

Evolving Iraya Tribe: The Changing Perspective, Culture and Environment

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Abstract

Mangyan is the collective name for the eight indigenous groups living in Mindoro, each with its own name, language, and set of customs which includes: Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Tau-buid, Bangon, Buhid, Hanunuo, and Ratagnon. In this study, the Perspective of Iraya Tribe on their Changing Culture was assessed using phenomenological approach. The researcher utilizes the in-person interview to gather data intended for this study. Eight people participated in the study including Mayor, Police, pastor, residents of the tribe and the informant from the government of Mamburao. The three (3) central themes identified are: 1) The Needs and Situation of the Tribe, 2) Adaptation to the changing Environment and Perspectives; and lastly 3) Dying Traditions due to Influence of Education and Religion. The needs and the emerging situation of Indigenous People (Mangyan, Iraya tribe) are quite alarming. Even though we have IPRA but the focus of the law does not fully support the society. People need to adopt to the environment in order to survive even at the cost of their own identity and independence. The IPED Curriculum is not fully monitored by the Department of Education. The main objective that is to preserve the culture of the IP was not met.

Keywords: Mangyan (Iraya Tribe), Changing Culture, Education, Religion, IPRA and IPED

Introduction

Mangyans

The eight indigenous tribes of Mindoro have known no other home since prehistory, although their ancestors probably migrated from Indonesia. The seventh-largest island in the Philippines, Mindoro is part of the MIMAROPA Region and is divided into two provinces, Oriental Mindoro and Occidental Mindoro (Ethnic Groups of the Philippines, 2019). Mangyan is the collective name for the eight indigenous groups living in Mindoro, each with its own name, language, and set of customs which includes: Iraya, Alangan, Tadyawan, Tau-buid, Bangon, Buhid, Hanunuo, and Ratagnon. There are around 300 million indigenous peoples in the world. In the Philippines, of the projected population of 94 million in 2010, about 15% belong to indigenous groups (Mangyan Heritage Center (MHC, 2019).

Mindoro is the seventh largest island in the Philippines, with an area of 10,224 square kilometers and two provinces – Oriental and Occidental. Of the total population of one million, the indigenous population is estimated at 100,000.

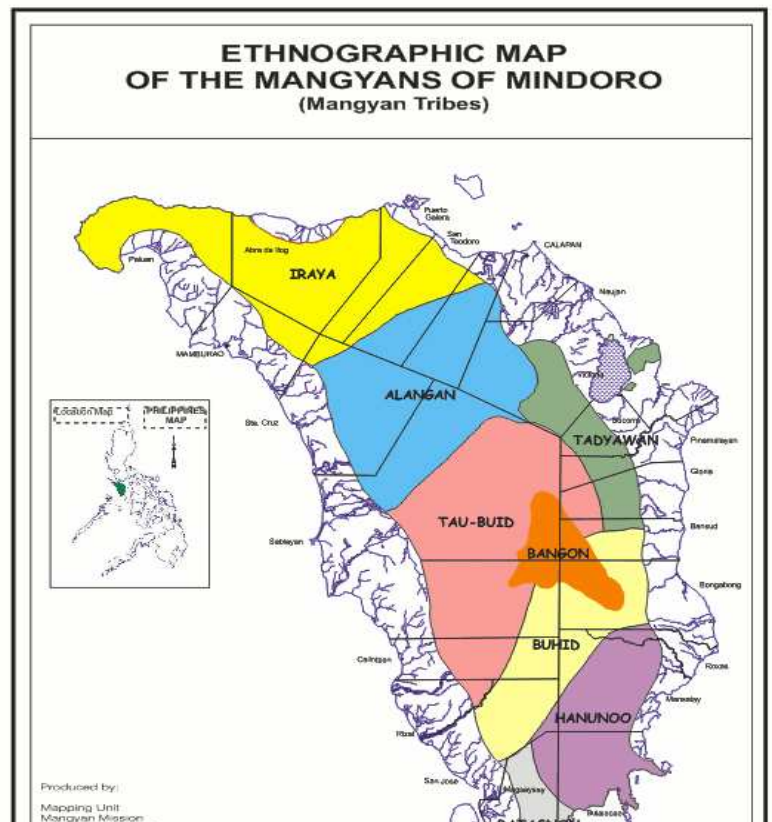


Figure 1. Map showing location of Mangyan groups on Mindoro (Ethnographic map of Mindoro) Source: <http://www.mangyan.org/book/export/html/60> retrieved on April 6, 2019

Iraya

The Iraya Mangyans live in the municipalities of Puerto Galera, San Teodoro and Baco in Oriental Mindoro but most are in Occidental Mindoro, particularly in the municipalities of Abra de Ilog, Paluan, Mamburao and Santa Cruz. Estel (1952) described the Iraya as having curly or deep wavy hair and dark skin but not as dark as that of the Negrito.

During ancient times, the Iraya traditional attire was made of dry tree bark, pounded to make it flat and soft. The women usually wore a blouse and a skirt and the men wore g-strings made of cloth. Today, however, the Iraya are dressed just like the lowland people. Ready-to-wear clothes are easier to find than their traditional costume (Uyan, 2002).

According to the report of Ethnic Group of the Philippines (2019), The Irayas' are also skilled in nito-weaving. Handicrafts such as jars, trays, plates and cups of different sizes and design are being marketed to the lowlanders. They subsist on rice, banana, sweet potato, and other root crops. The Iraya Mangyans live in Occidental Mindoro, mainly in the towns of Abra de Ilog, Mamburao, and Paluan. Some populations of Iraya are also found in the Oriental Mindoro towns of Puerto Galera, San Teodoro, and Baco. The Iraya are usually not concentrated in just one specific area; they live in various barangays* of a municipality. Their population in Puerto Galera, northwest Mindoro, is a typical example. Barangay Baclayán, which is about a one-hour walk from Santo Niño, has around 600 Iraya. The barangay has a



An Iraya-Mangyan family
[Source: Mangyan Mission] retrieved
on April 6, 2019,
<http://www.mangyan.org/book/export/html/60>

health clinic and a school, and a very active community. Other barangays in Puerto Galera have substantial populations of Iraya: Sitio Talipanan Barangay Aninuán, located about two kilometers from San Isidro (White Beach) and Anilao, also has several Iraya residents. Other small pockets of Iraya are found along the Puerto Galera-Calipan road. The diet of the Iraya consists mostly of rice, banana, beans, papaya, corn, squash, sweet potato, and other root crops. Traditionally, the Mangyan are animists and are known to be superstitious. Today, however, many Iraya are Roman Catholic, Evangelical Christian, and Iglesia ni Cristo, which is attracting a growing number of converts from other faiths. Many Iraya in the Puerto Galera area come down from the mountains and join the town's Christmas season festivities. They sell their handicrafts and trade with the other locals for food and goods. The Iraya language is an Austronesian language belonging to the northern Mindoro group. The known dialects of Iraya are Abra-de-Ilog, Alag-Bako, Pagbahan, Palauan-Calavite, Pambuhan, and Santa Cruz. Each dialect is distinct, but the basic vocabulary and grammar of everyday speech are the same. Tagalog words are also used by the Irayas living in the border areas between the foothills. Even though there remains a healthy number of Iraya speakers to this day, certain alarming developments could jeopardize the future of the language in some parts of Mindoro. A good example are the Irayas of Baclayán. Many of the youth can only muster a smattering of Iraya, as Tagalog is slowly replacing their native language. And few show interest in preserving their language, as perhaps it is no longer useful to them.

Culture

Ledesma (2016) of Philippine Daily Inquirer described Mangyans as “peace-Loving people. They enjoyed the wisdom of innocence and the courage of strong men. And while

their customs differed, they lived in gentle harmony and never had tribal wars. Their existence was first documented by a Spanish historian in 1571. Originally the only inhabitants of Mindoro, they believed in animism and good spirits, revered shamans and healers, and used esoteric herbal cures. As civilization closed in on them, they moved to isolated mountain tops in order to protect their survival, their lifestyle and their dignity.

Quint Delgado Fansler, a young idealist who was once with Jesuit Volunteers Philippines, says, “Their intrinsic values of honesty, generosity and hospitality exemplify the best of who we are. Our acceptance of them gives us a broader understanding of ourselves as a country, a more open patriotism.” Those lines justify what kind of culture we have as Filipinos. Truly we should be proud of.

20th Century Mangyan

To continually support and monitor the progress of Mangyans, Mangyan Heritage Center (MCH) was founded in 2000 in Calapan, Mindoro. Emily Catapang, the appointed executive director and a culture worker from Tuguegarao, was in-charge of this research center with its library, archives and traveling exhibitions.

According to Catapang (2016), “Family togetherness is deeply valued. After the initial harvest of rice and corn, they wait to be complete before the first meal is served. “Elders settle every dispute and in many tribes, elections are held with the use of leaves. For example, if a candidate is represented by mango leaves, his voters bring mango leaves to the general assembly. Until a few years ago, before electricity and TV, even petty crimes were rare. “However, changes are happening. Now birth certificates are issued, while as recent as a generation ago, age was calculated by the number of harvests since one’s birth. Secondary schools teach Mangyan script and the native language, as well as Tagalog and English. Clearly

there is progress, but a sweet contentment is also disappearing.” Mangyans have been dancing with the winds of happiness and ease for hundreds of years. Today, one questions whether life seen through the lens of materialism is, in fact, progress.

Fansler says, “Culture changes. Heritage does not. The significance of Mangyan life is that it represents a living pre-Hispanic culture.” In this research, let’s try to look through changes that generates a new picture of Mangyans (Iraya Tribe). How changing time does affects the peace-loving culture and the heritage of indigenous people.

Research Questions

1. What are the needs and situations of the Iraya Tribe of Mangyan group of Indigenous people based from their living experiences?
2. How do they adopt in the changing perspective of the world in terms of lifestyle, technology and ways of living?
3. How does Education and Religion affects the traditions of Mangyan people specifically Iraya tribe?

Methods

Research Design

This study is qualitative in nature utilizing phenomenology. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a way of understanding and discovering the meaning of every individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The purpose of the phenomenological approach was to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. In the human sphere this normally translated into gathering ‘deep’ information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative

methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s). Phenomenology was concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, 'bracketing' taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving. This research utilizes phenomenology in order to understand the lived experiences of the participants of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Locale of the Study

The Municipality of Mamburao is located on the level of the coastal bank of Mamburao River and in the lower part of the mountains. Mamburao have 15 Barangays with an approximate land area of 22,950 hectares. Based on the census conducted in the year of 2007 there are recorded entire residents of 34,487 (<http://mamburao.webtogo.com.ph/about.do>). Almost 10 % or 100,000 of the population of the province of Mindoro was composed of Mangyans that are divided in 8 different indigenous group. (http://www.delahyde.com/lubang/pagesl/Mangyan_Village.html).

Population of the Study

The study used purposive sampling method using the following criteria: (1) The participants of the study belong to the Mangyan Indigenous Group specifically in the Tribe of Iraya. (2) They were selected based on their information that they have and if they have the position in their tribe like the Mayor, Police, pastor, residents of the tribe and the informant from the government of Mamburao.

Data Gathering and Procedures

The researcher utilizes the in-person interview to gather data intended for this study. The researcher provides a semi-structured interview to the participants, audiotaped the

interview and transcribed it. The advantage of this interview is that the participants of the study may provide a historical information about the topic to be discussed and it gives an opportunity to the researcher to control the way of asking questions to the participants (Creswell, 2014).

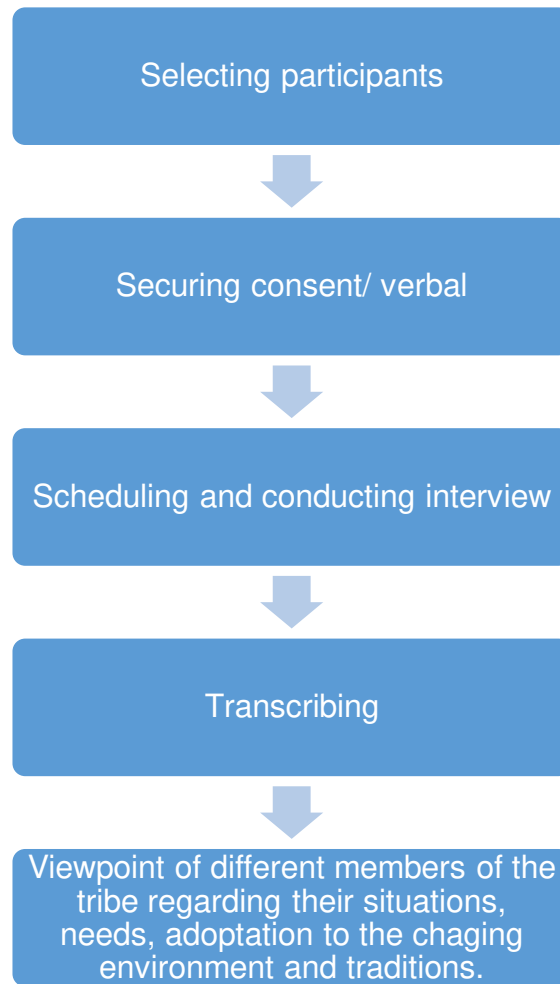


Figure 3. Flow of Data Gathering and Procedures

Data analysis

To come-up in the different meanings of the themes of this study. From the gathered interview, the researcher first organized and prepared the data for analysis. Second is the

manual coding of the data. Third, identifying and describing the themes of the study. Lastly, knowing the relationships of the themes and its interpretation. (Creswell, 2014)

Ethical consideration

Ethical principles were strictly observed in this study. Informed consent was secured prior to the conduct of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants who consented can withdraw at any time. The researcher provided a full disclosure information to participants, which helped them make an inform decision to participate, and that translated to an autonomous decision without coercion. The participants were provided with a copy of the signed consent form. For confidentiality and anonymity, the names of the participants were not being disclosed. Each participant was given code names. The participants were also be given freedom to withdraw as a participant of the study at any time.

Results and Discussion

Based from the interview and data gathered the following themes are generated from the different respondents belong to Iraya tribe.

The three (3) central themes identified are: 1) The Needs and Situation of the Tribe, 2) Adaptation to the changing Environment and Perspectives; and lastly 3) Dying Traditions due to Influence of Education and Religion.

Emerged Themes:

Theme 1 - The Needs and Situation of the Tribe

Based from the article wrote by Salamat (2013), If the lack of classrooms afflicts ordinary Filipino children, Mangyan children who live in far-flung areas frequently do not have formal schools at all, resulting in a far worse illiteracy incidence among the Mangyan. This, in turn, leads to the tribe's further marginalization. For many of the Mangyan, becoming literate and numerate is one burning aspiration. "I want to be able to read and write my own name, at least," said Dawseg.

a. Needs of the Tribe

To be able to see the current status of the people in the tribe makes them happy that there is possible actions that might happen after these. The respondent emphasize that: "Salamat at malalaman ninyo ang kalagayan naming at ang mga wikang iraya", "at Nakita nyo ang kalagayan namin ditto". "Kami nga'y nagpapasalamat para ang aming mga Gawain dito ay alam ninyo para malaman ninyong ay ganon pala ang mga iniingatan ninyo". "Ang mahalaga ay nagkaunawaan tayo ah at nalaman nyo ang tradisyon naming", 'sana ay nagkaintindihan tayo Kung ano ang kalagayan naming dine". This objective is directly parallel with Indigenous People's Right Act (IPRA), states that "to recognize and promote the rights of indigenous peoples within the framework of national unity and development". Section 28 of the IPRA states: "The State shall, through the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP), provide a complete, adequate and integrated system of education, relevant to the needs of the children and young people of indigenous communities." In order for them to get the education that would help them in today's society so they can better defend themselves from globalization and advancements in technology, they have to walk

great distances and sometimes cross rivers. Although education would help them cope, it can prove to be a danger to the preservation of their culture and practices. Mangyans oftentimes have to sacrifice one for the other. Some fear losing who they are when they mix with lowlanders, thus causing them to avoid lowlands and educations which results in illiteracy from lack of contact with the outside world (Mangyans: Inequality & Marginalization, March 22, 2016).

b. Emerging Situation of tribe

Since from the beginning Mangyans are present in the community. The Mangyans are the original settlers in Mindoro even before the Spaniards came. Their lands are taken from them and they were forced to move to the mountains and make their dwelling there. The result of centuries of oppression is being experienced until today (Mangyans: Inequality & Marginalization, March 22, 2016). Naturally they are being mixed up with other tribes which sometimes we mistakenly identified as Mangyan. *“dahil ang katutubo pag napahalo dyan na sa amin, yan ay ilokano at napahalo sa amin sasabihin yan ay katutubo, kaya kami dun kang sa wikang Mangyan”*. *“oo, ako ang nagging mayor na hindi nanggaling sa ibang lugar. Dito din ako inanakat dito din naubos ang mga ninuno kong mga lolo ko”*.

Theme 2 - Adaptation to the changing Environment and Perspectives

Some Mangyans are forced to adapt to the changing world and forsake their culture and their identity. Their rich culture is being lost bit by bit due to their need to conform to the way of the lowlanders to survive (Mangyans: Inequality & Marginalization, March 22, 2016).

a. Adapting the changing Environment

Before the Houses of Iraya people are made of bamboo and reeds and as a result it can be easily be destroyed in storms. To avoid it to happen again Sturdy houses made of hollow blocks are being used now by the people. In our previous discussion, we new that Iraya people are peace-loving people. It can be supported by the fact that in their community drinking alcohol is strictly prohibited and punishable by law. Currently, according to our respondent, *“ay naku poagka minsa’y nagkahabulan, bubugan na sila dyan, kaya ako andto nalang naka safety. Nasigawan ko na lang na “Ala, pag tagumpay kayo dyan sa paglalasing ay ala sige maganda yan!” , ”ay oo! Pagka yung pamilya nya ay lumapit sa akin. Pagka di na nya kaya ay. Pero pag naglipana dyan ay di nalapit sa akin ang pamilya nya ay hindi ako nakikialam, pamilya nya iyon eh!.* This adaptation from the lowlanders might be wrong but unfortunately it is already practice among tribe members. It is the same with the used of technology, the used of cellphones are now more visible than the traditional harana, *“Ayan na nga yung harana. Hindi ko pasasalpuhan kay bayo kong bulalatlitan, kabuhayan, kamatayan, karagutan ng katawan yang pungulungung sa libangan sa ilog ng banabaan sa lupa ng biniguan. Yan ang nanliligaw!” , “Meron pang ano yan, meron pa jan sa ano nila na kwan, parang dito sa atin din.. yung mga babaero din. Yan! May parusa din yan. Yan ay pinapalo, anong tawag don? Padadapain yan sa tabla. Halimbawa, singkwentang palo, hampas. Kahit isa lang ang naging babae nya. Kumbaga iyan ay kasalanan”.*

b. Change of Perspective

Women are married at a young age and are expected to bear many children for survival and because of traditions (Mangyans: Inequality & Marginalization,

March 22, 2016). But now, women are not bearing multiple number of children, in our interview with them, “isa lang anak naming kasi mahirap ang buhay”, that’s the answer of the couple. Before they used to believe that planting vegetables need to follow a particular belief system such as: “*pag kami ay nagtatanim nagsisimula kami ng martes. yan ay kung tawagin namin ay yan daw yung walang ipa. Gawa ng butil. Kung sa sakit naman ay kwan pagkuha naming ay martes din. Mahalaga yung martes*”. But later on they learned that planting crops only follows seasons in the Philippines. Remains are very important in our natives like, “*ay yung lolo pa nung lolo namin, iniwan sa bahay yung mga patay, binabalot lamang at tinataas tapos iiwanan na yung patay*”, “*yung kapitbahay naman isang maganak lang yan! Ngayon pag may namatay na isa so pag iniwan nila yung patay doon, lahat yan aalis na hahanap naman ng ibang bundok yan dun naman sila maninirahan*”. but later on due to limited places that they can live they already changed it. “*ay oo! Pero ngayong sibilisado na nagkarron na ng ipon ipon ng libingan, Yun yung dati, pero ngayon dahil medyo sibilisado na ay hindi na. katulad nito may baryuhan na sila, pag may namamatay ay dito pa rin sila pero nililibing nalang nila dun sa isang lugar*”.

Theme 3 - Dying Traditions due to Influence of Education and Religion

Education really matters in order to progress a community. Based from the article published by Business Mirror; Makati City (2019), Training The Mangyans in Naujan have an existing IP organization called Samahan ng mga Nagkakaisang Mangyan Alangan ng Mindoro Association. According to Sanama, previous efforts to help their community farm their land have been unsuccessful primarily due to the absence of technology and knowledge

transfer to the Mangyans. With the help of EastWest Seeds Inc., the mothers were educated and given hands-on training on natural farming technology.

a. Effects of Education to Traditions

The statement above support that education can teach us new things. But unfortunately these also lead to change their natural way of living. The following statements clearly shows that the language of the IP also change, *“Natututo pa po ba ang mga bata? Ng iraya?” Yung mga nag-aaral ngayon, tinuturo pa po yung iraya o yung tagalong na?”*, *“Tagalog na siguro”*, *“Tagalog na”*. the conservation of the natural dialects is fully replace by tagalog. The present constitution, which was written in 1987, in Article XIV Sec 1 states: “The State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels, and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all.” Furthermore, Sec 17 also reads: “The State shall recognize, respect, and protect the rights of indigenous cultural communities to preserve and develop their cultures, traditions, and institutions. It shall consider these rights in the formulation of national plans and policies”.

b. Effects of Religion to Traditions

Based from the article published by Servano (2014) on religious beleifs and practices of Mangyan explain that: Since the Mangyan are swidden farmers, their spiritual beliefs are related to their means of livelihood. Agricultural rites suggest the importance of farming and the belief in spiritual beings or forces that can influence a good harvest. But based from the statements, *“Dati kapag bilog ang buwan hindi sila nagtatanim dahil hindi suerte pero ngayon nagtatanim na sila*

para may makain”. “May mga lugar na hindi pwdeng puntahan. Natatakot ang tao dahil sabi ng matatanda may mga aswang”, “Dati hiwa-hiwalay ang tirahan, ngayon hindi na. may komunidad na kami”. “hindi na ako naghahanap ng ibang asawa, magagalit ang Diyos”. “Hindi na po kami naniniwala sa mga usog. Iba ang turo ng simbahan sa amin”. In some other Mangyan tribe according to Postma (1999), The Hanunuo are allowed to marry another man/woman if the first spouse gives his/her consent. The man may opt to build another house near the first family, but dining place is shared. This is directly against with Christian practices which Iraya tribe learned.

Synthesis

There are three main themes identified. First is **The needs and Situation of the Tribe**, the needs and the emerging situation of Indigenous People (Mangyan, Iraya tribe) are quite alarming. Even though we have IPRA but the focus of the law does not fully support the people. The Government often takes for granted indigenous people. Their rights often overlooked and get trampled upon. Priority should be given to the Mangyans living in poverty. Their children malnourished and dying. More programs should be made available to help them cope and adjust to the changing world around them, with losing their identity and culture (Mangyans: Inequality & Marginalization, March 22, 2016). The second theme described the **Adaptation to the changing Environment and Perspectives**. People need to adopt to the environment in order to survive even at the cost of their own identity and independence. The Government and

the community should make every effort to preserve their rich culture and instead use this uniqueness to promote their products (weaved baskets etc) and to attract tourists / locals who are willing to be exposed to this cultural diversity. Instead of shunning them, we should embrace their differences and learn from them, treat them as equals (Mangyans: Inequality & Marginalization, March 22, 2016). The last theme identified was **Dying Traditions due to Influence of Education and Religion**. DepEd Order No. 32 s. 2015 – Adopting the Indigenous Peoples Education Curriculum Framework emphasized that, The teaching-learning process shall be designed to maximize the ancestral domain and the activities of the community as relevant venues and settings for learning in combination with classroom-based sessions, fostering among learners the appreciation for and practice of lifelong learning while deepening their relationship with the ancestral domain.

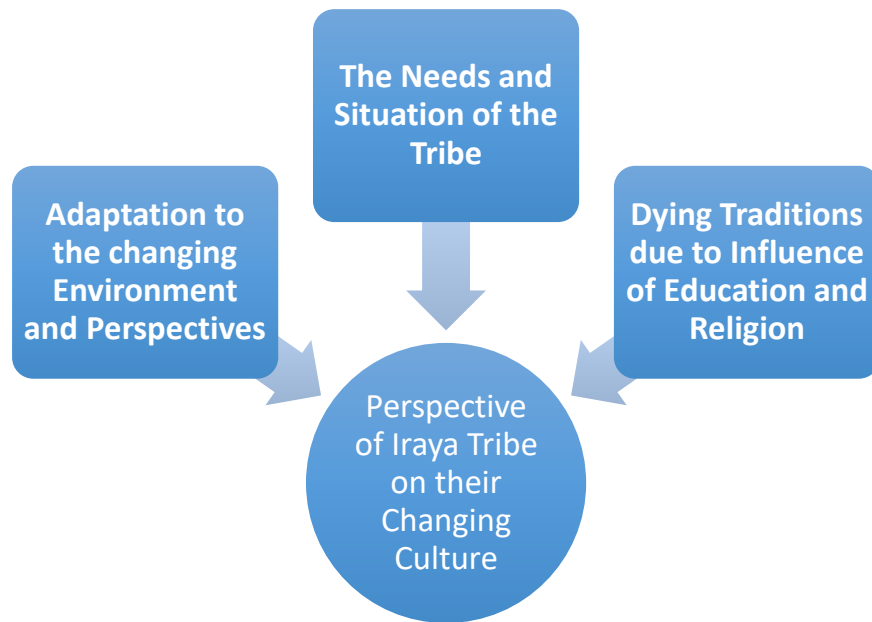


Figure 4. Perspective of Iraya Tribe on their Changing Culture

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