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A Study On Social Welfare Development Of Tribals In Coimbatore District With Special Reference To Irulas

SUPERVISOR

Dr. S. SUNDARARAJAN M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.,

Associate Professor,

Department of Public Administration
Government Arts College (Autonomous)
Coimbatore- 641 018
Tamil Nadu

RESEARCH SCHOLAR

N. NAGARAJ

PhD (Full Time)

Department of Public Administration,
Government Arts College (Autonomous)
Coimbatore 641 018
Tamil Nadu

ABSTRACT

This study examines the social welfare development of tribal communities in Coimbatore District, focusing specifically on the Irulas tribe. Despite their rich cultural heritage, the Irulas face numerous socio-economic challenges, including high poverty rates, limited access to education, and inadequate healthcare services. This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of existing welfare programs.

The findings reveal that while government initiatives aimed at improving the welfare of tribal populations are in place, significant barriers to implementation remain. These include bureaucratic inefficiencies, a lack of community awareness, and cultural obstacles that hinder participation. Moreover, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is highlighted as crucial in facilitating access to resources and empowering the Irulas community. Key findings indicate that although various government schemes exist to promote tribal welfare—such as employment generation, educational scholarships, and healthcare services—implementation often falls short due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of awareness among the community, and cultural barriers that inhibit participation. Many Irulas remain unaware of the available resources, leading to underutilization of welfare programs.

The study concludes with several recommendations aimed at enhancing the social welfare of the Irulas. These include:

1. **Community Engagement:** Actively involve the Irulas community in the planning and execution of welfare programs to ensure their needs are met.
2. **Awareness Campaigns:** Implement targeted awareness initiatives to educate the community about available services and benefits.
3. **Collaborative Efforts:** Foster partnerships between government agencies and NGOs to create a more cohesive approach to tribal welfare

The study emphasizes the need for customized interventions that align with the socio-cultural dynamics of the Irulas. Recommendations include enhancing community engagement in the planning and execution of welfare programs, increasing awareness of available services, and fostering collaboration between government bodies and NGOs. Ultimately, this research aims to inform policymakers and contribute to the sustainable development of the Irulas tribe in Coimbatore District.

Introduction:

The tribal communities of India represent a diverse mosaic of cultures, languages, and traditions, often facing significant socio-economic challenges that hinder their development. Among these communities, the Irulas tribe in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, stands out for its rich cultural heritage and unique way of life. Historically marginalized and often overlooked in developmental policies, the Irulas experience issues such as poverty, lack of access to education, inadequate healthcare, and social exclusion. These issues help in formulating effective policies and interventions aimed at achieving gender parity. The Irulas, primarily engaged in traditional occupations such as hunting and gathering, have seen their livelihoods impacted by changes in environmental policies and land use. As a result, many have migrated to urban areas in search of better opportunities, leading to further disconnection from their cultural roots. This shift has created a pressing need for targeted social welfare programs that address their specific needs and promote their socio-economic development.

Objectives

1. Assess Socio-Economic Conditions:

To evaluate the current socio-economic status of the Irula tribe, including aspects such as income levels, employment patterns, educational attainment, and health indicators.

2. Evaluate Welfare Programs:

To analyze the effectiveness of existing government and non-governmental welfare programs aimed at supporting the Irula community and their impact on improving living standards.

3. Identify Barriers to Implementation:

To investigate the challenges and barriers faced by the Irula tribe in accessing and utilizing social welfare services, including bureaucratic hurdles, lack of awareness, and cultural obstacles.

4. Promote Sustainable Development:

To contribute to the discourse on inclusive and sustainable development for tribal communities, advocating for policies that address the unique needs of the Irulas and similar groups.

Concept of Tribes:

The word tribe is derived from the Middle English which having Latin roots referred to the divisions of early Romans. There are two different meanings

Indian Tribal Areas

India's tribal areas are home to diverse indigenous communities, each with unique cultures, languages, and traditions. Predominantly located in regions like Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh), Northeast India (Nagaland, Manipur), Western India (Gujarat, Rajasthan), and Southern India (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka), these areas face socio-economic challenges such as poverty, inadequate education, and limited healthcare access. Government initiatives like Scheduled Areas and various welfare schemes aim to uplift tribal populations, while NGOs play a crucial role in advocacy and support. Preserving tribal heritage and promoting sustainable development are vital for enhancing the well-being of these communities.

Tribal's in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is home to several indigenous tribal communities, each with distinct cultures, languages, and traditions. Some of the notable tribes include:

1. **Irula:** Primarily found in the Western Ghats, the Irulas are known for their traditional skills in snake-catching and herbal medicine. They face socio-economic challenges, including limited access to education and healthcare.
2. **Toda:** Residing mainly in the Nilgiri Hills, the Todas are recognized for their unique culture, distinctive dairy farming practices, and vibrant rituals. They have a matriarchal society and live in traditional huts.
3. **Kota:** Also located in the Nilgiris, the Kota tribe is known for its pottery and handicrafts. They have a rich oral tradition and practice a blend of agriculture and traditional crafts.
4. **Kurumba:** This tribe inhabits the hills of the Western Ghats and is primarily engaged in agriculture and gathering forest products. They have a rich tradition of folk songs and dances.
5. **Paliyans:** Primarily found in the forests of southern Tamil Nadu, the Paliyans are semi-nomadic and depend on forest resources for their livelihood. Their culture is closely tied to nature.

Tribal Development

Tribal development refers to the efforts and policies aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities. These initiatives seek to empower tribal populations while respecting their unique cultures and traditions.

Tribal Development Administration

Tribal Development Administration focuses on improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities through specialized policies and programs. It involves dedicated departments at state and national levels, ensuring targeted resource allocation and integrated development initiatives across sectors like health, education, and infrastructure. Key components include capacity building, community participation, and monitoring and evaluation to assess program effectiveness. Collaboration with NGOs enhances grassroots engagement and cultural sensitivity. By promoting legal protections and facilitating financial support, Tribal Development Administration aims to empower indigenous populations, preserve their cultural identities, and ensure sustainable development tailored to their unique needs.

Irula

The Irula tribe is an indigenous community primarily found in the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu and parts of Kerala. Known for their rich cultural heritage and unique traditions, the Irulas have a distinct identity shaped by their historical practices and connection to the land. Distributed in the districts including Coimbatore. The name Irulas supposed to be derived from the Tamil Nadu 'irul' means darkness. This name refers either to their black skin complexion or refers to the gloomy jungles in which they live. The Irulas lived in unsettlement just like the majority of Indians farmer.

House types are variable in their structure depending upon the nature of the local climate and materials, the kind of subsistence economy included in and the nature of the social organization of the society and the kind of aggressive threats it must face from the enemies.

Irulas live in the middle region of Coimbatore District. The Irulas are small in status very dark skinned broad nose and so like the kurumbas. Irulas sometimes have their heads in the Tamil fashion and near a Keelumi or topknot the women are generally on the head.

They cultivate patches of dry grains like ragi, samai, tinaia, dhull, maize and castor and grow much plantain sand some jack, lime, orange and other fruit trees in some places thwy do not plough the land but carry out shifting cultivation in patches of jungle which they sell. They are earn something by collecting forest produce sucas gums, dyes and honey etc. they have few dealing with the people of the plains itself but frequently travel down to the plains to dispose their produced goods.

Cultural Aspects

- **Language:** The Irula people speak Irula, a Dravidian language, although many also communicate in Tamil and Malayalam.
- **Traditions:** The tribe has a rich oral tradition, with folklore, songs, and dances integral to their cultural expression.
- **Livelihood:** Traditionally, the Irulas were known as snake catchers and herbal medicine practitioners. They rely on agriculture, collecting forest products, and handicrafts for their livelihood.

Social Structure

- **Community Life:** The Irula community is organized into clans, with strong social ties and a matrilineal structure. Decisions are often made collectively, reflecting a communal way of life.
- **Beliefs:** The Irulas practice animism, worshipping nature and ancestral spirits, alongside some Hindu influences.

Methodology

Research is simply a systematic and refined technique employing specialized tools, instruments and procedure in order to obtain a more adequate solution of a problem, than could be possible under ordinary wheels. I start with the problem collects data or fact, analyses these critically and reaches decisions based on actual evidence.

Research is a defined scientific method as one consisting of systematic observation, classification and interpretation of data. The principle methods employed in this study are the following

1. Collection of data from Irula tribe through interview schedule
2. Collection from the Department of Adi – Dravidar and Tribal Welfare regarding schemes
3. Collection of secondary data from various books and journals.

MAJOR SCHEMES PROGRAMMES OF THE MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS

About The Ministry

The Ministry was set up in 1999 after the bifurcation of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment with the objective of providing more focused approach on the integrated socio-economic development of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). The programmes and schemes of the Ministry are intended to support and supplement other Central Ministries, State Governments and partly of voluntary organizations, and to fill critical gaps in institutions and programme's taking into account the situation of STs through financial assistance. These schemes comprising economic, educational and social development through institution building are administered by the Ministry and implemented mainly through the State Governments/ Union Territory Administrations. The Ministry also supplements the efforts of other Ministries by way of various developmental interventions in critical sectors through specially tailored schemes.

ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs in India plays a crucial role in the development and welfare of tribal communities. Here are some key functions and responsibilities:

1. **Policy Formulation:** It formulates policies and programs aimed at the socio-economic development of tribal populations.
2. **Implementation of Schemes:** The ministry implements various schemes for education, health, livelihood, and infrastructure development specifically targeting tribal areas.
3. **Empowerment and Rights:** It works to ensure the protection of the rights of tribal communities, including land rights and cultural preservation.
4. **Skill Development:** The ministry promotes skill development and entrepreneurship among tribal youth to enhance employment opportunities.
5. **Research and Data Collection:** It conducts research and collects data on tribal issues to inform policy decisions and program designs.
6. **Coordination with States:** The ministry coordinates with state governments to implement tribal welfare programs effectively.
7. **Awareness and Advocacy:** It raises awareness about tribal issues and advocates for their inclusion in broader development agendas.

By focusing on these areas, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs aims to improve the living conditions and ensure the sustainable development of tribal communities in India.

Schemes and Programmes of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs

- Adi Prashikshan
- Adi-Prasarn
- Adivasi Grants Management System
- Direct Benefit Transfer Portal (DBT)
- Going Online as Leaders Program (GOAL)
- NGO Grants Online System
- National Overseas Scholarship Portal
- National Tribal Fellowship Portal
- National Tribal Migration Support Portal
- National Tribal Research Portal
- National Tribal Virtual Art and Culture Portal
- Scheduled Tribe Component Monitoring System
- Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers
- Spring Water Atlas
- Swasthya, Tribal Health and Nutrition Portal

Strengthening Education among Scheduled Tribe Girls in Low Literacy District

The scheme aims to bridge the gap in literacy levels between the general female population and tribal women, through facilitating 100% enrolment of tribal girls in the identified Districts or Blocks, more particularly in naxal affected areas and in areas inhabited by Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs), and reducing drop-outs at the elementary level by creating the required ambience for education. Improvement of the literacy rate of tribal girls is essential to enable them to participate effectively in and benefit from, socio-economic development.

The scheme will be implemented in 54 identified Districts where the ST population is 25% or more, and ST female literacy rate below 35%, or its fractions, as per 2001 census. Any other tribal block in a district, other than aforesaid 54 identified districts, which has scheduled tribe population 25% or above, and tribal female literacy rate below 35% or its fractions, as per 2001 census, shall also be covered Blocks intimated by West Bengal and Karnataka so far. Such Blocks fulfilling the criteria in other States may also be considered as and when reported). In addition, the scheme will also cover areas below a Block level (e.g. Gram Panchayats) inhabited by the notified Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)

- Ensure that all tribal girls in identified districts or blocks are enrolled in school
- Reduce the number of girls dropping out of school at the elementary level
- Close the gap in literacy levels between tribal women and the general female population

The scheme provides 100% grant-in-aid to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and voluntary organizations to run and maintain educational complexes for tribal girls.

Other schemes implemented by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to improve education for tribal students include:

- Post Matric Scholarship and Pre-Matric Scholarship for ST students
- Special Central Assistance to Tribal Sub-Scheme (SCA to TSP)
- Grants under Article 275 (1) of the Constitution
- Ashram Schools
- ST Hostels
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs)
- Scheme of Strengthening Education among Scheduled Tribe Girls

Socio – Economic Conditions of the Irula Tribals

The Irula tribals, predominantly located in Tamil Nadu and parts of Kerala and Karnataka, possess a rich cultural heritage and distinct socio-economic conditions shaped by their historical practices, environment, and contemporary challenges.

Economic Activities

1. Agriculture

- Subsistence Farming: The Irula primarily practice subsistence agriculture, growing crops such as millets, pulses, and vegetables for their own consumption.
- Shifting Cultivation: Some communities engage in shifting cultivation, also known as slash-and-burn agriculture, where land is cleared for farming and then left fallow to regenerate.

2. Forest Resource Utilization

- Collection of Forest Products: The Irula rely heavily on the collection of various forest products, including fruits, nuts, honey, and medicinal plants, which are essential for their diet and income.
- Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs): They gather and sell NTFPs, contributing to their livelihoods and providing an essential source of cash income.

3. Traditional Occupations

- Snake-Catching: The Irula have a historical reputation for snake-catching, which continues to be practiced, although its prominence has diminished due to changing socio-economic conditions.
- Rat-Catching: This traditional occupation is also practiced, with Irula families often employed in agricultural areas to control rodent populations.

4. Wage Labor

- Migrant Labor: Many Irulas engage in seasonal migration for wage labor in agriculture and construction, seeking opportunities in nearby towns and cities.
- Daily Wage Labor: They often take up daily wage jobs in local agriculture, construction, and other manual labor sectors, supplementing their income.

Education

The education activities of the Irula tribals reflect their ongoing efforts to improve literacy and access to quality education, despite facing various challenges. Here's an overview:

1. Formal Education

- Primary Schools: Efforts have been made to establish primary schools in Irula-dominated areas, but access remains limited, especially in remote locations.
- Government Initiatives: The government has implemented programs aimed at increasing enrollment rates, particularly for girls and marginalized communities.

2. Community Learning Centers

- Alternative Education: Some communities have established informal learning centers to provide basic education, literacy programs, and vocational training tailored to local needs.
- Focus on Local Languages: Educational materials and instruction in local dialects are often used to enhance comprehension and relevance.

3. Awareness Campaigns

- Parental Engagement: Initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of education for children, particularly girls, are crucial in changing attitudes toward schooling.
- Community Meetings: Local leaders and NGOs often conduct meetings to discuss the benefits of education and encourage families to prioritize it.

4. Skill Development and Vocational Training

- Vocational Courses: Programs aimed at providing vocational skills, such as tailoring, handicrafts, and agriculture, help older children and youth gain employable skills while continuing their education.

Health Conditions

The health conditions of the Irula tribals are influenced by a variety of factors, including access to healthcare, socio-economic status, and cultural practices. Here's a detailed overview:

1. Access to Healthcare

- Limited Facilities: Many Irula communities live in remote areas with inadequate healthcare infrastructure, resulting in limited access to medical facilities.
- Transportation Challenges: Difficult terrain and lack of transport options hinder timely access to healthcare services, especially in emergencies.

2. Common Health Issues

- Infectious Diseases: The Irula are prone to common infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and respiratory infections due to poor living conditions and lack of preventive healthcare.
- Nutritional Deficiencies: Malnutrition is prevalent, particularly among children and pregnant women,

stemming from limited access to diverse and nutritious food.

3. Traditional Healing Practices

- **Use of Traditional Medicine:** Many Irula people rely on traditional healers and herbal remedies for treatment, reflecting their cultural practices and beliefs.
- **Integration with Modern Medicine:** There is a gradual shift towards recognizing the importance of modern healthcare, but traditional practices remain prominent.

4. Maternal and Child Health

- **High Maternal and Infant Mortality Rates:** The community faces high maternal and infant mortality rates, often linked to inadequate prenatal and postnatal care.
- **Access to Reproductive Health Services:** Limited access to reproductive health services and family planning resources contributes to health challenges for women.

Social Structure

1. Kinship and Family

- **Extended Family Units:** Irula social organization often revolves around extended family groups, which provide support and resources.
- **Patrilineal System:** The tribe typically follows a patrilineal lineage, where inheritance and family name are passed down through male members.

2. Community Cohesion

- **Strong Community Bonds:** The Irula people have a tight-knit community, with strong bonds of kinship and mutual support among members.
- **Collective Decision-Making:** Important decisions are often made collectively, with elders playing a significant role in guiding the community.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Traditional Roles:** Gender roles are traditionally defined, with men often engaged in hunting, agriculture, and labor, while women are typically responsible for household duties and child-rearing.
- **Elders' Authority:** Elders hold a respected position in the community, often acting as decision-makers and custodians of cultural knowledge.

4. Cultural Practices and Traditions

- **Folk Beliefs and Rituals:** The Irula tribe practices various rituals and ceremonies tied to their cultural heritage, including festivals that celebrate their connection to nature and community.
- **Traditional Knowledge:** The community has a wealth of traditional knowledge regarding herbal medicine, agriculture, and sustainable practices, which is passed down through generations.

Housing and Living Conditions

1. Housing Structure

- **Traditional Homes:** Irula homes are typically simple huts made from locally available materials such as mud, thatch, and bamboo. These structures are often single-room dwellings.
- **Design and Layout:** The layout is functional, often incorporating a central space for cooking and sleeping. Houses may lack separate rooms for privacy.

2. Materials Used

- **Local Resources:** The construction materials are usually sourced from the surrounding environment, which makes the homes well-suited to the local climate.
- **Thatch Roofs:** The roofs are often thatched, providing adequate protection from rain and heat but requiring regular maintenance.

3. Living Conditions

- **Basic Amenities:** Many Irula households lack basic amenities such as electricity, running water, and proper sanitation facilities, impacting their quality of life.
- **Sanitation:** Access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities is often limited, leading to health risks associated with waterborne diseases.

4. Community Layout

- **Village Organization:** Irula villages are typically organized around a central area where community activities take place, fostering social interaction and cooperation.
- **Proximity to Nature:** Homes are often situated close to agricultural fields or forest areas, reflecting the community's reliance on these resources for livelihood.

Challenges

The Irula tribe faces a range of challenges that impact their socio-economic conditions, cultural heritage, and overall well-being. Here's an overview of the key challenges:

Economic Marginalization

- Limited Income Opportunities
- Dependence on Seasonal Work

Access to Education

- Low Literacy Rates
- Inadequate Educational Facilities

Healthcare Access

- Limited Healthcare Infrastructure

Cultural Barriers Housing and Living Conditions

- Substandard Housing
- Environmental Vulnerability

Social Discrimination

- Marginalization
- Stigma Land

Rights Issues

- Displacement
- Legal Challenges

Environmental Challenges

- Resource Depletion
- Climate Change Impact

SUGGESTIONS:

- Awareness should be given to the tribal people regarding governmental programmes' and schemes for their upliftment.
- Education Initiatives
- Healthcare Improvements
- Economic Development
- Infrastructure Enhancements
- Cultural Preservation
- Land Rights and Legal Support
- Community Engagement
- Addressing Environmental Challenges

- Enhanced Representation
- Development agricultural methods should be introduced
- Government should provide compulsory education to the tribal people

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic conditions of the Irula tribals are influenced by a mix of traditional practices and modern challenges. While there are efforts to improve their situation through government programs and community initiatives, ongoing support and targeted interventions are essential for their sustainable development. Addressing education, health, and economic empowerment will be essential for the Irula community's advancement and integration into the broader socio-economic framework. The economic activities of the Irula tribals reflect their deep connection to the land and forests.

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