

to the cause of Indian archaeology he was bestowed numerous prizes, fellowships, and public honours, including the title of *Padma Bhushan* by the Government of India. The Robert Bruce Foote Plaque which he received in 1974 was one award he particularly cherished, because it was presented by the Department of Anthropology of Calcutta University which at one time had considered Deccan College as its rival in prehistoric studies.

He published his autobiography entitled "Born for Archaeology" in 1978 and is survived by his wife, Sarladevi.

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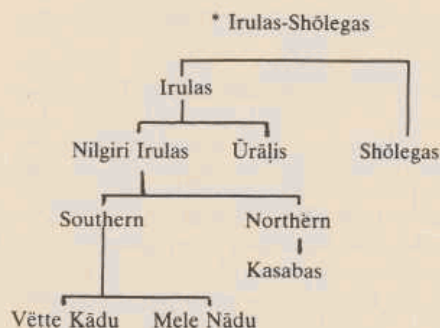
### The Cat in Irula Culture

#### An Irula Creation Myth

Kamil V. Zvelebil

#### 1.

The Irulas (*ēṛḷaru*) are a tribal complex of four communities inhabiting lower slopes of the northern, eastern, and southern segments of the Nilgiri Hills (South India). They speak a non-literary language of their own – the *ēṛḷa na:ya* – in four mutually intelligible dialects; historically it belongs to the Tamil-Malayalam subgroup of South Dravidian. Two of the tribes intermarry, so that the Irula complex forms a tribal group of three endogamous units, with another tribe, the Shōlegas, closely related:



This (simplified) stemma is based on linguistic considerations as well as on the analysis of mythologies and reflections of the pertinent social organization. Hence it should not be regarded as a simple copy of the Neogrammarian "Stammbaum" symbol.

The creativity of Irula-speaking communities finds expression mostly in music, songs, dance, and, above all, verbal art. They have a wealth of oral traditions characteristic of most pre-literate cultures. Story-telling, oral rendering of myths, legends, genealogies, riddles, proverbs, and sayings are still very much alive in all Irula communities.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.

In the myths and stories various animals play often important roles. Among the animals one encounters most frequently jackals and foxes, tigers, elephants, buffaloes, crocodiles, and snakes. One of the most important animal occurring in Irula lore is the cat.

Two kinds of cats appear as actants in Irula narrative art, the domestic cat and the wild cat. Of the two the domestic cat, presented as a shrewd beast, occurs in short narratives and anecdotes, whereas the almost mysterious wild cat has a most important function and plays a most important role in Irula mythology.

### 2.1

Domestic cat (*Felis catus*), Irula *pū:ne* (DEDR 4355), is considered clever and clean. The following story in my corpus explains why cats bury their excreta: The tiger had no steady hygienic practice and did not, like the cat, hide its excrements. Even otherwise the cat was much more accomplished.

1 For the Irulas and their language in general, cf. Zvelebil 1981; 1973; 1979; 1982; Burrow and Emeneau 1984 [DEDR].

The tiger came to the cat to learn, and the cat, considered the tiger's elder brother (*aṇṇa*), taught the tiger how to crawl, to catch a prey, to climb a tree. While the cat was teaching the tiger how to climb a tree it did not show him, however, how to climb down. The tiger, sitting up in the tree and unable to get down, warned the cat that he would take his revenge: he would watch it carefully and trace it with the help of its excreta (*pi:*), get somehow down, and ultimately eat it (*tindiruge*). Therefore the cat covers its excrements with earth. The tiger in the story fell down from the tree and broke its neck.<sup>2</sup>

In agreement with the other Irula stories the tiger is presented here as a stupid and uncivilized animal. In other Dravidian folk-tales this is also usually the case. M. B. Emeneau's data show the tiger in Kota, Toda, and Coorg stories to be a stupid creature. My Indian assistant, well-versed in Nilgiri folklore, J. D. Rajiah, told me that the story of the tiger and the cat was current among the Kuṛumbas, too.

### 2.2

Wild cat is probably the most important animal in traditional Irula sacred lore since, according to a well-known Mele Nāḍu Irula creation-cum-ancestor myth, the first pair of Irulas were created from wild cats by gods Ra:mā and Si:de (Rāma and Sītā).

This lovely beast, usually designated as jungle cat (*Felis chaus* Guldenstaedt; cf. Prater 1971: 75 f.), whose colour ranges from grizzled fawn to rich darkish brown with black stripes on the legs and near the tail, likes lower marshy ground with plenty of cover; hence it is also called swamp cat. Its ears have short black tufts somewhat like those of the lynx or caracal. It is of relatively large proportions.<sup>3</sup> Jungle cat is called *bo:kka*, *bo:kka*, *bo:kke* in Irula.<sup>4</sup> My Ūrāḷi Irula informants main-

2 Told by Rāyappan, Ūrāḷi Irula, Gundri, on 1. 3. 1978.

3 I caught a glimpse of the Nilgiri wild cat on a memorable day (February 15, 1978) prawling in grassy, swampy land at the foot of the Rangaswamy Peak. I was surprised by its relatively large size and lovely colour.

4 Alternative forms *bo:ka*, *po:ka*, *po:ke*, cf. Ālu Kuṛumba *bo:ka*, Pālu Kuṛumba *pōkkānu*, which is to be connected with DEDR 4106 Tamil *pākkāṇ*, Malayalam *pōkkān*, Pengo *boyka* "wild cat." When I asked repeatedly my Irula informants for a gloss on this word, they inevitably came up with *co:le pū:ne*, lit. "jungle cat." This may be compared with the Ālu Kuṛumba *có:le-kōtti* "Wildkatze, Dschungelkatze" (Kapp) and Badagu *ka:ḍu kōtti* (see Hockings 1988: 685).

tained that the name derived from the sound that the jungle cat makes, and imitated it with obvious gusto – something like *bə! bə! bə!*, ending in a pronounced glottal catch.

## 2.3

The Mele Nāḍu Irula creation myth involving the jungle cat<sup>5</sup> was told under difficult and complex circumstances in 1976, 1978, and 1981. I consider it necessary to reveal the circumstances here, even at the danger of being accused of introducing too much of a personal note. The main informant was Ra:mā of Kūñjapeṇe, aged 45–50. In 1976 the story was told and tape-recorded for me by Dr. D. B. Kapp (Heidelberg University) and his assistant J. D. Rajiah, and later retaped by me. Since I wished to clear some doubts concerning a few minor details, a slightly different version was again recorded by J. D. Rajiah. Subsequently, Ra:mā fell from a tree and suffered head-injuries. In 1978 I returned to the Nilgiris. Ra:mā denied any knowledge of the myth and even the fact that he had ever told it. Other informants told me that, between 1976 and 1978, Ra:mā got possessed by a deity (*toga*), and since his injury and the possession incident behaved oddly. Fortunately, other Irula informants confirmed the authenticity of the story, while Ra:mā adamantly refused to speak about it. Finally, in 1981, I checked its authenticity with my most reliable Irula informant, P. Siva Raj, also of Kūñjapeṇe. Ra:mā died in November 1979.

The creation myth runs as follows: In antiquity (*pa:yṅga:la*) when there was no one else, gods Ra:mā and Si:de (Rāma and Sītā) took two wild cats, one male and one female, into their laps as if they were their children, but saw that the beasts crawled on all four and did not speak (*na:ya maṅikkadu, na:ya maṅikka:le*). They searched for

a goose-berry tree (*nelli mara*),<sup>6</sup> and a monkey called Ra:manti<sup>7</sup> showed them the tree, whereupon they gave its fruits to the cats to eat, and the cats began to speak. Subsequently, the jungle cats began to change into a man and a woman, and that is how the first Irula pair came into being.

They were of course naked. Ra:mā gave them tender leaves to put on, and showed them what they should eat: two kinds of tubers (*kaṅgu*) called *nu:re* and *riē*,<sup>8</sup> five sorts of plants,<sup>9</sup> and honey (*te:nu*). They also ate the fruit of two trees,<sup>10</sup> and one kind of grain,<sup>11</sup> one single grain of which was enough for a day.<sup>12</sup>

Ra:mā and Si:de then created the first two Shōlegas (*co:legaru*) who lived in wet and rainy regions. They were so ugly that the Irulas wished to live as far away from them as possible.

Then Ra:mā appeared to the first cat-like Irula pair in a dream and told them how to have sexual intercourse. But he first advised them how to obtain proper human shapes since they were still like jungle cats, with long claws and fur, crawling on all four, climbing trees and rocks. The man first shaped himself, then he shaped the woman: he

6 Emblic myrobalam, *Phyllanthus emblica*, Proto-Drav. \**nelli*. The fruits of this tree are famous for their medicinal properties; they are supposed to be endowed with life-prolonging qualities, and are used in magic. The tradition about these special properties of *nelli* must be very ancient since already in the oldest Tamil texts extant (almost 2000 years ago), the fruit is mentioned as having been presented by the chieftain Añci to the poetess Avvai and given her thus unusual longevity or even deathlessness.

7 What does the name signify? Is it a contamination of Rāma and of Hanumān? Cf. DEDR 4698 Tamil and Malayalam *manti* "female monkey, black-faced monkey, monkey in general."

8 *Nu:rekaṅgu* is so-called Fiji yam (*Dioscorea pentaphylla*). Though I have seen and tasted the *rekaṅgu* and was shown the plant (a kind of wild yam) I am unable to identify it botanically. The plant of *nu:re* is called *nu:rekaṅgukoḍi*. *Nu:re* occurs in Tamil as *nūrai* in a very old ("Sangam") text, *Ma-laipaṭukaṭām* 515. DEDR does not quote the item. *Riē* manifests different phonetic shapes (*rīa, riē, rī:ya*); the plant is called *rī:yaṅke:ca:ṅkoḍi*, the flower *riāpu:*, thicket of *riē* plants is *riāpode*. No known etymology. The presence of the centralized vowel(s) indicates development from a form with, possibly, a retroflex/alveolar consonant.

9 The five kinds of plants or vegetables (*da:gu*) are *vacaḷe* "spinach/purslane"; *ci:nde* *Menispermum cordifolium*; *ka:licci*, leaves of *Prosopis spicigera*; *pa:yile*, unidentified (lit. "green-leaf"); *po:ri*, unidentified.

10 *nēramara* and *kalluvāmara*; neither of the two could be identified.

11 *pā:ṅḍivede*, Italian millet, *Panicum italicum* (*Setaria italica*), cf. Ālu Kūṛumba *a:ṅḍi*.

12 Notice that the food was vegetarian, although Irulas are nowadays far from being vegetarians (see below).

Under 984a Hockings quotes a Badaga proverb *u:r kottiya hos yendu / ka:ḍu kottiya pis yendu* "He says 'shoo' to the village cat, but says 'come' to the jungle cat," i.e., "he is stern and unfriendly towards his kindred, but is charitable and obliging towards strangers," and adds: "This is Bühler's interpretation."

5 A confusion of the jungle cat with "big-sized, white-and-black faced, black monkey" (informants' description) called in Irula *bu:kā, bu:ke* masc. / *bu:ki* fem. could probably arise. However, both the description of *bo:kka* in the creation myth, and repeated checking with my informants, notably with P. Siva Raj, ruled such confusion out. The animal considered the ancestor of the Irulas is undoubtedly the jungle cat.

beat and pressed her two sides, creating thus her waist, and as he squeezed in the middle her breasts and hips and buttocks bulged out; he also pressed with his hands so that he formed the cavities round her collar bones and her neck, and she was well-shaped and beautiful.

Since, however, the two Irula ancestors, the male Ērļa and the female Ērļci, lived so near the Shōlegas, they could not have intercourse: their sexual appetite disappeared due to the voyeurism of the repulsive Shōlegas. Therefore Ra:mā came and made the Irulas very tiny, stood them in front of an ant hill and told them to crawl through it. When they emerged on the other side, they had again their proper size, but the Shōlegas were left behind, and the ant hill became the border sign between the Irulas and the Shōlegas.

The god had also helped the first Irula to create all animals as his friends. As the Irulas were about to enter the ant hill, the man sent all his animal friends to the forest where they became wild. Thus the domestic cat (*pū:ne*) became wild hare (*munna, monna*, DEDR 4968); the bandicoot (*ōggane*) became wild cat (*bo:ka*), as the original wild cats had been transformed into the Irulas. To another bandicoot the Irula said: "You may go to the house and eat mice." Thus it became the domestic cat (*pū:ne*) since the original domestic cat became the hare. To another bandicoot he said: "Go to the forest and eat tubers." Thus it remained bandicoot.

Then the first Irula pair had intercourse. Afterwards, Ra:mā came and pinched the woman under her knees; that is why women have cavities there. And Ra:mā pinched and pinched till blood came out; since then women menstruate from the vagina. He told the woman that during her periods she must stay away from men and make herself clean. That's why women during their periods stay in a separate menstruation hut (*taniku:re*). He also told her that she must wash after every act of intercourse.

The woman bent her husband's legs and her own; since then they did not have stiff legs; the long claws they had previously used for climbing and digging also gradually disappeared.

The first Irula couple gave birth to twelve sons and twelve daughters. They were brothers and sisters. Therefore Ra:mā turned them back to back, and again turned them face to face. The twelve boys then chose their twelve wives, and these pairs became the ancestors of the twelve tribes: Irulas, Vē:ḍas, Todas, Kotas, Kuṛumbas, Paṇiyas, Kāḍu Nāyikas, Pāṇdyas, Tamils, Kannaḍigas, Baḍagas, and Englishmen.<sup>13</sup>

3.

Interpretation. What is the *message* of this myth? Nearly all human societies that possess a corpus of traditions about their own past possess also a creation/ancestor myth. In preliterate communities – and the Irulas are almost completely preliterate – anchored still firmly in oral tradition, such myths are of fundamental importance, fulfilling several crucial functions: fostering the group's self-identity, explaining its traditions and customs, legitimizing prescriptions, restrictions, and prohibitions, etc.

According to this Irula creation myth no one existed (all the informants stressed this fact vehemently) but a pair of gods called Ra:mā and Si:de.<sup>14</sup> Next we are faced with a problem: did this divine pair "create" the cats so to say *ex nihilo*, did they beget them, or did they "obtain" them from nature? The problem is semantic since the word used (repeatedly) by the informants was *pēru* (DEDR 4422) "to get, obtain; generate, beget" with the reflexive *ko!* "for themselves." If I read the several versions of this story correctly, the two animals were "taken, obtained" from nature, and subsequently they were gradually transformed into humans. The nature-culture opposition is resolved by this gradual transformation of the two wild cats into the first human (Irula) pair through the following steps: 1. acquisition of language by eating the magic-laden fruits of the myrobalam tree, 2. acquiring dress from leaves to cover their na-

13 Other versions of the myth give a slightly different list: Irula, Vō:ḍa, Toda, Kota, Kuṛumba, Paṇiga, Kāḍu Nāyika, Paṇḍiga, Tamil, Badaga, Kannaḍiga, English. – Vē:ḍa (Vō:ḍa), lit. "hunters"; Todas (Toḍavā) and Kotas (Ko:tā) are well-known Nilgiri communities; Kuṛumba is a summary term for a number of Nilgiri tribes, cf., e.g., Kapp 1982 and a number of most informative papers by Kapp dedicated to the Kuṛumbas; Paṇiya (Paṇigā) is a little-known Nilgiri tribal community of agricultural serfs; Kāḍu Nāyikas (alias Jēnu Kuṛumbas) is a Nilgiri tribal community; Paṇḍiga/Pāṇḍiya may refer either to an unidentified tribal group or to a section of Tamilians; for Badagas (Baḍagā) cf. Hockings 1980. None of the list contains Shōlegas (see below).

14 The Irulas (rather exceptionally among Nilgiri tribal groups) have been always described as Vaiṣṇavites. I tried to show that their Vaiṣṇavism is very much mixed with Śaivism, and that there is an older, indigenous-autochthonous layer of Irula religion which is extra-Hindu and pre-Hindu (cf. Zvelebil 1982: 130 ff.). It is, however, admitted that certain features, particularly in mythology and in worship (Rangaswamy Peak) point to an early and perhaps dominant Vaiṣṇava character of the secondary (adopted or imposed) layer of Irula religion.

kedness, 3. obtaining proper human shape. In all these steps towards culture the deity Ra:mā (and Si:de) is the instigator and teacher.

The jungle cats (*bo:ka*, *Felis chaus*) as direct ancestors of men, obtained from nature, are obviously important. The fact may point to some totemic belief, although there is no evidence at present that the wild cat functions in the Irula community as a totemic animal.<sup>15</sup> In fact, there is, as far as I know, no trace of any totemism in any Irula community. The motivation given in the story for "obtaining for themselves" the two wild cats was the deities' loneliness; they took the two animals into their laps (*ma:ḍi*) as their children. Why jungle cats? Ūrāḷi Irula Rāyappan of Gundri and Siva Raj of Kūñjapeṇe tried to explain: first of all, because the *bo:kka* is such handsome animal, and, apparently, though wild, can become used to people and even show interest and affection; second, because its call (*bo! bo!*) is very similar to the sound of a child's crying and calling.<sup>16</sup> Among all the animals available in the low jungles of the Nilgiris, the wild cat is perhaps the most suitable candidate to be considered as an attractive ancestor of man: fiercely independent and yet friendly to humans, at least potentially; lovely, lithe, clever, of the right size (not too large like the elephant or the bear), not murderously inimical (like the tiger or the sloth-bear), not bothersome and prone to be ridiculous and a nuisance too much similar to man (like the monkeys), not repulsive (as the jackal or the hyaena), not too dissimilar (like the crocodile or the snakes), not considered too slow and stupid (like the buffalo). All these animals function as actants in Irula narrative art, but none of them (with the possible exception of snakes) appear in mythology. Thus it was perhaps for a combination of reasons why *bo:kka*, possibly the loveliest of all known smaller cat-varieties, became the ancestor of all mankind – in the Irula version of human evolution.

According to the story only two Nilgiri area tribes are autochthonous and "original": the Irulas (*Ēḷaru*) and the Shōlegas (*Co:legaru*).<sup>17</sup> While the Irulas were created first from the jungle cats, the Shōlegas were created next, also by Ra:mā and Si:de. All the other "tribes" of men were generated by the first Irula pair. This is very significant since it points to a very special, close relationship between the Irula-speaking communities and the Shōlegas, as my subsequent research has also shown. Such special relationship is manifested from a number of facts: from the close relationship of the Irula and Shōlega languages; from the complex Mādēshūrsāmi myth of Ūrāḷi-Irulas; from the myths round Rangaswami Mountain, and other myths and legends centering round the transition-area between the Nilgiris and Southern Mysore; from the very specific "love-and-hate" relationship between Irulas and Shōlegas (see Zvelebil 1989; also 1979: 97–100).

The role of the ant hill is typically important.<sup>18</sup> It divides the Irulas and Shōlegas, and thus becomes a symbol of their respective proper territories. In addition, only after crawling through it can the Irulas have proper sexual intercourse. Only then do they lose the last vestiges of their original, "natural" state, and become fully human. This is significant: for the ant hill plays a great role in a number of Irula stories and is connected with their mythology, as the entrance to the mysterious chthonic regions in the depths of the Earth; there is an Ūrāḷi Irula deity called Puttammāḍēvi, "the Mother-Goddess of the Ant Hill"; snakes, worshipped by many Irula communities, live in deserted ant hills; ant hills as such are also worshipped and are connected, like snakes, with fertility.<sup>19</sup>

The first Irula man's handling the animals – changing domestic cat into hare, bandicoot into a wild cat (so to say of the second order), another

17 Etymologically connected with Irula *co:le* "forest, jungle" (Badaga *sōle*, Tamil *cōlai*, DEDR 2891, cf. the Indian English *shola*), hence "jungle-people."

18 It is perhaps significant that an enormous number of huge ant hills (Tam. *puḷḷu*, Irula *puttu*, DEDR 4335) may be seen in the Moyar Valley, dividing Nilgiri proper from the territories of southern Mysore (they present a striking sight when one goes by bus or car from Bhavanisagar Reservoir or Sattiyamangalam to Tengumarahada along the Moyar River).

19 Cf. Zvelebil 1982: Index s. v.. In the Hinduism of Tamilnadu, probably the most striking instance of the worship of (originally) an ant hill is the famous idol Vānmikānātha-Purriṭaṅkoṭṭāṇ ("one who resides in the ant hill") in Tiruvārūr, which dates from at least the early Śaiva bhakti period (cf. the hymns of Nāṇacampantar and Appar; see Ponnusamy 1972).

15 One thing may be significant, though: The Irulas are not at all squeemish about their diet; they are absolutely no vegetarians, and relish eating the meat of various animals, in particular of iguana, pangolin, porcupine, rats, and wild fowls, not to speak of sambar deer. However, my informant Siva Raj was horrified when I asked whether they would eat the meat of the wild cat; he categorically stated that no Irula would ever touch the flesh of the jungle cat.

16 Does all this suggest the possibility of domestication, or even the process of domestication of the cat? We should also bear in mind that cats (unlike dogs) are not considered polluting animals in Hinduism; in many Hindu temples cats live in plenty, not only tolerated but often kept and pampered as pets.

bandicoot into domestic cat, etc. – symbolizes the power of the Irula, who came from nature and is “of nature,” over nature.

The first Irula pair had twelve sons and daughters. Since they were siblings, something had to be done to avert incest. The incest taboo is illustrated by the well-known motif of turning the man-woman pair back to back and again face to face – i.e., disturbing and changing the original pattern. Since each pair ceased thus to be brother and sister, they could become man and wife, and the ancestors of the twelve “tribes.”

The inclusion of the English and the exclusion of the Shōlegas are both significant: the inclusion of the English demonstrates the Irula claim to be the ancestors of all mankind – apart from the Shōlegas, a sort of “ugly” counterpart, a failed mirror-image of the Irulas, almost (but not quite) coëval with them.

It remains to be added that there exist among Irula-speaking communities yet other creation accounts: according to one current story (P. Siva Raj, 1978), Rāma and Sītā created the Irulas out of dust and ashes; according to another (Dāsa of Kaḷḷampaḷa, 1978), the Irulas were created by Dharma from the sweat of his brow and were fostered and taught by a virgin goddess called Valliyamma; and according to a Vēṭṭe Kāḍu Irula myth (Maṇiya Mūppān, 102 years old, Mēle Mulli, 1978), mankind was created in a gourd during the universal flood. All these other origin stories seem to me to be, however, strongly influenced by non-Irula material. The “jungle cat creation myth” seems to me to be the most authentic and indigenous one.

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## Das Amt des Wahrsagers bei den Ālu-Kuṛumba (Südindien)

Dieter B. Kapp

### 1. Einleitende Bemerkungen

Die Ālu-Kuṛumba sind ein kleines, etwa 1000 Mitglieder zählendes, eine dravidische Sprache sprechendes Stammesvolk, das in den Nilgiri Hills Südindiens siedelt. Der Tradition nach betreiben die Ālu-Kuṛumba Schwendwirtschaft, sammeln Dschungelprodukte verschiedenster Art und jagen mit Hilfe von Fallen, Schlingen und Netzen.

Der Stamm ist in zwei exogame, nicht-totemistische Klane geschieden, Nāgara und Bēḷḷega, von denen sich im Verlauf der Zeit insgesamt fünf Nebenklane abgespalten haben, und zwar drei vom Nāgara-Klan (Kayigēru, Gobeāḍa und Īrapaṇe) und zwei vom Bēḷḷega-Klan (Mācole – auch Bēḷḷare genannt – und Bēḷḷaku). (Zu Näherem über die Ālu-Kuṛumba vgl. Kapp in „Zitierte Literatur“.)

Die Ālu-Kuṛumba folgen einer magisch-religiösen Weltanschauung und bekennen sich zu einer Form des Ahnenkultes (vgl. Kapp 1982b). Neben vier weltlichen unterscheiden die Ālu-Kuṛumba insgesamt sechs (bzw. sieben) nicht-weltliche Ämter, die neben dem Priester (*maṇṇugara* [DEDR 4666 (a) + *-gara* (vgl. 2.1)]), dem für eine Reihe bestimmter Zeremonien des im 16. Jh. aus Karnataka in die Nilgiri Hills eingewanderten Ackerbauernvolkes der Baḍaga zuständigen Priester (*kāṇi-kuṛuma* [DEDR 1443 + 1844]), dem Schamanen (*devvagara* [DBIA 219 + *-gara*]),