

## **xSocio and Culture Dimension of the Irula Tribes in Kanchipuram District of TamilNadu**

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### **Abstract**

India has one of the largest concentrated of tribal population in the world. Most of the tribes live mostly in well-defined but isolated hill area, which are often inaccessible and relatively under- developed and poorly integrated with the rest of the nation .since ages, in Tamilnadu state, there are 36 scheduled tribes Irulas community is one of the major scheduled tribe of Tamilnadu. On the basic of the territory they occupied. The Irulas derived into southern Irulas and northern Irulas. The life cycle rituals of the Irulas are unique in nature. They observe pure and post-delivery rituals, naming ceremony etc. this paper discuses about the socio and cultural dimension of the Irula tribe in Kanchipuram district of Tamilnadu.

**Key words:** Irular, Socio- Culture, Hunt.

### **Introduction**

The Irula tribe second largest tribal group in Tamilnadu according to 2011 census. They are mainly distributed in Kanchipuram, Thiruvallur, Tiruvannamalai, Villupuram, Vellur, Salem, Coimbatore, Trichirapalli, Chennai and Nilgiri 11 districts to Tamilnadu.<sup>1</sup> The Irula are known as villain in Chengalput and Thiruvallur.<sup>2</sup> They live in multi cast villages with other castes people in separate hamlets. They are traditionally the main occupation of Iruls has been snake, rat catching and honey collection. They also work as laborers (coolies) in the fields of the landlords during the sowing and harvesting seasons or in the rice mills, and marginal people.

The Irula is a Dravidian tribe. They are very dark- skinned, with narrow chest, thin bodies, and flabby muscles reminding, in their general aspect, of the Yanadis of Nellore.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that the Irula houses are similar to the Kattunayakkan houses but they are not clean, besmeared and with designs like the Kattunayakkan houses. Irulas are non – vegetarian they take paddy, but they also gather sticks for sale as firewood in return for pice, rice and sour fermented rice gruel, which is kept the higher classes for cattle.

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1. Policy book 2013-2014- Adi Dravidar And Tribal Welfare Department- Government Of Tamilnadu
  2. R.Venkadaraman- Two south Indian Tribes-Servant of Indian Society pg no 13
  3. Edugar Thurston, K. Rangachari- Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi 1987 vol-2 pg.no.383

The Irula community is derived into following sub group

- ❖ Melandu irula
- ❖ Kasaba irula
- ❖ Urali
- ❖ Villians
- ❖ Vettaikkaran.<sup>4</sup>

These groups are endogamous in nature. They are further divided into several clans which are tottering in nature. The clans locally termed as Jathi. None from the community will be doing any harm to the clan object, trees or animals. The old people have enough knowledge about the community norms and traditions, but the new generation is gradually getting away and adopting the new way of life being in contact with the other communities of the area and the people.

### **Objective**

- i. To identify the Irula tribe in Kanchipuram district
- ii. To analyze the tradition and lifestyle of plain area Irula at Kanchipuram district Tamilnadu.
- iii. To study the social status of the Irula tribe
- iv. To know the cultural dimension of the Irula tribe

### **Methodology**

The present study is based on primary data, by interview scheduled to the selected respondents to collect information required. Therefore investigation and data collection for the study were carried out during the period yearly once February and March. Data collection was analyzed for the purpose of giving precise and concise information. The total sample comprised 100 respondents were selected by adopting purposive random sampling technique.

### **Study Area**

The purpose of the present study, the Irula tribes inhabited district in Kanchipuram of Tamilnadu. Inhabited by the Irula tribes have been considered. As this district have been considered as represent as almost all due Irula of Kanchipuram live in this district. The country was recommended to be called as Thondaimandalam (the land of saives) but the king preferred to be called as Thondaimandalam. The king gave away the conquered land to his son Adondai who was accordingly crowned in Kanchi. The Pallavas of Kanchi rose to prominence in the 4th century AD and dominated the south for another 400 years. In the sixth century the over ran the Chola dominions and carried their arms to extreme south.

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4. <https://www.semanticscholar.org>

## Population

Irula are dispersed in 11 districts of the state but mainly concentrated in one district of Kanchipuram, as per 2011 census the total population of Irula in these was 29,706 district 1% in Kanchipuram. They are listed under various panchayat such as. Out of total population of Tamilnadu Irula are 29,706 of which 14,824 male and 14,882 female. The detail of the population in district in given below.<sup>5</sup>

S.No	Panchayat	Male	Female	Total
1	Kanchi	1315	1327	2642
2	Walajabad	766	771	1537
3	Uthiramerur	1404	1414	2818
4	Sri Perubuthur	636	559	1195
5	Kunnathur	1124	1134	2258
6	Thiruporur	1439	1419	2858
7	Kattangulathur	2196	2226	4422
8	Thirukazhukundram	1528	1558	3086
9	St.Thommas Mount	966	973	1939
10	Achrapakkam	1285	1309	2594
11	Maduranthagam	1148	1161	2309
12	Lathur	463	462	925
13	Chithamur	554	569	1123
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>14,824</b>	<b>14,882</b>	<b>29,706</b>

Census of India 2011 - Kanchipuram District

## Derivation of the word Irular

The Irula is the scheduled tribe in Tamilnadu and they are mostly found in the accessible forest of Nilgiri district. The word 'Irul means Darkness and the name of the Irula has been given to these people due to their black complexion. They are generally forest dwellers and collect jungle products which they sell and consume for subsistence. They are derived in two groups viz.,

- Kadu Irula,
- Vangu Irula

## Kadu Irula

The Kadar lives in the forests and do not practice agriculture, building shelters thatched with leaves and shifting location as their employment requires.

## Vangu Irula

Who are settled in the village, Vangu Irula have taken up agriculture some are working as agricultural laborers and factory's works also,<sup>6</sup>

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5. Census of India 2011 - Kanchipuram District- Directorate of Census Operations Tamilnadu

6. S.H. Ahamad& J. Sreenath – All India Anthropologic Survey South Zone- pg 58

## **Language**

The main language of the people is Tamil. The habit of the Irula is at the junction of various districts linguistic areas represented by Tamilnadu. On the west and south side Tamil speaking and Thiruvallur, on side Telugu speaking they speak a language of their own and it consists of both Tamil and Telugu words.

## **Food**

The Irular are non-vegetarians and eat the flesh of rat, chicken, sheep, goad, rabbit, pig, porcupine, mongooses, monitor lizard and turtles and trap rats and birds in the shrub jungles of their habitation. They collect termites during rainy season and store for lean season. Some of them are adept in fishing in the ponds and tanks. They collect wild fruits, medicinal herbs, honey and bees wax for consumption as well as for trade. They eat twice a day and usually cook in the evening after returning from work. Rice, ragi, and jower are the staple food along with a variety of pulses and locally available vegetables. They consume leafy vegetables like drumstick leaves, wild grass. Milk consumption is rare among the Irula. Cow and goat milk is fed to children in rural areas.<sup>8</sup>

## **Religion**

Mostly the gods and goddess of the wider hindu pantheon order are worshipped by the Irulas. Gods such as amman, Vishnu (Ezhumalaiyan), Shiva and goddess like Kanniyamman (Sabdhakannigal) are worshiped. They all so have faith and belief in jungle dwelling spirits. Each settlement has a temple, put up little away from the main huts. The temple is a small structure with a thatched roof and the walls of it are constructed by using coconut strip. This structure is erected two feet above the ground level on four wooden pales. Inside this temple, 7 bricks stones are 7 stones (statues) are kept in row and in front of this conches, trisul and a worshipping plate are kept,<sup>9</sup> Their annual festivity of Masimagam Tamil month of Masi. All the irula people who can live in different districts will be visiting the mahabalipuram beach from the first day of the month of masi on the full moonday. Those who come will stay in a small cloth tent for the night some shows (dance, drama) will be held to keep them awake at night. They are enjoying it. The next day from 4am their deity worship, wedding, earing ceremony, god conversion, lead worship something will take place better of all is executed of there is there is any debt fulfillment of request.<sup>10</sup>

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7. P. Devegi- Thamizhar Panpattil Irular Kulamarapugal. Pg no 100

8. B. Anadbabu- Tribal Development- pg 437

9. Filed work (Irula Women Dhanalakshmi) 2020 March 8

10. V. Ramamoorthy – Dinamani News Pepar 6 March 202

## **Marriage**

Monogamous marriage is the rule, but a few polygamous marriages occur. Polyandry is extremely rare. Sororate and levirate remarriages are not the norm. By choice and consent, however, Irula men many occasionally marry sisters of their discussed wives. The old traditional marriage started by parents negotiating and the young man then going to the young woman village with a load of fire wood to live with her on tribal basis for a few days, has almost disappeared. Now a day's the young man's parents go to the prospective bride's house, after they are certain that she is in a marriageable clan. The bride- price, now usually the standards amount of Rs 101.50 paisa. For marital proposes they recognize tribal sub-division is a very vague way. Marriage is not a very impressive ceremonial. The bridegroom has to present new cloths to the bride and his ather and mother in law.

The clothing given to the last named is called the Palkuli (Milk Mony) for having nursed the bride marriage is ceremony on any day except Saturday. A very modest banquet in proportion to their slender means is held and toddy provided if the state of the finances will run to it. Towards evening the bride and bridegroom stand in frond the house and the latter ties the Tali which consist of a bead necklace with a round brass disc. In the case of a marriage which took place during my visit the bride had been wearing her new bridal cloth for month before the event. <sup>11</sup>

## **Health, Medicine**

The Irular resending in exposed villages wash their body habitually. The Irular living in isolated villages though wash their cloths and clean their teeth, soup and paste rarely used. They also use ash, Charcoal, and Neem, Pongamia twigs for cleaning their teeth. All time they consult their traditional medicine men for all kinds of diseases, body ailments and curing the complaints that have occurred due do the influence of sorcery, etc. the Irular are well known for their expertise in 'Black magic' and in the treatment of snake bite for seeking native medicine for treatment of snake bite and for remedies to over- come from black magic.

The Irular proficient in magic- religious cures for many common ailments; they have their own way of diagnosis of different diseases and modes of treatments.<sup>12</sup> they are adept at catching snake and rats. Today they catch snakes to extra venom, for which they have license from the wildlife warden. Hunting is special talent for Irula which gives them food. They were leading an active and adventurous life often in hostile environments. Irulas, especially women are specialists in traditional herb medicine, have a good knowledge on various herbal medicinal plants and its uses. They practice more than 500 traditional healing systems.

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11. <http://www.everyculture.in>

12. B. Anadbabu- Tribal Development- pg 435, 438

The Irula Tribal Women's Welfare Society (ITWWS) is revitalizing this traditional herbal medicinal knowledge and over 120 traditional healing systems are documented by the ITWWS. Irula are in demand for treating snake-bite cases and for skin care treatments in villages. Names of some herbal plants in Irula to cure snake bites are: 'periyangai' herbal plant used as an anti-dote for snakebite.<sup>13</sup>

### **Music and Dance**

Irula are good musicians, displaying skills both in vocal and instrumental music. Instrumental music is one of their chief hobbies and is indispensable at wedding, funeral rites and social festivals. The Irula make their own 'Dolu' and wind instruments their musical enjoyment. This dolu is the main instrument played on the occasions of marriage burial and festivals. The dolu is made with animal skin; one drum covered one side with animal skin all these musical instruments are made of indigenous. Irulas perform group dancing on festival days and as a part of the marriage funeral, and puberty rites. They do not usually sing while dancing, but do the dance to the tune played on Dolu.<sup>14</sup>

### **Ornaments**

The common and usual ornaments of women are a pair of ear studs called Kammals, Bangle- either gold, glass, plastic or plates – worn on the wrist, ear and neck. Married Irula women wear Tali, in modern days Tali, the married Irula women wear traditionally they were "Block Pearls" as their Tali. Wearing gold chain around the neck by a few is not uncommon.

### **Dress**

The people are simple in their dress habits. Villagers prefer to use cotton dhotis and shirts but the shirts martial today are polyester cloth, which, though up among the loins. Generally women's wear dress consists of a saree.<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Irular, one of the six primitive tribes in Tamilnadu, rely on superstitions and natural elements. The Irula are the aboriginal inhabitants of the plains and shrub jungles in northern districts most of them still subsist largely on hunting and collection of minor forest produce. Their expertise in hunting deadly snakes bites .the tribes also the citizens of India and hence the problem the promotion of there is of equal importance. The tribe like to strengthen themselves from contaminating influence of modern civilization and like to protect themselves not only economically, but culturally, from outside exploration. The second is protecting the tribal economic rights.

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13. V. Gnanasundharam- Changing cultural landscapes and diminishing cultural/ linguistic heritage

14 .Filed work (16/9/ 2020)

15. Filed work (27/09/ 2020)

## End Notes

1. Policy Book 2013-2014- Adi Dravidar And Tribal Welfare Department- Government Of Tamilnadu
2. R.Venkadaraman- Two south Indian Tribes-Servant of Indian Society pg no 13
3. Edugar Thurston, K. Rangachari- Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi 1987 vol-2 pg.no.383
4. <https://www.semanticscholar.org>
5. Census of India 2011 - Kanchipuram District- Directorate of Census Operations Tamilnad
6. S.H. Ahamad& J. Sreenath – All India Anthropologic Survey South Zone- pg 58
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