

# The Status of Narikuravar<sup>1</sup> Community: Challenges Faced Transitioning from their Traditional to Present Occupation

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## Abstract

The Narikuravar community is a semi-nomadic indigenous tribe from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. This research focuses on the challenges faced by the Narikuravar community during the transition from their traditional occupation to their present occupation. Though their traditional occupation was hunting in the forest, they have had to give up it ever since hunting in the forest was prohibited by the government. Now, most of them have taken up manufacturing safety pins, hair pins, hand-made bags, beaded ornaments, and so on. Most of them travel about selling their products in different parts of the country, returning home after several months. The major issues which confront the Narikuravar community are poverty, illiteracy, disease, and discrimination in society. This paper deals with the concerns of the Narikuravar community and the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in uplifting the status of the Narikuravar community.

## Introduction

The Narikuravar community is a semi-nomadic indigenous tribe from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. They are a minority, with about 8,500 Narikuravar families (30,000 people) currently in Tamil Nadu, less than 0.1 per cent of the population (The Hindu, 14 March 2017). Though their traditional occupation was hunting in the forest, now they are prohibited from hunting by the government in order to preserve endangered species. Hence, they have been forced to take up alternative employment such as selling beaded ornaments, handbags, and so on. Though they have their own residences in their villages, they migrate with their families from place to place to find a market for their products. Some of their children also accompany the adults wherever they go, and hence they are deprived of education. The major issues which confront the Narikuravar community are poverty, illiteracy, disease, and discrimination in society. Due to the Narikuravar's consumption of meat (forbidden by Hinduism), they are despised and discriminated against as untouchables and are excluded from the streets inhabited by people from the upper castes. The Narikuravars in Tamil Nadu are struggling for their right to lead a socially enriched life with education, assets, and social well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> The Narikuravar community is a semi-nomadic indigenous tribe from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

### Meaning and Origin of the Narikuravar Community

The term 'Narikuravar' is a combination of the two Tamil words '*Nari*' and '*Kuravar*' meaning 'Jackal People' or 'Fox People', for they are experts in hunting and trapping jackals and other game. The Narikuravars call themselves Vaghris and speak the language of Vaghris, called Vaghriboli, related to the language of the state of Gujarat. From linguistic evidence, their origin seems to be the western parts of India mainly from Gujarat and Rajasthan since the language of the Narikuravars is very similar to the western Indo-Aryan dialects of India. Vaghris are also found in Central India, and they are known as Baghris. According to Arockiasamy, Vaghris also live in the southern state Andhra Pradesh. They are known both as '*Nakkalvandlu*' in Andhra which means 'Jackal People', and '*Yeddu Marugu Vetagandhu*' which means hunters who hide behind the bullocks (since they conceal themselves behind bullocks while hunting). The Vaghris of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh are distinct from the Vaghris living in other states. Thus, the name Narikuravar is used to distinguish them from Vaghris who live in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh (Arockiasamy 2000: 25–26). Though there are many stories and legends about Narikuravars, their origin and history do not have a reliable source. Their language Vagiboli did not have a script; furthermore, their illiteracy in other languages meant no community member could record their history. Today they speak Tamil, Telegu, or Hindi with others; the educated among them are able to read and write in the Tamil language. The Narikuravars' traditional occupation is hunting. They set out for hunting in groups, carrying muzzle loaders, mostly early in the morning. They are known for hunting jackals by imitating their call. To catch a jackal, they go out into bushes, imitate its howl, and trap the jackal when it appears. They eat the meat of animals and sell their teeth, nails, and tails for a good price since these are considered to be auspicious. The horn of the jackal considered to be a fortune generator and charm in the Narikuravar community. They also hunt rare birds and animals such as parrots, pigeons, crows, moorhen, doves, hares, and mongooses. They either sell them or consume them. They are also good taxidermists and stuff the skins of mongooses, squirrels, eagles, and foxes for sale. According to Padambharati, when they go hunting in the forest, they also collect herbs and plants for medicinal use. They have natural, herbal and indigenous medicines for various ailments like snake and insect bites, gas problems, paralysis, fever, and headache prepared out of herbs and wild roots (Padambharati 2005: 9). When going out into the forest, they used to carry guns both for hunting and for protection. Now, under strict regulations, hunting is forbidden in the forest and thus the Narikuravars are not given license to own guns. As they are prohibited to practice their traditional occupation, they are forced to take up new occupations. They have taken to making fine bead necklaces and ornaments as an alternative economic activity. The women of the Narikuravar community are the main artisans. They go out selling these ornaments from town to town, village to village, on the sidewalks, at bus stands and railway stations with their children alongside them. They sell them in huge amounts at the holy places of different cities, in the places where festivals are held. In the past, they used to take their children along when selling their handmade ornaments, but this deprived the children of their education. Only

recently have they realized the importance of education, and encourage their children to go to school. The Narikuravar communities have settled in both urban and rural settings. According to The Hindu newspaper, those who are settled in urban areas gather wastepaper, metal, and plastic waste and sell them to junk dealers. During the winter, they occasionally go to rural areas to hunt birds. On the other hand, the Narikuravars in the rural areas carry out the trade of selling fine beads ornaments in small towns all through the year. The Narikuravar living in rural areas are therefore more mobile than those living in urban Narikuravar areas. The latter are relatively more settled and move out very little. The Narikuravars in both rural and urban areas are fundamentally nomadic in nature despite having permanent settlements and are therefore semi-nomadic presently (The Hindu, 8 January 2008). Narikuravars live in groups and move to various places as a group. Each group has its own leader whose position is not determined by heredity but according to his physical strength. The leader is called 'Kurun Matto' and considered to be a teacher, a doctor, and a judge. The leader plays a dominant role at the time of festivals. He enforces discipline and imposes fines on those not following the rules.

### The Profile of the Narikuravar Community in Idhaya Nagar

This research focuses on the causes of the present vulnerable situation of the Narikuravar community, especially the Idhaya Nagar Narikuravar community located in the Tirupattur District, and also focuses on options for their holistic welfare in the future. The Idhaya Nagar community was established 20 years ago. There are 51 families consisting of 176 people (95 males and 81 females) in Idhaya Nagar. Since their traditional hunting occupation is forbidden by the government, they are now involved in manufacturing safety pins, hair pins, hand-made bags, beaded ornaments, and so on. Most of the adult men travel about selling their products in different parts of the country and return home after several months. Sometimes the women and the children also accompany men on their business travel. The average income of a family in the Narikuravar community in Idhya Nagar is Rs. 6786/- (83USD) per month. They live in poverty resulting from a lack of proper stable jobs and regular incomes. The Narikuravars in Idhya Nagar live in huts, simple molded houses, and thatched houses. The literacy level of the Narikuravar community in Idhaya Nagar is 60%. Since the children of Narikuravar community accompany their parents on business travel instead of going to school, there is a lower rate of literacy level in Narikuravar community than in the general population. During their migration, they sleep on unsanitary pathways and open areas, becoming infected with various diseases. Due to poverty, they are unable to attend to the health of their family and provide education for their children. They have no schools, clinics or hospitals in Idhaya Nagar. In society, Narikuravars are looked down upon by the people of the upper castes. The residences or habitations of the Narikuravar community are located in inconvenient places of the villages, far from those of the upper castes. They don't have access to any transport facilities to go out to different places: they have to use their own private vehicles for transportation. All the houses have both water and electricity facilities. However, they don't have toilets attached to their

houses, and hence, they must use open areas instead. The female children are given in marriage within their own community as soon as they reach puberty and thus, they are not able to further their education. The female children are not permitted to marry people outside the community, limiting their options to find a good partner in life. The Narikuravar community does not encourage marriage with other castes or communities. Though they have their own religious festivals, they celebrate the popular festivals of different religious communities such as Pongal (harvest festival), Diwali (festival of lights), Christmas, and other traditional feasts. There is hardly any interaction between the Narikuravar community and the rest of society even during village festivals, public gatherings, and religious ceremonies. They are ostracised and face social stigma. To assist them, various policies and programs of government and non-governmental organizations focus on the holistic growth of the Narikuravar community with regard to the social, economic, health and hygiene, gender, and educational welfare needs of this community.



The Streets of Narikuravar Community in Idhaya Nagar  
Source: Photo taken on 20 August 2022 during field research



The Houses of Narikuravar Community in Idhaya Nagar  
Source: Photo taken on 20 August 2022 during field research

## The Position of the Narikuravar Community as Citizens of India

In the history of caste-based Indian society, the position of the Narikuravar community has been ambiguous. Before Indian independence, the Narikuravars lived as nomadic tribes. According to Xaxa, during British rule, they were classified under denotified tribes which were identified as criminal tribes. After independence, they were included in the backward class list, even though they lived in caves and in the hills like tribals. The Narikuravars were stigmatized under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871; although the denotification order was revoked in 1952, the stigma continues. Denotified tribes suffer from a variety of handicaps because of their exclusion from the constitutional schedules. Firstly, the Narikuravar community is not included in the category of Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989) under which the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are protected (Xaxa 1999: 3589–3594); as a result, human rights violations against them cannot be addressed effectively. The second handicap is that the denotified tribes are deprived of central reservations and concessions although some states grant them access to state facilities. The third handicap is that denotified tribes are not enumerated separately in the decennial census as is done for the other Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and hence, there is no proper data for Narikuravars on various issues.

In March 2022, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M K Stalin, wrote a letter urging the Prime Minister of India to intervene and expedite the inclusion of Narikuravar and Kuruvikkaran communities on the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs). The CM noted that the Narikuravars are one of the most deprived and vulnerable communities in Tamil Nadu, deserving of the constitutional protection and welfare measures offered under the list. Acting on the suggestion of the Tamil Nadu Government, on 14th September 2022, the cabinet of the central government approved including Narikuravars under the ST category through amending the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 (The News Minute 2022). The Narikuravar community has appreciated the initiative of Tamil Nadu Government for including them in the list of Scheduled Tribes, which has raised their expectations for better welfare policies towards them by both central and state governments.

A survey on the position of the Narikuravar community in Idhaya Nagar as citizens of India has been carried out based on their access to the rights and privileges that are offered to every citizen of India by the government. When the Narikuravar community were nomadic and without permanent residence, they were not eligible to apply for passports, bank accounts, resident and ration cards, and so on. However, during the time of Kamaraj (1903–1975) as the Chief Minister of the state of Tamil Nadu between 1954–1963, they were given individual houses legally registered to their names. As they were used to nomadic life, they sold their property and moved out of their residential areas. Hence, for long time, they were not eligible for basic documents and personal identity cards, and so on. The survey results are given below.

Table 1 Possession of a Passport

Obtained Passport	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	7.8
No	47	92.2
Total	51	100.0

Table 2 Possession of an Aadhaar Card<sup>2</sup>

Aadhaar Card	Frequency	Percent
Yes	51	100.0

Table 3 Possession of a Community Certificate<sup>3</sup>

Community Certificate	Frequency	Percent
Yes	29	56.9
No	22	43.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 4 Possession of legal ownership for their Houses

Legal Ownership	Frequency	Percent
Yes	35	68.6
No	16	31.4
Total	51	100.0

Table 5 Possession of a Bank Account

Bank Account	Frequency	Percent
Yes	35	68.6
No	16	31.4
Total	51	100.0

<sup>2</sup> Aadhaar is a 12-digit individual identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India on behalf of the Government of India.

<sup>3</sup> A Community Certificate also known as caste certificate is issued by the Revenue Department of the state Government to certify that a person belongs to a particular caste. If one belongs to any of the particular reserved communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Backward Classes as specified in the Indian Constitution, they obtain benefits in education and employment sectors from the Government.

Table 6 Possession of a Ration Card<sup>4</sup>

Ration Card	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	42	82.4
No	9	17.6
Total	51	100.0

Table 7 Access to Government Offices

Able to approach	Frequency	Percent
Never	4	7.8
Sometimes	22	43.1
Often	18	35.3
Always	7	13.7
Total	51	100.0

Table 8 Eligibility for Government Jobs

Eligibility for Government Jobs	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	29.4
No	36	70.6
Total	51	100.0

Table 9 Those who have applied for Competitive Exams for Government Jobs

Competitive Exam	Frequency	Percent
Yes	21	41.2
No	30	58.8
Total	51	100.0

Table 10 Working in Government Jobs

Government Jobs	Frequency	Percent
Yes	7	13.7
No	44	86.3
Total	51	100.0

<sup>4</sup> A ration card is an official document issued by state governments in India to households that are eligible to purchase subsidised food grain from the Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). They also serve as a common form of identification for many Indians.

The results of the field survey (Tables 1–10) indicate that most of the members of Narikuravar Community in Idhaya Nagar have access to the rights and privileges offered by the government policies and projects. The situation of the Narikuravar has improved over the span of a couple of decades. One of the reasons is their decision to settle down in permanent residences, allowing them to apply for basic documents and identity cards. As shown in Table 2, all the members of Narikuravar community have an Aadhaar Card (Personal Identity Card given by the government of India) which is required to apply for any official documents and certificates. In an interview with a member of an NGO which works for the welfare of the Idhya Nagar Narikuravar Community, a couple of years prior, it was not possible for the members of the Narikuravar community to obtain a loan from the banks since they did not have permanent residence or the personal identity card (Aadhaar Card). However, Table 5 shows that a good number of them now have bank accounts in Idhaya Nagar. The community can now save its earnings for the future and apply for various loans from the banks for its educational and business needs. The ration card allows the middle class, lower middle class, and poor families to purchase subsidised grocery items provided by the government. Table 6 shows that a majority of the members (82.4%) of the Narikuravar community have ration cards. Ration cards can be used only in the ration shops of one's hometown, and are invalid in the ration shops of other places. Until a couple of years ago, the Narikuravar community was nomadic in nature, so they did not have ration cards, rendering them ineligible for the subsidised government groceries. The community certificate, also known as a caste certificate, is issued by the state of government of India to certify that a person belongs to a particular caste. If one belongs to reserved castes and tribes (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) specified in the Indian Constitution, one enjoys benefits in various government sectors. Table 3 shows that only about half of the members (56.9%) in Idhaya Nagar have a community certificate. Though the community certificate is essential for receiving the benefits of government, only students and educated persons apply for the community certificate to obtain scholarships at educational institutions and jobs in employment offices. Half of the uneducated members of the community in Idhaya Nagar have not applied for the community certificate as they do not know to utilize the benefits of the government. In recent years, the number of the children from Idhaya Nagar going to school and colleges has been constantly increasing. A good number of children pass into university education and a few of them have graduated from the University. All of the graduates from Idhaya Nagar community are first-generation graduates. As shown in Table 8, there are only a few eligible for government jobs. A good number of them (41.2%) tried to get government jobs by sitting for competitive exams. As it is very clear in Table 10, only a few of them have achieved government jobs as it is not easy to be employed in the government sectors. The Narikuravar community, established 20 years ago in Idhaya Nagar, is improving steadily. However, there is a long way to go to have access to all the official documents. As is shown in Table 1, only 4 of the members (7.8%) of Idhaya Nagar have obtained passports. They have not yet improved to the level of the majority holding passports. Overall, the Narikuravar community in Idhaya Nagar are doing their best at making themselves eligible to enjoy the rights and privileges as citizens of India through their permanent residency.



### Challenges during the Change of Occupation of Narikuravar Community

Narikuravars were traditionally forest dwellers making their living by hunting. Currently, as hunting is prohibited by the government, they have surrendered their hunting guns. Deprived of their traditional occupation, they have had to take up new occupations in order to survive. Today, most of the community has taken up bead necklace manufacturing and sales as their new occupation. This work is undertaken by the young and old without regard to gender. Most of the women have taken making beads at home as their new hobby, whereas most of the men make the rounds of different places to sell the bead necklaces made by the women. However, there are also a good number who have taken different jobs as their new occupation such as daily wage labourers, menial job workers, and so on. This part of the paper analyzes the challenges faced by the members of the Narikuravar community of Idhaya Nagar during their change over to new occupations.

Table 11 Ease of Relinquishing Traditional Occupation

Ease of Relinquishing Traditional Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Never	4	7.8
Sometimes	33	64.7
Most of the time	10	19.6
Always	4	7.8
Total	51	100.0

Table 12 Comfort in New Occupation

Comfort in New Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	11.8
Sometimes	22	43.1
Most of the time	17	33.3
Always	6	11.8
Total	51	100.0

## Problems Faced in the New Occupation

Table 13 Lack of skills

Lack of skills	Frequency	Percent
Never	16	31.4
Sometimes	22	43.1
Most of the time	1	2.0
Always	12	23.5
Total	51	100.0

Table 14 Job Location

Job Location	Frequency	Percent
Never	7	13.7
Sometimes	21	41.2
Most of the time	9	17.6
Always	14	27.5
Total	51	100.0

Table 15 Difficulty in Investment

Difficulty in Investment	Frequency	Percent
Never	8	15.7
Sometimes	23	45.1
Most of the time	8	15.7
Always	12	23.5
Total	51	100.0

Table 16 Difficulty in Marketing

Difficulty in Marketing	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	11.8
Sometimes	23	45.1
Most of the time	9	17.6
Always	13	25.5
Total	51	100.0

The results of the field survey (Tables 11–16) show the difficulty experienced by the members of the Narikuravar Community of Idhaya Nagar in switching over from the traditional to new occupations. Table 11 shows most of the Narikuravar community (72.5%) found difficulty in relinquishing their age-old traditional occupation. The wisdom and skills for the traditional occupations were inherited from their ancestors. Therefore, only a small percentage (11.8%) of the community finds their new occupation comfortable as it requires new professional skills in order to succeed. Table 13 indicates that most of the community (74.5%) feels a lack in professional skills for their new occupation. More than half of them (Table 14, 54.9%) find it difficult to have a suitable place to carry out their new occupation. Most of the Narikuravar community in Idhaya Nagar have taken to making bead necklaces as their new occupation, and many of them (84.3%) find it difficult to find money to buy the necessities for their business. Without sufficient money to even make ends meet, they are forced to borrow money from money lenders at a high interest to pay for what they need in new businesses. Though they make bead necklaces with much difficulty, Table 15 shows that most of them (88.2%) find difficulty in marketing their products. The reasons behind this are marketing in unknown places, taboos on the Narikuravar community, difficulty in gaining credibility for the products from the buyers, people's attachment to branded items and so on.

Table 17 The Places of Sales of their Products

Places of Sales	Frequency	Percent
Local	19	37.3
Outstation	32	62.7
Total	51	100.0

Table 18 The Persons involved in Sales

Persons involved in Sales	Frequency	Percent
Male	9	17.6
Female	5	9.8
Both	37	72.5
Total	51	100.0

Table 19 Stay in Outstations during Sales

Stay in Outstation	Frequency	Percent
Never	7	13.7
Sometimes	14	27.5
Most of the time	22	43.1
Always	8	15.7
Total	51	100.0

Table 20 Duration of Stay in Outstations

Stay in the Migrated Places	Frequency	Percent
Less than 15 days	18	35.3
15-30 days	29	56.9
More than 30 days	4	7.8
Total	51	100.0

Table 21 Availability of Basic Needs in the Present Occupation

Basic Needs	Frequency	Percent
Never	11	21.6
Somewhat	33	64.7
Mostly	4	7.8
Completely	3	5.9
Total	51	100.0

Table 22 Renting Home or Room during Migration

Renting	Frequency	Percent
Never	28	54.9
Sometimes	9	17.6
Most of the time	14	27.5
Total	51	100.0

Table 23 Facing Threats in the Migration Destinations

Threat	Frequency	Percent
Never	15	29.4
Sometimes	15	29.4
Most of the times	16	31.4
Always	5	9.8
Total	51	100.0

Table 24 Belongings Stolen at the Migration Destinations

Stolen	Frequency	Percent
Never	12	23.5
Sometimes	23	45.1
Most of the times	14	27.5
Always	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Table 25 Facing Violence in the Migration Destinations

Facing Violence	Frequency	Percent
Never	16	31.4
Sometimes	14	27.5
Most of the times	15	29.4
Always	6	11.8
Total	51	100.0

The difficulties faced by the Narikuravar community during the sales of their products are clear in Tables 17–25. Most of the members (62.7%) of the community do the marketing of their products at outstations. As Table 18 indicates, both males and females (72.5%) are involved in marketing at the outstations. Most of them tend to stay in outstations (86.3%) for a duration of 15–30 days since they do not have much money to spend on traveling back to their native place. During their stay at the outstations, most of them (78.4) find difficulty in fulfilling their basic needs such as food, water, clothing, sleep, and shelter. As shown in Table 22, most of them do not rent a room at the migration destinations. There are two reasons: one is insufficient money to rent a room, and the other is the unavailability of the room due to discrimination against the Narikuravar community, as they are considered lower class by society. Table 23 shows that most of them have been threatened during the migration to outstations during the sale of their products since they are vulnerable without socio-economic-political support in society. Since they stay on the footpaths and on the platforms of bus and railway stations, the belongings of many (76.5%) of the Narikuravar community are stolen during their stays in the outstations. A significant percent (68.7%) of the members have even faced violence during their stay at the outstations (Table 25). The violence stems from being suspected of being thieves and criminals as they sleep in unsafe and unknown places. The field survey indicates that the members of the Narikuravar community in Idhaya Nagar find various difficulties during their migration for the selling of their products. Some of the reasons would be the taboo on the Narikuravar community by society, discrimination against the Narikuravar community, and lack of proper protection for the members of the Narikuravar community by police officials.

### The role of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations in Protecting the Rights of the Narikuravar Community

This section analyzes the roles of governmental and non-governmental organizations in improving the socio-economic conditions of the Narikuravar community.

Table 26 Law Protecting Narikuravar Community

Protection of Law	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	23.5
No	39	76.5
Total	51	100.0

Table 27 Government Department Working for the Welfare of the Narikuravar Community

Government Department	Frequency	Percent
Yes	9	17.6
No	42	82.4
Total	51	100.0

Table 28 Narikuravar Association for Protection of Rights

Association	Frequency	Percent
Yes	9	17.6
No	42	81.4
Total	51	100.0

Table 29 NGOs Working for the Welfare of the Narikuravar Community

NGOs	Frequency	Percent
Yes	25	49.0
No	26	51.0
Total	51	100.0

Table 30 Awareness of Government Welfare Schemes

Awareness	Frequency	Percent
None	15	29.4
No much	28	54.9
A lot	6	11.8
Complete	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

Table 31 Beneficiaries of the Governmental Housing Scheme

Beneficiaries	Frequency	Percent
None	3	5.9
Few	32	62.7
Many	11	21.6
All	5	9.8
Total	51	100.0

Table 32 Beneficiaries of Government Rations

Beneficiaries	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	11.8
Sometimes	10	19.6
Often	15	29.4
Always	20	39.2
Total	51	100.0

The socio-economic conditions of the Narikuravar community are deficient, without having any notable change in their quality of life over time. In the British colonial history of India, they were categorized as a socially marginalized group, and were excluded from political, social and economic participation with the rest of the community. Even since the independence of India, the impoverished life of the Narikuravar community continues, and there have not been many governmental policies and projects which could change the life of the community. As we observe in Tables 26 and 27, there are not many governmental laws protecting the rights of the Narikuravar community nor a government department working for the welfare of the community. One of the constitutional and legal reasons would be the placement of the Narikuravar community in the Categorization of Caste list. Though the Narikuravar community have most of the traits of Tribal communities in India, they were placed in the category of Most Backward Caste. The tribal communities in India enjoy a lot of benefits from the various reservation policies of the government from birth to death, and they are given

preference in education, employment, promotion in their career, and so on. However, though the Narikuravar community are like the tribal communities, living in poor socio-economic conditions, they are not given special attention due to their caste categorization. According to the NGOs working with the Idhaya Nagar community, there are no official data or documents on the population, education, employment, and other details of the Narikuravar community. They are an under-researched community for two reasons: they are nomadic in nature, often on the move, making it difficult to make a statistical study, secondly, since they are politically uninfluential, they are neglected by the government as well. The Narikuravar community does not have their own associations to protect their rights as shown in Table 28. They lack the necessary information to form such associations. Due to poverty, they are attending to migrating to different places to earn their living rather than thinking of their rights and privileges. Table 29 makes it clear that there are many NGOs working for the welfare of the Narikuravar community improving the members of the community, helping the education of the children, caring for the health issues of the community, forming self-help groups, attending to the legal needs of the community, and so on. Since the Narikuravar community is uneducated and not well-informed, they are not aware of the various schemes of the government. One of the noteworthy works of the NGO in the Idhaya Nagar is making the community aware of the various government policies and schemes provided to them. As we observe in Tables 30 and 31, only a few of the members of the community are aware of the various schemes of government such as the housing scheme (Table 31). However, as the Narikuravar community is economically poor, most of them (Table 32) were aware of the rations of the government providing grocery items at a subsidised rate.

Table 33 Current Status of Narikuravar community after 20 years of settlement in Idhaya Nagar

Issues	Bad	To some extent	Getting Better	Best
Dignity in the society	9 (17.6%)	24 (47.1%)	12 (23.5%)	6 (11.8%)
Economic condition	9 (17.6%)	32 (62.7%)	10 (19.6%)	—
Educational status	7 (13.7%)	13 (25.5%)	19 (37.3%)	12 (23.5%)
Employment opportunity	26 (51.0%)	13 (25.5%)	12 (23.5%)	—
Culture	15 (29.4%)	20 (39.2%)	2 (3.9%)	14 (27.5%)
Health status	13 (25.5%)	20 (39.2%)	12 (23.5%)	6 (11.8%)
Social status	18 (35.3%)	19 (37.3%)	9 (17.6%)	5 (9.8%)
Respect in society	14 (27.5%)	16 (31.4%)	11 (21.6%)	10 (19.6%)
One's own business	10 (19.6%)	21 (41.2%)	6 (11.8%)	14 (27.5%)
Recognition in society	23 (45.1%)	16 (31.4%)	10 (19.6%)	2 (3.9%)

The study on the present condition of the Idhaya Nagar community after 20 years of settlement shows that there is a gradual improvement in their overall living conditions, yet



there are also areas that need more attention and care. Due to their settlement in one particular place, the children of the Narikuravar community are able to continually attend school, and gradually the educational status (60.8%) of their community is improving. According to the interview with the community and NGOs, Sacred Heart College Society (SHCS), and Tirupattur, run by the congregation of Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), are playing an important role in the education of the children of the Narikuravar community. They inform the parents and children of the importance of education for the empowerment of the community. They help the children to get enrolled in government and private schools. There is also the Evening Study Centre at Idhaya Nagar run by SHCS, helping the children with their homework, and clarifying the subjects that they do not understand at school. SHCS has appointed a teacher and volunteers from Sacred Heart College who take care of the centre, with a good number of children regularly attending the evening tuition classes. During the weekends, the children are offered motivational classes, special classes in Maths, Social Science, and English, with group building games and lessons on social etiquette. Snacks and refreshments are provided which also encourage many children to participate in the weekend classes. Once a month, the children are brought to the Sacred Heart College (run by SDB) to have sports and games on the campus and participate in exercises for personality and leadership development. According to the SHCS, the children of the Idhaya Nagar community participate in the summer camp organized for children from different communities and places, giving them opportunities to interact with other children through various activities and to build up the confidence to be a part of the larger society. SHCS also offers educational scholarships to reduce dropouts. Though migration and poor economic conditions were the cause of a large percentage of dropouts among the Narikuravar community children, being settled at Idhaya Nagar and being provided with educational scholarships from SHCS have improved the educational status of the Idhaya Nagar community.

While their educational status is improving, on the other hand, their employment rate is poor (51%). There are three main reasons proposed for their poor employment. First, state and central governments have inconsistent policies towards the welfare of the Narikuravar community. Though they are socio-economically poor, they are not given reservations and concessions available in the various government policies on education and employment. Second, the other communities discriminate against the people of the Narikuravar community as being uncivilized and unreliable. Thus, they are not provided with job opportunities in either the formal or informal sectors. Third, the Narikuravar community themselves practice social self-exclusion. Having unique cultural and social habits, the Narikuravar community avoid mingling with the people of other communities either in business or in personal communications and collaborations.

The government of India took the initiative to improve the economic and employment conditions of poor rural people and implemented the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in 2005. Though the people from Narikuravar community are qualified, being in a rural and unemployed situation, they exclude themselves, so they remain unemployed and poor. Given the socio-cultural realities of the Narikuravar communities, the government should make plans and policies that would benefit them both economically and socially.

The survey at Idhaya Nagar shows that the majority of the members of the community (60.8%) are finding difficulty in conducting their business. Most of them are in the business of making and selling bead ornaments. The interviews indicate that most of them have learnt the trade from their parents and relatives in the village, and none of them are trained in modern skills with modern technical machines in the professional training schools and training centres. Hence, though family trained in making ornaments, they lack the professional touch in their job, and thus their products are not attractive enough for the consumers from good economic backgrounds; consequently, their products are not sold at good prices. They also lack entrepreneurial skills in selling their products. Though they work hard making ornaments, migrating to different places to sell their products, they don't earn much, leading to poverty. The Government should support them with good marketing opportunities and marketplaces near their residences so that they could sell their products at a reasonable profit.

In an interview with a member of SHCS, the NGO at Idhaya Nagar, it was learnt that SHCS has introduced Self Help Groups and Micro Credit Facilitation to the members of Idhaya Nagar for their economic welfare. The Self-Help Group program is a Women's Empowerment program under which women save small amounts every month in SHGs (Self Help Groups). They obtain loans from their SHGs which helps them avoid traditional money lenders with high interest rates. The SHGs also assist women to set up new businesses and help women and their families become economically independent. Besides aiding in financial autonomy, the SHG provides a platform for these women to discuss social issues. SHGs also strengthen the solidarity, confidence, and courage among the women in the community.

The SHCS also introduced the community to the benefits of the Micro Credit Program (MCP). According to Sankaran, MCPs extend small loans to poor people for self-employment projects that generate income, allowing them to care for themselves and their families. Credit is usually provided to groups of individuals or village organizations that use joint-liability to enforce loan repayment. Through group savings and loans, poor people often increase their economic security and well-being. Over the past two decades MCPs have emerged as one of the leading strategies in the overall movement to end poverty (Mohanan Sankaran 2005). Thus, using the benefits of MCPs, the women of the Idhaya Nagar community make efforts to empower themselves economically as a community of women. SHCS has built a multi-purpose/community hall in Idhaya Nagar to facilitate the various gatherings of different groups formed in the Idhaya Nagar community such as SHGs, MCPs, school children, village council members, and adults, which leads to the overall empowerment of the community. Since they do not have proper housing facilities and undergo migration, they have little recourse to institutions when faced with health issues. Indeed, the government has not established any hospital or clinic in their residential areas. Moreover, interviews indicate that most of them avoid hospitals unless they are in a very serious situation and about to die. They manage most of their illnesses with their traditional medicines. In the interview with the volunteers of the SHCS NGO at Idhaya Nagar, it was learnt that the SHCS has helped a number of families to maintain healthy environments by building toilets in their houses. Through the survey it is shown that social status, recognition, and dignity of the members of the Idhaya Nagar community amidst the members of the other communities are still lacking; they are not valued

as human beings. The government should make laws and policies that uphold the human dignity of and respect for the members of the Narikuravar community.

Table 34 Internal Challenges of the Narikuravar community in Idhaya Nagar

Challenges	Never	Sometimes	Mostly	Always
Lack of unity	19 (37.3%)	17 (33.3%)	1 ( 2.0%)	14 (27.5%)
Culture lag	4 ( 7.8%)	30 (58.8%)	11 (21.6%)	6 (11.8%)
Gender bias	16 (31.4%)	25 (49.0%)	5 ( 9.8%)	5 ( 9.8%)
Superstitious beliefs	9 (17.6%)	32 (62.7%)	4 ( 7.8%)	6 (11.8%)
Marriage within blood relations	9 (17.6%)	12 (23.5%)	16 (31.4%)	14 (27.5%)
Inter-caste marriage	33 (64.7%)	15 (29.4%)	1 ( 2.0%)	2 ( 3.9%)
Values	20 (39.2%)	16 (31.4%)	11 (21.6%)	4 ( 7.8%)

In the field survey at Idhaya Nagar, it was observed that there are also various internal challenges regarding their socio-economic-cultural growth. In the fast-growing era of technology and globalization, the members of the community are quite adamant in following the conservative customs, values, and traditions of their community which impede their growth. Various superstitious beliefs prevent the members of the Narikuravar community from acting freely and rationally. One of the concrete examples involves female children and women. Most of the Narikuravar community do not permit female children to attend school upon attaining puberty, and they take pride in it. It deprives the female children of education and bright futures. Since the female children remain at home, parents marry off their girls at very young ages to boys in the same community, thinking that they are securing their daughters' future. In the survey, it was learnt that majority (64.7%) don't accept their children entering inter-caste marriage. Hence, the children do not have freedom to choose their own life partners. Since they get married at a young age, they are faced with various health issues. In the survey, it was observed that most of them are addicted to alcohol and return home in the evenings drunk, leading to quarrels and fights. Since they return home very late in the evening, they buy food for the family meal in the restaurants. In this way their daily wages are spent on alcohol and restaurant food, leaving no savings for the future. Without savings, they have to borrow money from moneylenders in cases of emergency, sickness, celebration, education of children, and so on. Most of them are unable to repay the money and interest, resulting in a vicious circle of poverty and lack of dignity in society.

## Conclusion

This field research on the Narikuravar community, who settled in Idhaya Nagar 20 years ago, has brought out some of the changes and challenges faced by the community. Thanks to

their permanent settlement in one place, they are eligible to enjoy various rights and privileges as citizens of India. In the interview with the members of the community, it was learnt that a large number of them are able to succeed in their personal businesses. With the support of NGOs working in Idhaya Nagar, the children and women of the community have benefited from various educational, economic, health, and social policies of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Overall, the Narikuravar community has seen gradual improvement; however, there are also various issues which confront them such as poverty, disease, school dropouts, adult illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination, poor housing, hygiene, superstitious beliefs, gender bias, social exclusion, and so on. The present condition of the Narikuravar community could be improved through a three-pronged collaboration between the government, members of other communities, and the members of Narikuravar community.

The government has not made many innovative policies and laws for the dignity and living conditions of the members of Narikuravar community. There could be two reasons. One would be that the Narikuravar community is not placed in the reserved category of caste list; hence, they cannot enjoy governmental benefits in the arena of education, employment, and so on. The second reason would be that they are comparatively few in number, and hence wield no political influence on the government. Recently, the government has passed a new law that includes the Narikuravar community in the reserved category of caste list and there is hope that proactive and target-oriented government programs that will bring improvement in the community.

The field survey indicates that the members of the Narikuravar community find various difficulties during their migration for the selling of their products. One of these difficulties is the discrimination against the Narikuravar community. Other communities should learn to include the Narikuravar community as part of society treating them with respect and dignity, for example employing members of the Narikuravar community in the private and informal sectors. The active collaboration of the members of other communities is very important in bringing change to the lives of Narikuravar community.

In order to gain emancipation and empowerment in socio-economic-cultural aspects, the Narikuravar community needs to overcome various internal challenges in their community such as superstitious beliefs, gender bias, disunity, culture lag, social exclusion, lack of vision, and so on. Since the Narikuravar do not have the habit of saving money, in cases of emergency, they have to resort to moneylenders and pay high interest. Consequently, they remain poor and disrespected in society despite their hard work.

To summarize, the wholistic growth of the Narikuravar community would be possible through innovative governmental policies and laws that emancipate the socio-economic conditions of the community and the active and altruistic collaboration of members of other communities through the programs of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Narikuravar community should awaken their inner desire and determination to overcome the internal challenges of the community, and grasp the various opportunities provided by the formal and informal sectors to empower and emancipate the members of their community as part of the universal society.

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