



Life Style And Major Issues Pertaining To The Narikuravar (Nomads) Community In Tamil Nadu

Dr. J. Jayachithra

Assistant Professor of Education, Alagappa University College of Education, Karaikudi-630003

KEYWORDS

Introduction:

This article aims to present the status of the 'Narikuravar' Community in Tamilnadu, by highlighting their lifestyle and bringing out the major social issues that the community confronts in the Society.

Narikuravars are widely known as nomadic communities having their own unique way of life and beliefs. The Narikurava are an indigenous group of people, living in Tamil Nadu. The name Narikurava is composed of the Tamil words "Nari" and "Kurava" –Nari means jackal and Kurava means people. So Narikurava means "Jackal People". The name relates to the former livelihood of the Narikurava-the hunting of wild animals. The ethnic group of the Narikurava holds an extremely underprivileged status within current Indian society. They neither have access to necessary resource for survival, such as drinking water or sanitation facilities, nor to formal education

Status of Narikuravars in Tamilnadu:

The **Narikuravars** are a nomadic community of people from Tamil Nadu. Their population is not more than 30000 in Tamil Nadu. They have no representation in any decision making bodies. The main occupation of the people who originally belong to the indigenous tribes, is hunting. But as they were prohibited entry into the forests to pursue this livelihood, they were forced to take up other alternatives such as selling beaded ornaments to survive. Hence they migrate from place to place to find a market for their beads. Children accompany the adults wherever they go, which means they never get to attend school.

Presently they are listed under most Backward classes in Tamilnadu and OBC in the central Government list.

Language:

The Narikuravas speak an Indo-Aryan language called **Vagri-boli**. Vagri-boli is a Western Indian language of the Indo-Aryan family. Due to this reason, they are also known as Vagris or Vagrivalas. Almost all Narikuravas are well-versed in Tamil. However, most of the Narikurava hymns and folk songs are in Vagri-boli.

Occupation and Living Conditions:

As an ideal type, the nomads do not have a fixed home. They may have a story of their origin, the place where they lived before journeying eternally, but they do not have a place to which they return after travelling for some months in connection with their livelihood.

Semi-nomads are 'partial nomads' – they have fixed habitations to which they return once a year. One of the main examples of semi-nomads is of pastoral people, who move with the herds of their animals after the monsoon harvest and return to their respective villages just before the onset of rains. For eight to nine months, when they are out of their settlements, moving with their animals in search of pasture, their houses either remain locked or they leave their women, children, old

people back who not only to look after the habitation, but also to sow winter crops, if any.

Tent/Jhuggis are the most common features in places of stay. Most of the communities live in poor living conditions and are deprived of basic amenities, such as toilets, water, electricity, etc. None of the families in the community own any land. These communities do not get wage employment for all seven days in a week.

Major Issues confronting the Narikuravar Community:

The ethnic group of the Narikuravars are attributed to an extremely underprivileged status in the Indian Society. They neither have access to necessary resources for survival, such as drinking water or sanitation facilities, nor to formal education.

The following are few of the major issues that are confronting the Narikuravar Community:

Discrimination

Due to their consumption of animals and places of settlement and other habits, they are classified as untouchables as per the Hindu varna system and are excluded from streets inhabited by upper castes. Hence they have been classified as OBC and not as Scheduled Tribe in their home state of Tamil Nadu. This has led to protests and resentment from the community. As the Narikuravars do not have a settled life and permanent settlement their children do not attend schools which are a vital aspect of discrimination in the modern social scenario.

Illiteracy

Education is a mirage to the Narikuravar communities. It is no wonder that these communities are largely illiterate and those who are educated are educated mostly up to Eighth standard only. Various surveys clearly reflect that the Denotified and Nomadic communities have poor access to education due to the problem of livelihood, security and sustenance.

Children are initiated into income earning activities at a very tender age. They are not motivated to attend schools due to the perception that education does not ensure any livelihood and the educated children will be a liability as they will not take to their traditional calling once educated. Poverty and lack of citizenry rights deny them access to basic rights

High Crime rates and Unemployment

High crime rates and unemployment are other problems which afflict the Narikuravar community. The proscriptions of fox-hunting as well as killing endangered species of birds and wildlife have depleted the Narikuravas of their traditional sources of livelihood. As a result, unemployed Narikurava youth are taking to crime and illegal activities. There have also been instances when Narikuravars have been arrested for the possession of unregistered firearms as country rifles which are banned according to the Indian laws.

Low Human Development Index and High Relative Deprivation Index.

In other words in matters of health, livelihood, occupation, and education, their

Community are lowly placed in Society. They have long periods of hunger; they remain in debt-bondage for longer period, and are unable to pay off their loans for generations; they perpetually experience the scarcity of resources. This is reflected in their social, economic, cultural, and educational backwardness

Child Marriage

Early marriage is a big threat for this community. 90% of the children get marriage before the age of 14 years. It denies the young an opportunity to grow and empower themselves. It challenges the basic right of these children to education, health, protection and development. The girls are forced into it a lot more, in comparison to their male counterparts which consequently impacts girls with more intensity.

Lack of Empowerment.

The nomadic communities have been at the margin of the political system. Since they do not have a permanent residence, they have not been able to obtain an 'Identity Card', or any other proof of their being a citizen of the state. Their names do not exist in the list of voters List in any area. As a consequence of this, they are debarred from all those ventures that require a proof of their citizenship. They are denizens of the nation without the rights of citizenship

Welfare Measures

In 1996, a Social Welfare Organization named 'Narikurava Seva Sangam' was formed in order to educate Narikurava children and facilitate them towards leading a settled life. Other social-welfare organizations too, have poured in their efforts to improve the lives of the Narikuravas.

In May 2008, the creation of a Welfare Board for the Narikuravas headed by the Backward Classes Minister was authorized by the State Government. However the enrolment is very low and slow. All those with membership would be eligible to the various government schemes for the minorities including marriage grant, educational loan, maternity loan, accident insurance, old age pension, etc.

But most of these people do not have the awareness about the scheme implemented by the welfare board. Sensitizing them and bringing them into the mainstream society are very important for facilitating them to lead a dignified life. The undeniable demand to remove them from the Backward Classes list and include them into Scheduled Tribes is a major need that is yet unfulfilled.

Conclusion:

We live in an era of global social life where every ethnic community are being recognized and acknowledged that their inclusion into the social mainstream is not an 'option' but a 'compulsion' for the respective Governments and other stakeholders.

In this scenario the plight of the Narikuravar Community is very pathetic as they are subjected to various kind of discrimination; as a result they are a living in poor social conditions, particularly when the cause of Human Rights and Human Development is debated as an imperative agenda of Social Development. What we need is a commitment strategic system of Social Welfare Administration to ensure that the Narikuravar Community has a focussed intervention to bring them out of their existing cycle of poverty and deprivation.

If the Narikuravar Community has to be given a fair chance to develop themselves and lead a socially satisfactory life, then there must be a concerted effort on the part of the Government, Civic Organizations to play an enabling role in their uplift to an Empowered Status in the Society.

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