

Tamil Nadu Assembly election 2026: Away from poll glitz, Adivasis of Anamalai hills fight for survival

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Rajalakshmi Jayapal, a young Kadar tribal leader from the Anamalai hills, with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in Coimbatore. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

While Tamil Nadu gears up for yet another **Assembly election**, a seven-km-long trek through the forest continues to be the routine for 24 families of the Mudhuvar tribe —

residing in Paramankadavu settlement near Valparai in Coimbatore district — to access the nearest motorable road at Nallamudi.

This is not an isolated case — Paramankadavu and 30-odd tribal settlements in the Anamalai hills, spread across Coimbatore and Tiruppur districts, lack electricity and tar-topped roads. “Since there is no road, seven children from the settlements study in the Government Tribal Residential School in Valparai. If anyone falls sick or a pregnant woman needs to be taken to the hospital, we carry them in makeshift stretchers to Nallamudi,” said M. Kannan, Mudhuvar leader from Paramankadavu. Nedungundran, a Kadar tribal settlement, has proper road connectivity and electricity, he added.

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G. Chinnappan, a Pulaiyar leader from Kattupatti tribal settlement on the Tiruppur side of Anamalai hills, said children from seven settlements of his community too, were made to study in the Valparai school due to lack of proper roads. “Seven of our settlements and some Mudhuvar settlements depend on a 19-km-long mud road to Upper Aliyar to access the outside world. Though we live in Tiruppur district, we are forced to travel to Valparai in Coimbatore district for most of our needs,” he said.

While Pulaiyar is classified as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in neighbouring Kerala, it is a Scheduled Caste community in Tamil Nadu. “Our appeal is to bring the community under the ST category,” he said. According to Mr. Chinnappan, they too face struggles, including delays in obtaining Aadhaar Card, birth certificate, and other documents.

Amutha Murugesan, a representative of the Eravalar tribe, said the majority of families from the community were displaced.

Adivasi representatives also flagged issues pertaining to the poor reach of flagship government schemes such as the *Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam* — doorstep delivery of healthcare for non-communicable diseases.

Various demands

Tribal activist S. Thanraj of Ekta Parishad, Tamil Nadu, wanted the State government to declare a special package for hill-dwelling tribals, like the ones of Anamalais,

considering factors such as malnutrition, poverty, diseases, and infertility, which collectively pose a threat to their existence.

He also wanted the government to take up an anthropological study and measures to improve their living standards.

“While Kadars are notified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Kerala, the same status is not accorded to them in Tamil Nadu. All these six tribes, along with Kani and Paliyar, should be notified as PVTGs in Tamil Nadu,” said K.M. Leelavathi, former member of Tamil Nadu State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Stalin’s ‘promising’ visit

Meanwhile, DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin interacted with **Rajalakshmi Jayapal, a young Kadar tribal leader** from the Anamalai hills, during his visit to Coimbatore for electioneering on April 2.

“She was asked to come to Coimbatore for an informal meeting with the Chief Minister on a very short notice. Mr. Stalin enquired about the grievances of tribals and promised to resolve them. Tribals see this meeting as a promising □gesture,” Mr. Thanraj said.

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