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# From Irulars History to their Present Life(Part 1)

There are about 36 types of tribal people who live in Tamil Nadu. The census of 2011 reveals that their total population is 7.21 per cent. Amongst them, the six communities of *Thoda, Koda, Kurumbar, Irular, Paniyan and Kattu Nayakkan* are slowly disappearing. According to the government, they are on the list of endangered tribes.

## Irulars



(Irular Tribe Children. Reference: The Hindu, Tamil)

Among these six tribes, the *Irulars* are the most important tribes in South India spread over Tamil Nadu. It is believed that this name is derived from the word "darkness". It is believed that they got this name because they lived in dense dark forests. And they have many names like *Kavalkaran, Kattukaran, and Pambukaran*.

## Primitive Tamilians

Anthropological studies suggest that these *Irular* people belong to the Negrito race, the primitive race of mankind. The ancestors of the Irulars are the primitive black race that entered India from Africa. Not only the *Kuravar* tribes, but Irulars also lived in *Kurinji* land, the first of the five lands. Anthropological studies say that they are original Tamil inhabitants. They have left the mountains and migrated to the forests and plains. Anthropological studies also suggest that their hereditary primitive people still live in the forests of the Andaman Islands.

## ***Irulars' Land***

Their habitat is forested and hilly land. Apart from that, they also live in the plains, so the Irulars live in all three lands the forest, mountains and plains. The hill tribals live in the Nilgiri region of Tamil Nadu. Plains *Irulars* live in northern Tamil Nadu. Today in Tamil Nadu they live in Tanjore, Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Villupuram, Chennai, Kanchipuram, Thiruvallur, Thiruvannamalai, Cuddalore. They also live in the Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats. There are massive differences socio-culturally between the hill *Irulars* and the plains *Irulars*.

## **Language of *Irulars***

The *Irulars* are spread all over South India. The language they speak is called *Irula* Language. This language has no letter format only spoken language remains. This language is also known as *Eravallam*, *Eruka*, *Irava*, *Irulikka*, and *Korava*. In this, the language spoken by the hills *Irulars* is different and that of the plains *Irulars* is different. Some researchers claim that this language is a separate language of the Dravidian language family. Some refer to it as a branch language of Tamil. According to UNESCO in its report, this language is slowly going towards extinction.

## **Unique people**

It is enough to understand the culture of the Irulars to show how false common sense is that tribals are uncivilized people. Although they were pushed to a very backward position in the social hierarchy, their culture was very special. And the culture of the Irular is very unique compared to all other tribes. Language, family, marriage, music, dance, food, worship, ritual, religious belief, lifestyle, etc. are all unique to them.

But in today's political and economic situation, their lives are being exploited very badly.



(Irular women plucking herbs)

One of the most important aspects of their culture is herbal medicine. They used medicinal herbs found in forests and mountains to prepare medicine for many incurable diseases and preserved their wisdom from generation to generation. Especially if they are bitten by poisonous animals like snakes, they are familiar with various herbal medicines to overcome the poison.

### ***Kanniyamman worship***



Kanniyamman

Their clan deity is ***Kanniyamman***. It is customary to ask *Kanniyamman* for a sign before doing any work, and they do everything only on the orders of the family deity. It is customary to worship many deities such as the deity who gave the title, the guardian deity, the *Kashta* deity, and *Murugan*. fortune telling is one of their characteristics. Some of the hill *Irulars* are said to worship Vishnu under the name *Rangasami* and they also worship *Mariamman*.

They are very devoted to nature. Likewise, those who believe in worshipping dead ancestors. They call Monday the "**Day of Fire**". They also believe that the snake will not come out of the shell on Wednesday. Also, they have *Mariamman* worship and *Natukal* (hero stone) worship. Researchers believe that the worship of *Natukal* was spread to others from them.

Following this, we will see in the next article, from the festival of the Maasi (Tamil month) month of Irular to the traditional industry.

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# From Irulars History to their Present Life(Part 2)

## **Masi (Tamil Month) Month Festival**

Every year on the full moon day of the month of *Masi* month, the *Paliyar* tribe gathers together on the beach of Mahabalipuram to cook supper, sing and enjoy all. After that in the morning after bathing in the sea they worship their deity *Kanniyamma*.



(Masimagam)

This festival is a very important part of their life. *Irulars*, who work as slaves in brick kilns and paddy fields, wait to celebrate this festival. It is a social collective movement. An immortal remnant of tribal heritage. It is customary to celebrate some festivals in the months of *Adi* and *Chithrai*.

## **No Irulars without a musical instrument**

*Irular* people have various traditions like stories, folk songs, anecdotes, proverbs, and playing musical instruments. As the day passes, when they are done with their hard labour and after dinner, they play musical instruments and sing songs and dance. In this, they dance as a group without any discrimination against males, females, children, elders and young people.

## Folk songs

The folk songs of the *Irular* are very distinctive. It is customary to sing songs according to various periods like birth, death, sadness, love, festival etc. As far as Irulars are concerned, song and story are inseparable. They used to play various types of leather instruments. Of these, *Kadime*, *Berai*, and *Thambatta* are the most important, and wind instruments such as *Bugari*, *Nagasuram*, and *Kvalu* are also commonly played.

## Food habit

*Irulars*, who live in the forest, get their food from the forest. They do not eat buffalo and cow meat. They eat goats, field mice, chickens, deer, pigs, rabbits, wild fowl, pigeons, and quails. In some other areas, the Irulars cultivate in a small area within their residential areas. They also eat *Ragi*, *Cholam* and tuber.

## Status of women

Women have the right to choose men for marriage. There is no habit of taking dowry. Those who wish to get married tell the elder called *Kadu Bhusali* or *Kadu Pusari* who performs all the rituals and conducts the marriage. He is also called *Jatti*. Women are given equal rights. Women also do work like collecting honey, picking herbs and digging tubers.



The forest is their heart and the mountain is their body

## Traditional occupation

They were engaged in various traditional occupations like hunting, collecting honey, catching *Eesal*, collecting herbs, and catching snakes. In today's situation, most of the Irular people work as slaves in brick kilns and rice mills. They also work as labourers for nearby landowners during the harvest season. They also work as guards.

Modern governments began to crush the *Irular* people who lived with the forest as their heart and the mountain as their body. For most of the past centuries, they lived in the mountains and forests. The colonial regime chased the tribals from their original habitats, while the English looted the forest resources through various oppressive laws. Through this, the majority of tribes started migrating. And after India's independence, the **Forest Protection Act of 1976** started driving them out of the forest, and little by little their culture and economy crumbled. Forest and mountain never starved them and after being driven from it they became miserable people.

We will see this in the next article from Criminal Inheritance Act to Welfare Commissions.

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# From Irulars History to their Present Life (Part 3)

## Criminal Tribes Act

Most tribes, especially the Irulars, who lived in the plains were included as criminals. It is a routine police practice to harass them by falsely accusing them of any theft occurring several kilometres away from their residence. It has also been a practice to sexually assault the women of the house who try to seek justice against it. Already their lives had been subjected to many hardships like drought, livestock destruction, poverty, and cultural destruction. They were living below the income line. In this situation, false cases by the police affected their position very badly.



(Irular people, reference: Wikipedia)

## People who cannot get a caste certificate

Getting a caste certificate is the biggest challenge for the Irular people. The authority to issue caste certificates for the Scheduled Tribe category rests with Commissioner. Children apply for a caste certificate as it is necessary to apply in schools and colleges and get educational incentives, but the commissioner does not verify it and gives it on time. Due to this education is questionable for many children.

## A life without basic comfort

They have no proper residence. The government refuses to give them when they ask patta for their place of residence. Even though the government allocates funds for housing, the reason why they are not eligible for it is because of their absence of a place of residence. The shanty areas where they live do not have any basic facilities like electricity, drinking water, roads etc. There is no right in the public lake, pond and puddles of the village. They have been fighting with the government for many years to build them

government housing. And one has to walk several kilometres to fetch drinking water. So clean drinking water is a big dream for them. All the houses do not have proper electricity and only a few houses have electricity.

### **Unsanitary living**

There is no primary health care facility where the Irular lives. So many miles have to be covered even in the most urgent times like childbirth despite illness. Many lives are lost as there is no transport facility to go this way. In today's situation, continuous protests are going on for various demands. But it is a very cruel situation that the Irular have to struggle daily to get caste certificates and residence certificates. Even though the government allocates crores of funds to the tribals every year, their condition does not seem to have improved. Doubts arise as to whether the money earmarked for the settlement of most of the Irular is properly managed. According to the 2011 census, approximately 7.21 lakh tribals live in Tamil Nadu. Disappointingly, less than 27.9% of them are literate.

### **2020-21 Financial Statement**

In this 2020-21 financial statement, the current government has allocated more funds than the previous one, which is approximately Rs 6108.60 crore. The State Government's allocation under the Scheduled Caste Sub-Scheme is welcome. This is 21.82 per cent of the total financial allocation.

It has promised to build houses for 8,803 tribal families under Chief Minister's Green House Scheme in 2020-21. Rs 395 crore will be provided in three years to carry out the works of connecting roads, streetlights, solar lights and water supply.

And in the budget estimates for 2020-21, tribals have been given Rs 210 crore in addition to the schemes sanctioned in 2019-20. All this is welcome.

### **An insecure life**

Police do not properly register cases against tribals and their protection is not ensured using the Prevention of Atrocities Act. Even if it does, it is not properly reported to the National Crime Records Bureau. Because between 1993 and 2009, 401 complaints have been lodged in police stations in the Villupuram district through the Tribal Irular Protection Society alone.

So, we can estimate how many atrocities would have taken place every year across the state and how many complaints would have been filed. But a look at the National Crime Records Bureau statistics is shocking. The tribals should be stopped from making false cases, arrests and torture.

### **Adi Dravidar – Tribal Welfare Commission**

To protect the legal rights of Adi Dravidians and tribals at the state level and to solve their important problems, Chief Minister M.K.Stalin has announced in the Legislative Assembly that a new body called 'Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidian - Tribal Welfare Commission' will be created to function with autonomous authority.

Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar - Tribal Welfare Commission has been ordered by Chief Minister M.K.Stalin to appoint the chairman and members. Also, the Tamil Nadu government has provided Rs 265 crore for the basic amenities of the Adi Dravidian people. The government should take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of tribal people in future.

(Note: Articles written in close reference to the book "Life of Irular People")

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