

**EVOLUTION AND REHABILITATION OF SCHEDULED CASTE AND SCHEDULED  
TRIBES IN MEDIEVAL THAGADUR NADU (INDIA)**

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**Abstract**

The paper focuses on Evolution and Rehabilitation of Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribes in Medieval Thagadur Nadu, Tamil Nadu, India. Thagadur Nadu is one of the economically backward districts in Tamil Nadu state and therefore the social status of the people is also determined by this economic backwardness. Integral caste system deeply entrenched in Indian society. Mr. Nesfield defines a caste as “a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community.”(qtd. in Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development) The word ‘caste’ comes from the Portuguese word ‘caste’ signifying breed, race or kind. In the Indian context, it refers to social divisions signifying rigid separate identities for each caste. Tolkapiyam, the first Tamil grammar work of the ancient Tamil also acknowledged the occupational division of the people, but though such a division was based on occupation, it later became a manner of social identity. Manu, the law giver, interpreted four Varnas, viz, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Shudra. As far as Tamil Nadu is concerned, caste division was further based on physiographic divisions called in Tamil language ‘thinai during Sangam period. Later, casteism based on birth began to be practiced with increase in contact with other regions. During Cholas period rigidity

became permanent and rules came to be practiced strictly. Simultaneously, different castes and sub-groups emerged due to inter-caste marriages in the post Sangam period and became highly established in course of time giving separate identity to each caste, some adopting Brahmanical practices and others following their own.

**Keywords: Social identity, Economical, Community, Evolution, Rehabilitation**

### **Objectives**

An attempt is made to focus on the Evolution and Rehabilitation of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in Medieval Thagadur Nadu.

To understand the concepts of growth and caste system

- To understand the early caste of Ancient India
- To know the early history of caste in Ancient Tamil Nadu
- To know the early history of Medieval Thagadur Nadu

### **Methodology**

This historical study uses analytical and explanatory methods. And the remarks and data were gathered from the scholarly works available by means of books, periodicals, and seminar papers.

### **Definitions of Caste**

According to Sir. H. Risley (1915), “a caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional, callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.” Dr. Ketkar defines caste as “a social group having two characteristics : (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group.” (qtd. in *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*) .A caste

is a social group with a divine or mythological origin, inherited characteristics like birth and

profession, a system of marrying relationships within their caste groups, mutual relationships

between castes that are ritually set in a graded scale, restrictions on social mobility, and further placement in the social distinctions based on their educational value.

### **Introduction of Caste in Ancient India**

In the past, a person's caste in India was used to determine his or her job, and that caste character was required to continue in that vocation until death. This practise persisted until independence from caste was achieved. It is forbidden for humans who belong to the highest caste to mix with those of lower castes or to marry members of those castes. In this way, castes in India served the purpose of clearly dividing the community. Typically, the Hindu religion is linked with the concept of caste. According to the Rig Veda, which is an early literary source that was used in Hinduism, there were four different groups that were called "varnas." Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras are all considered to be members of the Varna caste system. The majority of historians continue to agree that the "varnas" were the foundation for the contemporary caste system. There was also a fifth category, which evolved into something much more demeaning than shudras; this category became known as Dalits, which literally means "untouchables." They were no longer permitted to enter temples, drink from the same water supply, and other similar activities after this change in policy. The practice of untouchability is the most prevalent type of discrimination in India, which is mostly based on the country's caste structure.

Caste is not and never has been a fixed fact of Indian life. Both caste as varna (the fourfold scheme of idealized moral archetypes) and caste as Jati (smaller-scale birth-groups) are best seen as composites of ideals and practices that have been made and remade into varying codes of moral order over hundreds or even thousands of years. The context for this fluidity has been the subcontinent's remarkable diversity in culture and physical environment, and above all the diversity of its states and political systems. Those conventions of rank and corporate essence that are often seen as the defining features of caste have been shaped, critiqued and reconstituted in all sorts of ways, both century by century and region by region. Looked at historically, however, it is possible to see a sequence of relatively recent political and ideological changes which brought these ideals

into focus for ever more people in the subcontinent. Between about 1650 and 1850, all three of these core concepts came increasingly to make their mark in Indian life.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes comprise about 16.6% and 8.6%, respectively, of India's population (according to the 2011 census). The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 lists 1,108 castes across 28 states in its First Schedule, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 lists 744 tribes across 22 states in its First Schedule.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scheduled\\_Castes\\_and\\_Scheduled\\_Tribes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scheduled_Castes_and_Scheduled_Tribes))

### **Introduction of Caste in Ancient Tamil Nadu**

As to "People" it is defined as a whole body of persons constituting a community, tribe, race or nation because of its common culture, history, religion or the like. This community in the case of Hindus is comprised of castes, (i.e.) a collection of families bearing a common name, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine following the same hereditary calling and forming a single homogeneous community. The name generally denotes or is associated with a specific occupation. The institution of caste is supposed to be an essential part of the social philosophy of the Hindus. Thus the influence of caste is found to be all pervasive.

In respect of the other followings such as Islam and Christianity. There are no caste systems as such but there are divisions within. However, with these basic religious beliefs, different languages, customs, etc., they constitute "People" and to speak about the people of any particular area, the geographical location and historical events are seen to have influenced them.

Tracing the introduction of Caste System throughout the Ages is the goal of the study of the Origin and Evolution of Caste System in Tamil Nadu. India is often a nation with many different ethnicities, faiths, and inequality. The Indian subcontinent's society is divided into various caste and religious groupings. In India, the majority of the population practices the Hindu religion. Hindu society is diverse and made up of many castes and sub castes. These castes do not divide society horizontally. Castes are positioned at distinct rungs of the Hindu social ladder.

### **List of Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu**

| S.NO | CASTE NAME  | S.NO | CASTE  | S.NO | CASTE  |
|------|---|------|--|------|--|
| 1    | Adi Andis   | 37   | Madari   | 73   | Velary   |
| 2    | Adi Dravida   | 38   | Madiga   | 74   | Vetan (in Kanyakumari district Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) |
| 3    | Adi Kamaraka  | 39   | Mails  | 75   | Vettiyan   |
| 4    | Ajjila  | 40   | Mala   | 76   | Vettuvan (in Kanyakumari district)                                       |
| 5    | Arunthathiyar   | 41   | Mannam   |      |  |
| 6    | Ayyanvar (in Kanyakumari district and Shenkotta taluk of Tirunelveli district)  | 42   | Mavilan  |      |  |
| 7    | Baira   | 43   | Moger  |      |  |
| 8    | Bakuds  | 44   | Mundala  |      |  |
| 9    | Bandi   | 45   | Nalakeyava   |      |  |
| 10   | Bellara   | 46   | Nayadi   |      |  |
| 11   | Bharat (in Kanyakumari district Shenkotah taluk of Tirunelvell district)        | 47   | Padannan (in Kanyakumari district Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district)  |      |  |
| 12   | Chakkiliyan   | 48   | Pagadai  |      |  |
| 13   | Chalavadi   | 49   | Pallan   |      |  |
| 14   | Chamar, Muchi   | 50   | Pallervan  |      |  |
| 15   | Chandala  | 51   | Pambada  |      |  |
| 16   | Cheruman  | 52   | Panan (in Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) |      |  |
| 17   | Devendrakulathan  | 53   | Panchama   |      |  |
| 18   | Dam, Dombara, Paidi, Pano   | 54   | Pannadi  |      |  |
| 19   | Demban  | 55   | Panniandi  |      |  |
| 20   | Godsgall  | 56   | Paraiyan, Parayan, Sambavar  |      |  |
| 21   | Godda   | 57   | Paravan (in Kanyakumari Shenkesh taluk of Tirunelveli district)              |      |  |
| 22   | Gosang  | 58   | Pathiyan(in Kanyakumari Shenkesh taluk of Tirunelveli district)              |      |  |
| 23   | Holeya  | 59   | Pulayan, Cheramar  |      |  |
| 24   | Jeguali   | 60   | Puthirai Vannan  |      |  |
| 25   | Jambuvulu   | 61   | Raneyar  |      |  |
| 26   | Kadalyan  | 62   | <b>Samagara</b>  |      |  |
| 27   | Kakkalan (in Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) | 63   | Samban   |      |  |
| 28   | Kalladi   | 64   | Supari   |      |  |
| 29   | Kanakkan, Padanna (in   | 65   | Semman   |      |  |

|    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
|    | the Nilgiris district)   |    |  |
| 30 | Karimpulan   | 66 | Thandan (in Kanyakumari district and Shenkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district) |
| 31 | Kavara (in Kanyakumari district)   | 67 | Thoti  |
| 32 | Koliyan  | 68 | Tinnvalluar  |
| 33 | Koosa  | 69 | Vallon   |
| 34 | Kootan, Koodan (in Kanyakumari district and Shenkotah taluk of Tirunelveli district) | 70 | Valluvan   |
| 35 | Kudumban   | 71 | Vannan (in Kanyakumari district Sherkottah taluk of Tirunelveli district)      |
| 36 | Kuravan, Sidhanar  | 72 | Vathiriyan   |

(<https://socialjustice.gov.in/common/76750>)

#### List of Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu

| S.NO | CASTE NAME    | S.NO | CASTE          | S.NO | CASTE  |
|------|---------------|------|----------------|------|--------|
| 1    | Adiyan        | 18   | Kurumans       | 35   | Toda   |
| 2    | Aranadan      | 19   | Maha Malasar   | 36   | Urali: |
| 3    | Eravallan     | 20   | Malai Arayan   |      |        |
| 4    | Irular        | 21   | Malai Pandaram |      |        |
| 5    | Kadar         | 22   | Malai Vedan    |      |        |
| 6    | Kammara       | 23   | Malakkuravan   |      |        |
| 7    | Kanikaran     | 24   | Malasar        |      |        |
| 8    | Kaniyan       | 25   | Malayali       |      |        |
| 9    | Kattu Naickan | 26   | Malaekandi     |      |        |
| 10   | Kochuvelan    | 27   | Mannan         |      |        |
| 11   | Konda Kapus   | 28   | Mudugar        |      |        |
| 12   | Konda Reddi   | 29   | Muthuvan       |      |        |
| 13   | Koraga        | 30   | Palleyan       |      |        |
| 14   | Kota          | 31   | Palliyan       |      |        |

|    |            |    |          |
|----|------------|----|----------|
| 15 | Kudiya     | 32 | Palliyar |
| 16 | Kurichchan | 33 | Paniyan  |
| 17 | Kurumba    | 34 | Sholagar |

(<https://www.tntribalwelfare.tn.gov.in/Tribes-of-Tamilnadu.php>)

### **Scheduled Castes of Medieval Thagadur Nadu**

In 1808, (Thagadur Nadu) Dharmapuri was the district headquarters under Hargrave, a British Revenue Officer. It was so up until 1820. Then the headquarters were shifted to Salem. Salem district was divided into Salem and Dharmapuri districts in 1965. In the case of Dharmapuri district, Dharmapuri was designated as the district headquarters. Dharmapuri is one of the places in Tamil Nadu where, in ancient times, particularly during the rule of the Adigamans, the learned were revered. Hence the name Dharmapuri figures in history as well as in Tamil literature.

The Scheduled Castes of the district belong mostly to the Adi-Dravidar comprising, Adi Kannadas, Chakkiliars, Paraiyars, Pallars and Kuravans. The Korava community was the only example of a gipsy tribe. But in some areas of Salem and Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu, they were settled like other castes and organized a regular Kaval system. They were found in large numbers in Aathur and Harur Taluk. Their language was Tamil, Telugu and Kannada.

The Kavalkaran Kuravas were divided into three endogamous groups: viz Melnadu, residing south of Salem: Attur-Nadu, East of Aathur and Salem Nadu West of Attur and east of Salem. Of these, Salem-Nadu Kuravars considered themselves to be superior. The Nari (Fox) Kuravars sold beads, medical roots and horn of the fox. People bought-this anatomical part of fox in the belief that it possessed medicinal qualities. Welfare measures were undertaken by Christian missions and government agencies to change the living style of these people.

In 1923, Kurava Rehabilitation elementary schools were started in Kallanathanm, Gopalapuram, Kalayanagari and Manivilundan for their childrens' benefit in Attur taluk. The London Mission Missionary Society with the Government aid in 1928 established a boarding house

for Kuravan boy and girls at Attur. An agricultural farm was assigned by the government in 1929 in order to pin up the community in a place.

The Government sanctioned the payment of an annual grant of Rs.1300/ with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 1936, to Rev. T.Narasimhan on behalf of London Mission at Aathur to meet the pay of teachers and contingent expenditures of the four Kurava Reclamation schools. The demeaning Criminal Tribal Act was replaced in 1947. They have remained unchanged in their life style doing odd jobs for survival.

The Chakkiliyar form one of the lower castes - there is no mention of them in early Tamil literature. They seem to have come from the Telugu and Kannada regions. Though they are now Tamil speaking people, their earlier mother tongue was Telugu or Kannada. Perhaps they came to Tamil region in the wake of Vijayanagar invaders. They are leather workers and their duty to remove the dead cattle from villages. They supply leather for agriculture purposes.

The “Avaram”( Tanner’s Cassia) plant-bark was a tanning agent held in much veneration by them. Their widows could remarry. Divorce was affected by a payment of a sum to the other in the presence of the local head of their caste.

### **Scheduled Tribes of Medieval Thagadur Nadu**

Thagadur Nadu, which lies in proximity to Western Ghats, has a long stretch abundant forest wealth and naturally it nurtures many tribal groups. Malayalis, Lambadis and Boyars are the three tribal groups that depend on nature for their livelihood in this district. As these people live in hill regions called “Malai” in Tamil, they came to be known as Malayali’s i.e. the inhabitants of the hill regions. These people lead a simple life. Each village has 20-30 houses built of bamboos, located opposite to each other in a straight line. A granary that stores grains cultivated from fields common to all is found. “Oor” Gounder or Pujari is responsible for distributing these grains to people Temple is located on the borders of every village. Ragi, kambu, maize, paddy, beans are the main food of the people.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people with shifting cultivation in vogue. The region is devoid of advanced agriculture. Besides agriculture, hunting, honey collection, animal



husbandry are the other income earning activities of the people. The Malayalis are not the aborigines of this region. They are said to be the migrants from Kancheepuram one of the feudatory capitals of the Vijayanagar. The inhabitants of Pachaimalai are known as a younger brother clan, the inhabitants of Kollimaali as middle brother clan and Sabers inhabitants as Elder brother clans. All these groups migrated from Kancheepuram. According to folklore, these people have left Kancheepuram in search of their deity smuged by Pujaris (Irulars). But they in a later period migrated to Salem, Dharmapuri, Coimbatore, Nilgiri and Mysore in groups to rescue their deity and settled there itself.

They rescued their deity at Kalvarayan Hills. But there are no historical evidences to this claim. The Kurumbars are said to be originally the warriors and soldiers under the Pallavas. In later years, they settled down as sheep breeders. Some of them have taken to weaving of course woolen blankets. In Thagadur Nadu, they are found mostly in Pennagram, Palacode taluks. Many of them have now taken to agriculture, but at a subsistence level"

The Kurumbars are divided into two endogamous sects called the Pal Kurumbars and the Sothu Kurumbars or the Anda Kurumbars. The two sects do not have much difference in social customs. In recent years, intermarriages between the sects have taken place. They employ mostly Jangamars as their Gurus. They allow divorces and remarriages. They speak a slang of Canarese language. They style themselves as Gounders. They are educationally very backward. Lambadis are migrants from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Marwar. They were the sellers of salt. It is believed that these people had been selling salt right from 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Buddhist Viharas have boosted this trade by lending money and when these Viharas lost royal patronage, these groups lost their glory.

They came to be known as Lamana or Banjara. Lambadis are found throughout India. The residential colony of these people is known as Thanda which is located far away from cities. In their colonies, other tribes do not coexist. But in Pennagram Thanda Boyar live along with Lambadis. The houses are small and simple. Boyars constitute an important tribal group of medieval Thagadur Nadu. Their mother tongue is Telugu and they are believed to have migrated into Tamil region

when Tipu Sultan's forces stayed at Dharmapuri in his war against the British. Boyars were experts in shooting and hunting and therefore became part of his troops. After the war, these people remained here.

Most of the people indulged in limestone, brick making, and quarry activities. Very few own lands. Landless Women and men earn their livelihood as agricultural laborers. As they are experts in the art of making bricks and limestone, they are exploited by landlords who pay them meager amount making them poor forever.

Boyars are not considered as Hindus by so called caste Hindus, Chettiars and Brahmins consider them as of inferior castes, Within Boyar community, some Boyar considers themselves superior to other claiming their descent as Raja Boyars, Chandhai Pillai. Boyars who consume rats, porcupine and are considered as an inferior sect by Kongu Boyars, Irulas are the next largest group in the Dharmapuri district next to Kurambar and Malayalees!

Irulas belong to one of the aboriginal tribes sporadically settled in various districts of Tamil Nadu. They are also living in the adjoining states of Kerala and Karnataka. The present study is confined to the Irulas inhabiting the lower jungle slopes of Dharmapuri hills of the Western Ghats, who differ from Irulas elsewhere in the socio-economic and cultural background. The Dharmapuri, Irulas are called Malandu Irulas or Maladessa Irulas. The eastern and southern slopes of the Dharmapuri are their native territory.

The present Malanadu Iruval population is roughly about 4500. Most of them are plantation laborers. They have some land on which they cultivate fruits and millets or cereals. They are used to collect wild roots for their food. In olden days honey-collecting, hunting and primitive agriculture were their occupations. While a majority of them are illiterate they know Tamil and Badaga (language of another (Nilgiri) tribe and speak their language before non-Irulas. Their hobbies are music, vocal and instrumental, dance and folk tales. A study of the folklore reveals interesting aspects of their social set up, group consciousness, social realities and myths besides songs, music and dance, the Irula tradition is rich in stories, proverbs and riddles.

### **Measure for Rehabilitation**

The Government has taken various measures to help Scheduled Castes and Tribes of Tamil Nadu. The Integrated Tribal Development programme was implemented for the uplifts of Sitheri tribes of Harur divisions. Under this programme, following benefits is gained by Sitheri villages. The Tamil Nadu Horticultural Department has provided seeds, traditional herbs, pesticides and other agricultural implements to the tribal to enhance their livelihood.

As cattle rearing are one of the important economic activities of the people, the Government has spent Rs.1, 12,900/- to provide 20 milking cows, 10 goats, 20 sheep, 20 oxen and 10 calves to selected houses. Since 1977-78, beehives are distributed to the people and the art of collecting honey is taught to them. For educational development of tribal children, residential schools were established at Naripalli, Suriyakadai, Pudukottai Saradu, Kalasapadi, Velampatti, Esthampatti, Vazhithottam, Nochikuttai and Sitheri all at the foothills of Sitheri hills.

A cooperative society has been set up with the vision to train tribal in self-empowerment. The society provides short term loans, consumer loans and medium term loans to start their economic activities. The society has set up Public Distribution shop to enable tribes to make use of subsidized food. Seventeen crèches have been set up at Sitheri hills for the welfare of tribal children. As towns and cities are far away from tribal regions, it is difficult for them to undergo medication for a serious illness. So the Government has established a hospital at Sitheri with adequate infrastructure. Full time doctors are employed here. One of the important aspects of better living is the availability of safe drinking water. In Sitheri, water tanks are made available for drinking at the cost of Rs.1, 05,000/- Besides, 19 colonies have been provided with safe drinking water supply.

The facilities are being extended to other regions as well. An immediate need of the people is better road facilities at most of the places are inaccessible, so at a cost of Rs. 65 lakhs, a road is being laid from Harur to Sitheri for a distance about 25 km.

To encourage education among youths, tribal students are gifted with two sets of dresses each on Pongal and Deepavali. Untouchability is a curse on our society. Tribal people are highly discriminated and targeted in the name of caste. Besides the tribes do encourage untouchability

among themselves. In order to get rid of this ugly attitude, the Government gives awards to villages that are free from untouchability. Hygienic environment prevents onset of many diseases. So to motivate people in this aspect, awards are given to villages which have maintained best hygienic practices. Adi -Dravida Colonies that are well maintained received Radio sets. Every last week of January is observed an Anti-untouchability week. Awareness of measures taken by the Government to get rid of this social evil is highlighted in public.

Civil marriages are encouraged to great extent. Many families are not economically well-off to pay their funeral expenses. Government has stepped in to help these people by giving an amount from Panchayat Union. The Adi -Dravida welfare Department runs schools that provide nutritious meals to these children. Thus, the Government has extended this scheme even to the remotest villages. Under Adi -Dravida Welfare Department there is 21 students' hostel and 10 elementary schools are also run by this department. Students are provided with a free text book every year to motivate them and to inculcate the habit of reading in them. As many tribes are without proper houses about 948.27 acres of land are identified as Government lands and given to those landless people. About Rs. 33.80 lakhs have been spent in this regard. Subsidies are given to Adi Dravidar and Tribals too, along with cows and oxen. About 50 people are benefited.

Though industries are not found in large number in the tribal belt, these people have shown tremendous interest in starting small scale industries. The applications of these people were taken up for consideration and interest free loans were given to them. Under self-sufficiency scheme, many welfare measures like safe drinking water, training in collage, laying of roads have been taken up to enhance the skills of tribal to lead self-sufficient life.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, a brief survey of the social structure of the case groups in Thagadur Nadu shows a few distinct aspects of change and continuity, in the social practices of the people. Certain castes like vanniyars who are dominant in the district have adopted and absorbed the new ways of communication and upliftment. The Government has remained affected to the fragmented holdings, reflecting the backwardness of their social standing and dependence on the land as the means of

livelihood and other who is dominant in the district is socially and economically very poor. Their social standing in the eyes of other dominant caste is only marginal, resulting in the autonomous operation of their caste members. Each caste has continued to maintain its traditional occupation. Only a small percentage of the people in the dominant castes, have come out of their traditional moorings. But the vast majority of the ten dominant castes has not changed their way of life and has remained attached to their traditional occupation. The cultural practices of the less dominant castes reflect the economic deprivation which itself is the outcome of lack of education and lac of avenues of economic opportunities in the District.

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