Kari Siddamma

A lifelong social worker & activist
Who works for the
Upliftment of the Irula Tribes

- ASHA supported projects since 2004 & ASHA fellow since 2015

- Created co-operatives, social programs & advocacy programs

- Works tirelessly to raise awareness about bonded labor

- Has freed 1000s of marginalized bonded laborers from rice mills & generational slavery since 2004

- Provides education to children, women & farmers through Bharathi Trust (Since 1990)

- Awarded Trafficking in Persons Hero-2006
Who are IRULAS?

- Irula scheduled caste tribe of over 25,000 spread across Tamil Nadu and Kerala
- Primary occupation include catching snakes & rats, fishing and as laborers
- Mostly unrecognized by the Indian government & Panchayats
- Heavily affected by 2004 Tsunami, recent floods, exploitative labor laws and landlords
- Endemic child labor & domestic alcohol abuse
Aval Vikatan Award

- Awarded to Siddamma in Nov 2018 for her efforts in training farmers in organic farming techniques
  
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxtELRzo3kw&t=660s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxtELRzo3kw&t=660s)

- Received a gift voucher of Rs. 15,000

- Post award, Siddamma had several farmers show up at the farm for organic farming training

- In March she will be training 200 farmers (through Aval Vikatan) at the farm. She will charge Rs 200 per person for food and accommodation at the farm.
Highlights in 2018

- **Gaja Puyal**: Cyclone that hit Tamil Nadu and Puducherry in Nov 2018. 80,000 people were evacuated and 63 people died with lots of cattle and boats affected during the storm. In Cuddalore, 149 Irula families had their houses washed away. Siddamma has been working with a local social activist (Geetha Ramakrishnan) to provide food etc. She needs **Rs. 7.0 lakhs** to provide some form of shelter- tarpaulin sheets and blankets

- The primary occupation for the Irulas in Cuddalore is fishing. Several livelihoods affected since they could not go out into open seas since it was deemed risky

- **Scheduled Tribe (ST) certificate**: On the bright side in Saminagar, Cuddalore, all the Irula families have now received an “ST certificate” enabling higher education at low cost

- **Irula Survey**: The ST Commissioner in Delhi had requested that a survey be conducted with information about the number of families, kids and the number of people who have pattas. This survey report was submitted to the Commissioner in early 2019. It was found that the budget allocated for the Irulas was not being properly utilized by the ST Director. The Commissioner talk with the Director to ensure he was not being the bottleneck for the funds and hopefully this will facilitate more funds being released towards the improvement of Irulas

- Siddamma had 3 meetings with the National Planning Commission of India. The Commission has agreed that 1 acre of land per Irula family with organic farming training should be provided by the govt. To each Irula family for self sustenance. Trying to get it implemented on the policy side
Site Visit Location (s)
GumudiPuram District
Borders AP & TN
Village 1: Kamrajnagar

- 82 families with 35 families having patta. The families that have a patta have a nicer brick house. More families getting patta and new housing coming to this village soon.

- Houses built by local Irulas while bricks/raw materials are provided by the government. Papamma, more than 70 year old woman built many of these houses.

- Avail free LPG for cooking needs

- Most of the villagers are fisherman. 6 boats available in the village. 50 families without boat.

- School and Medical check up.

- Fewer number of children per household

- The Irulas in this village wanted a common community hall for them to be able to discuss issues and possibly take refuge in incase of a calamity

- The women wanted some fresh ideas to supplement their primary income from fishing. Recurring need in all villages.
Village 2: Ellarmedu

- This village is close to farms growing mango trees. The villagers work at these farms and are also fisherman.

- 24 families of which 12 families have patta and good houses.
- We met Satish Kumar who had done his MA and is studying to be a lawyer.
- Chinnarasaasu and Satish Kumar help kids in the village by giving tuitions. All the kids (26) goto school. Chinnarasaasu and Satish Kumar indicated that they needed a hall with a tubelight/blackboard to teach the kids.

- Electricity/water was available in the village and not a problem.

- The women in the village expressed interest in tailoring classes. Some of them had made doormats with Sarees and they looked beautiful. Siddamma said that she would get in touch with stores in Chennai (like Re-store) to see if they would be interested in selling the door mats. The women also expressed interest in tailoring classes.

- The main problem in this village was that there were too many families living in one small house. Siddamma said that she would identify land for additional families and see what she could do to get them housing.
Village 3: Yedakandigai

- Everyone has a ST certificate in this village
- All kids were going to school including the girl children
- Electricity/water was available in the village
- 24 families of which 20 families needed patta.
- Primary occupation: Fishing and working at the local farms.
- This village has no boats. The men folk currently rent another person’s boat for Rs.10 per day to go fishing
- It felt like not many people were happy in this village. Majority of them complained that they had too many families living in one small house. They desperately wanted additional land so they could move out. They seemed to think I was the messiah who could get them additional land. This seemed to be the recurrent theme in the last 2 villages and as Siddamma mentioned in a lot of other villages
- Siddamma said that they will be working on getting additional land for these families.
Overall Summary

- The village leaders along with the Taluk leaders are taking care of most of the village needs. Sidamma is very proud of the growing self sufficiency. She mostly involves herself at the policy level when it comes to land related issues because this requires the aggressiveness and weight that someone like Sidamma brings.

- The villagers were thrilled to have Siddamma. There was genuine warmth, love and reverence for her.

- Thaluk leaders like Valli and Pappamma are shining examples of women leaders that have been inspired by Siddamma’s leadership. They are bold and not afraid to speak their mind, take care of several need of the villagers and lead crucial meetings involving disputes and settlement of issues.

- School and medical help is accessible. All the kids in the 3 villages were going to school.

- All the houses had basic necessities like electricity and water.
Current Needs

- Atleast 2 boats needed in Yedakandigai
- School supply (board and tubelight) for tuitions in Ellarmedu
- Flood Rehabilitation in Cuddalore
- Old jeep of Siddamma’s seems to be giving her many problems and is essential for her travel to visit villages/farm. May need to be replaced soon and she doesn’t have the money for it.
Fellowship

Siddamma

Questions