

TRIBES OF TAMIL NADU: CONVERTING OR EXTINCT?

SNEHA K

Abstract

In this research paper, I will discuss the main argument that deals with the issue regarding 'Tribes of Tamil Nadu'. In distinguishing between the converting and extinct tribes, while analyzing the topic I also highlight the different tribes of Tamil Nadu pointing towards the laws, acts enacted for them. Besides providing a map on the status of converted tribes of Tamil Nadu, I assess the extent to which these lay a ground work for differentiating between converting and extinct tribes. This research paper is structured as follows after giving an overview on the topic, later on discuss about in depth about the Tribal Community of Tamil Nadu also to study about their population and even about the 6 primitive tribes and later look into the tribes conversion and extinction and the Schemes and Programs launched by the government for the tribes well being. It will also address the socio-economic cultural factors and the ground realities and challenges faced by the Tribal Community of Tamil Nadu. This research paper will also look into the defectiveness of laws relate to these community.

Keywords: Tribal community, Tamil Nadu, Conversion, Extinct, Law, Act

Introduction

A group of people who share common ideas and live in the same place as a forest as a troop as a whole is commonly said a tribe. A body of Indians of the same or a similar race united in a community under one leadership or government and inhabiting a particular though sometimes ill defined territory.

In Oxford Dictionary of Sociology 'tribe' is defined as a social group bound together by kin and duly associated with a particular territory; members of the tribe share the social cohesion associated with the family together with the sense of political autonomy of the nation. ¹

W.H.R. Rivers defined a tribe as a social group of a simple kind, the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government, and act together for such common purposes as warfare'

A process known as 'religious conversion' involves changing one's identity, worldview, and allegiance with a particular religion. Conversely, the act of

conversion dialectically establishes (and frequently modifies) the same things that individuals convert to and from.²

India has 84.51 million tribal people, or 8.14% of the world's total tribal population. Across India, there are roughly 449 tribes and sub-tribes. The forests are home to half of India's tribal population, who rely on the forests for their economy. According to the 2011 census, 7.21 lakh people in Tamil Nadu are tribal, making about 1.10% of the state's overall population. Tamil Nadu is home to 36 distinct tribes and sub-tribes. The population's literacy rate is 27.9%. The majority of Tamil Nadu's tribal population is employed as agricultural labourers, farmers, or forest-dependent people. Tamil Nadu is home to six ancestors. The tribal groups in Tamil Nadu are distributed in almost all the districts and they have contributed significantly in the management of the forests.³

The indigenous communities, often known as "forest dwellers," reside inside Reserved Forests as well as

outside and in their peripheries. Nature is the focal point of their sociocultural existence. Tribals' access to resources, employment prospects, and standard of living have all been negatively impacted by forest degradation, which has also had an impact on food availability, livelihood alternatives, and food availability. The Forest Department in this State has been directly involved in tribal welfare operations and has taken various steps for tribal development through programmes like ITDP, HADP, WGDP, and TAP.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Doli Choudhury (2021): In this article, the author gives a short introduction to the tribal groups in Tamil Nâdu. Mainly explains abo 6 primitive tribal groups out of 36 groups likely, Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irulur, Paniyan and Kattunayakan.

Arvind Sirohi: This author has contributed the basic definitions to my research work. The term definition of tribe and definition given by sociologists and others were taken by me for my research work from the writings of this author.

C S Kotteswaran (2017): This author's article 'Tamil tribes face extinction' has made me analyze the problems faced by the tribes and the reasons for the extinction of the Tamil tribes.

C. Prem Nazeer (2015): This author's writings adds more information to my research work since he describes the geographical location of each tribe or most of the tribes and he has even discussed many other topics related to Tamil tribes.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Tribes in Tamil Nadu are also in risk of going extinct; out of the 36 different tribal groups in Tamil Nadu, six are classified as endangered. All six of these tribes now number less than 2,000 people combined. A high-ranking state official stated that the Koduvelan, Melakudi, and Mahamalar tribes are in danger of going extinct, with fewer than 160 members remaining. According to state surveillance, the tribal population remains unchanged in over 80% of the ethnic groups.

The irony lies in the fact that, out of the 7.95 lakh tribal people in total, about 54,000 are tribespeople

by genetics, but they are currently unsure of which group they belong to, according to the official. Of the 36 tribal communities in Tamil Nadu, the population of the six major tribes—Toda, Kota, Kurumba, Irular, Paniyan, and Kattunayakan—has remained constant and has neither increased nor decreased. According to the official, they are now referred to as especially vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs)..⁴

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The main aim of this study is to understand about the 'Tribal Community of Tamil Nadu'. The specific objectives of the study are mentioned below:

- To describe in depth about the Tribal Community of Tamil Nadu.
- To study about their population and even about the 6 primitive tribes.
- To Study about the tribes conversion and extinction
- To study the Schemes and Programs launched by the government.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is non-doctrinal. The sources of data collection are from secondary sources like Articles and Journals.

1.5 RELEVANCE OF STUDY

It was basically my interest to take up this study because of the 50% of Toda tribes which are converted to Christians.

1.7 HYPOTHESIS

The Tamil Nadu Tribes are also in **risk of extinction**, and many of its members have switched to other religions. Nearly 91,000 tribes are supported in Tiruvannamalai, and more people are increasingly identifying as kurumans. A tribal welfare worker acknowledged that problems with inter-caste marriage, conversions to other **religions, migration, and a lack of genetic** or anthropological information impact the identification of tribes. Tribal inhabitants in the Krishnagiri district experience a kind of Thalassemia, whereas those in the Nilgiris experience sickle cell anaemia and TB. A series of blood diseases known as **sickle-cell disease (SCD)**

are frequently inherited from parents. The genetic condition lowers the average age of tribes and causes an anomaly in the oxygen-carrying protein haemoglobin.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What are all the Tribes of Tamil Nadu?

As per The Oxford English Dictionary the word 'tribe' is derived from the Latin term 'tribus' which was applied to the three divisions of the early people of Rome.⁵ In general terms, Tamil Nadu may be divided into three geographical divisions: the eastern coast line region, the middle plain area, and the north and west mountainous regions, where the bulk of the tribal people reside. The Kalrayan hills in south Arcot district, the Yergadu, Pachamalai, Kollimalai, and Sitteri hills in Salem district, the Anamalai in Coimbatore, the Palanimalai in Dindigul district, the Elumalai (cardamom hills) hills, and the Varshanad hills in Theni district are the important hills in Tamil Nadu. As per 1991 census, there were 5.74 lakhs of tribal people living in Tamil Nadu, compared to 5.58 crores of people overall. Tamil Nadu has an extremely low concentration of tribal people. 1.03 percent of the population was tribal, compared to the overall population. Tamil Nadu has 36 different tribal tribes.⁶

The six primitive tribe:

Toda: The Toda pastoral tribe, a small tribe in southern India, is known for their Dravidian language and traditional trade with other Nilgiri peoples. They live in small thatched houses and perform rituals for dairy activities, such as milking and giving herds salt. Toda funerals are a significant event, with Kurumba jungle people playing music and providing forest products. The Toda religion centers on the buffalo, and polyandry is common. However, recent cultivation of pasture land by other peoples threatens Toda culture, reducing buffalo herds. A separate community of Toda, numbering 187 in 1960, converted to Christianity in the 20th century.⁷

Kota, Dravidian-speaking peoples, known as Kota, lived in seven villages in the Nilgiri Hills, south of India. They were artisans and musicians, providing tools, wooden implements, and pots to Ba

aga and Toda families. They also provided music for ceremonies and shared grain from Ba

aga harvests with Toda. Kota families cooperated with Kurumbas, who provided jungle products and magical protection. After 1930, traditional interdependence among Nilgiri groups was abandoned, and Kota livelihood relied on grain and potato cultivation.⁸

Kurumba, The Kurumba people, originally pastoralists, were closely related to the Pallava dynasty. After the 8th century decline, they dispersed across southern India, becoming geographically separated and culturally distinct. Governed by a headman and two assistants, they practice Hinduism but have abandoned traditional customs. The Kuruba, an ethnologically similar group, now live in the Cardamom and Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu.⁹

Paniya: The Paniya have verifiably functioned as rural workers. Their significant divinity is called 'Kali' and they additionally love banyan trees. The Paniya communicate in the Paniya language, which has a place with the Dravidian family, *ibid*.

Kattunayakan: The individuals from this local area are short, have dark skin, and have distending brows. Chasing and gathering backwoods produce are the two fundamental methods for living for the clan. They communicate in a language which is a combination of Dravidian dialects.¹⁰

Irula: Irulas are occupied with an assortment of minor timberland items. Some of them are likewise occupied with caring for the crowds of dairy cattle having a place with others. They speak Irula, which has a place with the Dravidian family, *ibid*.

LIST OF TAMIL NADU SCHEDULED TRIBES

1 Adiyar 2. Irular; 3. Eravallan; 4. Aranadan 5. Kadar 6. Kammara (with the exception of the districts of Kanyakumari and Shenkottah taluk in Tirunelveli district) (c), 7. Shenkottah taluk in Tirunelveli district and Kanikaran, Kanikkar (in Kanyakumari district) (a), 8. Kaniyan, Kaniyan, 9. The Kattunayakan 10. Velan Kochu 11. Konda Kapus, 12. Kondareddis 13. Koraga 14. Kota (with the exception of the districts of Kanyakumari and

Shenkottah in the Tirunelveli district) (c), 15. Kudiya, Melakudi, 16. Kurichchan 17. Kurumbas (district of Nilgiris) (b), 18. Kurumans, 19. Maha Malasar Malai Arayan (20), Malai Pandaram (21), and Malai Vedan (22), Malakkuravan (23), Malasar (24), 25. Malayali (in the districts of Tiruchirapalli, North Arcot, Pudukottai, Salem, Dharmapuri, and South Arcot) (d), 26. Malayekandi, Mannan, 27. Mudugar, 28. Muduvan, 29, and Muthuvan, 30. Palleyan, 32. Palliyan, 33. Palliyar, 34. Paniyan, 35. Sholaga, 36. Toda (excluding Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) (c), 37. Uraly

2. Whether the Tribes Converted getting enough Status for which they had undergone these conversion?

Even though after getting converting into Christians are the tribes getting enough status as expected: Due to religious conversion, the process of partition and segmentation that developed, divided the tribal society vertically as also in social station. In other words, due to religious conversion, two parallel sections emerged in the same community. They got separated from each other socially, culturally, religiously and mentally. Very few social contacts exist between the Christian tribals and the non-Christian tribals. The converted tribals have been deprived of the rights they could get from the original tribal society. On the other side, they did not get any benefits from the Christian sections of the tribal society and they could not become a part of the Christian section. So they are in a dilemma.

In tribal communities where the number of converted Christians is big, they are more powerful in the community. They consider the non-Christian tribals who are in a minority as inferior socially and show dislike for them. In these communities where the converted Christian are in a minority they are disliked by the majority non-Christian tribals. Thus, because of Christianity, majority and minority groups have emerged in the tribal population, which not only create conflicts sometimes but force those Christians or non-Christians who are in a minority and are disliked to migrate also. The Uranv and Munda converted Christians have migrated

because they got separated from their original tribal communities. They earn livelihood by working as laborers, driving rickshaws, working in Christian organizations by any other vocation that they can find.

So it's clear that inspite of getting converted into Christians they do not own the recognition which they had wished for, they can neither return back to their original place since they came out as they converted their religion and nor look forward for the better future in the same religion, which has put this people in dilemma.¹¹

Population of Tamil tribe is increasing as decades passes:

As we research about population growth of Tamil tribes we can see that there is continuous development in their population rate. For say, there was about 5.73 lakh people according to 1991 census, as decades passes 651321 (male=328917, female= 322404) in 2001 and 752906 (male=380217, female=372689) in 2011. So from here it's clear that there is rise in the population level of Tamil tribes as decades passes.

Now lets see in deep about population of Tamil Tribes in the respective districts, Salem= 103921, Tiruvannamali= 72760, Villupuram= 63920, Vellore=63040, Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri=59549, Namakkal= 51416, Tiruvallur= 37858, Coimbatore= 29103, Nilgiris= 28373, Kancheepuram= 26508, Trichy= 18912, Erode= 17693, Perambalur= 11836, Cuddalore= 11773, Tirunelveli= 8358, Chennai= 6728, Dindigul=6484, Madurai= 5972, Kanniyakumari= 5443, Thanjavur= 3641, Tuticorin= 3494, Nagapattinam= 3420, Tiruvarur= 2673, Virudhunagar= 2357, Theni= 1686, Karur= 1450, Sivagangai= 1083, Ramanathapuram=1078, Pudukottai=782. Therefore, in total 651321 members according to 2001 census.

The primitive tribes like Irula=155606, Kotas=925, Panian=9121, Kurumbas=5498, Todas=1560, Kattunayakan=45227 are the population of these tribes according to latest census. It is seen that there is rise population level of these tribes from 1961=95755, 1971=107003 and 1981=483847. Even though there is rise in overall population if we see in depth we can observe that there is decrease

in population of few tribes like Kota, Kurumba and many others.

Vertical division and segmentation due to status

: The process of separation and segmentation that emerged as a result of religious conversion split the tribal culture vertically and also in terms of social station. In other words, two parallel sectors of the same community arose as a result of religious conversion. They lost touch with one another on a social, cultural, religious, and mental level. There are seldom any social interactions between tribal Christians and tribal non-Christians. The rights that the converted tribal people may have had from the old tribal community have been taken away from them. On the other hand, they were excluded from the tribal society's Christian sections and did not get any advantages from them. They therefore face a challenge. They are more influential in tribal societies when there are many converted Christians. They despise the minority non-Christian tribal groups and think less of them on a social level. The bulk of the non-Christian tribe members in these societies despise the minority of converted Christians. In the tribal population, dominant and minority groups have therefore arisen as a result of Christianity, which not only occasionally causes conflicts but also forces those Christians or non-Christians who are in a minority and are despised to move as well. The Urav and Munda converted Christians left their indigenous tribal groupings because they were cut off from them. They can find employment as labourers, rickshaw drivers, workers in Christian organisations, or any other occupation to support themselves.

3. What are the several plans and initiatives that the Tamil Nadu Forest Department offers to help their tribal people grow and thrive?

The majority of Adi Dravidar/Tribal people are socially and economically disadvantaged. The majority of families are underfunded, and they have limited access to chances for work, education, and other sources of money. As a result, the Tamil Nadu government runs a number of welfare programmes to aid in the socioeconomic and educational

advancement of the state's Adi Dravidar and tribal populations. The Forest Department in this State has been actively involved in ancestral government assistance exercises and has undertaken many drives through programmes and schemes such as ITDP, HADP, WGDP, and TAP for ancestral turn of events. Two schemes are given below,

A) NABARD Assisted Project: A project to upgrade the infrastructure at tribal schools run by the Forest Department was launched under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) with a budget of Rs. 5.07 crore. In 2007–08, Rs. 1.01 crore was spent, while in 2008–09, Rs. 4.06 crore was spent...¹²

B) Integrated Tribal Development Programme: Forests and tribal groups coexist in a symbiotic connection that benefits both parties. In order to raise the standard of living in tribal communities, government regulations also mandate the implementation of particular projects. Because of the inadequate development in isolated tribal communities, the Forest Department inevitably has a significant role to play. The creation of jobs, the enhancement of tribal villages' physical infrastructure, and education have all received enough support. An amount of Rs. 10.10 crore was approved in 2012–13 for the rehabilitation of existing schools, roads, and katcha homes. Up to 2013–14, Rs. 6.27 crores were spent, according to *ibid*.

There are **TRIBAL WELFARE PROGRAMMES** like,

- 1. Article 275 (1) of the Constitution of India:** According to the Act, infrastructure works such as Foot Over Bridges, Link Roads, Electrical Connection, Check Dams and Screening of Sickle Cell Anaemia are being carried out in the tribal areas.
- 2. Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs):** Under this Scheme provides Construction of traditional houses, milch animals, Fishing nets, Two-wheelers, Drinking water facilities and street lights to the Paliyar and Katunayakkan tribes living below

the poverty line.

3. **Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub Plan:** Under this scheme provides Dairy Cows to the tribal groups living below the poverty line. Dairy cows are provided to groups who have pledged to supply milk only to the Tamil Nadu Milk Producers Co-operative Society.
4. **Comprehensive Tribal Development Programme (CTDP):** Under this Scheme provides Land development activities, Improvement of Roof houses, Road work, Improvement of infrastructure in GTR schools, Drinking water, Economic development Schemes and training skills to the Tribal people living below poverty line.
5. **Schools and Hostels:** Government Tribal Residential Schools are given for tribal students.
6. **Special Area Development Programme (SADP):** In order to provide special attention to Hill Areas of Tamil Nadu, the Government in the Budget 2015-16 announced a new programme called “Special Area Development Programme” with an outlay of Rs.75 Crores. The project will improve the livelihood of the tribal people, Establish livelihoods in the villages for the tribal people, provide safe drinking water facilities for the hill tribes and provide additional buildings to the GTR Schools, Community halls, Computers, Driving licences, Footpath etc.
7. **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006:** Through the scheme, Individual Rights on land up to a maximum of 10 acre to tribal who have been residing in the forests prior to 13.12.2005 and the non tribes who have been residing in the forests for 3 generations i.e. for 75 years as on 13.12.2005. Villages in the forests are also provided with community rights including a various of rights.
8. **Industrial Training Institutes:** Through the Scheme, Industrial Training Institutes exclusively for the Scheduled tribes are functioning in Karumanthurai – Salem District, Kolli Hills – Namakkal District, Jamunamarathur – Thiruvannamalai District, Anaikatti –

Coimbatore District, Gudalur – Nilgiris District and Sankarapuram – Villupuram District to the Tribal peoples.

9. **Provision of Minor Irrigation:** The Scheme will be construct of Check dams, Sprinklings etc. for Irrigation facilities in areas inhabited by more than 50 per cent of the tribal population.
10. **LAMP Societies:** This scheme to tribal peoples provides interest free loans, through Multipurpose Co-operative Societies (LAMPS), sale of produce at good prices, supply of essential commodities such as rice, salt and kerosene at reasonable prices, distribution of inputs for agriculture at reasonable prices and loans for economic projects.
11. **Free houses:** Through this Scheme, Construction of free houses for tribal who are having free house site patta.
12. The other tribal welfare programmes are like; Provision of Drinking water facility, Development of Horticulture, Sericulture Scheme, Animal Husbandry, Development of Agricultural lands, Supply of Beehives, Afforestation Programmes, Street Lights, Formation of Link Road, Vocational Guidance, Employment Opportunities, Providing training for women development.

4. What is the history of division and discrimination of tribal communities?

In the post-independence era, when the states were divided, and the borders were being defined, the tribals of South India were the most affected. Since the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka divided the populations of the tribes widely residing in the Western Ghats amongst their states, the number of tribal populations has declined. Among such tribal groups are Kurumbar, Paliyar, Katunayakar, Cholakar tribal communities, which are of the same ethnicity and are relatives. When we assess their current situation, it is evident that tribal populations are systemically cast out, in which they are continually denied forest rights and political, socio-economic, and developmental welfare. Perhaps the development of the tribal population

would have been better if all these forest areas had been consolidated and converted into a tribal-state or territory. The Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is in place to grant rights of different Scheduled Tribes in several states in Northeast India to establish Autonomous District Councils and Autonomous Regional Councils. Such a system should have been implemented in South India, too. The 1996 Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act in particular, has failed to be implemented here. Moreover, the implementation of the Integrated Tribal Development Program (ITDP) will only happen if there are more than 50% of the Adivasis living in one area, which is largely not the case for the tribal populations in the Western and the Eastern Ghats, in states such as Tamil Nadu. Merely because the tribal population isn't more than 10 lakh, the tribals and their welfare are largely ignored.¹³

SUGGESTION :

The need for tribe members to own land is as follows: Land ownership and poverty are closely related. Only through owning land is it possible to eliminate the poverty of tribal people. It will provide for their necessities for a living, dignity, culture, traditional living, and food. To guarantee that the Recognition of Forest Rights Act of 2006 is implemented to protect tribal history, the state government, which has been too distant from tribal people and their development, must adhere to the law's original purpose. The Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006 ensures that every member of a tribe can own 10 cents of land for housing and a maximum of 10 acres of agricultural land. As far as tribals are concerned, their land is their life. Historically, tribes had fought hard for their land when they were encroached upon and taken away. Some tribals have sacrificed themselves to protect their land. We build statues, celebrate and worship the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for this country, but we conveniently forget the sacrifice of the tribes who lost their lands, their livelihoods for the growth and development of the country. Tribals, who belong to the forests and have a rich heritage and culture, are set aside and denied their birthright to live on their own land. They are being forced out with excuses like development work, wildlife

conservation. They are treated as second-class citizens. They are destroyed culturally, *ibid*.

CONCLUSION:

Reducing the gap between the tribal and non-ancestral population in terms of financial, educational, and social status is crucial for tribal development; the aim is to include the tribal in the norm of monetary and social developments. Six Tribal Communities—Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irulur, Paniyan, and Kattunayakan—have been designated as Primitive Tribal out of the 36 Scheduled Tribe population groupings in the state. The ancient networks, also known as backwoods residents, reside inside Reserved Forests as well as close to their boundaries. Their social life revolves around the outdoors. The Forest Department in this State has been actively involved in ancestral government assistance exercises and has undertaken many drives through programmes and schemes such as ITDP, HADP, WGDP, and TAP for ancestral turn of events. Six ancestral networks—the Toda, Kota, Kurumbas, Irulur, Paniyan, and Kattunayakan—have been identified as Primitive Tribal people groupings, according to the Tamil Nadu Backwoods Division website. Oddly, all six of the clans are native to the Nilgiris. They are the blacksmith and carpenter community of Kotas and the pastoral community of Todas. Irulas, who formerly collected small-scale forest goods, are now involved in agriculture, working with tea, coffee, spices, and other items. The Kurumbas are customary healers and honey hunters; the Paniyas are primarily farmers; and the Kattunaikas are native forest inhabitants with knowledge of wildlife, forest pathways, etc.

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Footnotes

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