

Emergency Response in COVID 19 Pandemic in Tamil Nadu

INSIDE

1. Brief Note of SASY - Pg : 1
2. Impact of COVID – 19 - Pg : 2
3. Access to Justice - Pg : 3
4. Relief Work (COVID-19) - Pg : 5
5. We Claim APP - Pg : 6

Brief Note:

Social Awareness Society for Youths (SASY) is a registered voluntary organisation working for the rights of the vulnerable, oppressed and marginalized communities since 2004. SASY is focusing on 6 thematic areas which include Access to Justice, Strengthening Local Government, Child Rights Initiatives, Dalit women leadership, Livelihood Promotions and Social Inclusion in Disaster Responses.

SASY is primarily engaged in protecting and promoting the rights of Dalit and Adivasi communities and working in 4 districts namely Villupuram, Cuddalore, Erode, Tirupur and Coimbatore Districts. SASY had responded to the incidents of caste atrocities along with professionals lawyers, special public prosecutors to access justice to the survivors of caste atrocities.

In these light SASY has addressed more than 983 incidents of caste atrocities, human rights violations & injustices occurred against Dalits and Adivasis. SASY has provided capacitation to more than 1000 human rights defenders, civil society organisations, community led organisations, young lawyers and they have been effectively contributed to increasingly access to justice by the survivors of caste atrocities.

The COVID – 19 Pandemic as resulted in unobserved pandemic in the form of the corona virus, which has spread to a large extent in India by leading to devastating situation since January 2020 where the students return from Wuhan, China. Nevertheless the disease is creating chaos and fear globally; yet the consequences for those in India especially the most marginalized groups based on caste, gender and class it poses a greater challenge due to corresponding effects in terms of accessibility of essentials. As the cases increased, our governments at the Centre and the states took emergency measures to contain the spread of the COVID 19 virus.

India had imposed Janata Curfew on March 22, 2020 to suppress the spread of Corona Virus among the people which led to the continuously lockdown since March 25, 2020 and we are in the 5th phase of the lockdown and have crossed more than 97 lockdown days.

The lockdown has resulted and created serious impact in the lives of the Dalits and Adivasis, migrants, daily wagers, transgenders, women, children and elderly people. They are naturally vulnerable, marginalized and socially excluded; it is manifested during any disaster and it is visible during this COVID 19 Pandemic too. They are worst affected due to this lockdown as they are not able to manage even their daily survival for food and other basic needs. There is a huge loss of livelihood and the people are struggling for their daily survival.

They face existing structural discrimination and social and economic exclusion are particularly vulnerable to its most devastating impacts in the short and longer term. The spread of the corona virus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, is driving massive disruption in unorganized sectors, financial markets, exposing huge gaps in government preparation and focusing worldwide attention on citizen's health.

This newsletter focusses on the timely and immediate response of SASY including relief response with core humanitarian standards, human rights monitoring & interventions of caste based discriminations, atrocities during the lock down days.

Impact of COVID on Dalit and Adivasi Communities:

There are also narratives of discrimination based on caste and gender that are coming and many are shunned away from purchasing rations and from entering camps for COVID-19 protection. It is the migrant and the homeless that are most affected among them, the Dalit migrants are further discriminated from reaching for relief. And the inequalities are evident and will continue to rise amongst the poor and marginalised communities.



While the country is grappling with the pandemic, Dalits residing in rural areas are still grappling with the fear of violence and atrocities on their homesteads by the dominant castes. And the impact is doubled when it comes to Dalit and Adivasi women and children during this crisis. Many women from the migrant labour community are in the construction industry or work as domestic help in metropolitan cities, they too will face the brunt of this lockdown and might also face domestic violence in their homes.



The Nationwide lockdown saw migrant workers from Tamil Nadu stuck in Mumbai

Impact of COVID on School and College Students:

The children are always vulnerable to pandemics. Malnutrition and impaired immune systems tend to aggravate the risk of infections. The children from the economically weaker sections (EWS) and vulnerable sections are dependent on their parents and due to crisis situation their livelihood and employment is lost for more than 97 days and there is uncertainty in the release of lockdown.

On the other hand, there is a lot of stress on Children with regard to exams as the 10th standard Board exams have been postponed due to COVID 19 lockdown in Tamil Nadu. During the distribution of relief materials it was evident that the poor and needy people are suffering without food and other essentials for their daily survival. Few of the parents worried and stated that they could not provide adequate, sufficient food, milk for their children.

Mean while, most schools have moved to online classes, this may sound easy and nice. But who are the children that have access to computer and to the internet from eight in morning to noon? The idea of having online education is an elitist idea that does not take into account millions of children, who do not have access to resources and will lose out on their education as a result of this lockdown.

INTERMISSION

Cradle of modern theatre in deep gorge as coronavirus stages terror act

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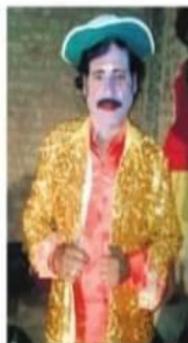
THE Tamil acting tradition owes a significant part of its brilliance and evolution to *Theru Koothu*, a traditional street theatre once in vogue across the Tamil country. The art form has produced several acclaimed artists, who shot to fame with their entry into cinema. It is known for its rhyming dialogues laced with pun and a good mix of humour and satire.

Temple festivals in rural Tamil Nadu keep the *Koothu* alive as villagers have not lost their fascination for the drama that is performed all the night in the open with just a screen in the backdrop. Thousands of folk music artistes performing *parai*, *thavil*, *nathaswaram*, etc., are dependent on the art for their livelihood. April-June

is the period of the year when villages beam with festivities. But, this time around, all the joy is gone with the vicious entry of coronavirus. Thus, it has rendered the *Koothu* artistes jobless.

"The only time we get business is during Chithirai, Vaikasi and Aani (Tamil months). Due to lockdown, all our shows stand cancelled. Even if we tide over the crisis, we are uncertain of how people will respond to our shows hereafter. This is a major setback for the art itself," laments Srinivasan, manager of Sri Padmavathi Theatre Company in Tindivanam.

The company signed shows worth lakhs of rupees for summer 2020, but all of them were cancelled resulting in a loss of about ₹90,000-₹1.5 lakh for each artist, said Srinivasan. "That is one bulk money we make for the whole year."



Artiste Karunanidhi: a group of artistes receiving relief from Ramesh Nathan, founder of SASY non-profit organisation | EXPRESS

"I have been into drama for 30 years now, and there had never been a situation like the current lockdown. Despite the low income we get from *Koothu*,



it is the love for the art that keeps us going," says M Karunanidhi (45) of the company. "When things get back in the groove, there will be films, and

the actors can make money. Most of the stage theatre artistes are educated, so they can make an alternative career. But, it is not as simple for

Let's revive *Koothu*!

R Kaleeswaran, founder of Alternative Media Centre, makes a case for booking the artistes for performances at events like weddings, cultural events and commercial carnivals. There is already a depression in *Theru Koothu* business with the rise of visual entertainments like cinema, he says adding that the performers face poverty and social apathy

Koothu performers. We are not farmers or educated to pursue other jobs. Without the art, our life is nothing. For an artiste, there is nothing more painful than letting his art die before his own eyes," says an emotional Karunanidhi.

G Arjunan, an artist from Tindivanam emphasised, "We

need the government to create an authorised platform for us to register and avail benefits as we are traditional artistes. The government should have a commitment to support folk arts."

R Kaleeswaran, founder of Alternative Media Centre, makes a case for booking the artistes for performances at events like weddings, cultural events and commercial carnivals. "With the rise of cinema and other visual entertainments, there already was a depression in *Theru Koothu* business. The performers face poverty and social apathy. The only way forward is keeping the art and the artistes alive by hiring them for shows at weddings, cultural events and commercial carnivals," says R Kaleeswaran, whose Alternative Media Centre aims to revive, support and preserve folk arts in Tamil Nadu.

Human Rights Monitoring & Interventions on Incidences of Caste Based Discriminations & Atrocities against Dalits and Tribals during the Lockdown:

The sudden and unseen lockdown of the government has affected the daily wage laborers, unorganised sector workers, and migrant workers in the worst forms. Furthermore, the governments announcement on social distancing is also perceived a social exclusion which is already existing in our nation in the form of caste discrimination.

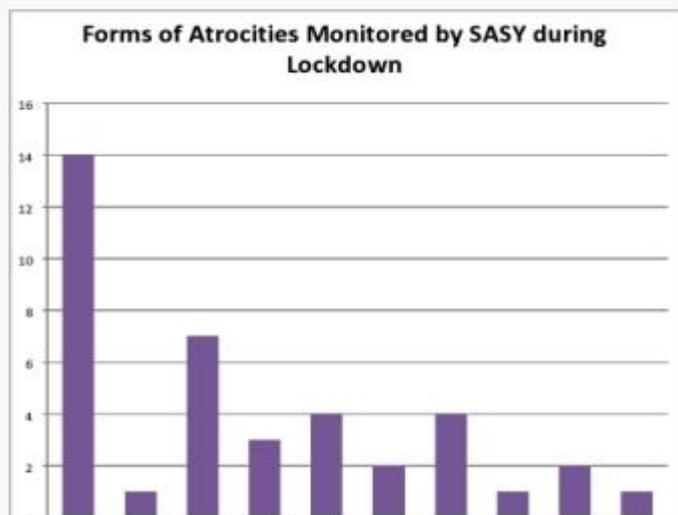
It has created serious impact on the vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed communities in the state of Tamil Nadu. And SASY has meticulously monitored the emergency situation across Tamil Nadu and the violence against the Dalit and Adivasi communities since March 25, 2020. It had professionally documented more than 40 forms of atrocities that have occurred across 20 districts of Tamil Nadu against Dalits, Irular Tribes, Women, Children, Single Women, migrant labourers and Elderly people.

Forms of Atrocities:

SASY has monitored 23 forms of caste based atrocities against Dalits and Tribals. The core element of the SC/ST PoA Act is to prevent the incidences/occurrence of any atrocity; but in these lock down days the government is mere spectator of witnessing and could not prevent the caste based atrocities, violence against the marginalised communities.

It is highly difficult task undertaken by the DHRDs during the lock down days since the perpetrators, police and other government officials are from the dominant caste and they are often caste biased. But the DHRDs are able to overcome all the difficult situations through their previous experiences, using legal safeguards and other tactics. In these backgrounds, SASY had made engagements with the district and state authorities with various recommendations and findings to reduce the incidences of the caste based atrocities and violence against the marginalized communities. Out of 39 cases, SASY had generated complaints to the concerned authorities in 23 cases and gained compensation in 8,50,000/- in atrocity cases.

SASY had petitioned to the Madras High Court in cancelling the bail petition of the accused persons in 4 cases under the chapter IVA of the Rights of the Victim-Witness of SC/ST PoA Act .



- Brutal Attack on Dalit
- Attempt to Murder
- Brutal Murder
- Cruel Form of Verbal Abuse
- Defamation of Dr. Ambedkar portrait
- Denial in Executing powers for Dalit Panchayat President
- Social Boycott
- Death of Sanitary workers
- Caste cruelty Muder

Access to Justice: Case No.1

Subramani (42) resident of Iyvathukudi Samathuvapuram, Viruthachalam Block, Cuddalore District is residing with his wife Selvi (38), Children Meenakshi (20), Kalliammal (19), David (15), Durga (14) and Chellammal (10). He is working as a daily wage labourer and taking care of his wife and children.

Earlier Subramani was taken into illegal detention by the Viruthachalam Policemen and they detained him 3 days; also registered 3 false cases in Viruthachalam PS, 1 case in Mangalampettai PS and 1 case in Veppur PS and totally 5 false cases were filed against him. About 13 months he was imprisoned and only before 6 months he was found to be innocent and released from the false cases. In these circumstances, the Veppur police on 21.02.2020 abducted Subramani.

The intimation was received SASY and SASY's program coordinator immediately reached the Veppur PS, nearby police station and could not find the whereabouts of Subramani. He then took Subramani's family to the Superintendent of Police – Cuddalore and Deputy Superintendent of Police – Thitakudi and made his wife Selvi to lodge a complaint to them seeking the whereabouts of her husband. Only after the intervention by SASY Selvi and her children were allowed to see Subramani and this was possible only by the immediate and consistent intervention of SASY.

Subramani was imprisoned on the same day and the next day the police told that Subramani was not in the prison. Later by the intervention of SASY and advocates it was confirmed that he was shifted to the Central Prison – Cuddalore. The next day the visitor petition was submitted and Selvi was allowed to see her husband.

It was also known that Subramani was tortured and severely beaten up in the prison and a Policewoman Kavitha had threatened that he would be murdered with the gun. This was recorded as a full statement and the complaint was submitted to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), Chennai on 27.02.2020 by the family members and relatives of Subramani. Later the NCSC had sent notice to the SP and DSP seeking immediate report on this matter

The complaint was submitted to the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), Chennai on 27.02.2020. By the continuous and critical engagements of SASY Subramani's relatives Sanjeev and Manikandan were rescued from the illegal arrest and detention. But Subramani was booked under Goondas Act and detained in Cuddalore Central Prison. The bail petition for Subramani has been filed and due to the lockdown this is still pending.

Since SASY had made direct representation to the NCSC, SHRC the inspector Kavitha had tried to take Selvi and her children in an ambulance during the lockdown days. While his wife Selvi screamed for help the inspector had told that she has corona symptoms and hence taking them. Later Selvi and her children were rescued from the intentions of the Inspector.



Access to Justice: Case No.2

Loganathan, S/o Mr. Murugan, resident of old Colony, Devampalayam & Post, Pallangarai via, Avinashi Taluk, Tirupur District and residing with his sister Malathi (19). On 07.05.2020, one of the goats of Loganathan had crossed the fencing (Kallikadu Thottam). Immediately the owner of the place Mr. Moorthy (Kongu Gounder Caste) and his son Praveen (21) had pulled the goat and threw it and this was noticed by Loganathan's sister Malathi and she informed her brother. Loganathan rushed to the place and requested Praveen to give his goat and Praveen told him how come he can speak to him without any respect; he also added that he would kill the goat and put as prey to his dogs and verbally abused him in derogatory and filthy language and took the goat along with him.

Subsequently, Loganathan along with his sister Malathi went to Kallikadu Thottam and met Praveen, his mother Rathinambal (45) and his grandmother Govindammal (75) and told them that his goat has unknowingly crossed their fencing and pleaded to give away the goat to them. They also told that this would never happen again and requested to give the goat. But Praveen's grandmother had verbally abused Loganathan and Malathi in derogatory and filthy language referring to the caste names and told them to fall in their legs and apologize to them. But Loganathan refused and denied to fall in their legs and told that he don't need the goat and tried to leave the place.



Case No.2 – Continue....

Meanwhile Praveen's mother Rathinambal had subjected Loganathan and Malathi to cruel forms of verbal abuse and threw the goat. They both took the injured goat and reached their home. The same day around 11:30 a.m Mr. Kallimuthu (Arunthathiyar) of the same village came to Loganathan's house and told them that Moorthy is calling them. Immediately Loganathan, his father Murugan and his sister Malathi went to Kallikadu Thottam and narrated the whole incident. But they did not hear it rather told that Loganathan had spoken against the Gounders (dominant caste people). The same night Mr. Kallimuthu came to Loganathan's house and threatened murugan stating that Loganathan has spoken against the Gounders and told Murugan to leave the village.

On 08.05.2020, around 8:50 in the morning, around 50 persons (Gounder Caste) including Suthama company Gopal Gounder, Armstrong Company Palanisamy Gounder, Kallikadu Thottam land lord Moorthy Gounder, Praveen, Rathinambal, Govindammal, Tamil Selvan, Chinnasamy, Maniyaan, Kallimuthu, post man Murugan gathered in Kallikadu Thottam; they had asked Loganathan, his father Murugan, mother Deivanai, sister Malathi, to apologize in front of Praveen, his mother and grandmother for speaking against the Gounders. But Loganathan refused to fall in their legs. The Gounders agitated on Loganathan's refusal.

And hence 2 counter case was filed by Praveen & Kallimuthu at Avinashi PS with the FIR No:1124, U/S 294(b),323,506(i),474 IPC R/w section 4 of women Harassment Act on Dated:15-05-2020 and FIR No:1125, U/S 294(b),323,506(ii), IPC Act against Loganathan, Murugan, Malathi and Deivanai .

Our Relief Work during COVID 19 Pandemic:

One of the thrust areas of SASY is Disaster Response and providing humanitarian assistance. SASY is also proactively engaged in Humanitarian aid to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity of the marginalized communities in disaster with relief and rehabilitative measures for the Survivors of Disasters.

SASY has been effectively engaged in Disaster Response to ensure Social Inclusion of Dalit and Adivasi communities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Management since, Tsunami 2004 and continued interventions in Thane cyclone 2011, Tamil Nadu Floods 2015, Vardah Cyclone 2016, Ockhi Cyclone 2017, Cuddalore Floods 2018, Gaja Cyclone 2018 and had involved in Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstructive activities at different level to ensure the social inclusion.

Likewise, SASY has been engaged in emergency relief response during COVID 19 Pandemic situation. This is one of the major epidemic occurred and Tamil Nadu ranks high in the country with more number of positive cases. Also due to the self-isolation and social distancing people are not able to get adequate food and suffering without basic amenities. The Dalits and Adivasi communities are naturally vulnerable, social excluded; it is severely manifested during the disaster times and also exist during this COVID 19 Pandemic too. This affected the loss of livelihood of the people and their daily survival. The humanitarian assistance is very much needed and the affected people need to be provided immediate relief assistance including dry ration and WASH kits to tackle this worst situation.



SASY has provided relief packages to the needy, vulnerable, marginalized and socially excluded communities including Dalits, Adivasis, Single Women, Elderly, Migrant Workers, Transgenders across 7-8 districts of Tamil Nadu. The relief kits included rice, dhal, sugar, salt, cooking oil and biscuits to the vulnerable families to cope with their daily survival. The relief packages had helped the 81 families to manage the next 30 days and till they get back to normalcy.

Direct Relief by SASY:

Cuddalore	-1272 families
Coimbatore	- 83 families
Erode	- 84 families
Tirupur	- 83 families
Villupuram	- 278 families
Migrants	- 28 families (from Bihar & Jharkhand)
Transgenders	- 15 families (Trichy District)
Irular Tribe	- 100 Families (villupuram)
Kuravar	- 132 (Cuddalore District)
Therukoothu Artist	- 30 Families (Villupuram district)

Total – 2105 families

Relief Provided by SASY along with other organisations:

1. Cuddalore – 111 Families
2. Villupuram – 172 Families
3. Erode – 696 Families
4. Tirupur – 300 Families

Total – 1279 Families

“WE CLAIM APP”

SASY has along engaged in monitoring the inclusiveness during the disaster response through the new initiative “WE CLAIM APP” which was launched by National Dalit Watch (NDW – NCDHR, New Delhi). SASY as one of the partner is engaged in monitoring the social inclusion in the epidemic situation in the state of Tamil Nadu. The WE CLAIM APP included questions related to protective, health & safety measures of the state and the government schemes and relief to the COVID 19 situation.

This app is to mainly locate the affected communities who are yet to receive the relief measures or are not enrolled under the public schemes to avail of the benefits of the State and Central Government. Volunteers who will be linked to the district administration will pursue the related interventions and advocacy with multiple Stakeholders and authorities at District, State and National level.

SASY has enrolled and surveyed about 2782 respondents through this app and in the process of 2nd survey in collecting the facts of the implementation/reach of the government schemes to the communities during the corona pandemic situation.

SASY is continuously engaged in human rights monitoring and relief response to combat COVID 19 Pandemic situation; SASY is also planning for rehabilitation measures to the affected marginalized communities with right based approach with legal standards along with socio-economic development.



Our Relief Work during COVID 19 Pandemic

Social Awareness Society for Youths (SASY)

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