

# The Socio-Economic Factors of Iruliga Tribes in the Ramanagara

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## **Abstract:**

This paper focuses on and suggests on overall and possible development of socio-economic factors of the Iruliga tribe in Ramanagara district in Karnataka. The study is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through the field study. And also an attempt is made here to examine the major problems that confront the tribe in general.

**Keywords:** Iruliga Tribe, Socio-Economic, Major Problems, socio-cultural changes.

## **Introduction**

The south Indian State of Karnataka is rich in its historic, cultural, and anthropological heritage. The State is the home to 42,48,987 tribal people, of whom 50,870 belong to the primitive group. Although these people represent only 6.95 percent of the population of the State, there are as many as 50 different tribes notified by the Government of India, living in Karnataka of which 14 tribes including two primitive ones are primarily natives of this State. They are Gaudalus, Hakkipikkis, Irruligas, Jenu kurubas, Bhils, Soliga, Betta or Kadu kuruba, Gonds, Chenchus, Koyas, Yeravas, Haleyas and Koragas. Extreme poverty and neglect over generations have left them in a poor state of health and nutrition. The Tribal literacy rate in Karnataka is 36.01 percent. (Census 2001) Bellary and Raichur contain a large number of tribal communities.

Nearly 60 percent of the tribal communities in Karnataka live in the areas surrounded by forests and hills and except for those living in urban areas. The tribes are one of the most neglected and disadvantaged groups in Karnataka. Most tribal settlements lack of basic amenities such as housing, drinking water, health and transport facilities. The extent of economic, social and cultural changes among these communities depends on their geographical distribution. Proximity to non-tribal settlements in some parts of the state has contributed to greater socio-cultural changes. Iruliga is one of the fourteen primitive tribal groups in Karnataka. The Iruliga inhabit in Ramanagara district, Karnataka state in India. Iruliga is well spread in Shimoga, Ramanagara, and Bengaluru urban. The name Iruliga is derived from the Tamil word "Irul" meaning dark which refers to their skin nature. The name Irula means "people of darkness." This could refer to their dark-colored skin or to the fact that all important events traditionally took place in the darkness of night. Iruliga they also call themselves Erlar or Pooari, while their neighbors refer to them as Eralollu, Irulas, Shikari and Pujari.

Though some academic work has been done on the socio-economic status of the Iruliga tribe in Ramanagar, Karnataka state many of these studies were conducted a long time back, and therefore have become irrelevant with time. Most of them did not focus on specific issues. Thus there was a need to

conduct a new study, which is based on present-day socio-economic status and realities. So this paper tries to analyze the present socio-economic life of the Iruliga tribe in Karnataka.

### **Objective of the study:**

1. To study the socio-economic details of the Iruliga tribe
2. To understand the socio-cultural rituals and activities of the Iruliga tribe
3. To assess the various factors that is responsible for the development of Iruliga and to facilitate new strategies for their empowerment.

### **Methodology**

Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Various government reports, books, journals, articles, newspapers and the internet were used for secondary data. The study considered both quantitative and qualitative data. Anthropological methods of observation, participation and interview were used in the field study to gather the primary data.

### **Result and discussion**

Iruliga, the minority tribe in Karnataka is mainly inhabited in Ramanagara district. They are also known as Iruliga, Irularu, Iruligaru, or Illigaru. They are more conspicuous in the Nilgiri Hills of neighboring Tamil Nadu and Kerala States and are listed under the Primitive Tribe Group where they are called Irular, which means night in Tamil language. Earlier the Iruliga's considered tribal people now they have been included in a scheduled tribe. (According to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes order act in 1976) According to the census of 2001, their population is 8427. They are predominantly a rural community and largely distributed in Karnataka.

### **Geographical distribution**

The Iruliga are also primarily tribes of Karnataka with a total population of about 10,259. Fifty percent of the Iruliga population is found in Bangalore's urban and rural districts and the remaining fifty percent is spread across Karnataka such as Hassan, Bidar, Gulbarga, and Ramanagara and other districts.

### **Habitations:**

They habitant in urban areas usually called **settlements**. Earlier they used to live in caves and these caves were usually close to the forest for livelihood. (Hunting, gathering and storage of forest products) Later they started building their hut by using bamboo and grass. After when they started living in the outskirts of the urban area they built houses using clay and bricks but now with the help of the government they have built houses of stones with tiled roofs.

### **Occupations**

These people are descendants of gypsies living in caves with hunting and gathering as their ancestral occupation. Traditionally, the main occupation of the Iruligas has been a snake, rat-catching and wild honey collection. Cattle breeding is another main source of income. Wild resources like honey, firewood and the like are also collected. They also work as laborers (coolies) in the fields of the landlords during the sowing and harvesting seasons. Fishing is also a minor occupation. Since the abolishment of snake catching by the Indian Government, the community had to abandon their

migratory lifestyle and make their living among the suspicious mainstream society. The community has settled down on the outer edge of various villages, trying to make their living as daily laborers in the fields, and bonded labor in rice mills. Since they do not have education and relevant livelihood skills. They subsequently learned the art of cultivation.

### **Socio-cultural status of Iruliga**

They gave importance to the joint family system and were also allowed to live together in relation. They are Hindus by religion and Kannada is their principal language, a few other languages are also spoken. They eat rice, ragi and all kinds of pulses. Groundnut and Palm oil are the cooking medium. Ragi, mustard, grains and pulses are the main food items in a vegetarian meal. The animal protein of rats, Cats, squirrels, and Birds, and meats of chicken, goat, pig and fish are favorites. The Iruligas are not vegetarian but they follow the tradition of Hindus and they consider them as Hindus so they will not eat beef as they believe in holy cows. Rice and vegetables are their staples.

Dancing plays a large part in Iruliga life rituals. Both the men and women dance to drums at funerals, weddings and births. The Iruliga of Karnataka do not remember much about their clans they are however patrilineal and draw their family lineage from the males they have a family god with whom they share a very personal relationship. As long as the other family does not also worship the same god marriage is accepted with any other spirulina. The Iruliga marry within their group. Marriage to one spouse is the normal practice. Sons inherit the property of their father. Families arrange the marriages. Girls are often married at a young age. Boys they are having the freedom to select their life partners. In the Iruliga community, it is said that when a man and woman like each other they go to a deep forest and spend there some days and as soon as they come back from the forest they will get a permit to marry each other and their husband should construct the hut for wife. After that, both have to take the hunting occupation for livelihood. In the Iruliga community, a strong and intelligent man will be selected as their head and called **Nagagowda**. Whenever rituals take place in their community they will be performed under the supervision of **Nagagowda**.

### **Religion**

They worship God and the devil (ancestor sole) as well. The Iruliga people practice Hinduism, the ancient religion of India. They do believe in worship and serve the gods whom they believe will give them favor and protection. They do not have a personal or familial relationship with their gods as Christians do. The Iruliga make statues of their gods with mud. They worship a female goddess named Kabalamma, Maramma, Madduramma, Halemaramma, Konamari and Srigalamuni, Vargalamani and Jademuni as their male god. For each god, there is a separate myth. They think these gods are more powerful than other gods. As with other tribal peoples, the Hinduism of the Iruliga is heavily mixed with animism, the belief that spirits inhabit the objects of nature. These spirits must be appeased or they can bring disaster upon the Iruliga community. The Iruliga are Known as forest saints or priests as they hold a relativity high status among the primitive tribes who live in the Forests of Southern India. However, they hold very low status as Rat, Snake and catchers in modern India. They celebrate Ugaadi, Sankranti, Shivaratri, and other Hindu festivals.

### **Birth ceremonies**

There are many Iruliga customs and observances involved from the birth to the death of a person. When

pregnancy approaches a tent is erected near the woman's house. Elderly women who are well versed in magic are to attend the pregnant woman. When the child is born, the child's aunt takes a glass of water and sprinkles it on the child. For seven days nobody will go out of the tent and none will be allowed to enter the tent. Food will be sent to occupants in the tent. On the seventh day child will be named and it is a big ceremony. The name will be the name of the grandfather or grandmother. Ramappa, Nagaraja, Maruthi, Kalamma, Kaveramma, Vaduki, Muniyappa are some common names. For three months relatives other than the immediate parents, should not touch the child. Those three months are taboo or termed as unholy. On those days the mother should eat and take rest without doing any work while the father attends to all the work.

### **Marriage ceremonies**

Marriage is fixed for girls within the age limit of 12 -18 whereas boy's age is from 14-24. People from the same clan within the Iruliga tribe do not intermarry. Marriages are fixed within the family by the parents. The bride's prize has to be given to the girl's house in the form of cash or cattle. Marriage is arranged in the presence of the tribal chief. The marriage ceremony takes place in the ancestral home where the village god is installed. An elder called Guruppa presides over this. Marriages that do not have the acknowledgment of a local panchayat are considered invalid.

### **Death ceremonies**

One's death will be proclaimed to everyone. The village elder will walk with a stick stretched forward. This communicates the death. The body will be kept in a typical tent on a bamboo platform, in a posture where both the legs have to be drawn backward and tied. The closest relatives bring water from the river. Water is drawn after uttering the name of the dead person three times without looking left or right. Ground saffron or turmeric liquid mixture is sprinkled over the body. Visitors spread white dhoti (cloth) over the body if the dead are male and color cloth in case of females and others who gather will settle civil as well financial disputes. If the dead is a married woman, seven persons from seven clean remove the thali (marital necklace). Later they rejoice and dance giving thanks to the god for preserving them till then. Grief and weeping are not done in the house. The body will be buried after 3 days. A body that is wrapped in linen is buried in the pit dug, where there will be a furrow to place the head. This is to avoid the falling of mud on the head! After the burial, it is customary that food is served on the banks of the brook. Iruliga who comes back after the burial, warms his feet by setting a fire grass (straw), which is pulled out from the roof. A full pot of water is kept at the entrance of the house. Caster or jingly oil is dropped into this water with a thin stick. The first drop is dripped by invoking the name of the dead person and the second drop by uttering the name of the father. When the two drops join, the head of the family touches it and applies it to his forehead. Before entering the house, occupants need to bathe. In appearance, the widow or the widower has to live as they saw each other at last before one's death. This is observed to recognize each other after the other dies. This demonstrates that the Iruligas believe in life after death.

### **Health**

They used to collect plant medicine for simple health problems. Tribes utilized the nearest Government Hospital. The bathing habit is the worst among them. Alcoholic addiction is a major health killer. Infant mortality and maternal mortality rates are also higher among them.

## Conclusions

This paper briefly examines the socio-economic development of a scheduled tribe of Ramangagra known as Iruliga, who lives in the areas of geographical seclusion of South India. The transition from their earlier lifestyle to a sedentary form of living has consequences for people in the tribal communities. The various tribal welfare programs that suggest the impact on the living conditions of the tribal communities have been limited. There were several limitations in the implementation of tribal welfare programs that need to be re-examined. An attempt is made here to examine the major problems that confront the tribe in general. The broader concerns of the tribal communities are in a way responsible for the overshadowing of the specific needs of women. This paper also suggests the improvement and development of the socio-economic conditions of the Iruliga tribe through government welfare programs.

The tribal groups who were displaced from their forest habitat do not have adequate access to development initiatives that would have provided an alternative livelihood for them. The economy of the tribal groups ranged from semi-traditional subsistence forms of living such as hunting, gathering and to a limited extent, agriculture. Despite their heterogeneous social background, the livelihood systems of all tribal groups centered on forest products. Hunting and collection of minor forest products are a part of their livelihood system. Both men and women are actively involved in the collection of honey, gooseberry, soapnuts, bamboo and edible roots and leaves. Hunting is mainly the activity of men. As part of the resettlement program, some families were allotted land for cultivation. They are not able to make optimum use of the land given to them because of the lack of credit, irrigation and other infrastructure facilities. The literacy levels are low among the tribal groups. School enrolment continues to be low and the dropout rate is very high. The health and nutrition levels are poor with a high prevalence of malnutrition and infant mortality.

## Suggestions for the development of economic factors in a tribal community

Social factor is a basic identity of how much powerful an individual is in a society. In numerous places, social factor is carefully connected with ethics, the use of richness and an upright measure. All civilizations have established a collective stratification inside their inhabitants where personages have credited a firm with their social grading. The social factor of tribes in India has changed a lot from the past times. In ancient times, Tribes were treated almost equal to the other communities. But, in medieval times things weren't in favor of the Tribes. So the other communities were in buildup dominating the Tribes. In India Tribal has started playing important roles in different sectors like politics, hospitals, education, business, etc. During British rule in India, many European Scholars came down to India to study the tribal people and their problems faced by them. The Europeans felt that Tribes were ill-treated in the society. Even today in some places like slums, villages, and tribal areas the Tribes are not treated as like other communities.

It is the inaccessibility of the area that accounts for the backwardness of the tribal, especially the primitive groups. Due to this reason, development services do not reach the remote packets. It is therefore suggested that the contraction of roads and communication systems in remote tribal areas must receive priority. Easy and effective communication will certainly pave the way for their progress and accelerate their contact with the outside world. Appointment of technical assistant was observed that the man power for technical assistance to the project officer is minimal. Tribal beneficiaries find it difficult to secure guidance from the project officer's office. Hence the project officer is required to be manned

with technical staff that can extend guidance & help the tribal as & when required. The need for technical training for self-employment & skill development to Industrial development in tribal areas invokes demand for more technicians such as filters, electricians, welders, carpenters, motor mechanics, etc. It is, therefore, proposed to set up training schools which can impart the above skills to tribal. This will help to curb the tendency of migration, especially in the Iruliga. Poultry farming was observed and this sector showed considerable promise as a means of providing gainful employment in the rural areas. There is a great demand for eggs and table birds. The tribal should be given adequate training to manage poultry farms and should be helped in developing market links. Cultivation of medicinal plants is necessary to promote and propagate the cultivation of medicinal herbs in tribal areas with the help of tribal. These medicinal herbs could be marketed to pharmaceutical industries. Healthcare services did not reach the primitive tribal as Iruligas effectively. The project officers must make efforts to monitor these services for tribal women, children, men and old folks besides health services.

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