

**AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF NARIKORAVAR
COMMUNITY IN CUDDALORE DISTRICT**

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B.DEVI M.A., Mphil.,

Ph. D Research Scholar (Full Time)

Enrolment No. 2304050009

Department of Economics,
Annamalai University,
Annamalai Nagar-608 002,
India

Under Guidance of

Dr.D.SIVAKUMAR, M.A., Mphil., Ph.D.,

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics
Annamalai University,
Annamalai Nagar-608 002,
India



ANNAMALAI

UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

ANNAMALAI NAGAR -608 002

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Introduction

In India we have achieved significant progress in the field of Economic condition. In spite of that we have deprived communities like the Narikoravar in Tamil Nadu, who are struggling for their rights to lead a socially enriched life with education, economics and social wellbeing. 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 Narikoravar community residing at Asakulam, Cuddalore District, and Tamil Nadu.

Narikoravar (Gypsies) are semi nomadic community residing in various states of India. Vaagiriboli is their mother tongue. It has only oral format but no writing script. The Narikoravars are called with different names in different states of India. It is believed that they belong to Chatrapathi Shivaji dynasty. Shivaji used to hunt tiger and use the nails of tigers to kill his enemies. 'Vaak' in Marathi means tiger, therefore it is said that they are called as 'Vagiri'. They are known as 'Nakkala', 'NakkalaVaandulu' in Andhra Pradesh; 'Singalan' in Kolkata; 'PaktiSinga' in Rajasthan; 'Kurivikarar' in Kerala; 'PaarthaPaarthilo' in Maharashtra; 'Vagiri' in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh; 'Hakkibikki' in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha; 'Narikoravar', 'Kuruvikaran' in Tamilnadu. They are named as Narikoravar or Kuruvikaran in Tamilnadu because they used to hunt Jackal (Nari in Tamil) in past for selling
wore as ornament. And as they also used to hunt birds they are called as Kuruvikaran (Kuruvi means Sparrow in Tamil)

Majority of this community people have primary level education. It is because lack of proper settlement in one place, lack of educational institution in their area, poverty, child marriage, negligence of government and lack of awareness about importance of the education. (Atheeque and Nishanthi 2016)

Narikoravars who live in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry. have classified into 5 clans named as 'Kudhiratho', 'Mevaado', 'Dobby', 'Cheliyo' and 'Chogan'. Some say that there are only three clans which include, 'Kudhiratho', 'Mevaado' and 'Dobby'. Narikoravars never come under caste classification. The Narikoravars in Tamilnadu worship Kaali and Meenatchi as their God. 'Kudhiratho', 'Cheliyo' and 'Chogan' are those groups who sacrifice buffalo as offerings for God. 'Mevaado', and 'Dobby' groups shall be classified as those who sacrifice goat as offerings for God. People of same clan will have brother and sister relationship. In a marriage

bride groom and bride belongs to different clans. At the time of marriage, the bride groom's family gives money to the bride's family to spend for marriage. So, there are no dowry problems or deaths in Narikoravar community. Every family head will have a 'Saami Mootai' which will be inherited by his eldest son at the death bed of Head of the family. Inside the saamimootai there will be a triangle shaped cloth which they call as Dadaji. All the other sons in the family will be given new Saami Mootai after the festival they celebrate, in which they sacrifice goat and buffalo based on their clans. The blood of sacrificed goat or buffalo is shed in triangle shaped cloth and kept inside. Women of Narikoravar community are not allowed to touch this, Saami Mootai.

The houses of Narikoravars will be in the outside of town or city, because they are not interested and ready to mingle with rest of the society. They also don't want to get into fight with rest of the people in society. Therefore, they always maintain a social distance. They have the habit of talking in high pitched voice, so they think others might get disturbed if they live near them, so they prefer to live separately. In Tamilnadu though Narikoravars live in households built by government, there are also many Narikoravars live under tree, roadsides, bus stands, railway stations by building houses with sarees and sheets. During the summer time, a grass named as 'Sambu' in Tamil is used to build their house. It helps to withstand the heat and also easy to move it from one place to other.

In Tamilnadu the Narikoravar are not categorized under ST. ST means Scheduled Tribe status which means the certain communities are categorized under this list, who are backward in economic, social, education status; so that they shall be given some reservations and certain subsidies or support from government for uplifting their life. In Tamilnadu they are categorized under MBC (Most Backward Class) which is list of communities one step better than ST list. Narikoravars are striving for ST status for very long period in Tamilnadu. The Narikoravars were classified as 'Criminal Tribes' by the Act passed by British Government in the year of 1871. The Narikoravars don't have to do any crime; as they are born travellers and have no place to live in, they are considered as criminals. It took almost seven decades to repeal the Criminal Tribes Act. But even after that it ended up in the negative way of affecting them more. They were classified as 'Denotified' in the year of 1950 which mean that they are no more criminals, but they also don't have an official status in Indian society. Next came, the Habitual Offenders Act in late 50's. This Act specifies that anyone whose way of life is 'not conducive to a settled way of life' is considered as Habitual Offenders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there has so far not been any research assessing the influence of different social factors, such as socio-economics status, discrimination, gender bias and education, on the access to health care of the Narikuravar community, previous studies on vulnerable or impoverished populations represent a good starting point for creating a theoretical framework. The current literature conveys the effects of education, gender, poverty and nomadism on healthcare-seeking behavior and access to care in India, finding a strong correlation between them and discussing both causes and their implications.

Previous studies have focused on understanding quantitatively the effect of different social characteristics, particularly the levels of women's education and the family's socioeconomic status on health outcomes, with predominantly positive correlations. Mathew (2012, 203–223) undergoes a systematic review of the existing literature on the inequities in childhood vaccination and their social and demographic causes; there are correlations between the level of child vaccination and factors related to the individual (such as gender and birth order), family (such as area of residence, wealth, parental education), demography (religion, caste), and the society (access to health-care, community literacy level) characteristics. Mathew (2012, 203–223) emphasizes that vaccination rates are lower among infants with mothers with no or low literacy, and families where women are not empowered.

According to NFHS-3 data and the UNICEF 2009 report, maternal education showed a statistically significant effect on whether children ever had vaccination, particularly in the cases of no education, incomplete primary education or only primary education, which are associated with low vaccination rates (Mathew 2012, 203–223). Singh and Yadav support the conclusion that the education of both parents was very influential on the vaccination of the children, and more notably, the effect of maternal education on child vaccination is higher than that of paternal education (Singh and Yadav 2000, 1194–1199).

Moreover, there have been studies linking parental education to reduced infant mortality. Maternal level of education is particularly related to the level of infant mortality and general child health, with more educated mothers having children with a higher nutritional status, and lower morbidity and mortality. Some of the studies that proved this relationship are: Caldwell 1979, 1994; Caldwell & McDonald 1982; Rao et al. 1997; Desai and Alva 1998; Das and Dey 2003; Khasakhala 2003; Kravdal 2004; Gakidou et al. 2010; Papageorgiou and Stoytcheva 2011; Saikia et al. 2013. Other studies have taken the analysis a step further and used data to prove a causal relationship between the maternal level of education and infant

mortality: Desai and Alva 1998; NIMS et al. 2012; Papageorgiou and Stoytcheva 2011 (Choudhury 2015, 544–572).

In line with the above-mentioned national studies, there are numerous local and state-wide studies that link higher maternal literacy to higher health seeking behavior and vaccination rates of children, particularly in New Delhi, Goa, West Bengal, Agra and Udaipur (Mathew 2012, 214–215). To the date, has been little reliable research about the Tamil Nadu state.

In addition to the individual maternal education level, a community's cultural and social capital has also been shown to be an important factor leading to health care seeking behavior. A multilevel analysis of data from the 1991 district level Indian Census and the 1994 Human Development Profile Index shows that there is a correlation between the proportion of literate women in a district and the percentage of children fully immunized in the district. The study models the data controlling the effect of the child's own mother education, therefore showing that community level of education is important for children's access to health and complete immunization in rural communities in India (Parashar 2005, 989–1000).

While family factors are important determinants of healthcare seeking behavior, external factors also play a large role. For example, the social status or caste and the geographical location of the community are a vital factor determining access to health. Access is considerably lower for lower castes and communities living in poverty, as well as for rural groups when compared with urban ones. Singh and Yadav (2000, 1194–1199) revealed that the children living in small, tribal villages with illiterate mothers had the lowest vaccination rate of all groups. Moreover, The UNICEF (2009, 3–5) survey reported the decreasing rank of vaccination rates per group to be: upper castes, backwards castes, schedules castes, with the lowest rate for scheduled tribes. From a cause-based approach, Acharya (2017) discusses the concept of unfair exclusion, “the complete exclusion of a group of people from availing some services for caste based reasons”, while the state health care system is meant to provide services to all citizens without discrimination. She therefore identifies access, availability, self-perception and utilization as the key for assessing differences in opportunities.

The Schedule Tribe status was promised to Narikoravars in 1964. But the petition was filed with the central government only in the year of 1987. In the first petition it was mentioned that ST status should be given to Narikoravars and Kuruvikaran. They both are same community only the people call them with different names with what they hunt. In the follow-up petition given in the year of 1987, mentioned only Narikoravars. The central government

questioned that how both tribes could be same, therefore they wanted an enquiry. It took almost 15 years. Instead of sending one tribe name to grant ST status, the state government of Tamilnadu had sent list of 23 communities. As those 23 communities have no recognition and official status their names were also added in the list. The Central government denied the petition and said in previous petition one tribe was mentioned but now there is list of 23, there is something wrong in it. Then by 2011 Narikoravars prepared a petition and forwarded it to state government of Tamilnadu. And even then, their petition was not accepted. Their efforts since 2013, on grassroots political mobilisation and hunger strikes had increased awareness of the poor state of the community. It has led to take efforts by the Centre to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order of 1950 to include the Narikoravars, Kurivikarran, and MalayeleeGounder among the STs. The bills were introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2016. On September 14th, 2022 to include Narikoravar under ST status bill was approved by Union cabinet. Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has initiated to draft the bill to amend the constitution (Scheduled Tribes) orders, 1950.

Gender discrimination exists in India till now. It starts from home where both male and female children are treated with bias. Government can increase the level of awareness about the need and Enrolment of Narikuravar (Nomads) Students in Primary School importance of education for the children of their community (J.Jayachithra, 2019) Girl children are discriminated in providing opportunity for education which reflects in the low level literacy rates of females in census data. Majority women in Narikoravar community do not have decision making authority in their families, child marriage have relatively decreased in the Narikoravar community when compared to past and 32 percent of respondents says that they never accept inter caste marriage in the community. And also about half of the respondents get economical support from SHGs and they also save money by depositing it in banks. (A.Amalorpava Mary and A.Anand Jerardsebastine, 2017).

Population and Place of Living

A considerable Village of 4 Narikoravar community is living in Cuddalore district. Asakulam is named after the former collector of Cuddalore District who helped build 300 houses during the year 2016. Asakulam is a non-descript place located 1 km away from the district capital of Cuddalore Interestingly, Asakulam is inhabited exclusively by the Narikoravar community. Currently there are 300 houses and about 425 families living there for about 30 years, out of which 425 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 Narikoravar welfare board. Most of them are having ration card and voter ID.

Economic Status

In earlier days, the main source of income for these people was hunting. They lost their livelihood after the Forest Department introduced districts regulations and levied hefty fine for Hunting. Currently the economic status of Narikoravar in Asakulam 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 fully 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, economic and educational status.

Conceptual Framework

As nomadic tribe Narikoravar community shift from place to place in groups, advantages to the occupation. They love to eat non vegetarian food especially birds and animals of the forest. They further earn their livelihood by hawking needles and glass beads. They sell fox horns and teeth known as “Narikombu” and “Naripallu” which would fetch good luck to the buyers. The men go for hunting and with licensed guns. They catch pries and cook being served in a large wooden plate from which all the members of the joint family eat. The dress habits, food habits, way of life of Narikoravar community in Tamil Nadu are different from the main stream communities, distinguishing and even discriminating. An estimated 9000 children from Narikoravar whole community are in situations of either school drop-out or non-schooling. Among them most of the young adults got married at their young ages, and are employed. We recommend an option of availing valuable land wherein Residential School infrastructure could be made available and the portion of land could be used for raising food crops in organic methods. By doing so, the action will also sensitize and cultivate

environmental conservation thinking on the children of Narikoravar community. As the Tamil community transforms itself into every aspect of modernity,

still the progressive political parties, those social organizations which are interested in social change/transformation have so far not addressed any of the Narikoravars issues on the social, political front. The irony is that they have not been enrolled in the electoral roll by the State Election Commission or Election Commission of India and even their participation in Enumeration through National Census Population has not been dealt fairly. Moreover, Narikoravar community has been placed in the list of Most Backward Castes by the Government of Tamil Nadu viz.

3. Statement of the Problem

Narikoravar community peoples spacing to the lot of problems in our daily life the discrimination is one of the major issues. As they are well known socially excluded community, because their cultural tradition they are not able to consolidate themselves in the Identity politics to demand their basic rights. The Narikoravar community has been consistently humiliated on the screen and in the social reality. Often, they are booked in the theft cases, smuggling and other non-boilable cases by the police. The state Government which is a delivering source of justice, equality and fairness to every individual and community miserably failed to hear their problems. There is no social movement to awake them for getting benefits from the modern social, political and economic institutions. Education is one of the most challenging issues for them that they have no access to the institution which needs a social, economic and geographical/demographical identity or evidence. So, this research is intended to explore the untold social reality through properly structured evidence as materials, and ethnography as one of the approaches and methods to reveal the social condition of the Narikoravar Community. The social exclusion perspective would be the most relevant one to understand the forms of exclusion, discrimination and humiliation done to the Narikoravar in the spheres of Social, political, Educational and Employment.

Objectives

There is no research studies conducted in this perspective. With a view to fulfil the research gap, the researcher would like to conduct a study with the following objectives:

1. To examine the nature and pattern of livelihood strategies adopted by the Narikoravar community in Cuddalore district.
2. To analyse the sources of income, occupational diversification, and economic sustainability of Narikoravar households.
3. To assess the impact of education, skills, and gender roles on livelihood choices and earning capacity of the Narikoravar community.
4. To study the constraints and vulnerabilities faced by the Narikoravar community in pursuing sustainable livelihoods, including social exclusion, lack of institutional support, and indebtedness.
5. To evaluate the role of government welfare schemes, SHGs, and financial inclusion in improving livelihood outcomes of the Narikoravar community.

Hypotheses of the Study

The study is based on the following testable hypotheses:

1. H₁: There is a significant relationship between education level and the choice of livelihood strategies among the Narikoravar community.
2. H₂: Occupational diversification positively influences household income and economic stability of the Narikoravar community.
3. H₃: Gender plays a significant role in determining access to livelihood opportunities and income generation within the Narikoravar households.
4. H₄: Limited access to formal credit and government welfare schemes negatively affects the sustainability of livelihoods among the Narikoravar community.
5. H₅: Social exclusion and historical marginalization significantly constrain the adoption of alternative and improved livelihood strategies.

Significant of the study

Narikoravar community is facing lot of problems at their day-to-day life. The discrimination is one of the major issues. They are well known socially excluded community, because their cultural tradition they are not able to consolidate themselves in the identity politics to demand their basic rights. The Narikoravar community has been consistently humiliated on the screen and in the social reality. Often, they are booked in the theft cases,

smuggling and other nonbillable cases by the police. The state Government which is a delivering source of justice, equality and fairness to every individual and community miserably failed to hear their problems. There is no social movement to awake them for getting benefits from the modern social, political and economic institutions. Education is one of the most challenging issues for them that they have no access to the institution which needs a social, economic and geographical/demographical identity or evidence. So, this research is intended to explore the untold social reality through properly structured evidence as materials, and ethnography as one of the approaches and methods to reveal the social condition of the Narikoravar Community. The social exclusion perspective would be the most relevant one to understand the forms of exclusion, discrimination and humiliation done to the Narikoravar in the spheres of Social, political, Educational and Employment life. (Beteille).

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