
Life of Villagers at Thirupachur in Thiruvallur District of Tamil Nadu: A Sociological Insight

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ABSTRACT

India comprises of eighty four percent of villages. Life in a village related to simplicity and subsistence have made sound reverberations. This study materialized in one such visit to a place in Thiruvallur District named as Thirupachur. Interested in the way of their living, these understandings and observations are recorded in the study focusing the insights from sociological perspectives.

Introduction

“The Soul of India lies in its villages”, as rightly pointed out by Mahatma Gandhi. If this be the underlying fact a soul search would definitely be beneficial. The location of the Thirupachur village is within the beautiful limits of Thiruvallur district in Tamil Nadu, the jurisdiction of Palliaraikuppam. The distance from Chennai (State Capital) is 49 Kms. The village population of Thirupachur has about 12,353 people, (male population 6,201 : female population 6,152). The vicinity has about 3,029 houses in Thirupachur villages. Agriculture is predominantly practiced and their livelihood depends on it completely. Mobility from the village is possible in the form of Public transportation which is available a little away at 2km from the village whereas private transportation is able to reach even within the village.

For all the major economic activities like buying commodities, selling agricultural products, the closest town capital is Thiruvallur. This actually puts at stake all the other basic needs, such as medical facilities, educational institutions and other forms of amenities for recreation and entertainment, to be difficult to reach and includes painstaking efforts as mentioned by the residents.

There is a small school located in the village for learning up to eighth standard. In case to continue further for high and higher secondary classes it becomes a compulsion that the students definitely need to travel to the nearby town or city according to their affordability. This leads to increased drop outs at primary or middle school itself in larger groups irrespective of their gender..

Caste-based divisions are rampantly present in the community, as people live in different neighbourhoods on the basis of caste segregation. The religious faith and belief of the villagers is predominantly Hinduism. The popular practice by the vast majority of the village's inhabitants was similar in the routine of visiting the temples to offer worship to god and prepare Pongal together as an offering included in the rituals followed and the common gathering for such practices also double up as the opportunity for building relationships and interactions of primary nature leading a social gathering.

Majority of women in the village typically stay at home and cater to the household needs. However, they are interested in acquiring various practical life skills like pottery, sewing, and so on. Discussing the various modes of commute, it was noticed that vehicles such as auto rickshaws, buses, cycles etc are equally accessible by the people in the village community. The housing infrastructure consists of mostly single floor housing structures that are constructed with partial support of government funding. This seems to ensure a favourable aspect in setting up residences of their own.

With such an observation of the basic way of life of the rural residents the study focussed to take up the following as objectives to further elaborately understand the rural life of the villagers.

The researcher approached the study village with a hypothesis that the homogeneous livelihood in the village and simple way of living would relate to a peaceful existence in rural society. Though not to be statistically tested the observations were recorded to prove or disprove the preconceived statement.

Review of Literature

Reference some works like Saswatik Tripathy (2018) in the article “A Case Study on the Village Keelamattayan” explained the basic characteristics of the village and specifically analysed how the caste practices obstruct the growth of the individuals and the overall development of the village. Vignesh R. Priyan (2019) “A case study on Ponkurichi village” brings out the important conditions prevailing in the village which obstruct the village becoming self-sufficient and also suggested patterns to develop the village into a smart village. Bhattacharya, Sumanta & Sachdev, Bhavneet (2021) “Smart Village: A new dynamic to end rural urban gap and move towards sustainable development for all” suggests to develop the villages in India by bridging rural urban divide and enabling planned urbanization. Ganee (2014) in “A Case Study of Rural Development Programmes In India” focuses on how rural development programmes work as a remedial measure of problems prevailing in the rural areas. Studies refer to the changes and transformation in Indian rural society in an unique way as is the nature of each village with its own proportion of tales and narratives. On Analysing this the following objectives for the study are framed.

Objectives Of The Study

The main focus of the study is to understand the realities of village life, studying the assess the level of process and pattern of rural change, with more focus on changing patterns of rural livelihoods, marriage, religion, education, occupation, road transportation, housing, sanitation, crime, health etc and its implication for future development. The study tries to understand the awareness level and impact of government interventions in rural development.

Research Methodology

The undertaken study’s nature depicts a descriptive field study, the one which narrates the existing situations in the village. The source of data for the study is based on the Primary data collected using unstructured Interview which was meticulously conducted with more than 50 family’s members all of whom are residents of the village. The interview questions were gradually built in the process of engaging in conversation and were carried out in the regional language and their responses were recorded as notes. The data thus gathered has been inferred from the responses of the 50 samples collected using random sampling method and are tabulated and discussed in the report.

Though there are numerous studies on rural societies in India no particular study has been done with the focus of Thirupachur village. The present study significantly brings out the socio, economic and

political participation and the process of transformation this village setup has undergone in past few years very much in tune with the social change in society.

Observations and Inferences

The features of rural society emphasizing on primary direct face to face relationship in contrast to the urban feature of anonymity is a unique attribute. The other dimensions of understanding of rural life includes the Social Institutions. The trends of change in the rural existence is vastly dependent on the implications from society.

Education: The interviewed families had members especially parents who were educated up to High School. The interests they showed on their children's education and their attitude towards the means to achieve it were completely different. The parents have much desire that their children study well far above them and they are even more eager to send their kids away from home to study in cities or even foreign countries. The significance that they attach to the continuation of education is clearly portrayed. Notwithstanding their financial difficulties, they still want their kids to pursue higher education. These dreams do not detract from the fact that the majority of people enroll their children in government schools, only some families were able to send their children to CBSE schools where focus on their children's overall development was ensured comparatively.

There is a major hindrance in regard with access to education citing lack of infrastructure - schools located in their vicinity. They are forced to travel far from their residences in search of pursuing higher education. The mere presence of a higher secondary school in their area not supported with adequate facilities and standards for amenities for academic and extracurricular activities is a drawback.

Occupation:

Eighty to ninety percent of the villagers openly declared about not having a job to be the main cause for all their problems. It was claimed that the workers had been going for 100 days job (as instituted by the Government Minimum Employment Guarantee Programme), cleaning roads, ponds, lakes, and even ploughing or watering fields after which they still continue to be jobless. The working hours were limited between 8 am to 2 pm. On enquiring the women respondents if they would like to learn any life skills so that they can earn a living alternatively, revealed that the majority felt that their spouses would not later send them to other jobs that might empower them with financial independence. The existence of clear patriarchy lingers with such thoughts and women are at a disadvantage, despite their willingness

to study, they are often denied access and opportunities, which continues keeping them as subordinates and dependents.

Religion: Rural beliefs and traditions are bound in every aspect of day to day living of the members. The customary rites and rituals and religious sentiments are embedded in the regular routines including their agricultural practices. The extent of the overlapping is to a level where rural religion is their way of life including all cultural aspects.

Marriage: The institution of marriage in society has been noted to be more successful today in rural regions than in the past. A predominant practice of child marriage is slowly dying out. Most of the respondents were married between the ages of 12 and 24. They do not, however, favour their children being married at such a young age. They echoed their views that they want their children to study, work, and earn money before getting married. Marriage squeeze is a demographic phenomenon underlining the asymmetry between the availability of potential brides and grooms in a population. Since mate selection is very specific and bound by religion, caste, and region in India, existing demographic and sociocultural variability reflects even more emphatically in the subgroups.

Health: With health being one of the most important factors in human welfare, it is heart wrenching to see how rural populations lack access to health care centres, clinics, as well as hospitals for basic first aid to emergency care. The respondents stated that they had to commute from the village to the city to seek medical care, which is 5.4 kilometers away from Thirupachur village to the government hospital in Thiruvallur town. According to the respondents, it is the only hospital that anyone would be forced to go to during an emergency situation. Some respondents stated it being a government hospital there was lack of proper sanitation and cleanliness, adding further source of infection to the patients.

Sanitation and toilet facilities: Despite being one of the most important aspects of life, the efforts to gather garbage only once a week from homes was worrisome, Hence waste disposal beside or behind their homes was unavoidable. There were no common dustbins found in the streets of the village, each household had their own ways of disposing of their household waste, by gathering the waste in their backyard or burning the garbage after collecting it or segregating it for decomposition etc.

A few respondents claimed that they had paid small amounts (a sum of 1000 rupees) to build toilets as part of the government scheme (Swachh Bharat Scheme), but it was incomplete. India is declared as Open defecation Free Nation as per record. With the numerous schemes and Sustainable Development goals the cleanliness of the environment becomes a high priority. Nearly 70% of the total population in India resides in rural areas. The government targets at working towards the welfare of the people living in rural areas across the nation yet the reality remains different.

Drinking water: None of the respondents reported any issues with distribution and quality of drinking water or any other water-related - sharing of water bodies for domestic or irrigation purposes Individual households have their borewell along with the provisions of the panchayat supply of water on a daily basis to fulfil their needs based on water availability. Access to water common bodies are also away from disputes and restrictions.

Housing and housing schemes: Thirty percent respondents mentioned that they did not have proper and safe houses. Concrete houses are still a privilege instead kaccha or mud houses with tiled or straw roofs are common. In the study area sixty percent of the houses are straw roof houses also with no proper toilets attached. There are numerous housing programmes offered by the government, including the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Indira Awas Yojana and others. The residents of the village are yet to benefit out of such schemes.

Drainage and rainwater management system: The frequent repetitive reported problem in the village premises was with rainwater drainage management. The streets in this locality are mud roads so during the rainy season a lot of potholes, messy streets and other difficulties are caused to the people in the rural area. This excess stagnation at varied places at times becomes causes for spread of viral contagious infections and diseases. Many suffer from mud sores on their feet. At times the water enters the house due to improper drainage or harvesting of the rain water. This also increases the mosquitoes breeding and becomes a menace also inflicting contagious diseases like dengue, malaria and other vector borne diseases. The improper runoff also disturbs their daily activities. The people find it difficult to walk on these mud streets, especially children who struggle on their way and back while going to school and sometimes affecting their play space.

Roads and transportation: The importance of road transportation is more of an essential prerequisite for survival. The better the connectivity the much greater are trade and commerce. The responses revealed that the roads were just constructed 10 to 15 years ago was alarming. In spite of recent laying of roads there were broken and damaged roads across the entire community, and some of the roads were even missing. Actions to complaints were limited to files and documents. Rural communities face challenges in offering safe, affordable, and reliable modes of transportation. Most of the poor people use public transports for their travel due to its affordability, but the frequency and availability is limited. Only one bus for every hour so the hardships are plenty even on a daily basis. The conditions of the bus are old and bad and especially during the rainy season, rain water seeps through the bus, worsening the condition. They also face other barriers in transportation like particularly based on caste, where usually, people belonging to the marginalised SC are not allowed to board the same bus as others. The population of the village and buses plying in the route are not of the adequate ratio, many villagers suffer from not being able to travel on time.

When questions were posed regarding transport facilities to the people living in JJ Nagar in Thirupachur village, most of them being lower middle class and daily wage workers or laborers, said that there are many bus stops in this village. Usually if one misses the last bus they are restricted from any sort of mobility from the village for that day. People undergo a lot of hardships even if they miss the bus by a few minutes, it upsets their entire plan and routine. They have to take other modes of private transport which escalates it to a costlier affair. Lack of enough public transportation also impacts the school going students. They also travel in overcrowded buses along with their overburdened school bags. The economic position of the people does not provide for other forms of convenient and comfortable travel. As a result, most parents prefer to send their children to work rather than to school because they can't spend for their transportation expenses separately. Transportation is an important aspect in development and economic growth in rural communities. Lack of transportation and poor road networks deprives rural communities of their basic needs such as primary health care, portable water and sustainable energy sources. Transportation affects construction and maintenance of infrastructure such as buildings that could house markets, hospitals, pharmacies, banks and credit /loan companies that could be useful in improving the livelihood of rural communities. Most of the people living in the village depend on transport for their lives so they are not able to go to the right place at the right time and if there is an emergency even to go to the hospital they have to rely on that transport so they suffer because it is not in order.

Religion and Caste: The caste based affiliation and identity is a major challenge because of which the village was split into NEW and OLD Thirupachur. The subordinated castes reside in OLD Thirupachur, whereas the dominant castes were to reside in new Thirupachur. The majority of the family of this village are of a particular religion. The religious practices are strictly attended by all the village people without excuses. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Jains were unanimous in expressing that they felt it was necessary to intervene in men and women of their community from marrying outside their religion and caste. But considerably fewer Christians and Buddhists feel this way. Rural communities are essentially caste-ridden. Religion accords legitimacy to the caste system. In reality in the countryside caste and religion are inseparable. The same is reflected in the locality of the village under study.

Self-help group and flow of microfinance: Finding sources of employment throughout the year is a big struggle for villagers especially, women to find avenues for revenue generation. There are very little opportunities in the village as there are no industries situated in and around the village generating demand. For such opportunities they need to travel to the city and it is hard to find a job which is conducive for village women including the travel distance and time. In this kind of situation self-help groups cater to generating such avenues by offering a helping hand for women of the village. There are a dozen active self-help groups functioning in the village. Self-help groups provide women with micro finance from group saving which they use for income generation activities. These self-help groups provide women with self-employment and financial independence. This automatically inculcates their leadership and decision making skills. The drawback of the self-help group sometimes relates to the non-payment of borrowed loan amounts among the group members or to the bank. Such delays and non-commitment further deteriorate their chances for getting more loan sanction from the bank.

Impact of Covid Pandemic on the village: During the first wave the rural areas with subsistence were not affected much but the second wave made survival quite tough. The most dangerous situation, besides health, was unemployment and food insecurity. During the lockdown period an online education system was adopted. However, this online education system could not be implemented in the village due to lack of access to internet services and gadgets to be used for online classes. Therefore, students from these rural areas faced digital divide and were deprived of accessing online mode of education.

Prevalence of Crime: Prevalence of theft, caste based violence and dowry are issues of concern in their village. Casteism paves the way for the occurrence of caste based violence in the rural society. Lack of education and unemployment were cited as causes for theft in the locality. Moreover the evil practice of dowry is very much prevalent in the villages as it is considered as a traditional practice and adds on to the family honour very specifically to the villagers.

Suggestions towards the development of the village:

Going by the pre conceived notion that village life is free from turmoil, the observational visit has brought out the harsh realities about the difficulties faced by the rural inmates and the contrast with the urban spaces and amenities.

Most of the people living in that village are dependent on agriculture. As agriculture is seasonal in nature, during non- seasonal periods the people in the village are unemployed. Moreover the employment given for 100 days under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme is not sufficient to support their livelihood. In addition to these, there should be allied occupation and other employment opportunities should be provided to the villagers. It was suggested by the villagers that Government or non- governmental organizations should impart skill training to women in the villages and provide them with employment opportunities. This would invariably lead to development of the village. Even Self-help group functioning would become more revenue generating and profitable if marketing for their products and services are improved.

People in the villages have very meager income which leads to education taking a backseat. Though the villages are interested in educating their children they consider education as an expense rather than an investment. Moreover when it comes to higher education, lack of good institutes in vicinity makes it necessary for students to migrate to cities, which is beyond the means for many families in the village. Government should propose to have higher educational institutions established within the vicinity of the village.

As remedial measures for Transportation hurdles and obstacles there should be good Public Transportation systems by implementing environmentally friendly and economical ways to travel across greater distances. Government should provide more frequent and affordable transit options, improving coverage, providing greater flexibility to passengers and increasing the number of buses. The conditions

of buses should be improved and strengthened to survive in all seasons. Roads in the villages also should be maintained and it is suggested that there should be all weather roads to withstand different climatic conditions. Improving the basic infrastructure is essential for sustainable agricultural development and overall development of the village.

Health care is very poor in the rural areas as there are only primary health centres and access to hospitals is very difficult. There should be alternative affordable health care facilities such as tie up with NGO working for health and medical camps should be conducted on a regular basis.

Villages are not aware of the different governmental programmes. There should be an awareness programme to provide necessary information about government schemes and welfare measures.

Self-help groups provide mutual support to the members of the group. For the members of the group, it is a step towards self-dependence, financial independence and empowerment of women. Though the slogan of the self-help group is “saving first-credit later”, the members of the group should realize the importance of returning the loan on time for appropriate functioning of the group and for the benefits of its members. Failing which invariably damaged the functioning of the self helps in the village. As a remedial measure non-governmental organizations can play an important role in coordinating the activities of the self-help groups. Another important role that the NGOs can play is imparting skill training to the women in the village. Women in the village are eager to equip themselves with employability skills which can provide them with job opportunities or self-employment. Therefore it is imperative that NGOs can be established in the village. NGOs also can work as a link between the Government and the villages. The role of NGOs are much more and they can work collaboratively with the Government in carrying out development Programmes also. Moreover NGOs can be channels for carrying out welfare and development work in the village. Community participation could be encouraged as self-help is the best help and it also falls in line with the self-sufficiency nature of the village.

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