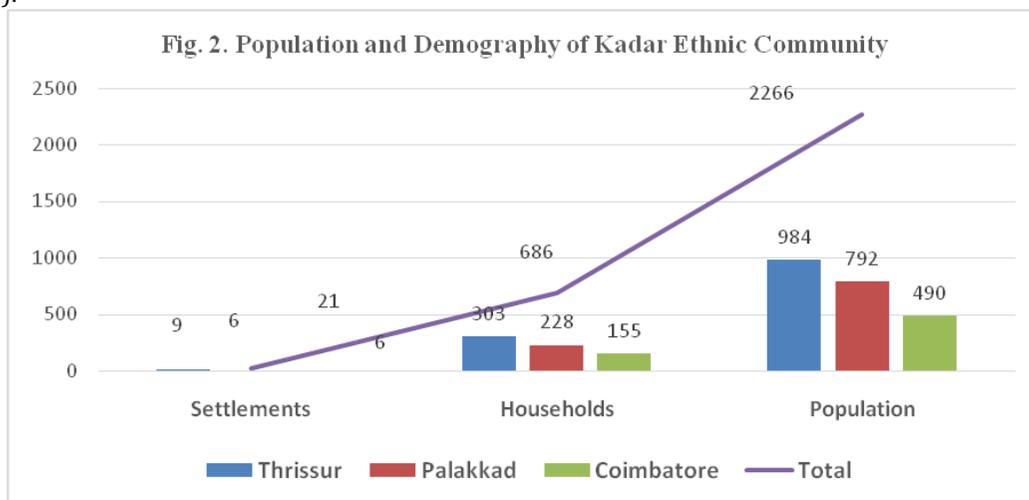
**Table 1. Distribution of Kadar Village**

SL No	Name of the settlement	State	District	Panchayath	Forest division	River basin
1	Anapantham Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Kodasseri	Chalakudy	Chalakudy
2	Vazhachal Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
3	Pokalappara Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
4	Peringalkuthu Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
5	Vachumaram Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
6	Mukkumpuzha Kadar Vilage	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
7	Sholayar Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
8	Anakayam Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
9	Perumbara Kadar Village, Malakkappara	Kerala	Trissur	Athirappilly	Vazhachal	Chalakudy
10	Kuriarkutty Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	Muthalamada	Parambikulam	Chalakudy
11	Parambikulam Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	Muthalamada	Parambikulam	Chalakudy
12	Parambikulam earth dam Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	Muthalamada	Parambikulam	Chalakudy
13	Thekkady 30-acre Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	Muthalamada	Parambikulam	Chalakudy
14	Cherunelly Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	Nelliyampathy	Nemmara	Bharathapuzha

15	Kalluchadi Village	Kadar	Kerala	Palakkad	Ayiloor	Nemmara	Bharathapuzha
16	Erumapara Village	Kadar	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	Topslip	IGWLS	Chalakydy
17	Udubanpara Village	Kadar	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	Valparai	Valparai	Periyar
18	Kallarkudi, Village	Kadar	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	Valparai	IGWLS	Periyar
19	Villoni Nedungkundu Kadar Village	Kadar	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	Valparai	Valparai	Bharathapuzha
20	Eathakuzhi Village	Kadar	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	Valparai	IGWLS	Bharathapuzha
21	Kavarakal Kadar Village	Kadar	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	Valparai	IGWLS	Bharathapuzha

**b. Demography of Kadar**

The earliest demographic account of Kadar can be found in Ehrenfels (1952), in which he mentions population around 1300. According to the 1981 Census it was 1120 and that of 1991 Census was 2021 individuals. The socio-economic survey of 1996 – 97 has estimated 1472 Kadar population, consisting of 744 males and 728 females in 1999 (Kakkoth, 2005). A detailed enquiry in this regard is summarised here (Table 2).



The current estimate of population of the Kadar indigenous community is 2266 individuals in 686 households within 21 villages in Kerala and Tamil Nadu part of Western Ghats. 984 individuals are in the Thrissur district, 792 in Palakkad District of Kerala state and remaining 490 are within Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. Nearly 77% (532) households are in Kerala, highest in the Thrissur district (303), 228 in Palakkad and remaining 33% (155) are in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. The highest population is within the Kuriyarkutty Kadar Village (285) situated in the Parambikulam Tiger reserve, Kerala then comes the Anapantham Kadar Village with 227 people. The smallest village is the Cherunelly in Nelliampathy hills of Palakkad district Kerala with 27 individuals in nine households. Among the overall population 33% (757 people) live in the Vazhachal Forest Division area, Athirappilly Grama Panchayat Thrissur district of Kerala. Historical evidence indicates the Kadar’s umbilical relationship with evergreen forests within the Anamalai Hills (Ehrenfels, 1952; Thurston, 1909; Bachan, 2006).

The traditional knowledge, dependence on forest resources and traditional resource collection areas of Kadar are more woven with Rainforest regions (Bachan, 2006). The forest conversion for monoculture plantations and the dams were the major driving force for their displacement from original habitations in the river valleys. This has subsequently restricted their land, resource and livelihood rights on forests (Bachan, 2006; Bachan et al., 2015). The present study also indicates 51% (1178 individuals) of Kadar still live within protected areas, 688 within the Prambikulam Tiger Reserve, Kerala and 490 in the Indiragandhi Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu. The remaining 49% are within reserve forest areas such as Vazhachal Forest Division (757), Nemmara Forest Division (104), Chalakydy Forest Division (227), Kerala.

Around 40000 ha of the forest within the Kerala part of Kadar's domain has been recognized as the Community Forest Resource (CFR) areas under the FRA (2006) during 2012. (Bachan et al., 2015).

**Table 2. Demography of Kadar**

SL No	Name of the settlement	State	District	No. Of house holds	Population
1	Anapantham Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	58	227
2	Vazhachal Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	54	182
3	Pokalapara Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	22	71
4	Peringalkuthu Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	22	74
5	Vachumaram Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	51	141
6	Mukkumpuzha Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	10	33
7	Sholayar Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	18	42
8	Anakayam Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	23	65
9	Malakkappara Kadar Village	Kerala	Trissur	45	149
10	Kuriarkutty Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	58	285
11	Parambikulam Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	54	205
12	Parambikulam earth dam Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	45	120
13	Thekkady 30-acre Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	34	78
14	Cherunelly Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	9	27
15	Kalluchadi Kadar Village	Kerala	Palakkad	28	77
16	Erumapara Kadar Village	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	26	84
17	Udubanpara Kadar Village	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	25	70
18	Kallarkudi Kadar Village	Kerala	Coimbatore	17	56
19	Villoni /Nedungkundru Kadar Village	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	67	216
20	Eathakuzhi Kadar Village	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	8	29
21	Kavarakal Kadar Village	Tamil Nadu	Coimbatore	12	35

**IV. Summary and Conclusion** The Kadar are original inhabitants of rainforests biomes of Anamalai hills of Southern Western Ghats. Lack of comprehensive information on their present distribution and demography lead to this paper. The present distribution of Kadar is within 21 villages within Kerala (15) and Tamil Nadu (6). Total population of Kadar 2266 within 686 families in the 21 villages. The pattern of distribution reaffirms them as endemic to the unique forested Anamalai hills rich in rainforest resources. Their demography indicates gradual increase in population from 1300 people during 1952 to ~ 1500 during 1980s and 2266 today indicating slight improvement in the social status compared to post independent period. The recognition of their community rights on forest resources following the international norms provides a ray hope to save this vulnerable indigenous community from the endangerment.

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