Reframing Cultural Value and Community Identity Through Public Policy: A Case Study of a Marginalized Community of Tamil Nadu, India

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The present case study is about the collective action taken by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their cultural values, establish their community identity and achieve other common objectives within the political framework. Public anthropology contains concepts and theories, which have interrelations with other social sciences thereby enabling a spontaneous consensus based on perceived injustice, perceived efficacy, and resolution by collective action. The research process followed the problem -solving approach to resolve the exploitation of the subjugated by the dominant. Thereby bringing about revitalization in the society and achieving equal distribution of social, economic and political status.

Keywords: public anthropology, political engagement, sub-culture, values and ethics

INTRODUCTION

Public Anthropology and Policy Initiatives

Anthropology has contributed, and continues to contribute to the social policy research, practice, and advocacy in a number of ways; it gained increasing relevance as the world is rapidly being transformed by the process of globalization. Though anthropologists have less influence in public policy as compared to economists, public anthropology has gained popularity in the process of sustainable development and created its footprints by maintaining its connectedness with humanity. It promoted diverse practices, better access and more accountability. Traditionally, the version of public anthropology, as propagated by Margaret Mead, involved 'translating 'anthropological ideas and concepts into a version that appeals to the broader public (Scheper-Hughes, 2009). Making anthropology public just in terms of subject matter, specifically the methodological inputs or as a stakeholder of multidisciplinary development projects may not be enough to substantiate neither ethically the issue dealt with and nor the role of an anthropologist.

Many a time it was just incorporated at the proposal level and hardly given due space in the process of application, hence it was imperative to get engaged anthropologically in public intellectual discourses and thereby attaining public acceptance in policy making.

Globally, in Europe, India, Africa and Latin America there is a strong tradition of anthropological public intellectuals engaging with various social and political terrains. The pioneering contributions of Pierre Bourdieu as a commentator on French radio and TV and Michel Foucault's participation in the underground sexual politics of San Francisco, writing scathing broadsheets that never reached graduate seminars at UC Berkeley can be regarded as public anthropology. Gilberto Freyre, Brazil's public anthropologist, famously described Brazil as a racial democracy, which became a national symbol of Brazilian identity rooted in ethnic and cultural heredity. Although Freyre's thesis studied the entrenched race-class system, it created a popular national stereotype. The idea was embraced by the popular classes, which claimed Freyre as their intellectual, the man who made 'brownness' an identity symbol of Brasilian.

Until the 1990s, most anthropological engagement with policy making tended to be of an 'applied 'and largely uncritical nature of commissioned studies or consultancy type research (Cochrane 1980; Willner 1980). The anthropological knowledge was expected to be more of functional mode and hence more relevant for policy makers, or anthropological research should be harnessed to serve the needs of government and not the studied population also. Even in the 1940s and 1950s Evans Pritchard (1951) sought to promote applied anthropology as a 'managerial science of mankind'. Three decades later, leading figures in British anthropology including Raymond Firth (1981) were promoting equally narrow definitions of applied anthropology in terms of its perceived 'value for government' or as it is now commonly termed as 'relevance to end users'.

Theoretical Perspective and Conceptual Framework on Public Anthropology

In recent year, anthropologists have increasingly shifted towards developing analytical approaches that seek to explicate policy both as a concept, and as a set of related practices (Shore and Wright 1997; Wedel et al. 2005). The fact remains that in terms of its methodology and focus, the anthropology of policy is very different from applied anthropology. However, it does not resolve the question of utility and relevance and raises a wider debate over what exactly anthropologists seek to achieve by applying their knowledge or engaging with policy makers. The answer-required clarity for various facets is it dialogue, negotiation, contention, influence over policy professionals, proving credibility of one's professionalism or a way for academics to shape the research expertise culminating into policy.

Most academics tend to treat policy as given, seldom questioning its meaning or ontological status as category, Whereas anthropologists start from the premises that 'policy 'is itself a curious and problematic social and cultural construct that needs to be understood and contextualized for a correct interpretation. Hence, public anthropology is the one that distinguishes the anthropology of policy from applied anthropology; it discerns it from policy studies. The anthropology of policy also originated from a growing recognition that policy has become an increasingly central and dominant organizing principle of contemporary society, perhaps even of modernity itself (Shore and Wright 1997, p.6). This is manifested in the pervasiveness of policies and in the complex ways the concept is put to work. Virtually every aspect of human life is now shaped by policies, where these emanate from governments, public institutions, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private sector bodies.

The modernization development growth and policy analysis has always followed positivistic approach and managed with quantification. The skewed analysis resulted in spurred dissatisfaction with the conventional quantitative research methods which represent policy analysis as a kind of 'scientific ' endeavor'. Scholars within political science and international relations have sought to develop alternative perspectives drawn on ethnography and other qualitative methods (Rhodes et al.2007). Particularly the work of Geertz, most notably in the development of 'Interpretive Policy Analysis'(Yanow 1996; 2000) drawn on continental European Philosophy, have turned to linguistics, discourse analysis and rhetoric as a way of rethinking policy analysis (Fischer and Forester 1993; Fischer 2003; Gottweis 2006; Peters and Pierre 2006; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). These developments open up a promising space for dialogue between anthropology and the more qualitatively oriented policy studies (Yanow, 2011). However, while such

approaches have introduced more qualitative perspectives into mainstream political science and the broad interdisciplinary filed of policy studies (which include politics economics operational research, organizational studies and public administration), they have done little to challenge the positivistic paradigm that prevails within these disciplines.

Anthropologists have long worked alongside public policy initiatives and acted as facilitators in bring about government policy programs. The resultant studies of such program witnessed the impact of policies upon the people and culture. The paradigm typically represents policy as an object rather than a set of cultural process and practices. Being an 'artefact', it follows that policies must have authors-rational actors called 'policy makers 'who 'make 'policy through a process of calculation and authorization which Colebatch, Hoppe and Noordegraaf (2010) call 'authoritative instrumentalism'. Such 'policies' are addressed in solving particular problem resulted from decisions made by some rational authority (a government, committee, management board, chief executive, etc.); and they are intended to produce manufactured measurable outcome. The government tries to conceptualize the identified problems by making decisions using top-down approach and by treating project as its priority and bringing public resources to bear upon these problems. It becomes more of a policy oriented and not the problem-oriented approach. Recently policies themselves have become an object and subject of anthropological enquiry. In many respects, the study of policy represents a blind spot for anthropology though its relevance everywhere is present and embedded in the framework of social intervention.

The foundational anthropology approaches never gave scope for critical analysis. Whereas post modernistic anthropology encounters with policy, highlighted ethical, political and epistemological challenges for the discipline in terms of its own entanglements with politics and power. It is a rich ground for future anthropologists to explore, involve and engage inside and outside the discipline, and inside and outside their objects of research. The intention of public anthropology is that local groups and communities should strengthen social capital and establish strong network with prime stakeholders like governmental institutions. The methodology adopted should not be solely enquiry-based but it should be more inclined towards dialogic, narration discourse and so on. The participant approach should be the core methodological value in such research. The outcome and interpretation reflect the voices of the people in totality. The thick-description, analysis and interpretation become a public good in its 'orientation and application that enriches the revivalist ethos of the marginalized community (Cammarota 2008).

Anthropology while explaining culture, its meaning, and practice in the past and the present, includes an evaluation of the discipline's own history, the approaches were to understand social economic, educational, political inequities as categories and hierarchies of gender, nation, caste, and class all of these fall within the anthropological domain. Anthropology is not a solely extractive engagement, but an ethnographic approach in the spirit of exchange. Public anthropology practice mostly unorganized, informal trend, and not associated within any specific theoretical school or subfield. It is most simply understood as anthropology engaged with public and their real-life problems and issues. It is a project of the current political and historical moment, of post colonialism, of contemporary shifts in the global order, of our own rethinking of the production and circulation of knowledge, and it is a new appreciation of the value and application of anthropology.

Public anthropology demonstrates the ability of anthropology and anthropologists to effectively address problems beyond the discipline—illuminating the larger social issues of our times as well as encouraging broad, public conversations about them with the explicit goal of fostering social change. It affirms our responsibility, as citizens of this planet, to meaningfully contribute to communities beyond the academy—both local and global—that make the study of anthropology possible (Borofsky, 1994). An ethnographic approach and engaged scholarship in public anthropology is an attempt that is both anthropologically significant and interesting and works to relieve human suffering. It strives to effect change based on ethnographic findings, with a long history of interventionist work, Franz Boas' efforts to change discriminatory ideas on race, Margaret Mead's efforts to influence social and educational policy, Sol Tax's action anthropology in the 1940s and 1950s, are but a few examples. It responds to specific conditions, collaborates with relevant communities in bringing out the difficulties as well as the contributions.

Ironically, what are often public, are the majoritarianism and their beliefs that leave little space for alternatives. As anthropology is good at accessing subaltern perspectives and unconventional or suppressed histories, public anthropology puts this strength to use. Access to policy makers is not always easy to obtain. Nor is it immediately evident to policy makers that why they might want to be in dialogue with anthropologists. Convincing others that anthropology is a positive resource for those involved in planning, implementing, and assessing public policy is an ultimate success of the anthropology of policy. There are many ways that anthropology can work to effect change at multiple levels. Public anthropology resonates with changes from individual lives to community, disciplinary approach to social moment, and revivalism to state policy, at its best, public anthropology responds to changes in both the discipline and in the society.

Public Anthropology and Political Engagement

In recent years there has been a marked increase in the literature on engaged or public anthropology, definitions of engagement have opened up to include a multiplicity of ways and forms that anthropological work can be seen to be politically engaged—ranging from direct activism, to critical deconstructions of dominant categories, (Low and Merry 2010; Checker, Vine, and Wali 2010; Brondo 2010; Mullins 2011; Lamphere 2004; Lassiter 2005; Peacock 1997; Borofsky 2011; Juris and Khasnabish 2013; Hale 2008; Speed 2008a). However, the ways in which epistemological and ontological critiques represent, the real, and the political nature of the issue through redefining forms of engagement and the impact need Intellectual elucidation. A combination of insights from new visions and forms of political action emerging from contemporary social movements, in particular, actions that involve and produce forms of knowing, in which complexity, uncertainty, reflexivity and criticality are key and enrich our vision of the public and political potential of anthropology, as well as of theoretical-practical knowledge production.

To give an epistemic definition, the relationship between knowledge and action as inherently political and the heart of such work require both social consciousness and academic integrity. It means moving beyond an intellectual recognition of the political nature of the relationship between knowledge and action (c.f. Foucault and Gordon 1980; Haraway1988). Recent debates in anthropological theory and method raised a particularly rich point of departure for the kind of epistemic and ontological politics. Social movements are perfect for the kind of complex, emergent, objects that anthropology has developed tools to understand, yet critical anthropology has paid relatively little attention to social movements, struggles, or politics of more broad issues (Law 2004; Casas-Cortes, Osterweil, and Powell 2013). In fact, for this reason, critical anthropology is often pitted against, or seen as opposed to, public, activist, or engaged anthropology. This opposition poses one of the major obstacles to the expanded notion of engagement. Moving beyond this divide is crucial for arriving at a more holistic and effective vision of engagement. This involves understanding how our assumptions about politics, action, and intellectual work help to perpetuate such unnecessary distinctions. A thorough and practical understanding of the socio, economic, political and legal aspects of the issue should be dealt with critical intellectual and theoretical perspective, including analysis of deconstruction and potentially powerful political practices.

Activist Research and Political Alignment

Central to any social movement is a series of material practices involving analyses, deliberation, research, investigation, questioning, thinking, and the orising which is done through the production of texts, reflexive discourse, and more subtle or virtual forms of intervention. A great deal of contemporary activism is constituted by experimental, reflexive, critical knowledge-practices, all of which are meant to develop better or more effective politics with good policies (Osterweil 2010; Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008). The traditional perspectives treat activism or political action as constitutively distinct from academic or knowledge-work, whereas the centrality of these theoretical practices suggests and facilitate political alignment and social transformation.

Interestingly, in Public anthropology both activist research and cultural critique emerged as responses to the increasing recognition of anthropology's role in critically questioning systems of hierarchy and oppression that were unintentionally harming the marginalised communities (Hale 2006, 2008; Speed 2008b; Scheper-Hughes 1995). Proponents of cultural critique responded to this crisis by advocating

through political philosophy, almost exclusively in the realm of the textual and absolute theoretical, and even arguing against direct forms of activism or engagement to avoid well-meaning yet flawed and simplistic impacts. Proponents of activist research went the other way and they saw the crisis as pointing to the need for anthropologists to work explicitly on behalf of marginalized and subordinated communities (Hale 2008; Speed 2008b; Smith 1999). Both groups were concerned for the communities but while activist researchers felt they had to do something on the behalf of these communities and cultural critics believed that more intervention at the micro-level would likely lead to more harm at macro-level and crumple the political alignment.

Proponents of activist-research are troubled by the suggestion that deconstructive critical interventions and sophisticated analyses are sufficiently political, believing that it is a self-serving justification for disengagement. However, opposing critical anthropology to political work doesn't resolve the problem of engagement: instead, it perpetuates a number of false oppositions between political action and intellectual work that in turn rest on an ultimate cynicism about the substantial political potential of critical knowledge.

Activist research is a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organised group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process, from conception of the research topic to data collection to verification and dissemination of the results. (2006:97) For Hale, and other proponents of activist research, true engagement assumes, even requires, a relationship to a community or group of people in struggle. This is not only premised on a definition of a field of struggle outside of the academy, it in a sense also implies that the absence of such a relationship essentially removes the possibility of substantive political intervention. While an anthropologist's relationship to a group of people in struggle, or to their field-site, certainly can be an important site for political intervention, questions about whether it should be limited to such a relationship, as well as what constitutes the "field," remain (see Marcus 2002).

It is often presumed or implied that values and logic are highly valorized within public anthropology practice—complexity, critique, questioning, investigating, deconstructing, and writing (text)—are somehow opposed to, or at odds with, those values needed in movements. Conversely, it is assumed that the reason for movements or activists is to suspend complexity in order to take action. Such views rest on a limited or positivist conception of action, subsequently overlooking forms of action that involve thought, complexity, contemplation, or problematization (Stengers 2005).

Social movements are the call for a positive and ongoing practice of investigation, experimentation, and imagination. The open-ended, experimental nature of these theoretical practices is not only opposed to ideas of analytical closure but they also stand in stark contrast to the ideological dogmatisms of leftist paradigms, with their rigid categories and expectations. At the same time, these practices emphasize and focus on the theoretical and investigative moment of political practice. In addition to the more or less clear-cut production of theory and analysis, a great deal of day-to-day activism can be understood to be part of an extended theoretical or experimental moment in which the object is to test out or to reveal the possibilities of new arrangements or imaginaries of the social, as well as to think within and against current formations—including the market, the state, and other major institutions.

Finally, key to any theoretical practice is privileging a kind of theory and knowledge more interested in opening up questions and processes of becoming and promoting a particular program or goal. Against ideological and dogmatic forms of knowing implicit in traditional forms of leftist practice, the theoretical practice of activists' points to the emergence of a new political ethic based on a different kind of epistemology—one founded on a commitment to critical reflexivity and an open-ended, processional orientation. These practices help create the conditions of possibility for new ways of being in the world, challenge what we consider to be valid or viable knowledge or truth claims and re-conceptualize the kinds of 'real' entities that populate the socio-political landscape.

Cultural Pluralism and Subculture Articulation

The cultural pluralism movement has, at its core, the aspiration and value to create a new society, where culturally different groups that exist within country can fully experience both the positive and distinctive attributes of their given and ascribed differences without the penalties of loss of status, educational, social

or political disenfranchisement. Cultural pluralism is the condition in a society in which individuals, on the basis of ascribed or attained characteristics are able to form and develop communities along the differences of race, age, sex, religion, language, and cultural life styles. Such societies are open, and members can select to belong to one or more social institutions at the same time. This condition can only exist in a pluralistic society where there are culturally diverse functions, and where they adhere to a universal value that promotes the use of the resources of the society to fulfill the needs of all of its members.

Cultural pluralism cannot exist in a society where culturally different communities exist in isolation from each other or/and in competition under unequal conditions.Indian society is distinguished from other cultures in respect of its continuity and heterogeneity, its accommodating history and its composite character. It has witnessed multiple waves of migrations over tens of millennia at different points of time. Migrating people brought with them their cultures, religions, philosophy, and behavioral patterns etc. The groups that migrated were able to maintain their unique cultural identities within a larger society and their values and practices were accepted by the wider culture. This amalgamation created a Cultural Pluralism in India.

Pluralism has been advocated at all levels in economics discourse. But an understanding of what is entailed by methodological pluralism and pluralism of method has been hampered by lack of reference to epistemological and ontological foundations. The theoretical approach to cultural pluralism was redefined by authors like Antonia Pantoja, Wilhelmina Perry and Barbara Blourock in 1976. Both proponents and critics of cultural pluralism recognize and accept the existence of the growth and development of social movement, but a critical observation has been lacking. Significant among the advocates of cultural pluralism are ethnics of color, women, homosexuals, senior citizens, disabled persons, religious communities, and groups of alternative life styles.

Sanday distinguishes cultural pluralism and structural pluralism and describes that a society is where more than one sub cultural themes exist because of the intra cultural diffusion. The members of these subcultures articulate and share the same elements of the mainstream culture. Depending on the barriers to diffusion, on the basis of certain unique characteristics, over time subsumed into the mainstream culture. *Cultural Pluralism* represents a synthesis of writings on culture and community. It acknowledges the existence of emerging cultural communities and provides a frame of reference for future observation and analysis, which are mainly based on Cultural values.

Cultural Values in Public Policy

Basic social habits, emotions and cultural ethics of any group of people are broadly defined as cultural values. From the point of view of the individual, culture may be objectively defined as all that behavior which he has learned in conformity with the standards of some group. This group is categorized may be as family, play associates, colleagues in work, same-sex companions, religious sect, political party, or all of these groups together. Further cultural values in stratified societies are communicative, core components for way of being and functioning. All these components form a comprehensive and cohesive way of life. Ralph Linton, classifies these various components into two general categories: covert and overt culture. Which is further classified into three different orders: material and kinetic, (overt culture) and psychological, that is the knowledge, attitudes and values shared by the members of a society. (Covert culture)

For culturally different communities to function in pluralistic society, members share same values borrowed from one another. Here Regulative values are those values commonly held throughout a society, adhered to and operationalized through policy positions, social institutions and other socialization processes. Priority regulative values enhance cultural pluralism through appreciation for a heterogeneous society; appreciation for one's own and one's fellow person's heritage; appreciation for the different and unique contributions of each group to the national heritage and value of the individual and his/her historical and cultural context.

These value positions are not created for the moment because they have been constructed into the society through trial and error process, which then transcends to become the culture of that society. Policies of the national and state government include similar lists of regulative values. The irony is that these value positions are institutionalized through the policies of a nation while at the same time other subjugate norms

marginalize, directly oppose and compete with value equality. Especially when community identity is categorized into scheduled lists for special privileges and welfare measures by the constitution of India, the conflict is apparent and identity movements become the prerequisite to ensure their voice is heard.

Social Process of Collective Identity

The construction of collective identities, based on power and economic relations is the basic component of social life. Such constructions are present in all human societies throughout history and create dynamic cultural patterns - especially those of primordiality, civility and `sacredness' which are ever present. The concept of identity has undergone a paradigm shift in the recent decades. Originally it stood for "sameness" where it denoted certain unique personality features which once acquired and integrated became permanent and are used in the context of ethnic identity. Jacques Derrida used the term '*difference*' to conceptualize identities and the processes involved in building it. "Collective identities" are representations containing normative appeals to potential communities and it gives the means of understanding themselves, or being understood, as members of a larger category or community of persons. The ways in which people respond to or engage with collective identities refers to the term "processes of identification". The empirical study conducted based on social, cultural, and historical contexts and processes of identification, includes dimensions and markers of collective identity, the semantic relations among different collective identities within larger systems of classification, was re-examined in terms of three sets of analytical approaches which are "structure and function", culture and meaning"; "practice and power." The contemporary collective identity movement further added a set "choice and freedom" in the process and provided adequate space in the social system. In such "choice and freedom" based cultural identity patterns, especially in Indian social context caste and its role in hierarchy needs an explicit understanding.

Processes of any identification requires familiarity with the contexts in which they occur that includes, specific geographical and infrastructural conditions, the neighborhood groups, a wide variety of institutions, different kinds of social relations, material resources, and also the kinds of symbolic and discursive resources that determines collective identities. In the process of analyses the State and State-regulated systems present extreme forms of political and economic centralization, and its effects must always be taken into account, even in cases where these effects appear to be highly mediated. Social change occurs when local or regional populations are integrated into larger administrative and economic system. Larger contextual changes may be gradual, hardly affecting the enduring conditions of everyday life in the short run or they may be very dramatic, taking the form of extraordinary events that alter previous conditions rapidly and sometimes quite radically. Counteracting the influence of dominant political or economic institutions requires a double focus on inter and intra relations of people involved in the hierarchal system. Caste relations must be understood to involve the different kinds of exchanges through which social life is constituted. Social exchanges may occur within the boundaries of established institutions or they may crosscut such boundaries, like in the case of networks and social fields. Networks are egocentrically defined sets relations, which crosscut established social and institutional boundaries, thereby providing further opportunities for individual and cooperative action (Barnes 1954; Mitchell 1969; Boissevain and Mitchell 1973; Leinhardt 1977; Wasserman and Faust 1994; Schweizer and White 1998; White and Johansen 2005). The case study of *DevendraKulaVelalar* is one such prime example.

Social processes are complex and overlapping in a variety of ways. The realization of value is always necessary as a process of comparison. The ultimate freedom is not the freedom to create or accumulate value, but the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what is the thing that makes life worth living. The present paper is an empirical case study trying to reconstruct the perceived meanings, necessarily involves social realities, substantiate with ethnographic approach and other scientific evidence. The process documentation of the case study model is set as a framework for attaining collective value identity of a community in Public policy. The paper justified the role of anthropologist in reframing the past and an intellectual engagement with the ongoing social issues combining ethics and politics.

METHODOLOGY OF THE CASE STUDY

The epistemological, ontological and methodological changes occurring within the social sciences had significant implications for case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Gerring, 2007). It is the empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, the research adopted described, explored and/or explained complex and dynamic social systems (Yin, 2009, p. 13). Community denotes a group of people who share common features, i.e., they share the same ethnic background, are domiciled in proximity to each other, or they possess the same values, but communities are far from homogeneous. The dominance of positivism provided overwhelming support for rational scientific methods characterized by systematic data collection, analysis and the production of universal 'truths'.

Inter-subjective communication is referred to as communication and exchange of ideas and knowledge between researchers and community members wherein all participants reflected and built intellectual engagement, and are thereby transformed (Prus, 1997). This dynamic process generated understandings that are not inert 'facts' but triggers for action and further reflection. The Case study was actively engaged in open sharing and pursuing the aspirations of the community. The research was embedded within the community and sometimes disparate pursuit of the aspirations was recorded. The study entailed by communicating 'findings' of case study research in the public sphere or iteratively fed the findings back into the community

The case study research incorporated elements of participatory action research, ethnography and quasi-experimental research designs. The value of the Case study lies in its capacity to contribute to human learning and the development of intellectual, social, cultural and political capital. Bourdieu (1977) and Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus (1986) explain that there is a developmental leap between rule-bound knowledge and the fluid and dynamic performance of knowledge. The case study is strongly value-driven and characterized by deep research-community entanglements, because they challenge long established research standards inspired by positivism and scientific rationality. As a result, criticism is less scientific because of multiple methods; organic in their approach to data collection.

The importance of the below mentioned case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003) Inherent data sources include, but are not limited to documents, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. Unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches within case study, the researchers collected and integrated quantitative survey data, which facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon, which was being studied. Data from these multiple sources was then compiled in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source is one important piece with each contributing to the researchers understanding of the whole phenomenon. This convergence added strength to the findings as the various facts of data were joined together to promote a greater understanding of the case. Although the opportunity to gather data from various sources was extremely attractive because of the rigor that can be associated with this approach, there were dangers. One of them was the collection of overwhelming amounts of data that requires extensive management and analysis.

Application of the Methodology in the Case Study

The Government of Tamil Nadu addressed a Government Order in 2018 to the Department of Anthropology; University of Madras adjuring are search to be conducted with quick reconnoiter of a community listed in the Scheduled Caste as *Pallar* in the State. The community has been fighting for their socio-economic and political upliftment through the name change as *DevendrakulaVelalar* in the Scheduled Caste list of Tamil Nadu for about five decades. They strongly felt that their name is derogative and has been published in the list by the dominant communities to humiliate them with such reference. They fused all the sub-communities of their clan, enhanced the social capital and consistently gave pressure to the State following various advocacies. Thus, the revivalist movement initiated by the community received ample support from the administrative side as many top-level bureaucrats belonged to the same community. Relatively the economic development of the community was well established by the advent of the positive

discrimination policy. The population is also sizeable in numbers and always attracted the political parties as a viable vote bank.

The basic objective of the study was to report the authenticity of the claim of seven sub-communities as a single entity under the name of *DevendrakulaVelalar*. The methodology for the case study was Ethnography and its relevant tools. Intensive field work was carried out for a year using different tools like key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observation, data compilation from secondary sources, archival evidences and archeological findings. The collected data was then compiled to be analyzed using important methods like historical archival analysis, the textual analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis and media analysis.

The collective aspiration, shared values and intentions within significant sections has been documented. The submitted ethnographic report was scrutinized at several levels before the stakeholders committee. The elucidation and the articulation of the theoretical and practical knowledge of anthropological experience were validated by presenting the findings to the panel of community leaders, bureaucrats and anthropologists. Finally, the policy was formulated and the Prime Minister of India announced in a public meeting about the validation of the anthropological report. The study has given popularity to anthropology in the State and anthropologists have become prominent stakeholders for framing public policy.

The case study is a continued commitment for being ethnographic witness, to describing in human terms that how life is lived beyond the borders of many others' experiences. But it also adds a commitment, through public anthropology to reframe the terms of public debates transforming received, accepted understandings of social issues with new insights, new framings and fostering social and political change that benefit others, especially those with whom we anthropologists work with. Ethnography remains at the core of all anthropological work when things fall apart politically and economically in a community which is being studied, and it, in some ways, facilitate those who are vulnerable in establishing their identity.

People have all sorts of potential identities, which most of the time exist only as a set of hidden possibilities. The relatively homogeneous communities in which anthropologists work are stratified either within or positioned hierarchically lower. The people who live in higher echelons of society often justify this arrangement in rhetoric/mythological sense. Nonetheless, anthropologists paint hierarchy in a favorable light, by way of new-ethnographic insights into social contexts where hierarchy is regarded as a desirable social good. It needs to be made clear to the larger society anthropology's value in addressing the problems that concern them. 'Purity' is clearly a "cultural value", conception of what people should want to be like, and power seems to be a determining factor in achieving such social change.

The case study of the community *DevendrakulaVelalar* provided important justifications for valuing practical, engaged community research that facilitated ethical action. Adding to it was the dialogic sense making that took place in the community, which resulted in defining the problem, and researching in consultation with the community. Unanticipated insights, derived through the co-production of local knowledge, helped to generate solutions and joint actions. The development of expert knowledge directly contributes to the 'world-making' potential of the community. The deeply engaged community case study contributed to the reframing of problems that in turn generate alternative solutions. Scholarship and advocacy do not have to be mutually exclusive and that awareness and change can happen when researchers actively engaging in embedded case studies of communities.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The sub-communities' five groups including **Devendrakulathan** have come together in a social movement for a collective identity, their cause being revivalist in character with regard to their identity. The analysis framework validates the data from the primary sources, which was done during the fieldwork. The credibility of research results comes through applying scientific method, measurement and sampling.

Primary Sources
The Quantitative primary data affirms the population count, the socio economic and educational status based on the comparative analysis of their socio, economic, and educational status that is appended here

for reference. The period of analysis is from 1940 to 2015.The qualitative primary data is upheld through the discourse analysis, content analysis and narrative analysis, which has been done for this particular study.

Secondary Sources of Historical Archival Analysis

Archival copper plates, books in the vernacular, land documents and Govt. Gazettes.

An archival copper plate (The Palani Cheppedu) is archival evidence from the year 1528 available in the Madurai Museum about how these seven communities have requested for a common name as *DevendrakulaVelalar*. The same has been further reaffirmed in the year 1749 through another copper plate. The Tamil book Mukkudarpallu edited by Puliyurkesikan in 2010 which is in vernacular is another source of information about their constant appeal for a common identity as *DevendrakulaVelalar*. All the documents attached especially the landowning documents mention their community as *Devendrakula, Pannadi, Kudumban, and Moopan. Pallan* was nonexistent until the early 1920s in these documents.

Narrative Analysis

Social: Their kinship pattern, marriage negotiation and death ceremonies are similar. The name *Vathiriyan* means '*vakkuthavarathavan*'(someone who keeps his/her promise always)

Economic: They are agricultural communities and almost every family possessed land. *Vathiriyan* are weavers and agricultural labors.

Education: The formal education has facilitated the community and the privileges of governmental schemes enabled them to raise their educational status.

Indigenous Knowledge System: The skill in agriculture starts from their ability to identify the land in the traditional division of *Kurunji, Mullai, Maruda, Neidal* and *Palai.* The *Madai Kudumban*is highly skilled in *Neer Pasanam (Irrigation water management)* for example the *Aarupasanam, (River irrigation management) Kulathu/Eri Pasanam (Lake water management) and Kamma Pasanam (Pond water management).* Common water resource management especially during the draught was beyond par.

Discourse Analysis

The focus group discussions with the sub communities illustrated that they have a single grievance, "the injustice of carrying wrong identity which is not ours. There is no historical or contemporary evidence."

Content Analysis

Highlighted the derogatory meaning of word '***Pallan***', (meaning someone who lives below). In our discourses, the word "*Pallan*" (147 times) has revealed the distress caused by the word '*Pallan*'. The narrative analysis investigates how these communities have perceived themselves as agriculturists and as owners and custodians of indigenous knowledge. Instead of this perception, other communities perceived them as just farm laborers (*coolie*).The community has been fighting for the *'correct'* nomenclature continuously and felt "we would have worked without *Kothu*" (*cooliee), if they had used *Kudumban,* instead of *Pallan.*

The identity ***"Pallan" a term of reference than a community by itself has*** created a sense of alienation and humiliation for the community groups validated by the theory identity politics.

This term has come into use only from the sixteenth century when there has been a concentrated effort to marginalize and peg them in the lowest rung of the social hierarchy.

The core of this analysis validates the grand theory of social movement from the three major aspects of their community. The plural culture clearly shows commonality in the cultural, social and economic behavior.

The claim for common identity has been the catalyst to bring them together, create fusion among them, and voice their grievance.

Quantitative Analysis
Demographic Profile of 7 Sub Communities
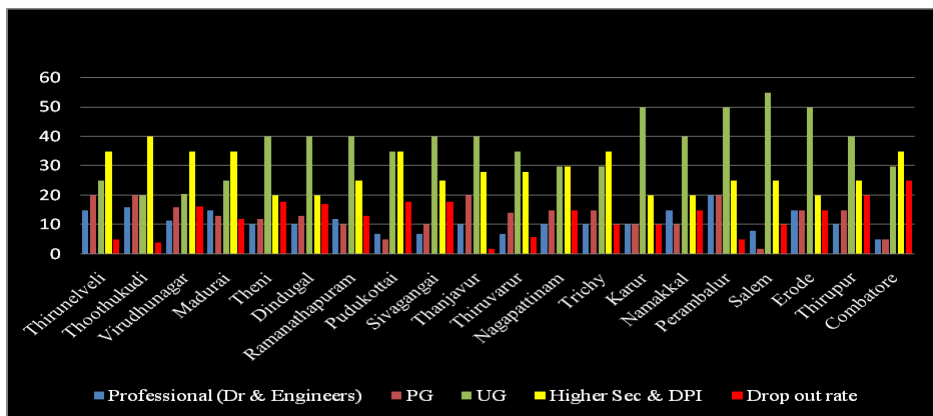
FIGURE 1
POPULATION DISTRIBUTION
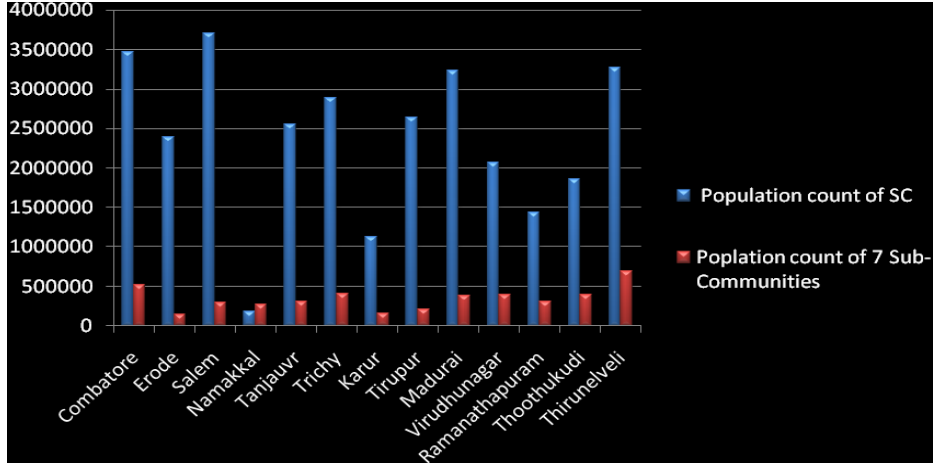
The Population count of the seven sub communities is 60,83,070 it constitutes only 8% of the Schedule caste Population in Tamil Nadu which stands at 7, 60, 38,376. They are evenly distributed across all the districts. The graph clearly indicates their migration is synchronic and validates the historical events, which were the cause for the migration to these regions.

Educational Profile at District Level

An analysis of the educational profile establishes the progressive development of the communities in the field of education. Most of the present youth are either graduate or post graduates. The Tirunelvelli, Thoothukudi, Madurai, Trichy and Perambalur have the maximum Postgraduates. All the Districts have a good educational grounding in school education and graduation. It is only in Tirupur and Coimbatore that a high dropout rate is seen.
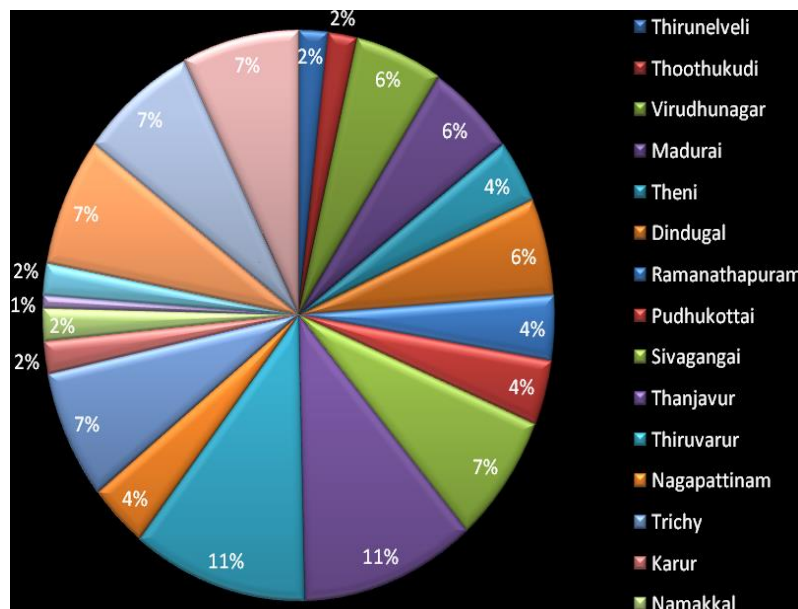
FIGURE 2
EDUCATIONAL STATUS

FIGURE 3
DROPOUT RATE AT DISTRICTS LEVEL
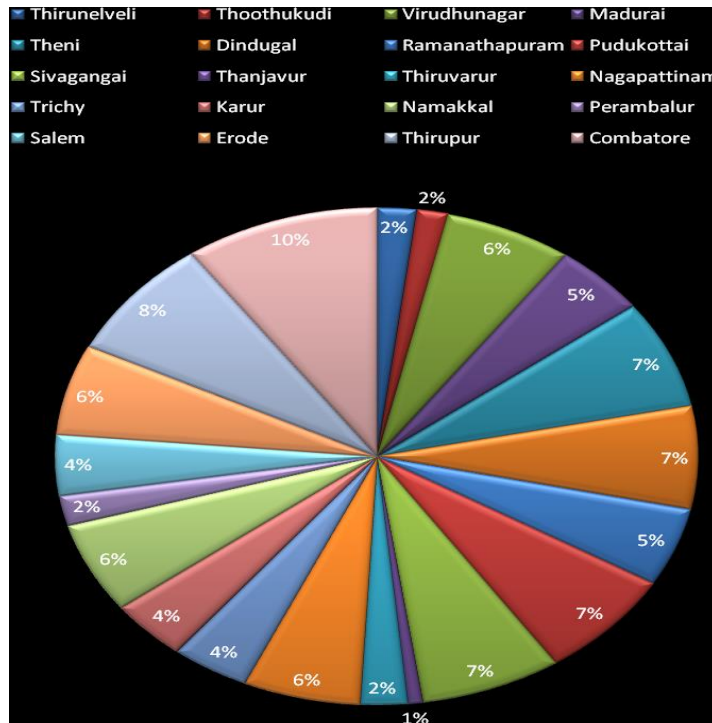
FIGURE 4
**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

This pie chart shows the percentage of deviation in women empowerment within the community. They mostly have either an equal or more contribution in the decision making process within the family. The progress of the community is fully attributed to the women who have taken the responsibility to ensure that development happens.
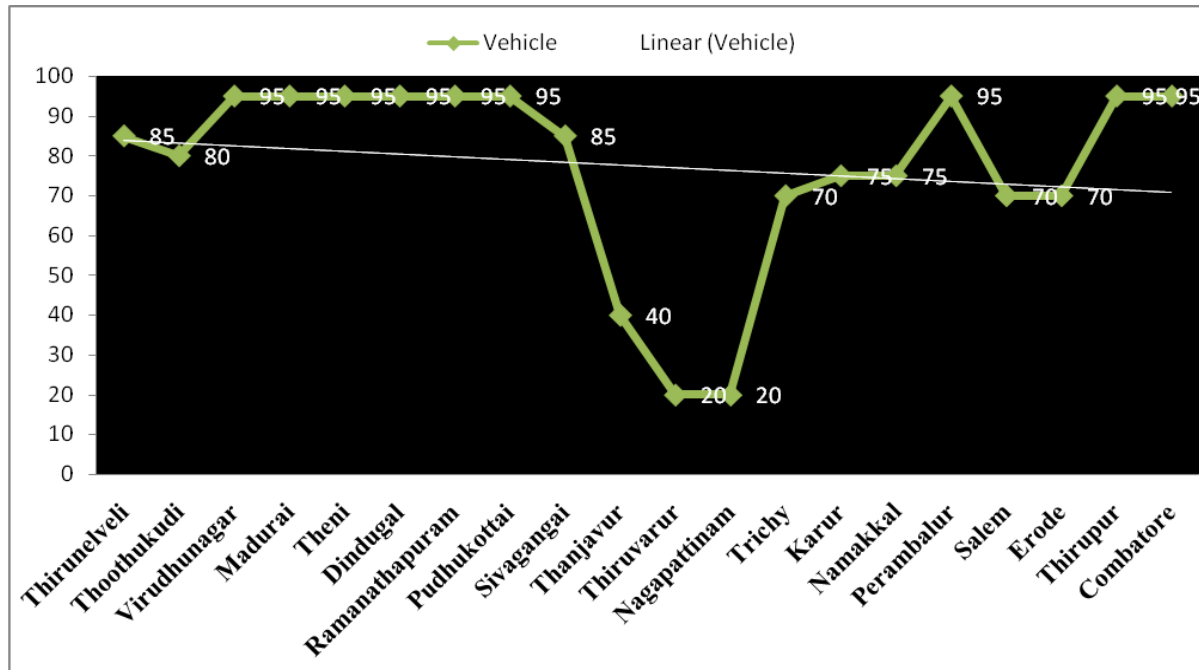
Economic Status of the Sub Communities

The following charts trace the growth of the seven sub communities economically. The first chart shows the type of houses owned by the members most of the houses are tiled or brick built houses. It is only in Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, and Trichy that the progress needs to be monitored.
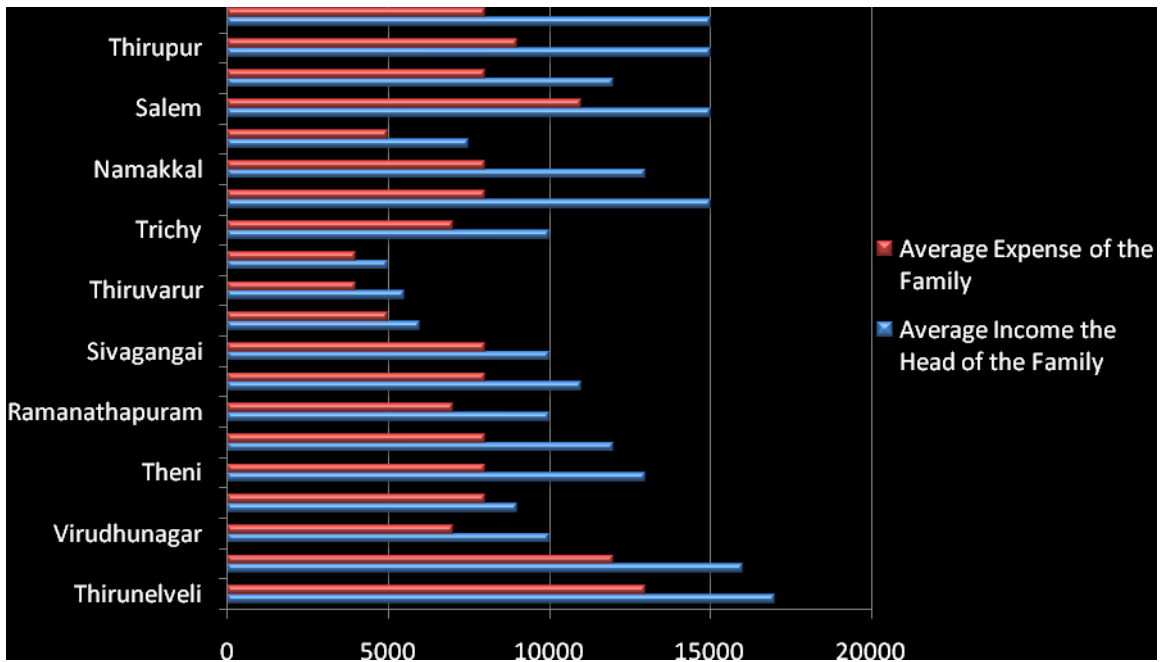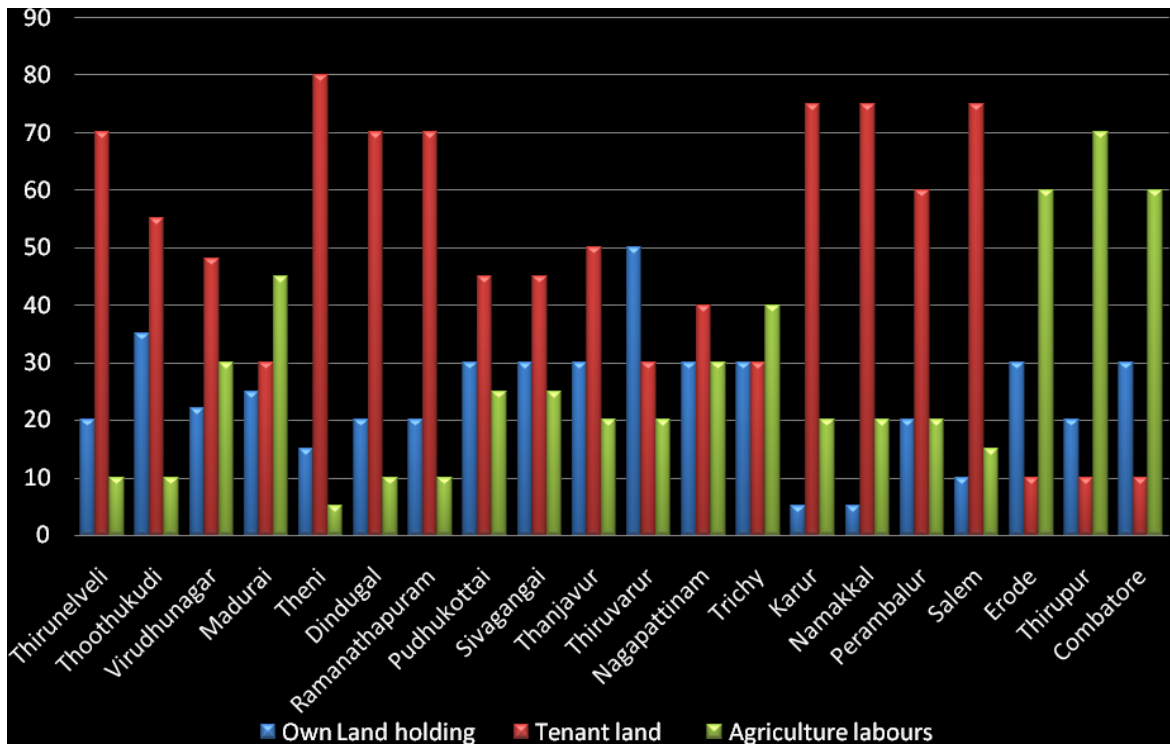
FIGURE 5
TYPES OF HOUSES
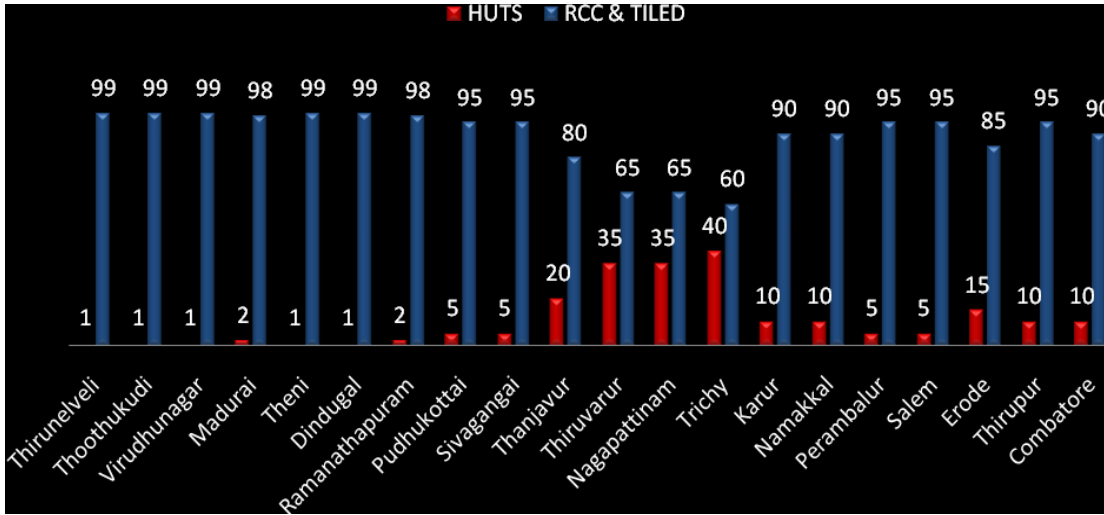
FIGURE 6
OWNERSHIP OF TWO WHEELER

FIGURE 7
FAMILY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

FIGURE 8
ASSETS DETAILS

The above tables show the basic demographic profile of the community studied and justified that there was not much variations of their socio-economic status among the sub-communities.

CONCLUSION

The present empirical study applied the following theories:

❖ Theory of Collective Identity
❖ Theory of Cultural Pluralism
❖ Theory of Revivalism,

The theory of collective Identity was validated; the members came together and established a single identity as *DevendrakulaVelalar*. Regards to cultural pluralism that no single community was isolated in their existence and continuous interactions were overtly visible. Finally, on the theory of revivalism, the communities were the custodians of agriculture and their indigenous knowledge have paved the way for climate change and alternative economy. These theories have been consistently applied and validated in the fieldwork. The findings of the empirical study of the Sub communities brought out the commonality of the cultural, social and economic traits.

- All the sub-communities have similar cultural practices.
- The Consanguine and Affinial patterns of kinship are strongly visible among the sub-communities.
- This kinship determines the roles and status based on the belief system and well established customs in everyday life.
- Layered social interrelations exist among the sub-communities
- All the sub-communities are agriculturalists and there is no visible variation in their soci-economic status.
- Their internal political system of the community is cohesive
- Members of the sub communities were very resoundingly assertive that "*Pallan*" was not their original identity and the word *Pallan* has an offensive meaning.
- The manufactured term of reference (*Pallan)* was thrust upon them by the administrative institution and they have been continuously fighting against this injustice.
- The ethnographic documentation of the sub-communities has followed the scientific approach.
- Ethnographically the sub-communities were analyzed to establish their cultural similarities/ variation and determine the identity as *DevendakulaVelalar*.

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