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Irula Tribe Members Awarded The Padma Shri

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On March 22, 2023, at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, President Droupadi Murmu awarded India's fourth-highest civilian award, the Padma Shri, to Masi Sadaiyan and Vadivel Gopal of the [Irula](#) tribe. The *Irula* tribe is a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) from Tamil Nadu. The award is a recognition of the crucial role the *Irula* have played in producing life-saving anti-venom. The Irular Snake Catchers' Industrial Co-operative Society Limited, of which Masi and Vadivel are members, is India's largest snake venom producer, from which anti-venom is produced.

While the *Irula* are known mostly for snake-catching – in which their expertise is unparalleled, with members of the tribe even visiting Florida, U.S.A. with herpetologist and Sanctuary Lifetime Service Award 2006 winner [Romulus Whitaker](#) to help capture Burmese pythons that have become invasive in the Everglades ecosystem there – the immense traditional knowledge the *Irulas* have of medicinal plants and biodiversity is often overlooked.

Despite world-renown for their knowledge of snake ecology, the *Irula* continue to face stigmatisation and discrimination, with most members of the community living in poverty. In this backdrop, the recognition to the community in the form of the Padma Shri in the field of Social Work to Vadivel Gopal and Masi Sadaiyan is long overdue.

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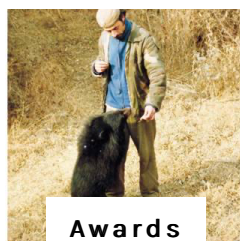


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