

Socio-Economic Life of Iruliga Tribe in Karnataka

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Abstract. *The objective of this research paper is to find out the socio-economic condition of the Iruliga tribe in Karnataka. To suggest the ways and means, for their overall development. This study is mainly based on the primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through the field study. This paper reveals that the tribal people are lagging behind the mainstream population with respect of their economic, social and cultural aspects. Even in this global world they are still continues their traditional way of life.*

Introduction

Tribal population constitute around 8.6 percent of the total population of India. These communities are varied from their belief, customs, traditional and religious practices. The above all are documented in their oral epics and songs. Tribal communities too have their legends about birth and death meaning of the universe. Tribal people believe that “The ultimate purpose of life is the creation of a meaningful order through imitation of the celestial model transmitted by myths and celebrated in rituals. (Madhu-2002)

Fifty communities have been currently identified as tribes in Karnataka. Karnataka has a sizable population of tribal people. There are 34.64 lakhs tribals distributed in various regions of Karnataka as per 2001 census. Raichur and Bellary contain large number of tribal communities. They are Gaudalus, Hakkipikkis, Irruligas, Jenu Kurubas, Malaikuds, Bhils, Soliga, Betta(Kadu) kuruba, Gonds, Chenchus, Koyas, Yeravas, Haleyas and Koragas. The Tribal literacy rate in Karnataka is 36.01 percent. (census-2001). Present paper reveals the socio-cultural and economic life of Iruliga tribe in Karnataka.

Objectives of the study:

1. To study the Socio Economic status of the Iruliga tribe.
2. To understand their lifecycle rituals
3. To suggest the future plans and programmes to improve their present condition.

Data and methodology

The present paper is mainly focused on the socio-economic situation of Iruliga tribe. The material of this study was collected through review of literature and field survey. The study considered both quantitative and qualitative data. To improve the quality and reliability of the information collected from the sample survey, a number of persons from different tribal settlements were chosen for in-depth interview.

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Result and discussion

Iruliga which is a minority tribe in Karnataka is mainly found in Ramaragara District they are also known as Iruliga, Irularu, Iruligaru, Illigaru. They called themselves as the devotees of forest or saints of forest. As they use to eat rats they might have got to the name of Iruliga. Iruligas are mainly found in Tamilnadu and Kerala State where in they are called there Iruliga, Irular. (People of india-2003).

Among the fifty communities of Scheduled Tribes listed in Karnataka. Iruliga's are also included. According to census of 2001 their population is 8,427 and are spread in various district in Karnataka (As per 2001Census)

Geographical distribution:

Fifty percent of Iruliga population is found in Bangalore Urban and Rural District and the remaining fifty percent spread in Hassan, Bidar, Gulbarga, Shimoga and Ramanagaram and other District.

Settlement of Iruliga tribe:

Earlier they lived in cave and these cave's were usually close to the forest for hillock and many families use to live in cave, which helped them in the hunting occupation and storage of food. (People of india-2003) They used to divide the time equally in hunting and raising their children. Then they started to build their hut by using bamboo, grass. Now they started to build their house with clay and bricks. Due to the efforts of Government they are living in the house made by stones and having tiled roof.

Livelihood:

Earlier the Iruliga were mainly hunters and also collected forest products now they are working as daily laborers, Agriculture workers and also sell fire wood collected from the forest for their livelihood. They are non-vegetarians and also take vegetables, fruits and roots for their food. Gradually then they started to working as a daily wage laborers, they started to purchase clothes, other household articles like oil, chili powder, sugar etc.

Long ago it is said that they were using leaves of teak wood plant as clothes. Then males and females among the Iruliga started to wear the clothes only on their waist, nowadays like others females started to wear the *sari* but wearing the blouse is not common among them, male started to wear the pant and shirts. Tattooing on their forehead is common among the females.

During their marriage ceremony or even when death occurs or at the time of festivals they are performing dance. During the time of certain special occasions they perform the dance with drum the playing. Male and female together perform Dance by clapping their hands around the fire, which has setup in their courtyard during the evening time of special rituals. It is common among them that they have the right to select their partners as they like, after selecting the partners they perform the dance very joyfully to express their happiness.

Socio-economic status of Iruliga tribe

Iruliga are identified as forest saints and also as priests. They are also identified by their duties. In earlier time they work as catch of rats and snakes, this is also another reason to identify them as Iruliga. In earlier days they are also called as an important community whose identity forest dwellers. But now a days their number is decreasing. Forest is not just dwelling place but is too scared to them. Even with all the government policy and programmes, they have not allotted any land for cultivation. They are not idea about the cultivation of land. Now also they don't have their own land, they are work as laborers in other's lands. In Karnataka the economic condition of Iruliga is very low, their population is very low and they are not able to get the facilities given by the Government.

Religion

They worship the God and also devil (ancienter sole). They made a statue of God from wet mud. They worship the Kabalamma, Maramma, Madduramma, Halemaramma, Konamari as their female god and Madappa. Srigalamuni, Vargalamani and Jademuni as their male god. For each God there is a separate myths. They worship these Gods and goddesses only because they have more power compare to other gods. They are celebrating Ugaadi, Gowri, Shankranth, Shivaratri and and other festival.

The culture and customs of Iruligas are adopted by the neighbor communities. By this also they follow same systems. They gave importance to joint family system and are also allowed to live together in relation.

For boys they are having a freedom to select their life partners. In Iruliga community it is said to have when a man and women each other they use to go to the deep forest and spend there some days. As soon as they come from the forest they will permit to get married and the husband has to construct a hut for wife. After that both have to hunting for their livelihood.

In their community the man who is strong and intelligent will be selected as leader by the community members. He is called as “*Nadagowda*”. The member who is work as assistant of the person is known as “*Kolukara*”, It continuing from the very beginning. Whatever rituals take place in their community it will be performed by the supervision of *Nadagowda*.

Summary and Conclusion

Iruligas are the traditional snake and rat catchers. Though it has been a longer period. They are been unable to find a sustainable occupation for themselves. They are unskilled in doing any kind of job.

They earn their livelihood by doing ‘coolie’. They are working as laborers in the fields of the landlords during the sowing and harvesting seasons in addition to working in the rice mills. They also do some work in the landlord's house. Fishing is also adapted an occupation in some of the Iruliga' villages. Some of them also collect firewood from the forest to sell. The main problems of these people are that, sometimes very less or get some rice or other things in kind as a payment for their labor. (Kuruva basavaraju-2000).

Their living conditions in the villages are not favorable. Many of them don't even have a land certificate for the place where they stay in and most people are not getting the benefits which has to be implemented to them from the government. As a result they don't have basic amenities like electricity and roads connecting to their villages. Luckily very few of them are getting water supply and bore wells as a source of water.

These circumstances have resulted in a situation where the Iruliga are virtually cut off from the mainstream of the society. They are totally ignorant about the happenings in the external world to the extent that they don't even know the benefits that they are eligible to receive as a Schedule Tribe. This state of affair is the result of their illiteracy. Taking advantage of this, the landlords cheat these people into signing the land granted to them by the government against paltry loans given to them by the landlords.

The above stated facts are only a tip of the iceberg of the kind of life that the Iruligas are leading. It would suffice to say that this community needs a lot more attention from the government and the society at large.

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