



# Intra-Caste Economic Disparities Among Scheduled Caste Households in Kerala: An Analysis of Income and Expenditure Patterns

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes intra-caste income and expenditure disparities between Kerala Scheduled Caste (SC) households based on data from 377 households. Statistical tests indicate stark differences in SC sub-groups across income, consumption, as well as food consumption. The empirical results point toward the importance of policy interventions addressed to these divergences as opposed to lump-sum interventions.

**Keywords:** Scheduled Caste, income, expenditure, food expenditure,

## Introduction

The economic heterogeneity within Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India has been a subject of growing academic inquiry. Previous studies have extensively examined the overall economic conditions of Scheduled Castes, highlighting disparities in income, consumption patterns, and access to resources



when compared to other social groups (Deshpande, 2000; Thorat & Newman, 2007; Sreeraj & Vamsi, 2016). Scholars have also explored the economic vulnerabilities of SC households, emphasizing the impact of historical marginalization, occupational segregation, and limited access to social capital (Deshpande, 2011). However, much of the existing literature has treated Scheduled Castes as a monolithic entity, overlooking the substantial intra-caste variations in economic outcomes.

While studies have analyzed disparities in education, employment, and asset ownership within the Scheduled Caste population (Munshi, 2019; Zacharias and Vakulabharanam, 2011). C), relatively few have systematically investigated the intra-caste differences in household expenditure patterns. In particular, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how different SC sub-communities exhibit variations in income levels, consumption expenditure, and allocation of resources toward food and other necessities. This gap is critical, as the intra-caste economic differences can have significant policy implications, influencing the effectiveness of targeted welfare schemes.

This study seeks to contribute to the literature by analysing intra-caste expenditure differences among SC communities in Kerala. Utilizing cross-sectional data from randomly selected SC households, this study examines variations in family income, total consumption expenditure, and food expenditure across different SC sub-groups. By employing ANOVA tests, the study assesses whether these differences are statistically significant, thus shedding light on the economic diversity within the SC category. By addressing this underexplored aspect of economic disparity, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Scheduled Caste communities in Kerala. It provides empirical evidence to support public interventions for reducing intra-caste economic inequality, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and financial stability of marginalized groups.

## **Methodology**

The study is based on a cross-sectional survey of 377 Scheduled Caste (SC) households randomly selected from different regions of Kerala—South, Central, and North. Specifically, Trivandrum (South), Palakkad (Central), and Malappuram (North) were chosen, with further stratification at the taluk and local body levels. One municipality and one gram panchayat were selected from each taluk using systematic random sampling, ensuring a representative sample of SC households. The study employed ANOVA tests to assess whether these differences are statistically significant, thus shedding light on the economic diversity in terms of income and expenditure within the SC category.



## Results and Discussion

### Average Differences in Family Income, Consumption Expenditure, and Food Expenditure by SC Community

Table 1 presents the average monthly family income, total consumption expenditure, and food expenditure across various Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in Kerala. The results indicate significant variations in economic standing among these communities.

The Kanakkan/Padanna/Padannan households report the highest average monthly income (₹24,714.29), whereas Panan households record the lowest (₹22,192.31), reflecting considerable financial disparities. In terms of consumption expenditure, Kavara households exhibit the highest spending (₹16,911.76), suggesting greater financial flexibility or higher living standards, while Kalladi households report the lowest consumption expenditure (₹14,931.37). Similarly, Mannan/Pathiyam/Perumannan/Velan households allocate the highest amount to food expenditure (₹3,866.67), whereas Kuravan/Sidhanar/Kuravar households report the lowest food expenditure (₹3,250.00), highlighting differences in dietary habits and financial constraints.

Community-specific variations reveal diverse economic behaviors. Pulayan/Cheramar/Pulaya/Pulayar/Cherama/Cheraman households, with an average income of ₹23,404.76 and consumption expenditure of ₹16,440.48, occupy a moderate economic position. Their food expenditure (₹3,788.10) is slightly above the overall average. Conversely, Cheruman households, which report a lower income (₹22,378.38) and consumption expenditure (₹15,486.49), may experience economic difficulties. Interestingly, Paraiyan/Parayan/Sambavar households, despite a lower income (₹22,484.85), prioritize food spending (₹3,848.48), which is above the overall average. Kavara households, with an average income of ₹23,029.41 and consumption expenditure of ₹16,911.76, demonstrate relative economic stability. However, Kalladi households, despite reporting a moderate income (₹22,901.96), have the lowest consumption expenditure (₹14,931.37), suggesting financial constraints or frugal spending habits. These findings underscore the significant economic diversity within the SC communities, illustrating the distinct financial behaviors and constraints faced by different groups within SC group.



**Table 1: Average differences in family income, consumption expenditure, and expenditure on food items by types of SC community**

Type of SC community		Average Monthly income of the household	Average Monthly total consumption	Average Monthly food expenditure
Pulayan	Mean	23404.761	16440.47	3788.09
	N	42	42	42
	Std. Deviation	6317.067	4643.64	1103.69
Kanakan	Mean	24714.28	16690.47	3571.42
	N	42	42	42
	Std. Deviation	9077.67	5307.55	991.25
Cheruman	Mean	22378.3	15486.48	3548.64
	N	74	74	74
	Std. Deviation	5103.58	4342.34	802.26
Mannan	Mean	24444.44	16777.77	3866.66
	N	45	45	45
	Std. Deviation	8220.14	5282.42	855.46
Paraiyan	Mean	22484.84	16333.33	3848.48
	N	33	33	33
	Std. Deviation	3993.12	5035.29	1078.80
Kuravan	Mean	23066.66	15866.66	3250.00
	N	30	30	30
	Std. Deviation	3912.25	4074.59	537.39
Panan	Mean	22192.30	16230.76	3388.46
	N	26	26	26
	Std. Deviation	2059.99	4607.01	561.65
Kavara	Mean	23029.41	16911.76	3691.17
	N	34	34	34
	Std. Deviation	4706.44	3687.55	816.63
Kalladi	Mean	22901.96	14931.37	3680.39
	N	51	51	51
	Std. Deviation	5678.92	4963.88	826.32
Total	Mean	23180.37	16090.185	3637.93
	N	377	377	377
	Std. Deviation	6005.25	4701.58	879.62

Source: Estimated from primary data



### *Statistical Analysis of Economic Differences Among SC Communities*

Table 2 presents the ANOVA test results assessing the statistical significance of differences in family income, total consumption expenditure, and food expenditure across SC communities. The analysis indicates significant differences across all three categories.

The ANOVA test for family income reveals a statistically significant variation among SC communities ( $F = 2.255$ ,  $p = 0.0266$ ), suggesting that differences in average income levels are influenced by community-specific economic conditions. The between-group variation in income is notably higher than the within-group variation, emphasizing the role of community affiliation in determining financial standing.

Similarly, the ANOVA test for total consumption expenditure reports an F-statistic of 2.590 with a p-value of 0.0378, confirming significant differences in spending patterns across communities. The variation in average consumption expenditure across groups exceeds within-group variation, indicating that community identity significantly impacts household financial behavior. Food expenditure also exhibits statistically significant differences ( $F = 2.714$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ), suggesting that SC communities allocate resources toward food differently, possibly reflecting variations in dietary habits, economic constraints, or cultural preferences.

The ANOVA results confirm that the type of SC community significantly influences family income, consumption expenditure, and food expenditure. These findings highlight the economic heterogeneity within SC communities and underscore the necessity for effective policy interventions to address disparities and enhance welfare of the marginalised group.

**Table 2: ANOVA Test results for Average differences in family income, consumption expenditure, and expenditure on food items by types of SC community**

		F	Sig.
Family income * types of SC community	Between Groups	2.255	0266.
Consumption expenditure * types of SC community	Between Groups	2.590	0378.
Expenditure on food *types of SC community	Between Groups	2.714	024.

Source: Estimated from primary data



## Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of intra-caste expenditure differences among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in Kerala, highlighting the significant economic heterogeneity within this marginalized group. The findings reveal substantial variations in family income, total consumption expenditure, and food expenditure across different SC sub-communities, challenging the prevalent assumption that SC households form a homogeneous economic category.

The results indicate that certain communities, such as Kanakkan/Padanna/Padannan and Mannan/Pathiyam/Perumannan/Velan, report relatively higher income levels and expenditure patterns, while others, like Panan and Cheruman households, exhibit lower economic standing. The disparities in spending patterns, particularly in food expenditure, suggest that community-specific economic behaviors, financial constraints, and cultural preferences play a significant role in shaping household expenditure decisions. These variations underscore the need for more effective policy interventions that recognize and address the distinct economic realities of different SC sub-groups.

The statistical analysis using ANOVA confirms that the observed differences in family income, consumption expenditure, and food expenditure among SC communities are statistically significant. This reinforces the argument that targeted policy measures are necessary to bridge the economic gaps within SC communities. Uniform welfare policies may not effectively address the intra-caste economic inequalities; instead, customized programs tailored to the specific needs of economically disadvantaged SC sub-groups can enhance their financial stability and overall well-being.

From a policy perspective, these findings emphasize the importance of adopting a differentiated approach in the design and implementation of social welfare schemes for SC households. Government initiatives should consider intra-caste economic disparities and ensure that assistance reaches those sub-communities that are relatively more disadvantaged. Moreover, enhancing financial inclusion, access to education, and skill development programs can help reduce economic disparities and improve the socio-economic conditions of marginalized SC sub-communities. This study contributes to the broader discourse on economic disparities within marginalized communities by shedding light on the intra-caste variations in expenditure patterns among SC households in Kerala. Addressing these disparities through effective policy interventions and inclusive development strategies will be



crucial in ensuring equitable economic progress within the SC population. Future research can further explore the underlying factors driving these differences and assess the long-term impact of policy measures in reducing intra-caste economic inequalities.

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