

Nadikerianda Chinnappa: The Legend of Coorg

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ABSTRACT

This document gives an Analysis of life and folklore in Coorg (Kodagu), a district in Karnataka state, India on the basis of Nadikerianda Chinnappa's work called 'Pattole Palame'. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss various aspects of life of people in Coorg as presented by Chinnappa in his work based on his observations and experience. An analysis of Social and Political Life of people in Coorg has been done with an emphasis on caste system, widow remarriage, status of women etc. All the above discussions have been done as seen by Nadikerianda Chinnappa.

Keywords: Coorg, Kodagu, Kodava, Pattole Palame.

INTRODUCTION

The 'Pattole Palame' is a result of an extraordinary achievement accomplished by a common man through his common sense. This extraordinary achiever is our Nadikerianda Chinnappa. He was born in a humble Kodava family in 1875. Although he was extremely talented he started working due to his unstable financial condition. For Chinnappa who occupied the posts of a teacher, revenue official, subedar in the army etc., the hobbies of collection and writing were his companions. As he declared, he had collected and recorded the things as he saw, heard, experienced by himself and learned from the elders. This 'Pattole Palame' is a grand record of information on the lifestyle, cultural uniqueness of the people of Coorg done in simple and appealing manner with due concern about the culture and with an aim of helping the coming generations to know their origins.

DETAIL AND DISCUSSION

'Arnadknoorpaje' means, six 'Nadus' (regions) have hundreds of customs. The area of Coorg was divided in to Nadus (regions). In his 'Pattole Palame', Chinnappa said that such several nadus have hundreds of customs. From this, we can note that the things collected and recorded by Chinnappa may not be applicable to all Kodava people everywhere in the Coorg. It is possible that the things recorded on Kodava culture in the 'Pattole Palame' work may be applicable only to some regions or a limited area of Coorg. Supporting to this view, I would like to refer a thing said by late 'Mandeera Jaya Appana'.

During 1961, the Kodava Sangha published a short form of 'Pattole Palame' work with the title: "Kodavanadap" (Kodava customs) and proclaimed the Kodava people to follow the customs, lifestyle and rules in the book. However, Kodava people didn't consider such proclamations seriously. And they didn't come forward to follow the lifestyle as said in the book.

There are reasons why Kodavas didn't respond to the Kodava Sangha and didn't follow Kodavanadap. There are differences between the customs of South Coorg and North Coorg, for example in the South Coorg region, marriage cannot be complete without the Mehandi custom (Henna) called 'Terana Beppo'. However, the people in North Coorg are not aware of this custom, which is not practiced. It is not prevalent.

There are reasons why we should not think the work 'Pattole Palame' as an ultimate representation to the Kodavas or Kodava culture. Native folklore is full of several other customs, traditions that were not recorded in this literature. However, we can proudly claim that Chinnappa attempted his best to protect the footprints of the native culture which was threatened to endangerment by the attack from

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the other cultures. The name of Nadikerianda Chinnappa is frontrunner among the persons who enriched the folklore of Indian Languages.

If we go back to the political and social context of the times of Chinnappa, the local officials of the Kodagu were serving the posts awarded to them by the local chieftains, and the British with honesty and quite happy with the rewards and positions assigned to them; their primary concern was to secure their positions, not the people, culture or their language and customs. With this kind of social environment, the commendable achievement was that of a common man who made big efforts to gather information on the culture he was born, lived and experienced. It must be admired that with the herculean effort, he informed and convinced the British officials about the importance of the Kodava culture and mobilised financial support for his cause and published his book with an intuitive title of ‘Pattole Palame’ in the year 1924.

It is important to note that there were books on Kodava culture to throw light on the lifestyle and culture of the Kodava people and they were given special place in the folklore even before the times of ‘Pattole Palame’. Kodava folklore came into existence in the form of literature even before the beginning of the 19th century. To name a few, Lt. Cover's "Memories of Kodagu Survey" (1817), Dr. Mogling's "Coorg Memories", Reverend Greater's "Coorg Songs (1870)", Rictor's "Coorg Gazetteer" (1871), Holland's "Coorgs and Yeravas (1901)" works record the information on the lifestyle and customs of Coorg. However, it is significant to note that the language of the land came into life from the work ‘Pattole Palame’ by Nadikerianda Chinnappa. The book was an authentic record of the Kodava life by the native, in his native language and it is considered as the chef-d'oeuvre of the Kodava folklore. Since the work has taken special place among the Kodava fans, Kodava speakers, folklore experts and the likes, the book ‘Pattole Palame’ has seen five editions and printed in Kodava, Kannada and English languages. The first edition of the work was published in 1924 by using Kannada script with the collection of riddles, moral quotes etc. It is imperative for the readers to note before the criticism of this unique work called ‘Pattole Palame’ that the Chinnappa has recorded the information as a collection of things on the folklore and the culture and the information recorded were not his personal opinions on anything, therefore the author is not directly responsible for any direct criticism or reviews of his work. The work is a biggest collection of folklore for the people of his native to explore and experience the things as seen by him, and in a way it had shown the sincere efforts by the author and his great affection for the culture. This work contains an overview of the history, geographical details and complete collection of information on the customs in practice from birth to death of persons during that time. It also contains some information on the connections between the Kodavas and the tribes and communities that speak Kodava language. The special place women had in the Kodava culture makes us to wonder today in the so called modern society.

Dowry was not practiced during those days and the society had approval for the marriage of the widows. Re-marriage was encouraged. ‘Pattole Palame’ contains a folk poem on the subject of a widowed woman who was married by one of the brothers of her husband.

“Choth choth chunnayi
tedigond pokane
tedi pona paballi
kal ke tore budda.
Ennanend arivira?
tannadanna devayya
kala kanda ponalli
anna bechcha momma
pandiya nadapole
ponnayi nadakalu
endenni nenatith
cheelanalla balan
baipirinji bandith

machchi manekerith
tanna petta avvang
ee suddinarpchi”^[1]

[A boy searches for a girl everywhere. However he fails to find the proper match for him. Then he realizes that the widow of his elder brother Devaih could be a proper match for him. The realization at the time seems like a medicinal herb for which he searched everywhere in the forests was just beneath the sole of his foot. He tells his mother that he wants to marry his sister in law according to the ancient customs.]

What we see from the above, is the realisation of the Kodava culture, which had a humane approach which allowed remarriage by brother in law to give second life to a widow. It is imperative to note that the society had no negative notions about the widow marriage and remarriage during those days.

Also, according to the ‘Okkarije’ and ‘Makkarije’ systems as discussed in the ‘Pattole Palame’, when a family was devoid of a male heir, girls in the family were becoming the successors. They were allowed to marry a man to their families and run the families on their command. This shows that matriarchal system was in practice in the absence of a male heir. Also, there was a custom called ‘Paitandec Alpa’, which honored woman who gave birth to ten children as a ‘Great Mother’ by the relatives and the neighboring communities.

Several fructuous things owing to the folklore were recorded in the ‘Pattole Palame’ work. Also here is a description about the festivals and the collection of songs sung on the occasions. The quotes said during the ‘Kail Pold’ festival were as useful as experienced guidance from the elders to everyone.

Example:

Narino pandino
batte but panang
shatrana enangate
mittoorak toneyayinil
rayang miniyate
devala mareyate

[Tiger and wild boars should be hit out of their path. Do not anger the enemy. Be helpful to your friends. Never go against the King. Do not forget the god.]

The words such as above which teach the values of life to all are relevant even till this date. The folk songs sung during childbirth, marriage, death are recorded in the original Kodava language.

Along with the above, an analysis is needed on the caste system discussed in the ‘Pattole Palame’ work. The castes other than Kodava are considered as ‘Shudra’ in the ‘Pattole Palame’ work. The castes related to the same can be listed as follows:

The Shudras of the Teeyas, Billavas, Peggades, Airies, Bannas, and Agasas should not be allowed in the nellakki nadubade, kannikombare and kitchen sections of the Kodava houses.^[1]

Medas, Holeyas, Martas and the castes of similar levels should stand on the yard.^[1]

It is inevitable that the above things will confuse the readers. The author has recorded few quotes in the miscellaneous section of the next pages. One quote is as follows:

“Pole movane talemovan”, means the Son of the Dalit caste is the elder son of our family. The elders might have the knowledge of the love, care, respect and the responsibility lay on the shoulders of the elder son. It says, “even if the Holy Scriptures is wrong, wise sayings can never be wrong”. It is not understood though, when they consider Dalit boy the elder son of their family, why they called their elder son ‘Shudra’ and kept him beyond the reach of their household.

There is another wise saying recoded in the ‘Pattole Palame’, regarding the ‘Meda’ community. “Pani ariyatha moodina medang kodkondu” which means the girl who doesn't know how to carry out the household chores should be married to the boy of the Meda community.

On this occasion also, if the elders of the local culture thought that ‘Meda’ community as untouchable, how did they think about the girl from their household to be married to the boy? No, not at all. The above lines express the concern, respect and their confidence about the sincerity and appreciation they have had about the skills of the people of that community, and not the feeling that they are Shudras/Untouchables.

There were 17 communities in the Coorg that were identified as tribals of Coorg who followed Kodava language, culture, lifestyle and identified them as the natives of Kodagu from several years, even before the publishing of ‘Pattole Palame’. Western scholar Richtor recorded 23 communities as the speakers of Kodava language. It is possible that all the communities which were identified as the natives had lived a life of harmony. It is a culture which sheltered each community who extended their helping hand to one another.

There are supporting information in the history of Coorg and native folklore which help me conclude this way. Richtor records in his writings that the Mark Cubbon, the then British commissioner, in his order, didn't consider the people of Coorg as an ethnicity or race, instead he considered them as gallant people of Coorg and calls them as little nation of warriors, and provides them exception from the anti-arms act prevalent at those times.

The history reveals that the erstwhile Kings who ruled Coorg considered the people here as Kodava people and used them for their services. The Hunsur inscription, which was the first ever inscription, makes reference of the Coorg and calls them as ‘Ella naada kodavaru’. The culture had no recognition for the hierocracy and the clergy class. The folklore culture identified and respected its elders as their ‘Karonas’ (origin) and worshipped them and were grateful them.

Most importantly, the folklore culture and its elders showed affection, respect, and devotion towards the people who helped them regardless of the communities they belonged to. They showed their gratitude in the form of providing them residence in their places.

A person named Katal Boltu who belonged to the Kapala Dalit community was dearest among the friends of Ponnappa a folklore warrior who was famous in the name of Kalyatajjappa. ‘Pattole Palame’ includes the collection of a poem in which the historical details of ‘Katalbolthu’ sacrificing his life for his friend were mentioned. The natives still show their gratitude to ‘Katalbolthu’ by providing him ‘Ede’ (sacrificial meal offered to the deity) and in a village called Ponnampete, an elderly person who belongs to ‘Kembatti Holeyas’ community takes the center stage in the religious traditions and festivities and the native Kodavas respect him with devotion. When a Dalit priest is apotheosised with a God called ‘Poladeva’ during the ‘Badrakali’ festival at the Nadikeri village, there is a custom where all the Kodava devotees salute him by touching his feet and get Prasada from him.

From the examples above, it can be understood that the concept of Kodava culture could be very recent. The lifestyles of all but 17 communities who are natives of Coorg should come under the concept of Kodava ethos. There may not have been any class systems in the original culture. The outsiders identified these people as Kodavas, who lived with their different hereditary professions. It can be supposed that the vested interests might have divided the society on the later days.

For example, it can be supposed that the people who took major occupations such as growing the ‘Kembutti Bhatta’ (Red Raddy) were called as ‘Kembatti Holeyas’, people who made baskets, fans, punnets and receptacles etc. were called ‘Medas’, the people who were experts in haircutting were called ‘Nayindas’ and the people who determined auspicious and inauspicious moments for the festivities and the important occasions in life were called ‘Kaniyas’. Then their roles and positions in the society may be determined based on the same.

There is no ambiguity that the social classifications were made long before the time of ‘Pattole Palame’ and Chinnappa has handed over the things he saw, experienced, and heard to the next generation in a sincere manner. However, the research of the original culture that was prevalent since long time needs to be done.

A grass-root research work needs to be taken up in a scientific manner to bring the folklore of the land to the light. Each village and street across the Kodagu should be researched and the collection of the oral folklore needs to be done. An attempt should be made to research the source of the local culture by threading the path of this oral folklore. Conceptual discussions on the culture should take place for

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the same purpose. It is possible that such conceptual discussions will help getting clear picture of the culture. A collection of the folklore needs to be done in conceptual manner without negligence and considering any aspect of the local society as mean.

CONCLUSION

‘Pattole Palame’ book is not the only yardstick of the Kodagu ethos. It is a genuine effort of collecting information reflecting the culture and traditions of a community. We need to put our sincere efforts to discover the original culture based on the ‘Pattole Palame’ work and while returning to our roots, we should be able to spread the flavors of this rich heritage to the entire world.

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