

Practice and Preservation of Material Culture Among the Koraga Tribe of South Canara

Dr. Basha K

Assistant Professor

Government First Grade College, Holenarsipur, Karnataka, India

bashak70k@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Koraga are a tribal community found mainly in the Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Shimoga and Kodagu districts of Karnataka and the Kasaragod district of Kerala, South India. These Areas in Karnataka are altogether often referred to as Tulu Nadu. Material culture which is in practice among the Koragas and other tribe has been supporting them to lead self-sufficient life without any menace. However, as a result of industrialization, urbanization, market economy, governmental policies and rehabilitation etc. their material culture is fading. At this backdrop, the present paper analyzes the material culture of the Koraga tribe and also suggests the conservation of material culture.*

Keywords: Artifacts, Bamboo, Koraga, Material Culture, Preservation

I. INTRODUCTION

Man has passed through several stages to reach the present stage of development in the course of evolution, this phase-wise development is appropriate both in the case of biological progression as well as technological and socio-cultural developments. Biologically, he has achieved the present state of increased cranial capacity, erect posture, power and precision gripping, stereoscopic binocular vision and several other facets (Rafferty, 2010). These biological alterations remarkably influenced the other perspectives of his life as well. The interaction among the human being led to the emergence of marriage, family-kinship ties, division of labour and socialization, etc. It was a considerable development from the socio-economic and cultural point of view. Secondly, the interaction of man with his neighboring environment was fundamentally concerned with fulfillment of his essential need of food (satisfaction of hunger). The impact of this interaction was evident in the material aspects of human life such as cultivation, animal husbandry, erection of house and house-hold items including basketry, fishing and hunting devices, musical instruments and agricultural implements, technological advancement in making of tools and weapons, covering of body etc.

Man's interaction with the perceived unseen world, because of either fear or faith, gave birth to religion, magic and nature-worship. Ascribing of mystic ancestral relationship with certain natural entities led to coming up of clan and lineage setup. Concepts of religious taboos, worshipping of totem, faith, prayer, belief, witchcraft, sorcery, shamanism, etc. were the other epilogues of this interaction. These three basic interactions laid the foundation-stone of culture, which emanated from the early savage state of man and continues to exist in the current stage of human advancement. However, due to the dynamic nature of culture, constant change has been taking place since times immemorial. It has not only influenced culture, but has also impacted upon people practicing it as well. Following progressive changes, the community has moved from the barbaric stage of development, to reach its present state of progression. However, these changes have caused the loss of certain cultural traits, loss of language, art-artifacts, traditional form of cultivation, customary practices, traditions, literature, dance, songs etc., as well, which has paved the path for loss of identity of several communities, especially the marginalized ones, including the tribals and indigenous people.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE KORAGA TRIBE

The Koraga are a tribal community who are basically found mainly in the Dakshina Kannada, Udupi District of Karnataka and Kasaragod District of Kerala State. They are also found in small numbers in almost all districts of Karnataka. The Koragas are classified as a Primitive Tribes Groups (PTGs) by government of India. The Koragas are summed up, in the Madras Census Report, 1901, as being a wild tribe of basket-makers and labourers, chiefly found in Puttūr, Mudbidri, and Uppinangadi taluk of South Canara district. They are, Mr. M. T. Wallhouse writes, "a very quiet and inoffensive race; small

and slight, the men seldom exceeding five feet six inches; black-skinned, like most Indian aborigines, thick-lipped, noses broad and flat, and hair rough and bushy. Their principal occupation is basket-making, and they must labour for their masters. Apparently, they live on the outskirts of villages, and may not dwell in houses of clay or mud, but in huts of leaves, called koppus. Like many of the wild tribes of India, they are distinguished by unswerving truthfulness.

The Koragas are employed by the sanitary department as scavengers. They remove the hide, horns, and bones of cattle and buffaloes, which die in the villages, and sell them mainly to Māppilla merchants. They accept food, which is left over after feasts held by various castes. Some are skilful in the manufacture of cradles, baskets, cylinders to hold paddy, winnowing and sowing baskets, scale- pans, boxes, rice-water strainers, ring-stands for supporting pots, coir (cocoanut fiber) rope, brushes for washing cattle, etc. They also manufacture various domestic utensils from soapstone, which they sell at a very cheap rate to shopkeepers in the market.

III. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Present study has emphasized to analyze the practice of material culture practising by the Koraga Tribe of South Canara district and need of preservation.

The present study has been conducted in South Canara (Dakshina Kannada). South Canara is a district of Karnataka state, with its headquarters in the coastal city of Mangalore. It is part of the larger Tulu Nadu region. The district covers an area nestled in between the Western Ghats to its east and the Arabian Sea to its west. Dakshina Kannada receives abundant rainfall during the monsoon. Since large number of Koragas concentrated in Mangalore, Puttur, Sullia, Moodabidri and Belthangadi taluks, 200 hundred respondents were selected from these taluks. Primary data concerned to the material culture practising by the Koraga are collected from the respondents with the help of interview schedule. Similarly, relevant literature collected from secondary sources as such journals, books, encyclopedias, gazetteers and reports.

IV. RESULT ANALYSIS

Obviously, Material Culture, includes tools, weapons, utensils, machines, ornaments, art, habitation, monuments, written records, religious images, clothing, etc. produced or used by humans. As part of the practice of material culture of the Koraga tribe, their habitation, household articles, musical instruments and fishing implements have been analysed in the following ways.

- **Nivasa (Shelter):** The shelter is one of the basic needs in human life after food and shelter. Therefore, housing pattern helps to understand any culture and lifestyles of any community. The traditional house of the Koragas is very simple. They used constructed with materials available within their ecosystem, such as bamboo, coconut leaves, areca nut leaves, etc. They used to construct a house with wooden pillars. The roof of the house is made of coconut or areca nut leaves and grass. The sidewall is made out of coconut leaves. Further, the floor is plastered with clay and cow dung. At present, most of the Koragas are living in the house constructed by Government authorities. Some houses were provided through the PVTG project.
- **Mora:** (Tray) Mora could be a bamboo tray used for separating chaff from grain and also utilized in the majority traditional festivals and occasions from wedding to festivals. **Bamboo Mouth Organ:** The bamboo free-reed instrument is one among the oldest traditional musical instruments utilized by the Koragas. Its whole length is about 5-6 inches only and half an in wide. Soft, quite thin bamboo is used to create this organ.
- **Ghorbe:** (Bamboo Cover) Ghorbe is used particularly during monsoon to cover the head while working in the open. Since it is to be placed on the head, it does not have any handle like an umbrella. It is prepared by knitting the small thin strips of bamboo held against each other properly locked. It is like a mat externally covered by the leaves to provide protection against rain water.
- **Chape:** (Mat): Both big and small mats and long mattresses are knitted from the very thin, narrow bamboo chips. The Koragas are used for sitting and sleeping purposes. It is also used for drying the food grains from sunlight.
- **Dolu:** (Drum) Koraga people are known for drum beating (dolu or dolu beating) and it's one among their important cultural contributions. They beat dolu during events like village fairs and Kambala. Traditional belief was that the sound of drum-beating by the Koragas drives away evil spirits.
- **Kolalu (Flute):** Flute is one among the best instruments made from thin bamboo. It produces beautiful sound with different tunes. Only a special quality of bamboo will be accustomed to making such bamboo flute. This bamboo

flute is incredibly easy to create. Flute music and dance involving both men and ladies also are important parts of the Koraga culture and are apparent at celebrations like Bhoomi Habba (worshipping earth).

- **Kooli:** Kooli was made from the stem of shrub which was weaving, like gradually converging the length towards down. It absolutely was having central horizontal diameter of 20-25 cm. and opening diameter was of 6-8 cm, and height up to 2 to 2.5 feet The Kooli was made in such manner that water and tiny fishes can escape very easily though the gaps made during formation of Kooli.

V. SUGGESTIONS

In the light of the findings of the study and fieldwork experiences, the following important suggestions mentioned for the implementation by the government, voluntary service organizations, activist and all those who are concerned in the preservation of material culture of the Koraga and other tribes.

- The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO in September 2003, calls for safeguarding knowledge and skills that are recognized by communities, groups, and in some cases individuals, as forming part of their cultural heritage; are transmitted from generation to generation and constantly recreated; are crucial for the sense of identity and continuity of communities and groups; are in conformity with human rights, and, mutual respect and sustainable development. This is commonly known as traditional or indigenous knowledge. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2006, recognizes “that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment”
- Recognition of the artists may be ensured. There are unsung artists who could never come up to the limelight due to want of recognition, and their artistic know-how will also die along with them. This recognition will encourage the new learners and people of the new generation to learn, uphold and practice their culture with pride and confidence.
- Under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the Tribal Research Institute and Universities need to undertake scientific techniques to preserve and promote the material culture of the Koragas and other tribes of the country.

VI. CONCLUSION

Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation Ltd. has been working to increase tribal peoples' income and livelihoods while preserving their way of life and traditions. It has also put in place several initiatives to familiarize people with the rich and diverse craft, culture, and products of tribal communities across the country, as well as to assist tribal populations in the marketing and development of their rich products. Their creations have a timeless appeal due to their natural simplicity. Handicrafts such as jewellery, accessories, paintings, metal crafts, terracotta & pottery, decorative items, food & organic items, cane & bamboo items, stationery, furniture, home furnishings, cuisine, etc. must all be preserved and promoted.

In collaboration with The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation Ltd (TRIFED), Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, has launched two interesting competitions, *Be the Brand Ambassador of Tribes India* and *Be a 'Friend' of Tribes India*. These competitions were created with the sole purpose of promoting tribal craft, culture, and way of life. Through these innovative contests, the public's awareness of tribal heritage, arts, and crafts can be increased. Citizens are hoped to contribute to overall tribal empowerment by purchasing more tribal products as they gain more knowledge and awareness about tribal heritage. However, mere sympathy by stakeholders of the society does not yield any fruitful result.

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