

# Invisible Margins: A Study on Panniandi Community in Thiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri Districts of Tamil Nadu

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## Background

Traditional caste-based hierarchical division of labour continues to prevail in India even today. The Indian caste system which is based on the four varna division is inextricably linked with and thrives on the reinforcement of caste-based occupations; designating distinct roles and allocating social values to specific groups in society. The system is also associated with repugnant practices like 'untouchability' and 'unseeability' which presumes some caste groups as 'pure', and some others as 'polluted' (Purity Vs Pollution). Occupations traditionally considered as 'lowly' continue to be dominated by the historically underprivileged sections in general, more so by the specific castes associated with such work. There are several such caste groups that suffer from extremely high levels of vulnerability, experiencing severe challenges in their everyday survival.

One of them is the "*Panniandi community*" of Tamil Nadu, whose main occupation is the rearing of pigs. The name 'Panniandi' derived from their traditional occupation of piggery; '*Panni*' mean 'Pig' and '*Andi*' meaning 'wanderer' is their identity marker. Their primary occupation is pig rearing, apart from which they also engage themselves in manual scavenging and sanitation work. The taboo associated with their occupation subjects the community to discrimination by the mainstream sections just like most other Dalit communities in general. The 1981 Census totalled their population in Tamil Nadu at 2595 (The Scheduled Castes – K S Singh, P.No. 1052 – 1053). While according to the 2011 Census, the *Panniandi* population identified in the state of Tamil Nadu was at 11,401. Despite the gradual increase of the Panniandi population as per population projections in two decades, the people of the community continue to face challenges in gaining state recognition as '*Panniandi*', a scheduled tribe. Recent incidents in the news have further highlighted the struggles of members in obtaining a community certificate in the name of '*Panniandi*'.

This study therefore aims to understand and analyse in detail this particular issue of **community recognition** of the group in the state and the associated social challenges.

## Scope of the Study

There are numerous Dalit groups in India whose life and vulnerabilities have not yet been explored in academic scholarship. "*Panniandi*," with their distinct socio-economic and cultural background is one such community that is yet to be studied in detail. Such surveys allow us a glimpse into the ground realities of their lives, facilitating a more informed bottom-up decision-making process. Thereby benefiting the concerned groups through essential targeted schemes and policies to tackle key challenges and enable growth.

### Research Team

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## Objectives

- To explore the demographic, socio-economic and livelihood conditions of the “Panniandi” Community in Tiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri districts of Tamil Nadu.
- To understand their socio-cultural patterns
- To find out caste-based vulnerabilities and community identity issues experienced by the community as a result of social exclusion and inequality and suggest necessary remedies.

## Methodology

The primary aim of the study is to enumerate the socio-economic condition of “Panniandi” community in Tamil Nadu. Their backwardness and vulnerabilities have not been studied much by both academia as well as the literature. The study attempted to understand their discrimination, vulnerabilities and social interaction with other communities.

Thus, a mixed method has been adopted to execute the focus areas of the study. Quantitative research using the ‘Kobo toolbox’ has been undertaken to study the community’s socio-economic status, health and livelihood conditions. Additionally, qualitative research methods have also been used to study the interaction patterns, vulnerabilities and discriminations. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Case Studies, Focused Group Discussion (FGDs) and Observation were also conducted. The study has covered the two districts of Tiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu wherein the population of the “Panniandi” community is dense.

## Sampling

Although, the population is unknown for the proposed study, according to the 2011 census data, it was estimated that there are 1,101 individuals of the “Panniandi” community residing in the Tiruvannamalai district and 1,725 of them located in the Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu.

Since the current population is unknown and the study adopts the convenient sampling technique for executing the research, six blocks have been covered in each district of Tiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri. Totally 292 persons from the community have been interviewed for the study as samples.

## Relevance of the Research

The issue of distribution of community certificates to the scheduled castes and tribes has become a relevant discourse, with increasing incidents of denial of certificates by authorities. In the modern times, Dalit communities like the “Panniandi” are leaving their traditional employment as a result of relatively greater social mobility, occupational diversity, and most significantly, their desire to be liberated from the menial, polluting caste-based occupations. However, this departure from their traditional occupation eventually poses a great challenge when it comes to proving their ‘backwardness’ to the government. In this case, the occupation of pig rearing becomes the sole justification of eligibility for government intervention.

Their desire to break the shackles of caste barriers and emancipate themselves becomes detrimental to their ability to avail their due rights and relief as an exploited community, since the government still goes by a very rudimentary assessment of Scheduled Communities.

The current study will seek to learn about this fact. It aims to support the government in refining the existing rehabilitation and welfare scheme programmes and develop new ones based on the major findings of study. Ultimately, the research findings’ will pave way to create acts and policies for the growth and welfare of the “Panniandi” Community of Tamil Nadu and help move closer to eradicating the practice of caste-based discriminations against them from society.



## Process

### Phase I: Review, Pilot Study and Tool Finalisation

- Collected secondary literature on the issues surrounding *Panniandi* community.
- Consultation has been made with organizations working for *Panniandi* community and their rights.
- Conducted Pilot survey in both Tiruvannamalai and Dharmapuri District
- Finalised the research tool (Interview Schedule) and converted that into Kobo toolbox application.

### Phase II: Field Data Collection

- Documented the cases of caste atrocities faced by *Panniandi* community in the Tiruvannamalai district.
- Conducted FGD among the *Panniandi* community in both districts.
- Quantitative data was collected using the Kobo toolbox application.

- Recorded case studies on caste based violences in the field.

### Phase – III: Data Analysis and Interpretation

- Data cleaning and analysis are carried out using SPSS for the quantitative data.
- Qualitative data is analyzed in thematic subjects.

### Phase – IV: Report Generation and Policy Recommendations

- Findings will be compiled in a comprehensive report, highlighting the issues faced by *Panniandi* community in general and challenges with regard to issuing of community certificate in specific;
- Formulation of policy recommendations to address the identified needs of *Panniandi* community and to promote well-being of the *Panniandi* community through the results of the study will be done.



## CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY

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