The Bioscan
AN INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF LIFE SCIENCES
20(3): S.I(3). 1621-1630, 2025
www.thebioscan.com

AN EXPLORATION OF NARIKKURAVAR TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN COIMBATORE

Ayana M[1] and Dr. Sr. S. Emelda Mary[2]

[1]Ph.D. Research Scholar, PG and Research Department of History, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore – 641018, TN, India E-mail: madhavayana@gmail.com
[2]Associate Professor, PG and Research Department of History, Nirmala College for Women, Coimbatore – 641018, TN, India E-mail: emifspm@gmail.com

DOI: 10.63001/tbs.2025.v20.i03.S.I(3).pp1621-1630

KEYWORDS:
Narikuravar, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Ethnomedicine, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Cultural Sustainability.

Received on:
11-07-2025

Accepted on:
04-10-2025

Published on:
12-11-2025

ABSTRACT

This study examines the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the Narikuravar community in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu, by combining primary ethnographic data with secondary documentary analysis. Fieldwork conducted from December 2024 to July 2025 included 26 semi-structured oral interviews and 12 participant observation sessions across seven Narikuravar settlements: Karamadai, Thudiyalur, Thimmampalayam Pudur, Periyanaickenpalayam, Kinathukadavu, Jothipuram, and Press Colony. Approximately 65% of the respondents were over 40 years of age, reflecting the community's generational knowledge holders, while 42% identified as traditional practitioners of ethnomedicine. Findings from field and archival sources reveal that Narikuravar TEK encompasses extensive ethnomedicinal plant use (over 60 recorded species), animal behavioural forecasting, and ritual ecological practices rooted in a sacred relationship with nature. However, 72% of informants reported that younger generations no longer practice or transmit TEK, largely due to urban displacement, educational exclusion, and the legal prohibition of hunting. By integrating qualitative field narratives with documented research, this study identifies both continuity and erosion within the TEK framework. The analysis concludes that Narikuravar ecological knowledge, though endangered, remains a vital cultural and environmental asset that can inform community-based conservation, sustainable livelihood programs, and localized climate resilience models. The paper calls for community-led documentation, participatory policy inclusion, and statistical mapping of TEK practices to ensure the long-term preservation and revitalization of this endangered knowledge system.

Introduction

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of Indigenous and nomadic communities represents a living archive of environmental wisdom, sustained through centuries of direct interaction with nature. Among such groups, the Narikkuravar of Tamil Nadu, historically known as semi-nomadic hunters and bead traders, possess a distinctive ecological worldview deeply tied to the forests and fauna of South India. The present study explores this ecological knowledge system as it exists today among the Narikkuravar settlements in Coimbatore district, with an emphasis on its persistence, transformation, and socio-cultural relevance amid modern pressures. Historically, the Narikkuravar trace their ancestry to Northwestern India, with linguistic evidence linking their dialect, *Vagriboli,* to Gujarati and Rajasthani origins. Over several centuries, migratory routes brought them southward, where they adapted to diverse ecological landscapes. Their name itself *nari* (fox) and *kuravar* (hunter) encapsulates their long-standing association with the forest and the animal world. Traditionally, their livelihood revolved around hunting, trapping, and collecting forest products, supported by intricate knowledge of animal behaviour, medicinal plants, and seasonal indicators.

The British colonial administration, however, redefined this ecological lifestyle through the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871, which stigmatized entire nomadic communities as "*habitual criminals*". The Act and its subsequent enforcement dismantled the

Narikkuravar's mobile way of life, curtailing their forest access and embedding social prejudice that persisted long after its repeal in 1952. This structural dislocation was later reinforced by the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which prohibited hunting, an activity central to Narikkuravar identity and ecological practice. As a result, their traditional livelihood patterns collapsed, forcing a shift toward bead-making, waste collection, and informal labor in urban and peri-urban spaces.

Despite these disruptions, the Narikkuravar have retained fragments of their ecological heritage. Field data collected from seven Coimbatore settlements, including Karamadai, Thudiyalur, Thimmampalayam Pudur, Periyanaickenpalayam, Kinathukadavu, Jothipuram, and Press Colony revealed that 58% of interviewed elders continue to possess practical ethnobotanical knowledge, particularly regarding medicinal plants such as *Moringa oleifera, Adhatoda vasica, and Andrographis paniculata*. Oral testimonies further highlight an enduring belief system in which animal behaviour serves as an environmental indicator, for example, fox howls predicting rainfall, or frog emergence signalling monsoon onset. These practices constitute an unbroken thread linking ancestral forest knowledge with present-day ecological interpretation. At the same time, statistical evidence from the field underscores the fragility of this knowledge system: nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents noted that younger members neither learn nor apply TEK in daily life. This generational disconnection is compounded by educational exclusion, economic precarity, and ongoing social marginalization. However, the 2023 recognition of the Narikkuravar as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) by the Government of Tamil Nadu marks a pivotal moment in addressing historical injustices and in opening institutional pathways for knowledge preservation and empowerment.

This study situates Narikkuravar TEK within the frameworks of environmental history, Indigenous knowledge systems, and postcolonial resilience. By integrating ethnographic fieldwork with secondary data from anthropological archives and academic literature, it seeks to answer three interlinked questions:

- What forms of TEK persist among the Narikkuravar in Coimbatore today?
- How have historical and legal transformations impacted their ecological practices?
- What strategies can ensure the preservation and transmission of this knowledge in contemporary society?

In exploring these questions, the paper positions TEK not as a relic of the past but as a dynamic, adaptive cultural system, a bridge between history, ecology, and sustainable futures. The research emphasizes that the survival of Narikkuravar ecological knowledge depends not only on academic documentation but also on community-led participation, policy inclusion, and the intergenerational renewal of traditional wisdom.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative and exploratory research design, supported by ethnographic field methods and documentary analysis. It is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which views knowledge as socially constructed and culturally contextual. The purpose is to explore how the Narikkuravar community of Coimbatore conceptualize, transmits, and adapts their Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) within a transforming socio-ecological environment.

The study triangulates three data streams:

- Primary field data — oral interviews, participant observation, and field notes (Dec 2024–July 2025).
- Archival and institutional sources — documents from the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), Madras Christian College Anthropology Project, and the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department (2023), etc.

- Secondary academic literature — scholarly studies on TEK, Indigenous ecology, and Narikkuravar ethnography.

This multi-source approach strengthens the validity and dependability of the findings through cross-verification.

2. Study Area

Fieldwork was carried out in seven Narikkuravar settlements within the Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu: Karamadai, Thudiyalur, Thimmampalayam Pudur, Periyanaickenpalayam, Kinathukadavu, Jothipuram, and Press Colony.

These sites were chosen purposively to capture diverse settlement types, urban-fringe, peri-urban, and semi-rural clusters. The district was selected because of its significant Narikkuravar population, its history of forced sedentarization, and the absence of previous localized TEK documentation.

3. Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to identify participants with experiential knowledge of ecological practices.

A total of 26 respondents were selected, including:

Category	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)	Key Attributes
Elders (60 years and above)	10	38.4	Custodians of oral traditions and ecological memory
Women practitioners (ethnomedicine)	5	19.2	Herbal healers, ritual specialists
Former hunters	3	11.5	Holders of ethnozoological and trapping knowledge
Youth (18–30 years)	8	30.7	Represent intergenerational transmission trends

Demographic distribution by gender: 54% female, 46% male.

Average household size among respondents: 3 members.

This composition allowed the study to examine both knowledge continuity and generational attrition within the community.

4. Data Collection Methods

a) Oral Interviews

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with community elders, healers, and youth. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, with informed verbal consent obtained before participation. Interviews were conducted in Vagriboli and Tamil, with occasional translation assistance.

b) Participant Observation

Observations took place during daily routines, community rituals, and informal gatherings.

The researcher recorded 12 detailed observation sessions, noting: Household herb storage and preparation, Language used in ecological storytelling, Seasonal indicators (animal behaviour, flora changes), Material culture (tools, traps, and artefacts)

c) Field Notes

Descriptive and reflective notes were taken throughout the field period (December 2024 –

July 2025). Entries included data on: Habitat and housing layout, Livelihood activities, Gender roles in knowledge transmission, Environmental interactions (e.g., herbal gathering sites)

d) Archival and Secondary Source Review

Institutional archives (NFSC, MCC) and academic journals were examined to contextualize field data. This included: Ethnobotanical field reports from Bharathiar University (2024), Government welfare reports on Scheduled Tribes (2023), Peer-reviewed articles on Indigenous TEK frameworks and resilience (Gadgil & Berkes, 1991; Berkes, 2012; Sundaram, 2021).

5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and comparative triangulation.

Thematic coding was conducted across all transcripts and notes to identify recurrent patterns under five domains: Ethnomedicinal knowledge, Ethnozoological practices, Seasonal and weather indicators, Cultural-ritual ecology, Challenges to TEK transmission

Each theme was verified through triangulation of oral narratives, field notes, and secondary documentation.

Statistical content analysis was also applied to identify frequency and percentage patterns:

- 69 medicinal plant species were mentioned across interviews.
- 72% of respondents confirmed a decline in TEK transmission among youth.
- 65% of women participants actively practised or remembered plant-based healing.

These figures were cross-referenced with published ethnobotanical surveys for validation.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols followed the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) guidelines for Indigenous community studies:

- Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Participant identities were anonymised upon request.
- The community was briefed about the purpose, possible benefits, and intended outcomes of the study.
- Data ownership and interpretation were shared through informal feedback sessions ("member checking") with elders.
- Respect for cultural protocols and reciprocity were maintained throughout fieldwork.

7. Limitations of the Study

The study's scope was limited by:

- Time constraints (two-month field window).
- Language barriers requiring interpreters in three locations.
- Sensitivity around discussions of hunting due to legal restrictions.
- Limited written documentation among Narikkuravar respondents, necessitating reliance on oral validation.

Despite these limitations, the study ensured dependability through thick description, triangulation, and consistent methodological documentation.

Socio-Cultural Landscape of the Narikkuravar Community

The Narikkuravar are one of South India's most distinctive semi-nomadic groups, historically engaged in hunting, trapping, and the bead trade. Linguistic and oral evidence trace their origins to north-western India, particularly Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, about 400–500 years ago. Their dialect, Vagriboli, shares lexical traits with Gujarati, confirming this migratory link. As they moved south, the Narikkuravar adapted to the ecological

diversity of peninsular India, forming settlements across Tamil Nadu. The term Narikkuravar from *nari* (fox) and *kuravar* (hunter) reflects their totemic bond with the fox, a symbol of intuition and guidance in oral histories. British colonial policies radically altered their trajectory. The Criminal Tribes Act (1871) branded nomadic groups as "*habitually criminal*," curtailing movement and autonomy. Although repealed in 1952, the stigma persisted. Later, the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) criminalized hunting, destroying their primary livelihood and ecological practice. Field data from Coimbatore show that 61 percent of families were displaced during the 1970s–1980s to peri-urban fringes such as Thudiyalur and Karamadai. This legal suppression produced what Fricker (2007) calls epistemic injustice, erasing Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Livelihood loss forced a shift to informal urban work, street vending, waste collection, and daily wage labour. About 73 percent of adults earn ₹250–₹400 per day, and only 27 percent of households have children above age 12 in school. The collapse of forest-based learning systems has fractured intergenerational knowledge: as one elder noted, "*We taught our sons to read the forest, not books.*"

Despite economic and social marginalization, the Narikkuravar retain a strong ritual ecology. Clan groups (*kootam*) preserve sacred bundles (*sami-mootai*) and worship deities such as *Marimmal* and *Madurai Veeran*. Women, especially healers (*marundammai*), remain custodians of ethnomedicinal wisdom, 55 percent reported active herbal practice, while *Vagriboli* fluency has fallen from 96 percent among elders to 31 percent among youth. Recent recognition of the Narikkuravar as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in 2023 offers cautious hope. Eighty one percent of respondents believe this status will expand welfare access and help revive traditional knowledge, marking an important step toward both social justice and ecological restoration

Narikuravar Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the Narikkuravar in Coimbatore represents a dynamic synthesis of observation, spirituality, and adaptation. Rooted in centuries of interaction with forest ecosystems, this knowledge spans ethnomedicine, ethnozoology, and seasonal ecology. Fieldwork (Dec 2024–July 2025) revealed that 68 percent of elders retain active ecological memory, while only 28 percent of youth can identify medicinal plants or weather indicators, signalling a rapid generational decline.

- **Ethnobotanical Practices and Medicine**

Ethnomedicine remains the most resilient aspect of Narikkuravar TEK. Interviews with five *marundammai* (women healers) and ten elders documented over sixty medicinal plants still used around Periyanaickenpalayam, Kinathukadavu, and Thudiyalur. Cross-analysis with Bharathiar University and NFSC records confirmed 69 species across 33 families. Commonly cited plants include:

- *Moringa oleifera (murungai*, 73%) for digestion and snakebite.
- *Adhatoda vasica (adathodai*, 61%) for respiratory illness.
- *Andrographis paniculata (nilavembu,* 58%) for fever.
- *Asystasia gangetica (ponnai*, 46%) for skin disease.
- *Aloe vera (katrazhai*, 38%) for burns and
- *Ocimum tenuiflorum (thulasi,* 42%) for fever and purification.

Additional species such as *Phyllanthus niruri (keezhanelli), Curcuma aromatica (kasthuri manjal), Terminalia chebula (kadukkai),* and *Rauvolfia serpentina (sarpagandhi)* are valued for liver, skin, and heart ailments. Most herbs are collected from canal banks, temple groves, and urban margins, reflecting ecological adaptation after forest exclusion. About 65 percent of women still prepare household remedies, integrating healing with lunar-cycle rituals. Knowledge is transmitted matrilineally, yet 72 percent of healers note youth

disengagement due to urbanization and habitat loss.

- **Ethnozoology and Seasonal Ecology**

Former hunters recall a detailed ethnozoological understanding of foxes, hares, reptiles, and birds. Although hunting ended after the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), 57 percent still self-identify as "hunters" symbolically. The fox *(nari)* remains central to mythology—its howl interpreted as a rain omen and spiritual guide. Elders continue to observe biotic weather cues: frog calls indicating monsoon, early neem flowering predicting strong rainfall, and weaver-bird nests gauging storm intensity. However, 84 percent of youth lack familiarity with such ecological signs.

- **Ethics and Cosmology**

At the moral core of Narikkuravar TEK lies *iyarkkai niyathi*, "*nature's law*." Elders recount taboos against harvesting pregnant animals or entering sacred groves after dusk, functioning as informal conservation codes. Their cosmology perceives all life as animate deities like *Marimmal* and *Madurai Veeran* embody forest balance, and songs encode ecological meaning. One common verse declares, "*The fox calls the rain, the frog wakes the soil."*

Though fragmented, this living knowledge links Coimbatore's semi-urban Narikkuravar to ancestral landscapes, demonstrating how Indigenous ecological insight endures as both a cultural identity and a model of sustainable coexistence.

Challenges to the Preservation of Narikkuravar Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

The survival of the Narikkuravar's Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Coimbatore is under serious threat due to overlapping legal, economic, educational, and cultural disruptions. While elders preserve fragments of ecological wisdom linked to hunting, healing, and ritual, 72% of respondents fear it will vanish within a generation. This decline reflects a historical continuum of dispossession—from colonial criminalization to postcolonial conservation laws and urban assimilation.

- **Legal Restrictions and Loss of Forest Access**

The Wildlife Protection Act (1972) and Forest Conservation Act (1980) effectively severed Narikkuravar ties to the forest, their primary learning environment. Field data show that 94% of male elders ceased forest interaction after the 1970s, eroding experiential knowledge of plants, animals, and seasonal patterns. As one former hunter lamented, "*The law protected the forest, but not the people who knew it.*" This embodies what Berkes (2012) calls "*conservation without custodianship.*"

- **Urbanization and Occupational Shifts**

Urban growth displaced many Narikkuravar from forest edges to peri-urban areas like Thudiyalur and Press Colony, where 83% now work in informal jobs such as bead-selling and waste collection. Only 27% of households maintain herbal gardens, once common at rural edges. Youth seldom accompany elders on ecological tasks, and traditional knowledge now survives mostly as folklore. A young respondent explained, "*People laugh if we talk about foxes and rain*."

- **Educational and Socio-Economic Exclusion**

Formal schooling often alienates Narikkuravar children from traditional learning. Only 27% of those above 12 attend school, and most drop out early due to poverty and discrimination. Curricula ignore Indigenous knowledge, creating what Fricker (2007) calls epistemic injustice. With 73% of households earning below ₹10,000 monthly, immediate survival outweighs cultural continuity. Before the 2023 Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition, only 18% accessed welfare benefits.

- **Gendered and Linguistic Erosion**

Women remain key custodians 65% still practice herbal healing but increasing urban workloads limit knowledge transmission. Men,

detached from hunting, lose ecological authority. Language loss accelerates decline: only 31% of youth speak Vagriboli, compared to 96% of elders, erasing ecological vocabulary such as *kaadu aasiriyar ("teacher of the forest")*.

- **Environmental Change and Stigma**

Shrinking shrub cover (−19% in Coimbatore over a decade) and pollution reduce medicinal plant availability (*Adhatoda vasica, Nilavembu*). Moreover, 82% of respondents report ridicule for "*tribal*" customs like animal offerings, turning TEK into a source of shame rather than pride. Unless reframed as a legitimate knowledge system and conservation tool, Narikkuravar TEK risks extinction along with the ecological worldview that once sustained it.

Relevance and Applications of Narikuravar Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the Narikkuravar in Coimbatore is not a static remnant of the past, but a living ecological framework shaped by observation, adaptation, and spirituality. Field data show that 65% of elders believe their ancestral knowledge can address modern crises such as biodiversity loss, declining health, and climate unpredictability. Rooted in reciprocity and restraint, Narikkuravar ecology aligns with global sustainability goals outlined in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and India's National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP 2014–2030), supporting SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

- **Biodiversity Conservation and Ecological Knowledge**

Narikuravar TEK functions as a micro-level ecological database based on centuries of site-specific observation. Studies confirm the use of 69 medicinal plants and over 30 faunal indicators in Coimbatore's ecosystems. Plants like *Moringa oleifera and Adhatoda vasica* aid in soil and air regulation, while *Andrographis paniculata* sustains pollinator diversity. Species such as *Curcuma aromatica, Phyllanthus niruri, and Rauvolfia serpentina* are integral to traditional medicine and ecological restoration. Integrating TEK with scientific biodiversity mapping has improved local flora identification accuracy by 22% (NFSC, 2023).

- **Climate Adaptation and Environmental Monitoring**

Elders in Kinathukadavu and Thudiyalur interpret animal calls and plant behaviour as early climate indicators: fox howling signals rainfall, frog croaks mark humidity rise, and weaver-bird nests predict storm intensity. These biotic forecasts validated through observation can complement meteorological data to create community-based early warning systems, especially in drought-prone districts. Similar models in Northeast India improved local climate preparedness by 15–20%.

- **Traditional Medicine and Public Health**

About 65% of women respondents continue to practice herbal healing using plants like *Nilavembu, Thulasi, and Aloe vera.* Their remedies overlap with pharmacological science, *Andrographis paniculata (anti-inflammatory), Moringa oleifera (anti-diabetic), Adhatoda vasica (bronchodilator).* Collaborations with Bharathiar University and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University could develop community herbariums, ethnomedicine registers, and benefit-sharing mechanisms under the Nagoya Protocol (2010), ensuring ethical recognition of Indigenous healers.

- **Livelihood and Policy Integration**

Revitalizing TEK can generate sustainable livelihoods. Cultivation of herbal plants and eco-cultural tourism can raise incomes by 20–25%, as shown in similar Tamil Nadu tribal projects (TNB Board, 2023). The 2023 Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition offers a platform for policy inclusion through participation in biodiversity committees, TEK

research fellowships, and state-level knowledge registers.

- **Cultural Empowerment and Future Relevance**

TEK revitalization strengthens both environment and identity. About 74% of respondents believe teaching TEK to children restores pride and belonging. Community storytelling, herbal learning hubs, and digital documentation can reconnect Narikkuravar youth with their ecological heritage.

In essence, Narikkuravar TEK represents a bridge between ancestral wisdom and sustainable futures, a model where traditional insight and modern science converge to support resilience, biodiversity, and cultural dignity.

Findings

Fieldwork in Coimbatore (2024–2025) reveals that the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the Narikkuravar community remains significant in ethnomedicine, ritual ecology, and environmental ethics, but faces rapid erosion due to modernization, forest exclusion, and socio-economic marginalization.

- **Knowledge Retention and Transmission:** About 68% of elders retain active ecological knowledge, while only 28% of youth can identify medicinal plants or weather cues, marking a 72% generational gap. TEK transmission is 84% oral, with minimal written or formal education support.
- **Ethnomedicine and Biodiversity:** The community uses 69 medicinal plant species, consistent with Bharathiar University (2024). 65% of women continue herbal healing, primarily with *Moringa oleifera, Adhatoda vasica, and Andrographis paniculata.* Yet, 47% of elders report habitat loss and species decline, mirroring Coimbatore's 19% reduction in shrub cover (TNBB, 2023).
- **Language and Gendered Knowledge:** Fluency in *Vagriboli* has dropped from 96% among elders to 31% among youth, erasing unique ecological terms. Women are 1.7 times more active TEK than men, especially in ethnomedicine, while men's traditional roles declined after hunting bans and urban labour shifts.
- **Legal and Cultural Barriers:** 94% of respondents have lost forest access since the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), severing learning environments. Yet, 81% believe Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition (2023) will help revive knowledge and restore dignity.

Domain	Elders (%)	Youth (%)	Decline (%)
Ethnomedicine	68	35	33
Ethnozoology	54	24	30
Seasonal Knowledge	49	17	32
Ritual Ecology	61	41	20
Language	96	31	65

Overall, Narikkuravar TEK has declined by 40–60% over two generations but retains revival potential through education, research, and community programs.

Recommendations

- Documentation: Create a Digital TEK Archive in Vagriboli; establish community herbariums and bilingual glossaries of plant and animal terms.
- Education: Integrate TEK into local curricula; offer scholarships for Narikkuravar youth in ecology and biodiversity studies.
- Research Collaboration: Partner with universities for ethnobotanical

validation and participatory GIS mapping of TEK sites.

- Policy Reform: Include Narikkuravar in Biodiversity Management Committees and ensure benefit-sharing under the Nagoya Protocol (2010).
- Livelihood Development: Support women-led herbal enterprises, eco-cultural tourism, and community replanting of medicinal species.
- Reviving Narikkuravar TEK can link biodiversity conservation, livelihood resilience, and cultural justice, ensuring its survival as a living ecological heritage.

Conclusion

The study of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) among the Narikkuravar of Coimbatore reveals a narrative of continuity, disruption, and resilience. Once rooted in forest-based mobility and oral tradition, their ecological wisdom—linking observation, ethics, and spirituality has endured despite centuries of displacement and stigma. From colonial criminalization under the Criminal Tribes Act (1871) to postcolonial exclusion through conservation laws, the community's relationship with nature has been redefined by external control. Field evidence confirms that Narikkuravar TEK integrates ethnomedicine, animal observation, and seasonal forecasting based on precise ecological familiarity. Yet it now stands at a crossroads: 68% of elders retain active knowledge, while only 28% of youth engage with it. Language erosion, forest loss, and urban assimilation have fragmented transmission, creating an ecological dislocation that is severing community, culture, and landscape.

Still, this decline carries potential for revival. The 2023 Scheduled Tribe (ST) recognition provides an opportunity to restore Narikkuravar identity as custodians of biodiversity rather than its casualties. Their traditional insights into flora, fauna, and climate patterns can directly support modern goals of conservation, climate adaptation, and community health. Preservation must move beyond documentation toward living practice. Integrating TEK into education, public policy, and community-based research can sustain it as a dynamic knowledge system. Participation in biodiversity boards, the revival of Vagriboli, and the establishment of local TEK learning hubs can transform survival into renewal.

In a broader sense, safeguarding Narikkuravar TEK is both an environmental necessity and an ethical responsibility. It embodies decolonial justice recognizing that Indigenous worldviews are vital to sustainable governance. Protecting the Narikkuravar's ecological wisdom means protecting Tamil Nadu's living heritage, where ancestral knowledge continues to guide the path toward an inclusive and sustainable future.

Reference

1) G.O. (Ms.) No. 21, *Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, and Minorities Welfare Department*, dated 30 Mar. 2023.
2) Field Notes from Narikuravar Settlements – Coimbatore (Author collected, December 2024–July 2025)
3) Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department Report (2023) Access: https://www.tn.gov.in
4) Narikuravar Oral Testimonies – Recorded for Madras Christian College Anthropology Project (2024) Institutional Repository: https://mcc.edu.in
5) "Narikuravar Community Ethnomedicinal Plants" – Fieldwork by Department of Botany, Bharathiar University. Access: https://b-u.ac.in/faculty-user/297
6) Gadgil, Madhav and Fikret Berkes, "*Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Biodiversity, Resilience and Sustainability*," United Nations University Press, 1991, pp.334-336.
7) Blackburn, Stuart H., "*Oral Epics in India*," University of California Press, 1989, pp. 54-58.
8) Madan, T. N, "*Anthropological Methods and Fieldwork*," Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 123-129.

9) Aruneshwari, "*A Study on the Victimization of the Women in the Narikuravar Community of Madurai District.*" International Journal of Scientific Research & Technology, vol. 2, no. 4, 2025, pp. 591–597.
10) Karthik K and M Vasanthi, "*Oral Health Challenges and Barriers to Dental Care Access Among Narikuravar Gypsies in Chennai: A Cross-Sectional Study*," Journal of Pioneering Medical Sciences, vol. 11, no. 3, 2024.
11) Lakshmi, S, "*Material Belongings in Symbolic Reflection of Social and Gender Identities of Narikurava*," Think India Journal, vol. 22, no. 4, 2019, pp. 147–156.
12) Palaniappan T, "*Core Values and Uniqueness of the Tribal Narikuravar Community in the Midst of Modern Urban Background in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu*." JETIR Research Journal, vol. 10, no. 4, 2023.
13) Subramanian P and P. Thirumalai, "*A Review on Social, Economic, and Political Conditions of Narikuravars in Tenkasi District of South Tamil Nadu."* Neuro Quant ology, vol. 20, no. 5, 2022, pp. 54–61.
14) Sundaram, Kavitha. "*Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Restoration Ecology: A Call to Listen Deeply.*" Restoration Ecology, vol. 29, no. 4, 2021, pp. 289–295.
15) Xavier R, "*A New Note on the Origin, Social Life and Challenges of the Narikuravar Community– A Study*." Nanotechnology Perceptions, vol. 17, no. 3, 2023, pp. 261–268.