

https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8443/jspui/bitstream/10603/98333/7/07_chapter3.pdf

in: P. Suresh (2014) Lexical structure of Irula language [PhD thesis]
Coimbatore, Bharathiar University

Chapter - III

Socio-Cultural Perspective on Irula Tribes

CHAPTER – III

SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON IRULA TRIBES

3.1. Introduction

Irula is a small tribal community, whose language spoken in south-eastern India, belongs to the Dravidian family. They belong to the Negrito (or negroid) race which is one of the six main ethnic groups that constitute the racial mosaic of India. The origin of the word '*Irular*' is not clear. Some surmise that the word '*Irula*' is derived from the Tamil word '*Irul*' implying the dark complexion of the *Irular*, often being spotted by villagers as distinct silhouettes in the forests. Supporting their local name, the forest people themselves claim to have originated from darkness. While others are of the opinion that the word '*Irular*' is a derivative of the archaic word '*erular*' which means 'one who digs tubers', as the indigenous people of that time engaged in the aforesaid activity. One should also note that, over the course of time, the /e/ phonologically graded into /i/ as result of mutation. The present study throws light on the cultural aspects of the Irulas, namely on their social divisions, sub-divisions and the rites and rituals associated with their marriage, funeral and other social ceremonies. It also attempts to give a brief description of their economic system and other artistic endeavors.

3.2. Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu: An Overview

The total population of Tamil Nadu as per the 2001 Census was 624.06 lakhs, of which 6.51 lakhs (1.04%) belong to the 36 Scheduled Tribes(STs) **Adhiyan**,

Aranadan, Bravallan, Irular, Kadar, Kammara, Kanikaran or Kanikkar, Kaniyan or Kanyan, Kattunayakkan, Kochu Velan, Konda Kapus, Kondareddis, Koraga, Kota, Kudiya, Melakudi, Kurichchan, Kurumbas, Kurumans, Maha Malasar, Malai Arayan, Malai Pandaram, Malai Vedan, Malakkuravan, Malasar, Malayali, Malayekandi, Mannan, Madugar or Muduvan, Muthuvan, Palleyan, Palliyan, Palliyar, Paniyan, Shologa, Toda and Uraly who reside in 3,834 tribal habitations. Six tribal communities have been identified as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) and they are Toda, Koda, Kurumba, Irular, Paniyan and Kattunayakkan.

Of the STs, Malayali, Irular, Kattunayakkan, Kurumans and Kondareddis together constitute 85.3 per cent of the ST population of the State. Malayali are the largest ST with a population of 310,042, constituting 47.6 per cent of the State ST population. They are followed by Irular, numbering 1,55,606 (23.9%), Kattunayakkan 45,227 (6.9%), Kurumans 24,963 (3.8%) and Kondareddis 19,653 (3%). Fourteen STs have a population below one thousand.

The growth rate of ST population in the decade 1991-2001 was 13.4 per cent which is higher than the overall growth rate of 11.7 per cent of the State. As per the 2001 Census, among the numerically large STs, Kurumans have reported the highest growth rate of 43 per cent, followed by Malayali (24.2 per cent), Irular (12.1 per cent) and Kattunayakkan (5.8 per cent).

Tiruchirappali, Villuppuram, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Dharmapuri and Salem districts have a tribal population of 2.10 lakhs. A majority of the tribal population in Tamil Nadu live in hilly ranges viz., the Eastern Ghats, the Western Ghats and the hilly tracts that adjoin the plains. These tribals live in forests. Irular in Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur districts form an exception to this general trend and are found to live in the plains.

Of the STs, six have been notified with area restriction. These are Malayali, Kurumban, Kanikaran, Kammara, Kota and Toda. Malayali have been notified in Dharmapuri, Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, Pudukkottai, Salem, Namakkal, Villuppuram, Cuddalore, Tiruchirappalli, Karur and Perambalur districts, Kurumbans in Nilgiris district, Kanikaran in Kanniyakumari district and Shencottah taluk of Tirunelveli district. Kammara, Kota and Toda have been notified throughout the State except Kanniyakumari district and Shencottah taluk of Tirunelveli district.

The Irulas are spread over the three Southern States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. In Kerala, Irulas are one of the primitive tribal groups and a major scheduled tribe. In Karnataka they are referred as Irular or Irulan, but in Tamil Nadu they are referred as Irular and notified in the list of approved Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) of Tamil Nadu by the Government of India. The same community is referred with different spellings. In Tamil Nadu, in the districts of Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Villuppuram and Vellore they prefer to call themselves as Irular but in Nilgiris, they prefer to call themselves as Irulas.

In Tamil Nadu, the Irula are distributed in eleven districts, namely Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Chennai, Thiruvannamalai, Vellore, Villupuram, Salem, Namakkal, Thiruchirapalli, Coimbatore and Nilgiris. Anthropometric and anthropological features reveal that the Irular of Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur districts are different from Irulas of the Nilgiris and the Coimbatore districts in Tamil Nadu.

3.3. Irulas in Coimbatore District: An Overview

3.3.1. Geographical Location

Coimbatore District lies between $10^{\circ} 10'$ and $11^{\circ} 30'$ of the North latitude and $76^{\circ} 40'$ and $77^{\circ} 30'$ of the East longitude. When the Irula tribes of Coimbatore settled in Kongunadu during the early times, the place was ruled by the Cholas. There were other kings of various dynasties who ruled this part and finally the British Empire ruled this place and named it Coimbatore.

Coimbatore district lies in the western part of Tamil Nadu, and forms part of the Kongunadu region. The district borders with Palakkad district of Kerala in the West, Nilgiris district in the North, Erode district in the North East and East, Idukki district of Kerala in the South and Dindugul district in the South East. The district has an area of 7,649 square kilometres. The South Western and Northern parts are hilly, part of the Western Ghats, and enjoys pleasant climate all throughout the year with heavy rainfall. To the West is the Palghat Gap, the only major pass in the long stretch of the Ghats adjoining Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The Palghat Gap, connecting Coimbatore city and Palakkad city, serves as an important transit link for both the states. The rest of the district lies in the rain shadow region of the Western Ghats and experiences healthy climate most parts of the year. The mean maximum and minimum temperatures for Coimbatore city during summer and winter vary between 35°C to 18°C and the average annual rainfall in the plains is around 700 mm with the North East and the South West monsoons contributing to 47% and 28% respectively to the total rainfall.

The major rivers flowing through the district are Bhavani, Noyyal, Amaravathi, Siruvani and Aliyar. The Siruvani river is the main source of drinking water for Coimbatore city and is known for its tasty water. Amaravathi Dam, which created Amaravathi Reservoir, is located at Amaravathinagar. The total population of Coimbatore district is 34,72,578 with 17,35,362 males and 17,37,216 females. In total ST population is 28,797 in particularly Irula tribe 7000 approximately (Coimbatore District Profile-2011).

The Irulas of Coimbatore district opine that they along with Irulas of Anamalai Hills and Attapady Valley of Kerala State form one group and are referred to as the “*veTTaka:da*” Irulas. Irula are divided into various exogamous patrilineal units. They are *devanane*, *koduve*, *veLLe*, *paratara*, *karaTiga*, *arumo:pu*, *kuppe*, *kuppiLi*, *uppiLi*, *kurunage*, *cambe* and *punge*. These units in general relate to “*gotras*” in Sanskrit and “*kulams*” in Tamil.

3.3.2. Living Places of Tribes in Coimbatore*

In Coimbatore district, Schedule tribes live in six panchayat unions namely, Periyanyakkanpalayam Panchayat Union, Karamadai Panchayat Union, Thondamuthoor Panchayat Union, Madukkarai Panchayat Union, Somayampalayam Panchayat Union and Valparai Panchayat Union.

3.3.2.1. Periyanyakkanpalayam Panchayat Union

Periyanyakkanpalayam Panchayat Union has thirty tribal settlements. They are Jambugundu, Alamarathumedu, Vadakkanur, Anaikatti, Thoonanoor, Sambukkarai, Kondanoor, Kondanoorpudur, Kottupulikadu, Ganndivazhi, Panapalli, Mankarai, Aaranatkadu, Marudunkarai Keelpathi, Marudunkarai Melpathi, Kulpadu, Thirumalur, Maruthamalai, Manguli, Pasumani, Kunjurpathi, Perumpathi, Royaroothupathi, Perumpathi, Pasumanipudur, Bilichi, Chinnathadagam, Naickenpalayam, Nanjundapuram and No.4 Veerapandi.

3.3.2.2. Karamadai Panchayat Union

Karamadai Panchayat Union has sixty nine tribal settlements. They are Melpaviputhur, Metiyur, Nelampathi, Okaiyanur, Okaipathi, Kuliur, Seenkuli, Senkulikalai, Gopanari, Alankanti, Alanthiyur, Patticala, Cenkuttai, Pulapathi, Pothanpatukai, Cenkattivelamani, Karivelamandi, Ansur, Arakathavu, Eluthakaliyur, Kaliyur, Kuravankandi, Eluthukalputhur, Karamadai, Parayankompal, Kundur,

* refer to Appendix I – Coimbatore Panchayat Union Map

Kattupathi, Kotukkanancur, Kandiyur, Irularpathi, Kodiyur, Nellimarathur, Puccimarathur, Kothekadu, Cirukinaru, Thondai, Cethukadu, M.G.R. Irular Colony, Pallapatti Irular Colony, Ketthanadu, Mathar, Korapathi, Verakal, Cithukonai, Vizamaruthur, Kadampan Kombi, Puthyapallam, Neradi, Paralikadu, Kallar Irular Colony, Uliyur, Kanthavayal, Cikthakasampalayam, Irumparai, Iluppanatham, Iyam Palayam (Bagavathi Amman Kovil Colony), Sethumadai, Maruthur, Mututhurai, Nalimurai, Vepamarathur, Odanthurai, Tekkampatti, Thozampalayam, Vellian Kadu, Kotai Pathi, Cuntakkarai Puthur and Kodipathi.

3.3.2.3. Thondamuthoor Panchayat Union

Thondamuthoor Panchayat Union has sixteen tribal settlements. They are Vellapathi, Cadivayal, Attukal, Nallurpathi, Cenkupathu, Pottapathi, Thanikandi, Thevaraya Puram, Mathvaraya Puram, Naraci Puram, Sarakarporathi, Titipalayam, Siruvani, Karunya Nagar, Pattiar Kovil and Pattiyar Kovil.

3.3.2.4. Madukkarai Panchayat Union

Madukkarai Panchayat Union has only five tribal settlements. They are Muruganpathi, Cinnampathi, Mavuthmpayhi, Maileripalayam and Pitchanur.

3.3.2.5. Somayampalayam Panchayat Union

Somayampalayam Panchayat Union has ten tribal settlements. They are Palamalai, Perumpathi, Kunjurpathi, Perukkapathi, Mankuli, Pasumaniputhur, Pasumani, Ranganathapuram, Rayaruthupathi and Thirumalur.

3.3.2.6. Valparai Panchayat Union

Valparai Panchayat Union has sixteen tribal settlements. They are Kadamparai, Poonachi, Kavarkal, Vellimudi, Eathakuli, Nedunkundru, Sakarankudi, Plalkinar, Udumanparai, Kallar, Mokeyfalls, Karumutty, Lower Poonachi, Mavadappu, Kaliuargudi and Paramankadavu.

3.4. The Irula Language

The status of the Irula language as a separate language from Tamil or as a divergent form of Tamil has been debated by scholars. Irula language belongs to the Dravidian family. Diffloth (1968) had concluded that Irula is closely related to Tamil. Louis had suggested that Irula is a dialect of Tamil with more Kannada language words. But Kamil Zevelibil (1973) had treated the Irula as a separate language. S. V. Shanmugam (1942) also defined Irula as a separate language in South Dravidian family. R. Periyalwar (1976) who did his doctorate in the Irula language had noted some unique features in the phonological and grammatical structure of the language and had concluded that Irula must stand as a separate language. Irulas are bilinguals as they speak Tamil. Generally, they do not speak Irula in the presence of non-Irulas. Due to their social insecurity and inferiority complex they think that their speech is not considered as a prestigious language.

3.5. Types of Irulas

According to Zvelebil Kamil (1979), *Irulas* can be divided into five sub-groups based on their socio-cultural and dialectical variations; they are *me:lenu:du Irulas*, *kasaba Irula*, *veTTaka:du Irulas*, *ura:Li Irulas*, and *ka:du puja:ri Irulas*.

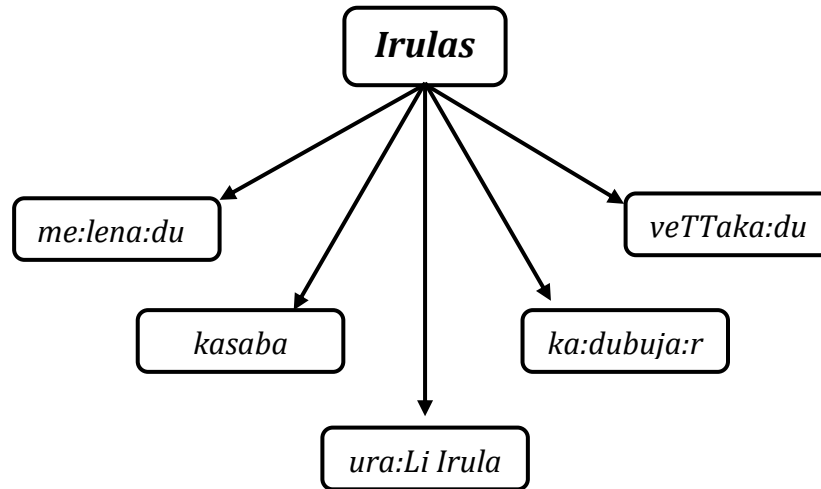


Figure 1 - Types of Irulas

As far as Irulas are concerned, their classification is based on language influence. The Irula language or speakers whose language is influenced by Tamil are known as *veTTaka:kadu* and *me:lenu:du Irulas*. Similarly, Malayalam influences Irula speech to form *ura:Li Irula* and Kannada, *kasaba Irula*.

Irulas of Coimbatore district say that the *Irulas* of Anamalai hills and Attapady valley of Kerala state belong to one group. All of them are referred by a common term *veTTaka:du Irulas*. R. Periyalwar (2012) has included *Irulas* of Coonoor taluk (Nilgiri district) in *veTTaka:du Irulas* category. The *Irulas* of Coimbatore district can be grouped into two types, those living in the reserved forest areas, and those living in the plains.

3.6. Clan Divisions of the Irula

There are twelve clans or *kulam* in Irula: *devanane*, *koduve*, *veLLe*, *paratara*, *karaTiga*, *arumo:pu*, *kuppe*, *kuppiLi*, *uppiLi*, *kurunage*, *cambe* and

punge. Clans are a form of social stratification. *Irula* tribe is an endogamous group. This decides the individual's status in the social stratification. Each clan has their own specific role to play in every birth or marriage ceremony, and this duty, which is also considered a right, is specifically assigned to that particular clan.

Each hamlet has a chieftain or *O:rumu:ppan* who determines cultural, social and religious matters with final authority. Out of all the clans, the '*kurunage*' *kula* is considered for this position as they are traditionally treated as the highest in the hierarchy. The '*veLLe*' *kula* is hereditarily attributed the position '*vanda:ri*' who acts as an informer and also as an investigator of any issue that may arise in the hamlet.

The '*kurunage*' *kula* is responsible for control and supervision of a particular social or cultural activity. Regarding a ceremony of general interest it is the '*cambe*' *kula* that is responsible. The '*maNNuka:ru*' handles all land-related affairs. The '*karaTiga*' *kula* is responsible for the rituals connected with cultivation. The '*koduve*' *kula* acts as a subordinate to '*kurunage*' *kula* by dealing with small issues. The '*devanane*' *kula* over the course of time has become shepherds. The '*devanane*' has the responsibility of managing funerals. Among the three types of *Irula me:lana:du Irulas* has 8 clans, *veTTaka:du Irulas* has 12 clans and *ura:Li Irulas* 8 clans. They are shown in table 2.

S.No	<i>me:lena:du Irulas</i>	<i>veTTaka:du</i>	<i>ura:li Irulas</i>
1.	<i>kuppe</i>	<i>kuppe</i>	-
2.	<i>cambe</i>	<i>cambe</i>	<i>cambe</i>
3.	<i>devanane</i>	<i>tevanane</i>	-
4.	<i>kalkaTTi</i>	<i>karaTiga</i>	<i>kalkaTTi</i>
5.	<i>koduve</i>	<i>koduve</i>	<i>koduve</i>
6.	<i>punge</i>	<i>punge</i>	<i>punge</i>
7.	<i>kurunage</i>	<i>kurunage</i>	-
8.	<i>peratara</i>	<i>peratara</i>	<i>peratara</i>
9.	-	<i>kuppiLi</i>	-
10.	-	<i>uppiLi</i>	<i>uppiLi</i>
11.		<i>veLLe</i>	<i>veLLe</i>
12.	-	<i>a:rumo:pu</i>	<i>a:rumo:pu</i>

Table 2 - Clan Divisions of the Irula

3.7. Irula Clans Deity

It is said that there are two divisions in *Irula*; they are Iswaran group and Dharmaraja group. But these groups are not considered as social divisions. They are divided into twelve clans/sets as follows:

S.No.	Clan	Deity
1.	<i>kuppe</i>	<i>nallamman</i>
2.	<i>cambe</i>	<i>maniarasu amman</i>
3.	<i>tevanane</i>	<i>malleswararsami</i>
4.	<i>karaTTiga</i>	<i>vetakaran</i>
5.	<i>koTuve</i>	<i>veraka:l amman</i>
6.	<i>punge</i>	<i>bagavati amman</i>

7.	<i>kuRunage</i>	<i>verapathran</i>
8.	<i>pe:ra:tara</i>	<i>vetakaran</i>
9.	<i>kuppiLi</i>	<i>verapathran</i>
10.	<i>uppiLi</i>	<i>ravaleswaran</i>
11.	<i>veLLe</i>	<i>verapathran</i>
12.	<i>a:Rumo:ppu</i>	<i>vetaikaran</i>

Table 3 - Irula Clans Deity

People of the tribal community admit that now-a-days, they never follow clan system for arranging marriages except when considering the brother group and the brother-in-law group. Thus, their social divisions have become obscure. A few of the Irula have recently developed some sort of differentiation among themselves on the basis of economic, educational and government houses pattern of living.

In the early Irula community there were twelve clans out of which seven were considered to be important. In the Irulas community a function or any ceremony is conducted only if all of the seven clans are present during the occasion. In this way, the ‘*cambe*’ clan are considered to be very important. They called themselves as *vanda:ri*, *kurunage*, *maNNukaru* and *koduve* and assemble to collect home taxes, donations and panchayat penalty which are then calculated by the *kurunage* in the presence of the *O:rumo:ppan*. By using this money, they conduct the festivals. In seasons, festivals are conducted in a religious and traditional way. They offer statues to deities. Considering their family god, they

themselves act as priests. During the village deity festivals the statues are poured with turmeric, neem water by the *O:rumo:ppan* and then they are offered to the deities by the maternal uncle.

3.8. Ethnographic Description of the Irula

3.8.1. Musical Instruments

Irulas are good musicians, displaying skills both in vocal and instrumental music. Instrumental music is one of their chief hobbies and is indispensable at weddings, funeral rites and social festivals. The Irula make their own drums and wind instruments for their musical enjoyment. The musical instruments are of six types: *kokalu*, *na:gacura*, *pore*, *tavilu*, *tambaTTe* and *jalra:*. The *kokalu* is a kind of flute (a kind of clarinet) made either of bamboo or bamboo with wood and metal. This flute is the main instrument played on the occasions of marriage, burial and festivals. The *na:gacura* resembles the snake charmer's wind pipe. The *pore* is made up of clay pot with animal skin in centre clay pot and both side tied tightly with rough animal skin it is like spherical shape. The *tavilu* is made up of drums with animal skin, one drum covered with both side with animal skin. The *tambaTTe* is also made up with animal hide it is in circular shape, and the *ja:lra:* is two metals jointed with a string, it is side instrument. All these musical instruments are made of indigenous materials.



Figure 2 – pore



Figure 3 - tavilu



Figure 4 – kokalu



Figure 5 – ja:lra:

Irula Musical Instruments

3.8.2. Folk Dances

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 drums and pipes. Men, women and children stand in separate concentric circles around those who play the instruments. Men raise their hands and wave them before their faces in a cross-wise manner. This is followed by straight vigorous and repeated movements. The women do their part by raising their hands to shoulder level with open palms, moving them from side to side

rhythmically and rotating the wrists. The children follow the movements of the women. While making these gestures they move about in circles adjusting their steps to the rhythm of the drum-beat. The pipers play different tunes to suit the occasion. Funeral dances which are performed at night are especially thrilling to a newcomer. A popular type of Irula dance is called *arakkole a:tta*.



Figure 6 – Old Men Dancing



Figure 7 – Everyone in the Hamlet Dancing



Figure 8 – Young Men Dancing

3.8.3. Other Instruments

Irulas weapons used for their work is on small scale production. They have to use them for agriculture, hunting and other occupations. They use many instruments like small stick, hook, bamboo box, knife, axe, sledge hammer, dipping hammers and spade. Then there are the house cleaning sticks and broom sticks which are made up of bamboos and coconut tree leaves.



Figure 9 - Occupational Instruments

3.8.4. *katari* ‘triangle shape made with three bamboo sticks’

katari is the instrument that shows the lifestyle and knowledge of Irulas. It is also a modern instrument. The instrument is in triangle shape made up of three bamboo sticks. It is a long stick having a triangle shape made up of small sticks. Both the sticks are tied with thread and look like a bow. Depending upon size they called as small and big *katari*. The thread is tightened by using the small stick and bent like a bow and keep food for that hunting animal or pray. When the animal is eating the grains, if they press the thread hard the bow makes that small stick to hit on the neck of the animal. The instrument was mainly used for hunting rabbit or hare. It is made up of bamboos and thread is extracted from coconut.



Figure 10 – Irula Instrument - *katari*

3.8.5. *cakke* ‘rectangular shape, tied with fibres’

This instrument called *cakke* is in rectangular shape. It is tied with string of and made to shrink on the centre. By using this they can hunt small animals. So

they use 4 to 5 *cakke*. It is mainly used for hunting squirrels, birds, hares and rabbits. The animals cannot escape from this instrument.



Figure 11 - Irula Instrument - *cakke*

3.8.6. *da:gukokki* ‘green clip’

da:gukokki is made up of long stick. This instrument is used for agricultural purposes. Front of this stick small curve like a clip. This *da:gukokki* is used to pick a creeper which is on the top of tree. This instrument is mainly used by Irula women.



Figure 12 - Irula Instrument - *da:gukokki*

3.8.7. *da:llu* ‘made up of two tree trunks tied with fibres’

da:llu is used in the place where the wild animals live especially wart-hog, fox, and cheetah. Their instrument is made up of the trunk of two trees and the centre part is made to shrink and at that centre they place the cholesterol of goat: the prey for that animal. The animal was tempted by the smell of cholesterol of goat. When they start to swallow the shrink thread too, the trunk will fall on that animal and it is separated into two parts. In this way it is very powerful instrument used by Irulas for hunting wild animals.

3.9. Administration Process

The Irula community practise both endogamy and exogamy. Endogamy means a rule requiring marriage within a specified social or kinship group. Exogamy means a rule requiring marriage outside of one’s own social/kinship

group. Suppose Irula community people are put practice in exogamy simply related person are kept away from Irulas community. Even though their parents permit marriage, it would not take into the account of the Irula community. Inter-caste marriages are less commonly prevalent in large extent. If Irula's community marriage with other caste people, they do not permit to participate any kind of rituals and other functions. There are five village administrative body namely *O:rumu:ppan* (Chief of the community), *vanda:ri* (messenger), *kurutala* (responsible to carry out all kind of festival arrangements) *maNNukka:ru* (land related process of agricultural activities) *koduve* (authority and Supreme power in his *kula*).

3.9.1. *O:rumu:ppan* 'chief of the community'

In every village *O:rumu:ppan* occupies topmost post of chief of the village. He has some extra exclusive power rather than others i.e. *vanda:ri*, *kurunage*, *maNNuka:ran* and *koduve*. He belongs to *kurunage* clan. His position is hereditary through his clan. All kind of rules and regulations of his hamlet (village) have to come under his knowledge. He is the final authority of all issues and related activities.

Any kind of announcement and declaration of village first it has to be informed to *O:rumu:ppan* after the message has to be revealed to other subordinates like *vandari*, *kurunage*, *maNNuka:ran* and *koduve*. Without *mu:ppan*'s knowledge, any kind of message has been not disclosed to other i.e. village people by subordinates. Especially in marriage day, firstly *mu:ppan* has to

bless the wedding badge (or) holy rope *ta:li*, after that it would get recognized by Irula community people in whole-hearted.

On the basis of mutual concern, *mu:ppan* is the power of divorcing authority to divorce married couples. If the dead body has to be buried in a burial ground (graveyard) first relation of dead body has to seek permission to *O:rumu:ppan* through *maNNuka:ru*. Suppose *O:rumu:ppan* has refuse to accept the opinion of the *maNNuka:ru*, based on particular issues, his decision is final one and no other option is there.

Moreover, Irula community participates only that person is recognized by twelve clan people's acceptance (wedding badge blessed by them). By contrast if the woman is wearing yellow wedding badge, she and her family is not permitted and has no right to participate in common village ceremonies. Hence, *O:rumu:ppan* would not intervene in their family affairs. Thus role of *O:rumu:ppan* takes place in special role especially in his restricted boundaries of hamlet.

In each *O:ru* 'village' has a chief of the village known as *O:rumu:ppan*, the position is mostly based on hereditary. He has all rights to finalise social, cultural and religious matters of the hamlet. The *mu:ppan* in each *O:ru* 'village' functions as a mediator, an articulator and a judge with power to impose proper punishments for the miscreants. He is the connecting link both his tribal folk and government officials.

3.9.2. *vanda:ri* ‘messenger’

vandari ‘messenger’ is in position of next to *O:rumu:ppan*. He belongs to white clan in Irular community. He passes all messages to the village (hamlet). He is the best informant and he is having stick (like cudgel) with his hand. This special indication refers that he is a informant. The news of a death in the Irula community, first it has to be informed *O:rumu:ppan*, than it has to be informed to *vanda:ri*. Whenever *vanda:ri* gets death news immediately, he spreads this news to another village with stick (like cudgel). From there first he informs message to *O:rumu:ppan* and then that village *vanda:ri* will receive this news. When his work completes in that village, on the final day he will get food grains and money from that village people. After that he will get back his stick (like cudgel) from them. It is a notable feature that in this system is purely based on ancient kings rules and hereditary regime. *vanda:ri* role is very significant and too appreciable one. It is very risky and adventurous job rather than other postings.

3.9.3. *kurunage* ‘responsible for festival arrangements’

During the festival day *kurunage* is responsible to carry out all kind of festival arrangements like Radio, Garland, Cooking and so on. He has to bring following necessary items like rice, maize, oil, coconut vegetables and fruits. At the time of death in any hamlet, *kurunage* plays very crucial role. He prepares food (in separate place) for their relatives of death family. This post is really equal to minister (present day position). On the end of the day, *kurunage* get coconut

and fruits from the deceased family. Nowadays they are to give him money (rupees) instead of things like coconuts, vegetables and fruits with respect.

3.9.4. *maNNuka:ru* ‘land related process of agricultural activities’

Responsibility of *maNNuka:ru* is very fruitful and viable in the land related process of agricultural activities and graveyard. Most of *maNNuka:ru* belong to *karaTiga* clan. He has occupied top priority in land related activity. If any Irula wants to do any activity in their land, they are required to inform and get permission from *maNNuka:ru*, because, it is believed that *maNNuka:ru* knows the times of cultivation and harvest. He would fast for a day and sleep on the field.

He sows seeds in corners of the field. After completion of his activities or formalities people start their usual agricultural activities in the field. On the day of harvest, people have to provide sufficient grains to *maNNuka:ru*. If any women have not worn black wedding badge, *maNNuka:ru* has to power to refuse to bury the dead body in graveyard. The more peculiar thing in Irula community is that they should get reorganization from twelve clans for wearing the black wedding badge. On the other side, *maNNuka:ru* has a power and authority (sanctioning power) to bury a dead body in a graveyard. *maNNuka:ru* is a watchdog of all land related activities.

3.9.5. *koduve* ‘authority and supreme power in his kula’

Every Irular community has a clan called *koduve*. He is the sole authority in his Kula. He is the ultimate and most powerful person in his clan. He has to fulfill

all the needs of the people. It is his duty to solve certain disputes, feuds, quarrels and tussles among the tribes, through *O:ru panchayat* as *O:rumu:ppan* conducts. During the time of festivals or religious ceremonies, he has to give counselling to people of the hamlet about the ritual related works. *koduve* has a right to participate in kula all functions and functionaries. Moreover, *koduve* would not solve a particular problem related any issue, immediately he has to bring the issue to *O:rumu:ppan*. He has a power to finalise and decide determinations or resolution in any kind problem attached to the issue.

3.10. Cultural Forms of the Irula People

The life cycle rituals of the Irulas are markedly different from that of the other Hindu or Christian communities. They perform the life cycle ceremonies with the help of their women by well-established cultural patterns and do not depend on outside intervention to keep itself going. They celebrate child birth, naming ceremony, ear boring ceremony, age attainment or puberty, marriage and death ceremonies. Except for marriage ceremony, for other ceremonies they spend very less amount and the participation of the women is a must one in all life cycle ceremonies.

3.10.1. Pregnancy

In Irula community after marriage the pregnancy of women and birth of child is considered to be a ceremony. 7th 8th and 9th month of pregnancy they conduct traditional formalities for that women. They give their favourite food to the women. They did not send the conceived women to house of their parents.

They are protected from spirits by hanging medicinal leaves in front of the houses. In the age of 3rd or 4th month of children, parents name them with their family deities. Honey is given to the child by his maternal uncle. After the birth of the child rather they apply turmeric and neem powder and cover with white cloth around the child (waist) hip. This will protect from mosquitoes, flies etc. After some days the maternal uncle will cut the outgrowth. Cutting outgrowth is a grand ceremony in Irula community. Maternal uncle will gift the child with new dress and jewels. They provide food with deer meat to the people for attending the function. Nowadays, they arrange mutton and chicken for the same.

3.10.2. Birth

During the age of 5th month of the child, birth hair removing ceremony is conducted. In early days, parents go to temple, place the child in the lap of maternal uncle and tonsure the head. But in present days they appoint somebody for doing these formalities. If the maternal uncle is not well off to gift the child with jewels, the parents make the child to wear jewels. They kill three goats and serve the people for attending the function.

3.10.3. Puberty

The important event of female children is puberty (or) age attainment. The parents inform the maternal uncle. He weaves a hut for the girls using *vialri*, *a:varam* and *darani* plant leaves. The girl should not see any male before the completion of puberty ceremony. On the day of puberty ceremony they pour

turmeric and other medicinal leaves water on her. Men and women celebrate the ceremony with their traditional dance and songs.

The maternal uncle brings coconut, fruits, paddy, candies, incense and camphor. They make the girl to sit before these things and do some traditional activities with singing songs. They serve vegetarian food for the people attending the ceremony. At time of the ceremony, the girl is served food, but her maternal uncle and other girls play with her by not allowing her to taste the food.

This is a peculiar formality followed by these tribes, because the girl is not allowed to take food and the food of the girl is thrown on the roof. It is believed that the food should be offered to crows. After that, the girl has to go to temple with her maternal uncle to offer coconut to her family deity. After completing these formalities the hut of the girl is burnt in the entrance of the hamlet. Nowadays they conduct this ceremony for 7 days. At present, they have started using coconut leaves for making hut for age attainment girls. The parents give clothes to the girls who stay with the age attended girl. During period days the girls are made to stay separately in a small hut and given separate vessels.

3.10.4. Marriage

In Irula caste they accept love marriages. Marriage is conducted in the temple of the bride's hamlet. In this marriage *vandari*, *mu:ppan*, *kurunage* likewise 12 clan people have to touch the holy badge and this makes the couples live happily and proudly as they believe. Once upon a time the holy badge is tied

by the father-in-law to the hand of the bride. In this holy badge they keep 1.25 rupees with yellow cloth.

Early days they tie three traditional holy badges but nowadays it is limited to one. They have two types of *ta:li* (holy badge) the first one is black and the other is yellow holy badge. They add a coin which has been engraved with the appearance of lord Muruga and his wife goddess Valli. After marriage they pray to Sun god. The formality of taking *a:rti* is done when the newly married couple visit the house of the bride. Remarriage is acceptable in their society. As the result of difficulty in organising 12 clans people, the parents of the couple visit temples and arrange marriages. This has been increased nowadays due to the practical difficulties.

When a child is born, his/her marriage is decided on order to maintain healthy relationship between the families. For deciding and fixing marriages, Sunday and Monday are thought as auspicious days. They do not rely on bride's home and bride groom's home where there is comfortable place they conduct the marriage over there. To make their children to get first the parents should wear a traditional black *ta:li* or else if they wear only *maÑjata:li*, then a day before to marriage they have to wear black *ta:li* or *karunta:li*. It is said that the *kurunage*, *peratara* and *cambe* are brothers according to their clans, so that it is restricted to get married among these clans.

S.No	Clan	Marriage Relationship with Other Clans
1.	<i>kuppe</i>	<i>devanane, cambe, arumo:pu, veLLe, kurunage, karaTiga</i>
2.	<i>cambe</i>	<i>devanane, kuppe, veLLe, kurunage, karaTiga</i>
3.	<i>tevanane</i>	<i>kuppe, cambe, arumo:ppu, veLLe, kurunage, karaTTiga</i>
4.	<i>karaTiga</i>	<i>kuppe, cambe, arumo:ppu, veLLe, kurunage, kuppiLi, peratarara, koduve, punge</i>
5.	<i>koduve</i>	<i>karaTiga, arumo:ppu</i>
6.	<i>punge</i>	<i>veLLe, peratarara, karaTiga, arumo:pu</i>
7.	<i>kurunage</i>	<i>tevanane, cambe, arumo:pu, veLLe, karaTiga, kuppiLi, kuppe</i>
8.	<i>peratarara</i>	<i>karaTiga, punge, uppiLi, arumo:pu</i>
9.	<i>kuppiLi</i>	<i>kurunage, karaTiga, arumo:pu, veLLe</i>
10.	<i>uppiLi</i>	<i>peratarara, arumo:pu</i>
11.	<i>veLLe</i>	<i>tevanane, cambe, arumo:ppu, kuRunage, karaTTiga, punge, kuppiLi</i>
12.	<i>arumo:ppu</i>	<i>devanane, cambe, koTuve, peratarara, kurunage, karaTiga, punge, kuppiLi, uppiLi</i>

Table 4 - Marriage Relationship with Other Clans in Irula

3.10.5. Death

Normally, Irulas bury their deceased. If a person dies in another hamlet which is different from where he/she belongs to, he/she is brought to his/her home town/hamlet for the death ceremony. At first the news is informed to the *kurunage* and *vanda:ri*, they pass the information by holding traditional stick. After arrival of

all the relatives, they clean the dead body with water in a sitting position in a wooden chair. This traditional activity is called *da:TTipoduke*. Maternal aunt of the dead person tosses a one rupee coin. If the tossed coin goes till the end, they think that the dead one has no unfulfilled desires. They believe they will rest in heaven.

The wealth of the hamlet and money collected from the people utilised to handle the death ceremony and for the other formalities related to that. The dead body is laid on a bamboo cot. The legs are tied with a holy badge. Then they tie the body with yellow water poured white cloth. The graveyard of Irular is a walkable one in distance from their living place. They do many traditional activities in graveyard like removing *ta:li* from wife of a dead person.

Mostly Irulars in Maruthamalai, Sarakarporathi and Attukal bury the body in their native place during that time they throw three stones in three directions. *maNNuka:ru*, *kurunage* and *vanda:ri* will dip the burring land three times. Then *mo:ppan* will put sand on the dead body, then all the 12 clans people put sand on the dead body and return without turning back to the graveyard. They pour milk over the buried place in 3rd or 7th day of death. Then they grow a plant to conduct *karuma:ti* a traditional activity after a year. The family of dead one should not be allowed to attend functions and they should not eat idly or dosa in their home. Nowadays it has been changed to one month. They have to go to temple first then they can live their normal life.



Figure 13 – Music Played Where the Deceased is Kept



Figure 14 – The Journey to the Graveyard



Figure 15 – Burial

3.11. Beliefs

Although the Irula are 95% Hindu, elements of their traditional ethnic religion are still part of their lives. Many of them have retained their own tribal beliefs that revolve around the spirit world. "House deities" are very important. They are the inherited clan-gods that are passed down through the male descendants. *puca:ri*, 'priest', used to contact the supernatural world of deities and spirits. Yearly once they used to pilgrim to the top of the forest, called Perumalmudi.



Figure 16- Village Priest



Figure 17 – Oracle

3.12. Kinship in Irula

The Irula form an endogamous caste with twelve exogamous patricians (in Sanskrit *gotras*, in Tamil *kulams*) clans in Irula: *devanane*, *koduve*, *veLLe*, *parathara*, *karaTiga*, *arumo:pu*, *kuppe*, *kuppiLi*, *uppiLi*, *kurunage*, *cambe* and *punge* and a clan represented by the *thudai meram* 'ilex denticulata tree'. Nevertheless, because members of a patrician cannot marry members in one or more "brother" patricians, there are exogamous patrician units among the Irula.

The overall size of these units varies from one area to another. Thus, the Irula kinship system is similar to the one that dominates in southern India. In addition, the Irula community has a system whereby each patrician is affiliated with a friendship patrician whose members help when an event, typically a rite of passage, requires cooperative effort. The ideal marriage among the Irula is of a female with her father's sister's son (i.e., a male with the mother's brother's daughter). Also in conformity with the acceptable Dravidian norm, an Irula male should not marry the mother's sister's daughter. An Irula male may also marry his elder or younger sister's daughter, but this practice exhibits a departure from the Dravidian system, in which a male cannot marry his younger sister's daughter (the Irula do not differentiate between the two sisters). Their kinship terms given below:

3.12.1. Kinship Terms in Irula

Relation through father

<i>pu:TTe</i>	father of grandfather
<i>puTTi</i>	father of grandmother
<i>acce</i>	grandfather
<i>acci</i>	grandmother
<i>appe/amme</i>	father
<i>agge/avve</i>	mother
<i>cittappe</i>	uncle
<i>periyappe</i>	father's elder brother
<i>cinnappe</i>	father's younger brother
<i>beleatte</i>	father's elder sister
<i>cinnatte</i>	father's younger sister
<i>beleagge</i>	father's elder brother's wife
<i>cinnaage</i>	father's younger brother's wife
<i>anne</i>	elder brother/father's elder or younger brother's son (if he is younger than the ego can refer or address by his name)

<i>akke</i>	elder sister / father's elder or younger brother's daughter (if she is younger than the ego can refer or address by his name)
<i>macce/maitune</i>	father's elder or younger sister's son / elder or younger sister's husband
<i>anni</i>	father's elder or younger sister's daughter
<i>tampi</i>	younger brother
<i>tanke</i>	younger sister
<i>ammi</i>	younger sister
<i>attige</i>	elder brother's wife
<i>konti</i>	younger brother's wife

Relation through mother

<i>pu:TTe</i>	mother of grand father
<i>pu:TTi</i>	mother of grand mother
<i>pa:TTe</i>	mother's father
<i>pa:TTi</i>	mother's mother
<i>ma:me</i>	mother's elder or younger brother

<i>ma:mi</i>	mother's elder or younger brother's wife
<i>beleavve</i>	mother's elder sister
<i>cinnavve</i>	mother's younger sister
<i>akke</i>	mother's elder or younger sister's daughter (if she is younger than the ego can refer or address by her name)
<i>macce / maitunne</i>	mother's elder or younger brother's son (if he is younger than the ego can refer or address by his name)
<i>anni</i>	mother's elder or younger brother's daughter (if she is younger than the ego can refer or address by her name)

Relation through wife

<i>penTu</i>	wife (she can be refer or address by her name)
<i>maame</i>	wife's father
<i>maami</i>	wife's mother
<i>koginti/konti</i>	wife's elder or younger sister (if she is younger than the ego can refer or address by her name)
<i>koginta/konta</i>	wife's elder or younger brother (if he is younger than the ego can refer or address by her name)
<i>akke</i>	wife's elder or younger brother's wife
<i>ayya</i>	wife's elder or younger sister's husband

Relation through husband

<i>aale</i>	husband
<i>ma:me</i>	husband's father
<i>ma:mi</i>	husband's mother
<i>koginti/konti</i>	husband's elder or younger sister
<i>koginta/konta</i>	husband's elder or younger brother
<i>ayya</i>	husband's elder or younger sister's husband
<i>tanka</i>	husband's younger brother's wife
<i>akke</i>	husband's elder brother's wife

Descendants

<i>mage</i>	elder or younger brother's son, son, husband's younger or elder brother's son
<i>maga</i>	elder or younger brother's daughter, daughter, husband's younger or elder brother's daughter
<i>marumage</i>	younger or elder sister's son /husband's elder or younger sister's son / wife's younger or elder brother's son/daughter's husband

<i>marumaga</i>	younger or elder sister's daughter /husband's elder or younger sister's daughter / husband's younger or elder brother's daughter/son's husband
<i>pe:re</i>	son, son/daughter's son
<i>pe:ra</i>	son's daughter/daughter's daughter

3.13. House

The ancient Irulas lived in the tree holes and caves. During the course of time, their population increased. So that they needed to find new forms of places for living. They constructed huts with bamboo sticks and teak wood. This type of house are made up with four teak timbers and surrounded by bamboo sticks. It has been covered with bamboo, *nocci*, neem leaf and teak wood. This type of bamboo stem are fully embellish by sand which is created like thread shape. So that they are simply escaped from small insects and fire. The middle of their houses there has been one strong 'y' shaped beam stem (made up with teak timber) to support their centre place of house. In front of their hut, there is a window which is made up with teak stem. Their huts seem to be like triangular shape. Inside their room there is a small size (hip height) wall. At present, there is another one small hut which is maintained for special purposes. This hut is used to rear goat and cow (cattle). Hence, during the mensus period of women, the women supposed to stay in the small room for three days. Around the hut, there is a strong bamboo stick in a standing position. Most of the huts have no sitting place in front of their hut.



Figure 18 – House Made of Mud & Tiles



Figure 19 – Hut Made of Coconut Palm Leaves



Figure 20 – House Built Using Bricks & Tiles

Irulas live in foothills and their agricultural field is located as a proximate one to their native place. They build huts by using sand and tree leaves, later the government also build houses for them. So they have started to live in different environment. In the east of each house, they build separate small hut for cattles. During period days the women also stay in the hut built for cattles. They use the water from the mountain only. In front of house they build a long hall to cook food. They use coconut tree leaves and trunk of trees to build their hut. Walls are built using sand and bamboo sticks. The bamboo walls are covered by sand.

3.14. Occupation

The main occupation of Irula is hunting wild animals to fulfill their necessity of food. Some of them involve in agriculture also, because of the government order, they left hunting, came down from the hills and got settled in foothills. Moreover, they are automatically forced to involve in cultivation, but

they have an ordeal with wild animals like wart hog, peacock & elephant which often spoil their agricultural fields. So they started demanding forest authorities to provide them electric fence. Because of these crises, the Irular get field from *kurumbagoundas* for lease and share the yield with them.

Most of Irulas are going for construction works. Men are doing the job of collecting and selling honey, ginger, onion, pepper, masanic potato, pardayil potato and some medicinal leaves. Women rear goats and cows. Nowadays government has started using these Irulas for collecting medicinal plants. These are all the sources of income of Irulas.



Figure 21- Grass for Making Broom



Figure 22 – Old Lady Taking Goats to Graze



Figure 23 – Goats Grazing

3.15. Discussion

In the light of the above discussion, Irula tribe has their own culture, rituals, attire, beliefs, lifestyle and most important thing is their clan system. During the course of time they have started losing their identity in terms of language, fables, traditional songs and the vocabulary of the possessions in their practices and premises. Especially, rituals have been affected and influenced by the plain people with whom the Irula people have radial and star connectivity. It is found that the identity of the Irula is being maintained by the people whose age is above fifty. The study has revealed that the social, cultural and linguistic aspects have been affected by the effects of the practices of the plain people.

3.16. Sum-up

This chapter entitled socio-cultural perspective on Irula tribes gives the introduction about Irula tribes and their origin. This is followed by an overview of scheduled tribes in Tamilnadu. Next it describes about Irulas in Coimbatore district which include geographical location and living places of Irula tribes in Coimbatore. This is followed by the types of Irulas and their clan division. Next is the kula-variation and their kinship relation. This is followed by ethnographic description of Irula. Finally explanation about cultural forms of the Irula people is discussed. The crux of this chapter is to introduce about Irula people and their socio cultural perspective.