

BULLETIN OF THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT MUSEUM

THE TAMIL NADU TRIBES

<https://govtmuseumchennai.org/uploads/topics/16527881055159.pdf>

Compiled by

Dr. N. DEVASAHAYAM, Curator for Anthropology,

Edited by the

DIRECTOR OF MUSEUM, MADRAS

New Series-General Section-Volume XVI NO.3

Published by

DIRECTOR OF MUSEUMS
Government of Tamil Nadu
2006



BULLETIN OF THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT MUSEUM

Compiled by DR. N. DEVASAHAYAM, Curator for Anthropology

Edited by
THE DIRECTOR OF MUSEUMS, CHENNAI

THE TAMIL NADU TRIBES

(Papers presented at the Seminar on "The Tamil Nadu Tribes" organized by the Government Museum, Chennai on 8th September 1973 in connection with the Silver Jubilee Celebration of Indian Independence)

New Series - General Section - Volume XVI No. 3



DIRECTOR OF MUSEUMS, CHENNAI - 8
2006

Printed at Government Central Press, Chennai

First Edition : 1990
Second Edition : 2006



Director of Museums, Chennai - 600 008.

Price : Rs.65/-

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Editorial Note - By Thiru G. Kesavaram, Director of Museums...	iii
I. Economic Problems of the Tamilnadu Tribes -By Thiru N.Amirthalingam	1
II. Welfare measures taken for Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu -By Thiru M.K. Gomethagavelu (with a special note on tribal development, 1978)	6
III. Geographical Relationship of Tamilnadu Tribes - By Thirumathi Nayeema Begam	18
IV. Health Practices of Tamilnadu Tribes - By Thirumathi Sumathy S.Rao	24
V. Religious aspects of the Tamil Nadu Tribes - -By Dr. M.S. Gopalakrishnan	27
VI. The Museum Approach to the Tamilnadu Tribes -By N.Devasahayam	34
Illustrations	40

iii
EDITORIAL NOTE

It was in 1972 that the subject of Ethnology was included as one of its disciplines in this Museum by Dr. George Bidie. Thereafter the Anthropological collections have grown gradually and steadily through the untiring efforts of the District Collectors, the succeeding Superintendents and the Curators in-charge of the Anthropology Section.

But in the last two decades, the field trips and surveys by the Section were conducted in such a way that almost all the major tribes in Tamilnadu have been covered district wise-i.e.in Madurai, the Pulayan, Paliyan and Muduvan, while in Coimbatore, the Irulas, Pulayan, Iravallar and Malasar; in North Arcot, the Maliyalis, Lambadis (B.C.), and Irulas; in Tiruchirappalli, the Pachai Malaiyalis; in Dharmapuri, the Chitteri Malaiyalis and Lambadis (B.C.); in Salem, the Kolli Malaiyalis; in Erode, the Sholagas; in Tirunelvely and Kanyakumari, the Kanis; and in Ramanasthapuram, the Kattunaickens. Further, during this period only, the largest populated hill tribe of Tamilnadu, the Malaiyalis was studied comparatively at Pachaimalai, Kollimalai, Kalvarayan, Chitteri, Yercaud, Shevaroy, Jawadhi and Yelagiri hills and their agricultural appliances were collected for the Museum.

With this enriched anthropology collection, three new galleries were thus opened during this decade - the Folk Arts, the Puppets and the Physical Anthropology galleries - and we had organised special exhibitions such as the Lambadis of Tamilnadu, the Hill dwellers of Tamilnadu, the Tamilnadu Tribes, etc.

Thus, the Madras Government Museum is the only prime Government Institution in the State, actively involved in projecting the life and culture of these tribals through their permanent displays, special exhibitions and publications.

There are 42 tribals in Tamilnadu with a total population of 5.20 lakhs as per 1981 Census. The papers presented at the seminar on the Tamilnadu tribes held in the Museum in 1973 form a part of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Indian Independence held in the Museum at that time. I hope, that these papers on Tamilnadu tribes will serve as a useful and purposeful bulletin of this Museum to numerous research students in the field of Anthropology trying to understand the life and patterns of the tribals in Tamilnadu.

MADRAS-600 008,
6th June 1989.

G. KESAVARAM,
Director of Museums,
Government Museum, Madras-8

1. ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF THE TAMILNADU TRIBES

A paper presented by Thiru N. Amirthalingam, State Editor, District Gazetteers, Madras - 600 008.

For ages, certain groups of people in India's hill areas and villages, mainly forest dwellers have suffered isolation and disability perpetuated by geographical and social factors. By and large, they have lived in a state of social and economic stagnation. These people have until recently lived a life not very different from that of their ancestors centuries ago.

In the Census of 1881 these people were termed as "Aboriginal". In 1891, the term "Tribe" was first applied to the semi-civilised inhabitants of mountains and forests. In 1901, a different classification of the castes was attempted in which a systematic study of a particular caste or tribe was found difficult. In 1911 and 1921 Censuses, the term was still vague and in 1931 Census, a wider term of "Depressed Class" was used to cover all the people who had social disabilities. These disabilities varied from place to place and from tribe to tribe. The Government of India Act, 1935, did not classify the Scheduled Tribes separately, but some of them were included in the list of Scheduled Castes. In 1941 Census, caste particulars were collected at the time of enumeration. As per the Constitution adopted in 1950, the President was entrusted with powers to declare certain castes and tribes as "Scheduled". In 1951 Census, Scheduled Tribes were classified as per the notification issued by the President under Article 342 of the Constitution.

The Backward Classes Commission recommended certain modifications to the list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and they were embodied in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes List of Modification order 1956. This order specified the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in each State on the basis of the States Reorganization Act of 1956 in consultation with the Collectors of the Districts. This formed the basis of enumeration in 1961.

Principal tribes of Tamilnadu and their population.-The Scheduled Tribes are usually found only in hilly areas and Scheduled Areas, declared as such. As at present, Tamilnadu State contains no Scheduled Area and not much of hilly areas, the Scheduled Tribe population in the State is also comparatively low. According to the 1941 Census, the population of the Scheduled Tribes in the composite State of Madras was 5.6 lakhs and in 1951 it was 6.4 lakhs. But after the reorganisation of States, the population of the Scheduled Tribes in Tamilnadu was reduced to 2.5 lakhs (in 1961). As per the 1961 Census, the Scheduled Tribes in our State form only 0.8 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribes population in India and 0.75 per cent of the total population of our State.

Salem District contains the largest concentration of the Scheduled Tribes in the State with 39.89 per cent. The Scheduled Tribes in this district are mostly the Malaiyalis. Next to it, is North Arcot with 23.53 per cent composed again mostly of Malaiyalis. The tribal areas of Coimbatore and Nilgiris districts containing some well known tribes like Kadar, Toda, Kota, etc., have only 7.99 and 5.14 per cent respectively.

The population strength of the principal tribes of Tamilnadu State as per 1961 Census is as follows:-

Name of the tribes (1)	Population (2)	Percentage to the total Scheduled Tribes (3)
Irular	85,395	33.89
Kadar	311	0.12
Kanikaran or Kanikkar	1,846	0.73
Kattunayakan	7,039	2.79
Kota	848	0.34
Kurumans (including Kurumbas)	1,557	0.62
Malasar	2,122	0.84
Malaiyali	1,35,398	53.73
Mudugar or Muduvan	140	0.06
Paniyan	4,863	1.93
Pallayan (including Palleyar)	1,831	0.73
Pulayan	3,219	1.28
Sholaga	6,507	2.58
Toda	726	0.29
Others	189	0.08
Total	<u>2,51,991</u>	<u>100.00</u>

The Malaiyali forms the biggest tribe with 53.7 per cent and next to it is the Irular with 33.9 per cent. The Sholagas, Kattunayakans, the Paniyans and the Pulayans, are also fairly appreciable in strength. The well known tribes of Toda, Kota, Kadar and Mudugar to be minor ones from the point of view of their numbers. They are each less than 1,000 in number.

With regard to the growth rate of individual tribes, we find that there are fluctuations from decade to decade. The Malaiyali tribe which decreased from 62,899 in 1911 to 62,025 in 1921 has increased sharply to 1,29,953 in 1961. In respect of Irulars, the population is more or less constant at about 80,000 ever since 1901. The Kotas are slowly and steadily decreasing. The Todas were also steadily declining till 1961 when a small rise is noticed. The Mudugar's population which was 752 in 1901 has dropped to mere 140 in 1961. The population of the Pulayans is also decreasing from 1911. Sholagas on the other hand show an increase.

The present sex ratio among the Scheduled Tribes of the State is 951 as against 992 for the general population.

Among certain tribes like Malaiyalis, there is a sharp fall in the sex ratio in the last 20 years, and that accounts for the exorbitant bride price, far above the traditional levels, demanded in recent years among the Malaiyalis.

Literacy Standards of the Tribes. - Regarding the literacy standard of Scheduled Tribes, their ranking for the districts of Tiruchirappalli and Ramanathapuram is ahead of the corresponding ranking of the general population. Their rank for the district of Kanyakumari is far behind the rank for the general population of the district.

Kurumbas, Todas and the Kotas who received the earliest attention from the Government and the social workers rank foremost. The tribes having low literacy figures are Sholagas (391), Malasars (399), Malaiyalis (493) and Irulars (629). In female literacy, Kurumbas and Todas are the foremost and the tribes Malaiyalis, Malasars, Sholagas, Irulars and Kattunayakans are the most backward.

Passing of the S.S.L.C. or the Matriculation is a definite stage in education, in this, the districts of Madras, Kanyakumari and Nilgiris stand foremost. The most backward district is South Arcot. In the next educational level viz., matriculation and above, Kotas and Todas stand ahead. The Kadars, Kanikkars, Malasars, Mudugars, Paniyans and the Sholagas do not have a single matriculate in the tribe.

Economic status of the Tribes.- The percentage of workers among the Scheduled Tribes is high in the districts of North Arcot, South Arcot, Salem and Madurai. Among Scheduled Tribe workers 42.1 per cent are females. A greater participation of women in the working force depends upon the nature of occupations. Salem with its predominant tribes of Malaiyali, stands first in this respect. In the rural sector, Tirunelveli has the highest percentage and Ramanathapuram the lowest.

The percentage of workers is highest among the Paniyans who are entirely engaged as agricultural labourers in Gudalur Taluk and the lowest is among the Todas.

The proportion of cultivators among them, is however, high with 3,305 persons for 10,000 as against 1,917 for 10,000 among the general population. A high proportion of cultivators among the Scheduled Tribes is explained by the fact that the tribes of Malaiyali form 53.7 per cent of the population of the Scheduled Tribes and its main occupation is cultivation.

Among the Scheduled Tribes the proportion of agricultural labourers is found to be high, being 1,172 as against 840 for the general population. Some tribes like Paniyans, Irulars, Malasars, etc., live mostly by agricultural labour. The tribes largely engaged in cultivation are the Malaiyalis (5,030), the Kanikkars (3,573) and the Kotas (3,410). The tribes least interested in

cultivation are the Kadars (nil), Malasars (3), Paniyans (199) and Pulayans (210). It is seen that the Kadars and the Pulayans are not also interested in agricultural labour whereas the Paniyans and the Malasars are largely engaged in it. The tribes engaged in the category of workers under mining, quarrying, livestock, are Kurumbas, Palliyans and the Pulayans. The Todas and the Kattunayakans have some interest in household industries and the Kotas who are good artisans have some interest in the category of manufacturing. In the category of trade and commerce, the only tribe which has any significant proportion of workers is the Kattunayakans. In transport the Kotas have significant proportion and in "Other Services" the tribes having a large proportion of workers are the Kadars, Mudugars and the Malaiyalis.

It has to be remembered here that the Malaiyalis who form 53.7 per cent of the Scheduled Tribe population in Tamilnadu are essentially cultivators and the size of their holdings, has considerably influenced the figures for the entire Scheduled Tribes. The cultivating households are more than 5 acres among Scheduled Tribes in the Malaiyali dominated districts of Salem, North Arcot and Tiruchirappalli and their percentages are 31.04, 40.32 and 44.27 respectively. These percentages are low in other districts. It is particularly low in the multi-tribal area of the Nilgiris.

The Scheduled Tribes do not generally get themselves engaged in scavenging etc. The tribes engaged in appreciable numbers in wood cutting, etc., are the Irulars, Malaiyalis, Sholagas and Malasars. The only tribe engaged in appreciable numbers in collection of forest produce is the Palliyans.

Steps taken to overcome the economic problems of the Tribes.-Economic problems of the tribes of the Tamilnadu are similar to that of the backward people of the State. Insanitary living condition, lack of proper housing, illiteracy, indebtedness and land problems are their principal problems which require our immediate and urgent attention to put them into sound economic footing. The Government of India as well as the Government of Tamilnadu have taken steps to ameliorate the difficulties of the Tribes.

The Government policy since independence has been to give opportunity to the tribal communities to develop according to their own genius. Their rights in land and forests are respected. They are being helped to make a better living out of land and forests by acquainting them with modern methods. Forest policy and administration are being so moulded as to foster forest wealth and the tribal economy together. Wherever possible, the tribal communities are being helped to take to settled and improved agriculture.

Education is the main lever of progress. Greater emphasis has, therefore, been laid on the provision of education facilities to them. It is through the spread of education that these communities can advance and catch up with the general population of the country. Education will widen the outlook of these people, make them aware of their social rights and responsibilities and enable them to enjoy in full the new opportunities that have opened up before them after independence.

The improvement in agriculture, the allotment of land, the extension of irrigation works, the expansion of facilities for vocational training, the development of cottage industries, and the organization of co-operative societies have helped the tribes in improving their economic position.

The medical and public health programmes undertaken for the benefit of the tribes have resulted in the improvement of general health standards and sanitary conditions among these people.

The effect of all these special measures taken towards the welfare and advancement of the tribes of our society has been to bring these people into the mainstream of national life.

In this connection, it is to be pointed out that any drastic attempt of change may destroy the richness of the tribal life and any civilization should be attempted whenever the tribes are ready for it. They should build up pride in their own life and become economically self-sufficient, so that they would not be completely overwhelmed when the outside world dominates them. It means making terms with the past and going forward in a natural evolution from it.