

A NOTE ON THE WELFARE MEASURES AND VARIOUS GOVERNMENT SCHEMES IMPLEMENTED ON THE NARIKURAVAR COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The northern and central areas are home to the majority of the Narikuravars, a Gypsy population. Hunting is the main activity of the Narikuravar people. They are referred to as bead-people apart from that. Previously, Narikuravars were listed as members of the Most Backward Classes or De-notified Communities. They are classified as Scheduled Tribes in 2023 after years of fighting for improved access to school, work, and other necessities. The socioeconomic and educational standing of Narikuravars in the state of Tamil Nadu is examined in this research. It seeks to address the state government's programs and awards to improve the community both before and after they were granted Scheduled Tribe status. The main problems they face include poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, child marriage, school dropouts, and prejudice. Because they are ignorant of these challenges, the majority of them do not get benefits from state or federal government programs.

Introduction

Around the globe, Gypsies are regarded as refugees and are not granted the same privileges as regular citizens. German philologist H.M.G. Grellman discovered that the Surat dialect is quite similar to the language of the Gypsies, and that one-third of the language spoken by the Gypsies is Indian in origin. The language spoken by the Jat tribe in the Indus area was comparable to that of the Gypsies. Thus, academicians and philologists consider India to be the motherland of the gypsies. Some academics contend that there are some similarities between the Sanskrit language and the language of the Gypsies.¹ The Mohammedan chronicles include tales about nomadic tribes known as Zotts. Arab writers claim that they dwelt in the Indus valley and consistently coped with the invasion by Arabs. Afterwards, under Walid I and Yazid II, a large number of these tribes were imprisoned and relocated.² These Zotts rebelled against Arab dominance in 820 A.D. Together with the adults, women and children battled. Prince Motasim ended the brutal conflict in 834 by putting a stop to the enemies. These tribes were thereafter captured in 856 by Byzantines known as Romus.³ The Arab chroniclers claim that the Gypsies referred to themselves as Roms at that time, although this is not a reliable source. A third of the Calo language, which is spoken by Gypsies in Romania, Spain, Hungary, and Russia, has Sanskrit root words. Many academics believe that the great flight of Gypsies may have occurred during Alexander the Great's conquest of India. Nevertheless, nothing is known about the Gypsies' past.⁴

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are

1. To discover the socio-economic status of the respondents.

2. To know their awareness about government welfare schemes of the respondents.

Methodology

The researcher has collected sufficient secondary data related to the study, and hence the researcher adopted descriptive research design for the present study.

History

One of the Gypsy groups residing in Tamil Nadu, India, is the Narikuravars. They are seen as a marginalized group in society that is not allowed to participate in social, economic, or political activities. Reports indicate that there are around 30,000 Narikurava households in the state, with roughly 8500 families. Narikuravars were classified as chronic offenders under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871,⁵ which was enacted under British control. Following India's independence in 1949, this statute was abolished, and in 1952, they were de-notified. They thereafter received the title of Most Backward Class. In 2023,⁶ the Indian government classified them as Scheduled Tribes. Scholars often associate the Romani group with the Narikuravars. Narikuravars were denied their fundamental rights and treated like untouchables. Their lives are made much worse by poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and a high crime rate. They are skilled hunters and beadmakers who are part of a semi-nomadic culture. They often tell the tales of their forefathers who moved to the south from northern India. The majority of them are proficient in Tamil, and they typically spoke Vagraboli, a language that combines Gujarati, Marathi, Sanskrit, and Hindi.⁷

The Vagraboli language is also used in their folk music. They are not aware of the government programs for their welfare, and they cannot access English-language schooling.

Hunting was the Narikuravars' main source of revenue. They lost their livelihood when the Forest Department implemented stringent hunting laws, particularly for endangered animals. Unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy made their lives even more miserable, and eventually some of the young people of Narikuravar started engaging in criminal activity. Anuradha, a teacher from Narikuravar, claims in an interview that most of the kids in their town only finish the eighth grade. Children in Narikuravar spend more time selling jewelry, toys, herbal oil, and other items than they do in school. In addition to child labor, child marriage has a long history in their culture. Because men travel great distances and leave daughters alone at home, females will be married off at a relatively young age for security concerns. One organization, Narikuravar Seva Sangham, was established in 1996 and existed until the establishment of the Narikuravar Welfare Board in 2008.⁸ The organization's goal was to raise the community's level of life by guaranteeing that they received high-quality education. They are unable to access better health care services since their communities lack basic infrastructural amenities. They also link gods to the illnesses of pregnant women and children, which is related to their religious beliefs. Another significant issue is the dearth of qualified healthcare professionals in rural regions.

Government Schemes for Narikuravars

The Tamil Nadu government has announced plans for the majority of the underprivileged, including Narikuravars, until 2023. Reducing poverty, creating jobs, and improving education were the government's top priorities. The Tamil Nadu government has granted a 20% reservation for the Most Backward Classes or De-notified Communities, which would help Narikuravars' socioeconomic development. The government has provided these communities with bicycles, uniforms, and a variety of scholarships and hostel amenities. The Ministry for Backward Classes and Minority Welfare said that in 2018–19,⁹ the community's pre-matric scholarship cost Rs. 345.13 lakh. If the beneficiary's parent makes less than 2 lakh per year, free education is set up in degree, certificate, and professional programs. Providing rural

girls with an incentive program has helped to lower the school dropout rate. The government operates more than 1300 hostels around the state of Tamil Nadu to make it easier for students to complete their education. Students in the dorms are provided with complimentary textbooks, newspapers, and guides. Three medical examinations will be performed in the dormitories each year. The hostels offer guarantee basic facilities like a TV, an inverter, a mixer, a grinder, and bed linens.

In addition to improving education, the state government has started economic development programs. Sewing machines and iron boxes are distributed to urban households earning less than 60,000 rupees per year and rural people earning less than 40,000 rupees per year. The homeless who belonged to the Most Backward Classes and de-notified groups were given house sites. The Tamil Nadu government has approved many welfare board-based support programs for every group. The welfare boards will provide maternity aid, old age pensions, death benefits, accident compensation, and school and college student scholarships. The establishment of the Narikuravar Welfare Board, led by a Backward Class Minister, was approved by the state government in 2008. Financial support is offered for self-employment on a group or individual basis. Individuals will get Rs. 7,500, while the group will receive a subsidy of Rs. 1,25,000. Established in 1982,¹⁰ the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Economic Development Corporation was incorporated under the Companies Act of 1956. This body's primary goal is to guarantee that the target population receives loans with low interest rates. To encourage the sense of independence, the New Swarnima Scheme for Women was established. The recipient will get one lakh rupees with a five percent interest rate. In addition, the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Economic Development Corporation launched the general term loan program, the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, microcredit for men, and the loan-plus-subsidy program for small and marginal farmers to build irrigation facilities. With a former High Court judge serving as its chairman, the Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Commission began operations in 1993 after the Supreme Court of India's ruling in the Indra Sawhney v. Union of India case. The Commission will update the list of Backward Classes and handle community-related problems.¹¹

The President granted the Narikuravars Scheduled Tribe recognition on January 2, 2023. "This is the first time our request has been officially approved by the Indian government and passed both houses of Parliament," the Narikuravar group said, declaring victory. We express our gratitude to the lawmakers involved in this issue. Everyone, even politicians, agrees that this action was required for the people's well-being. The community will now be able to benefit from programs created to help tribal communities grow. In ten places, including seven districts where the number of tribal people is fifty percent or above, the Tamil Nadu government has launched the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP). Among them are the Pachamalai, Kolli, Kalrayan, Jawadhu, Sitttheri, and Yelagiri hills. In 2018–2019, the government launched the Comprehensive Tribal Development Program, allocating fifty crore rupees. In order to bring the tribal community to the forefront, TAHDCO¹² has promoted skill development programs, infrastructural development initiatives, education upliftment programs, economic development schemes, etc. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs launched the Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub Plan, which focuses on small-business and agricultural revenue-generating ventures. Raising the level of life for tribe members is the goal of this. Ten percent of SCA funding are used to teach ST youngsters in skill development, thirty percent are used to build infrastructure in tribal regions, and sixty percent are used for economic development programs. Since 2004–05, Tamil Nadu has benefited from the 10% SCA allocation that the Indian government has made available to state governments as incentives. Furthermore, the Indian Constitution has a clause allowing

grants-in-aid from the Consolidated Fund of India to be used for the wellbeing of the country's indigenous people. The creation of infrastructure, including roads, power, housing, clean drinking water, and so forth, was the primary priority. However, in order to provide high-quality education for indigenous pupils, a portion of these monies have been used for Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) from 1998–99.¹³ Tamil Nadu's seven districts—Kanchipuram, Villupuram, Vellore, Namakkal, Salem, Nilgiris, and Tiruvannamalai—are home to EMRS. The state government will get central aid under this article as a 10% incentive for promoting creative plans to improve the lot of indigenous populations in their states. In order to do this, health centers, awareness campaigns, new farming technologies, and sign boards with appropriate barter rates will be constructed in tribal communities. Every year, the Indian government provides grants-in-aid for the emancipation of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG). The tribal populations that fall under PVTG's jurisdiction are economically disadvantaged, uneducated, and still use antiquated farming methods. Brick kilns, beehive boxes, drinking water distribution facilities, and other infrastructure development projects have been carried out under this program. To assist students from the ST group in continuing their education, the Indian government has introduced pre-matric and post-matric scholarships. Numerous programs offered by the Central and Tamil Nadu governments were available to Narikuravars.¹⁴

Impact

Up until 2023, the Narikuravars were considered the Most Backward class; more recently, they were granted Scheduled Tribe status. They are included among the localities that have benefited from government programs both before and after 2023. Their lives are nonetheless stigmatized and degraded despite government interventions. Research conducted on this population in many areas shows that despite facing numerous social and economic challenges, they continue to lag behind. According to a 2017 research on the Narikuravar group in the Asakulam area of the Villuppuram district of Tamil Nadu, 78% of the Narikuravars there make beads, with the remaining Narikuravars choosing to hunt for a living. Just 7% of respondents make more than 10,000 rupees each month, while the majority make 5,000 rupees. According to research, they make between \$50,000 and \$70,000 a year, which puts them below the poverty level.¹⁵ The majority of them said that, in contrast to wealthy families, impoverished families are their primary clientele and that they would not, of course, shell out a lot of money for Narikuravars' goods. The average monthly income in the Pudukkottai area is 4000 rupees. With such a little sum, they won't be able to pursue school or get better health care. The majority of them are rubbish scavengers in the Chennai area. Over 70% of them anticipate receiving government assistance, such as a credit facility, to launch their own companies. This demonstrates unequivocally that they are either uninformed about government programs or unavailable for them.

Studies show that the educational attainment of the Narikuravar is quite low. Some of them left school after finishing elementary school, and many of them never got the chance to pursue further education. There are very few Narikuravars who go on to complete professional or higher education programs. Only 7% of Narikuravars in Pudukkottai district have completed high school, and 1% have pursued further education, according to research. However, because the community's children are more educated than their parents, we cannot overlook the generational shift in educational qualifications. Their lack of education, illiteracy, and poor English language skills were the main causes of their ignorance about government programs. The fact that Narikuravars identify as a nomadic group makes it difficult for government

representatives to deliver the appropriate message to their address. They lack the knowledge and awareness necessary to organize the family budget or calculate their earnings.¹⁶

Politicians often ignore the public and only engage with them when the election is close. Narikuravars in the Chennai area allege that when their houses were destroyed by floods, the government failed to rescue them or provide them compensation. Additionally, they contend that the processes are too complicated to comprehend and to identify the recipients of government programs, and that authorities are requesting additional documentation. Furthermore, as every process is becoming digital these days, computer knowledge is a sufficient need.

In addition to all of this, they face a great deal of prejudice in society. Narikuravars are often thought of being robbers and abductors. People avoid them because they are seen as untouchables in workplaces, schools, and even hospitals. They become a more marginalized and oppressed class as a result of their separation from society and the government.¹⁷

Suggestions and Conclusion

After a protracted battle, the semi-nomadic Narikuravars group in Tamil Nadu was granted Scheduled Tribe status in 2023. The neighborhood is still ignorant and backward despite government initiatives. Education will lead to more productive lives and builds the groundwork for change. Illiteracy in the Narikuravar village will be eliminated if more youngsters are given better education and the school dropout rate is decreased. They have access to government-provided scholarships, libraries, hostels, and other necessities. Colleges and schools are able to guarantee admittance to pupils from the Narikuravar community. By training young people, implementing skill development programs, constructing schools, offering free tuition, introducing technology, promoting computer literacy, raising awareness of government programs, setting up health clinics, and other means, students and faculty from various colleges can adopt and develop the community in social and economic ways under the RESCAPES program. By guaranteeing job prospects, financial facilities, skill development training, etc., Narikuravar women may be empowered and focused. The government need to do more to decentralize its programs and make them less complicated and more people-focused. By opening physical and online marketplaces, the government can increase the popularity of Narikuravar's goods. The Narikuravar community should be made aware of the need to eradicate social stigma, and more social efforts may help elevate them.

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