

## LIVING CONDITIONS AND AFFECTS OF DEFORESTATION OF IRULA TRIBES WITH REFERENCE TO COIMBATORE DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of the study to know the housing conditions, family, occupational, economic, community and social life and its problems affects of deforestation on Irular villages in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. Sample size; 44 households were surveyed and Semi-structured Interview schedule was used to collect data. Study population: Irular tribes. Universe: 28 Irula families from Perukkpathi village, and 16 Irula families from Kanchoor Pathi Village. Study was carried out in the early year of 2020. The result illustrated that majority (40%) of the respondents are satisfied with occupational life, most of the (41%) of the respondents are dissatisfied with economic life, 68% are satisfied with their housing conditions, 41% of the respondents are highly satisfied with their family life, more than half of the respondents (57%) are satisfied with their healthy life and 60% of the respondents are highly dissatisfied with their social and community life. On the basis of deforestation; majority of the respondents (59.09%) of the respondents know someone that has been affected by deforestation, 56.81% of the respondents participated in a protest against deforestation, 56.81% of the respondents think that deforestation has negative effects in general and 79.54% of the respondents believe that we need trees for our survival.*

**Keywords:** Deforestation, Irular tribes, Living Conditions

### 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.

### **SCHEDULED TRIBES IN TAMILNADU: 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, Villupuram, 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, Thiruchirappalli, 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.

## **TYPES OF IRULAS**

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

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Objectives**

- To find out the housing conditions, family, occupational, economic, community and social life and its problems of Irular tribes in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu
- To know the affects of deforestation on Irular tribes in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu

### **Sources of Data**

Secondary data was collected from research articles, books, news papers, internet websites etc. Primary information obtained from the respondents by using interview schedule.

### **Sampling**

Sample size; Out of total 9 Irulas villages, among them; Perukkpathi and Kanchoor Pathi villages were selected randomly in Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. After that 44 households were surveyed and Semi-structured Interview schedule was used to collect data. Study population: Irular tribes. Universe: 28 irula families from Perukkpathi and 16 Irula families from Kanchoor Pathi Villages were selected for this study. The study was carried out in the early year of 2020. Data was collected from the adult family member available during the time of interview.

## ANALYSIS

**Table: 1. Profile of Irula Tribes**

S. No	Profile of Irula Tribes	Domain	Frequency	Percentage%
1	Gender	Male	32	73
		Female	12	27
2	Age	<25	3	7
		26-35	11	25
		36-45	12	27
		46-55	08	18
		56-65	07	15
		>65	03	8
3	Education	Illiterates	29	66
		Primary school	04	09
		Middle school	09	20
		High school	02	05
4	Occupation	Agriculture	19	43
		Construction work	08	21
		Snake trapping	03	07
		Casual labour	04	09
		Others	08	18
		Unemployed	2	05
5	Family Type	Nuclear	11	25
		Joint	31	70
		Extended	02	05

The above table shows that 73% of the respondents are male while as 27% of the respondents are female. 27% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 36 to 45 years of age group, 25% belonged to 26 to 35, 18% belonged to 46 to 55, 15% belonged to 56 to 65, 8% belonged to >65 and remaining to 7% belonged to <25 years of age group.

With respect to education, 66% of the respondents are illiterates, 20% studied up to middle school, 9% studied up to primary school and 5% studied up to high school.

On the basis of occupation, 43% are doing agricultural work, 21% are doing construction work, 18% are doing others work, 9% are casual labour, 7% are snake trapping and 5% are unemployed.

The above table revealed that 70% of the respondents belonged to joint family, 25% respondents nuclear and remaining 5% respondents belonged to extended family.

**Table: 2. Satisfaction with Living Conditions**

S. No	Satisfaction with Living Conditions	Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage%
1	Occupational life	Highly satisfied	-	-
		Satisfied	18	40
		Dissatisfied	13	30
		Highly dissatisfied	13	30
	Economic life	Highly satisfied	1	2
		Satisfied	16	36
		Dissatisfied	18	41
		Highly dissatisfied	9	21
	Housing conditions	Highly satisfied	6	14
		Satisfied	30	68
		Dissatisfied	6	14
		Highly dissatisfied	2	4
	Family life	Highly satisfied	18	41
		Satisfied	18	41
		Dissatisfied	7	15
		Highly dissatisfied	1	3
	Health life	Highly satisfied	18	41
		Satisfied	25	57
		Dissatisfied	1	2
		Highly dissatisfied	-	-
	Social and community life	Highly satisfied	-	-
		Satisfied	7	15
		Dissatisfied	11	25
		Highly dissatisfied	26	60

Table 2 shows that 40% of the respondents are satisfied with occupational life, 30% are dissatisfied and also 30% highly dissatisfied with occupational life.

On the other side, 41% of the respondents are dissatisfied with economic life, 36% are satisfied, 2% are highly dissatisfied and remaining 2% are highly satisfied with his economic life.

On the basis of housing conditions of the respondents, 68% are satisfied, 14% are highly satisfied, same 14% are dissatisfied and remaining 4% are highly dissatisfied with his housing conditions.

With respect to family life, 41% of the respondents are highly satisfied, same 41% are satisfied with their family life, 36% are satisfied, 15% are dissatisfied and remaining 3% are highly dissatisfied with their family life.

Regarding health life of the respondents, 57% are satisfied with his health life, 41% of the respondents are highly satisfied while as 2% are dissatisfied.

Further 60% of the respondents are highly dissatisfied with his social and community life, 25% are dissatisfied and 15% are satisfied.

**Table: 3. Effects of Deforestation**

S. No	Effects of Deforestation	Frequency	Percentage%
1	On average, how much time do you spend outside on a weekly basis?		
	(a) 0-2 Hours	8	18.18
	(b) 3-4 Hours	14	31.81
	(c) 5-6 Hours	10	22.72
	(d) 7+ Hours	12	27.27
2	Have you ever been personally affected by deforestation?		
	Yes	29	65.90
	No	15	34.09
3	Do you know anyone that has been affected by deforestation?		
	Yes	26	59.09
	No	18	40.90
4	Are you aware of any local areas that are undergoing or have undergone deforestation?		
	Yes	23	52.27
	No	21	47.72
5	Have you ever participated in a protest against deforestation?		
	Yes	25	56.81

	No	19	43.18
6	Do you think deforestation has positive or negative effects in general?		
	Positive	12	27.27
	Negative	25	56.81
	Depends on the situation	7	15.90
7	How often do you recycle?		
	Always	10	22.72
	Most of the time	11	25
	About half the time	9	20.45
	Once in a while	7	15.90
	Never	7	15.90
8	Do you believe we need trees for our survival?		
	Yes	35	79.54
	No	9	20.45

Table 3 illustrated that 31.81% of the respondents spend 3 to 4 hours outside weekly, 22.72% spend 5 to 6 hours, and same 7+ hours where as 18.18% o to 2 hours spend outside weekly. The above data shows that 65.90% are personally affected due to deforestation and 34.09% are not personally affected due to deforestation.

Followed that 59.09% of the respondents know someone that has been affected by deforestation remaining 40.90% of the respondents don't know someone that has been affected by deforestation.

Further, 52.27% of the respondents are aware about local areas that are undergoing or have undergone deforestation where as 47.72% of the respondents are not aware about local areas that are undergoing or have undergone deforestation.

Besides the above table shows that 56.81% of the respondents participated in a protest against deforestation while as 43.18% of the respondents have not participated in a protest against deforestation.



Furthermore, 56.81% of the respondents think that deforestation has negative effects in general, 27.27% of the respondents think positive effects and 15.09% think that effects of deforestation depends on the situation.

Based on recycle of the respondents, 25% of the respondents opined “Most of the time” 22.72% of the respondents opined “Always” recycling, 20.45% opined “About half the time”, 15.90% opined “Once in a while” and same 15.90% opined “Never”.

Finally 79.54% of the respondents believe that we need trees for our survival and 20.45% of the respondents don't believe that we need trees for our survival.

## CONCLUSION

From the study it was evident that majority of the Irulars' living conditions was marked by illiteracy, poverty, poor housing conditions, indebtedness; The study proves hypothesis that the living conditions and psychosocial aspects of Irular tribal community is poor. On the other side, Irulas tribes were found affected negatively due to deforestation. Above findings of the study are only a tip of the iceberg of the living conditions of Irulars and they need necessary psychosocial intervention and suitable alternative rehabilitation measures.

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