Chapter 3

Socio-cultural aspect of the Kodavas
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Introduction

This chapter covers mythological, social, cultural, ritualistic, festive, religious aspects of the Kodavas as evidenced in their traditional clothing in the early twenty-first century. Data has been collected from Madikeri and Virajpete in Kodagu in the last quarter of 2014 and early 2015.

3.1. The origins of Kodagu

Kodagu or Coorg had three names in mythology – Brahmakshetra, Matsyadesha, and Krodadesha.

According to Rice, Kodagu got its first name from the Creator, Brahma, himself. While on pilgrimage in the Western Ghats (the Sahyadri), Brahma spotted a nelli (*Phyllanthus emblica*) tree, which gave him a fleeting glimpse of Lord Vishnu, the Preserver, with the conch, the discus and the club. Brahma worshipped Vishnu, pouring water from the Viraja River on the tree. (The Viraja River is beyond the Seven Seas that surround the world.) Therefore, the land where the Kaveri originates was called the Brahma Kshetra.

The second name, Matsyadesha, is from King Chandravarma, whose father was the ruler of Matsyadesha. The *Kaveri Purana* (chapters 11 – 14 of the *Skanda Purana*) is an early text that discusses the origins of the Kodavas. In the *Kaveri Purana*, Kodagu country was called Matsyadesha (*matsya* meaning fish, *desha* meaning country or nation). Matsyas were one of the Indo-Aryan tribes of Vedic India, inhabiting a place that roughly is the territory of Jaipur, in Rajasthan. In the early 6th century BCE, Matsya was one of the sixteen *mahajanapadas*, or great kingdoms, whose importance had dwindled
by the time of the Buddha. The *Mahabharata* mentions about seven Matsya kingdoms. In particular, the *Mahabharata* names a king Sahaja, who ruled both the Chedis and the Matsyas, implying that the ancient Matsyas belonged to the Chedi kingdom.

Kodagu’s ancient name as Matsyadesha could also be because Kodagu was ruled by kings, who were descendents of fishermen cum warriors from the Ganga River basin of North India. Siddhartha, king of Matsyadesha, had a son, Chandravarma, who during his travels, came to the Brahmagiri Mountain. Chandravarma meditated there on Goddess Parvati, and when she appeared before him, asked for three boons – the first being a kingdom of his own, the second, a Kshatriya wife who would begat his children, and third, a place in Heaven. The Goddess replied that due to his past karma, he was not entitled to children from a Kshatriya wife, and therefore, he could father children only through a Sudra wife. The Goddess herself presented him with a Sudra maiden, and prophesied that he would have eleven sons, who would be called *ugras* (fierce men). The *ugras* would be like kshatriyas in all respects, except that they would not be permitted access to the four Vedas, the six *angas*, and Vedic ritual. Chandravarma named Coorg, Matsyadesha after his father’s kingdom.

The third name comes from the *Puranas* that refer to Kodagu as ‘Krodadesa’, meaning the land (*desa*) of the people blessed by the Mother Goddess. Continuing from the previous story, Chandravarma’s Sudra wife bore him eleven sons (his Kshatriya wife was barren). His eleven sons married the hundred daughters of the King of Vidharbha born through his Sudra wives. Vidharbha Raya’s daughters had many many children. Each of Chandravarma’s sons had more than a hundred sons each, each boy having nails as strong as tusks of a wild boar. Food became scarce, and the sons went out to new territories, tore up the ground with their nails, levelled the slopes, and settled in the new territory. The dug up countryside looked like it was torn up by the Varaha or Kroda (boar avatar of Lord Vishnu), and thus gave the countryside the name Krodadesha. Another version for this is, of the ten avatars
of Vishnu, only the Varaha avatar (the boar) saved Mother Earth from within the ocean. After doing his cosmic work, Varaha ascended to heaven. During his ascent, his tusks fell on a land that was subsequently called Krodadesa. With the passage of time, Krodadesha was called Kodagu and its people, Kodavas; today the word Coorg or Kodagu serves the land and its people.

Another explanation is that the word ‘Kodagu’ is derived from the word ‘Kudu’, meaning ‘hilly place’, as Kodagu is situated on the Western Ghats. According to yet another explanation, ‘Kodagu’ comes from the word "Kodamalenadu", which translates as "steep hill sandthickforests".

3.2. The origins of the Kodavas in written documents

The word ‘Kodava’ could be derived from the strong Kodava affinity to River Cauvery (kod, meaning bless, and avva meaning mother for mother River Cauvery). Cauvery and Kaveri are interchangeable.

Another explanation comes from the Cauvery Purana (part of the Skanda Purana, Skanda being the son of God Shiva and Goddess Parvathi) which says that the Kodavas are the descendents of King Chandravarma of the Kadamba dynasty; these descendents ruled over Kodagu from the fourth century to the middle of the sixth century. Chandravarma of the Chandravanshi Kshatriyas (a lunar dynasty), was the son of the Emperor of Matsya Desha. During his travels, Chandravarma came to Kodagu, then uninhabited jungle and became the first raja of Coorg.

The Kaveri Mahatmya (a.k.a. KP) refers to Kodavas as Ugras, as descendents of the marriage of the Kshatriya prince, Chandravarma and his Shudra wife. His eleven sons married the daughters of the Raja of Vidharbha. In time, their descendents came to be called Kodavas.

For more than two millennia, Anuloma marriages contributed to the social fabric of this country, and Kodagu. Anuloma marriages happen when a
man of a higher varna - Brahmin, Kshatriya, or Vaishya - marries a woman of a lower varna, for instance, a Shudra. The offspring that result are of an in-between varna - in Kodagu’s case, the Ugras, and contribute to the natural order of society, a patriarchal society. Ugras means ‘fierce men’, and they (Kodava Ugras) had all the attributes of true Kshatriyas except access to the four Vedas and Vedic ritual.

Reflecting this sentiment, Col. Wilks, in History, says that the Kodavas are ‘descended from the conquering army of the Kadamba kings.’ He also mentions that the first colonists may have migrated from the Kadamba kingdom of Banavasi.

3.3. More legends on Kodavas

There is an old legend that when Alexander the Great invaded North India, many of his soldiers stayed back, wandered down south, married the native women and settled down in the hills of the Western Ghats, especially Coorg. Other writers have theorized that the Kodavas might have originated from Mount Caucasus, of the former USSR.

L. A. Krishna Iyer, in ‘The Coorg Tribes and Castes’, says that ‘their (Kodavas) mode of life, pride of race, impart in their whole being an air of manly independence and dignified self-assertion, well sustained by their peculiar and picturesque costumes.’ (Emphasis mine)

Abdul Gaffar Khan penned a book, Kodavaru Arabiyaru, meaning Kodavas are Arabs. He bases all his findings on the similarity of costumes and clothing patterns on both sides. The kupya resembles the kuffia of the Arabs and Kurds. However, within India, the Kashmiris, Rajputs and Marathas also wear similar looking clothing or robes, especially the men. Besides this, writers have mentioned that Kodavas might have originated from Mount Caucasus, of
the former USSR. Moeling, 1885, speculated that Kodava culture shared many features of the ancient traders of Arabia.

According to another theory, the 2500 year-old civilization of the Coorgs evolved from a synthesis of people that originally lived in the region of today's Oman and Yemen. According to Yemen's history, people from there had migrated to the Coorg region around the fifth century BCE.

Ponjanda S. Appaiah claimed that they were Babylonians and Kurds.

Another pre-Independence perspective states that the Kodavas are descendents of Scythians (a.k.a. Shaka), and may be the Western Kshatrapas (Connor 1870, Rice 1878). Genetic evidence backs this one claim partly. Kshatrapa comes from the word ‘satrap’, of kings of old who paid tribute to the Persian Empire, until Alexander destroyed the empire.

Other theories suggest that the Kodavas were Dravidian brachycephalics, and the earliest agriculturists of Kodagu, dating back at least two thousand years. (Other bracycephals include Bunts, Konkanas, and Mysore and Tamil Brahmans). Originally seafarers, they are believed to have settled in North Malabar (prior to the Brahmins settling there), and subsequently migrated to Kodagu. After settling in Kodagu, they might have allied with the neighboring Tamil-Malayala Cheras (from whom they might have got their Dravidian language, which was Tamil-Malayalam influenced) during the Tamil Sangam period of 300 BCE to 300 AD. Other communities who dwelt in Kodagu were the forest loving Kurubas, who followed the primeval hunter-gatherer culture, and also spoke a Dravidian tongue. The language of the Kodavas – enriched by borrowings of Kannada, and inheritance of Tamil and Malayalam - became Kodava-thak. The Kodavas later came to be politically under the rule of the Ganga and Kadamba rulers.

Tamil Sangam literature (300 BCE to 300 AD) mentions the Kudaku (parts of Kodagu, Kerala and Salem), which was west of Tamil dominions.
Both the name of the place and the people have the same name (Kodava/Kodavu, Kodaga-Kodagu, Coorgs-Coorg). Kannada inscriptions dated after the Sangam period mention Kudagu nad (incorporating bits and pieces of Kodagu, Western Mysore and Kerala.

It has also been proposed that the Todas of the Nilgiris, and the Kodavas of Kodagu may be of the same racial group. However, no recent genetic testing has been done to prove the truth of most of these theories.

3.4. A brief history of Kodavas and their political rulers in Kodagu

A gold coin of Kodagu has been found dating to the first century BCE, proof of complex culture existing there.

For hundreds of years, South Indian royal families like the Kadambas, the Gangas, the Cholas, the Chalukyas, the Rastrakutas, the Hoysalas, the Chengalvas, Kongalvas and the Vijaynagara Rayas, as well as Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, and the British, ruled Kodagu. Around 400 AD, Rajaraja Chola’s territory included Kodagu.

From the second to the sixth centuries, the Kadambas ruled Kodagu’s northern provinces.

The southern provinces were governed by the Ganga dynasty from the fourth to the eleventh centuries. A Treasury plate in Madikeri dated to about 466 AD, says that Kodagu was part of Gangavadi. The earliest writings discovered in Kodagu, by the Gangas dating from 800 to 900 AD (888 AD to be precise), mention Kadangas, a sort of defense-related earthen war trenches or ramparts made by the Kodavas. In 1878, the Kadangas were found in almost every part of Kodagu, and as Rice says in his 1878 account of Coorg, the highland Coorgs ‘toiled to secure the possession of their hills.’ This clearly
shows Kodagu was occupied by a martial people – probably the early Kodavas, with the Kadangas mentioned at least once in a 9\textsuperscript{th} century inscription.

In the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries, Kodagu was ruled by the Jain Gangas of Talakadu, under whom the Chengalvas (Changanda Kodava)… kings of Changanad held the east, as well as, part of the north of Kodagu. The Bilur stone writings of Kiggatnad in 899 AD talks about Penne Kadanga in the banks of the Lakshmanthirthha (a.k.a. Peddore). In the ninth century, the Chalukya King Satyashraya wins Ganga, Kalinga, Chola, Kerala and Konkana, and goes to Kodagu (a.k.a. Kombelu) as written in the Shikaripur inscription.

In 919 AD, Rajaraja Chola conquered Kudu Malenad (Kodagu) as recorded in the Malamahi inscription. In the eleventh century, the Cholas defeated the Gangas, and became the rulers of the whole of Kodagu. (One of the names for Kodagu was also Malenad).

In 1034, King Nanni Chengalva and another ten kings after him ruled Kodagu up to 1297 AD, according to the Heggadadevanakote inscription. Around 1140 AD, during the reign of King Narasimha of Dwarasamudra, one Hemmadigowda conquered Kodagu (Kodagi) and died fighting, according to the Chickmagalur inscription.

The Kodavas are also mentioned in the twelth century Palpare inscription in Nallur village in South Kodagu, which also mentions the Hoysala king, Ballala II. The inscription was published in \textit{The Imperial Gazetteer of India}, 1908, where it says: ‘In 1174, Ballala II of Mysore sent his general Bettarasa to fight against the Chengalva king in Kodagu, and in the fight that ensued at Palapare, Bettarasa was victorious and built a township in and with, Palpare as his capital. But after sometime, Pemma Veerappa joined by Badigondeya Nandideva, Udayaditya of Kurchi, and the Kodavas of all the nads, marched against Palpare and attacked Bettarasa, who seems to have got the worst of it at first but was victorious.’ Pemma Veerappa Kodava fought two battles against Bettarasa at Palpare Fort leading the Kodavas to victory in the
first battle, but losing to Bettarasa in the second. The Kodavas are referred to as the ‘Kodagaru of all the nads’. The Hoysala king conquered ‘Kudagu Malenad’ (Kodagu), as deciphered partly in the Narsipur inscription.

During the time of Pemma Veerappa, in the twelth century, there is the mention of the Kodagaru, carved on stone. In the twelth century, the Hoysalas of Hassan drove out the Cholas from Kodagu.

In 1316, Ballal Devarasa ruled padinalkanad (padinal means 14) in Rice’s inscription.

Inscriptions at Palur and Bhagamandala mention the King Bodharupa making grants in 1380.

According to Firishta, a Council of Elders who recognized the supremacy of Vijayanagar administered Kodagu. Noted Kodava leaders include Achunayaka (Ajjikuttira Kodava) of Anji Kerinad, Karnanda Kodava of Bhagamandala, Kaliyatanda Ponappa of Nalkad, and Nayakanda Kodava of Armeri. Coorgs in the past were allies of the Kolathiri and Arakkal kingdoms of Kannur, and some Coorg mercenaries served Hindu and Muslim Rajas.

From the fourteenth century (1339 AD), the Vijaynagar kingdom held sway. With their demise, the local Palegars or Nayaks, became independent and began to rule different Nads. At the end of the sixteenth century, according to Firishta, Coorg was ruled by independent local feudatory Nayaks or Palegars. Under the Vijayanagar kingdom, Coorg was divided into a number of small districts called Kombus. Kodagu was partitioned into 35 Nads and 12 Kombus. Usually, two to three Nads were ruled by one Nayak.

In the seventeenth century, after the fall of the Vijaynagar kingdom, the Kelladi Nayaks of Ikkeri consolidated power in Kodagu and established the Paleri (Haleri) dynasty. A prince of the Ikkeri family, settled in Halerinad as a Lingayat priest (a.k.a. Jangam), and slowly took over the whole of Kodagu (and Mysore for a while). The Paleri/Haleri kings - Lingayats of the
Veerashaiva faith - ruled Kodagu from 1600 – 1834. Viraraja was the first prince in the line. Appaji and Muddu Raja I succeeded him, first one, then the other.

Muddu Raja, grandson of Paleri/Haleri king Vira Raja, moved his headquarters to Madikeri (a.k.a. Muddu Raja Keri) and built his capital there in 1681. Muddu Raja ruled Kodagu from 1633 – 1687.

Dodda Vira Raja (a.k.a. Siribai Dodda Vira Raja) ruled from 1687 – 1736, Chikkavirappa from 1736 – 1766, Muddu Raja II and Muddayya from 1766 -1770, Dodda Vira Rajendra from 1780 – 1809, and Linga Raja II from 1811 – 1820, and all were tied to the political history of Coorg. Hyder Ali attacked the weak ruler of Kodagu, Chikkaveerappa, in 1763 and captured some territories of Kodagu, but his troops were defeated by the Kodavas in 1766. When Chikkaveerappa died, the kingdom was split into Haleri/Paleri and Horamale, and two rulers who were cousins – Mudddu Raja II and Muddayya Raja – ascended the respective thrones, and jointly ruled Kodagu from 1766 – 1770. From 1770 – 1774, Devappa Raja - son of Muddaya - ruled for four years, which annoyed Linga Raja of Haleri/Paleri.

In 1770, Linga Raja I of Paleri and Devappa Raja of Horemale fueded with each other, and Hyder Ali (of Mysore) stepped in to help out Linga Raja, who had fled to him for protection. The Raja in turn gave up a few territories and offered tribute. Devappa Raja was arrested by Hyder’s men, and imprisoned in Srirangapatna. One Nayakanda Uthappa, the Nayak of Beppunad, married the Raja’s sister, Nilammaji, and attacked the Mysore army at Thomara ghat.

When Linga Raja I died in 1780 (according to the Mahadevapet copper plate of 1782), Hyder Ali interned his minor sons with a governor as guardian, in a Mysore fort, and installed a governor as their guardian at Mercara (Madikeri) with a Mysore garrison comprised of Muslims. The Nawabs of
Mysore, in the *Annals of the Mysore Royal family*, may have acquired three places, Madikeri, maybe Kudige in Kushalnagar, and Balekadar.

Linga Raja I’s son, Viraraja Wodeyar, after six years of imprisonment, escaped with his family and re-entered Kiggatnad, Kodagu.

In 1782, the Kodavas threw out the Mysore troops and took back control from Hyder Ali, who died the same year. In 1784, Tipu Sultan (son of Hyder Ali), incited the Kodavas to become violent by means of a derogatory speech made in Madikeri. Tipu captured, imprisoned and converted many Kodavas, killing those who rebelled. In 1785, the Kodavas rose in revolt again… and Kodagu was divided into, and kept captive by, garrisons in four forts. Kodava *karyakars* like Kulley Ponnana, Appanervanda Achaya helped Viraraja Wodeyar escape from prison in the Gorur fort.

Tipu’s relationship with the Kodavas was an on again, off again, power relationship. Both Hyder and Tipu were interested in Kodagu for its superior rice crop. In 1786, Tipu Sultan rebuilt the mud Mercara Fort (originally built in 1680 by Muddu Raja Wodeyar) with stone, renamed it Jaffarabad, and held this garrison till 1790.

In 1788, Dodda Vira Rajendra (a.k.a. Vira Rajendra Wodeyar), formerly kept captive at Periapatam, escaped with his wife and brothers Linga Raja and Appaji and aligning with a Kodava rebellion, and the British, drove out Tipu’s army (who were aligned with the French), and recovered his kingdom. Muddu Raja’s greatgrandson Dodda Vira Rajendra recaptured the fort in 1790, and established Madikeri as capital. Some of the history of Kodagu Rajas from 1633 till 1807 is in the *Rajendraname* - a Kannada text, patronized by Dodda Vira Rajendra Wodeyar - which covers a period of 175 years.

In 1790, Dodda Vira Rajendra signed a treaty with the British East India Company officer Robert Taylor. The Kodavas backed the British as Tipu was the common enemy of both parties. In 1792, Lord Cornwallis, Governor
General of India, drove Tipu back to Srirangapatna. At the meeting place at the foot of Ambatti hills, with General Robert Abercromby, the Kodagu Raja founded Virarajendrapet (a.k.a. Virajpete). In 1793, Abercromby and the Raja drew up a new agreement. From then on till his death, the Raja remained a trusted ally of the British.

Tipu died in Srirangapatna, defeated by the British in 1799. Linga Raja succeeded his niece Devammaji (daughter of Viraraja Wodeyar, married to Sode Raja) to the throne in 1809, and ruled till 1820. Linga Raja II constructed the Sri Omkereshwara temple in a combination of Islamic and Gothic styles, according to a copper plate in the same temple in Madikeri.

In the peace treaty, Kodagu was part of the deal with Tipu. Kodavas converted to Islam by Tipu were settled in Kodagu in their respective villages. North Kodagu Kodava farmers had been killed by Tipu's men. So the Raja settled Tulu and Kannada farmers (later called Kodagu Gowdas) from Sulya (Dakshina Kannada) and Sakleshpura (Hassan). Craftsmen and farmers from Northern Kerala, called Airi and Heggade, also settled in Kodagu around the same time. Konkani Roman Catholics, who escaped imprisonment in Srirangapatna, settled in Virajpet. While 80,000 Kodavas were reported missing (most killed in Mysore Sultanate atrocities and the remaining converted to Islam), some 10,000-15,000 surviving Kodavas still lived in Kodagu at that time. The population of Kodagu was small at that time (25,000-50,000) as a result of mass killings and ethnic cleansing under the Mysore Sultan.

The Haleri dynasty ruled Kodagu between 1600 and 1834. Viraraja the Younger ascended the throne and ruled from 1820 – 1834, and praises himself in writings of the palace walls in Madikeri. In 1830 AD, the Rajas’ tombs of Madikeri, carry written praise for Biddanda Bopu and his son - the Syrekarekar Somaya. In 1834, a Coorg general called Apparanda Bopanna, whose ancestors had opposed the British tooth and nail, in a volte-face, welcomed the British
forces under Col. Fraser into the fort at Mercara (Madikeri). Col. Fraser became the Commissioner and Political Agent for Kodagu (called Codagu in those times).

The British took over in 1834, exiled the last raja, Chikka Vira Raja, and ruled till 1947, when India became independent. Kodagu was the smallest province in British India, in area being only 1582 square miles. A few freedom fighters from Kodagu supported the National Independence Movement. One of them, Pandyanda Belliappa, is known as Kodagu's Gandhi.

British Kodagu was administered by a commissioner, subordinate to the resident of Mysore, who was also officially Chief Commissioner of Coorg. Dewan Bahadur Ketolira Chengappa was Chief Commissioner of Kodagu from 1947 to 1949. He was succeeded by Chief Commissioner C.T. Mudaliar from 1949 to 1950. After Independence in 1947, Coorg remained a Part ‘C’ state. In 1950, Kodagu became a state. In 1956, Kodagu was merged with Mysore state, later renamed Karnataka.

The British exited Kodagu, but left behind coffee plantations and spice harvesting, for which Kodagu is now renowned, making Kodagu the coffee producing capital of India.

3.5. The Kodava community

Kodavas did not accept the ancient Aryan varnashram and hence never had a caste system. In Hindu society, however, whenever there was an intercaste marriage, the offspring did not belong to either parent’s caste, so this gave rise to a new caste – this probably was the case with the Ugras.

So the Coorgs rejected the Aryan varnashram, but they had family based communities. The family unit of the Kodavas is called the okka. It is a joint patrilineal clan with males descended from a common ancestor. The male members of an okka share an okka name (also called a manepedha). There are
currently 1720 *okkas* (1040 Kodava, 320 Gowda, and 360 *okkas* of other communities).

In the past, members of an *okka* lived in a large ancestral house - the *aine mane* (*ayyangada mane* – House of the Elders). Each *aine mane* belongs to an *okka* (patrilineal clan) that is identified by its *manepedha* (name of the *okka*). Sixty percent of the *okkas* no longer have a traditional *aine mane*. *Aine manes* usually had a courtyard in the front, and a fence. There also were out houses for additional living space. The *aine mane* was usually in the midst of landed property called *jamma* and had thatch huts of non-Coorg laborers attached to the *okka*, who provided basic services.

The Coorg (Kodava) village is a collection of houses built on family or ancestral property. This cluster of homes and property formed the heart of a village called *ur*. And members of the same *ur* collaborated for weddings, funerals, the harvest festival (*huthri* or *puttari*), hunts, dances, *meedi* (ancestor worship), etc. Several *urs* or villages were called a *nad*. Several *nads* comprised a *sime*. Historically, Kodagu had eight *simes*. The land belonging to the *okka* was farmed by all the family members and could not be partitioned or sold. If an *okka* had huge tracts of lands, it had to send one male family member to the village temple, to serve as the *mukkati*. Any family that sent a *mukkati* was called Mukkatira, and thus one of the commonest *okka manepedhas* is Mukkatira. The *mukkati*’s responsibilities included sweeping the temple premises, and lighting the temple lamps. Occasionally, he even did guard duty.

The male members of an *okka* share an *okka* name. The founder of each *okka* is worshipped by members of that clan or *okka*. *Guru karana* is worship of the clan or *okka* founder. On their ancestral clan lands, the Kodavas have a shrine called a *Kaimada*, dedicated to the founder-ancestor of the *okka*. Weapons of wood or metal are sometimes kept in the *Kaimada*. Thus ancestor worship is an intrinsic part of Kodava life.
A family living in the village is part of that community, and the head of each family (with its specific manepedha), has his own role. Girls and boys from one okka cannot marry within the same okka. However, cross cousin marriage between children of brother and sister is accepted.

The oldest member of the family is the head of the okka and is called pattedara or koravukara. In each generation, the eldest member of the clan becomes the pattedara. Similarly each ur, nad and sime are headed by a takka. The takkas settled disputes and imparted justice after consultation with other elders.

3.6. Kodava religion and festivals

The nature of the Kodagu eco-system impacted the nature of religion in Kodagu. Firstly, Kodagu has valleys, rivers, Western Ghats, etc. which influence their religious practices. The various rulers and conquerors of Coorg too left an impact with their versions of Hinduism, or Islam. The British too left an imprint on the clothing and accessories of the Kodavas. Sanskritic Hinduism usually and gradually, takes over local customs and makes them more Hindu. This is the case for the whole of India, and Kodagu is no exception. Most of the Coorgs were originally food cultivators (especially of rice) and of a warrior bent. They worship the River Kaveri, and protect the forests and their resources.

The Coorg ecosystem is a mix of hilly spaces and valleys, tied together by the serpentine coils of a roiling River Kaveri, who begins her journey at Talakaveri.

This source of the River Kaveri, Talakaveri, draws a large number of pilgrims each year, during Tula Sankramana, when the river is said to be ‘born’ each year. Talakaveri is based in the Bramhagiri Hill of Kodagu. Pilgrims crowd Talakaveri and Bhagamandala on Tula Sankramana when the river
gushes out at a pre-specified time. The river then goes underground and comes to the surface again several miles later. In keeping with the trend of Sanskritization, there is a southern version in Bhagamandala of the holy sangam at Prayag in Allahabad, where two real, and one invisible, rivers meet – Ganga, Jamuna, and the extinct Saraswati River. In Bhagamandala too, River Kaveri meets two other rivers – the Kannika and the underground, invisible Sujyothi, and this confluence is called the Triveni Sangam, and is considered to be the most sacred place along the entire course of the river. Both the Ganga and the Kaveri rivers are sacred to Shiva. The Kaveri Purana describes the sacred river spots from source till the Kaveri joins the sea.

Kaveri Sankramana falls in mid-October when the Sun enters Tula Rasi at a predetermined time… on the first day of Libra, when the Sun transits from Virgo to Libra. It is marked by a fountain of Kaveri river water gushing out from a small tank in Talakaveri. This gushing water is considered to be sacred and is called theertha. Huge crowds of pilgrims go to Talakaveri to witness the annual ‘rebirth’ of the river. On this day, Kodavathis (Kodava women) wearing new silk sarees perform puja to a coconut or a cucumber, which is wrapped in a red silk cloth, and decorated with flowers, and the Pathak (a jewel with gold cobra hood set on a gold coin, flanked by corals and gold beads, which is considered the Kodava mangalsutra). This puja is called Kanni puje (referring to Goddess Parvathi, who incarnated as Kaveri). This is the only festival in Coorg where completely vegetarian food is eaten. The Cauvery Purana mentions the incident when the family deity Cauvery (a.k.a. Kaveri) transformed herself into the holy river by the same name, and the Kodavas who had gathered in large numbers were blessed by her, and inherited their style of saree from that incident.

Puttari means ‘new rice’, and is a rice harvest festival that usually comes in late November or early December. Puttari (a.k.a. huthri) is celebrated usually in the aine mane (the ancestral home of a single clan or family, of usually one okka or manepedha). The aine mane is decorated with mango and
banana leaves and flowers, and proteins served include pork, mutton and chicken. Other foods which may be served include sweet dishes like akki payasa and thambuttu (a banana mash, which is a favorite), regular fare like otti (rice roti), paaputtu (steamed rice breads), kadambuttu (steamed rice powder balls), and nooputtu (freshly made rice noodles).

During Puttari, paddy sheaves are ritually cut. The day following the cutting of the sheaves, there is a feast, a dance and sports for all the villagers. A local astrologer then decides which member of each okka is suited to the rite of cutting the sheaves. The selected member then dons a white kupya, for the rite.

*Kail Podh* is celebrated eighteen days after the Sun enters Simha Rasi when transplanting of rice is completed, and when defending the same against wild boars, and other wild animals is necessary. *Kail* means weapons or refers to individual Coorg armories, and *Podh* means festival. When *Kail Podh* is celebrated, the family weapons are cleaned or washed; the family members have a ritually pure bath, wear ritually pure clothes, and then perform the rites of worship on their weapons, with the old Aryan belief that the weapons must not fail them when used. The Kodavas worship their weapons, like the Coorg sword and dagger, and various firearms. This traditional festival was one reason why the Kodavas were exempt from the 1861 Indian Arms Act. Proteins like pork and chicken or mutton are eaten for such functions, and liquor is also generously downed.

Apart from this, Kodavas are ancestor worshippers. The annual ritual to honor the ancestors and those who recently died is called *meedhi*. Different delicacies – the favorite foods of the ancestors - and an unopened bottle of alcohol are also offered along with a lit oil lamp.

Kodagu also has a unique way to protect its rich biodiversity - *Devarakadu*, sacred forests, which protect fauna and flora of different parts of Kodagu. Most villages in Coorg have a *Devarakadu* - an abode of the gods -
which comes with strict rules not to poach, or cut down the trees, thereby preserving the ecosystem’s biodiversity.

Between mid-July to mid-August of the Kodava calendar, is Kakka\-da\-na\-sa, an auspicious month that falls smack in the midst of the heavy monsoons of Kodagu. In Kakka\-da\-na\-sa, the Kodavas eat maddu toppu - a purple black medicinal food preparation, which if made the right way, is alleged to have about 18 types of herbal medicinal properties. On Kakka\-da\-na Padinetti, the maddu toppu is most effective. Padinetti means eighteen, and this day falls on the eighteenth day of Kakka\-da.

The Kodavas have a number of dances – the kol atta, kudre atta, etc. which are performed at special village or community festivals outdoors. Special clothing is also worn on those occasions.

A renowned holy spot is the Igguthappa temple, which houses an incarnation of Subramanya, the God of harvest, rain, rice and snakes. The legend around this temple is that seven deities (six brothers and a sister) travelled through Malabar to find shelter, and a dwelling. Three of the brothers settled in Malabar villages, and the remaining four came to Kodagu. The eldest brother settled near the Paaditora Pass, and is called Igguthappa, and true to the Sanskritization trend all over India, is now identified with Subramanya, the warrior son of Lord Shiva. Iyappa, the son of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu is the hunting god of the Coorgs, loafing through the forests at night with a pack of hunting dogs.

The most recent Kodava specific annual fest to take over Kodagu is the Kodava Hockey Festival, which in 2015 sees its 19th edition. Different okkas host the event every year. And the competition between different okkas is fierce. Traditional dances and adventurous sports are also part of the fest. Kodagu has produced many an Olympian-type sportsperson, and their sportive spirit culminated in this unique Kodagu event.
3.7. Marriage among the Kodavas

*The World Book Encyclopedia* (1976) states that marriage is a heterosexual, contractual relationship, uniting a man and a woman. This important relationship, with its legal framework wherein a man and a woman have a relationship called the marital status, is recognized and protected by law. Society protects, provides, and encourages the institution of marriage for its ability to maintain family life, protect young children, and provide older people with a safe haven.

A family, in Kodagu, is composed of marital, parent-child, sibling relationships, etc. Marriage, especially, is the bedrock on which the entire clan like okka community (with a common *manepedha*) is based.

In the Kodagu of yore, each *manepedha/okka* had an *aine mane*, a family abode, where orphans, old people and widows of that *okka* could be maintained. Thus family life, the weak and economically deficient were protected. Kodava society was no different from other societies… it recognized that marriage was a legitimate way to love and have sex, and further the family. As with the rest of humanity, marriage is considered important for the existence and survival of the human race, is a repository for cultural features like clothing, and has always had legal, religious, and ethno-specific community sanctions. Human children need the longest time among all planetary mammals to mature and be self-sufficient. This is one of the important reasons that marriage is such a universal, culturally common, feature. And the Kodavas live by this truth too.

Among the Kodavas, a marriage is either an arranged or mutual love one, and is generally hoped to continue till the death of one of the partners. Among the Kodavas, parents of the bride and groom, elders of the community, a go-between, can arrange the marriage. In the past, the soon-to-be bride or the groom might not always have been asked for consent. Today, however, not only is the consent of both bride and groom required, a betrothal precedes the
actual wedding ceremony. A few marriages occur without parental consent as in love marriages, showing how the community is changing with the times. In north India, gold and red are common bridal colors for the wedding ritual. The Kodavas follow the same code especially for the bride, pointing to a north Indian ancestry for the Kodavas.

The Hindu law books and benchmark texts like Kautilya’s *Arthasastra* mention eight kinds of classical marriage: **Gandharva – lovers marrying secretly**, Brahma - a father giving away his bejeweled daughter, Prajapatya - the joint performance of sacred duties by both groom and bride, Aarsha - where the groom presents two cows to his father-in-law in gratitude, Daiva - giving away the bejeweled bride to the officiating priest inside the Yagna sacrificial altar, Aasura - giving away the bride in exchange for bride price, **Rakshasha - abduction of a woman (for marriage by force) through raiding parties of Kshatriyas who kidnapped the bride from her home**, and Paishacha – abduction/seduction of a woman while she was sleeping or intoxicated.

Since society is always in a flux, what was commonplace in ancient times is not so any more. Gandharva and Rakshasha are the only two forms of ancient Hindu marriages that seem to have left their imprint on present day Kodava marriages.

Love marriages – today’s Gandharva marriages – are on the rise among younger Kodavas. The other type of ancient Hindu marriage that lives on in the form of a fun ritual is the Rakshasha marriage, where the bride was kidnapped from her home. Abduction takes a lot of physical strength and may be for this reason, there is no child marriage among the Kodavas. The bridegrooms of old had to be physically fit for the role of kidnapper, even having to fight off the bride’s family, echoes of this surviving in a wedding ritual called the *bale birudu* (plantain honor).

In his 1952 account, Srinivias mentions that when a Kodava man was getting married, his maternal uncle, paternal aunt, and married sisters all
brought gifts and sheets of cloth called kêtâmë. The wedding party that brought the kêtâmë was honoured with the plantain honor – the bale birudu. A row of plantain stems are stuck in the mud outside the ceremonial hall. The man who lops of the ‘head’ of the plantain stems, should be wearing a Kupya, and wielding a sharp Coorg sword (odi kathi). Each plantain stem is representative of a man, who is the defender of the bride. The ceremonial chopping off of the plantain stems is actually a victory over any and all opposition from the bride’s family – pointing to the classic Rakshasha style of marriage. Sometimes, up to three men of the ‘raiding party’ from the groom’s side successively lop of the plantain ‘heads’ placed in the ground. A high degree of physical stamina and strength is required to wield the odi kathi and chop of the banana stem tops. Physical strength is a requisite for a bridegroom, and for this reason child marriage never happened in the Kodava community, because it is quite impossible for children - little boys - to chop off the banana stems, and thus gain entry into the bride’s wedding house.

Exogamy is commonplace among the Kodavas. The Kodavas live in clan-like family divisions (okka), each division marked by an individual manopedha name. Manopedha loosely translates to ‘house name’ or clan, and includes all members of a family (okka) that are born through the same founding ancestor, who was the first man with that specific manopedha. Women who marry, cannot marry men with the same family name or manopedha, or okka. When a woman marries a man who carries a different manopedha, she adopts the name of the conjugal okka, leaving behind the natal manopedha.

Most Kodavas marry without horoscopes. The wedding ritual in Kodagu is called a mangala, one of several different types of mangala for men. Other mangalas include kanni mangala (marriage to a virgin), kuudoli mangala (marriage to a widow or divorcee, to continue the family), okka parajae, makka parajae, nari mangala (tiger kill honor), balleki mangala (to wed a plantain stem), and kemi kuthu mangala (the ear piercing ceremony, which was a rite of
passage for Coorg boys in the past). A mangala is only performed on ‘good days’. Usually, there are no mangalas during Kakkada month (a month that falls between mid-July and mid-August).

3.8. Kodava names

Kodava names begin with a clan or okka name (manepedha), followed by a middle name and a surname. The okka clan with a shared manepedha is central to Kodava culture and families trace their lineage through clan (okka) names. Marriage within the same clan - okka, who share a manepedha - is discouraged. The word manepedha is loosely translated to ‘housename’, but more specifically means a clan or okka name. All manepedhas have the following suffixes, which mean ‘belonging to’ as in ira/era or ada/anda. Family names can be patronymic – appa/ayya, or metronymic – amma/avva. Names that correspond to elder brother - anna or elder sister – akka, are also used as suffixes in names

Kodava manepedhas might have originated in the names of villages in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Kerala. This was hypothesised by Ponamma and MP Cariappa, who travelled all over India, in 1981. Some of the manepedhas covered in this survey include Ammathira, Adikera, Ajnikanda, Ammanichanda, Appachettolanda, Allumada, Bayavanda, Baduvanda, Biddanda, Ballepanda, Ballarpanda, Chembanda, Chinnapanda, Chandapanda, Chewira, Chiriyatanda, Chandanda, Itira, Kallira, Kalliyanda, Kotera, Kallachanda, Kuppadira, Keravanda, Kallichanda, Kavadichanda, Kannambira, Kottukathira, Kellira, Kongetira, Kademada, Lythichanda, Merianda, Mandethira, Mellira, Mallamada, Mallengada, Manepanda, Moodera, Mukkatira, Nayakanda, Nellamakada, Pandiyanda, Sanavanda, and Thanachira.
Kodavas have many points of variation with other communities in South India. Though Hindu, Kodavas do not use the services of a Brahmin priest for ceremonies, with the elders of the family donning the mantle of priests. No fire god rituals, thread ceremonies, slokas and Vedic chants common in most Hindu ceremonies are performed.

3.9. Kodavas as an ethnic group

In anthropology, the term *ethnic group* is used to describe a group of people with shared ancestry, language, cultural and historical tradition, and a fixed terrain. The term *ethnic* comes from Greek ‘ethnos’, meaning heathen. Ethnicity is a characteristic of populations that live in mutual contact rather than in solitary isolation, but maintain their differences with each other – this trait is common for ethnic groups, world over.

Ethnology is invaluable when studying an ethnic group. *Ethnology* according to *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary* is the study of peoples. *Ethnography* is qualitative research design that investigates cultural occurrences, and the field work that ensues reflects the knowledge and semantics in the lives of the ethnic group. Both ethnography and ethnology complement each other, ethnography being the scientific study of the races of the earth or individual cultures, and ethnology the comparative study of different peoples or cultures. Membership in an ethnic group is connected with shared cultural heritage, ancestry, history, homeland, language, and symbolic systems such as religion, mythology, and ritual, cuisine, and dress style.

Ethnic groups are not closed and isolated, but are absorbed into larger states or nation states. Because India has so many ethnic groups – the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the other Backward Classes, the ancient Aryan varna stratification of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, representations of all the eight world religions (Hinduism, Zoroastrainism,
Judaism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism) are just a few within India – the defining features play out in varied ways in this country. Also, in the past, when two people of different varnas married, their children were often rejected by both natal castes, and were forced to start a new grouping.

Lewellen, 108, says that ethnicity has its beginnings in inequality, and plays center stage when the ethnic group and the mainstream make contact. Other scholars regard ethnicity as a class struggle, in relation to power, where many ethnic groups slug it out in the same geographic space, with the result that the dominant group dominates and captures access to means of production and dictates how production results must be shared. In India, things are not so simple. Thanks to the Aryan migrations into the sub-continent, and the complex cultures brought into and developed in the country, ethnicity as inequality is just one dimension of an ethnic group. Population pressures, a wide variety of ethnic groups fighting to survive and succeed in the same geographic space, are some of the impetus for ethnicity. Other special attributes like skin color, putative common ancestry, myths of descent, place of origin, religion, sub-sects, and land ownership or tenancy all contribute to identity of ethnicity. A geographic space, which is the ancestral home of the ethnic group, a shared and common language, legal land rights to their homeland are further markers of the group’s ethnicity. Other shared features include the same social conventions, a cultural complex that includes mythology, cuisine, history, religious symbols, and, dress style and appearance. In India, ethnic groups live side by side with other ethnic groups in the village, town, city, state or country.

The Kodavas are renowned for their martial culture, with a well-deserved reputation as formidable soldiers, and officers with a good command over their men, for centuries, including most recently, during British rule as well as post independent India. Valiant sons of Kodagu include servants of the new Indian nation like Commander-in-Chief of all the armed forces of independent India, Field Marshal K.M. Cariappa, OBE, and General K.S.
Thimayya, DSO, as well as a host of Kodava freedom fighters who fought for independence in British India.

3.10. Social milieu – the Kodavas and other communities of Kodagu

Coorg has a large number of ethnic groups. Apart from the Kodavas themselves, there are Amma Kodavas, Muslims, Jains, Christians, Gowdas, tribals, Lingayats, and various other castes. Brahmins were not native to Kodagu, and therefore don’t feature in most Kodava functions. Amma Kodavas used to perform the role of priests in the past, and were vegetarian, but dressed like the Kodavas.

For several centuries, there has been a long, continuous relationship that the Kodavas have had with other communities that live side by side with them. This is evident in wedding ritual like the washerman’s white cloth set out for both the Kodava bridegroom and bride as they walk forward. Or the wedding volaga, where the lower castes play percussion and other musical instruments for the wedding music for different functions. For functions like mangala or worship or other rituals, the lower castes are an integral part of the ceremonies. However, when the lower castes participate, they have no dress code restrictions. But the Kodavas very strictly follow one.

The Kodava religion, culture and language in Kodagu has influenced the Kodava Peggade (or Heggade), the Amma Kodavas (the priests of the Kodavas in the past), the Airi (artisans and carpenters), Banna, the Hajama (barbers), the Meda (craftsmen and drummers), the Madivala (washermen), Koyava and the Kembatti (labourers), and Poliya.

Kodava Gowdas wear a saree similar to the Kodava podiya – the pleats however are tucked in the front like the nivi style, though the pallu is pulled over the right shoulder like the regular Kodava podiya. Amma Kodava women however, wear the same style Kodava podiya, and the men wear the kupya, like
the Kodava men. Tribal women of olden times in Kodagu, wore the Kodava podiya, but sans a blouse, and knotted at the right shouder like the poorer Kodava women. Now-a-days, they wear a blouse, which can be understood as better economic status or a desire to copy the Coorgs.