Map of Karnataka
Map of Kodagu
Introduction

Tradition, according to *The Word Power Dictionary*, is a custom, or belief handed down from the past, especially by practice. Clothing, *Word Power* defines as ‘articles of dress or apparel’. The marriage of tradition to clothing results in cultural and historical encapsulation in dress. The topic ‘*Anthropological study of customs and dress patterns in traditional clothing of the Kodavas of Kodagu*’ is geographically centered in Coorg, a.k.a. Kodagu, a hilly region of Karnataka, South India, and focuses on an ethnic group, the Kodavas.

Karnataka is a state in the south of India. In December 2013, India had a population of 1.252 billion, within 29 states. In 2014, Karnataka had a population of 64.06 million (a million is ten lakhs, and ten million is a crore). Karnataka is south of Maharastra State, south-east of Goa, west of Andhra Pradesh, north and northwest of Tamil Nadu, north-east of Kerala, and east of the Arabian Sea.

The word Kodagu might be derived from ‘kudu’, which refers to a hilly place, apt for its location in the Western Ghats. Kodagu has latitude of 12.4208 N and longitude of 75.7397 E, and is situated in Karnataka. *Kodagu*, or *Coorg*, occupies an area of 4,102 square kilometres (1,584 sq mi). Kodagu’s altitude is 1,525 m, and it has an average temperature of 15 C. Kodagu has year long salubrious climate, and among other epithets, is called the ‘Scotland of India’ and the ‘Kashmir of the South’.

Kodagu is bordered by Dakshin Kannada district on the north-west, Hassan on the north, Mysore district on the east, Kannur of Kerala is on the south-west, Wayanad of Kerala on the south. Rainfall is very intense in July and August, stretching on to November with milder showers. Yearly rainfall might exceed 160 inches in some places, earning Kodagu the name ‘Cherapunji of the South’.
Kodagu is an ecological hotspot of the Western Ghats on its eastern slopes. Kodagu vegetation can be divided into evergreen, semi-evergreen, dry, moist deciduous and tropical rainforests. Its three wildlife sanctuaries are Brahmagiri, Talakaveri, and Pushpagiri. Its national park is Nagarhole, a.k.a. Rajiv Gandhi National Park.

Kodagu flora includes *Michelia champaca* (Champak), *Mesua* (Ironwood), *Diospyros* (Ebony and other species), *Toona ciliata* (Indian Mahogany), *Chukrasia tabularis*, *Calophyllum angustifolium* (Poonspar), *Canarium strictum* (Black Dammar), *Artocarpus dipterocarpus*, *Garcinia indica*, *Euonymus*, *Cinnamomum camphora*, *Myristica*, *Vaccinium*, *Myrtaceae*, *Melastomataceae*, *Rubus* (three species) and a rose. In the bushes, there are areca, plantains, canes, wild black pepper, ferns, and arums. In the west of Kodagu’s bamboo forests, we find *Dalbergia latifolia* (Blackwood), *Pterocarpus marsupium* (Kino Tree), *Terminalia tomentosa* (Matthi), *Lagerstroemia parviflora* (Benteak), *Anogeissus latifolia* (Dindul), *Bassia latifolia*, *Butea monosperma* (Palasha), *Nauclea parviflora*, and several species of acacia. Teak and sandalwood grow in the east.

The fauna includes the Asian elephant, tiger, panther, leopard, dhole, jungle cat, gaur, boar, sloth bear, several species of deer, lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri langur, slender loris, bonnet macaque, common langur, barking deer, mouse deer, Malabar giant squirrel, giant flying squirrel, Nilgiri marten, common otter, brown mongoose, civet, porcupine and pangolin. Shelled tortoises and river otters are found near the banks of rivers. During monsoon, leeches proliferate in the green forests, and honeybees in the trees year round. Aves include black eagle, vulture, peacocks, emerald dove, black bulbul, Malabar trogon and jungle owls. Reptiles include the king cobra, python and viper and crocodiles.
The River Kaveri, which originates in Talakaveri, feeds the agricultural belt of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Kodagu has paddy fields in the valleys (historically, a reason for many invasions and captures), oranges, Coorg Honey, coffee, black pepper (Piper nigrum), cardamom (Elletaria cardamomum), and vanilla agro-forestry in the hills. Agriculture is a mainstay, and the most important crops are rice and coffee. Kodagu cardamom too is a crop that gives good returns.

Legend has it, that coffee agro-forestry was introduced to the Western Ghats by the Muslim saint Baba Budan, in the sixteenth century, from the Yemeni port of Mocha. The Kodavas had accepted it, but serious cultivation started only after the British took over Coorg in 1834. Kodagu is now the coffee producing capital of India, and India is the world’s fifth largest coffee-producing country. Coffee agro-forestry in Kodagu has about 270 species of shade trees. Most of Kodagu is under cultivation, with paddy fields in the valleys and coffee plantations on hillsides, the latter the continuing inheritance from British occupation.

Kodagu has a population of 554,762, with a population density of 135 inhabitants per square kilometer. Kodagu has a sex ratio of 1019 females to every 1000 males. Literacy rate is at 82.52%.

Madikeri (Mercara) is the district capital, with Virajpete, Kushalnagar, Gonikoppal and Somwarpete being the other towns. Virajpete is the largest taluk and comprises the towns Virajpete, Gonikoppal, Siddapura, Ponnampet, Ammathi, Thithimathi...

A brief pre-history of Kodagu

Pre-historic cairns have been noted in a few places in Kodagu. Doddamalte village (in Somwarpete) is one such site. The Archaeological Survey of India has described them as megalithic burial monuments, a.k.a.
cairns. Most of the cairns are at ground level, resembling stone burial chambers, four to five feet in height. The locals call them Pandava Pare, and legend has it that the five Pandavas stayed here for a while. Another legend connected to Pandava Pare states that when digging the nearby Honnamannekere, no water was found. After a series of human sacrifices, water gushed forth, and the sacrificed humans were buried in Pandava Pare. These megalithic sites date back 3000 to 2500 years. Other sites include Bavali village in Madikeri, and Kedamullar in Virajpete taluk, and in Kushalnagar. Kodagu megalithic sites are dolmen or cist circles. Dolmens are megalithic tombs with a large flat stone laid on an upright one, according to the Pocket Oxford Dictionary. Megalithic sites in Virajpete contained antique earthenware, bone fragments, iron implements, bangles and charcoal. Unusually, one elongated Roman amphora was also found.

Underground cists in Kushalnagar brought up black and red pottery, vessels with three spouts, urns and dishes, one of which had rice husks and another, ragi millets. Iron weapons like swords and sickles and javelins, plus a human skull with two teeth were also discovered. Near Madikeri, in village Bavali, were found dismantled cist burials that date back to 3000 BCE.

Kodagu was home to a celt called the ‘Mercara celt’ discovered in 1868 on a hill top six kilometres from Madikeri, and currently in the possession of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, in Kolkatta. A celt is a pre-historic, chisel-edged stone tool. The Mercara celt is made of diorite, and has the accession number 994.

**Human evolution and clothing**

Humans split from the chimpanzees about 6.5 million years ago in Africa. Since then the journey of becoming human has taken many routes. Today, clothing and accessories are part of the experience of being human.
An early discovery is yet another pointer that the human tendency to decorate, to accessorize and live symbolically is quite old, and very human.

Beyond Asia, in southern Africa, discoveries that point to ‘art, body decoration, symbolism’ have been unearthed in Blombus Cave on the Indian Ocean coast of South Africa. The artifacts in the cave date from 1,00,000 years to 77,000 years – pointing to a continuous tradition of 23,000 years. In the Blombus Cave, discoveries of perforated bead work, with wear and tear suggesting contact with either string or clothing push back the milestones of human clothing and accessories beyond what we had originally thought. (Barnard, 2011)

Clothes serve many purposes... protection, belonging, a cover from embarrassment, status, gender, etc. ‘In traditional societies, even in Europe until recently, dress indicated gender, status and role... It seems also that clothing is a special case of the universal of body adornment. Adornment may signify belonging or group identity... Clothing is the principal cultural correlate of physical differentiation... The exact content of the language of dress in any traditional society is hidden from outsiders. Strangers find the nuances of local dress amusing or irritating gibberish. Within the group, of course, dress is significant in the smallest detail.’ Shephard, 1978.

Clothing can be decorative, communicative or protective, clothing can be a set of unique items, it can be an environmental disaster that leaves its impact in the ecosystem, it can stand up as the harbinger of change or as a thumb on the nose to colonialism.

Details of dress and accessories of any ethnic group are of relevance only to that group, recognized only by those who belong to the group...and outsiders who want to study that group might miss the shades, the nuances, the fine details. This study is a voyage of discovery of Kodava traditional attire and accessories by an outside researcher - a Turkman of Iran to be precise.
Origins of clothing in India

Ancient times begin, before 3000 BCE. Archaeology, historic texts, sculptures, statues, frescoes, vases, bas reliefs, all give us evidence of the past. Orature, or the tradition of oral literature, is also a folk record. Within India, we have always had a healthy oral culture – or orature. Myths are orature, which after centuries become literature and texts when they are set down in writing.

In ancient times, the sub-continent’s Indus Valley culture extended about 1600 km, and flourished at its zenith from 3000 BCE to about 1700 BCE. The Indus culture was probably one of the earliest urban cultures with a pan-Indian location. The urban life in the cities of the Indus civilization with its ‘modern’ looking grid plans, efficient drainage systems, public service edifices like baths and granaries suggest a very evolved, structured, civilized people. One of the most famous artifacts of Mohenjo-daro is a bust of a man, most probably a priest. He wears a unique one-shouldered garment with trefoils, each of which was originally filled with red paste. The shoulder covered is the left, and the garment looks like a proto-historic version of the later dhoti and shoulder cloth, or ‘saree’, which became a sort of common man’s (or more correctly, woman’s) uniform in India. Most of the saree styles of the sub-continent have the left shoulder covered.

Other ‘mother goddess’ figures from today’s Pakistan and northwest India show elaborate high hair styles, with broad choker-like necklaces, and huge ‘jhumki’ like ear-rings.

Indus cities had a roaring trade in fabrics with Mesopotamia. The ancient Mesopotamians, who imported Indian cloth from the Indus Valley, called cotton, ‘Sindhu’ after the River Indus (Sindhu). Backing this, archeological digs of Indus culture sites have found spindle whorls dating to 3000 BCE.
Clothing accessories from the Indus Valley

Indian clothing has had a continuous tradition for several millennia starting latest with the Indus Valley culture. Indus Valley excavation sites show us that cotton was spun, woven, dyed. Tools like bone needles, and wooden spindles push back the culture of Indian couture to the early Indus period – around five to six thousand years back. As is the standard with the different stages of Indus civilization, many discoveries in the Indus sites went on to become design classics of India, one common example being the design of the ubiquitous bullock cart, which has remained unchanged for millennia. The same can be said of cotton spinning methods, some of which remain unchanged till today. One of the most famous artifacts of Mohenjo-daro is a limestone bust of a bearded man, wearing a one-shouldered garment with trefoils.

One of the trade strongpoints of the Indus culture was the making of high quality clay bangles, beads and other ornaments, which were exported to the Middle East, and Mesopotamia (partly encompassing today’s Iraq). Analysis of ancient beadwork from the Indus sites has shown silk fibers in the beadwork, the silk being made through reeling - a process mastered by the Chinese.

Silver and gold jewelry were also among the Indus Valley civilization finds. Evidence suggests that the Kolar gold fields of Karnataka provided some of the ore used in Indus jewelry finds. Lapis lazuli embedded jewels were also discovered, which can be proof that though there was a high degree of lifestyle standardization, design and style – all three very human elements co-existed with the inhabitants of the civilization. The word for veil is absent in Sanskrit and Prakrit literature, which shows that veil usage in India is not a historical inheritance.
Clothing in the *Mahabharata*

India has two epics – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Both cover wars, with a series of incidents culminating in the triumph of goodness and justice, in peacetime and war. The *Mahabharata* is the larger of the two, and covers innumerable kingdoms, kings, battle formations, architecture, modes of transportation, all of which impacted the clothing styles of the time – clothing being totally a product of the times, which is the reason why this epic has been selected over the *Ramayana*.

The one standout incident of peacetime that covers clothing in the *Mahabharata* is the attempted disrobing of Draupadi (wife of the five Pandavas) in the royal court by the evil Dushasana acting on the command of his vindictive elder brother, Duryodhana of the Kauravas. Lord Krishna, with his yogic powers, made Draupadi’s ‘saree’ an unending one, thereby saving her dignity and self-respect. Other mentions of accessories include the fact that all weapons (of the Pandavas) were kept in a room or annexe connected to the main bedroom of the Pandava palace.

Lord Krishna himself is the center of a story that reveals the abundance of jewelry worn by royalty in those times. Sage Narada - a tireless mischiefmaker - visits Lord Krishna’s palace and tells Subhadra, one of Lord Krishna’s wives, that in her next life she may not have the same husband, but if anything were donated to a Brahmin, that same thing would be hers in her next birth too. Passionate about her husband and loathe losing him in a future life, without thinking sensibly, Subhadra donates Lord Krishna to Narada. This news spreads like wild fire through the palace, and all of Krishna’s other wives come scrambling to get their husband back. The clever Narada tells the wives that the only way they could get their husband back, was to give an equivalent quantity of gold. So weighing Lord Krishna on one scale, the wives begin giving away their jewelry on the other scale, and when that huge amount proves inadequate, they buy up all the jewelry from all the goldsmiths in their
Finally, they get their beloved husband, Lord Krishna, back. The women in the epic wore gold ornaments, on the hands, face, body and feet. The men wore tougher ornaments made of copper as their ornaments had to double as protective covering too, in event of battle or in combat conditions.

For the warm climatic conditions of ancient India, clothing had to first be comfortable, and then address the need for protection, communication and décor. Clothing necessities for both men and women included the Uttariya, a single piece garment draping the neck and shoulders, the anga-vastra – an ancestor of the dhoti – which covered the lower body. The anga-vastra was covered with an upa-vastra, which ended midway the thigh. In addition, only the women wore an Indian version of the boob tube, which covered the bosom. Silk and cotton clothing were common, and the rich wore fabric that was expensive to make, and rich families patronised the making of perfumes like attar of roses, which needed several thousand kilograms of roses for a miniscule amount of attar to be processed.

Clothing has always been a mark of an individual’s personality and lifestyle choice. Ascetics, sages and gurus who lived far from civilization were sometimes clad in animal skin – deerskin or tigerskin. And within the royal courts, bright colors signified personality choices. Lord Krishna and Nakula wore yellow, Krishna’s brother Balarama and Nakula’s brother Sahadeva wore blue, Yudhisthara and Arjuna wore white, Duryodhana and his nemesis Bhima wore red, and Shakuni, scheming uncle of the wicked Kauravas, wore black. Wool was rare, being used mostly in places like Kashmir and Bactria (Bahlika).

Wars are an intrinsic part of the epic. During wartime, clothing and war accessories for humans and their animals are described in detail. The first element or governing principle of the wars was that it had to be fought in daylight hours, and therefore visual cues were important in distinguishing allies from enemies at great distances, and therefore influencing what battle formations were to be used. The Kekaya kings were Pandava mother Kunti’s
sister’s children born to the Kekaya king, and therefore cousins of the Pandavas. (Kekaya is located in today’s Pakistani Punjab) They dressed in purple when coming to do battle in the great Mahabharata war, and their flags were also purple. Their steeds were dressed in deep red, and both these colors helped the allies and the enemy to identify them. What the steeds of other warriors were clad in is covered in great detail in the epic, a few of which are mentioned below.

Elegant Kamvoja steeds decorated with the feathers of green parrots were Pandava Nakula’s chariot steeds. Black legged steeds with breast-plates of gold, bore youthful Sauchitti to battle. Steeds with a color like red silk, in golden armour, and chains of gold, bore Srenimat.

Besides the clothing of the men and their horses, banners hoisted on top of long, high poles, were also used for identification and communication. A standard, according to The Pocket Oxford Dictionary, is a distinctive flag. Upraised standards can be spotted from great distances on the battlefield. Salya of the Madras had on his standard, an image like the goddess of corn, with a cornucopia of seeds. The ascetic preceptor of the Pandavas, Kripa, had a bull on his standard. Terrifying enemy soldiers who spotted it on the battlefield was the standard with the ape of fierce face and tail of Dhananjaya’s chariot. The eldest Pandava brother, Yudhishthira’s standard, displayed a golden moon with planets around it and had two kettle-drums – Nanda and Upananda – with a machine that produced harmonious music. On the Kaurava side, the lion-tail standard of Drona’s son, Ashvathamma, decked with gold, was an inspiration for the Kaurava army. Marking the standard of King Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava brother, was an elephant decked with gold, adorned with bells, which chimed with the sounds of a hundred bells.

Armor and the arms are also covered in fine detail. Yudhishthira held the celestial bow Mahendra; and the gigantic Bhimasena carried the celestial bow Vayavya. Nakula had the Vaishnava bow, and Sahadeva, the Aswina. The
terrible bow - the Paulastya – was the giant Ghatotkacha’s. Most of the kings wore crowns of copper (gold plated) to battle to protect their heads. There is archeaological evidence that iron was not widely used during the wars in the Mahabharata, except for Kaurava ally Karna’s armor. Copper armor tuned with tin and zinc was widespread.

**Clothing of the Mauryan period in the Arthashastra**

Written centuries after the great epics, the Arthashastra of Kautilya is a benchmark text on wealth creation by the state and the individuals that reside in that state.

Kautilya in the Arthashastra (early 300s BCE) mentions that garments could be made of cotton, wool, bark-fibers, silk-cotton, hemp and flax. Skins and furs were also used. Different quality clothing was made from the materials mentioned above. Jewelry was commonplace, with both men and women wearing ornaments of gold, set in pearls, and various precious stones like diamonds and rubies, and semi-precious stones, on the hands, feet, waist and heads. Gems of the highest quality enriched the royal treasury, and included pearls, diamonds, corals, rubies, beryl, sapphires and pure crystal. The self-employed in the economy included weavers, washermen, dyers, tailors, goldsmiths, silversmiths and ironsmiths.

Imports were common… Ceylon, Barbara and Arachosia were the sources of quality pearls, Nepal for woolen cloth, Gandhara, Vanayu and Bahlka (Bactria) for furs. Perfumes of sandalwood and aloe and vetiver were commonly used and considered articles of high value. Garlands were also popular, and the king had special garland makers, as well as shampooers and bath preparers. Different grades of courtesans had to specialize in shampooing, perfume preparation and garland making.
The spinning of yarn was the women’s domain in the Kautilyan economy, and an individual activity, being decentralized, contractual, and conducted in state run ‘factories’ or sheds, under state supervision. Different yarns varied from a coarse, refined, or medium quality, and were spun from cotton, wool, silk cotton, hemp, flax, silk, and wool from deer. Supplies for animals like ropes, straps, thongs, and other woven implements were also carried out in the sheds. Not just animal supplies or dress materials, bed sheets, coverings, and quilted armor were also made at these sheds. Many women worked for free to pay back a tax or a fine. Phalgu or articles of low value included woolen articles, skins, furs, silk and cotton cloth. Shops for gold, textiles, and jewelry were abundantly found in the Kautilyan or Mauryan economy. However, the textile industry was guarded very closely for being a source of export trade. Kautilya prescribed very severe penalties for giving away trade secrets of the textile industry.

Indian clothing as mentioned by the Greeks

Alexander’s invasion of northwest India precedes the Arthashastra by a couple of decades. Greek historian Heredotus went into raptures over Indian cotton, calling it ‘a wool exceeding in beauty and goodness that of sheep.’ Cotton cultivation and clothing were ideally suited for India’s heat and summers, and this fact was noted by the travelers, and diplomats who came to India, or studied the country. During Alexander’s foray into north-west India (in the 300s BCE), his writers and chroniclers mentioned that the Indian men wore high-heeled white boots. Apart from these, Greek writer Strabo described the ‘extravagant clothes worn by the richest Indians.’

Greek historian Arrian was an excellent chronicler of ancient Indian style. He elaborates, ‘The Indians use linen clothing, as says Nearchus (the Admiral of Alexander the Great’s fleet of ships in 325 BCE), made from the flax taken from the trees, about which I have already spoken. And this flax is
either whiter in colour than any other flax, or the people being black make the flax appear whiter. They have a linen frock reaching down halfway between the knee and the ankle (*an early form of the dhoti*), and a garment which is partly thrown round the shoulders (*maybe a shawl*) and partly rolled round the head (*a turban*). The Indians who are very well-off wear earrings of ivory; for they do not all wear them. Nearchus says that the Indians dye their beards various colours; some that they may appear white as the whitest, others dark blue; others have them red, others purple, and others green (*this is the first recorded instance of punk rock style colored hair anywhere in the world*). Those who are of any rank have umbrellas held over them in the summer. They wear shoes of white leather, elaborately worked, and the soles of their shoes are many-coloured and raised high, in order that they may appear taller.’ This is one of the first historic records of high heels worn by men to appear taller.

**Second and first centuries BCE**

Dated a few decades after the Mauryan dynasty, in the northwest of India, many terra-cotta figurines of the second century BCE with elaborate headdresses and jewelry - especially large earrings - have been found, and relocated to the Guimet museum in Paris. They have been nicknamed ‘the Baroque Ladies’, though they most probably were variations of mother goddess or fertility cult figures.

The Yaksha is described as ‘a semi-divine personage, who lived in the woods, on trees, in cliffs, the Yaksha (along with his female counterpart, the Yakshi) was a force of nature who could be rendered benevolent.’ Yaksha figurines from the Pitalkhora caves, Maharastra, used as guardians of the gate (*dwarapalikas* perhaps) and dating from the first century BCE, have elaborate headdresses, and used yellow and red pigment on the faces – perhaps a sort of early makeup technique that has not survived till the present.
First century BCE to third century AD

Between the first century BCE and the third century AD, India had multiple foreign dominations and influences - the Yavana (Greeks), the Shakas (Scythians), the Pahlavas (Parthians), and the Yeuh-Chih (the Kushans). All these people spoke Indo-European languages, and were of Caucasoid origins. In his work, *India*, Taddei describes in detail a Yaksha from Patna, today in the Indian Museum of Kolkatta, dated to the first century BCE. ‘This is a massive figure, wearing a dhoti, but not in the customary fashion – but with the edge falling over the feet; a belt tightens the cloth against the hip and hangs loose, ending in a large knot.’ Other Yaksha costumes show a broad Hellenistic influence – somewhat copying the Greek himation, but the Yakshis shown side-by-side are heavy, bare-breasted and with very less jewelry, both displaying immunity to the Greek influence as well as copying the same.

In Gandhara, the Buddha figures are dressed in Hellenistic clothes. In Butkara, in Swat (today’s Pakistan), green schist sculptures embody the Gandhara style with Greco-Roman elements, but are probably Parthian (Pallava) in origin. (*A schist is a layered crystalline rock*). The figures all display the Indian way of draping the garment’s folds.

The nomadic Kushans (the Yueh-chih) were bearers of a culture similar to a few Iranian nomadic populations. A schist slab (from Kapisa, today’s Afghanistan), depicting a Boddhisatva flanked by donors, shows all figures wearing non-Indian robes and shawls, and having a pronounced lack of jewelry.

For centuries, Indian clothing continued to be a source of revenue for Indian states. The Romans did a brisk trade with the Indians. Pliny, the Roman author and administrator, complained in the Roman Senate that Roman gold was leaving Rome for India to buy luxury goods like textiles.
Ajanta and Ellora

A lot of information of Indian clothing in the past comes from rock sculptures and paintings in cave complexes like Ellora. Both the paintings and the statues of Ellora display dancers and goddesses with a waist wrap somewhat akin to the dhoti, and for women’s clothing, a predecessor to the modern nivi style sari.

In Ajanta, Buddhist artworks developed into a unique art form. Ajanta has two time frames – the first starting in the first century AD and the second starting in the fourth century AD. During the 4th century and till the end of the 5th century, the Vakatakas – contemporaries of the Guptas – left a strong Buddhist cultural influence in Ajanta. The artwork that survives - in painting and sculpture - date to between 4th and 7th centuries AD. The triad of Artha (the quest for wealth and power), Kama (the pleasures of the senses) and Dharma (moral law) is demonstrated in beautiful and profane paintings. Yakshas, heavy set and festooned with a wealth of jewelry, are carved into the ancient stone. The sculptures show us the dimensions and the forms of the jewelry; the paintings show us the colors of the jewels, head dresses, clothes in painstaking details. The Boddhisatvas are shown in Buddhist robes holding rosaries and flasks.

Indian muslin and other fabrics

Ancient India has been the repository of many fine fabrics, like the luxury sivi cloth given to Lord Buddha as a gift from his physician, Jivaka. The making of luxury sivi is now an extinct art. Nearer to our times, Indian muslin has been the center of many legends, including the fact that, ‘a hundred yards of Daulatabad muslin,’ according to poet Amir Khusrau, ‘could pass through the eye of a needle, so fine was its texture.’ The upper castes, for several
centuries, were draped in fine muslin. Plain muslins, doria a.k.a. striped muslins, and checked muslins continue to be spun in a large number of places.

The saree in the present

The saree is a popular dress style of the sub-continent. There are more than eighty recorded ways to wear the saree. The nivi is today's most popular saree style. The nivi sari was popularised through the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma. In one of his paintings, the Indian subcontinent was shown as a mother wearing the nivi style. The Kodavas call the nivi saree (or seerae) the Kannada podiya.

In many parts of India, the ubiquitous saree was worn in various regional styles. A scan of saree styles on the Internet shows up several regional variations. The nivi was common in Andhra Pradesh, as was the kaccha nivi, a style worn with the pleats gathered together, pulled between the legs and tucked at the waist, behind.

Both in Gujarat and Rajashthan, the pleats follow the nivi style, being tucked in front, however, the pallu goes under the left arm, over the right shoulder, and is then drawn again under the left arm and tucked at the back.

The Maharastrian or Konkani style saree is a nine yard saree, worn somewhat like the Maharastrian dhothi. The center of the sari (held lengthwise) is placed at the center back, the ends are brought forward and tied securely, then the two ends are wrapped around the legs, and the ends are then passed up over the shoulders and the upper body. The nine-yard is worn by upper caste Brahmin women from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Goa. A nine-yard saree is also worn by Iyengar and Iyer women of Tamil Nadu… another case of upper caste Brahmin women holding on to tradition.

The Gobbe seere style has been adopted by women in the Malnad or Sahyadri areas and is commonly found in the central region of Karnataka. It
embraces the eighteen molas saree that circles the waist three or four times, including a knot after it crisscrosses both shoulders.

The Gond sari style of Central India begins by covering the left shoulder, and then is wrapped over the rest of the body. The Goan style encompasses a knot below the shoulder, and then the cloth crosses the left shoulder to be secured at the back. Tribal sarees basically cover the bosom, and then the saree is secured by knotting it over the chest firmly.

A traditional Malyali sari, the *mundum neratham*, uses unbleached, cream colored cotton, has a border of gold or pastel shades, and is worn in two pieces.

In 2012, Shauna Wilton, traveling through South India, talking to educated young women of Indian metropolises, analyzing side by side paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, where goddesses, mythological figures, and royalty all wore the saree, concluded that even if style varied place to place… the sari remained a sign of Indian womanhood. Wilton’s conclusion: It doesn’t matter what religion a woman belonged to – Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain (or what state, or what linguistic group), ‘she will adapt the saree to her religion’, during marriage.

**Twentyfirst century India**

In the twentyfirst century, India has the largest area in the world under cotton cultivation. One fourth of the world’s cotton comes from India. This country has probably one of the richest set of clothing traditions in the world to clothe its billion plus people – sarees of all descriptions, salwar kameezes, churidhar kameezes, half-sarees, burqas, shararahs, ghararas, tribal costumes, gypsy Lambada attire, trousers of various descriptions, uniforms for the police, army, air force and navy, shorts, dhothis, kupya-cheles, lungis, pajamas, Tibetan men and women’s costumes, nun and priest’s habits, the attire in the North-East states, dressing up as tigers and monkeys, dance costumes for all
different classical dance styles, you name it, and some part of India has it. And accessories including jewelry, weapons, bags, shoes, in gold, silver, leather, iron, bronze, glass, plastic, imitation gold, platinum, all types of precious and semi-precious stones, plus wealth from the sea like coral, pearls, etc. enrich the lifestyles of the people. Rayban glasses, Rolex and Titan Raga watches, and an unlimited number of cell phone models add to today’s accessory mix.

India has a strong fashion industry and a slew of designers, who make old fashions refreshingly new, and new fashion into a blend of fusion. Every state has its own unique clothing style(s), which represent, along with cuisine, décor, rites, rituals, one or the other ethnic group. Today, e-commerce buying from Internet sites like Myntra, and tele-home shopping, have added more dimensions to the way the middle and upper classes acquire stuff like clothing and accessories. Malls and boutiques add to this mix. Boutiques selling Armani, Prada, Chanel, and stocking Ritu Kumar and Rohit Bal, have exclusive up market clients. But the neighbourhood tailor is still in demand, because however much variety you can get from shopping, none of it can replace the personalized stitching of a blouse that goes with a saree, or the uniforms for schoolchildren, policemen, security details, the kupya of the Coorgs, etc. because the human body has an endless number of shapes and sizes.

However, similar to the movie Roti, Kapada and Makaan, this triumvirate for a ‘normal’ human existence still eludes many people below the poverty line in India.

The Kodavas

The Kodavas are an ethnic group from Kodagu, who speak the Dravidian language, Kodava-thak. They are also called Coorgs, and their native area is also called Coorg. The Coorgs were the earliest agriculturists in
Kodagu. Thanks partly to their social system of clan like family divisions (okkas/manepedhas), they practice family (okka/manepedha) based exogamy and community wide endogamy, though that is changing in the present generation. The Kodavas routinely practice ancestor worship, especially the ancestor of their particular okka. The okka is the Kodava community-based patrilineal clan, all of whom owe allegiance to the founder-ancestor, and share the particular okka name, the manepedha. Membership of an okka comes through by birth, and for ladies, by marriage to their husband’s okka.

Kodavas are Hindus, specifically Kshatriyas. Kodavas have a strong martial culture. They are called, and call themselves, Kshatriyas because of their martial traditions and their right to bear arms.

The Kodavas are the earliest agriculturists in Kodagu; they were and are in many places, the landowners. Mostly, in the past, the Coorgs traded superior Coorg valley rice for gold, salt and important necessities. Agro forestry is one of the main stays of Kodagu. Deforestation can affect the survival of Kodava culture, including their specific clothing. So can job immigration… Other reasons may come up during the field work.

Kodavas practice a system of land tenure, called Jamma (privileged tenureship), instituted in Kodagu during the Paleri Dynasty of the Lingayat Rajas. Jamma agricultural lands were handed down generation to generation by Kodavas as a hereditary right, were indivisible and included rights over the adjacent uncultivated woods (banè). The advantage is that lands under Jamma next to agroforestry areas remain intact. Jamma land tree rights remain with the ruling government.

Kodava cuisine is unique, with a strong emphasis on proteins like lamb, chicken, pork, river fish, and vegetables that abound in the hills like tender bamboo, wild mushroom, coconut, jackfruit, plantain, forest mango and many common vegetables that have hillside flavours. Kodagu’s most important culinary contribution is Kachampuli - cooked, black colored, flavourful vinegar.
not found anywhere else in the world, and deserving of a Geographic Index
tag. Alcohol is socially accepted and commonly used on a daily basis, thanks to
the year-round inclement weather.

Who the Kodavas are, where they actually originated from, is not clearly
established. The only clearly known fact about them is that they are a martial
race who settled in Kodagu centuries back. Much speculation has been done
about the Kodavas being a race that is part royalty and part Shudra, or part
Arab.

And this speculation about them being outsiders who settled in Kodagu
has been partly proved with genetic testing. Specifically, the original parent
group was Scytho-Dravidians who in turn became three different groups – the
Maratha Brahmins, the Kunbis, and the Kodavas. The Scythian ancestors of the
Kodavas are also called the Sse. Racially, the Kodavas have the R1a1 (M17) Y
chromosome that is common among the Indo-Europeans, hinting that they
might have been of the same proto community that became the ancestors of
Lord Buddha, who was a Shaka (Scythian), Indo-European and a Kshatriya.
The Scythians were also called the Western Kshatrapas (after the word
‘satrap’), and were defeated by the Guptas. Kodava individuals whose genes
were tested by the National Geographic Genographic Project are living proof of
this particular Y chromosome (Chromosome is a thread like structure found in
the cell nucleus of animals and plants, carrying genes). More research has to be
done by geneticists and ethno-historians for clarity on the origins and past
Diaspora of these people, both points being outside the scope of this study. In
support, Erskine Perry says that ‘the Kodavas have no resemblance to any of
the races of south India and that it clearly indicates they must have come from
outside.’

The population of Coorgs (Kodavas) is around one lakh and sixty
thousand. And they may constitute about one-fifth of Kodagu’s population.
History repeatedly tells us that no matter who ruled Kodagu – whether the
Lingayat kings or the British – the Kodavas were not influenced by the rulers’ customs, religion, clothing, etc. This may be because that though the Kodavas migrated from the north of India, they held on to their old customs and traditions, especially in the area of clothing.

Kodava clothing traditions

Classic subjects of anthropological studies have usually been ethnic groups or their cultures. This study is about the traditional clothing of one ethnic group residing in Coorg - the Kodavas - in late 2014 and early 2015. The Kodavas (or Coorg individuals) live in different areas of Kodagu (Coorg) – Madikeri and Virajpet. And the Coorg Diaspora includes Mysore and Bangalore, Bombay and New Delhi, US, UK, and the Gulf, and many more places not mentioned here. How much of tradition continues to survive in Kodagu among the Kodavas with the strong wind of regionalization, nationalization and Westernization, we will try to assess in this study. In the continuum of influence, we can begin with an ethnic community/indigenous group, progress to localization, then regionalization, and lastly nationalization or Westernization.