

Demographic Status and Growth Patterns of the Jenu Kuruba Tribes in Karnataka: A Geographical Analysis

Dr. Chandrakumar

Associate Professor, Department of Geography,
Maharani's Arts College for Women, Mysuru

¹Received: 28/03/2025; Accepted: 30/04/2025; Published: 12/05/2025

Abstract

The research aims to elucidate the demographic conditions and growth trends of the Jenu Kuruba tribal community in Karnataka, along with their socio-cultural traits, way of life, and the geographical areas they occupy within the state. According to the 2011 Census, the total Scheduled Tribe population in Karnataka was approximately 4,248,987, of which the Kuruba tribal population accounted for 36,076 individuals. Consequently, the Kuruba tribe constitutes only about 0.85% of the overall Scheduled Tribe population in the state. As indigenous forest inhabitants, they strive to maintain their culture, identity, and ancestral ties to the forests of Southern India. This group is classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Karnataka, recognized for their traditional practice of honey gathering in the forested regions of Kodagu, Mysore, and Chamarajanagar, and they have a profound connection to the Western Ghats. The research paper primarily focuses on two key objectives: first, to investigate the origins and socio-cultural status of the Jenu Kuruba tribal population in Karnataka, and second, to analyze the spatial distribution and demographic patterns of the Jenu Kuruba tribal community throughout the state. This finding indicates a sustained long-term population expansion of the community, notwithstanding historical displacement and its nomadic past. Furthermore, with an R^2 value exceeding 0.70, the model demonstrates a strong explanatory, and the projected population for 2021 (46,024) can therefore be regarded as a high-confidence estimate suitable for informing government welfare planning and infrastructure development.

Keywords: Jenu Kuruba Tribal; Origin; Demographic; Lifestyle Patterns; Socio-cultural Status.

Introduction

Jenu Kuruba community are a traditional honey gathering tribe, and are among the original inhabitants of the forests of the Western Ghats that stretch over three states— Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Historically, their livelihood, culture, and economy were rooted in foraging, hunting, and the sustainable management of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), with a particular emphasis on honey collection. Their extensive ethnobotanical and ecological knowledge has been essential for effectively navigating and utilizing the diverse resources of the rainforest.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the origin and socio-cultural status of the Jenu Kuruba tribal population in Karnataka.
2. To study the spatial distribution and demographic patterns of the Jenu Kuruba tribal population across the state.

¹ How to cite the article: Chandrakumar (May 2025); Demographic Status and Growth Patterns of the Jenu Kuruba Tribes in Karnataka: A Geographical Analysis; International Journal of Development in Social Sciences and Humanities; Vol 19, 44-50

Hypothesis

1. The Jenu Kuruba tribal population has significantly increased in Karnataka over the past few decades.

Materials and Methods

The study is presently based on secondary data. Data have been collected from various sources such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Bhasha Sanchike- Ministry of Education, Census of India publications, published books, academic articles, reputable periodicals, official government websites, and journals related to tribal studies, demography, and the Jenu Kuruba tribal community. The study used statistical tools such as trend line analysis and the exponential growth model for the analysis of secondary data.

Jenu Kuruba Tribal Community in Karnataka: A Historical View and Concept

The Jenu Kuruba tribes are a traditional forest-dwelling community primarily residing in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. They are an indigenous community and a PVTG, concentrated in the border districts of Karnataka and Kerala. In Karnataka, they are located in the districts of Kodagu, Chamarajanagar, and Mysuru, with extensions into the adjoining regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, known for their deep ecological wisdom and unique relationship with the forest. Their origins are deeply rooted in the forested regions of southern India, and they are regarded as among the original inhabitants of the Western Ghats. The term 'Jenu' means 'honey' in Kannada, reflecting their traditional occupation as collectors of honey and other minor forest produce. In the early twentieth century, the Jenu Kuruba lived in forest huts and practiced shifting cultivation. Their culture and livelihood were closely linked to foraging and the sustainable use of forest resources. However, from the 1970s onward, forest conservation initiatives and the establishment of tiger reserves in the Nilgiri region—particularly Nagarhole and Bandipur National Parks led to the displacement of many Jenu Kuruba families from their traditional habitats. Along with broader processes of modernization, these conservation policies have significantly altered their traditional livelihood practices, settlement patterns, and overall way of life.

Demographic and Socio-Cultural Status of the Jenu Kuruba Tribal Community in Karnataka

The Jenu Kuruba tribal community classified as a primitive tribal group in Karnataka, had a total population of 36,076 according to the 2011 Census of India, comprising 8,767 households with 17,948 males and 18,128 females. Approximately 70% of this population is concentrated in specific taluks, including H.D. Kote, Hunsur, and Piriapatna in Mysuru district; Gundlupet taluk in Chamarajanagar district; and Virajpet, Somavarpet, and Madikeri taluks in Kodagu district. Physically, the Jenu Kuruba tribes are generally short-statured with a mesocephalic head shape and broad facial and nasal features. They share some anthropological affinities with the Kurumba of Nilgiri and Betta Kuruba communities, although notable differences exist in their material cultures. Although their numbers grew gradually from 34,747 in 1981, their literacy rate remains low at 56.1%.

Socio-Cultural Status of Jenu Kuruba Tribal in Karnataka

The Jenu Kuruba tribal traditionally lives in small settlements known as hadis. Historically, they were food gatherers who practiced shifting cultivation, which contributed to a semi-nomadic way of life. In recent decades, however, government interventions have encouraged their resettlement into larger, more permanent hamlets. Agriculture is practiced as a subsidiary occupation, and instead of using ploughs, they traditionally prepare the land by lightly scratching the soil with a bamboo spear-like implement. The Jenu Kuruba social organization is semi-nomadic and operates without formal institutions such as rulers, police, centralized administrative authorities, or religious monasteries. Instead, social order is maintained through indigenous systems of discipline and diffused authority. At the settlement level, leadership is structured around a headman (yajamana) and a ritual head or shaman (gudda). While the yajamana oversees decisions related to movement, daily activities, and social functions, religious authority is centrally vested in the gudda. The overall pattern of life in each settlement is believed to be guided by ancestral spirits, whose will is interpreted and communicated through the shamans.

Geographical Distribution of Jenu Kuruba Tribal in Karnataka

The population of the Jenu Kuruba tribal community in Karnataka is predominantly concentrated in the forested and hilly regions of the state's southern districts, reflecting their historical origins as forest dwellers and honey gatherers of the Western Ghats, as shown in Table-1.

Table -1 Geographical Distribution of Jenu Kuruba Tribal in Karnataka

S. No	District	Taluks of Habitation	Ancestral Forest Context
1	Mysuru	H.D. Kote, Hunsur, Piriyaapatana	Highest concentration, often near the Kabini Reservoir and the borders of Nagarhole National Park.
2	Kodagu (Coorg)	Virajpet, Somavarpeta, Madikeri	Hilly and forested areas historically linked to honey collection in the rich environment of the Western Ghats.
3	Chamarajanagar	Gundlupet	Area adjacent to the Bandipur Tiger Reserve in the southern part of the state.

Source: Census of India – 2011.

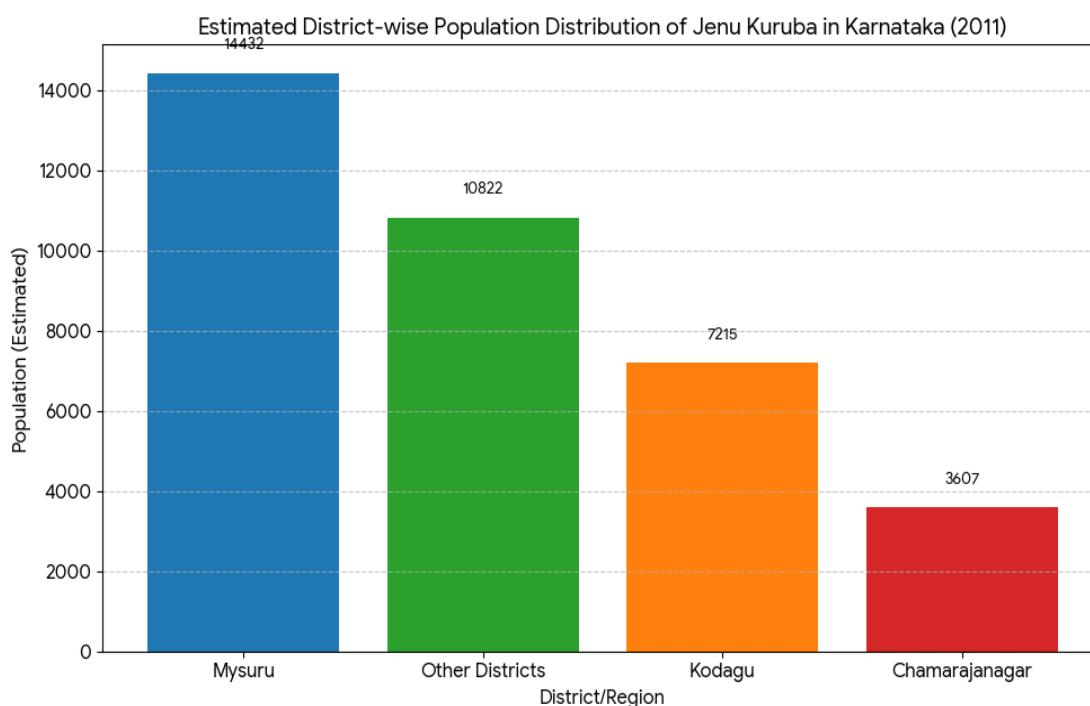
The above table shows that the geographical distribution of the Jenu Kuruba tribal in Karnataka. These districts encompass major protected forest areas, which form the ancestral home of the Jenu Kuruba. The population is intrinsically linked to the major forest areas, including the Nagarhole Tiger Reserve and the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, which are part of the larger Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

Table-2 District-wise Population Status of Jenu Kuruba Tribes in Karnataka

S. No	District	Population	Percentage of the total
1	Mysuru	14,430	40%
2	Other Districts (Scattered)	10,823	30%
3	Kodagu	7,215	20%
4	Chamarajanagar	3,608	10%
	Total	36,076	100%

Source: Census of India – 2011.

The following table presents the distribution of the Jenu Kuruba tribal population across various districts of Karnataka according to the 2011 Census. The total population of the community in the state is 36,076. Mysuru district has the largest share, with 14,430 individuals, accounting for 40% of the total population, indicating a major concentration in this region. Kodagu district follows with 7,215 people (20%), while Chamarajanagar district has a smaller population of 3,608 (10%). About 30% of the population resides in other scattered districts, highlighting that while the community is concentrated in certain southern districts, a significant portion is dispersed across the state.

**Graph-1:** Derived from table-2.

As per the graph, Mysuru district has the highest concentration of Jenu Kuruba tribes, with around 14,432 individuals, making it the largest single population cluster among the districts. The combined population in other scattered districts amounts to around 10,822, indicating a considerable portion of the community is dispersed across smaller or less concentrated areas. Kodagu district is home to about 7,215 Jenu Kuruba tribes, representing the third-largest concentration, while Chamarajanagar district has the smallest population among the specified regions, with an estimated 3,607 individuals.

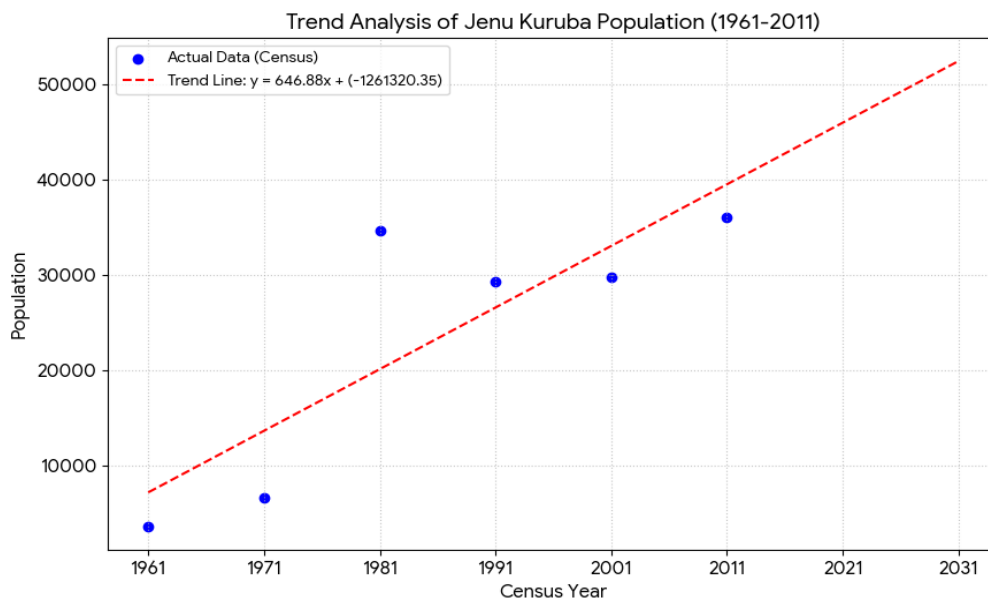
Population Growth of Jenu Kuruba Tribes

The population of the Jenu Kuruba tribal community in Karnataka has shown significant fluctuations over the decades. They are a designated PVTG in Karnataka, India, has a population of approximately 36,076, according to 2011 Census data. These variations are often attributed to changes in legal classifications and administrative boundaries rather than just natural demographic growth.

Table – 3: Census-wise Population Growth of Jenu Kuruba Tribes in Karnataka (1961–2011)

Census Year	Population	Decadal Growth (%)
1961	3,623	-
1971	6,655	+83.7
1981	34,747	+422.1
1991	29,371	-15.5
2001	29,828	+1.6
2011	36,076	+20.9

Source: Census of India – 2011.



As per graph, the performing a linear regression analysis on the census data enables us to quantify the long-term growth trend of the Jenu Kuruba tribes community and project future population figures. The above table shows that census wise population of Jenu Kuruba tribes in Karnataka from 1962 to 2011. The population of Jenu Kuruba tribes was 3,623 in 1961, which significantly increased to 36,076 in 2011. In Karnataka, the Jenu Kuruba tribal population decadal growth is 83.7% in 1971 to positively increase to 20.9% in 2011.

The Regression Analysis: The statistical analysis of the census data from 1961 to 2011 yields the following growth equation:

$$y = x - m$$

$$y = 646.88x - 1,261,320.35$$

Where:

y = Predicted Population

x = Census Year

m = 646.88 (Slope): On average, the community has grown by approximately 647 people per year over the last five decades.

This suggests that, on average, the recorded population has grown by approximately 647 individuals per year over the 50-year period.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2): An R^2 of 0.706 indicates a strong positive correlation, though it highlights the 'noise' in the data caused by the 1981 administrative spike (when area restrictions were lifted).

Testing Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant growth in the Jenu Kuruba population over the past few decades (slope = 0).

H1: There is a significant growth in the Jenu Kuruba population over the past few decades (slope \neq 0).

Table – Result of Regression Analysis for Jenu Kuruba Tribes Population

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	0.7055	Moderate-Strong Fit. 70.5% of the population changes are explained by the passage of time (linear growth).
Correlation Coefficient (R)	0.8399	High Positive Correlation. There is a strong relationship between the year and population growth.
Slope (m)	646.88	Annual Increase. The population grows by approximately 647 people every year.
Standard Error	7,839.2	Volatility Measure. This high value reflects the "shocks" in the 1981 and 1991 data.
P-Value	0.036	Statistically Significant. Since $p < 0.05$, we reject the null hypothesis and confirm a significant growth trend.

Source: The Researcher Compiled from Data.

The table above presents the results of the regression analysis conducted for the Jenu Kuruba tribal community in Karnataka over the period from 1961 to 2011. As per result, approximately 29.5% of the variation in the data remains unexplained by the model ($1 - R^2$), representing the residual variance. In this analysis, the residuals are most pronounced in 1981—when the observed population substantially exceeded the estimated trend—and again in 1991. Despite these fluctuations during the twentieth century, the statistically significant p-value (0.036) confirms that the observed upward trend is unlikely to have occurred by chance. This finding indicates a sustained long-term population expansion of the community, notwithstanding historical displacement and its nomadic past. Furthermore, with an R^2 value exceeding 0.70, the model demonstrates a strong explanatory, and the projected population for 2021 (46,024) can therefore be regarded as a high-confidence estimate suitable for informing government welfare planning and infrastructure development.

The long-term census data indicate a clear upward trend in the Jenu Kuruba population over the past few decades. Although some intermediate decades show fluctuations, the overall increase is substantial and systematic rather than random. Based on the observed trend, the increase in population cannot be attributed to chance alone and reflects a real growth pattern over time. Since the data demonstrate a consistent and substantial long-term increase in population, the null hypothesis is rejected. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the Jenu Kuruba population has experienced significant growth over the past few decades. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Suggestions and Conclusion

The present analysis of census data from 1961 to 2011 reveals that the Jenu Kuruba tribal community has experienced a significant long-term increase in population over the past five decades. Although the population trend shows certain fluctuations—particularly a decline during the 1981–1991 period—the overall direction of change is clearly upward. The population increased nearly tenfold during the study period, indicating substantial demographic growth. The statistical trend analysis confirms that this increase is systematic and significant, rather than a result of random variation. Improvements in access to healthcare, reduction in mortality rates, increased awareness, and gradual socio-economic changes may have contributed to this population growth. However, the observed fluctuations also suggest that the community has faced periods of vulnerability, likely linked to displacement, forest policies, livelihood challenges, and limited access to resources.

In conclusion, the Jenu Kuruba tribal community has demonstrated demographic resilience and growth over time, but population increase alone does not necessarily reflect improved quality of life. Therefore, there is a need for sustained, community-specific development interventions focusing on education, health, livelihood security, and cultural preservation to ensure that population growth is accompanied by overall social and economic well-being. This study highlights the importance of continuous monitoring and evidence-based policy planning to support the sustainable development of the Jenu Kuruba community.

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