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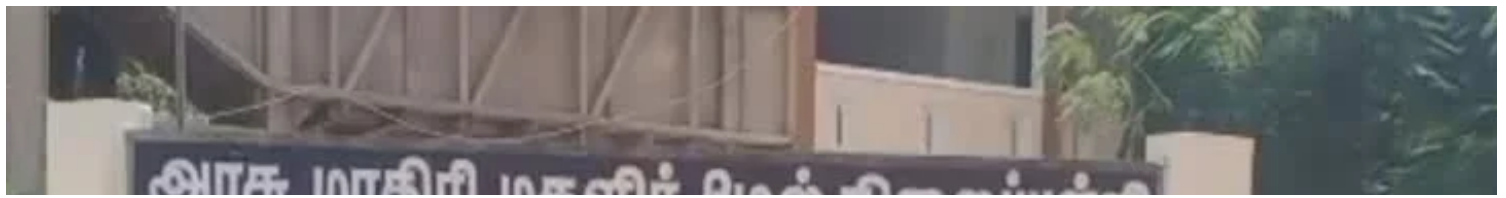


Why The Kuravars, One Of The Oldest Tamil Tribes Has Been Battling To Access Education?

The Kuravars are one of the oldest surviving Tamil tribes. In fact they are one of the five clans that contributed to the evolution of Tamil culture and civilization. Hence, it is disheartening to see the Kuravars struggling to access basic facilities like food and education.

Adivasi Awaz creator Kavipriya argues that although the right to education is considered a basic human right, in India many sections of the society, ranking low in the social hierarchy are deprived of it, like the Tribes of Tamil Nadu. The author collaborated with a researcher to understand and analyse the situation of the Kuravars.

The research done on the field illuminated many dark realities of the Kuravars. It was found that the Malai Kuravars (Mountain Kuravars) who reside in the Mannargudi village of the Thiruvarur district have not been assigned Community Certificates. This implies that they would be unable to access education in general, however access to higher education would prove to be especially difficult. The Malai Kuravars have been struggling for the past fifteen years to get their community certificates from the government. The affected people claim that thousands of petitions have been filed which remain unattended in many government offices, even today. This issue had its inception in the 1980s, when many tribal people from Ayippetai, Suriyamangalam, Thadhampetai, Thirunallur, Vadakirarajapuram and Vazhakkaraimeedu villages of Chidambaram Taluk, Cuddalore district and Thirunaarayur, Nandhimangalam, Udaiyarpaalayam Taluk, Kozhivaikal and Kodaari Karuppur villages, started migrating to villages in Thiruvarur district in search of livelihoods. At present, there are about 250 families and about a thousand people residing in the Mannargudi area.



Students are demanding their community certificate.

Interview With a Few Kuravars Who Have Been Battling for Certificates

M Rajendran from Sidhamalli village near Mannargudi has been in the fight to avail community certificates. He explained the issue as follows.

“In 1984, thirty families including mine migrated from Aiyappettai village near Chidambaram to Sidhamalli village. We have been living here for the past thirty-three years. Our occupations include hunting foxes, iguanas and squirrels, knitting bags and working as construction laborers. About 250 of our children study in government and private schools across the district. We have voter IDs, Aadhar and ration cards. We also received pattas for government land. Nonetheless, we are being denied the Malai Kuravar community certificate. We’ve been approaching the government on all fronts for the past 15 years. Yet, we have not been able to get those certificates.”

Another resident **R Anadhraj** said:

“I finished my primary education at Sindhamalli and did my secondary education from Budhakaram government high school. Once I completed my 12th grade, I applied at the Government Polytechnic College. As I did not have the community certificate, I was denied the seat. Subsequently, I joined a private Polytechnic College in Pattukottai district promising that I will submit the Certificate soon. However, they cancelled my admission when I was not able to submit the Certificate within the stipulated time. Now, I work as a daily labourer. This is the situation, even with my brother Silambarasan. He couldn’t pursue his higher studies without the Community Certificate.”

K Arun, residing in the same area stated:

“The Principals in local government schools mark Malai Kuravars (ST) in school transfer certificates for our children. They also help in receiving the scholarship amount. However, government and private colleges do not accept the school leaving transfer certificates as proof of Caste.”

B A Gandhi, district president of Labour Union, who has been fighting for the rights of the Malai Kuravar people stated:

“In 2012, in response to the petition to the councilor, the VAO visited and surveyed the villages. They recorded details of the marriages, death and other familial ceremonies of the people in the community. They also recorded the food habits, spoken language, occupation, mode of worship and the local patron gods of the people. However, there is still no progress.

The local Revenue Inspector is asking the people who have been residing here for about 33 years to go back to Chidambaram district to get their Community Certificates. Is this possible? How will another district provide these certificates? It is unfortunate that the government officials are responding in such an ignorant manner. The local political representatives should ask the Tamil Nadu government to fast track the process and provide ST community certificates for the local Malai Kuravars residing in Mannargudi. More than thirty eligible individuals have lost their opportunity for higher studies because of the lack of certificates. The government should take concrete steps to make sure that socially disadvantaged people can exercise their

rights and move up the social ladder. This is the request and demand of the tribal people here.”

S Selvasurabi, Divisional Revenue Officer who has been waiting for the government’s reply concerning the community certificates argued:

“Ever since the Mannargudi revenue taluk was created, we have no records of the Malai Kuravar tribe. Therefore we would not be able to provide a Malai Kuravar certificate to anybody. As per the Adidravidar and Tribal Welfare Department 2005 rules, the people who have migrated from their native districts can get their community certificates from their native districts. They have to show proof of a blood relation who is currently residing in their native district and can get the certificate. The Revenue Inspector and SC and ST officers will run a background check and provide the Community Certificate. However, keeping in mind the educational opportunities of the children in the community, we have informed the government about the issue. We are waiting for a positive reply from the government.”

Also Read:- [Distorting The Histories Of Tribes In South India: The Case Of Kuravars And Narikuravars](#)

Dr. Ambedkar had observed that in an unequal society, like India, education is the only weapon of the Oppressed. Is it fair then, that this right be denied for Kuravars, who are amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged of tribes in Tamil Nadu? Will the government take action against this discrimination? Or will it show immoral ignorance? The answer to this question lies in the action of the government, which has been silent for the last 15 years. Young students are the future pillars of our democracy. Will the government ensure education to all? Will it provide proper community certificates to Kuravars, in order to ensure education for all?

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