



A Study on Narikuravar (Nomads) Community in Palamalai Nagar, Sivagangai District, Tamilnadu

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ABSTRACT

In India we have achieved significant progress in the field of science and technology, agriculture, medicine etc. In spite of that we have deprived communities like the Narikuravar in Tamil Nadu, who are struggling for their rights to lead a socially enriched life with education, economics and social well being. This article aims to shed light on the life style of the Narikuravar community residing at Palamalai Nagar, piyoor panchayat, Sivagangai District, Tamil Nadu. A considerable population of 1473 Narikuravar community is living in palamalaingar, sivagangai district. The pitiable condition is that they are living together with families of their married children in a single roomed house. Among the school going Narikuravar children only 30% to 40 % show regular attendance. The dropout rate is also getting higher every year. As their earnings cannot full fill their needs, they are borrowing money from money lenders and repayment becomes a great burden for these people. Child marriage is one of the major menaces confronting this community. Recent announcement of Central Government to include Narikuravar community in Scheduled Tribe category would light the lamp in their lives.

KEYWORDS :

Introduction

In India we have achieved significant progress in the field of science and technology, agriculture, medicine etc. In spite of that we have deprived communities like the Narikuravar in Tamil Nadu, who are struggling for their rights to lead a socially enriched life with education, economics and social well being. We should take up the responsibility to uplift them to an empowered status in the society. This article aims to shed light on the life style of the Narikuravar community residing at Palamalai Nagar, piyoor panchayat, Sivagangai District, Tamil Nadu.

Population and Place of Living

A considerable population of 1473 narikuravar community is living in palamalaingar, sivagangai district. Palamalai nagar is named after the former collector of Sivagangai District who helped build 176 houses during the year 1992. Palamalai nagar is a non-descript place located 4 km away from the district capital of Sivagangai. Interestingly, Palamalai nagar is inhabited exclusively by the Narikuravar community. Currently there are 191 houses and about 547 families living there for about 30 years, out of which 423 family members are children. It is believed that their ancestors migrated to Tamil Nadu from Gujarat and Rajasthan. They are living in very old and almost ruined houses built by the government about 14 years ago. Some of these are in small shanties. Neither the damaged houses nor the shanties save them from the scorching sun or torrential rains. The pitiable condition is that they are living together with families of their married children in a single roomed house. The government has proposed to build new houses for them through the Narikuravar welfare board. Most of them are having ration card and voter ID.

Language

The Narikuravar in palamalai nagar speak vagriboli language like the rest of the tribe in other areas of Tamilnadu. But there is no written form for this language. They sing folk songs in Vagriboli. All of them are well-versed in Tamil.

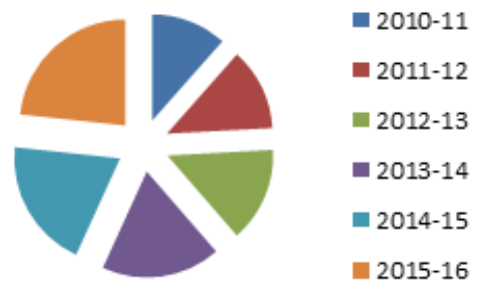
Educational Status

A small Panchayat Union Primary School with classes up to 5th standard is functioning in Palamalai nagar. Initially it was started by the collector Mr. Palamalai and then it was handed over to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Funded by SSA the school was running by the NGO called ASIFA as a Residential Special Training Center (RSTC) and it was named as "Undu, Uraivida palli". Though food was provided for the whole day, the NGO could not run the school due to abject lack of knowledge and interest of the Narikuravar students. Then the government took responsibility in the year 2010 and the school emerged as a Panchayat Union School from 26.07.2010. The enrolment details are given in the following table.

Table:1 Enrolment of students in Panchayat Union School in Palamalai Nagar, Sivagangai Dist.

Year	Class										Total		Grand Total
	I		II		III		IV		V		M	F	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F			
2010-11	7	10	5	3	4	4	2	2	3	3	21	22	43
2011-12	7	3	7	10	5	3	4	4	2	2	25	22	47
2012-13	5	6	7	3	7	10	5	3	4	4	28	26	54
2013-14	13	15	8	8	7	3	5	3	5	1	38	30	68
2014-15	4	10	13	17	7	7	7	3	3	3	34	40	74
2015-16	7	13	4	10	13	17	7	7	6	3	37	50	87

Student strength



The above table shows a gradual increase in enrolments every year. Despite the fact that this is a Government school, no other community children prefer this school, because of the presence of the Narikuravar children which obviously indicates social discrimination against Narikuravar community in the modern Social Scenario.

In addition to this, KR Government aided primary school; Sivagangai has 48 Narikuravar children who are enrolled there. For high school level, a very small number of these children are going to Raja Higher Secondary School, Allis Miller High School and the RRK Middle School in Sivagangai. These children are given free education and transport facilities by these schools. Among the school going Narikuravar children only 30% to 40 % show regular attendance. The dropout rate is also getting higher every year. Besides, they are also being supported and sponsored by an NGO called 'Contaction' by providing tuition

with food in morning and evening. Also SSA has the contribution of giving awareness program and identifying the dropouts.

The Government gives scholarship of Rs.500/- per year to the Narikuravar students. But the sorry state of affairs is that Narikuravar students are not even able to open a bank account and avail this scholarship.

In spite of these facilities, the children are not motivated to attend the school as they have negative perception on education. In case of female children, they continue their studies up to 8th Std or till the time of attaining puberty, whichever happens earlier. After that they are considered eligible for marriage. In palamalai nagar, only two girls have studied up to 12th Std. In the case of male students nobody has gone beyond 7th standard because they have to shoulder the responsibility of earning for their family along with their parents. After learning to calculate small amount of money, boys abort education and accompany their parents to the tribal trade of selling beaded ornaments. No wonder, the Narikuravar children are frequently absent in the schools. Sometimes the absence stretches up to 15 days as they go to nearby temple festivals to find a market for beaded ornaments prepared by their parents. In palamalai nagar, many intelligent children are not able to continue their education due to poverty.

Economical Status

In earlier days, the main source of income for these people was hunting. They lost their livelihood after the Forest Department introduced strict regulations and levied hefty fine for Hunting. Currently the economical status of Narikuravar in palamalai nagar is such that they cannot satisfy even their basic needs through family occupation of selling beaded ornaments. They purchase the raw materials such as beads from Madurai, prepare ornaments and go to public places like temples, bus stand, festival areas etc. to find a market.

Unmindful of their poor economic condition, they spend a lot for rituals and ceremonies. As their earnings cannot full fill their needs, they are borrowing money from money lenders and repayment becomes a great burden for these people. They remain in persistent debt-bondage for longer period and are unable to pay off their loans for generations. This adversely affects their social, cultural, economical and educational status.

Political Status

These people do not have the basic knowledge about our current political system and hardly show any interest in participating in the political movements. Owing to their lack of political knowledge many political parties are exploiting them.

Cultural Aspect Living Condition

Narikuravar community neither has proper access to necessary resources for survival such as drinking water, sanitation facilities nor to formal education. During day time nobody is seen in palamalai nagar, as all are busy selling beaded ornaments leaving aged in their houses. They buy rice from co-operative society and cook during evening time. Many of them buy unhealthy food sold in their area at cheap rate.

A considerable amount of their earning is spent on liquor for all members of the family including women. This habit is one of the major causes for their economic backwardness and poor quality of life.

Child Marriage

Narikuravar children are getting married in their own community in the same area or other area. Child marriage is one of the major menaces confronting this community. Female children get married as soon as they attain puberty. Pathetical enough, without getting awareness about how to lead their life, children become young parents. Even though a number of Laws are available to prevent the menace of child marriage, these laws don't bind the Narikuravar community or eradicate this social problem.

Rituals and Ceremonies

Narikuravar in palamalai nagar have their own ritual of worshipping God. Usually they have ceremonies in the month of august each year and mainly worship Goddess Kali, Marimmal, Meenakshi Amman and

God Madurai Veeran. They appease these Gods through different types of sacrifices such as Buffaloes, Goats and Pigs. Each Narikuravar clan has a bundle of cloths called sami-mootai, meaning God's bundle. It is filled with blood of animals they sacrificed and cloth dipped in their (sacrificial animal) blood. The sami mootai of one clan should not be shared by other clan. Upon the death of the head of the family his eldest son inherits the sami mootai. This practice continues for generations altogether. A clan-leader's prestige and standing depends on the antiquity of his samimootai. They invite their relatives from other areas for functions and rituals. Least caring for their poor economical conditions, they spend beyond their means in these functions. For that they borrow huge money on high interest from money lenders and later they struggle hard to repay the debt. Most often, they only manage to pay the interest, while the principle amount keeps mounting.

On the brighter side, unlike other people who pray and care for their welfare, the Narikuravar worship for the welfare of the country, their soil and for the bountiful Nature.

Narikuravar Welfare Board

In May 2008, the creation of welfare board for the Narikuravar headed by the backward caste minister was authorised by state government in Chennai. The Narikuravar in palamalai nagar are getting welfare schemes from this board through backward and most backward welfare department in collector office, Sivagangai. All the Narikuravar families in palamalai nagar were given Rs.17,500/- as welfare fund. Each family is given an identity card from the board. But none of the welfare measures such as accidental death assistance (Rs 100000), assistance for marriage (Rs 2000), assistance for pregnancy (Rs 6000), old age pension (Rs 400 per month) etc. reaches them.

Included in ST Category – a Boon

Recent announcement of Central Government to include Narikuravar community in scheduled tribe category would light the lamp in their lives. This status has been attained by this community through their long pending demand for over 35 years. As early as 1980, the State Government of Tamil Nadu had sent a recommendation to the Central Government for including them in the ST list. It will bring about a sea change in the social and economical status of Narikuravar community. To be precise, the young generation will get all the scholarships needed to continue their education and later on they will also get quota to enter the Government job. This huge step forward would result in resurgence of Narikuravar community not only in Educational, Economical and Employment spheres but also in the political arena.

When asked to opine about this announcement, the Narikuravar community in palamalai nagar expressed their immense happiness and confidence about their development in future. With proper access and awareness about this Government policy, this community can definitely be enriched socially, economically and culturally.

Suggestion

In spite of various welfare schemes given by government, Narikuravar don't have awareness to avail this. So the need of the hour is to create easy access to the schemes given by the government. Also they should be cautious about their health and environment. They must realise the importance of education and culture. They should be prevented from political exploitation and awareness must be created about their democratic rights. One of the main reasons for backwardness of these people is their isolated status. The children of nomadic people should be given the chance to mingle with other community where they would come in contact with other people, and get an opportunity for turning a new leaflet. This would help in their eventual assimilation in the society.

There is no organized financial assistance or Subsidised Loans for the business of Narikuravar community. If a family invests five lakhs rupees on raw material, it can make hundred percent profits. But banks don't come forward to give them loan and support their business. These issues must be addressed by the Government and Banks should be given direction to help in the economic upliftment of the Narikuravar community. If the Government gives legal patta and house bond to the Narikuravar, they can produce them as guarantee to get loan from the banks.

Awareness programme about development of culture, significance of education, consequence of child marriage can be conducted by NGO and other social organisation. Further, researchers can throw limelight on them by doing relevant projects.

Conclusion

Sensitizing the Narikuravar community and bringing them into main stream will lead to their comprehensive development. It is the bounden duty of the government and the society to lend a helping hand to the Narikuravar community to uplift them from their deprived status and ease their social stigma. The Government should also take steps to bring about an empowerment among people to make their life better. The recent ST status announced by the Government will prove to be a gateway for Narikuravar community to join the mainstream of life.

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