Socio Economic Profile of Goat Farmers in Southern Region of India

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The goat is one of the smallest domesticated ruminants, contributing to the production of milk after cattle and buffaloes, and can survive on shrubs, trees, and desert scrubs and even thrive under minimum housing inputs. Goat farming in southern India is largely traditional, with low input and low output systems. The socio-economic profile of goat farmers is a critical factor in determining the productivity and sustainability of goat farming. This study seeks to analyze the socio-economic

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profile of goat farmers in southern India, focusing on parameters such as demographics, land use, income patterns, access to services, and market participation. For this study, three states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Maharashtra were selected. From each study location, 30 farms with not less than 10 adult goat holdings were selected. The primary data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews. Of the 180 respondents included in the study, 75.60% of respondents are male, followed by 24.4% of respondents are female. The findings showed that 39.4% of respondents had attended the Secondary level, 31.7% of respondents had not attended the secondary level, 22.2% of respondents had attended the primary level, and only, 4.44% of the respondents studied college and above. The majority of the goat farmers (45.60%) had been involved a decade in goat keeping followed by 11-20 years (37.80%), 21-30 years (15.00%) and above 31 years (2.80%) respectively. The socio-economic profile of goat farmers reveals their strengths—resilience, indigenous knowledge, and community-based rearing systems—as well as their constraints—limited resources, institutional exclusion and market vulnerability. This study contributes to that broader understanding and provides a roadmap for strengthening the goat farming sector in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and empowering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Goat farming holds an important role in the livelihoods of rural populations across India, particularly in the southern region which includes Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra. The practice is primarily adopted by marginal and small-scale farmers due to its low investment requirement, adaptability to diverse agro-climatic conditions and capacity to provide a steady source of income, nutrition and employment to the women and youths. In these areas, goats serve as a form of "moving bank" an accessible asset that can be easily liquidated during times of financial need like children's education, marriage and medical emergency.

The southern region of India contributes significantly to the national goat population. According to the 20th Livestock Census (2019), Tamil Nadu alone has over 9 million goats, with other southern states also reporting substantial populations.

Goat farming in southern India is largely traditional, with low input and low output systems. It is characterized by extensive and semi-intensive methods where goats are grazed on common lands, fallow fields, and along roadsides. These breeds are known for their adaptability, disease resistance, and dual-purpose utility for both meat and milk.

Goat farming would be more promising in the area if the issues regarding housing, feeding, and disease control as well as using improved breeding system could be solved. Government and non-government agencies should give an extra care in this area to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the farmers by intervening in the aforesaid management tools for improvement. Considering this, they should arrange regular training programmes and make them aware of the scientific feeding, breeding, management and disease control in goats. (Islam et al., 2015).

Women also play a major role in goat farming in India, often taking responsibility for feeding, heeding, breeding and weeding, yet they have less control over the income derived from goat farming.

The goat is one of the smallest domesticated ruminants, contributing to the production of milk after cattle and buffaloes and can survive on shrubs, trees, and desert scrubs and even thrive under minimum housing inputs. Among all the species of farm animals, goats are widely distributed in all agroecological zones of India. Indian goats contribute noticeably to the national economy and play a noteworthy role in the nutritional security of rural livelihood by providing valuable sources of animal protein like meat and milk (Bhakt et al., 2018).
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Small farmers and landless people make up the majority of the farming population in this area; with a significant proportion belonging to the most backward farmer's class. (Nithiaselvi et al., 2023).

This study, therefore, seeks to analyze the socio-economic profile of goat farmers in southern India, focusing on parameters such as demographics, land use, income patterns,

access to services, and market participation. The insights drawn will contribute to the formulation of effective policies aimed at strengthening the small ruminant sector and uplifting the livelihoods of rural households.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Area and Selection of Farms

For this study three states namely, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Maharashtra were chosen. In these states, Erode and Pollachi from Tamil Nadu, Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam from Kerala, and Ahmed Nagar and Miraj from Maharashtra were selected as the trial location as specified by the funding agency. From each study location, 30 farms with not less than 10 adult goat holdings were selected. The interview schedule was pre-tested with 15 goat farmers in a non-sample area to ensure clarity, relevance, and sequencing of questions. Based on the feedback, minor modifications were made to improve the flow and comprehensiveness of the instrument. The collected data was analysed statistically. The primary data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher and trained field assistants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted at the respondent's home or farmstead. Data collection was carried out during early mornings and late evenings to ensure that respondents were available and not engaged in farm or wage labour activities.

Age: It refers to the chronological age of the respondent in completed years at the time of interview. Age is a significant factor that influences labour availability, experience in goat rearing, and openness to adopting modern technologies.

Sex: It refers to the gender of the respondent who takes care of the goats. The respondents were categorized into male and female. Gender distribution in goat farming often reflects broader socio-cultural patterns in rural.

Education: It refers to the level of education successfully completed in formal schooling or college by the respondent. Education plays a critical role in awareness, management efficiency, and adoption of scientific goat farming practices.

Occupation of the respondent: It refers to the occupation of the respondent for earning

livelihood at the time of investigation, Occupation plays a vital role in determining a farmer's dependence on goat rearing as a primary or supplementary source of income. It also provides insights into labour availability, risk diversification, and the potential for income generation. In rural districts, goat farming is commonly practiced in conjunction with agriculture, wage labor, and other livelihood activities. which is defined specifically as follows:

a. **Primary occupation:** It refers to the occupation that provides more than 50 per cent of the respondent's family income.

b. **Secondary occupation:** It refers to the occupation that provides additional source of income to the respondent's family other than primary occupation.

Flock size: It refers to the total number of goats owned by the respondent's family at the time of interview. Flock size is a crucial indicator of the scale and intensity of goat farming operations. It reflects the economic status of the farmer, investment capacity, land availability, labour input, and reliance on livestock as a source of livelihood.

Experience in goat rearing: It refers to total number of years of direct experience of the respondent in goat rearing at the time of interview. Experience in goat farming plays a crucial role in shaping the management practices, productivity, and sustainability of small ruminant rearing. It reflects the level of traditional knowledge, practical skills, and adaptive capacity that farmers bring to livestock management.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Classification of Farmers Based on Gender

Of the 180 respondents included in the study, 75.60 per cent respondents are male, followed by 24.4 per cent respondents are female. Male respondents are more in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra (85 per cent and 88.33 per cent) compared to Kerala (53.33 per cent). Hence, it could be concluded that majority of the goat farmers are male in this study (Table 1). The goat rearing was done mostly by medium and small farmers and landless agriculture workers. In Tamil Nadu, in Erode and Pollachi districts garden land cultivation comprising mainly turmeric, Maize, Groundnut, Mulberry for

Sericulture, Banana, Sugarcane and Coconut gardens are prevalent in this area. In Maharashtra, Sugarcane cultivation is done in large scale. In Kerala plantation crops comprising rubber and areca nut tree plantation is present on large scale. Goat rearing is taken as mixed cropping and integrated farming components.

These findings are in comparison with the study of Bhagat et al. (2023) that goat farmers were mainly from the male domain (58.57%) whereas, only (41.42%) were female. Rawat et al. (2016), who stated that 62% of goat farmers in the north Goa were men, while 38% were women. Dhaliwal et al. (2022), also reported that 100% of goat farmers in Punjab were men and contrast findings displayed by Mallikarjuna et al., (2021), Misra et al., (2006) and Tanwar et al., (2008) Tudu et al., (2015), Bashir and Gamit et al., (2020) who stated that most of the goat farmers in their study were women.

3.2 Age-wise Categorization of Goat Farmers

Of the 180 respondents included in the study, Majority (58.9%) of the respondents belonged to the old age category, while middle and young age categories were 35.00 and 6.1 per cent respectively. It was also noticed that most of the respondents belonged to old age categories (Table 2). In all the study areas, the goat farmers were 50 and above years age group followed by 35 to 50 years and below 35 years respectively. The youth and middle-aged group are interested in non-agricultural activities like IT jobs and old age group continues agriculture and allied activities like goat rearing as a traditional occupation. The youth should be imparted interest and economic benefits of animal husbandry like commercial goat farming.

These findings are associated with Deshpande (2010), Sabapara (2016), Reddy et al., (2017), Yusouff et al. (2018), Bhikya et al. (2021), Mallikarjuna et al. (2021) and Bhagat et al. (2023). It shows that the traditional goat farming is losing popularity against new generation.

3.3 Social Status of Goat Farmers Based on Religion

The religion of goat farmers in the study area is given in Table 3. It is observed that from the Table 5 the majority of goat farmers were Hindus (86.67 per cent) followed by Muslims (7.78 per cent) and Christians (5.55 per cent) among the collected sample respondents in the study area. It is interesting to note that only in Kerala state goat farmers were Christians.

3.4 Educational Status of Goat Farmers

Of the 180 respondents included in the study, 39.4 per cent of respondents had attended the Secondary level, followed by 31.7 per cent of respondents who had not attended secondary level and 22.2 per cent of respondents who had attended primary level. Only, 4.44 per cent of the respondents studied college and above. Hence, it could be concluded that the majority of the goat farmers had not undergone formal education (Table 6). There is good scope for importing skills on scientific rearing of goat farming through hands-on training for goat farmers who do not have formal education.

These findings show a close association with the finding of Dhara et al., (2016), Bashir and Bhikya et al., (2021), Mallikarjuna et al., (2021) and Bhagat et al. (2023). who stated that the majority of the goat keepers were illiterate and had minimum school education but this finding is contradictory to the conclusion of Reddy et al., (2017) and Gamit et al., (2020) who revealed that only 8% and 44.17% were illiterate respectively.

3.5 Major Occupation of Goat Holders

The major occupation of respondents is presented in Table 5. In Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu Animal husbandry including goat rearing was reported as the main occupation in Kerala state agriculture was the main occupation and animal husbandry was a subsidiary occupation in the study area. Other occupations such as landless agricultural workers, Petti traders, and construction labourers were also involved in goat rearing. Tethering system goat rearing was most popular among other occupational groups.

These findings are in line with Beigh et al., (2020), Mallikarjuna et al., (2021), Deshpande et al., (2010) and Sujtha et al., (2023) animal husbandry was the primary occupation of the majority of respondents followed by agricultural labourers. Animal husbandry forms a significant source of livelihood for the majority of the farmers, where goat farming is an integral part of their livestock farming under prevailing agro-climatic conditions.

Table 1. Classification of farmers based on gender

Gender	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Men	51 (85.00)	32 (53.33)	53 (88.33)	136 (75.60)
Women	9 (15.00)	28 (46.67)	7 (11.67)	44 (24.40)

Table 2. Age-wise categorization of goat farmers

Age	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Up to 35 years	7 (11.67)	1 (1.67)	3 (5.00)	11 (6.1)
35-50 Years	16 (26.67)	24 (40.00)	23 (38.33)	63 (35.00)
50 and above	37 (61.67)	35 (58.33)	34 (56.67)	106 (58.90)

Table 3. Social status of goat farmers based on religion

Religion	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Hindu	57.00 (95.00)	44.00 (73.33)	20.00 (91.66)	156.00 (86.67)
Muslim	3.00 (5.00)	6.00 (10.00)	5.00 (8.33)	14.00 (7.78)
Christianity	0.00 (0.00)	10.00 (10.66)	0.00 (0.00)	10.00 (5.55)

Table 4. Educational status of goat farmers in the study area

Education	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
No Schooling	48 (80.00)	0 (0.00)	9 (15.00)	57 (31.7)
Primary	3 (5.00)	3 (5.00)	34 (56.67)	40 (22.2)
Secondary	3 (5.00)	57 (95.00)	11 (18.33)	71 (39.4)
Higher Secondary	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (6.67)	4 (2.22)
College and above	6 (10.00)	0 (0.00)	2 (3.33)	8 (4.44)

Table 5. Major occupation of goat holders in the study area

Occupation	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Agriculture	8 (13.33)	45 (75.00)	15 (25.00)	68 (37.78)
Animal husbandry	42 (70.00)	9 (15.00)	39 (65.00)	90 (50.00)
Others	10 (16.67)	6 (10.00)	6 (10.00)	22 (12.22)

3.6 Classification of Farmers Based on Agricultural Land Holding

Classification of goat farmers based on the agricultural land holding is given in Table 6. The majority of the goat keepers are in Tamil Nadu (51.67 per cent) and Maharashtra (61.67 per cent) followed by small and medium agriculture land holders. It is interesting to note that in Kerala no goat farmers belong to the landless category.

These findings are line with the findings of the previous studies of Sujtha et al., (2023) Mohan et al., (2012), Singh et al., (2018) and Mallikarjuna et al., (2021) that revealed majority of goat farmers belong to the landless, marginal or small farmers category.

3.7 Annual Income of Goat Farmers

The annual income of goat farmers based on mean household income per annum in the study area is presented in Table 7. In Kerala and Maharashtra, most of the goat farmers earned an annual income between Rs.0.5 to 1.5 lakh whereas in Tamil Nadu all the Goat farmers under study earned above 1.5 lakhs per annum. The variation in the annual income depends on the industries and commercial cash cropping like

turmeric and sugarcane were present in the study location in Tamil Nadu.

3.8 Classification of Farmers Based on Flock Size

The majority (52.2 %) of the respondents belonged to the large flock group (52.20 per cent), followed by 32.80 per cent respondents who had medium-sized flock size and only 15 per cent of the respondents had small flock size. (Table 8).

The flock size (Mean ± SE) of goat farms under study is given in Table 9. It can be noted that flock size was large in Maharashtra followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala state. Land availability, feed and fodder resources, grazing area and economic condition influence the flock size. Geographically Maharashtra state is larger followed by Tamil Nadu and Kerala state. It is observed that none of the farmers castrated the male stock.

The results are in agreement with Bhikya et al., (2021), Bhagat et al., (2023) and Mallikarjuna et al., (2021) where they concluded that goat farmer had medium flock size but some findings like Sabapara et al., (2016) and Bashir and Venkatachalapathy (2017) completely alter from present finding and concluded that majority of the goat farmers had small flock size.

Table 6. Land holding

Landholding (in acres)	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Landless	31 (51.67)	0 (0.00)	37 (61.67)	68 (37.80)
Small (1-2.5 acres)	11 (18.33)	20 (33.33)	15 (25.00)	46 (25.60)
Medium (2.5-5 acres)	6 (10.00)	30 (50.00)	12 (20.00)	48 (26.70)
Large (5 acres and above)	12 (20.00)	10 (16.67)	10 (16.67)	32 (17.80)

Table 7. Annual income of goat farmers based on mean household income per annum in the study area

Annual income	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Below Rs.50,000	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
Rs.50,000-1,50,000	0 (0.00)	39 (65.00)	38 (63.33)	77 (42.80)
Rs.1.5 lakhs and above	60 (100.00)	21 (35.00)	22 (36.67)	103 (57.20)

Table 8. Classification of farmers based on flock size in the study area

Herd size	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Small (10-12)	5 (8.33)	11 (18.33)	11 (18.33)	27 (15.00)
Medium (12-20)	9 (15.00)	37 (61.67)	13 (21.67)	59 (32.80)
Large (20 above)	46 (76.67)	12 (20.00)	36 (60.00)	94 (52.20)

Table 9. Mean ± SE goat flock size

Average Flock Size	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall n=180
Entire buck	3.05 ±0.33	2.97±0.16	2.85±0.5	2.96±0.33
Castrated	0.00 ±0.00	0.00±0.00	0.00±0.00	0.00±0.00
Doe	11.65 ±0.60	4.34±0.24	13.57±1.62	9.85±0.82
Young stocks	5.75 ±0.04	9.42±0.32	3.97±0.52	6.38±0.29
Total	20.45 ±1.14	16.75±0.65	23.78±2.10	20.33±1.63

Table 10. Goat farming experience of farmers in the study area

Experience (in Years)	Tamil Nadu (n=60)	Kerala (n=60)	Maharashtra (n=60)	Overall (n=180)
Up to 10 years	43 (71.67)	3 (5.00)	36 (60.00)	82 (45.60)
11-20 Years	9 (15.00)	41 (68.33)	18 (30.00)	68 (37.80)
21-30 years	3 (5.00)	16 (26.67)	8 (13.33)	27 (15.00)
31and above	5 (8.33)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	5 (2.80)

3.9 Experience in Goat Farming

The experience in goat farming as reported by the respondents is given in Table 10. The majority of the goat farmers (45.60 per cent) had involved a decade in goat keeping followed by 11-20 years (37.80 per cent) 21-30 years (15.00 per cent) and above 31 years (2.80 per cent) respectively.

These findings are in line with Mallikarjuna et al., (2021) and Bhagat et al., (2023) and that majority of the goat farmers had an experience of more than 10 years in goat farming.

4. CONCLUSION

Goat farming is more than a livelihood—it is a socio-cultural asset, a nutritional safeguard, and a stepping stone out of poverty for millions in southern India. where agriculture is vulnerable to rainfall variability and economic opportunities are limited, small ruminants offer a pathway to resilience. However, to unlock this potential, there is a need to move beyond piecemeal interventions and toward a systems-based approach that connects producers to services, markets, and institutions in a meaningful way.

The socio-economic profile of goat farmers reveals their strengths—resilience, indigenous knowledge, and community-based rearing systems—as well as their constraints—limited resources, institutional exclusion and market vulnerability. Addressing these issues requires not just technical solutions but also a deeper engagement with the social structures, cultural values, and power dynamics that shape rural livelihoods.

This study contributes to that broader understanding and provides a roadmap for strengthening the goat farming sector in a way that is inclusive, sustainable, and empowering. With the right investments and policy vision, goat farming can evolve from a subsistence activity to a dynamic engine of rural transformation in southern India.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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