



This (simplified) stemma is based on linguistic considerations as well as on the analysis of mythologies and reflections of the pertinent social organization. Hence it should not be regarded as a simple copy of the Neogrammarian "Stammbaum" symbol.

The creativity of Irula-speaking communities finds expression mostly in music, songs, dance, and, above all, verbal art. They have a wealth of oral traditions characteristic of most pre-literate cultures. Story-telling, oral rendering of myths, legends, genealogies, riddles, proverbs, and sayings are still very much alive in all Irula communities.¹

2.

In the myths and stories various animals play often important roles. Among the animals one encounters most frequently jackals and foxes, tigers, elephants, buffaloes, crocodiles, and snakes. One of the most important animal occurring in Irula lore is the cat.

Two kinds of cats appear as actants in Irula narrative art, the domestic cat and the wild cat. Of the two the domestic cat, presented as a shrewd beast, occurs in short narratives and anecdotes, whereas the almost mysterious wild cat has a most important function and plays a most important role in Irula mythology.

2.1

Domestic cat (*Felis catus*), Irula *pū:ne* (DEDR 4355), is considered clever and clean. The following story in my corpus explains why cats bury their excreta: The tiger had no steady hygienic practice and did not, like the cat, hide its excrements. Even otherwise the cat was much more accomplished.

1 For the Irulas and their language in general, cf. Zvelebil 1981; 1973; 1979; 1982; Burrow and Emeneau 1984 [DEDR].

The tiger came to the cat to learn, and the cat, considered the tiger's elder brother (*aṇṇa*), taught the tiger how to crawl, to catch a prey, to climb a tree. While the cat was teaching the tiger how to climb a tree it did not show him, however, how to climb down. The tiger, sitting up in the tree and unable to get down, warned the cat that he would take his revenge: he would watch it carefully and trace it with the help of its excreta (*pi:*), get somehow down, and ultimately eat it (*tindiruge*). Therefore the cat covers its excrements with earth. The tiger in the story fell down from the tree and broke its neck.²

In agreement with the other Irula stories the tiger is presented here as a stupid and uncivilized animal. In other Dravidian folk-tales this is also usually the case. M. B. Emeneau's data show the tiger in Kota, Toda, and Coorg stories to be a stupid creature. My Indian assistant, well-versed in Nilgiri folklore, J. D. Rajiah, told me that the story of the tiger and the cat was current among the Kuṛumbas, too.

2.2

Wild cat is probably the most important animal in traditional Irula sacred lore since, according to a well-known Mele Nāḍu Irula creation-cum-ancestor myth, the first pair of Irulas were created from wild cats by gods Ra:mā and Si:de (Rāma and Sītā).

This lovely beast, usually designated as jungle cat (*Felis chaus* Guldenstaedt; cf. Prater 1971: 75 f.), whose colour ranges from grizzled fawn to rich darkish brown with black stripes on the legs and near the tail, likes lower marshy ground with plenty of cover; hence it is also called swamp cat. Its ears have short black tufts somewhat like those of the lynx or caracal. It is of relatively large proportions.³ Jungle cat is called *bo:kkā*, *bo:kka*, *bo:kke* in Irula.⁴ My Ūrālī Irula informants main-

2 Told by Rāyappan, Ūrālī Irula, Gundri, on 1. 3. 1978.

3 I caught a glimpse of the Nilgiri wild cat on a memorable day (February 15, 1978) prowling in grassy, swampy land at the foot of the Rangaswamy Peak. I was surprised by its relatively large size and lovely colour.

4 Alternative forms *bo:ka*, *po:ka*, *po:ke*, cf. Ālu Kuṛumba *bo:ka*, Pālu Kuṛumba *pōkkānu*, which is to be connected with DEDR 4106 Tamil *pākkāṇ*, Malayalam *pōkkān*, Pengo *boyka* "wild cat." When I asked repeatedly my Irula informants for a gloss on this word, they inevitably came up with *co:le pū:ne*, lit. "jungle cat." This may be compared with the Ālu Kuṛumba *có:le-kōtti* "Wildkatze, Dschungelkatze" (Kapp) and Badagu *ka:ḍu kōtti* (see Hockings 1988: 685).