

Amazing Kota Tribes: A documentation of their Origin and Identity

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The tribes of South India's Nilgiri Hills were segregated from those living in the plains below for many generations. Any significant interactions with the Hindus of the lowlands were hindered by the temperature of the plateau and the steepness of the hills. As a result, the tribes created a social enclave that was near to Hindu culture geographically but not culturally. The Todas were pastoralists, the Badagas were farmers, the Kotas were craftsmen, the Kurumbas were food gatherers and sorcerers, and the Nilgiri people lived in economic and social harmony. Rev. Metz, critically states that, "Kotas in the olden days were the only one of the hill tribes who practiced the industrial arts and they were therefore essential almost to the very existence of the other tribes and casts of the Nilgiris" (Metuz186).

The English found the plateau approximately a century ago, and they saw it as a blessing as a refuge from the summer heat of the lowlands. The provincial government's seat was shortly relocated to the hills for six months each year after they quickly constructed a road through to the peak. Lowland Hindus and Mohammedans, servants, businessmen, and wanderers searching for work—men from different castes and regions—also arrived with the British officials and tourists. Thus, Hindu and European cultures that had invaded the Nilgiris had an effect on the locals. Depending on its own preferences and tendencies, each tribe adopted certain ideas from both sources while rejecting others. It is wise to think about the nature of cultural exchange in the region prior to the arrival of Europeans before trying to evaluate these borrowings. The amazing mystery is that it amounted to so little; there was some cultural exchange between the tribes. The four groups were linguistically and culturally distinct, despite their continuous and intimate contact with one another. Each of the other tribes' villages were and are all conveniently close to any settlement of one tribe. However, there are not many similarities between the four civilizations. There were only hazy analogues in Kota life for the intricate Toda rituals and social structure. While Badaga house and clothing are comparable to Kota attire, there are few other aspects of the two civilizations that are similar. Kota and Badaga both had admiration and respect for the Todas, but despite their high status, the others only adopted a small number of their less significant features. There are a number of explanations for why there was so little trait dispersion among these four groups, despite their close proximity. One difference amongst the civilizations is that they all had very different economic foundations. The buffalo herds were Toda's whole world. While Badaga life was preoccupied with the wellbeing of the crop, Kota faith and interest were focused on the smithy. Each society had a distinct area of interest, while the other groups had nothing to offer. The kind of social interaction may be more significant. Kurumbas are often summoned from their habitats in the woods to provide for Kotas and Badagas. Their magic-related services are essential. Kurumbas may visit their Kota clientele many times each week while carrying out their professional duties. However, if a Kurumba enters the hamlet, the news spreads quickly, and women and children flee for cover inside

their houses until the Kurumbas have disappeared. A Kurumba is seldom permitted within the boundaries of another tribe's dwelling, therefore all dealings between Kota and Kurumba take place outside the community.

In a similar fashion, Kota musicians are required to be present at all important Toda ceremonies; but, if the band gets too near to a dairy, the location becomes polluted and can only be resanctified by performing extensive purificatory procedures. This is the case even if the band is not playing. The same may be said of the relationships that exist between all of the tribes. Despite the high frequency of encounters, social interaction was limited to a predetermined roster of activities with very specific parameters. It was very forbidden for there to be any form of close contact, since it would open the door for members of one group to freely interact with members of another group. The issue of prestige symbolism presents a third obstacle to the process of intertribal spread. It is common practise to see distinctive characteristics of a tribal group as status symbols. Any effort by another organisation to replicate it is met with vehement opposition and resistance. For instance, Badagas are known to wear turbans but Kotas are not. When certain Kotas in the past started donning turbans, the Badagas thought that the Kotas were trying to elevate themselves above their own level. The Kota offenders were ambushed and beaten up by some of the Badagas, who also stole their headgear, which had the effect of preventing other Kota from learning this characteristic. This circumstance is representative of the situations that exist over the whole of India. Each and every caste and tribe has its own one-of-a-kind arrangement of customs, which together constitute a separate cultural compartment: Vargese opines that they have Hinduized some of their religious belief and practices, though the emphasis on traditional beliefs still dominates over those adopted.

Barriers against close ties and symbolic concerns of group status both act as impediments to the spread of information. All of the conditions that led to regular interaction in the Nilgiris region without resulting in acculturation continue to hold true. On the other hand, there have been a few significant adjustments made. During the time of the ancestors, any disagreements that arose within a tribe or between different tribes were brought before a council that was made up of the leaders of each tribe. The British administrator, and not the council, is currently the highest court of appeal at this time. Rapid transformations in the economy have recently become apparent. Potatoes are gradually replacing millet as the primary crop grown by the Badaga people because potatoes are more profitable. The Kotas' economic foundation is put at risk since the revenue they get in this manner might be used to purchase equipment that are imported.

Tribal members have been making the journey to the weekly market for the last half a century, during which time they have seen all kind of foreign items, traditions, and even motion pictures. Kotas' social system has grown in such a manner that, a "Keri" corresponds to a clan, and the members of ai itself has become a social grouping of kinsmen. The Kotta settlement is divided into keris, each of which is referred to as a ward. Keri members reside in a row of houses that are completely separate from one another. Since each Kota town contains between three and four keris, it's apparent that the arrangement of the keris

differentiates them from one another and makes it simple to distinguish them from one another. According to David Mandelbaum,

Each keri as the seat of a partineal clan, but it is apt to consider each settlement as a clan, independent of others. within a village, a kota man's keri is determined by birth irrespective of where he / she may live or change of residence. Thus, change does not alter one's allegiance to the 'Keri' to which he belongs by birth. usually a male members of a keri is related to all other male members of the same keri, as either father's father, brother or son. (Mandelbaum 20)

The Kota people have been more adaptable to changes in their environment than the Toda people, but they have not been as flexible as the Badaga people. They have not been as sensitive to Hindu manners as their neighbours who work in agriculture, despite the fact that they have not been so enmeshed in a single goal that they have become insensible to everything else. The Kota people and the Hindus who live in the lowlands are culturally and socially worlds apart. Their presence cannot be accepted by caste males due to the fact that they are blacksmiths, musicians, and carrion eaters; as a result, they have less opportunities than the Badagas have to socialise with people from the plains. Since the gap between Kota and lowlander is only bridged by a few tenuous contacts, the tribesmen have a greater reluctance to cross over into strange cultural territory and have less longing to identify with Hinduism than the Badagas do. This is in contrast to the Badagas, who have a greater desire to identify with Buddhism. They have been forced to make certain adaptations as a result of the partial disintegration of the old system of intertribal ties; nevertheless, these adjustments have not yet entailed any significant deviation from traditional indigenous practises. The decreasing return that they were getting from their crafts was compensated by an increase in the size of their ancient cultivations. They continue to engage in the customary trade of products and services with the Toda, Kurumba, and certain Badaga. Even to the untrained eye, it is possible to see the direct impact that European culture has had on Kota life. Axles from Chevrolet have taken over as the primary source of raw material for spades. The traditional thatched roofs and tribal togas are being replaced by tiled roofs and fitted jackets. However, they are just superficial replacements in and of themselves. Regardless matter where the metal comes from, the members of the tribe continue to work as blacksmiths, and the smithy continues to play a significant role in both the social and religious life of the community. The introduction of new crops has not led to a shift in perceptions about land ownership or the usufruct rights of families. Ancient ideas of a masculine manner, of the unity of siblings, and of the supernatural penalties are buried under the tiling and the clothes in the shop.

Kotas living in modern cities are urbanised, highly productive, diligent, and pious, and they have an innate desire to study and advance their culture. They are conscious of the rapid changes in their surroundings, have welcoming personalities, and have excellent habits. They do not have the practise of storing hides, eating carrion, or performing music at the funerals of members of other hill villages, despite what was previously said about them. Only the older people and priests make it a practise to let their hair and facial hair grow out, while

the younger people are just like any other urban youth. The names of the tribal people follow Tamil tradition in terms of both their pronunciation and the fact that they are named after their grandparents. This is one of the many ways in which the Tamil culture is reflected in the tribal people. Puchan, Belian, Mundan, Mayilan, Thethan, Munukalan, and others are examples of common names given to boys. Also prevalent is the name Kambattan or Kamattan, which derives from the name of their god, Kamattarayar. Many other variations of the names Mathi, Neechi, Puyyi, Kembi, Thalichi, Mangi, and Thavasi are used when referring to females. In most cases, the first male kid is given the name Kambattan (sometimes spelled Kamattan) after their deity, while the first female child is given the name Madi, which is a synonym for the goddess Kaligai. This name is avoided at Sholur because the name of the deity is not something that should be adopted by a mortal man.

Even though agriculture is the primary source of income for Kotas at the moment, they have shown themselves to be skilled craftsmen in fields like as blacksmithing, carpentry, pottery, and basket making. In early sources, “the Kota people are more often characterised as village craftsmen, particularly iron smiths of the hills” (Rivers 23), than as farmers. Ootacamund is a hill station town, and with its creation came the introduction of a market; hence, all agricultural instruments are now accessible in the market. Because of this, over time, the Kotas began to realise that their traditional employment was becoming less lucrative and shifted their focus to agricultural pursuits, which is their primary occupation to this day. They are up to date on a wide variety of cutting-edge agricultural practises, which is another evidence that this community puts in a lot of effort. The majority of the land owned by the Kotas is used for the cultivation of annual vegetable crops such as potato, cabbage, cauliflower, mustard, radish, raagi, little millet, wheat, onion, french bean, potato, tomato, tea, carrot, and coriander.

Their agriculture is dependent on the monsoons from both the southwest and the northeast, and only a very small portion of their land is irrigated. Rain is the primary source of water for their crops. Therefore, any inconsistency in the distribution of rain has a negative impact, not only on the crop but also on their economy. The lack of rainfall that has been seen over the last few years has led to a decline in the amount of land that is being used for the growing of vegetable crops. On the other hand, those who own property are becoming more interested in cultivating tea gardens. Once it is well-established, tea plant can tolerate longer periods of drought than annual vegetable crops can. In addition, the cultivation of tea is considered to be more lucrative than the production of vegetable crops since tea cultivation may provide money throughout the year until the plant dies. Due to the increasing destabilisation of the sloped hill regions, it is a challenge to support the efforts of the tribal people to develop their economy on the one hand, while on the other hand attempting to protect the environmental stability that has been achieved.

The fundamental aspects of life in Kota have not been significantly altered as a result of these developments. More noteworthy have been some less noticeable occurrences, the effects of which have caused a series of disruptions across the whole of the society. A single apparently harmless command issued by a British officer has the potential to radically upset the balance of power among the tribes. When the people of Kotagiri were given the order to

use latrines, it was the first step in a chain of circumstances that led to this result. It just so happened that the community was situated in a region that was known for its beautiful scenery and mild climate. When the English arrived and acquired property from the Kotas of Kotagiri and erected bungalows surrounding the hamlet. Everyone goes to the police station, the market, and the English hotels.

During the process of modernising tribal people, it is imperative that each and every one of their most cherished rituals and traditions be preserved. According to Nehru's well-reasoned viewpoint, "there are aspects of valuable tribal life that have to be preserved. Non-tribal people should strive to model themselves after the values possessed by the tribal people. It was his hope that they would not conform to the illegitimate standards of the so-called civilised world" (Koppar). To provide an example, there has been an increase in the number of "dowry weddings" among the rapidly expanding Gond tribal people of Maharashtra" (Chinai 3). This is being done so that they may "keep up" with their non-tribal counterparts. Nehru had a strong aversion to the idea of tribal people becoming clones of metropolitan civilization. He was of the opinion that they should be given the opportunity to cultivate their own culture and to make their own individual contribution to the overall cultural wealth of the nation. Therefore, the ultimate goal of tribal development should be to maintain, enhance, and promote everything that is finest in tribal society and culture. This should be the primary focus of tribal development.

The preservation of the skills and knowledge that have been passed down through generations of indigenous groups has received very little attention. It is important that the transmission of modern technology does not compromise the original culture and heritage of the people to whom it is being given. On the other hand, modern technology can be used to make the most of the local natural resources by combining them with the expertise of tribal people. This is because tribal people are the keepers of a lore and a store of rare skills.

In most cases, there will be at least one blacksmith working out of each village. However, due to the lack of a market for their products, the growing trend toward engaging in agricultural operations, and the tendency of educated young people to seek jobs in the government or in private managements on a permanent basis, only a small number of families are currently utilising their skills as a means of making a living in today's society. In addition to being buffalo and cow keepers, Kotas are also involved in cattle breeding. Because there are not enough grazing areas available, the revenue from this endeavour is lower. It is uncommon for them to work as agricultural labourers. The economy of Kota, on the other hand, is mostly dependent on agricultural goods, which are either sold directly in the fields or at Mettupalayam, which is the closest plains station. A significant proportion of members of the current generation are now working in a variety of governmental and quasi-governmental organisations.

It is clear that the Kota tribespeople who live in the Nilgiris are bright, diligent, and able to adjust to their ever-shifting environment with little difficulty. As was said previously, there are officials, instructors, and medical professionals working for a variety of organisations. Therefore, it is essential to improve their cultural practises, their knowledge of ethnobiology, and their social behaviour before all is gone. The Nilgiris are known as the

“Queen Hill Stations” because to the stunning natural beauty that can be seen there. The visitors are led around the lake, the tallest point ‘Do, the botanic garden, and ddabetta’ as well as to view the pitiful faces of the impoverished tribals (not just Kotas), who are barely dressed. The tribal people, in turn, might perhaps anticipate some kind of cure to their economic ailment now that they are being schooled in that manner. Dr. Rajammaj made these remarks while delivering the keynote address at the UGC National Seminar in February 1987 on the topic of “Nutritional Ecosystem among Tribes.” He stated that tribal people should not be treated as merely show pieces, and that more attention should be paid to all aspects of their way of life. It is important that the environmental, ecological, and cultural aspects be taken into account while planning for the health and socioeconomic status of indigenous peoples.

There is a pervasive viewpoint that a significant portion of the government’s welfare programmes for indigenous peoples do not have a tribal focus or perspective. At the national level, stereotypical tribal plans are being implemented, and there is no meaningful effort being made to alter these plans based on the requirements of the different tribal groups. Instead of the current system of having a national policy, it is possible to plan tribal welfare schemes in such a way that they should be specific, coincide with the occupation of the tribals, and the tribal community themselves can be made into the main partners. This would replace the current system of having a national policy. Long ago, “Jawaharlal Nehru issued the command that the members of the tribal communities themselves should be educated and taught to assume responsibility for the work of tribal uplift” (Ferreira n.pag).

In addition to designing tribal welfare programmes that are pertinent to the circumstances and requirements of the local community, the implementary machinery (workers) should have a mindset of social service, and the participation of tribe people must be increased. A variety of programmes aimed at improving the welfare of indigenous communities are now being carried out by state and central governments. Unfortunately, many of the indigenous communities are not aware of the principles behind such programmes or their benefits, and as a result, they are unable to fully use the benefits that are available to them. Education on how to participate in welfare programmes that provide the most advantages should be provided to tribal people. It is imperative that measures be implemented to ensure that money designated for tribal welfare do not expire. There have been a significant number of Large size Agricultural Multipurpose Co-operative Societies (LAMPS) established in the tribal regions of India. The purpose of these societies is to provide tribal members with production credit as well as consumption credit; to engage in the marketing of agricultural and minor forest products; and to distribute agricultural production requisites as well as consumer goods so that the tribals can access all of the available facilities through a single point of access. It is important to regularly assess the extent to which such companies have an effect on the way of life of the local tribal people as well as the economic and social growth of the surrounding regions. According to Pamela F. Reynolds, “both the pupils and the teachers in elementary schools should come from the same social background” (153). The adults in a society will have a stronger commitment to moulding the children who are a part of their own society, which is one of the benefits. In turn, those children’s children will learn from them and comprehend the principles they uphold. Utilizing the skills and zeal of

educated young people from native communities will be of assistance. However, in today's world, many of the educators working in tribal regions have neither an interest in teaching nor continue working in the same location. This is mostly because there is a lack of commitment and incentives. Primary Health Centres (PHC) in tribal regions must be able to operate efficiently with the appropriate facilities and enough staffing levels. Because the vast majority of India's tribal people are illiterate, it is essential that films on topics such as general cleanliness, health care, and family planning be shown on a regular basis in order to raise awareness about these issues.

It is a heartening sign that the Department of Forestry, Government of Tamil Nadu is making a concerted effort to gain the trust of the local population, whether it be the tribals or the fishermen of the coastal areas, and to involve them in the collection of forest produce, regeneration programmes on mangroves, raising of social forestry in wastelands, and so on. This is a positive step in the right direction. The Department of Forestry, which was formerly cut off from the rest of society's activities, has recently been deeply engaged in a variety of community endeavours. It is imperative that stringent steps be adopted to stop the illicit cutting of trees. It is imperative that forest rules be upheld at all costs. Employment opportunities at salaries suitable for tribal members may be found in activities such as logging, resource extraction, transportation, road construction, plantation work, cultural operations, and forest preservation. The disadvantaged tribal people who roam aimlessly around the forest might be taught to recognise and gather medicinal herbs. It should not merely be an increase in money that is the objective of forest management; rather, the goal of forest management should be the preservation and restoration of forests as well as the wellbeing of the people who live in and around the woods. The indigenous peoples need to have access to facilities that will allow them to cut grasses for fodder, collect deadwood for fire, gather rhizomes, roots, fruits, seeds, etc. for food, herbs for medicinal, and other minor forest products. The tribes in the area need to be seen as constituents of the ecology. It is possible to give them permission to keep watch over the woods and act as security guards. We are going to look at ecology largely from the perspective of humans since the environment is not a subject of "beautiful tigers and trees," but rather of the people who live in and around the woods.

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