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A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS & RIGHTS OF  
MIGRANT LABOURS WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO IRULA COMMUNITY AT  
TIRUVALLUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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**ABSTRACT**

*P*overty has been a major issue to India since independence and a series of anti-poverty schemes. The multidimensional poverty index of the Indian population shows that 28.6 percent lives below the income poverty (HDR 2010). In Tamil Nadu, the Malayali and Irula tribes have a population size of one lakh, together these two tribes 68.66 percent of the total tribal population (Mohanty, 2006). Tiruvallur district has a scheduled tribe population that constitutes 1.37 percent of the total population and is ranked 8th in terms of concentration of tribal population in Tamil Nadu (Census 2001). The Migrant Labours are pushed to the more labour intensive sectors like brick kilns, rice mills, plantations, stone quarries, building construction, road construction etc. But due to the location and nature of the jobs in the unorganized sector the tribals have to go work and live there. This results in huge scale migration of individuals and in most cases families that is mostly intra-district, inter-district and inter-state migration. Though livelihood is ensured for the tribal migrants their illiteracy and lack of awareness on rights makes them vulnerable to exploitation in many ways by the middlemen and the employers. The unorganized sector is highly characterized by non formal employer worker relationship, low wages, long hours of work, harsh working conditions, labour exploitation, lack of social protection, total absence of workers welfare, lack of workers organizations, non compliance to labour laws, seasonal unemployment and exclusion from government welfare

*schemes and services. Hence Migration seems to be a solution to the problems of the tribals in their native villages or districts but it has also become a major reason that exposes these marginalized communities to much more vulnerable situations of exploitation and denial of rights and welfare services. Hence the topic has been chosen as a Study "A Study on the Problems & Rights of Migrant Labours with Special Reference to Irula Community at Tiruvallur District, Tamilnadu."*

**KEYWORDS:** *Irulas, Tribals, Indebtedness, Forcible Eviction, Migration, Livelihood*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The right to mobility is important human right especially when people are faced with limited economic opportunities and alternative livelihood. India embarked on the new economic policy of liberalization in 1991 and migration has gained its importance especially in this process of renovating the social structure and where change is certain in every aspect of human life. The progress in the levels of education and that of transport and communication facilities, the shift of work force from agriculture to industry and tertiary activities etc has resulted in a rapid transformation of Indian economy. These technological advancements and urban growth has undoubtedly become instruments of change in the most of the developing countries including India but a closer examination reveals that this growth of the urban centers is a result of migration of people from villages to the cities. The migration for livelihood among the poor (scheduled caste and scheduled tribes) is on a constant rise due to the complex interplay of the push and pulls factors. Taking advantage of their situation, the unorganised sector pushes them to the extreme, making them highly vulnerable due to the exploitative conditions of work and inhuman living conditions. Migration has provided a livelihood no doubt, but whether it has ensured these vulnerable sections of the society with all the safety, security and most importantly their rights remains to be answered.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS OF TRIBALS**

The Constitution of India through a policy of positive discrimination and affirmative action, particularly for the scheduled tribes has devoted more than 20 Articles for their redressal and upliftment of the under privileged. It has been done to protect these communities from all possible exploitations and ensure social justice. The tribals, along with Dalits, otherwise the so called untouchables, became subjected to special protective provisions under the Indian Constitution. The vast majority of Indigenous Peoples were classified as Scheduled Tribes.

Under Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India it refers Scheduled Tribes as those communities, who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. This Article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by the President through an initial public notification or through a subsequent amending Act of Parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes. The list of Scheduled Tribes is State/ Union Territory specific and a community declared as a Scheduled Tribe in a State need not be so in another State. The inclusion of a community as a Scheduled Tribe is an ongoing process.

The Fifth Schedule to the Constitution lays down certain prescriptions about the Scheduled Areas (SAs) as well as the STs in states other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura

and Mizoram by ensuring submission of Annual Reports by the Governors to the President of India regarding the Administration of the SAs and setting up of Tribal Advisory Councils to advise on matters pertaining to the welfare and advancement of the STs (Article 244(1), the Constitution of India). Meanwhile, referring to the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution prescribes certain tribal areas in these states as Autonomous Regions with special district councils (Article 244(2), the Constitution of India).

In Tamil Nadu there are six tribal communities (Irular, Kattunayakan, Kota, Kurumba, Paniyan and Toda) that are recognized by the government as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs). Their total population is 2,17,937 (794,697 in census 2011) in the state and among them Irulas have the largest population of 1,55,606 among the PTGs constituting 71.4 percentage (Census 2001).

### **THE IRULA COMMUNITY**

Irulas are an ethnic group of India. They inhabit various parts of the southern half of the country, but mainly reside in the Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu. A scheduled tribe, their population in this region is estimated at between 1000 to 2000 people. The Census of Kerala identified 756 Irulan individuals from 189 families, who lived in 9 settlements covering .23 km<sup>2</sup> in the state. The Irula speak Irula, which belongs to the Dravidian family.

### **Issues Faced by Tribals:-**

Indigenous Peoples suffer higher rates of poverty, landlessness, malnutrition, human rights violation, unemployment and internal displacement than other sects of the society, and they have lower level of literacy and less access to health services.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS**

In terms of human development index, tribals are at the bottom of the rank in every state, every district and every village. No one can question the basic fact and truth that the tribals are the poorest of the poor in India. About 65 percent of the Scheduled Tribal population in India (except north east region) is living below the poverty line. Low literacy rate, high drop-out rate in school, nutritional deficiencies, endemic diseases and poor living conditions, low bargaining power, indebtedness, forcible eviction, migration, mortgage, atrocities, violence, exploitation of traditional knowledge, and degradation of forest resources, negligence are the long-term problems faced by tribal people. The tribals in India live under extreme poverty and hunger because the majority of them do not have land for cultivation. The tribals do not have the habit of saving money. Most of the displaced tribals are denied of their right to live in forest which used to be their source of livelihood. Now they depend only on daily manual work to meet their expenses. Now they depend only on daily manual work to meet their expenses. And the awareness towards the Human Rights is less.

### **MIGRATED LABOURS**

Labour migration is an important factor that the socio-economic development of the nation. The constant increase in the movement of people from the rural and most backward areas in search of employment has been a significant feature of the labour market in India since the dawn on the economic liberalization.

Both the Census and the National Sample Survey in India provide the vital statistics related to migration but both only consider a change in the place of residence or birth as the criteria which are no way related to employment. As per the Census a person is considered to be a migrant if his/her place of

enumeration (village/town) is different from the last (previous) usual residence. The usual residence for the purpose of census is taken to be the person staying continuously for a period of six months or more. However, the visit of married women (staying sometimes more than six months) to their parent's house for child birth or for any other reason is not considered as migratory movement. Again, movement from one locality to another within the same town or village is not considered as migration (Census 2011).

The term migrant is usually understood to cover all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of "personal convenience" and without intervention of an external compelling factor. This term therefore applies to persons, and family members, moving to another country or region to better their material or social conditions and improve the prospect for themselves or their family (IOM 2004).

A large number of tribal young men and women are either unemployed or underemployed. They are unhappy for they are not able to get jobs that can keep them occupied throughout the year. They need to be helped in finding secondary source of income by developing animal husbandry, poultry farming, handicrafts, handloom weaving, etc.

Thus, in our study we tried to fine out the problems and rights of the migrants labours.

The objectives of the study are:

- ★ To study the problems faced by the Irula community migrant Labours.
- ★ To study the socio - economic conditions of the Irula migrant community.
- ★ To study the various Rights of migrants labours of Irula community.

- ★ To study the workers welfare and the coverage of the government welfare schemes among the Migrant Labours.

### **RICE MILLING SECTOR**

India's 68.8 percent of the population lives in the rural areas and most of them are part of the unorganised sector that contributes 92 percent of the labour force (ILO). The unorganised sector provides a variety of employment opportunities with varied incomes for the semi skilled and unskilled labour force. Rice being the staple diet of the South Indian states and its production is mainly done in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The paddy needs to be processed into rice and then sold into the open market. The paddy processing into rice was traditionally a home based operation but with the industrialization it has developed into broad based operations. Redhills area in Tiruvallur district is about 25 kilometers from Chennai and the concentration of rice milling sector is high due to its proximity to Chennai city and the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh the major rice producing states in south. The industry has been operating over the past 25 years and most of the rice mills were established initially as boiling and drying yards and many units have undergone mechanization during the past 10 to 15 years. The industry has attracted the rural population with its numerous job opportunities leading to mass migration of individuals and families from within the state and other states like Andhra Pradesh, Odhisa and Bihar.

### **SAMPLE**

The state of Tamil Nadu being the third most urbanized state in India is an example of rapid urbanization according to 2011 census. It tops the list of urbanized states with 48.45 percent of the population living in urban areas in 2011 compared to 34.15 percent in 1991

census, which is an increase of 14.3 percent. The state has 32 districts and there 10 city corporations and 148 municipalities, 561 town panchayats and 12,618 village panchayats. This evidently speaks of the rapid urbanization of the state. The adjacent districts to the metropolitan city also tend to become urbanized very soon.

The study was carried out in Tiruvallur District is located in the North East part of Tamil Nadu. It is situated in the North latitude between 12°15' and 13°15' and East longitude between 79°15' and 80°20'. The district is surrounded by Kancheepuram district in the South, Vellore district in the West. Bay of Bengal in the East and the State of Andhra Pradesh in the North. The district spreads over an area of about 3,424 Square Kilometers. Tiruvallur district comprises of four revenue divisions (Tiruttani, Tiruvallur, Ambattur and Ponneri) with nine taluks (Tiruvallur, Pallipattu, Tirutaani, Ponammale, Ambattur, Madhavaram, Uthukkottai, Ponneri and Gummidipoondi) and fourteen development blocks (Appendix - 2). The district has a population of 27,54,756 (Male -13,97,407 and Female - 13,57,349). The scheduled tribe population is 37,858 (Male - 18,880 and female - 18,978). (Statistical

Handbook, 2010 -2011). The district situated adjacent to Chennai and has enjoyed the benefits of urbanization with 16 industrial estates and many other agro-based industries. The total rural population is 45.52 percent and the urban population is 44.48 percent. The main occupation of the district is agriculture and allied activities (Census 2001). The district has a mixture of urban and rural characteristics. The Eastern part of Tiruvallur district is dominated by urban characteristics while the Southern and Northern part of the district has influence of Andhra culture due to its position.

The tool for data collection adopted is interview schedule. The tool was in English which was translated in the local language during the interviews.

Interview schedule is for personal interviews with the 150 respondents. It consists of questions pertaining to migration, the push and pull factors and its trends. The situation of the migrant workers in the destination areas focusing on their living conditions, working conditions, the welfare and safety measures provided by the employers in the rice milling sector, their health conditions, education of children and the inclusion of the workers under the government welfare schemes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Lack of Homestead Rights \* Migration of Respondents Cross tabulation

			Migration of Respondents		Total
			Rural to Rural	Rural to Urban	
<b>Lack of Homestead Rights</b>	Yes	Count	37	9	46
		Expected Count	25.1	20.9	46
		% within Lack of Homestead Rights	45.1%	13.2%	30.7%
	No	Count	45	59	104
		Expected Count	56.9	47.1	104
		% within Lack of Homestead Rights	54.9%	86.8%	69.3%
<b>Total</b>		Count	82	68	150
		Expected Count	82.0	68.0	150.0
		% within Lack of Homestead Rights	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The above table reveals that around one third (30.7%) 46 out of 150 respondents have migrated due to the lack of homestead rights in the source villages while the for other 69.3 percent (104 out of 150 respondents) it does not seem to be an issue in their migration

process. An in depth analysis of migration based on their trend shows that among the rural to rural migrants 45.1 percent (37 out of 82) and 13.2 percent (9 out of 68) the rural to urban migrants have cited it as one of the reasons for their migration.

CORRELATIONS

		Lack of Homestead Rights	Migration of Respondents
<b>Lack of Homestead Rights</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.344(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	150	150
<b>Migration of Respondents</b>	Pearson Correlation	.344(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	150	150

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson’s correlation is positive and low for the two variables indicating a low

and positive association between the variables lack of homestead rights and migration.

**Table 2: Legal Entitlements \* Migration Cross tabulation**

			Migration of Respondents		Total
			Rural to Rural	Rural to Urban	
<b>Lack of Legal Entitlements</b>	Yes	Count	48	9	57
		Expected Count	31.2	25.8	57.0
		% within Migration of the Respondents	58.5%	13.2%	38.0%
	No	Count	34	59	93
		Expected Count	50.8	42.2	93.0
		% within Migration of the Respondents	41.5%	86.8%	62.0%
<b>Total</b>		Count	82	68	150
		Count	82	68	150
		% within Migration of the Respondents	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Among the migrants, 38 percent (57 out of 150) of the respondents have cited the lack of legal entitlements in their native villages as the reason for migration. It is evident from further analysis that more of rural to rural migrants (58.5%), 48 of 82 respondents and less

(13.2%) 9 out of 68 respondents among the rural to urban migrants have cited it as a reason for their migration. The proportion of people migrating from rural to rural areas due to lack of legal entitlements is comparatively high compared to those migrating from rural to urban area within the sector.

## CORRELATION

		Migration of the Respondents	Lack of Legal Entitlements
<b>Migration of the Respondents</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.465(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	150	150
<b>Lack of Legal Entitlements</b>	Pearson Correlation	.465(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	150	150

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson's correlation coefficient is positive and moderate between the two variables lack of legal entitlements and

migration indicating a moderate and positive association.

## CONCLUSION

The Irula migrant workers are living in an overwhelming socio – economic condition that forms the major push and pull factors in their migration to the unorganised sector in Redhills area of Tiruvallur district. Migration has ensured their survival but at the cost of greater vulnerability both in their source and but destination areas of work leading to exploitation of labour and neo debt bondage like conditions in the sector. Their living and working conditions are appalling which violates even the most basic human and labour conventions and rights in the country. Further adding to their despair is the total absence of welfare and safety measures from the employers in the sector and the lack the government entitlements, rights and services that has turned them into the missing citizens of this nation and an invisible workforce in the unorganised sector. The government has a major role to play in ensuring the rights, entitlements and services to this marginalised community through convergence of government schemes and services in their source areas and through an effective enforcement machinery protect and safeguard the rights of the workers and the punish offenders where extreme cases of labour exploitation are found. The employers have a greater role of providing decent living and working conditions that uphold the migrant workers rights and dignity. They also should ensure the workers safety and social security through welfare measures and safety mechanisms within the sector. Civil societies should actively engage in right based activities that will empower the workers and help them to organize through which their collective voice could be heard. The rights of every single migrant worker should be protected and with these highly vulnerable conditions if exclusion

continues they will remain as the missing citizens of this country and an invisible workforce that contributes to the economy at the cost of their human dignity, rights and vulnerability.

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