

## Customs and Culture of Irulas

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### Abstract

**Irular tribes are one of the second largest groups of Tamil Nadu after the Badgas. They are situated at the base of the western ghat. In the family of the tribes in this region, male members exercise dominant authority over the family members while women occupy a subordinate position. Wedding ceremonies vary from one tribe to the other. By and large all these tribes permit the wedding at an early age for the principal reason that the source of happiness consists of the solace of a domestic life. But many of the rites and formalities are similar among the tribes. The life of these tribes revolves around the pastoral and agrarian economy. No fundamental innovations were introduced in the agricultural work by them inspite of advancement in science and technology of the present day. Blind faith, absence of education and lack of contact with the rest of the society seem to be the reasons for the unchanging belief and practices. Irulas culture is one of the different ways. They are considered marriage function is not an important ritual in the community. But death ceremonies are considered is an important ritual in this community. This paper focuses on customs and culture of the Irula tribes of Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu.**

**Keywords:** *Domestic, marriage, wedding, early age*

### Introduction

The biggest inborn populace is found in India and they comprise almost 8% of the Indian all out populace. Perhaps the biggest clan in Tamil Nadu is Irulas and it has been confronting a few psycho-social-financial issues during most recent two decades. Prior they were customarily snake trappers, with the prohibition on exchanging snake and its skins with no option rehabilitative estimates their living states of their life has been influenced. It is right now, scientist made an endeavor to consider the living states of the Irular inborn Community. Discoveries uncovered that 66% ignorance, negative mentality towards instruction and young lady youngsters training, (84%)inadequate lodging conditions, dominant part were engaged with cultivating, have work instability, low salary, obligation, 81% live under beneath destitution line, none of them were having banking offices, latrine office at home, a large portion of them don't have a network endorsement to benefit govt welfare measures, liquor reliance is seen among men people, low quality of life, unforeseen weakness care office and in general poor living condition.

## Area Profile

The study was undertaken in Coimbatore district. Coimbatore District is situated in the East of Tamil Nadu. It is one of the small districts of Tamil Nadu. The district has an area of 4723 sq.kms of the state's geographical area, with a scheduled tribe population of 28342 as per the 2011 census. The tribal people constitute 8 percent of the total population of India. The term "tribe" means, a group of people who live at a particular place from time immemorial. Anthropologically the tribe is a system of social organization which includes several local groups- villages, districts on lineage and normally includes a common territory, a common language and a common culture, a common name, political system, simple economy, religion and belief, primitive law and own education system (India tribal belt, en.Wikipedia.org).

## History

The Irula inhabit the northern districts of Tamil Nadu, a state in north eastern India. Located not far from the city of Madras, they live in a tropical area subject to monsoon rains. Their language, Irula, is related to Tamil and Kannada, which are southern Dravidian languages. In the Tamil language, the name Irula means "people of darkness." This could refer to their dark-colored skin or to the fact that all important events traditionally took place in the darkness of night. When a girl attains puberty, she is confined to a seclusion hut for seven days, where she is assisted by a few girls of her settlement who have not yet attained puberty. Every day, the girl is given bath after applying turmeric paste and coconut oil on the body. After the seventh day, the girl is taken to the river, accompanied only by women. Once at the river, her bloody clothes will be burned, and the girl will be bathed. Then, if the girl's family has enough money, a function will be held. In this function, the girl will be ritually bathed again. The the girls mothers sisters daughter will drip oil from her left hand onto the back of the girls hand. Then the mother's sister's daughter with very large rings on her finger will tell the girl to bring her hand up and put the oil on top of her own head. When the girl tries to lift her hand, her mother's sister's daughter with the large rings on her right hand will slap the girls hand down. Then she will tell the girl to do it again, and again she will slap the girls hand down. This happens several times. All the members of the settlement assemble and give presents of money to her.

## Marriage Ceremonies

Marriage is considered as a sacred and an important event in the life of any individual. Among the irula tribes, men or women were allowed to marry according to their wish and marrying more than one man or woman was not considered as a crime. The marriage is fixed for girls within age limit of

12-18 whereas boy's age is from 14-24. People from the same clan within the irula tribe do not intermarry.

Marriages are fixed within family by the parents. Dowry system (money given to the bride groom during the time of marriage by the bride's parents) was common among the irular tribes from the ancient times. Prize has to be bride's house in the form of cash (Rs.1000 – 2000) or cattle. Marriage ceremony takes place in the front of the home or in village temple. The conformation of the marriage is called the groom tie the yellow rope of thali (marital necklace) along with two black beads as the bride. The married women were not allowed to participate in any of their community function if they were not wearing mangal sutras and along with the family members these women will be thrown out of their community and village. The customs and habits of the irulas are very crude. Irulas are accepted child marriage. Divorces are not permitted for irular tribes.

### **Delivery Pattern**

Normally, delivery is considered to be the second birth for any woman. But as far as irular tribes were considered, deliveries were conducted at home with the help of a local old lady who had attended the delivery. After the birth, the child is bathed in warm water. The mother confines herself to the seclusion hut for 10 days during which she takes hot water bath after applying a turmeric paste and coconut oil on the body. On the 10th day, she is removed to another seclusion hut, where she remains for 80 days during which she is prohibited from doing any manual work even in the kitchen. The Irular thus observes 91 days birth pollution. The naming ceremony is performed on that day. On the other hand, if the labor pain develops she would pour little amount of castor oil in her left palm and touch it with the right hand fingers, at the same time uttering some words of prayers. The old lady delivery attendant would drop the castor oil and they have a superstitious belief that if the oil drops continuously, the delivery would be very easy for the expectant mother. On the other side, if the oil drops down in separate drops, the delivery would be very difficult.

### **Death Ceremony**

One's death will be proclaimed to everyone. These communities followed the death ceremonies are the body will be kept in a typical tent on a bamboo platform in a posture where both the legs had to be drawn backwards and tied. The closest relatives bring water from the tap. Water is drawn after uttering the name of the dead person three times without looking left or right. Ground saffron or turmeric liquid mixture is sprinkled over the body. Visitors spread white dhoti (cloth) over the body if the death is male and colour cloth in case of female. If the dead is a married man, seven persons from

seven clan remove the thali (marital necklace) from his wife. If the husband dead, his wife is called widow. The women should not attend any functions and should not remarry.

### Objectives

- To Analyze the socio- cultural life of Irulas
- To find out the change due to the Assimilation of innovations cultural traits.

### Research –Methodology

The present study was conducted purposely in Nilgris district of Tamilnadu as the district has need for the study because as till now not much study has been conducted there. Irulas are one of the six primitive ethnic group inhabiting the area of the Nilgiris mountains, in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, India. A scheduled tribe, their population in this region is estimated at 25,000 people. This is one the fast depopulating community in India. Their language is called Irulas, which belongs to the Dravidian family. In the Tamil language, the name Irulas means "people of darkness." This could refer to their dark-coloured skin or to the fact that all important events traditionally took place in the darkness of night. In comparison with other tribal population, Irulas are still backward in Education & Employment. A total size of sample that constituted was 100 of respondents. Interview schedule was prepared to examine the socio life of the Irulas

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Changes in the economic system of Irulas

S.No	Economic System	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Traditional Economic System		
a)	Hunting and gathering	-	-
2.	Changed economic system		
a)	Hunting gathering with Agriculture labour	15	15
b)	Owner cultivator	30	30
c)	Daily wages labourer	50	50
d)	other	05	05
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows that the economic organization among Irula community categorized in to two categories i.e. Traditional economic system and changed economic system . But now a days no respondent use traditional hunting and gathering economic system in fact the economic of 100 percent respondents have changed, in which the economy of 15 percent respondent is hunting gathering with

Agriculture labour, 30 percent respondent are owner cultivator and 50 percent respondent are daily wages labourers while 5 percent involve in other work such as self employed, private or government job.

#### Changes in the Dress pattern of Irulas

S.No	Traditional dress	Frequency	Percentage	Modern dress	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Dhoti, Ganji, Kurta, Gamcha	20	20	Pants, Shirt, T-Shirt, Jean	70	70
2.	Saree, Saaya, Blouse Salwar kameez	10	10		-	-
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>		<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>

Study reveals that modernization has put a huge impact on the dressing pattern of irula tribe as the time changes they start wearing more western clothes in comparison to traditional clothes more often and these changes can be seen in young generation lying between 15 to 40 years of age, from above table it can be seen that only 30 per cent of the respondents wear traditional clothes while 70 per cent of the respondents wear western clothes. The above finding is in conformity with study of Khoper and Talikar (1999)

#### Changes in the house of pattern of Irulas

S.No.	Economic system	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Traditional house pattern		
a)	House under the tree		
	Grass roof house(hut)	-	-
b)	Changed Houses		
2		-	-
a)	Mudwall with grass roof house	65	65
b)	Semi cemented	30	30
c)	Cemented house	05	05
	<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

The above table, based upon observation shows that house pattern among Irulas i.e. traditional and changed house pattern. Now a days no respondents are living in traditional grass root house (hut) while 65 percent respondents live in kuccha house with grass roof, 5 percent respondents live in cemented house with tiled roof and 30 percent respondent live in cemented house that is of changed house pattern.

### Cultural changes in the ornament of Irulas

S.No	Traditional	Frequency	Percentage	Adopted ornaments	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Silver jewelry	20	20	Artificial ornaments	70	70
2.	String of red and White beads	7	7	Other ornaments	3	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>27</b>		<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>

The above table shows that 20 percent respondents wear silver jewellerys and 7 percent respondents wear string of red and white beads that is traditional while in changed ornaments 70 percent respondents wear artificial metal ornament and 3 percent respondent wear other ornaments. Changes in the ornament and pattern of ornament are due to changes in the economy and their purchasing power.

### Changes in the Entertainment media due to developmental programme

S.No.	Traditional Entertainment	Frequency	Percentage	Media Entertainment	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Folk Songs	10	10	Radio/stereo	4	4
2.	Folk Dance	10	10	Television	2	2
3.	Folk tale	2	2	Mobile	72	72
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>78</b>

In the above table shows that the entertainment media used by Irulas is divided in to two category i.e. traditional entertainment media and changed entertainment media, but now a days 10 percent respondents entertained by Folk song and 10 percent respondents by Folk dance and only 1 percent by Folk tale while 4 percent respondents listen Radio, Stereo, 2 percent respondents see television and 72 percent respondents use mobile phone in changed entertainment media. In every village most of people use mobile as their entertainment medium and skipping the traditional entertainment.

### Change pattern of economic transaction within community and influence of developmental rogramme.

S.No	Transaction material	Traditional way of transaction with	percent	Changed way of transaction with	Percent	Total
1.	Edible things	Edible things	0	Money	100	100

2.	Other things e.g Mat, Broom, Basket etc	Edible things(rice)	5	Money	95	100
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The above table shows transaction within community in which only no respondent transact edible things with edible things and 100 percent with money and 5 percent respondents transact their artifacts with edible things, while 95 percent with money. Transaction within community with edible things is traditional while with money is changed why of transaction developmental programme, training has changed attitude of Irulas community where the mode of transaction how been changed instead edible things environment of money is slightly increasing.

#### Changing pattern of economic transaction within community and influence of developmental programmes.

S.No	Transaction material	Traditional way of transaction with		Total	Frequency of respondent do not transact	Total
		Ins	Money			
1.	Hunted Material	2	15	17	83	100
2.	Gathered Material	3	14	17	83	100
3.	Mats	0	17	17	83	100
4.	Brooms	0	17	17	83	100

The above table shows that only 2 percent respondents transact hunted material with grains and 15 percent transact with money and 83 percent respondents do not transact, 3 percent respondents transact gathered material with grains and 314 percent with money while rest respondents do not transact. No respondents transacts mat with grains and 17 percent respondents with money while resting respondent do not transact No respondent transact brooms with grains and 17 percent respondents transact with money while resting respondents do not transact,

#### Change in types of utensils used by respondents

Sr.no.	Traditional Utensils	Frequency	Percentage	Modern Utensils	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Earthen Pots	3	3.0	Steel utensils	30	30
2.	-	-	-	Aluminum utensils	67	67

	<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>97</b>	<b>97</b>
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As per the study reveals that earthen pots are difficult to maintain and are not long lasting and in case of aluminum and steel utensils they are long lasting and easy to maintain they can be use on stove, gas and on earthen chulha as well while earthen pot can only be use on earthen chulha, the above table shows that 67 per cent of the respondents use aluminum utensils 30 percent use steel utensils while only 3 per cent of the respondents still use earthen pots.

#### Assimilation of Arts and Rituals

S.No	Types of Arts	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Basketry	10	10.00
2.	Tattoo	15	15.00
3.	Wall art	75	75.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Artifacts is the one of the most important and integral part of tribal life. It gives them a different identity and it is also one of their work for survival, with changing time this tradition of making of artifacts had slightly decreased but still can be seen among them. Wall art is the most Above table shows that 75 percent of the respondents involve in wall art will 10 percent and 15 percent are respectively involve in basketry and tattoo

#### Changes in the daily life materials due to the modernization

S.No	Traditional Item	Frequency	Percentage	Change and adopted item	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Stone Grinder or Wooden Grinder	100	100	Electronic grinder	-	-
2.	Agriculture Wooden implement	90	90	Modified plough	10	10
3.	Hunting Gathering Stone and wood tools	95	95	Modified Hunting and gathering tools	5	5
4.	Mat	85	85	Chair,cot,stool	15	15
5.	Oil lamp	55	55	Electric bulb and torch	45	45

6.	Cotton rope	22	22	Plastic rope	78	78
7.	Pitcher	5	5	Plastic and metal buckets	95	95
8.	Earthen pots for storing grains	95	95	Aluminium,plastic or steel containers for storing grains	5	5
9.	Wooden comb	2	2	Plastic comb	98	98

In the above table it is shown that some changed material cultures are slowly-slowly introduced as technology developed but presently in traditional items 100 percent respondents used stone grinder and wooden masala grinder, 90 percent Agricultural wooden implements,95 percent hunting gathering stone and wood tools, 85 percent mat, 55 percent oil lamp, 22 percent cotton rope, 5 percent pitcher, 95 percent Earthen pots for storing grains, 2 percent wooden comb while no respondents used electronic grinder and Mixi, 10 percent modified plough, 95 percent modified hunting gathering tools,15 percent respondents used chair, cot, 45 percent electric bulb and torch, 78 percent plastic rope, 95 percent plastic bucket,5 percent Aluminium or steel or plastic containers for storing grains, 95 percent respondents use plastic comb due to modernization and demonstration of innovated things they take benefit from these things. Due to culture diffusion Irula community is adopting innovated material cultures instead of their traditional one.

### Conclusion

In the family of the tribes in this region, male members exercise dominant authority over the family members while women occupy a subordinate position. Wedding ceremonies vary from one tribe to the other. By and large all these tribes permit the wedding at an early age for the principal reason that the source of happiness consists of the solace of a domestic life. But many of the rites and formalities are similar among the tribes. The life of these tribes revolves around the pastoral and agrarian economy. No fundamental innovations were introduced in the agricultural work by them inspite of advancement in science and technology of the present day. Blind faith, absence of education and lack of contact with the rest of the society seem to be the reasons for the unchanging belief and practices. The tribes are also the citizens of India and hence the promotion of their welfare is of equal importance. Both the governments, individuals and service organizations must jointly formulate certain plans and programmes to improve the economic conditions of the tribes and bring them to a state of secured living. To realize this, the housing, educational, medical, and agricultural, trade, communication and banking facilities can be provided by the said agencies generously. The tribes

want improvement without being disturbed. Their age old customs should be respected and their local rights should be protected. The government should consider their basic requirements and demands. The tasks that can be imposed on our government and non-government organizations are as follows: The first is to preserve, strengthen and develop all that is best in the tribal society, culture, art and language. The tribes like to strengthen themselves from the contaminating influences of modern civilization and like to protect themselves not only economically, but culturally, from outside exploitation. The second is to protect the tribal economic rights.

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