



SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONDITION OF THE KOTAS OF THE NILGIRIS

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INTRODUCTION:

The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve is home to indigenous communities (PTG'S) who have traditionally been dependent upon natural resources, utilizing and surviving on forest resources for a period of time. The Nilgiri is the home of the Adivasi Community called **Kotas**. The Kotas are settled only in seven settlements namely, Kollimalai (Kolmel), Kundah (Meenaad), Pudhu Kotagiri (Porgaad), Kil Kotagiri (Kinnaad), Sholur kokkal (Kurgoz), Tiruchigadi (Trisigari), Gudalur kokkal (Kalaas). The Kota settlements are known by the name "**KOKKAL**".

Ko(ku) means mountain, and they are the people of the mountain. They are found only in the Nilgiri district. They are known by the names Koter, kotharu

and Kothewars. The interesting feature of the Kotas is that, they are the artisans and musicians and provide services to the Badagas and Todas of Nilgiris. Their traditional seven villages are interspersed among the Toda and Badaga settlements throughout the Nilgiri plateau.

History of the Kotas

The kotas are known by several names like koter, kotharu, kothewars and kohatur. They are found only in Nilgiris district and distributed only in seven settlements.

"Kotas in the olden days were the only one of all the hill tribes who practiced the industrial arts and they were therefore essential almost to the very existence of the other tribes and castes of the Nilgiris" (Rev. Metz., 1864)

"The derivation of the term 'kota' is a clearly indicated, from the Gauda – Dravidian word Ko (Ku) mountain, and the kotas belong to the Gaudian branchdh" The kotar legend says, Kota, Toda and Kurumba were brothers, earliest inhabitants of the Nilgiris and they were



created from three drops of the Gods (Kambatrayan) perspiration. Their separation took place, when God asked them what they wanted. The kotas asked for talents of art. The Todas asked for buffaloes and became dairy men. Kurumbas asked power to destroy their enemies and became black magicians. To protect and help the Badgas from Tippu Sultan's oppressions, the kotas got themselves distributed in different geographic regions of the Nilgiris, and established in these 7 settlements

Kota Settlements

The kota settlements are basically accessible to the Badaga and Toda settlements. Currently there are seven kota settlement in the Nilgiris.

S.No	Kota Name	Common Name	No of House hold
1	Kolmel	Kollimalai	75
2	Trisigari	Trisigadi	90
3	Menaad	Kundah kotagiri	70
4	Porgaad	Pudhu kotagiri	75
5	Kinnaad	Kilkotagiri	35
6	Kurgoz	Sholur Kokkal	75
7	Kalaags	Gudalur	10

Sholur kokkal is known to be a very old village. Pudhu kotagiri is a relatively new settlement which underwent changes during the colonial period.

KERI SYSTEM

The kota village is called a kokkal, represent a linear type of dwelling with thirty to sixty houses, divided into two or three localities called 'Keris'. 'Keri' means a street, this is a special feature of the kokkal.

KOTA DIALECT

The Kota speak 'Kota dialect', an old dialect of Kannada mixed with Tamil words. Their language doesn't possess the written script.

KOTA TRADITIONAL GARMENT

The male dress consists of a shirt and a 'mundu' (lungi) and a common's dress consist of a single piece of white coarse cloth called 'kir'. Their traditional garment is known as 'Varad', a white bed-spread cloth, thrown around the body by men and women.

MARRIAGE SYSTEM

Monogamy is the common practice. Male dominating society, he is the



headmen of the house. Child marriages were common in those days. The marriageable age of girls is 12 and boys get married at the age of 16. The changes have come in the recent years to 21 for girls and men wait till 30 due to Government's intervention. A token of one Rupee 25 paise is to be given by the boy's parents to the girls for binding the alliance. No dowry system is in practise. Women are respected in the family and in the society. They get married among the cousins, no trace of inter caste marriages. This is highly objected. There is no sub caste among the kotas. There is only two 'Kottarams' namely "Mamman" and "Machan". The bride's parents can give articles to their daughter. The marriage takes place at their houses, in a very simple manner, in their traditional adivasi dresses, without much ornament. No music is played. The woman wear a black beed – weed lock after the marriage, all the relatives eat in one plate, showing a sense of true love and oneness.

JEWELLERY

Kota men and women wear 'kakk' earrings. The women wear 'kapu'. The jewellery is made of silver. They avoid making expensive and valuable items.

STAPLE FOOD – NON VEGETAIRANS

In the olden days, they ate Thinai, Kelvargu, Samai, Kanchi Kodumai and Keerai Vidai (which was rosted and mixed in honey and ate as break fast). They are non-vegetarian class. They don't use much spices like clove and cinnamon.

KOTA PRIEST

Kota temples have poojaris. The poojaris will only enter the Kota temple, once in a year. The temples don't have a door, as they don't posses any valuable treasures. No Idols are kept inside the tample. The priest should not drink buffalo milk. They are married but they will not mingle with the common people.

KOTA MUSIC:

Kota music is integral to their beliefs of survival and religion. According to a recent book on Kota music, instrumental



tunes of Kotas differentiate, mark and particularly constitute ritual occasions, each one characterized by broad stylistic features. There is a repertoire for dancing; a repertoire for funerals and a repertoire for 'god' and 'god tunes' along number a dozen. The longest and the most important one are called 'temple opening tunes'. They have an elaborate set of tunes for their rain-making ceremony; they believe that when they play it in their villages, combined with their unity and righteousness rain falls, crops grow, cattle multiply, children are born and the community thrives. Music for the Kotas serves as a conduit in the oral transmission of moral stories for their day to day life. The Kotas play four kinds of instruments. An oboe, a frame drum that is beaten with a pair of sticks, a barrel drum that is beaten with both the hands and a brass horn. All the instruments and drums for music are made by Kotas themselves, a sole exception being the semi-circular brass horn.

The dancing traditions of Kotas are very

vibrant including that of women. Women's dancing also auspiciously wind up Kota rituals and ceremonies. Kota men wear exotic and colorful dancing costumes. Kota mendancers in the past were always addressed by a special Badaga term. The tradition of Kotas providing music to Toda and Badaga ceremonies ceased by the 1950s and in a sense it ended the symbiotic relationships also that existed between these communities for ages.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF THE KOTA TRIBES

Kotas are Smiths and experts in industrial arts and crafts and practice smith work in their village smithy. They are the leading craftsman in iron, wood and clay. Being non-vegetarians, they also reared cows and other domestic animals besides their smith work. After getting their own cultivable lands and due to no demand for their implements and also because of disappearance of symbiotic relationship with other tribal communities and with Badagas, they



adapted mixed economic activities. The formal education made them to undertake smith work outside their settlements for money. They are now involving themselves in the promotion of Tourism.

S.N	ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES	PERCENT AGE
1	TRADITIONAL SMITH WORK(Wood/Pottery and iron smith)	12.67%
2	ANIMAL HUSBANDARY	11.56%
3	SELF CULTIVATION AGRICULTURE/HORTICULTURE	58.54%
4	MODERN EMPLOYMENT	16.20%
5	MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES	1.03%
	TOTAL	100.00

THE TRIBAL COUNCIL

Kota Tribal council, called as “KOOT”, maintains customary norms in the community. The kotar woman can share their grievances to the council by standing, but never allowed to sit along with men in equal status. Mostly the problems will be settled by the elders in the family itself, very rarely the cases will be taken to the ‘koot’ by women.

DEATH CEREMONY

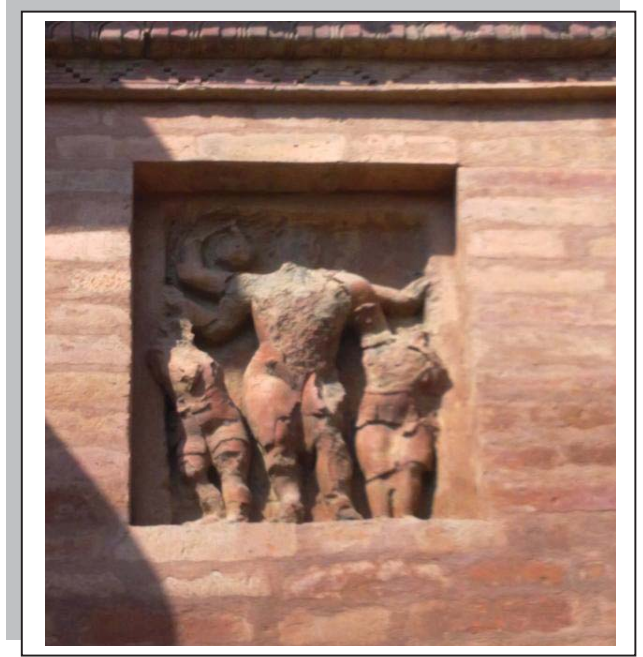
They cremate the dead and used to sacrifice a male buffalo at the funeral.

They burn the house hold articles used by women along with their body. In case of male members, their daily used items are to be burnt. Two days mourning will be observed by the kokkal. All the families contribute money and buy firewood and cremate. For two days no one will go for work. And they sing “Attil” (Story about the life of the dead soul).

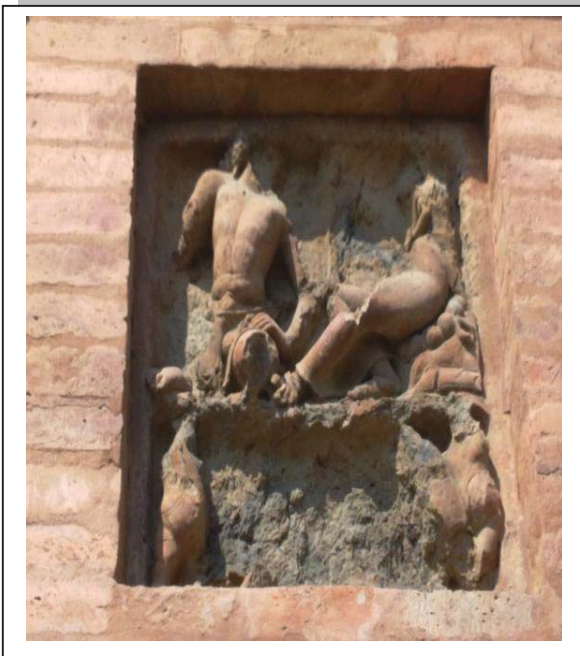
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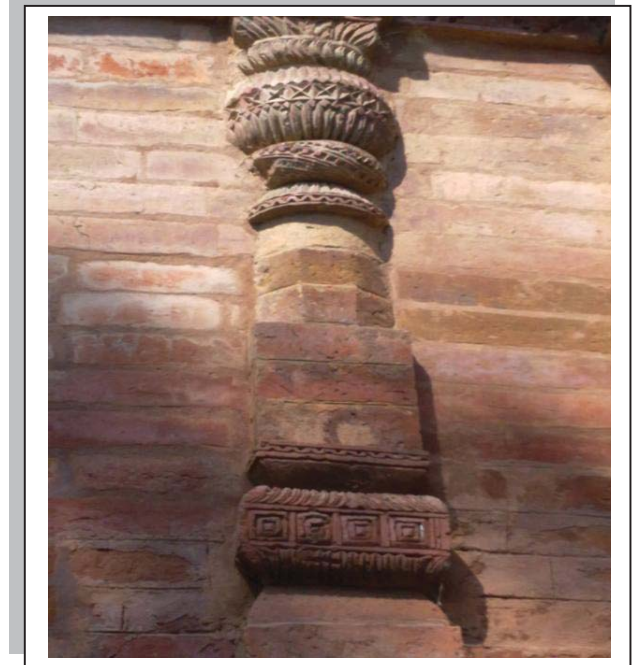
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