Abstract
Irular tribes are one of the second largest groups of Tamil Nadu after the Badgas. They are situated at the base of the western ghat. In the family of the tribes in this region, male members exercise dominant authority over the family members while women occupy a subordinate position. Wedding ceremonies vary from one tribe to the other. By and large all these tribes permit the wedding at an early age for the principal reason that the source of happiness consists of the solace of a domestic life. But many of the rites and formalities are similar among the tribes. The life of these tribes revolves around the pastoral and agrarian economy. No fundamental innovations were introduced in the agricultural work by them inspite of advancement in science and technology of the present day. Blind faith, absence of education and lack of contact with the rest of the society seem to be the reasons for the unchanging belief and practices. Irulas culture is one of the different ways. They are considered marriage function is not an important ritual in the community. But death ceremonies are considered is an important ritual in this community. This paper focuses on customs and culture of the Irula tribes of Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu.

I. INTRODUCTION
According to Census 2011, India has a population of 1.21 billion. More than 800 million Indians live in rural areas and 400 million live in urban areas. Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute 8.6 percent of the country’s population. Scheduled Tribes in India are Adivasis with 622 Adivasi Communities still speaking 325 Languages, living in 645 Districts in...
105295 Villages. Over 57% of them are living out of Forest and less than 40% are still in Forest areas. Tribes are distributed all over India, viz. Central zone, Western zone, North Eastern zones, Southern zone and Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands but mostly concentrated in Central, Eastern and North-Eastern India. About 75 Tribal groups in India are PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups). Their primitive traits, geographical isolation, distinct culture with traditions, language, shy of contact with community at large are causes for economical backwardness.

2. PROFILE OF THE DISTRICTS
The study was undertaken in Coimbatore district. Coimbatore District is situated in the East of Tamil Nadu. It is one of the small districts of Tamil Nadu. The district has an area of 4723 sq.kms of the state’s geographical area, with a scheduled tribe population of 28342 as per the 2011 census.

3. TERM OF TRIBES
The tribal people constitute 8 percent of the total population of India. The term “tribe” means, a group of people who live at a particular place from time immemorial. Anthropologically the tribe is a system of social organization which includes several local groups- villages, districts on lineage and normally includes a common territory, a common language and a common culture, a common name, political system, simple economy, religion and belief, primitive law and own education system (India tribal belt, en.Wikipedia.org).

4. HISTORY OF IRULA TRIBES
The Irula inhabit the northern districts of Tamil Nadu, a state in north eastern India. Located not far from the city of Madras, they live in a tropical area subject to monsoon rains. Their language, Irula, is related to Tamil and Kannada, which are southern Dravidian languages. In the Tamil language, 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.

5. CUSTOMS AND CULTURE OF IRULA TRIBES

5.1 Dress Code
The tribal men wear cotton dhoti and shirts, women wear saree with blouse and adult women wear sarees only without blouse. Adolescent girls residing in the tribal schools wear salwars and half sarees. Middle age women wear nighties in the full time.

5.2 Puberty
When a girl attains puberty, she is confined to a seclusion hut for seven days, where she is assisted by a few girls of her settlement who have not yet attained puberty. Every day, the girl is given bath after applying turmeric paste and coconut oil on the body. After the
seventh day, the girl is taken to the river, accompanied only by women. Once at the river, her bloody clothes will be burned, and the girl will be bathed. Then, if the girl’s family has enough money, a function will be held. In this function, the girl will be ritually bathed again. The girl’s mother’s sister’s daughter will drip oil from her left hand onto the back of the girl’s hand. Then the mother’s sister’s daughter with very large rings on her finger will tell the girl to bring her hand up and put the oil on top of her own head. When the girl tries to lift her hand, her mother’s sister’s daughter with the large rings on her right hand will slap the girl’s hand down. Then she will tell the girl to do it again, and again she will slap the girl’s hand down. This happens several times. All the members of the settlement assemble and give presents of money to her.

5.3 Marriage Ceremonies
Marriage is considered as a sacred and an important event in the life of any individual. Among the Irula tribes, men or women were allowed to marry according to their wish and marrying more than one man or woman was not considered as a crime. The marriage is fixed for girls within age limit of 12-18 whereas boy’s age is from 14-24. People from the same clan within the Irula tribe do not intermarry. Marriages are fixed within family by the parents. Dowry system (money given to the bride groom during the time of marriage by the bride’s parents) was common among the Irular tribes from the ancient times. Prize has to be bride’s house in the form of cash (Rs.1000 – 2000) or cattle. Marriage ceremony takes place in the front of the home or in village temple. The conformation of the marriage is called the groom tie the yellow rope of thali (marital necklace) along with two black beads as the bride. The married women were not allowed to participate in any of their community function if they were not wearing mangal sutras and along with the family members these women will be thrown out of their community and village. The customs and habits of the Irulas are very crude. Irulas are accepted child marriage. Divorces are not permitted for Irular tribes.

5.4 Delivery Pattern
Normally, delivery is considered to be the second birth for any woman. But as far as Irular tribes were considered, deliveries were conducted at home with the help of a local old lady who had attended the delivery. After the birth, the child is bathed in warm water. The mother confines herself to the seclusion hut for 10 days during which she takes hot water bath after applying a turmeric paste and coconut oil on the body. On the 10th day, she is removed to another seclusion hut, where she remains for 80 days during which she is prohibited from doing any manual work even in the kitchen. The Irular thus observes 91 days birth pollution. The naming ceremony is performed on that day. On the other hand, if the labor pain develops she would pour little amount of castor oil in her left palm and touch it with the right hand fingers, at the same time uttering some words of prayers. The old lady delivery attendant would drop the castor oil and they have a superstitious belief that if the oil drops continuously, the delivery would be very easy for the expectant mother. On the other side, if the oil drops down in separate drops, the delivery would be very difficult.
5.5 Death Ceremony
One’s death will be proclaimed to everyone. These communities followed the death ceremonies are the body will be kept in a typical tent on a bamboo platform in a posture where both the legs had to be drawn backwards and tied. The closest relatives bring water from the tap. 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 death is male and colour cloth in case of female. If the dead is a married man, seven persons from seven clan remove the thali (marital necklace) from his wife. If the husband dead, his wife is called widow. The women should not attend any functions and should not remarry.

6. CONCLUSION
In the family of the tribes in this region, male members exercise dominant authority over the family members while women occupy a subordinate position. Wedding ceremonies vary from one tribe to the other. By and large all these tribes permit the wedding at an early age for the principal reason that the source of happiness consists of the solace of a domestic life. But many of the rites and formalities are similar among the tribes. The life of these tribes revolves around the pastoral and agrarian economy. No fundamental innovations were introduced in the agricultural work by them inspite of advancement in science and technology of the present day. Blind faith, absence of education and lack of contact with the rest of the society seem to be the reasons for the unchanging belief and practices.

The tribes are also the citizens of India and hence the promotion of their welfare is of equal importance. Both the governments, individuals and service organizations must jointly formulate certain plans and programmes to improve the economic conditions of the tribes and bring them to a state of secured living. To realize this, the housing, educational, medical, and agricultural, trade, communication and banking facilities can be provided by the said agencies generously. The tribes want improvement without being disturbed. Their age old customs should be respected and their local rights should be protected. The government should consider their basic requirements and demands.

The tasks that can be imposed on our government and non-government organizations are as follows: The first is to preserve, strengthen and develop all that is best in the tribal society, culture, art and language. The tribes like to strengthen themselves from the contaminating influences of modern civilization and like to protect themselves not only economically, but culturally, from outside exploitation. The second is to protect the tribal economic rights. The government of India should help the tribal people to develop according to their own culture and tradition.

7. REFERENCES

**To Cite This Article**