Report
OF THE
Jungle Tribes Mission
ON THE
Coimbatore and Nilgiri Hills

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REPORT
OF THE
Jungle Tribes Mission

The Tribes on the Nilgiris

The jungle tribes of these Hills are the Badagas, the most influential of all; the Todas, who are the aborigines; the Koters, the Kurumbers, Sholagers, Kasabars, and Irulars. All these tribes except Badagas, Koters and Todas live in their primitive ways in small hamlets situated in most unhealthy spots on the lower slopes of these mountains. Hidden from observation and difficult of approach these simple folk live in villages visited only by the wild beasts and the malarious diseases that make the jungles so deadly to strangers. Each tribe has its own social customs and modes of worship. The Irulars shake hands and bow to each other when they meet. This peculiar custom is not seen amongst other tribes. Both sexes do this.

The Irulars' Dwelling Place

In a glade of the forest or on a grassy slope far away from busy towns, but close to the haunts of the elephant, tiger and bear, the Irula builds a very small hut of bamboos thatched with grass.

The height of the hut is usually about five feet and the entrance extremely small. From twenty to sixty huts form a village. To reach the village one must find the track leading through the dense
jungle and on arriving at the outskirts one must not be surprised to see all the people flying in fear into the forest.

**Their Dress**

The men wear a small piece of cloth round their waist and only very few of them cover the body. The women tie a piece of cloth around their bosoms which hangs to the knees. They rarely if ever wash their clothes and hence they are generally very dirty. Their only ornament is a necklace formed of many strands of black beads.

**Their Food**

Some of them cultivate small patches of jungle land for ragi and cholum, the common grains of the district, but most of these poor people satisfy their hunger during the greater part of the year by eating roots and herbs which they find in the forest. When even these are not obtainable they will cut down a tree called "hatchi" and burn it and then dissolve the ashes in water with tamarind pulp and eat it. They rarely possess the simplest kinds of lamps and therefore they usually cook their food and eat it before sunset. When crops are growing they make huts in high trees and remain in them at night to frighten away wild animals such as deer and wild pigs and when elephants come to destroy the cultivation they make a big noise with tom-toms until they drive them away.

**Marriage**

They have no ceremonies at their marriages. The man who wants a wife, or his parents, selects a girl
and then goes to the father and asks his consent. If he agrees the bridegroom pays him from one to fifteen rupees, according to his ability, as a price for his daughter. Then the parents bring the bride to the bridegroom’s house and leave her there. After she comes there the husband gives his wife a necklace of black beads and makes a feast for his relatives and friends. After the feast the marriage is over. It is their custom to marry more than one wife. If a man wishes to marry another woman he sends the first wife to her father but keeps the children if there are any. A woman can always dissolve the marriage bond by paying back the money her husband paid for her. She is then free to marry any one else. If she marries again without paying the money the former husband can compel the second husband to pay it.

**Burials**

Near each village is a graveyard. When a death occurs the body is placed in front of the house so that all may have room to gather and sit around to view the corpse and prepare it for burial. The women sit on a group and weep and mourn with shrill cries and the men dance around the corpse with music for a time and then carry it in a dhooly to the graveyard and bury it without further ceremony. After the grave is filled in each one touches the grave with his right hand and then puts both hands to his forehead. This is their last farewell to the deceased.

If any member of the tribe dies in a distant place he is buried there, but after a year the relatives go
and dig up the bones and bring them with music to their own village and bury them there.

Religion

The Irulars have no temples or priests of their own, but occasionally they go to Hindu shrines and imitate the Hindus in their offerings of sheep, fowls, cocoanuts, etc. When they have a sacrifice in their own villages they put a stone under a tree to represent the God for the time being but afterwards they take no notice of it. They offer sacrifices sometimes to "Kattoo Muniappa" before they reap their crops, as he is supposed to guard their fields.

Missionary Visits

Various attempts have been made to reach these people by missionaries. In 1892 Rev. Wieland, of the Basel Mission, paid a visit with us to some of their villages and slept one night in the feverish locality with the sad result that he suffered for six months with malaria fever. In 1895 Mr. H. H. Bird and Mr. Maynard made tours through those parts and preached the Gospel in many villages without suffering any ill effects. Mr. Mallis also made a short trip with me and preached in several villages. On that occasion we had great difficulty to gather the people. As soon as they saw the white man they ran away. All these gentlemen were very much interested in all they saw of the Irulars and have shown much sympathy with us Indian brethren, who took up this work in the beginning.
How the Gospel Reached Them

In 1898 I was converted from heathenism. After three years Mr. B. Daniel, who was then my fellow worker, and myself were called by the Lord to work among the jungle tribes of the Western part of the Nilgiri Hills. These people had never yet heard of Jesus and His salvation. Yielding ourselves to the call of the Spirit we were led to a place about 32 miles from Coonoor called Gopaneri, where we found many Irulars. In the beginning they were very frightened when they saw us and ran away and hid in the jungles. Gradually, however, we gained their confidence. The work was very hard and meant much suffering but we went about from place to place in the strength of the Lord and told them of Christ. Often they begged us not to go near their huts and we had to sleep out under trees. After some months of strenuous effort some of the Irulars professed faith and were baptized. At this time Pastor Lazarus and Preacher Michael from Ooty came and encouraged us.

The new converts had to meet with much opposition and endure severe persecution from their friends and relations. The work was going on well when we workers were attacked with malarial fever and were compelled to go to the town for about a year. On our return to the Irulars we found to our sorrow that the little flock had gone back during our absence, but we sought them out and some of them returned to the Lord again. But owing to the
feverishness of those parts we have never been able to remain long amongst the people, and for some years past all we could do was to pay flying visits occasionally.

**Present State and Need of the Work**

There is now a small group of Irular Christians who are standing firm in their faith. The leading man among them is Meshach. He learned to read the Bible and has become a true and faithful witness for Christ among his own people. Some who formerly persecuted him are now friendly and interested in the Gospel. Of late years many Irulars have come to work in the cocoanut gardens near Kullar and Meshach is now going about in that locality and teaching those who are willing to listen about Christ. Formerly they were afraid to send their children to school but now they are anxious to have a school open and promise to let the children learn. Brother Michael, who is now my co-worker, and I feel the need of getting a school started near Kullar. By this means some Irular boys may be prepared to go back into their jungle villages to gather and teach some of the thousands of Irular children for whom nothing whatever is being done.

They are more than ten thousand people in the Irular tribe and except ourselves no one has attempted continuously to carry the Gospel light into their midst.

There is every reason to expect that many of this
tribe will yet be won for Christ if proper work can be done amongst them.

The first thing we have to do is to purchase a plot of land at Kullar upon which the Irular Christians can build their houses and a school can be erected. Towards this some kind friends here already have given us Rs. 27, but we need a much larger sum as land is dear in that locality.

We are now seeking for a suitable place and ask our friends to join us in prayer that we may be rightly guided. I shall be glad to answer enquiries and give further information about the work.

September 21st, 1910. R. Samuel.

Our dear Brother Samuel’s endeavours to take the Gospel to the Irulars have always called forth my sympathy and interest. It appears to me that the time is ripe for a definite move forward. I was with him and Evangelist Michael yesterday visiting the localities near Kullar where the Irulars from western villages are now settling for work.

We saw many of these poor people and learnt from them that they are now very desirous of having their children taught and of hearing the Gospel themselves. I can very heartily commend Samuel’s plan of getting a plot of land upon which the Irulars can settle and a school be erected. But I see that it will need a sum of Rs. 400 at least and possibly more because of the high prices
demanded by the owners of land near Kullar. It seems to me a far wiser plan to take advantage of the fact that the Irulars are now coming so freely to Kullar and to open the work there, rather than to try to go on with the work away at Gapaneri where the work was first started. That village is so very difficult of access that it becomes necessary to spend some nights there, and thus the workers are exposed to the deadly malaria; but at Kullar the workers need not stay during the night, and this is a very great advantage. No natives, except the Irulars, stay the night in these fever-haunted spots. I have urged these brethren to make another effort to find a suitable piece of land at a reasonable price and I trust the Lord's people who know of this effort will back it up with their prayers and support.

T. H. MAYNARD,
Grays, Coonoor.

N.B.—This work was commenced in simple dependence upon God and we still maintain the same position. Our purpose is to lead the Irulars and other dark tribes into the light of the Gospel.

Money is now required to buy a plot of land and put up a suitable house and school room.

Friends desiring to have fellowship with us in the work may send their gifts to

R. SAMUEL,
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