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Ground report: Tamil Nadu Adivasis, especially women, face mass disenfranchisement during SIR

The investigation revealed the shocking truth that many tribal residents were unaware that the SIR process was taking place. <https://thesouthfirst.com/tamilnadu/ground-report-tamil-nadu-adivasis-especially-women-face-mass-disenfranchisement-during-sir/>

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Members of Irular tribe in Tamil Nadu.

Synopsis: A **South First** investigation has revealed that lakhs of Adivasis in Tamil Nadu are at risk of disenfranchisement during the recent SIR of voter rolls. Most of them, illiterate and daily-wage labourers, lack even basic identity documents to prove that they are citizens of India.

Lakhs of Adivasis in Tamil Nadu are at risk of being excluded from the voter rolls during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR). A field investigation by **South First** found that the danger is especially severe for women, as the majority of them lack the documents required to prove their eligibility.

Since 4 November, an SIR of the electoral roll has been underway across Tamil Nadu under the supervision of the Election Commission of India. A one-month deadline has been given for 68,467 Booth Level Officers (BLOs) to visit all 6.41 crore voters in the state, distribute enumeration forms for the revision, collect the completed forms, and upload them online.

Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Archana Patnaik recently told the media that more than 96 percent of voters have already been given the enumeration forms, and over half of those forms have been filled out and collected.

However, a fundamental question now arises: Are the lakhs of Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe) residents of Tamil Nadu included in these numbers? Will BLOs even be able to reach these communities within the given time? And even if they do, do these tribal residents possess the basic documents needed to prove their eligibility as voters?

To find answers, **South First** began a field investigation among tribal communities. The investigation revealed the shocking truth that many tribal residents were unaware that the SIR process was taking place.

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Tribal communities in Tamil Nadu

Broadly, the tribal population of Tamil Nadu can be divided into:

1. Those living in plains regions
2. Those living in hilly areas

As part of its first phase, the **South First** team met members of the Irular and Kuravar communities living in the plains of northern Tamil Nadu.

Large tribal populations are found in Chengalpattu, Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, and some parts of Krishnagiri. According to the Tamil Nadu Tribals Association (TNTA), about three lakh tribal people live in these plains alone.

Most of them depend on daily-wage labour, including forest work, firewood cutting, construction labour, selling herbal or bead ornaments, etc. Nearly 40 percent migrate frequently in search of livelihood, settling temporarily wherever work is available.

The Election Commission's mandate is clear: "No eligible voter should be excluded, No bogus voter should be allowed."

However, a significant number of these tribal residents either do not understand the importance of a voter ID card or simply do not possess any documents required to obtain one.

'I have no proof that I'm an Indian citizen'

At the Irular colony in Narasamangalam, Tiruvallur district, 25-year-old pregnant C Priya stood with her two other children. Despite her age, she has no Aadhaar card, ration card, voter ID, caste certificate, or even birth certificate — no proof at all of being an Indian citizen.

Her husband Chinna is in the same situation. Priya's relatives said that since hospitals insisted on Aadhaar numbers during delivery, Priya often gave birth at home. As a result, neither she nor her children has any documents.

In another Irular settlement at Vasanampattu, the government, along with NGOs, has built houses for 14 families. Some have even received land pattas.

One such family is that of Dinesh and Poongodi. Although 23-year-old Dinesh's name is on the patta, he does not possess a single identity document, Poongodi said. She too has no Aadhaar or any other proof.

While Dinesh may eventually be able to obtain documents using his patta, Poongodi has nothing to prove she is his wife, leaving her completely excluded.

South First's fieldwork found that in almost every Irular or Kuravar settlement in districts like Chengalpattu and Tiruvallur, at least one entire family has absolutely no documents at all. Shockingly, the majority of those without documents are women.

Even among those who do have some proof, it is often incomplete:

- Aadhaar without voter ID
- Voter ID without Aadhaar
- Or one document missing for one family member

For instance, at Vasanampattu, a couple — Jayanthi and Ramaraj — have no documents except that Jayanthi has a voter ID card. They said their constant migration for work meant they never applied for anything else.

How did Jayanthi get a voter ID in the first place? R Murugappan, State Coordinator of the Social Awareness Society for Youths, explained, “In many places, local politicians facilitate voter ID cards for select tribal residents to boost their vote bank.”

However, that “luck” does not extend to all.

In Puliur near Thirukazhukundram, 19-year-old C Priya has no birth certificate or other documents despite repeated attempts. Yet her mother, Radha, has an Aadhaar card and a voter ID — obtained when she first enrolled for Aadhaar, but Radha's daughter was never included.

Similarly, 24-year-old Sivaranchani and her husband Rajendran (33), from the same village, have no documents at all.

Across the plains of northern Tamil Nadu, a large number of Irular and Kuravar families have no means to include themselves in the electoral roll, even though they are fully eligible citizens. This could prevent them from participating in the 2026 elections — and possibly any election thereafter.

Also Read: [Nirmala Sitharaman slams DMK's protests against SIR in Tamil Nadu](#)

The complications of SIR for those registered long ago

Some tribal residents do possess voter IDs, and they have received SIR forms. But that is where the complications begin.

SIR forms require voters to fill in not only their own details but also information about:

- where they were registered in the previous SIR, or
- where their relatives were registered.

Only if these entries match, or if the voter can submit one of 13 approved documents, will their names be included in the updated electoral roll.

These 13 documents include:

1. Any Identity card/Pension Payment Order issued to a regular employee/pensioner of any Union government/state government/PSU.
2. Any Identity Card/Certificate/Document issued in India by the Government/ local authorities/Banks/Post Office/LIC/PSUs prior to 01.07.1987.
3. Birth Certificate issued by the competent authority.
4. Passport
5. Matriculation/Educational certificate issued by recognised Boards/universities
6. Permanent Residence certificate issued by the competent state authority
7. Forest Right Certificate
8. OBC/SC/ST or any caste certificate issued by the Competent Authority

9. National Register of Citizens (wherever it exists)
10. Family Register, prepared by State/Local authorities.
11. Any land/house allotment certificate by the Government
12. Aadhaar card

However, since most tribal families migrate frequently, they rarely have a stable residence for more than 10 years.

According to I Dellibabu, State General Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Tribal Association and former MLA, “Only 30 percent of tribal women and 42 percent of tribal men are even marginally literate. Expecting them to track old SIR entries or ancestral voting details is unrealistic. And most do not possess any of the required documents.”

Once BLOs upload the collected data by 4 December, officials will scrutinise the documents. If discrepancies arise, voters must produce proof. Without that, their names may be dropped.

“Even for ordinary working-class voters, this process is difficult,” said Dellibabu. “For isolated tribal communities with little education or access to technology, this verification is practically impossible.”

In fact, many tribal residents with voter IDs have no birth certificates or supporting documents — like Jayanthi from Vasanampattu, who has only a voter ID.

Migrant tribal workers at high risk of exclusion

Another major concern is seasonal migration. Many tribal families live in permanent settlements but leave for months at a time to work in other districts or states. Since the SIR window is just one month, those who are away may be entirely excluded from the rolls.

“About 30–40 percent of tribal families keep migrating for livelihoods,” said Dellibabu. “They settle wherever there is work. If they are away during SIR, their names may be deleted.”

For example, tribal residents of Nachinampatti and Kattarasanpatti in Arur, Dharmapuri district, leave for Sabarimala in the Pathanamthitta district of Kerala every *Mandalakalam* season for work. They return only by the end of January.

This could result in over 200 families losing their voter registration, he warned.

Accessibility is the biggest challenge

According to Dellibabu, more than 60 percent of tribal residents lack basic identification documents like Aadhaar card, ration card, or voter ID. Even among the rest, documentation is inconsistent.

Additionally, most tribal hamlets are located in remote, scattered settlements, often difficult for officials to access.

Sending BLOs to cover all these areas in a single day or short period is not feasible, he said, adding, “More BLOs must be deployed.”

He urged the Election Commission of India, the Tamil Nadu government, and the Tamil Nadu Election Commission to extend the SIR deadline specifically for tribal communities.

He said that many migrant families return home for Pongal.

“If the SIR process is extended till after Pongal,” he said, “we can include at least 60–70 percent of tribal residents in the electoral roll. Otherwise, a large population will be left out entirely.”

(Edited by Muhammed Fazil.)