

Meet Narikkuravar who love Meat...

[If you are a researcher, please do not read any more as my writings are not academic but out of personal first hand exposure. I would love profiling this people but I have too limited background information about these tribe men (also women) who are living on the fringes. Though some of my ethnic profiles were references for researchers and writers, this will neither fascinate you nor give you more information rather a glimpse into the life of this least of the people].



First time I met Narikkuravar was at a gathering in Chennai. They were neat and tidy, dressed up and 'decorated' well. They were nomadic but mostly semi-settled, living in huts and sideways. I was told, being unhygienic was a way of protection for them. It took some time for me to understand its real implications.



If you were not a researcher and continued reading, please come along with me to the Chennai Central railway station and take a suburban train to Arakkonam. I am sure they are living all around, but you will not miss seeing some of them on these trains or at the Arakkonam bus stand. Let us be prepared to sit or stand holding on to the hangers as most the time it will be crowded. This trip, we will get off at Thiruvallur, hardly an hour journey from Chennai Central.



The one with rolled up long hair on his head, coming with threads of red and black around his shoulder, ladies hair- supporting outfits- combs, hairpins, toys, led lamps, earbuds- most of them cheaper, is a Narikkuravar man. You may soon see their ladies as well wearing skirts a little longer than three fourth's blouse and saree on top. You can buy a packet of safety pins for Rs.5 and a lice comb for Rs.10 if you really need one! Can you see slings sold anywhere else? They make these slings, as they are also expert to catch birds and animals. They are non vegetarians and they mostly catch their prey themselves.



It's Tiruvallur; let's get off here. We can hire an auto or take a bus for five kilometers from here, on the outskirts of the town to see a small community of Narikkuravar. The people who lived freely gathering their own food, making a sustainable living of themselves, being part the food-chain and of the environment are now strangers struggling to survive. As a tribe that once lived in harmony with the nature to sustain their livelihood are alienated by the so called policies in the name of protection of forest, development, and industrialization.





On this street there are just four households. The roofs that leak had been protected by polythene sheets and used flex banners. Most of them have gone on the suburban train to make both ends meet. Some of them also do rag picking to sustain themselves. This fish-cart (tricycle) is the only vehicle to transport the rags collected and for a family ride in addition to the moped seen around.





The families are happy today. There is smoke rising from the huts, yesterday they managed to catch a wild cat (kattu ponnai). Its feasting today for all of them; most of the catch is being preserved for future. The meat is sliced in such a way to dry it on strings. Animals are their friend and prey as birds are.





Children are free from study or homework as none of them go to school. Who cares if they are not educated? Let alone help them live in a house and have a way for livelihood before they can send their children to school!



As we return, let's have a peep into the other gypsy community living nearby on the open ground. They are yet another group making a living through selling household items like millstones, mats, and brooms. They are indeed different from the Narikkuravars.

Sun is really getting hotter above; this man is trying to make a fire live to cook some rice while his mother is making the side dish- chutney, red-chilly and tamarind ground with a bit of salt.





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Our time is limited here as my purpose of this trip is documentation of an Adult Literacy Program being done for yet another people. Interested to see my video, *Let the People Learn ?* (See it on the YouTube copy link> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjDkclj3RmE>) - *Philipose Vaidyar* (philjy@gmail.com) Pictures: copyright - Philipose Vaidyar

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