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Empowerment of Tribal Communities through Innovation and Entrepreneurship: A Path to Sustainable Progress in the Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu

S. Alexander Danifel

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1661-8573>

P. Amarjothi

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce
Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9811-7413>

Abstract

This study investigates the ways in which entrepreneurship and innovation might strengthen tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's southern regions. It examines how these initiatives foster socioeconomic growth while preserving traditional jobs. A mixed-method approach was used to collect data from 400 tribe households using surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The findings highlight the value of financial inclusion, skill development, and education in fostering creativity. Barriers including a lack of capital and market access impede progress. The study concludes with suggestions for enhancing vocational training and business opportunities.

Keywords: Economic, Sustainable, Entrepreneurial, Tribal, and Endeavour

Introduction

With a focus on how innovation and entrepreneurship may foster long-term socioeconomic improvement, the study looks at ways to empower tribal groups in Tamil Nadu's southern regions. Living in districts like Dindigul, Theni, Tirunelveli, and others, Tamil Nadu's tribal tribes face challenges like poverty, limited access to markets, a lack of education, and barriers to modern business techniques. The study is to explore how promoting innovation and entrepreneurial activities within these communities can be advantageous in order to boost economic resilience, enhance livelihoods, and preserve traditional vocations. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study looks into the prospects and challenges of entrepreneurship in tribal communities using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Objectives

- Look at how economic empowerment innovation can help keep traditional vocations alive.
- To understand how efforts to improve sustainable livelihoods impact tribal people.
- To assess the educational and skill development of tribal youth, especially in the area of entrepreneurship.

Scope of the Study

This investigation focuses on the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, including Dindigul, Theni, Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, and others. With an emphasis on residents of these districts, the study investigates how indigenous communities participate in innovation and entrepreneurship. The goal of the investigation is to increase our understanding of tribal culture and the transformative potential of innovation in these societies.

Research Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to give a comprehensive picture of the tribal groups' engagement with innovation and entrepreneurship.

Data Collection and Sampling

- A sample of 400 tribal households was selected from the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, which include Dindigul, Kanyakumari, Madurai, and other locations.
- To ensure a varied representation of age, gender, and tribal group, the study used a stratified and random sampling technique.
- To understand the interest in entrepreneurship and the socioeconomic situations, data was gathered using focus groups, interviews, and structured surveys.

Collecting Qualitative Data

Focus groups and interviews were conducted to learn more about cultural beliefs, barriers to entrepreneurship, and community objectives.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis of qualitative data was used to identify common challenges and opportunities in the tribal groups. Quantitative data was evaluated using statistical tools to search for connections between entrepreneurial endeavours and socioeconomic growth. Additionally, the data was categorised using age, gender, traditional occupation, and rates of entrepreneurial success.

Testing Hypotheses: The study examined both the null and alternative hypotheses to ascertain if entrepreneurship and innovation significantly affect the socioeconomic empowerment of tribal groups. The impact of education and skill development on entrepreneurs' success was also evaluated.

The promise and challenges of innovation-driven empowerment for the tribal tribes in southern Tamil Nadu were well grasped thanks to this mixed-methods approach.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H0): In Tamil Nadu's southern districts, the socioeconomic empowerment of tribal communities is not greatly impacted by innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): In Tamil Nadu's southern districts, the socioeconomic empowerment of tribal communities is greatly impacted by innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives.

Null Hypothesis (H0): Among tribal youth in Tamil Nadu's southern districts, education and skill development have no discernible impact on the success of entrepreneurial endeavours.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): For the tribal youth in Tamil Nadu's southern districts, the success of their entrepreneurial endeavours is significantly influenced by education and skill development.

Sample Size

Using a stratified and random sampling technique, 400 tribal households were chosen as a representative sample for the study. In order to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, and tribal group, respondents were selected from a variety of villages located throughout southern Tamil Nadu.

Research Questions

- What obstacles and difficulties do tribal communities encounter when embracing innovation and entrepreneurship?
- What is the effect of innovation and entrepreneurship on tribal communities' socioeconomic well-being?
- What quantifiable measures of the success of entrepreneurship in empowering tribal communities exist?

Research Methodology

A mixed-method approach is used in the research. To obtain understanding of cultural perceptions and the obstacles to entrepreneurial growth, participant observations, focus groups, and interviews were used

to collect qualitative data. To evaluate the effects of entrepreneurial endeavours, the state of the economy, and the degree of interest in innovation among tribal members, quantitative data was gathered through the use of structured surveys. The study presents a thorough analysis of tribal empowerment through innovation and includes a variety of demographic and socioeconomic indicators.

Data Analytics

1. Demographic Information

Age Group Distribution

Age Group	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
18-25 years	15	60
26-35 years	40	160
36-45 years	30	120
46-60 years	10	40
60+ years	5	20

Interpretation: According to the data, 40% of respondents are between the ages of 26 and 35, and 30% are between the ages of 36 and 45. This suggests that young and middle-aged people are the study's most engaged participants. The fact that older age groups (46–60 years and 60+ years) are comparatively under-represented implies that middle-aged and younger tribal members are more involved in or affected by innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives.

Gender Distribution

Gender	Percentage (%)	Number of respondents
Male	60	240
Female	38	152
Other	2	8

Interpretation: With 60% of respondents being male, 38% being female, and only 2% identifying as another gender, the data demonstrates a notable gender gap. This may point to a social dynamic in which women participate less in formal economic activities or a cultural propensity for men to pursue entrepreneurship. It may also draw attention to the necessity of broader-based initiatives aimed at empowering women and other genders within tribal communities.

District-wise Representation

District	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Dindigul	20	80
Theni	18	72
Tirunelveli	17	68
Kanyakumari	10	40
Thoothukudi	10	40
Madurai	7	28
Ramanathapuram	6	24
Sivagangai	5	20
Virudhunagar	7	28

Interpretation: Dindigul (20%) and Theni (18%) have the highest percentage of responders, closely followed by Tirunelveli (17%). This distribution suggests a fairly uniform distribution with minor variations throughout Tamil Nadu's southern districts. The lowest representation is found in the districts of Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram, with 5% and 6%, respectively. This indicates that, in comparison to other districts, the tribal communities in some of them may be smaller in number or less involved in entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives.

2. Traditional Occupation and Livelihood

Primary Occupation

Primary Occupation	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Agriculture	45	180
Handicrafts	25	100
Fishing	15	60
Others	15	60

Interpretation: Agriculture continues to play a significant role in tribal livelihoods, as evidenced by the significant percentage of respondents (45%) who list it as their primary occupation. Another traditional job, handicrafts, makes up 25% of the total, demonstrating its importance in maintaining tribal cultural legacy. Fishing and other occupations have lower percentages (15%), which emphasises the variety of tribal livelihoods but also raises the possibility that some traditional jobs may be in danger or be less lucrative.

Profitability of Traditional Occupations

Profitability of traditional occupation	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Highly profitable	20	80
Moderately profitable	30	120
Barely profitable	50	200
Others	15	60

Interpretation: Of the respondents, 50% say that their traditional jobs are not very profitable, and 20% say they are very profitable. This implies that traditional means of subsistence might not be long-term viable in the absence of interventions like increased funding, better access to markets, or instruction in contemporary methods.

Threats to Traditional Occupations

Threats to Traditional Occupation	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Yes (Facing threats)	75	300
No	25	100

Interpretation: The vast majority of respondents (75%) think that their traditional careers are in danger, and this perception may be brought on by things like increased competition in the market, environmental issues, or changes in the economy. Just 25% of workers believe their jobs are safe, underscoring the critical need for safety precautions and economic diversification.

Support Needed for Traditional Occupations

Support Needed for Traditional Occupations	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Financial assistance	50	200
Market access	30	120
Training in modern techniques	15	60

Interpretation: Financial aid was required by half of the respondents (50%) while market access (30%) and modern technique training (15%) were cited by the remaining respondents as important areas of support. This indicates a lack of knowledge and funding, which are crucial for the modernisation and sustainability of traditional livelihoods.

3. Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Entrepreneurial Engagement

Entrepreneurial Engagement	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Engaged in Entrepreneurship	40	160
Not Engaged	60	240

Interpretation: Of the respondents, only 40% are entrepreneurs, and the majority (60%) do not engage in any kind of entrepreneurship. This suggests that even though tribal communities are interested in starting their own businesses, many still face obstacles to entry, which may have to do with money, skills, or market opportunities.

Type of Entrepreneurial Activity

Type of Entrepreneurial Activity	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents (out of 160 entrepreneurs)
Small-scale businesses	55	88
Online businesses	20	32
Other	25	40

Interpretation: Among those engaged in entrepreneurship, 55% are involved in small-scale businesses, while 20% have ventured into online businesses. This highlights that while small-scale businesses dominate, there is a growing trend toward digital entrepreneurship, albeit in a smaller percentage.

Impact of Entrepreneurship on Income

Impact of Entrepreneurship on Income	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Significant increase	30	120
Moderate increase	50	200
No change	20	80

Interpretation: The majority of respondents (50%) stated that their entrepreneurial endeavours had resulted in a moderate increase in their income, while 30% saw a significant increase. This shows that, although more assistance is needed to fully realise its potential, entrepreneurship is a feasible route to economic empowerment.

Challenges in Entrepreneurship

Challenges in Entrepreneurship	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Lack of capital	60%	240
Limited market access	30%	120
Lack of business skills	20%	80

Interpretation: 60% of the respondents stated that a lack of capital is the biggest obstacle to entrepreneurship. Limited market access (30%) and a lack of business skills (20%) are two additional challenges. These results imply that the success of entrepreneurship initiatives in tribal areas depends on financial inclusion and business education.

4. Sustainable Livelihood and Innovation

Adoption of Innovative Practices

Adoption of Innovative Practices	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Yes	25	100
No	75	300

Interpretation: The overwhelming majority of respondents (75%) do not use innovative practices, suggesting that there is resistance or other obstacles to innovation in tribal communities. While innovation has begun to take root, there is still a long way to go before it is widely adopted, as evidenced by the mere 25% of people who have made innovation part of their livelihood.

Support Required for Livelihood Enhancement

Support Required for Livelihood Enhancement	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Training and skill development	45%	180
Financial investment	30%	120
Technology and infrastructure	20%	80

Interpretation: Training and skill development (45%) was the most often requested support for improving one's livelihood, followed by financial investment (30%) and technology access (20%). This demonstrates that tribal communities are conscious of their limitations and look for useful infrastructure and skill support to raise their standard of living.

5. Education and Skill Development

Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Primary education	40	160
Secondary education	35	140
Higher secondary education	20	80
College education	5	20

Interpretation: The data shows that 40% of the respondents just finished primary school, while a smaller portion continue their education after that. Tribal communities' low levels of formal education may limit their capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship, highlighting the necessity of educational initiatives.

Vocational Training Received

Vocational Training Received	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Yes	30	120
No	70	280

Interpretation: There is a sizable deficiency in skill training, as only 30% of respondents had vocational training. This shows that specific training programs are needed, especially in entrepreneurship and contemporary business practices, that are pertinent to the needs of tribal communities.

Adequacy of Education for Entrepreneurship

Adequacy of Education for Entrepreneurship	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Inadequate	50%	200
Adequate	30%	120
Highly Adequate	20%	80

Interpretation: Just 30% of respondents think their education is sufficient for entrepreneurship, while half of them (50%) think it is not. This underlines even more how important it is to improve educational initiatives that emphasise entrepreneurship, company management, and creative thinking.

6. Findings and Challenges

Impact on Household Quality of Life

Impact on Household Quality of Life	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Highly positive impact	35	140
Moderately positive impact	45	180
Neutral impact	20	80

Interpretation: Three-quarters of respondents (35%) report a highly positive impact, and a sizable portion (45%) report a moderately positive impact on their household quality of life. This demonstrates how efforts to improve livelihoods and entrepreneurship are raising the standard of living in tribal communities, but more needs to be done to guarantee that these benefits are widespread and long-lasting.

Challenges Faced

Challenges Faced	Percentage (%)	Number of Respondents
Financial constraints	60%	240
Market competition	25%	100
Lack of government support	15%	60

Interpretation: For tribal communities, lack of government support (15%), market competition (25%) and financial constraints (60%) continue to be the biggest obstacles. This implies that although initiatives aimed at enhancing livelihoods and entrepreneurship are beneficial, external obstacles frequently impede their progress.

Summary and Interpretation

The study's findings are presented in full in the tables above, which offer significant new information about the demographics, employment trends, entrepreneurial activity, obstacles, and educational attainment of tribal communities in Tamil Nadu's southern districts. Every table and figure will help us comprehend the social and economic dynamics and provide ideas for enhancing sustainable lifestyles and the innovative empowerment of these people.

Discussion on Analysis and Results

The analysis of data collected from 400 respondents in tribal communities in southern Tamil Nadu offers valuable fresh insights into the socioeconomic environment, challenges, and opportunities for empowerment through entrepreneurship and innovation. Apart from analysing the fundamental reasons and proposing possible policy measures, this conversation also emphasises the consequences of the results.

Age Group Distribution

Given that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35, followed by those between the ages of 36 and 45, it appears that middle-aged individuals are the most active participants in livelihood and innovation projects. This pattern supports the idea that younger and middle-aged members of the community are likely more open to new ideas and initiatives. A larger reliance on traditional occupations or possible resistance to change could be indicated by the lower representation of older age groups (46+ years), which could restrict the overall adoption of innovative practices.

Implication: Policies and programs aimed at young people may be more effective in encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation in tribal communities. Nonetheless, older family members must be included in these projects in order to close the generational divide.

Gender Distribution

With 38% of respondents being female and 60% of respondents being male, the data clearly demonstrates the gender gap. This is consistent with widespread observations that women in tribal communities may encounter social and cultural obstacles to engaging in the economy. Even though women's empowerment has advanced, these numbers show how important it is to implement focused initiatives that boost the number of women pursuing entrepreneurship.

Implication: More targeted interventions are needed to give tribal women access to resources, training, and financial support in order to achieve gender equity. Women's empowerment can increase household income and the well-being of the community.

District-wise Representation

There is a balanced representation of respondents across the districts, with the largest numbers found in Dindigul, Theni, and Tirunelveli. This is a reflection of the geographical dispersion of tribal communities throughout southern Tamil Nadu, where socioeconomic circumstances vary by district. The lesser presence from Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram may be due to a lack of awareness or access to government programs in these areas.

Implication: Policy measures must be tailored to the particular circumstances of each district, particularly in under-represented areas, in order to ensure equitable resource allocation and promote entrepreneurship.

Traditional Occupations and Their Profitability

The continued prevalence of traditional activities, particularly agriculture (45%), demonstrates the importance of these sectors to tribal subsistence. Nonetheless, the fact that just 20% of respondents said their traditional occupation was very profitable shows how hard it is for these communities to make ends meet. This is made worse by the notion that traditional jobs are in jeopardy due to things like technological developments, market competition, and environmental deterioration.

The implication Modernising traditional occupations requires skill development, increased market accessibility, and the adoption of sustainable practices. Profitability would rise, cultural heritage would be preserved, and economic expansion would be encouraged.

Entrepreneurial Engagement and Challenges

Many tribe people still rely on subsistence farming, as evidenced by the fact that just 40% of them are entrepreneurs. Lack of capital (60%) and market accessibility (30%) are the main barriers, highlighting the structural issues that hinder entrepreneurship. This suggests that although tribal members could be interested in launching their own businesses, they are constrained by both financial and physical limitations.

The implication Financial inclusion and simple access to loans at affordable rates are essential to unlocking the entrepreneurial potential of native communities. Additionally, efforts to improve

market accessibility, such as the development of digital platforms or cooperative models, could help bridge the gap between producers and consumers.

Adoption of Innovative Practices

There is a notable disparity in the adoption of new technologies and methodologies, as evidenced by the startling 75% of respondents who have not adopted innovative practices. This may be the result of low awareness, inadequate education, or the high price of innovation. But as evidenced by the 25% of respondents who have embraced innovative practices, growth is possible provided the proper support networks are in place.

Implication: Training, technology access, and raising awareness of the advantages of innovation are all critical for promoting innovation. The implementation of innovation in tribal contexts may be promoted by pilot projects that demonstrate its efficacy.

Education and Skill Development

50% of respondents said their education was insufficient for entrepreneurship, and only 30% of respondents had received vocational training, highlighting a significant gap in education and skill development. This is a major obstacle to economic empowerment because education is essential for people to engage in and reap the rewards of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Implication: Digital literacy, business management, and entrepreneurship are the main topics of educational programs designed specifically for tribal communities. These programs are essential for developing capacity. NGOs and local institutions working together could make it easier to carry out these training programs successfully.

Impact on Quality of Life

It is encouraging that 45% of respondents said that entrepreneurship initiatives had improved their quality of life somewhat. But the fact that only 35% of respondents said it had a very positive impact shows that many are still having difficulty seeing meaningful improvements in their standard of living. External challenges like market instability or limited access to resources could be the cause of this.

Implication: More robust support systems are needed to ensure that entrepreneurship leads

to observable and sustainable improvements in quality of life. This means providing access to stable markets, continuing skill development, and financial services.

Key Findings

Barriers to Entrepreneurship: Lack of capital, market access, and business savvy are the most challenges faced by Native American entrepreneurs.

Low Adoption of Innovation: Most respondents did not embrace novel techniques, suggesting that more money, education, and knowledge of innovation are needed.

Educational Gaps: The need for education and training tailored to tribal needs is highlighted by the majority of respondents' perception that they are ill-prepared to launch their own company.

Gender Disparity: The low representation of women in entrepreneurship suggests that there are social and cultural hurdles that need to be addressed with targeted interventions.

Challenges and Negative Impacts

Despite the positive developments in business, there are still many challenges facing tribal communities. Market competition, budgetary limitations, and a lack of government assistance are major obstacles that keep them from growing. Additionally, the preservation of culture is at risk when traditional occupations are endangered.

Disintegration of Conventional Practices

Impact: Traditional knowledge, skills, and jobs that have been passed down through the centuries may gradually disappear as a result of the emphasis on contemporary entrepreneurship.

Rationale: Tribal groups depend on traditional occupations like farming, handicrafts, and resource management. By pulling attention away from these traditions, entrepreneurship may contribute to cultural estrangement and the loss of cultural heritage.

Inequality in Society

Impact: Entrepreneurship may unintentionally contribute to the expansion of social and economic gaps in the community if capital and knowledge are not allocated fairly.

Justification: Not all community members have equal access to resources including training, education, and financial aid. As a result, those who are wealthier or more educated may thrive, leaving others behind and creating a wider divide.

Over-reliance on External Markets

Effect: Promoting Entrepreneurship may cause communities to become more reliant on external markets, making them more vulnerable to market fluctuations. If companies are primarily focused on commercialising their products for external markets, a drop in demand or pricing adjustments could have a significant effect on the community's economic stability. Financial crises could arise as a result of this.

Environmental Degradation

Impact: Growing entrepreneurship may make the environment worse, particularly in sectors like agriculture and small-scale industry. **Rationale:** When natural resources are overused for financial gain without consideration for sustainable methods, it can result in pollution, soil erosion, and deforestation, all of which negatively impact the environment where tribal members live.

Land Loss and Displacement

Impact: As a result of increased entrepreneurship, tribal communities may experience land grabbing or be evicted from their ancestral lands.

Justification: There may be pressure to use tribal property for commercial endeavours due to the emphasis on development and commerce, which could lead to disagreements over land ownership and even evictions.

Limited Adjustment to Contemporary Business Methods

Impact: The failure of entrepreneurial ventures may result from tribe members' inability to adapt to modern business procedures.

Justification: Tribal societies, especially the older generations, may find it difficult to understand or adapt to the complexities of modern entrepreneurship, including internet marketing, money management, and customer relations.

Implementation

Effective implementation techniques are crucial to ensuring that entrepreneurship and innovation initiatives in indigenous communities lead to long-term empowerment and growth. The following is a list of steps and recommendations for a successful implementation:

All-Inclusive Engagement and Planning

Take action: Include tribal communities in the decision-making process to integrate local traditions, values, and objectives into the initiatives.

Implementation: Organise workshops and community events where tribal members can voice concerns or suggestions on business ventures. Verify that the solutions developed satisfy their needs and cultural norms.

Courses and Training Initiatives

Take action by providing specialised education and career-training programs that enhance the creativity, technology, and entrepreneurship skills of indigenous adults and youth.

Implementation: Establish training centres with courses on business management, marketing, financial literacy, and contemporary technology. Training women and other underprivileged populations should be given special priority.

Financial Support and Credit Accessibility

Act Now: Provide grants, microloans, and low-interest loans to indigenous entrepreneurs to help them launch and expand their businesses.

Implementation: Assist indigenous company owners financially by collaborating with local banks, government programs, and non-governmental groups. Make the application process easier and ensure that financial literacy is taught as part of the entrepreneurship curriculum.

Maintaining Customary Professions

Take action: Encourage innovation in established sectors to preserve cultural heritage and guarantee their long-term commercial sustainability.

Implementation: Support projects that modernise traditional occupations, such as eco-friendly handicrafts or organic farming. Establish cooperative models to enable farmers and craftspeople to work together to increase their market share.

Market Access and Infrastructure Development

Take Action: Boost market accessibility locally, nationally, and globally by utilising digital platforms, co-ops, and better transit.

Implementation: To increase connectedness, construct physical infrastructure such as communication networks and highways. Assist digital literacy initiatives so that indigenous business owners can use online marketplaces to sell their goods.

Observation and Assessment

Action: To identify areas for improvement and guarantee long-term success, continuously monitor and assess the impact of entrepreneurship programs.

Implementation: Establish a routine monitoring system to assess social well-being, income levels, and economic growth. Get input from the tribe's members to determine their level of satisfaction and what more help they require.

Entrepreneurship Programs with a Gender Focus:

Action: Create focused programs that support female entrepreneurs by giving women in tribal communities equal access to resources and training.

Implementation: Establish mentorship programs and allocate funds exclusively for women in order to assist female-led enterprises. Encourage women to participate in committees that decide on entrepreneurship-related programs.

Management of Sustainable Resources

Take action: Implement environmentally friendly practices to ensure that business ventures do not endanger the sustainability of the environment.

Implementation: Instruct people in sustainable agriculture, forest management, and resource conservation. Promote commercial initiatives that put environmental preservation first, such as eco-tourism.

Recommendations

- **Encourage Financial Inclusion:** Provide grants, microloans, and low-interest loans to indigenous business owners.
- **Extend Education and Training Programs:** Pay particular emphasis to vocational training and entrepreneurship education that is relevant to the

tribal way of life.

- Promote Gender Equality: Encourage and support women's participation in entrepreneurship through focused programs and incentives.
- Encourage Innovation: Create pilot initiatives that showcase creative solutions that have worked well in indigenous communities in order to encourage broader adoption.
- Strengthen Market Access: Develop digital platforms or cooperative models to connect tribal entrepreneurs with larger markets.

Conclusion

The analysis's findings provide insight on the potential and challenges of using entrepreneurship and innovation to strengthen tribal communities. Despite the obvious desire and some success, the lack of resources, financial backing, and educational opportunities prevents this promise from being fully realised. To guarantee lasting growth, a multipronged approach combining targeted interventions for financial inclusion, skill development, market access, and education is needed. Comprehensive community development will require promoting indigenous women and bridging the generational gap in the economic sector.

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Author Details

S. Alexander Danifel, Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India, **Email ID:** alexanderdanifel@gmail.com

P. Amarjothi, Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India, **Email ID:** amarjothisuruthi@gmail.com