



# Sustainable Lifestyle Transitions among the Soliga Tribes of Kathirimalai Hills

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**Abstract:** Sustainable lifestyles represent patterns of behaviour and consumption that support human well-being while minimising ecological impact and preserving resources for future generations. Among India's diverse tribal populations, the Soliga tribe of the Kathirimalai hills presents a compelling case of lifestyle shaped by ecological harmony, cultural heritage, and gradual socio-economic transition. Historically dependent on forest-based livelihoods and guided by indigenous knowledge systems, the Soligas have practiced environment-friendly ways of living. However, processes of globalisation, technological penetration, state-led development programmes, and forest conservation policies have significantly altered their socio-cultural and economic environment. The present study explores the shifting lifestyle patterns of the Soliga community with a focus on their social structure, cultural practices, economic activities, and factors driving change. Drawing on descriptive research and case studies, the findings reveal that while government schemes and NGO interventions have improved access to housing, education, welfare benefits, and political participation, persistent challenges remain. Limited digital access, low awareness of modern agricultural technologies, vulnerability to displacement, and restricted livelihood opportunities due to forest regulations continue to affect their well-being. The case studies further demonstrate internal variations among households based on land ownership, education, and technological exposure. Despite these challenges, the Soligas exhibit resilience and a willingness to adapt, highlighting the importance of culturally sensitive development strategies. The study concludes that sustainable tribal development must integrate traditional ecological knowledge with equitable policy measures, ensuring that modernization does not compromise cultural identity or ecological balance. This research adds to the understanding of how tribal lifestyles evolve in response to socio-economic pressures while retaining their indigenous values.

**Index Terms** - Sustainable lifestyles, Soliga tribe, socio-economic transition, tribal culture, globalization, digital divide, indigenous knowledge and Kathirimalai hills.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Life styles serve as “social conversations”, in which people differentiate themselves from other people, signal their social position and psychological aspirations. Since many of the signals are mediated by goods, life styles are closely linked to material and resource flows in the society. “Sustainable life styles are patterns of action and consumption, used by people to affiliate and differentiate themselves from others, which meet basic needs, provide a better quality of life, minimise the use of natural resources and emissions of waste and pollutants over the lifecycle, and do not jeopardise the needs of future generations.” (UNCED, 1992) Sustainable life styles should reflect specific cultural, natural, economic, and social heritage of each society. India has the largest concentration of tribal people anywhere in the world except perhaps for Africa. The tribals are children of nature and their life style is conditioned by the eco-system. India, with a variety of ecosystems, presents a varied tribal population throughout its length and breadth. A life style takes shape within the specific interweaving of economic, political, cultural and religious frameworks, patterns and discourses. Under conditions of globalisation, it is also greatly influenced by demography and technology. Tribal people are usually understood as those who have a mainly self-sufficient way of life, largely outside the mainstream of urban nation- states .According to the International Labour Organisation Convention 169 also makes a distinction between ‘indigenous and tribal’ through it defines tribal peoples whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations (Corry, 2011).

The process of tribal transition is related more to the change in the basic socioeconomic conditions of their life. There is no doubt that the assimilation of tribal population into the wider folds of society through the adoption of the language of the dominant landowning section of the locality by accepting their belief systems and thereby becoming Hindus or Christians are important aspects of transition (Damle, 1997). The tribal societies of India have come in contact with various external and or internal forces and are in constant change. As they are no longer in isolation, but exposed to various forces, so change in their culture is inevitable. Many people started exploiting the poor, illiterate, helpless tribal people and pushing them below the poverty line.

The development programmes helped the Soligas receive the benefits of housing, drinking water, public distribution cards for food, different types of pensions, and to some extent health facilities from the NGOs and Government. Slowly their socio- cultural and economic life style is changing and they are now participating in the Panchayathi Raj system and some have even become members of the Grama Panchayathi, Taluk Panchayathi, and Zilla Panchayathi. Even still they are facing reservation problem because some of

forward communities include in the Scheduled tribals categories so there need for sub reservation for forest based tribes. The Forest policy affected the tribal livelihood and they faced displacement and the NTFPs ban and with the BRT Wildlife Sanctuary being declared as a Tiger Reserve, they will again face displacement and it will affect their tribal culture and life style. Considering the above facts and findings the lacuna in each level/ stage an attempt is made to study the lifestyle of Soliga tribe.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Sajeev M.V et al (2023)** have conducted a study on the consumption habits of fresh and dried fish, as well as the factors that influence fish purchase, among the Koragas and Soligas. Additionally, we prioritized raising awareness regarding the advantageous effects of consuming fish and enhanced the tribes' ability to create fish-based products.

**V. Ramakrishnappa (2022)** have examined the vision areas of digital India initiatives and analysed various issues and challenges faced by Indian tribal communities to access digital services and digital platforms.

**Shoja Rani and Liya joy (2022)** perused the presence of a digital gap within the Paniya tribal population residing in the Kannur area. Furthermore, it identified the factors contributing to the digital divide within the Paniya Tribal community.

**Lahiri B et al. (2020)** attempted to develop a mobile-based fishery advisory prototype in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya as an alternate method of fishery extension to deliver the correct information at the right time for Garo tribal farmers.

**Nalini Sekaran (2018)** have analysed the tribes lived in the cluster of villages mainly in the Biligiri Rangana hilly areas of Karnataka. This study has made to trace the history of the soligas and socio-economic status of the soliga women since independence.

**Binoy S.S et al (2018)** explored about that the tribal literacy rates have increased, leading to the adoption of technologies such as Direct to Home (DTH) and mobile phones among the tribes. Technology is made available in hamlet areas because to the cell network coverage provided by the national government.

**Cheluvamba (2012)** has documented the changes that took place in the socio-cultural practices of soliga tribes of karnataka in the context of globalisation.

**Keshava (2005)** have compared the collected with the available data on growth pattern and observed the association between growth pattern and economic status of the soligas' tribe.

**Pown Radha (2005)** designed his study and identified the folk dances and sports inherent in the tribal people of Tamil nadu.

## OBJECTIVES

- To describe the profile of the Soliga tribes.
- To study the social structure and functioning of the Soliga tribes.
- To identify the factors influencing the Soligas' culture, economy, and social status.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of the data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure (Kothari, 2005). The study is descriptive in nature and case study was conducted. It is learnt from a review of the literature that, there are hardly any studies on the life style of the Soligas with socio-economic and cultural background at the kathirimalai hills. Hence, the descriptive research design was considered appropriate for the present study in order to contribute something new to the existing body of knowledge.

In order to get accurate data from the different stakeholders of the Soliga tribe, the technique of data collection, viz., interview and observation were adopted.

## CASE STUDIES

### Case 1

A 42 years old a proprietor of 2 hectar land and lived with his wife and children in kathirimalai village. It shows that he belonged to an upper-middle-class family earning Rs 12000- 15000 per month. His wife, was rearing animals on their farm and around three men have been working on his land for daily wages. This couple had four female and two male children; three of their daughters got married and settled in the same village; their two young male children are studying in a government middle school in Kathirimalai. He said they had customs that one should get married to their same clan (Tribal endogamy). Last year, their 4th daughter completed her 8th standard at the same school located in their habitat. So her parents planned to send her to a government higher secondary school, anthiyur. But she was not interested in staying in a hostel and continuing her studies because she lived her entire life of 13 years in her hamlet with her friends and family. He had a smartphone that he had purchased four years earlier, which was used by everyone in his family. Besides him, his son was using his smartphone to play games and watch movies. He (the respondent) is also doing the same, like watching movies and reels in share chat, YouTube, etc. Only organic pesticides are used, and only grow a few crops, such as wheat and ragi. So, they needed to learn about the soil testing laboratory and its importance. In this modern era, these laboratory centers play a crucial role in developing the agriculture field, like the cultivation of various crops and pesticide usage, etc. It shows that he followed the traditional cultivation style and was unaware of technology and its functions. Though some use of them in his village uses tractors in their landforms, sannagiriya uses only bulls.

### Case- 2

A 50 years old man was lived with his wife and seven children. He worked as a farmer in neighbour's land for daily wages, and her wife was also working for daily wages. He used to wake up in the early morning at the time of 4.00 AM. It shows Wake up early was one of the customs followed by their ancestors, and the tribal members of Soliga strongly followed it till now. Their three children were studying at kathirimalai middle school. Their elder daughter married within their same hamlet. Their elder son also got married and

lived with his wife and children. His younger son was discontinued her studies after completing the 6th standard. The respondent said his son was not interested in studies, but He forced him to attend school. But his son refused to continue his studies so he has worked for a daily wage for the past four years.

The respondent had a smartphone for communication, which was the only phone for all the family members. They lived in a small house with only two rooms. Among these two, one is the kitchen, and the other is the bedroom. He seemed to be worried that living in such a small hurt was inconvenient to his family members. So he planned to build a new concrete house for his family, but his economic background made him adjust. The government of India has introduced schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), which aims to provide housing for all by 2022. But these people are not aware of these types of plans. The informant was very disappointed that he couldn't fulfill his wife's and children's needs. Other than communication, he was not aware of any technologies.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlights the dynamic relationship between sustainable lifestyles, tribal traditions, and modern socio-economic transitions among the Soliga tribe. The Soligas, deeply rooted in nature, embody a lifestyle shaped by ecological balance and traditional values. However, globalization, modernization, and state policies have significantly influenced their way of life, introducing both opportunities and challenges. Development programs and government initiatives have improved access to housing, education, and social participation, yet issues such as digital exclusion, economic vulnerability, and displacement due to forest policies persist. The research emphasizes that sustainability for tribal communities must extend beyond material consumption to encompass cultural preservation, social inclusion, and empowerment. The Soligas' gradual adaptation to modern tools and governance systems reflects resilience, but the need for targeted awareness programs, equitable policy implementation, and sub-reservations for forest-based tribes remains crucial. Overall, a balanced approach integrating traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary development frameworks is essential for ensuring that the Soligas and similar tribal populations can thrive without compromising their cultural identity or environmental harmony. The study thus contributes to understanding how sustainable lifestyles can bridge the gap between tradition and progress in tribal societies.

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