

## 7e. ADIVASIS IN TAMILNADU

The Veerappan reality has brought out clearly as to how the tribal people's lives in Tamilnadu get shattered by a nexus of police, the forest department, politicians and smugglers. Their basic human rights are cynically violated. Despite being protected by law against encroachment into tribal areas, land alienation is increasingly becoming an issue in tribal areas. Their right to preserve and enjoy their cultural heritage in harmony with nature is severely threatened by the process of modernization and economic growth.

*"There are 36 Tribes and the population as per 1991 Census is 5.74 lakhs, representing 1.03% of the Tamil population..."*

- Ninth Five Year plan Tamilnadu : 1997-2002

The major tribes in Tamilnadu are Malayali, Toda, kurumba, Paniya, Irular, Kattunayakkan, Kani, Palliyan, Sholagar, Kadar and Veddar. Most of the tribal communities are small in size and the exceptions are Malaiali and Irular tribes.

Only two taluks in Tamilnadu, ie., Devakottai Taluk in Sivagangai district and Thiruchuli taluk in Virudhunagar district do not have any tribal population.

Although tribals are found in all the districts, their major concentration is in the north, central and western regions of the State.

*"2.10 lakhs of tribal people live in Tiruchi, Villupuram, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Dharmapuri and Salem districts."*

- Policy Note on Forest Department 1999-2000

Majority of the tribal population in Tamilnadu live in hilly ranges viz., Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats and the discontinuous hill tracts adjoining the plains and the hills. These tribals live in forests. Irular in Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur districts form an exception to this general trend and are found to live in the plains.

***The basic human rights of tribals in Tamilnadu are cynically violated. Land alienation is increasingly becoming a major issue in tribal areas***

*It's an open secret that hardly any education takes place in the tribal schools run by the government, for the simple reason that no teacher comes to the school (except, of course, to collect salaries!)*

## The ever-present and widening gap

Just as in the case of dalits (and most often, even worse and more striking!) the increasingly tragic situation of tribals in Tamilnadu as well as the continuing gaps of standards of social development between tribals and non-tribal sections of the Tamilnadu population is indeed worth a serious attention.

## Literacy

The following table contrasts the literacy levels of tribals Vs non-tribals in Tamilnadu:

**Percentage of literacy Rates in Tamilnadu**

	1971	1981	1991
Tribals(ST)	9.02	20.46	23.35
Non-SC/ST	43.58	51.01	58.27

(Thangaraj, MIDS)

The situation is even more tragic in the case of tribal women, viz-a-viz non-tribal women:

	1971	1981	1991
Tribal(ST) women	4.48	14.00	16.94
Non-SC/ST women	30.47	39.04	48.57
Non-SC/ST men	56.40	62.69	67.72

As per Planning Commission estimates, "At present, there are 236 GTR schools and 26 hostels catering to the needs of nearly 16000 scheduled tribe children. In these schools and hostels the children are provided boarding and lodging at free of cost". But it's an open secret that hardly any education takes place in these "schools", for the simple reason that no teacher comes to the school (except, of course, to collect salaries!)

## Urbanisation

Only 17.30% of tribals in Tamilnadu (compared to 37.52% of non-SC/STs) enjoy the benefits of urbanisation in Tamilnadu.

	1971	1981	1991
Tribals(ST)	5.50	12.01	17.30
Non-SC/ST	33.31	36.18	37.52

(Thangaraj, MIDS)

## Health

Infant Mortality Rate		
	Rural	Urban
Tribals(ST)	23.8	-
Non-SC/ST	86.7	50.5

Mortality differentials in India, 1984  
(Vital Statistics division, GOI, 1989)

Death Rate		
	Rural	Urban
Tribals(ST)	5.70	3.10
Non-SC/ST	11.20	8.40

Mortality Differentials in India, 1984  
(Vital Statistics Division, GOI, 1989)

## Basic Amenities

With regard to availability of basic amenities too, the plight of the tribals, compared to non-tribal sections, is indeed shocking.

***In June 1999, the chairman of the National SC/ST Commission took a serious view of the underutilization of funds by the Tamilnadu Government with regard to the welfare of SC/STs***

<b>Percentage of households having the amenities</b>			
	<b>Dr. Water</b>	<b>Electricity</b>	<b>Sanitation</b>
Tribals(ST)	48.68	30.31	11.37
Non-SC/ST	66.31	61.31	26.76

(Ninth Five Year Plan Tamilnadu : 1997-2002)

*“Displacement of adivasis from forests using various should be necessarily and immediately stopped. All those lands that have so far been forcefully alienated from the tribals and indigenous communities should be returned to them with immediate effect.”*

**- Tamilnadu Peoples’ Manifesto, 1996**

*“The economy of the tribals in forest areas is dependent on the forest resources”*

**- Policy Note on Forest Department 1999-2000**

Tribals, like dalits, face systemic problems – distance from health facilities, lack of transport, frequent non-availability of medical staff, poor awareness, low response level and continuation of traditional practices that affect health seeking behaviour. Many of them live in remote or isolated habitations that are typically cut off from many of the development programmes.

In June 1999, at a review meeting with the Chief Secretary and other officials of the State Govt, Mr. Dileep Singh Bhuria, chairman of the National Commission for SC/STs has taken a serious note of the under-utilisation of funds by the Tamilnadu Govt with regard to the welfare of SC/STs:

- Under the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), the percentage of expenditure went down from 88.5 in 1992-93 to around 76 in 1997-98.
- The construction of roads, provision of health facilities and education in tribal areas was no better. In the past two decades, against the target of laying roads in the tribal localities for about 30kms every year, only 22 kms of roads

was built annually. 50% of the hamlets in the TSP and the non-TSP areas did not have medical facilities within a radius of 5 kms. And around 40% of the settlements were not provided with protected drinking water supply

- On his visit to a tribal residential school in Nandanam in the city, Mr. Bhuria said the school was in a miserable condition and 50 children from various parts of the State were living in single-room accommodation, which also served as a kitchen, dining room and living room. Moreover there was no proper toilet facility

Again, in early 2000, a member of the Tamilnadu Human Rights Commission had claimed that the Rs. 400 crores allocated for tribal welfare had not been spent and that many tribals had been denied their community certificates.

Even though these above statements have been denied by State Govt authorities, tribal welfare in Tamilnadu surely needs a thorough reappraisal, based on the rights and legitimate demands of tribals in Tamilnadu.

Tribals in Tamilnadu have for long been demanding that their areas should be included under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. Self-rule, as articulated by the Bhuria Committee 1996 Report offers a clearly viable possibility for empowering the dalits. Self-rule should pave the way for the tribal communities to acquire the power to own and manage the resources of the forests and also to govern their own institutions.

The announcement by the Govt. of the establishment of a separate Directorate of Tribal Development in the 2000-2001 Budget Session of the Assembly offers a dim hope.

***In early 2000, a member of the Tamilnadu Human Rights Commission claimed that the Rs 400 crores allocated for tribal welfare had not been been spent and that many tribals had been denied their community certificates***

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