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A Study on Education and Employment Hurdles Faced by the Narikuravar Community in Tamilnadu

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ABSTRACT: The Narikuravar community is known as the gypsies of Tamil Nadu. The society is Peripatetic nomadic by nature, and its makeshift communities may be found all across Tamil Nadu. The Narikuravar are hunters and gatherers who are also well-known for their beadwork, basketry, and fortune-telling abilities. They are extremely poor, nomadic, and severely disadvantaged because of the quirks of their language, nomadism and abject poverty. Education is the most important instrument for improving the quality of life for a community or civilization. Society has to embrace and assist a particular community when they step forward to pursue education. One such community in Tamilnadu that lags behind in terms of jobs and education is Narikuravar.The Narikuravar people are frequently marginalized by society and have restricted access to formal jobs, healthcare, and education. Narikuravar has imagined a path from poverty and access to fundamental rights for generations. Following a protracted legal battle, the Narikuravar community has been listed as a scheduled tribe after a struggle of forty years. This study focuses on the current obstacles facing the Narikuravar community in Tamilnadu, India, in obtaining employment and educational possibilities after receiving an ST status. This study was conducted in the Chennai gypsy colony of Kotturpuram. The researcher employed an interview schedule as a means of gathering data. Data were gathered from school-age children, community elders, and college students.The researcher had found that there are challenges in getting education and employment due to the complication of getting an ST certificate and what to do after getting it and limited awareness about government schemes.

KEYWORDS: Challenges, Education, Employment, Gypsies, Narikuravar, Nomadic, Peripatetic, ST Status.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous tribes continue to migrate around the world in order to meet their biogenic demands for food, clothing, and shelter, which they strive to do through hunting, agriculture, herding, and other means. As a result, people frequently refer to them as "nomadic tribes." However, the characteristics of Indian nomadic tribes and the reasons behind their nomadism are distinct. Determining the origin of the many nomadic tribes is a challenging task. These tribes are mentioned in certain ancient Indian texts. But as times have evolved, so too have the reasons behind their nomadism.The term 'Nomad' has been derived from the original Greek word 'Nemo', meaning "animal husbandman" or "cattle rearer". The European Continental population remained in a state of cattle herders for a long time. Only later, do they evolve a steady lifestyle. On the Indian Subcontinent, however, the presence of cattle herders, hunters and food' gatherers is noticed in all the stages of evolution of human civilization (Mane, Laxmaxi,1997).Therefore, the term "nomadic tribes" refers to those tribes that are on the outer reaches of mainstream society, lack a village of their own, own no permanent homesteads or agricultural land, and constantly migrate in search of work. These tribes are also considered to be socially, economically, and educationally backward.The origin of the nomadic tribes in India may.be traced to three sources: (1) the tribes that survived in dense jungles for thousands of years in isolation from the mainstream human civilizations, e.g. Santhals, Bhils, Korkus, Kolams, Gonds, Warlis, Katkaris, etc.; (2) the tribes that, consequent to the annihilation of their natural habitat, survived on the periphery of the human civilization and sustained on beggary or by practicing their aboriginal skills, e.g. Kaikadis, Makadwalas, parudis, Gopals, Chitrakathis, Joshis, Paradhis, Kanjarbhats, etc.; (3) the tribes that survived on the established.caste system of the mainstream society but lived on its fringes, e.g. Ramoshis, Berads, Vadars, Ghisadis, Gondhalis, Mang-Garudis, etc.

The research on south Asian nomads is mainly centered on pastoralists, and chiefly investigates aspects of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, but, with some exceptions, is silent on health, education and development (Sharma, 2011). Indian society comprises castes, tribes, religions, and nomadic communities. The nomadic communities are outside of the caste system. In India, about five hundred different communities of mobile herders, foragers, and peripatetics have been estimated, and their population is roughly seven percent of the total (Rao and Casimir 2003). Nariuravar is one of the nomadic communities in Tamilnadu, India.

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Historical view of nomadic - denotified tribe in India:

The history of Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic communities of India is one of persecution, subjugation, and neglect. Little is known about these communities, and the colonial state hardly realized the plight of these branded communities under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, which forcibly alienated them from their traditional occupations and habitations through other subsequent legislations (Government of India , 2017). The status of these communities can be broadly classified into two phases – pre-independence and post independence. The pre-independence phase was mainly associated with the exploitation and discrimination in the form of the Criminal Tribes Act 1871. The post-independence phase began with symbolic repartitions on the part of the newly established state but stopped short of impactful and meaningful legislative and policy measures. The colonial notion and tag of criminality percolated in the mindset of the newly established government. Consequently, today they have come to represent the poorest of the poor, often invisible from government records and unable to benefit from the state (Government of India, 2017).

Present status of Nomadic Tribe - Denotified Tribe (NT-DNTs):

There is a need for coordinated efforts towards rehabilitation because the DNTs are still burdened by the labels and ideas that have been their lot since the colonial period. The responsibility for enacting long-lasting and truly successful change rests with the federal and state governments, even though these initiatives must be multifaceted in order to address gender bias, persistent underdevelopment, and illiteracy.(Bokil, 2002). De-notified tribes, listed as criminal tribes under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 - a colonial law. After coming under several law variations, these tribes were eventually delisted after 1947 (Indian Express, 2018). In Indian society, the so-called de-notified tribes—previously referred to as ex-criminal tribes—occupy this artificially created category. The most recent survey results state that there are 198 groups in India that are nomadic and de-notified tribes, meaning they are spread out, disorganized, and absolute strangers. They don't understand social justice, and economic disempowerment ultimately led to bonded labor, slavery, and poverty. Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes are the reserved category under which the majority of these communities fall.' (Gandhi, and Sundar, 2020).DNTs and NTs as separate categories are found only in three states in India -

Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu. These states created a separate category for DNT communities. A separate category is created in Maharashtra called Vimukt Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT). In Tamil Nadu, DNTs and NTs are clubbed in a separate category called DNC (de-notified communities). In Gujarat, they are considered DNT communities. Other than these three states, DNTs are included in constitutional categories called SC or STs (Bhandalkar, 2017). According to the Idate Commission Report (2017), "although many of the de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes are spread among SC/ST/OBC, many are still not classified anywhere and have no access to socio-economic benefits whether education, health, housing or otherwise. There are 313 Nomadic tribes in India" (Rathod,2000)'India alone is estimated to have a nomadic population of at least 60 million (between 7-10 percent of the population) (National Convention, 2005, cited in Krätli and Dyer, 2009). According to the Chairperson of the National Commission on De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Tribes (NCDNSNT), Balkrishna Renke, there are 11 crores of De-notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic people in India (Sharma, 2011). This is a rough estimate, but the exact population is still unavailable. Research is carried out on tribes, but hardly non-Denotified tribes, pastoral nomads, etc., are represented in academia and research. There is literature written from the colonial notion's perspective, but the nomad's real plight is hardly described.

Status of Narikuravars in Tamilnadu:

The Narikuravar community, a specific and ancient nomadic group in India, embodies a wealthy tapestry of subculture, traditions, and a completely unique manner of life. With a history deeply rooted in the subcontinent, the Narikuravars have traversed landscapes, facing demanding situations and contributing to the numerous cultural mosaic of India. This nomadic community, often known as gypsies or itinerant wanderers, has a storied beyond that warrants exploration to understand their traditions, struggles, and contributions to the broader Indian society.The Narikuravars are spread across diverse states in India, with great populations in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala. Their nomadic life-style has traditionally revolved around a few key elements: a close reference to nature, traditional occupations, and a distinct social shape. Living in small, near-knit corporations, the Narikuravars have preserved their cultural identification through centuries of migration, adapting to the changing landscapes whilst maintaining a robust sense of network.

One of the defining capabilities of the Narikuravar network is their deep courting with nature. Historically, they have been regarded for his or her capabilities in searching and gathering, relying on the assets supplied by means of the herbal world for sustenance. Over the years, this reference to nature has developed, and the Narikuravars have developed a profound expertise of natural medication, which performs an essential position in their traditional recuperation practices. The expertise of medicinal flora, surpassed down via generations, reflects the network's reliance on nature for both survival and nicely-being.The traditional occupations of the Narikuravars have been fashioned by their nomadic lifestyle. While hunting and accumulating had been essential to their early subsistence, the network has various livelihood techniques over the years. Basket weaving, avenue performances, and fortune-telling are the various numerous occupations that the Narikuravars have engaged in to sustain themselves. The difficult craftsmanship displayed in their hand-crafted baskets and the spell binding road performances, frequently proposing traditional

music and dance, spotlight the community's creative prowess.

Despite the richness in their cultural heritage, the Narikuravars have faced ancient marginalization and discrimination. Stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding their nomadic life-style have led to social exclusion, proscribing their access to schooling, healthcare, and other essential services. The loss of constant settlements has also posed challenges in terms of securing land rights, in addition exacerbating their vulnerability. Efforts to deal with these problems and uplift the network have gained momentum in recent years, with numerous governmental and non-governmental projects aimed at enhancing their socio-economic conditions.

The social structure in the Narikuravar community is characterized by a sturdy feel of cohesion and interdependence. Each family unit performs a critical function within the collective properly-being of the network, with obligations disbursed among special contributors. The elders preserve a function of admiration, serving as repositories of traditional understanding and expertise. The communal nature of choice-making fosters a feel of belonging, and disputes are regularly resolved in the network, reinforcing their inner cohesion.after four decade struggle Narikuravar community got ST status in september 2022.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Phillipe Cupertino Salloum e Silva (2020) conducted a study on “Gypsies, Coloniality and the Affirmation of Human Rights in Brazil” Various socioeconomic and ethnic minorities in Brazil, including Quilombolas, Indigenous peoples, the elderly, and those with disabilities, have received explicit recognition in human rights are covered by the Federal Constitution of 1988 and other normative documents. One such minority that is the subject of this scientific study is the Gypsies. The research question taken up by this essay is this: How did colonial practices intended to control the Gypsy people relate to the creation of their political and legal status in Brazil? The following methodological resources were used in this study: The writers' participation in the Bill 48/2015 legislative process and their documentary study on the archives of colonial and post-colonial laws pertaining to the administration of Gypsies in brazil.as well as the literature review, which connects decolonial theory to studies on the Gypsy question.

Christina Velentza (2020) conducted a study on “Early Marriage and Education Drop Out in Traditional Roma Communities in Transylvania” education of children from Roma communities. This paper's methodology is based on fieldwork that was done in the Transylvanian region of Romania, primarily in the city of Târgu Mureș (Tírgu Mureș), between February and July of 2012. It involved multiple meetings and interviews with policy makers, local government representatives, civil society representatives, academics, political parties, representatives of traditional Roma communities, and local school officials.This work is the outcome of direct communication with a number of the local communities in the area, including Sibiu, Brasov, Sighistoara, Alba Iulia, and Târgu Mureș, as well as the capital Bucharelax.The town of Tirgu Mureș is home to the majority of traditional Gabor Roma people who still arrange early marriages.

Jayachithra, J. (2019). Enrolment of Narikuravar (Nomads) students In Primary School at Palamalai Nagar in Sivagangai District, a research on the enrollment of Narikoravar (nomads) pupils in elementary school was conducted. This study's main goal is to examine the enrollment progress of kids from the Narikoravar community at the Panchayat Union School. The researcher obtained student enrollment information from the school's faculty and administrative personnel. Additionally, the researcher conducted a trend analysis from 2019 to 2024 after gathering the
data. The outcome demonstrates a steady rise in student enrollment. The researcher came to the conclusion that since increasing school enrollment is the only method to improve society, it would be better if the government took action to raise awareness of the need.

J. Jayachithra (2016) conducted a study on “Lifestyle and Major Issues Pertaining to TheNarikuravar (Nomads) Community in Tamil Nadu”The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the "Narikuravar" community's situation in Tamilnadu by showcasing their way of life and outlining the main social difficulties that they face in society. In this case, the Narikuravar Community's situation is extremely pitiful since they face many forms of discrimination and consequently live in substandard social conditions, especially in light of the ongoing debate over the importance of human rights and development for society as a whole. To guarantee that the Narikuravar Community receives a targeted intervention to break free from their current cycle of poverty and deprivation, we require a commitment strategic system of Social Welfare Administration.A deliberate effort must be made by the government and civic organizations to play an enabling role in the Narikuravar Community's elevation to an Empowered Status in the Society if they are to be given a fair chance to develop themselves and enjoy a life that is socially satisfactory.

D. Kirubanithi, K. Raj Mohan Rao (2015) conducted a study on “A Study on Socio Economic Condition of Narikoravar Community in Villupuram District of Tamil Nadu"Tamil Nadu's Narikoravar community is referred to as the Gypsies. The community's makeshift settlements, which are nomadic in character, can be found anywhere in the State of Tamil Nadu. Nonetheless, Tamil Nadu's northern and central districts are home to the majority of the state's population. The Narikoravar are hunters and gatherers who are also well-known for their beadwork, basketry, and fortune-telling abilities. The community has consistently endured unfavorable portrayals in the mainstream media and on television, which has contributed to their extreme disadvantage owing to the idiosyncrasies of their language, nomadic lifestyle, and extreme poverty. The government's attempts to put them up in

one or two settlements for the long term have been a complete failure. A few of the community's inhabitants have received education from missionaries and other charitable organizations.

The present study differs from the reviewed studies in many ways such as main variable, dimensions, population, sample, tool and background variables etc, Therefore, the investigators has opined that the present study would be able to provide information needed to the government organizations, administrators and policy makers, to understand the contemporary challenges Narikuravar community to access education and employment opportunities.

Statement of the Problem:

The purpose of this study was to examine the contemporary challenges of the Narikuravar community in Tamil Nadu to achieve socio-economic indicators like educational and employment opportunities through socio-economic schemes or policy intervention by the state. Socio-economic indicators like educational and employment opportunities were separated into the respondent's background information.(i.e., employment status, education level, prior training, etc.) and information about the respondents' view of the state sponsored schemes for their upliftment. Investigating the background information was deemed crucial for this study as it was anticipated that through this examination, it would be feasible to pinpoint specific characteristics, socio-cultural aspects and factors contributing to significant improvement in the society and in their lives. The second part of the study asked the respondents to give their known knowledge of the state welfare scheme to them in terms of education and employment.

Narikuravar community people face a lot of problems in their daily life; discrimination is one of the major issues. As they are a well known socially excluded community, because of their cultural tradition they are not able to consolidate themselves in Identity politics to demand their basic rights.

The state government which is a delivering source of justice, equality and fairness to every individual and community miserably failed to hear their problems. However, finally after five decades the state approved for the Narikuravar community removed from the Other Backward Class (OBC) list and joined the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list. There is no social movement to awaken them to get benefits from the modern social, political and economic institutions. Education is one of the most challenging issues for them because they have no access to the institution which needs a social, economic, and geographical/demographic identity or evidence. So, this research is intended to explore contemporary challenges of the Narikuravar community to access education and employment opportunities.

Research objectives:

1. To trace the origin and historical background of the Narikuravar community.
2. To study the socio-economic status of the Narikuravar community in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
3. To explore the contemporary challenges by the Narikuravar community to access education and employment opportunities.
4. To examine the impact of programme/policy for development of the Narikuravar community.

Research questions:

1. What has been the change in the socio-economic status of Narikuravar after their inclusion in Scheduled Tribes?
2. What kind of challenge is faced by the Narikuravar community after getting ST status?
3. What are the welfare schemes and policies available for the Narikuravar community?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This quantitative study utilizes Kerlinger's (1979) definition of theory and employs the theory of social exclusion and inclusion formulated by René Lenoir and further developed by Silver (2007, 2009) to investigate multidimensional exclusion. Social exclusion is perceived as a dynamic process characterized by the gradual disintegration of social bonds across economic and social dimensions, encompassing education, employment, assets, and social relations. Employing a deductive, micro-level theoretical framework (Neuman, 2009), the study examines the contemporary challenges faced by the Narikuravar community in Tamil Nadu as the independent variable, socio-economic indicators such as education and employment as dependent variables, and state policy interventions as intervening variables, to empirically evaluate patterns of enduring caste-based exclusion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs mixed method research strategy by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research draws upon both secondary and primary data, where the latter was directly collected from participants through structured interviews. For purposes of convenience and facilitating rapport, the research utilizes convenience sampling, which is one form of non-probability sampling that enables one to delve deeper into subjects and have better insights into their specific experience and plight. The target for the study is one small community of Narikuravar comprising about 525 individuals located in the Kotturpuram division, Saidapet, in the Chennai district and Tamil Nadu legislative assembly constituency. Of this population size, a sample size of 35 participants from the Narikuravar colony was sampled in order to offer some insights into the socio-economy and cultural dimensions under inquiry.The study is limited to a single Narikuravar colony comprising approximately 525 individuals, with the

sample largely skewed towards younger respondents who are more directly affected by ST status in education and employment. Owing to the small sample size and localized focus, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire Narikuravar community.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

India looks forward to becoming one of the superpowers of the world. From the early centuries, the Indian subcontinent is known for its diversified caste, class, cultural, religious, ethnic, and lingual groups. It also owns one of the most ancient civilizations and has also achieved several multi-faceted signs of progress since Independence. Though there is growth in literacy rate, self-sufficiency in agricultural production, and development in modern industry considerably, still there are clutches of casteism, communal violence, illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, and corruption. Even though the essence of the Indian Constitution is justice, equality, and fraternity, still there is discrimination either in direct form or other. The Narikuravar community is one such group of people who face several challenges in their day to day life.This study was carried out in Tamil Nadu, at Kottur,Chennai district to understand the contemporary challenges faced by the Narikuravar in the process to access education and employment opportunities. A convenience sampling technique was adopted in selecting the samples for this research. In the first stage, the universe was identified based on historical relevance with the settlement of the Narikuravar community. Secondly, from these areas, 35 respondents were selected for the study. Thus the sample size of the study is 35 respondents. Interviews that were structured were used to gather the primary data which comprised questions in a sequence of bringing out the socio-economic profile, challenges faced by the Narikuravar community, and the process of empowerment. The collected data are analyzed and shown with simple percentage tables and charts generated. Analysis for the same was done and the findings of the research are as follows.

In terms of socio -economic challenges, it was found that the Narikuravar community found it hard to make out from their income as it was not sufficient. Though they try to start some income-generating activities to be self-sustained and self-employed, they are not recognized and appreciated by other people from caste Hindus and scheduled castes who are positioned upper in the hierarchy. This financial situation most of the time places them lowest in the cadre and when materialistic things are not fulfilled their way for empowerment becomes very tough. One of the major challenges faced by the people living in lower strata have problems rooted in their social insecurity which leads to the discrimination and exclusion that in turn impact on all other spheres of life. Narikuravar have become the victims of caste through various forms of caste discrimination.

In India, there is a Reservation system which is affirmative action that provides representation for historically and currently disadvantaged groups of people in Indian society in fields of education, employment, and politics. This is one of the significant processes by which the so-called people in the periphery are provided an opportunity to move to the core and thus get empowered. But pathetically the majority of respondents are not aware of the reservations provided by the Government, as they are illiterate, ignorant, and also resided in urban areas. The respondents feel that the reservation provided is adequate and it is helping them to overcome the challenges faced by them.

The majority of respondents are not aware of Government welfare programmes relating to education and employment. To educate the deprived section of the population, the Government has introduced various welfare programs and scholarships and also fee concessions.Though the majority of respondents had a Negative impact and said there is no much impact or any changes in their life. Because not all the children are interested in education, though the Government has provided all the needed materials free of cost and they have benefited, some children refuse to continue the education. The empowerment of the Narikuaravar is expected to happen by providing equality in social aspects in education and employment. Education is the key to attain empowerment and equality. All the respondents agreed that education is needed for empowerment. Respondents also said that education can create a wider scope because it can help them to overcome their poverty as they can provide better job opportunities.

Table 1 Impact of Government scheme & policy and Employment

Sl.no	Particulars	Frequency	
1	Caste-Based Occupations in Settlements	35 (100%)	0
2	Experiences of Discrimination in Employment Seeking	35 (100%)	0
3	Understanding Government Employment Reservations	7 (20%)	28 (80%)
4	Impact of Government Job Reservations on Employment Opportunities	9 (26%)	26 (74%)
5	Employment Outcomes for Individuals Attaining Scheduled Tribe (ST) Status	0	35

			(100%)
6	Awareness of Government Schemes and Policies for Development and Empowerment	12 (66%)	23 (34%)
7	Utilization of Government Schemes/Policies	0	35 (100%)
8	Government employment provide upliftment	30 (86%)	5 (14%)
9	Awareness of the Narikuravar Welfare Board	23 (34%)	12 (66%)
10	Membership Inquiry: Welfare Board Affiliation	14 (60%)	21 (40%)
11	Availability of Adequate Housing Facilities for Families	0	35
12	Exploring the Role and Functions of Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing Development Corporation (TAHDCO)	0	35 (100%)
13	The Effectiveness of Government Program Outreach	0	35 (100%)

The Narikuravar community view on Government jobs was analyzed and found that only 86% of the people are of the opinion that employment provides upliftment. The majority of 14% refused to accept it. This is because of the work nature and stigma on their community provided to them. It is pathetic that even in Government jobs the erstwhile occupation is being continued by them. The barrier of taking up the job which was associated with their community was a major challenge to be addressed.

The observation from the overall study reveals that The Narikuravar community should be more active and energetic to participate and convert their challenges into their stepping stones, which in turn can make the empowerment process easier and faster. Only a few members of the community are participating actively in the process of empowerment whereas the remaining people are frustrated with the discrimination and exclusion faced by them.

CONCLUSION

Graded inequality is one of the important characteristics of the caste system in India which penetrates every sphere of citizens in the nation. To bridge the gap of inequality several measures have been taken by the Government of India since its independence. From the early centuries, different hierarchical classifications are found among which the Narikuravar community is one such community which lies bottom-most among the nomadic community. Therefore they become excluded in exclusion. After a long social movement, the Narikuravar community got St status. The Narikuravar community process of empowerment starts with the ST status that they receive. But they face several challenges at all three levels. At the societal level, they have to handle the stigmatized stereotypes which follow them even today in the form of their occupation and residential locality. At the community level within their Nomadic, they face discrimination and inequality which usually pull down their confidence and lower their participation in their developmental activities. At the individual level, they come across so many obstacles and hurdles that make them content with what they have and which does not push them to fight for their rights and integrity. On the whole, the process of empowerment should be at a faster pace than the challenges they have for a better outcome. Hence their challenges are to be addressed differently at different fronts. At the societal level, Government welfare programmes and policies framed positively to empower them. Still, most of the people are not aware and are not interested in being inclusive in this development process. This is mainly because of procedural inconvenience and discrimination they face both at the bureaucratic and political levels. Most of the time the employment opportunities provided are also in alignment with their community occupation. This also pulls down their spirit.

The study emphasizes the pressing necessity to establish inclusive environments that facilitate the Narikuravar community's movement from the social periphery to the mainstream. This can be accomplished by enhancing educational access and fostering awareness through community members actively involved in empowerment initiatives, serving as role models and catalysts for change. The results show how important it is to strengthen collective bargaining and networking tools in order to clearly express community needs and have an impact on state-level policies and development programs. Political participation within the Narikuravar community is still low, and it takes a lot of work to get more people involved so that they have more say in decisions.

The study also stresses re-socialization as an important intervention that aims to build group solidarity in order to challenge fixed social statuses and help people move toward achieved status. This kind of collective mobilization, which is based on a shared identity and sense of solidarity, is likely to have longer-lasting and more transformative effects on the community.

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