



PRACTICES OF PERSONAL HYGIENE HABITS AMONG IRULA TRIBE IN DHARMAPURI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU – A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Maintaining personal cleanliness is vital for a variety of reasons, including personal, social, health, psychological, and lifestyle. Maintaining a high level of hygiene helps to avoid the emergence and spread of diseases, illnesses, and foul odors. Bathing, hand washing, tooth brushing, and wearing clean clothing all contribute to healthy personal hygiene. It also entails making safe and healthy choices when socializing with others. Good personal hygiene not only improves our appearance, but it is also essential for preventing infections and diseases and avoiding unpleasant odors. The present paper is an attempt to understand the practices of personal hygiene habits among the Irula tribe in Dharmapuri district and for the purpose of the study two village panchayats have been selected by multistage sampling method and a structured interview schedule has been used as tool of data collection. The results indicated that the Irula tribe in the study area is having less personal hygiene habits and these must be corrected through appropriate ways and means.

KEYWORDS : Practices, Personal Hygiene Habits and Irula Tribe

INTRODUCTION

Good personal hygiene activities such as brushing one's teeth, having regular showers, going for a head wash and using deodorant on a regular basis can help to increase one's personal beauty. Being clean and odorless allows others to get to know more easily. Being mindful about the hygiene requirements makes someone more aware of their appearance. Feeling physically good allows them to look at themselves with optimism. Skipping any hygiene activity for a day or more increases the risk of contracting a variety of disorders. When their hands are not cleansed with soap after using the restroom and they are directly involved in food preparation, their risk exposing others to a variety of infectious diseases. Additionally, avoiding showers increases the chance of illness. As a result, developing good personal hygiene can help reduce the likelihood of becoming ill.

The second largest tribe in Tamil Nadu is Irular, after the Malayali Tribe. Irulars were mainly concentrated in north-eastern part of Tamilnadu - Chengalpattu, Kanchipuram, Thiruvannamalai, Thiruvallur and Villupuram district. Beside Salem and Dharmapuri, few Irula found in Western Ghats of Nilgiri hills. The Irula tribe in Dharmapuri district is living in low socio-economic status (Senthilkumar and Gopalakrishnan, 2013) and now-a-days, the Irual tribe gave away their traditional religious practices and this was happened because of the close association with the plain people and such contact has been established in search of employment in the plain area (C.Gopalakrishnan and Senthilkumar, 2016). Similarly, Senthilkumar and Gopalakrishnan (2020) found that the Irular in Dharmapuri district in particular women facing problems in their daily life, like family problems, educational problems, employment problems and financial problems and these problems forced them to migrate to other places from their native places. The present study is an attempt to understand the practices of personal hygiene among Irual Tribe in Dharmapuri district of Tamil Nadu.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Dharmapuri district consist of eight taluk and from these eight taluks the researcher selected two taluks i.e., Pennagaram and Pappireddipatti, through randomly. The Pennagaram Taluk consists of 23 village panchayats and the Pappireddipatti Taluk consists of 19 village panchayats. From the 23 village panchayats of Pennagaram taluk, Irula tribes living in 10 village panchayats. Out of 19 village panchayats of Pappireddipatti taluk, Irula tribes living in 8 village

panchayats. All the Irula hamlets of Pennagaram taluk are located in the hill area whereas all the Irula hamlets of Pappireddipatti taluk are located in the plain area. From the 10 village panchayats in Pennagaram taluk, one village panchayat i.e. 'Vattuvanahalli' selected through lottery method. Out of 8 village panchayats in Pappireddipatti taluk, one village panchayat i.e. 'Irulapatti' selected through lottery method. The 'Vattuvanahalli' village panchayat have 570 households and the 'Irulapatti' village panchayat have 550 households as per 2011 census. Out of 570 households in 'Vattuvanahalli' village panchayat, 127 households are belonging to Irulas and out of 550 households in 'Irulapatti' village panchayat, 138 households are belonging to Irulas. All the 127 households in Vattuvanahalli and 138 households in Irulapatti have considered as sampling unit for the present study. It means that one respondent from each household in Vattuvanahalli and Irulapatti has selected for the study. Thus total sample size is 265 respondents. An interview schedule is used as a tool of data collection. The interview schedule consists of socio-economic profile, personal hygienic habits. The collected data have been analysed with the help frequency table, percentile score, mean score and standard deviation.

RESULTS

Among the total respondents, nearly one-third of the respondents (29.43 %) are belonging to the age group of 31-40 years, 27.92 per cent come from the age group of 21-30 years, 24.53 per cent hail from the age group of 41-50 years, around one tenth (10.57 %) come from the age group of 51-60 years and the remaining 7.55 per cent belongs to age group of 61 years and above. As far as the sex of the respondents is concerned, nearly three-fifth of the respondents (56.6 %) are male and the remaining two-fifth (43.4 %) are female.

With regard to educational status of the respondents, more than two-fifth of the proportion of the respondents (43.02 %) are illiterates, 25.28 per cent have primary level education, 15.85 per cent have middle school education, 10.19 per cent have completed high school level education, 4.15 per cent have completed higher secondary education and remaining 1.51 per cent have college-level education.

As far as the occupation of the respondents is concerned, around one fourth (24.15 %) working as agricultural coolie, 16.23 per cent involved in the livestock management, more than one-tenth (12.08 %) engage in construction work, 8.67 per cent of the respondents are housewives, 7.55 per cent of the

respondents are working as daily wage labourers in poultry farms, and remaining are involving in bricks making, gathering forest products, working as priest in the temple, working in private concerns, working in a government sector as well as mat vendors.

While considering the respondents' family monthly income concerned, nearly one-third proportion of the respondents' (31.70 %) family earn between Rs.10,001 – Rs.15,000 per month, 29.06 per cent of the respondents' family monthly income is less than Rs.5,000, 22.64 per cent of the families get between Rs.5,001 and Rs.10,000 per month and remaining 16.60 per cent of the respondents' family obtains more than Rs.15,000 per month.

As far as applying oil and combing hair is concerned, out of 265 respondents, of them 67 respondents are applying hair oil and combing hair and remaining 198 respondents are not applying hair oil and combing hair on daily basis. Of the total, 25.28 per cent are applying hair oil and rest of 74.72 per cent are not applying hair oil. Among the plain area respondents, 61.59 per cent are applying hair oil and combing hair and among the hill area respondents, 27.56 per cent are applying hair oil and combing hair on every day.

While considering the habit of taking bath on daily, out of total 265 respondents, 151 respondents are taking bath daily while 114 respondents are not taking bath daily. It is clear that 56.98% are taking bath while 43.02% are not taking bath daily. It is evident that in plain areas have more basic amenities than hill areas and it is reflected in the responses of the respondents and it means that 79.71 per cent of the plain area respondents are having the habit of taking bath daily and in the case of hill area respondents only 32.28 per cent are taking bath daily.

From the responses of the respondents' on their knowledge on cutting nails, it is clear that out of 265 respondents, half of the respondents (53.58%) gained knowledge about the importance of cutting nails. Among the plain area respondents, 65.22 per cent aware about the importance of cutting nails and among the hill area respondents, 40.94 per cent aware about the importance of cutting nails. On the other hand, half of the study population are found to be not aware of the importance of cutting nails with respect to personal hygiene and health of an individual as well as family. Aging and illiteracy is also found to be major cause for not aware of the importance of cutting nails. Few respondents expressed that they have the habit of nail biting. They have also expressed that though the habit of nail biting is not good for health, they are still involved in biting nails while they are tensed and or during economic crisis.

With regard to changing clothes daily, out of 265 respondents, 47.16 per cent of them change their clothes daily and the remaining 52.84 per cent of respondents do not change clothes daily. Among the plain area respondents, 50.72 per cent change their clothes daily and among the hill area respondents, 43.31 per cent change their clothes daily. It is obvious that personal hygiene is observed by little more than half of the respondents that few of the respondents have the habit of changing clothes daily even though they do not take bath regularly.

As far as wearing slippers, 71.69 per cent of the respondents are aware of the importance of wearing slippers and they are found to be using slippers regularly. The remaining 28.31 per cent of the respondents are not wearing slippers. In the plain area 76.09 per cent of the respondents aware about such importance and in the hill area such importance is mentioned by 66.93 per cent of the respondents.

CONCLUSION

For the past five decades, the Irular has been dealing with a

number of socio economic issues. Many families in Irula face poverty, a lack of work prospects and inadequate healthcare facilities. Added to this, under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, the Indian government outlawed the export of snake skins in 1976. As a result, the Irula tribe lost a significant source of money, their professional lives was impacted and they were compelled to work as "coolies" in the agriculture and other informal sectors. Their socio-economic living conditions have been marked by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and lack of social and economic security. They struggle hard for their bare necessities. Since most of them are illiterate they have not been able to come out of pathetic living conditions. Overall the living conditions of Irulars are unstable and pitiable. These issues are also reflected in their practices of personal hygiene. A considerable proportion of the Irula tribe respondents don't follow the personal practices of combing and applying oil to their hair, cutting nails in regular manner, taking bath daily, changing clothes regularly and wearing slippers and these must be corrected through appropriate ways and means like conduct awareness programme in the school as well as in the public domain, street play, puppet show and the like. In this regard, Senthilkumar and Gobalakrishnan (2016) mentioned that the socio-cultural profiles of the Irular community are very unique in nature and that should be preserved. This preservation is also seem to be good when the Irula tribe is used to follow good personal hygiene practices in their daily life.

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