

**Unveiling the History and Symbolism of Languishing Kurumba paintings****Vijayalakshmi Ravi, Dr. R.Sheela John**

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[doi: 10.48047/AFJBS.6.15.2024.3112-3132](https://doi.org/10.48047/AFJBS.6.15.2024.3112-3132)**Abstract**

The art of Kurumba paintings originating from the Nilgiri hills, in Tamil Nadu, India is a captivating form that dates back around 4500 years. These traditional tribal artworks hold value and are commonly seen adorning the walls of huts and caves. Depicting scenes from life, rituals and mythology Kurumba paintings offer a glimpse into the heritage of the Kurumba people illustrating their close bond with nature and spiritual beliefs. Symbolism plays a role in Kurumba art often portraying human figures, animals and natural elements that reflect the tribes respect, for nature and divine beings. Despite efforts to preserve this fading art form Kurumba paintings continue to face challenges in maintaining their legacy. The researcher with a keen interest collected and documented the art.

Keywords: Kurumba tribes, Rock painting, Languishing, Kurumba tribal painting

1. Introduction

Tribal groups in India are the earliest inhabitants of a country that experienced diverse waves of invaders and other settlers over thousands of years, making it difficult to identify the precise origin of today 's tribal peoples from a —purist perspective. The state and discourse in India reject the term —indigenous peoples and prefer instead to use the Constitutional term —Scheduled Tribes. (Das, Hall, Kapoor, & Nikitin, June 2014). Folk and tribal art has been one of the most noticeable trademarks of the Indian Heritage. It has flourished through centuries in the Indian sub-continent and their diversity, their ease and originality has charmed people all over the world. The creativity in India is as diverse as its topography. The art forms include paintings which are an integral part of the tribal tradition and often mirror the lifestyle and tradition of the particular era.**Invalid source specified.**

Researcher has collected and documented the tribal paintings of Kurumba which is one

of the languishing arts in India. Kurumba, a people living in the Nilgiri hills, west-central Tamil Nadu state, southern India. Originally pastoralists, the Kurumba were probably identical with or closely related to the Pallavas. Kurumba, a tribal group living in the southern part of India in the states of Tamilnadu, has a rich heritage of painting. It is interestingly sad to note that practicing artists are hard to find among the tribal people. Kurumba art is no longer appreciated and popular which has led to the decline in Kurumba paintings. Recently many articles are published in TOI, Hindu, News minute stating that Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India in co-operation with Tribal Research Center, Ooty conducted workshop among tribal community to develop this art form. Nilgiris police adopted Kurumba Tribal to preserve the art form etc., Many organizations are coming forward to preserve this art. Based on the facts mentioned above and with a keen interest the Kurumba paintings were collected from various sources and documented.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Tribes of India

India has the single largest tribal population in the world compared to any other country with a population of 67.75 million (1991 census). They constitute 8.1 percent to total population of the country. (Sujatha.K, April 2000) In tribal India, a number of tribes depend on crafts and cottage industries for survival. They sell their finished products in the periodical markets. They are engaged in a variety of crafts and art works. (Pankaj, 2008) Art is an integral part of most, if not all, human societies and that by failing to study it anthropologists deny themselves access to a significant body of information. (Morphy & Perkins, 2006)

Until recent years nobody had taken the trouble of recording the artistic tradition of tribal people. The impact of Europe brought in an entirely new set of conditions which upset the social basis of primitive and folk-art tradition in India. Even a century ago, the life of the guild artist was closely integrated in the economic life of the villages. In exchange of his art products the artist was assigned a measure of land by the village community. (Mookerjee, 1954) Globalization brought about drastic changes in the life of the tribal people. It puts heavy constraints on the life of the tribal artist and their art forms. Growth of the global culture is an alarming threat to our indigenous cultural diversity. Therefore, adequate steps need to be taken to protect our exclusive art forms. (Fousiya, 2018)

2.2. Nilgiris Tribal

India has the second largest tribal population after Africa. Although they are a minority in terms of the total population, they are significant in terms of their socio cultural and economic specificities. They constitute 8.6% of the total population of the country, a significant 104 million as per the Census of 2011. The total population of Tamil Nadu stood at 7,21,47,030 in 2011, with the tribal population at 794,697. The tribal population has risen from being 1.04% of the total population in 2001 to being 1.1% of the total population as per the Census of India, 2011. Tamil Nadu has 0.76% of the total ST population in India mentioned in Tamil Nadu Rural Transformation Project report 2017. The state of Tamil Nadu has 32 districts. Among these 32 districts, the Nilgiris district has the largest population of tribes. In Nilgiri district there are six particularly vulnerable tribal groups they are Todas, Irulars, Kotas, Kurumbas, Paniyas, and Kattunayakans. (Magimairaj & Balamurugan, 2017)

Nilgiris district is one of the smallest districts in Tamilnadu. Etymologically the word Nilgiris means Blue Mountain. According to the 2001 census, the total scheduled tribe population in this district is 25,048, which constitute 15.98% of the total tribal population of the state. But in 2011 census, the total population of the Nilgiri district is 7.64 lakhs peoples out of which the total Scheduled Tribes population was 28378, constituting 4.32 percent of the total general population. The Scheduled Tribe population in Nilgiri district is not evenly distributed in the six taluks. 32.08 percent of them live in Pandalur taluk; 24.10 percent of the tribes live in Kundha taluk; 9.27 percent of them live Udagamandalam taluk and remaining 6.96 percent live in Coonoor taluk. (Ramasubramanian, 2019)

For many centuries the tribes of the Nilgiri Hills in South India were isolated from the people of the plains below. The steepness of the hills and the climate of the Figureau discouraged any extensive contacts with the Hindus of the lowlands. So, the tribes formed a social enclave which was geographically close to Hindu life but culturally remote from it. The Nilgiri folk lived in

economic and social symbiosis, the Todas being pastoral people, the Badagas agriculturalists, the Kotas artisans, the Kurumbas food gatherers and sorcerers. (Mandelbaum, 1941) Non-wood forest products (NWFP) play an important role in the daily life and well-being of tribes in Nilgiris. (Balasubramaniam et al., 2019)

2.3. Kurumba Tribes in Nilgiris

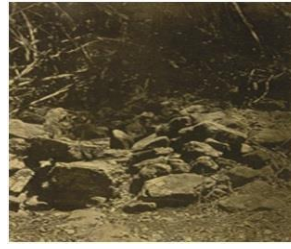
Kurumbas, of whom however there is not much to be said, they live, not on the Figureau of the hills, like the Todas and Badagas, but on the slopes, and in the most feverish places; they are, however, in constant intercourse with those two tribes, for whom, they act as priests and musicians. The Kurumba villages consist only of a few huts, with a small extent of cultivation near them, and are known by the general designation of Motta. The Todas divide the Kurumbas into three classes; the Mulla Kurumbas, the Naya Kurumbas, and the Panias. The two latter live in the Wynaad. Each Badaga district has its own Kurumba priest, who comes up at the ploughing season, and sows the first handful of grain; and at the harvest time also before the sickle is put to the crop. And if a standing crop should at any time be attacked by insects, he is sent for, and has to go through the ceremony of lowing like a calf; which the Badagas believe has the effect of killing the insect. For the services the Kurumba either receives remuneration in grain, or if he is paid in money, receives a quarter of a rupee for every yoke of oxen required to plough the land. The Kurumbas, who live in the mid-ranges of the Nilgiris or blue-mountains, entertain a confusing and mysterious identity. Several factors add to the romanticisation of these tribal people. Like the mountain ranges, the word kurumba is found in the adjoining states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. The tribes themselves are sometimes called Kuruba and sometimes confused with other tribes of similar names like Kuruman. The Kurumbas are generally believed to be the descendants of the Pallavas whose rule was at its grandest in the 7th century. Losing power to the Kongus and the Chalukyas, the Pallavas were finally driven out and dispersed by the Chola king Adondai. They settled in scattered settlements in the Nilgiris and Wynad, in Coorg and Mysore. It is the Kurumbas of the Nilgiris whom we refer to when we say Kurumba (Metz, 1864). Figure 1 shows the kurumba tribals in C1900.

Figure 1

Kurumba Tribal C1900

Figure 2

Kurumba Kovil in the Nilgiris Hills



Brecks (1873) publishes the photograph of Kurumba Kovil in the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu, taken by an unknown photographer from the Madras School of Arts in 1871-72 which was shown in Figure 2. Brecks was the Commissioner of the Nilgiris and wished to make a record of the indigenous hill-tribes of the region before their way of life, customs and legends died out due to increasing western influences. Based on Tamilnadu's Nilgiri District, they prefer the term kurumbar to themselves, while others refer to them as Kurumba, Kuruba, Kuremna, and Kuruman. Kurumba means one who cares for sheep, etymologically speaking. Although some Kurumba live in the state's plain region, they have not been notified as a planned tribe.(Monisha, 2020) . Of the Kurumbas it has been said: “They worship also a rough round stone under the name of Hiriadeva, setting it up either in a cave or circle of stones, like the so-called “Kurumba Kovil” of the Badagas which the latter would seem to have borrowed from the Kurumba. Each Badaga Grama, with its group of villages, keeps a Kurumba priest called Kani Kurumba who performs annual ceremonies for the Badagas at seed and harvest time. (Metz1864). An interesting note from history is to be found in the writing of Francis (1908) is of the view that the Nilgiri District contains far fewer people than any other collectorate in the Presidency, fewer, indeed than many taluks in the plains and less, than a fourth of the population of Madras town and the number of persons to the square mile there is less than in any other part of the province.

Jakka (2003) identifies five distinctive Kurumbas in the Nilgiris on the basis of region of residence, language spoken, and variety of cultural traits, namely as Aalu or Paalu Kurumbas, Betta Kurumbas, Jenu or Then Kurumbas, Mullu Kurumbas and Urali Kurumbas. Aalu Kurumbas are found in the taluks of Coonoor and Kotagiri, Betta Kurumbas and Jenu Kurumbas inhabit the Mudumalai Sanctuary, Mullu Kurumbas are found in Pandalur taluk whereas Urali Kurumbas are distributed in the taluks of Gudalur and Pandalur. (Aalu (milk), Paalu (milk), Betta (hill), Jenu (honey), Mulla (net), and Urali (village) as well as the Mudugas (no etymology)). Each is a distinct ethnic group differing from the others in dialect, religious beliefs, and other cultural attributes. The Kurumba houses known as "Gudlu" are temporary constructions in the forests. The traditional occupation of the Kurumbas is food gathering, like collection of honey and forests produce. They are also cultivating millets like ragi and samai

on a small scale of mainly on hill slopes and mountain ridges. Honey fetches considerable remuneration for the Kurumbas. It is released much by public. Honey is collected mostly in the summer months from the cliffs, rocky crevices and the branches of giant trees. The supplement their usual diet with ample quantity of honey. Kurumbas are known to possess keen eyesight, gained possibly from constant watching of the honey bee to the hives. Now, they are mainly engaged in agriculture and those who do not own lands work as casual agricultural laborers. The Kurumbas are hard working people, but the economic condition of the Kurumbas is very poor. The tribe of Kurumbas in the Nilgiris is divided into 5 ethnic groups, viz. Alu or pallu Kurumbas, Beta Kurumbas, Jenu Kurumbas and Urali Kurumbas. Each of these groups has their own distinctive habitats within the Nilgiris. The Alu or Pallu kurumbas are to be found only in the taluks of kotagiri, Coonoor and Kundah. From the accounts of the British travellers in the nineteenth century, we learn that this group resided in caves or rock shelters or huts in small hamlets on the steep slopes of this region. The Alu Kurumbas are considered as medicine men, faith healers who had the capacity to exploit the medicinal properties of plants available in their habitat. Kurumbas have a strong belief in ancestor worship. They are considered authors of dolmens and megalithic edifices seen in many places in Nilgiri hill ranges (Kapp, 1985).

The Kurumbas, flying thither for refuge, and finding the summit already in possession of a superior people, would naturally shelter themselves in the untenanted solitudes lower down, hiding in the dense forest of the mountain sides as at the present day. Their partial inoculation with the religion and language of neighbouring races seems also to confirm the theory of isolation in respect to the other, and further removed, tribes. (King, 1870)

Kurumba tribes are found in the forest area of Chemmankarai, Nilgiri district. They are skilled people in honey collection, food harvesting and Kurumba tribes are found in the forest area of Chemmankarai, Nilgiri district. They are skilled people in honey collection, food harvesting and medicine preparation. They collect medicinal plants from the deep forest area and utilize it efficiently. These people live in forest area in habitat of wild animals and they are able to sense the smell of the animals nearby or on the way. They make money by selling jack fruits, citrus, Guava, coffee bean cultivation, wild chillies etc., to the Burliar shops on the way to Mettupalayam to Ooty. (Metz al., 2017) The Kurumbas' primitive occupation was shifting cultivation. They were a food gathering community. Many Kurumbas had occupational migration. The Nilgiri Adivasi Welfare Association Report showed that out of their total population 58.92 per cent constituted workers. A majority of them, i.e., 42.75 per cent were engaged in agriculture. This was followed by 15.23 per cent of industrial workers, and 29.65

per cent were in government service. The remaining 12.29 were in various other unorganized services. (Yoganandham & Govindaraj, 2020)

A typical Alu Kurumba village or motta (or kombhai) is made up of five to six huts scattered on the steep wooded slopes of the Nilgiris. Individual huts stand alone on a flattened piece of land and are home to a nuclear family. Constructed from a bamboo backbone with walls made of criss- crossing bamboo strips and grass, they are often fortified with mud and cow dung and support a tiled roof. A small partition, a metre deep and a metre high, divides the interior space into the kitchen and the living or sleeping room. The kitchen or ittumane (food house) has a narrow one-foot-high ledge running the length of a wall. This ledge holds the fireplace and the utensils. Steel vessels have replaced the traditional bamboo vessels and leaves used earlier. The sleeping room or vagamane serves for all other purposes. The houses open to flattened verandahs or thinnamanne that are used for social purposes. Many of the Kurumbas now live in the government settlements that are brick houses with tin roofs. The Kurumba ancestors gathered honey and cultivated small patches of raagi, saami and other grains for food and survival. Small patches of coffee and raagi are still grown in the villages though. Coffee and tea are popular drinks. Even children as young as five are given black sweetened coffee to drink in the mornings. Jackfruit, another plant growing in abundance in the Nilgiris is also eaten in generous quantity in its raw and cooked form. With most of the kurumbas working on the plantation, they have to leave home in the morning and return only after five in the evening. This allows them only two meals (ittu) a day. The meal consists of rice (replacing raagi) and a curry. The kurumbas eat fish, chicken and goat meat. Chewing tobacco and drinking alcohol, irrespective of gender are also popular. (Nelson & Gopal, 2021)

2.4. Kurumba Tribal Paintings

India is home to over 10 crore tribals, with each group having its distinct characteristics. But what binds them together is their affinity with nature, with aspects of their lives from food, and medicine to paintings deeply intertwined with the natural surroundings. The Kurumbas have remained hunters and gatherers of food and are well versed in the technique of collecting honey. The Kurumbas are known for their paintings and witchcraft. (Ganesh et al., 2021)

The Kurumbas' art reflects their socio-religious structure. The male members of the temple caretakers, or priests to the Kurumba community, have long practised the skill. The women of the household help to decorate the house by making borders around the door and windows and kolams on the floor. Kurumbas other than temple caretakers are not permitted to perform the skill. The outer walls of the temple and the house serve as the painting's canvas. The figures reflect their Gods and express Kurumba beliefs as well as village and tribe milestones. The

artist also draws on his own life for inspiration. The figures are formed out of lines and have a simple design. The primary features of their drawings are independent lines and concentric dots with simple geometric patterns. The figures are similarly devoid of any indication of their natural surroundings. The surface on which they are painted serves as the defining environment. (D. Kasturi & Kanagambal, 2021)

Rock art has been found throughout large areas of South Asia; the Nilgiri region is not an exception. Rock art was first noted in the Nilgiri area during the mid- 19th cent. Two rock art sites are reported one painted and another incised. These art works is quite significant for insights into the history of the Nilgiri Hills. It gives us some guidelines for when occupation of the hills began, and may suggest to what extent the Nilgiri Hills were isolated or part of a broader social milieu. These sites also indicate some of the subsistence and ritual activities engaged in by local people, reflect the beliefs of the practitioners of this art, and give some hints as to the cultural affinities of the artists. There is a pre-historic site near Velaricomбай, a Kurumba hamlet, located 16 km from Kotagiri. The ochre painting, spread over the rock canvas date back to the pre-historic era and unfolds vital clues about how the Kurumbas, a tribal community in the Nilgiris, lived. There, a gigantic cult figure stares from the rock canvas. It has long limbs and carries a decapitated head on his right hand, while the torso of the slain person lies below. A halo in dotted line surrounds the huge figure. He is a key figure perceived by the pre-historic people as their main deity or cult hero. A kurumba priest, even today, draws anthropomorphic forms on temple walls over the previous year's paintings. They believe that the spirit from the painting flies to the pre-historic figure on the cliff and rejuvenates it. They conduct a secret ritual to recharge the cult figure, as they believe he brings prosperity to their hamlet. The rock paintings depict the lifestyle of his ancestors. They depicted rituals involving harvests, festivals, and death, as well as things they were scared of, such as snakes, and muni (evil force), 'dodda deiva' (the big deity) 'neer deiva' (water deity) and the kudils and parans (machans). A 'muni sangili' shown near the feet of the beheaded figure depicts the evil force. These paintings are 5,000 years old or dated 3,500 B.C. (Hockings, 2012). Kurumba art has become a means for managing social uncertainty and above all, for constructing and maintaining a distinct identity within the pervading Hindu society. (Tenti, 2021)

3. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

3.1. Study on Kurumba painting

Kurumba painting is a rare art and a few books and literature are available for the same. This is presented in the review of literature chapter under the topic - Kurumba tribes in Nilgiris

and Kurumba tribal paintings. Initially information about the painting was collected through other sources and the same is presented under the following headings.

3.1.1. Collection of data on Kurumba painting

3.1.2. Story behind Kurumba painting

Kurumba painting provides interesting insights about the Kurumba tribes and the same is explained below

3.1.1. Collection of Data on Kurumba Painting

The researcher started with collection of data from newspaper, followed by websites and personal interview. The primary and secondary data about the Kurumba painting was collected and documented. From the article in the newspaper, it was clear that the Kurumba painting is not only languishing but also a resourceful art. The articles were found in The New Indian Express (dt 17/5/2012), The Times of India (dt 24/10/16) and The News Minute (dt 22/6/2018) gave information about the surviving Master artisans Mr.Balasubramaniam and Mr.Krishna who were doing their best to revive this traditional art form through exhibitions, trainings and workshops. These artisans are natives of Sholurmattam, Kil Kothagiri district where this Kurumba art is originally practiced.

Figure 3
The New Indian Express
(dt 17/05/2012)

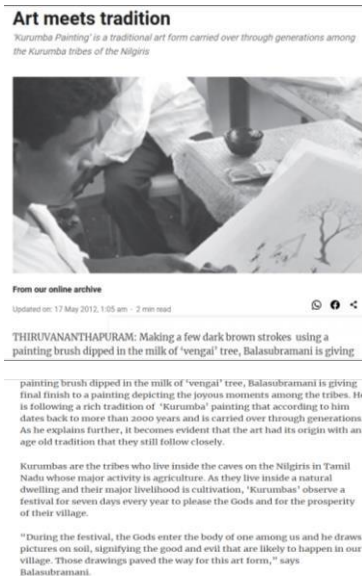


Figure 4
The Times of India
(dt 24/10/2016)

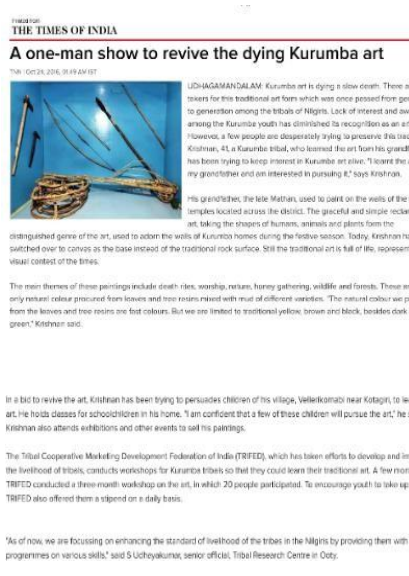


Figure 5
The News Minute
(dt 22/06/2018)

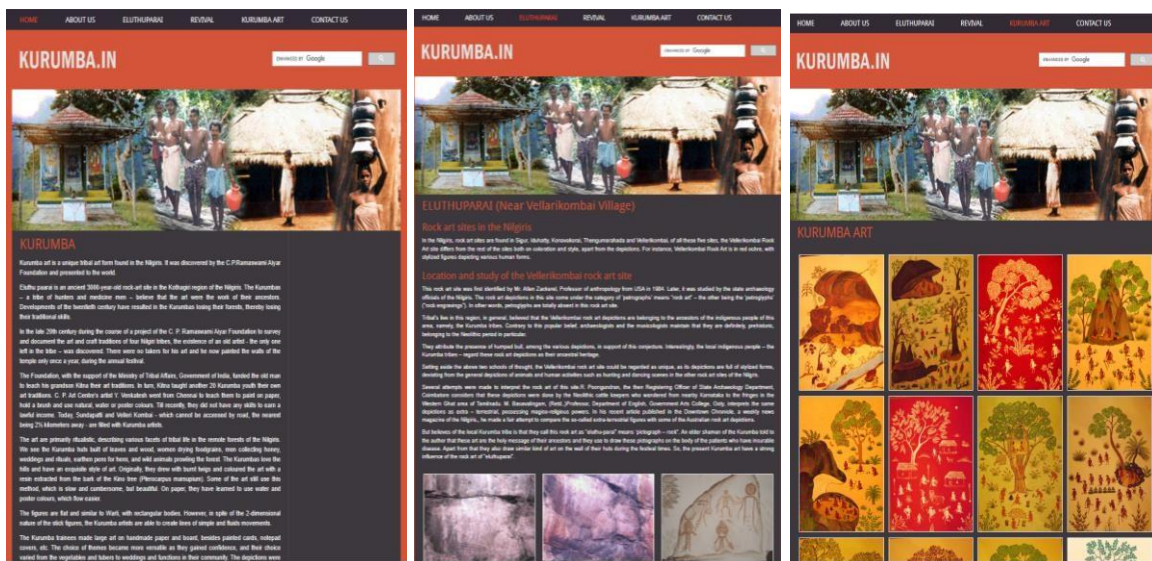


The newspaper article also hinted about the website KURUMBA.IN. This website was published by The C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation, Alwarpet, Chennai with the support of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. The website displayed the various steps taken to revive the art form through trainings and exhibitions. They also sponsored art materials

for creation of Kurumba painting. CPR foundation started the training in 1999 till 2013. In the addition to the trainings, exhibitions and commercial skills development were conducted. They have uploaded the colourful images of various activities of Kurumba life style like rituals, occupation and their routine life. It also gave details about the rock art that local Kurumba call this as Eluthu - parai means pictograph – rock which was considered as the holy message of their ancestors. Eluthuparai had an influence on the present Kurumba painting. Kurumba art is a unique tribal art which is primarily ritualistic describing various facts of tribal life in the remote forest of Nilgiris.

Figure 6

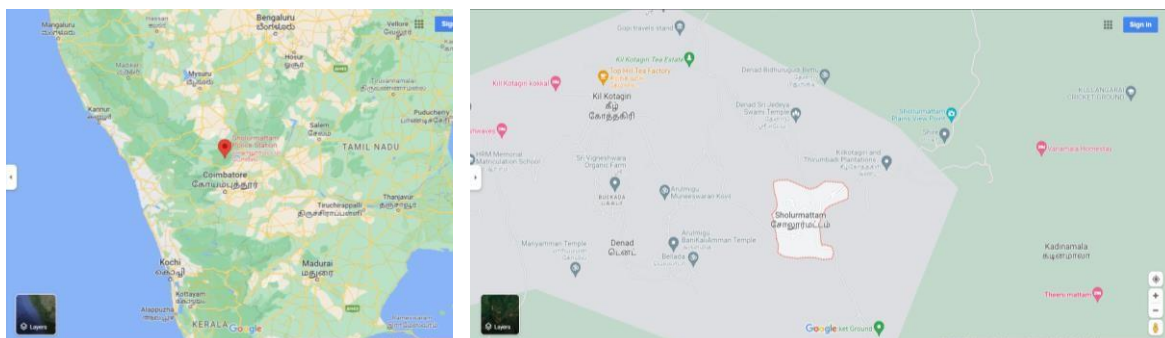
Website: KURUMBA.IN



The researcher conducted a personal interview with Mr. Balasubramaniam, Master artist to understand the nuances of the painting. This Kurumba artist resides in Sholurmattam, Kil Kotagiri on the road towards Kodanadu which was shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Location of Sholurmattam



- Place - Sholurmattam, Kil Kotagiri Nilgiris
- Pin Code - 643217

- Panchayath - Denad Panchayath
- Taluk - Kotagiri
- District - Nilgiris
- State - Tamil Nadu

Mr. Balasubramaniam (Figure 8) was practicing this art from childhood and stated the Kurumba painting has its origins in rock paintings 4500 years ago and an awareness of this Kurumba painting was drawn on the walls of homes. First the walls were coated with cow dung or red soil (semmanu) before doing the art. The beliefs, rituals, hunting techniques, and daily village life of the Kurumba people are depicted in traditional Kurumba art which is termed as Ajile Bottu in local language. He appreciated that the Kurumba youth are taken interest in reviving this art form in recent days. To name a few products created by youth are bamboo, glass, tiles, cups etc

Figure 8

Interview with Artisan Balakrishnan



As stated by the artist, the story of Kurumba paintings depicts the cultural and religious beliefs from birth to death of the tribes. Originally Natural dyes were used in traditional Kurumba painting, which is not available in large quantities. Hence in recent time the Kurumba art was created with posters and acrylic paints in their training courses and workshops. For original art work, natural dyes are used. In Kurumba art, six colours were used and the details of the same are listed below

- Brown & Black colour is extracted from Bark of *Pterocarpus marsupium* (Vengai maram) sourced from tree aged above 10 years
- Yellow is extracted from Bark of *Pterocarpus marsupium* (Vengai maram) sourced from tree aged below 4 years
- Light green & Dark green is extracted from Kaatavarai sedi (kaatai sedi)

- White colour is extracted from the seeds of *Leucas aspera* (thumbai sedi)
- Red colour is from red soil (Semman) and black soil (Kaliman) are soils used in the background of houses.

Feathers of hen, peacock, bamboo sticks and aerial roots of the Banyan tree (aalam viludhu) were used traditionally for painting which is now replaced with brushes (size 0 to size 5). Thanks to the conduct of various training, 8 master artists are currently doing the Kurumba painting.

3.1.2. Stories behind Kurumba painting

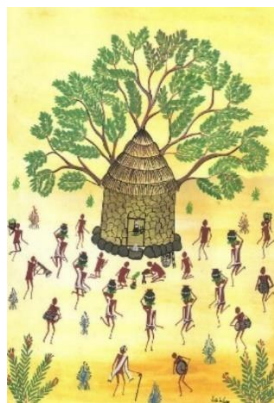
Kurumba art was also explained in by Mr. Balasubramaniam in comparison to the Warli art. The one of the main differences between Warli and Kurumba paintings is the colors and the shape of the human figure. The body is rectangular in Kurumba painting while it is triangular in Warli art.

After the personal interview, the researcher collected images of Kurumba paintings from various sources which includes museums, websites, books, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and trades men. Based on the above primary and secondary data, the details of the Kurumba paintings were consolidated in research. Hence the following set of Kurumba painting were selected for the study and the same is explained below

3.1.2.1. Prayer for Rain - The painting “Prayer for rain” depicts seven women, each wearing a scarf or a sash, and carrying pots. Key Deva/Malinga Deva are names associated with the pots. Stones encircle the shrine, which has a thatched roof, and a stone was placed within the circle. The women pour their seven pots of water over the stone. If the water runs out over the edge of the circle, it was believed that there will be a good rain for the crops.

Figure 9

Prayer for Rain



Nearby a number of drummers play various drums, and an elder, with white hair, stands looking on in the foreground, wearing a sash and carrying a cane. The three men are seen talking more

generally, about their customs. Clearly music was a major aspect of their lifestyle and the Figure 9 shows musicians playing bells, which used to be made of bamboo.

3.1.2.2. Honey cultivation

“Honey Cultivation” depicts Thaen Paarai where they go every year to collect honey. Tribal trek into the cliffs where the beehives are found. They make ladders out of bamboo, tie them together with climbers found in the forest, and use the sturdy ladder to reach the beehives. They light fires to drive the bees away before collecting the honey. From each beehive, they get 10 to 15 kilos of honey. Kurumba songs are linked to the gathering of honey. There will be 20-30 bee hives suspended 300-400 feet above the ground level, affixed to a rock formation located 6-7 kilometers into the Sholurmattam forest. The Kurumba tribes present honey as an offering to their deity prior to selling or consuming it. Smoke (sutta) is used to render the bees asleep, so preventing them from attacking humans. There is a plethora of medicinal flora within the forest. This painting was given below in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Honey Cultivation



3.1.2.3. Wedding Rituals

“Wedding ritual” painting which represent the rituals performed in the tribe during wedding ceremony. A pathway ‘Mettu Seelai’ is laid out for a prospective Kurumba bride. The worthiness of the groom is decided by ‘Kaelvi Panam’. The groom arrives dancing his way as he balances a stick on his shoulder with two bags full of coins. The village elders count the coins, and if happy give the nod. Then, the bride walks down the mettu seelai, gets their blessings, and the wedding festivities begin. The maximum Kaelvi Panam that is expected of a groom is Rs.101 while the minimum is Rs.10. This painting is presented in Figure 11.

Kurumba Painting selected for the study is Wedding Rituals of tribals. As is the case with other castes, weddings today are exceedingly expensive among Kurumba. The bride's parents are

required to spend the equivalent amount on clothing, jewels, and housewares, while the groom's parents spend a few thousand rupees on the festivities.

Figure 11

Dowry

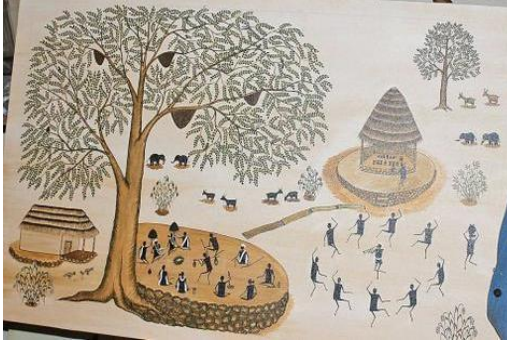
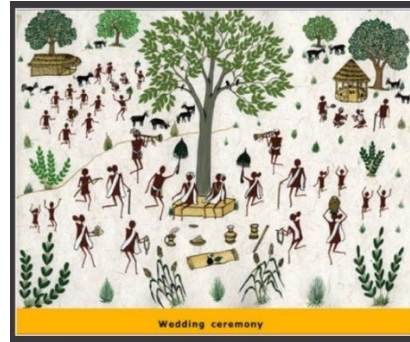


Figure 12

Wedding Rituals



As nearly half of the men marry either their mother's or their uncle's daughter, their paternal aunt's daughter, or their sister's daughter (in that order of preference), consanguineous marriages, such as cross-cousin marriages, are preferred among the Kurumbas. The wedding guests give the newlyweds cash contributions that are regarded as loans or are repayable later. Figure 12 shows wedding rituals painting depicts the bride and groom sitting under Achadhinnai (Mud Platform) which is built around the Palai maram (traditional tree). In Alu tribal community, there are 2 sub-categories: Nagar kulam and Belaga kulam communities living in 7 semmai (settlements). Nagara will take bride from Belaga and vice versa and there are also many subs caste below it. There is a house nearby and a temple (Gugai mania) depicted in the painting. The Guhai mania has stones representing their ancestors and rituals were performed in the month of Karthigai with all crops they cultivated (thinai and saamai are the main crops). Dance is common during the wedding ceremony. In front they will spread a towel and keep a stone, a small vessel (sombu) with sudamara pattai water, beetal leaves (vetri ellai), arecanut (paaku). The groom should pay dowry (kaelvi pannam – Rs 101/-) to bride father. Half of the dowry is to be given during the wedding (Rs.51/-) and the other half will be paid after her death by the bride brother. Teak leaf / chemmbu (Colocasia) leaf umbrellas were used during wedding ceremonies. If the marriage is done under the Palai maram tree, there is no need to do rituals during death of the bride or they will do barakatta savu (funeral ceremony). The people will dance throughout the night as a part of wedding celebration. The painting also shows trees, goats, musical instruments like blow pipes and women in dancing postures.

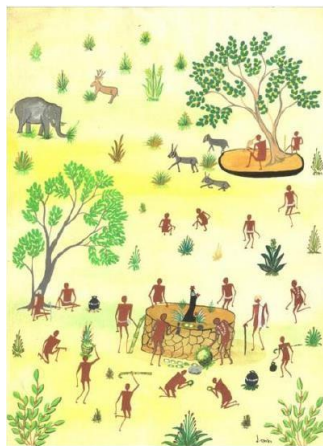
3.1.2.4. Rituals of Harvest Festival

The painting “Rituals of harvest festival” is an interesting painting which depicts a musical instrument made of bamboo resembling a flute, played by a villager under a tree. Other

people are gathering around a shrine. When they plant pulses (beans and peas), for the success of the crop, they offer seeds at the shrine of the deity. The name of the God is 'Thuppa Kata Devar'. To perform the puja (or offering), they use round leaves, a particular kind of leaf from the jungle trees, with boiled rice. This is exactly the kind of tree whose branches are waving above the head of the flute player in front of the shrine, people have marked out a place to plant a few seeds, and these seeds are being offered to the God. The plants that grow in this spot will now belong to the God, and they will be used only for pujas. Two gray-haired elders in the painting wear scarves and carry canes. This painting is given in Figure 13.

Figure 13

Rituals of Harvest Festival

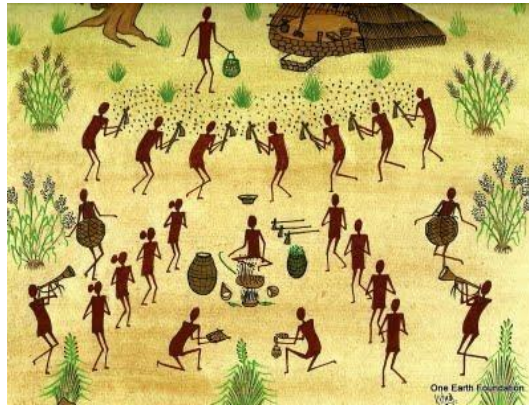


3.1.2.5. Cultivation

“Cultivation” is an important occupation done by Kurumba people in ancient days that was well picturized in this painting. The Kurumba ancestors used to cultivate small patches of raagi, saami and other grains for food and survival. Small patches of coffee and raagi are still grown in the villages though. Coffee and tea are popular drinks. With most of the Kurumba working in the plantation, they have to leave home in the morning and return only after five in the evening. This allows them only two meals (ittu) a day. The Kurumba share a common musical culture with other Nilgiri tribes. Bamboo pipes (kolu) and mono faced drums (tambatte) and two-faced drums are the popular instruments. Themes are either devotional or associated with marriage rituals. In dance there are two kinds; one is the gandes aattam that is performed by the men while another slower version yennattam are performed by the women. When they cultivating, a separate place (mannu kara) will be cultivated for offering to the god. If they got good harvest in the offering place, it is considered as a good sign in harvesting. The painting of ‘Cultivation’ is given in Figure 14.

Figure 14

Cultivation



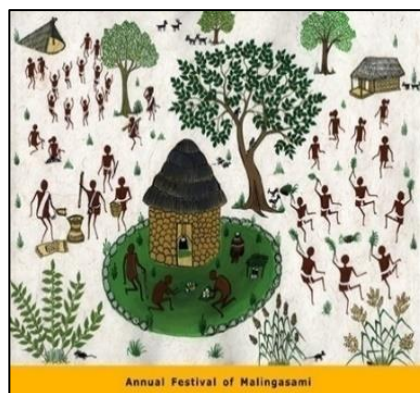
The crops like little millet (saamai) and fox tail millet (thinai) are the significant grains in the Kurumba village. The lower part of the painting shows the offering to God and the upper part of the painting shows the Kurumba making channels to sow the seeds. The shrine of Thuppa kata Devar (God of harvest) is represented in the form of small mud pot. A group of tribal men and women gathered around the shrine for offering their prayers before sowing. A Kurumba tribe carrying a seed basket. The offering was placed in the leaves of the sacred tree and 3 spades were placed before the mud pot. Due to lot of insects and animals, the cultivation has reduced drastically.

3.1.2.6. Annual Festival of Malingasami

Malinga deva (God) - yearly ones they hatch the roof of the temple in March & April (Panguni) month. The grains, sambrani, honey and forest products will be offered to the god. It's done to protect their wealth, agriculture and health of the tribes in the particular village/area which is called as Semmai (taluk). There are 7 Semmai for Kurumba tribes and they have Malinga deva temples in each seemai. Dance is an integral part of the festival is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15

Annual Festival of Malingasami

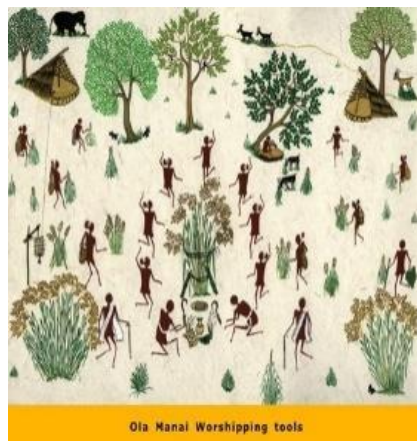


3.1.2.7. Ola Manai Worshipping Tools

Ola means agricultural forest, Manani – means place in Kurumba. Harvesting is the important part of the rituals. They harvest the crops and offer them to the God in kolaga/padi (measuring unit for grain - 2 uri = 1 padi = 7200 rice grains approximately). When the particular place has good harvest, they worship the god with the grains. The grains will be given to Gugai Manai and the priest of the temple to protect the harvest. After offering the harvest, then they will cut the other crops. Rats (within 20 days of sowing), elephant, buffalo are the major threats to the crops and Kurumba believe that the offering to God helps to protect the harvest is depicted in Figure 16.

Figure 16

Ola Manai Worshipping Tools



Conclusion

Tribal art in India is incredibly diverse and rich, reflecting the cultural heritage and traditions of various indigenous communities. However, many of these art forms are facing challenges due to modernization, lack of awareness, and economic pressures. Kurumba paintings, known for their captivating history and meaningful symbolism provide a glimpse into the spiritual practices of the tribe. This study has shown how these artworks beautifully capture the essence of Kurumba culture and their spiritual values. From human figures, to geometric designs these paintings showcase the tribes' strong bond with nature and their gods. Preserving Kurumba art is essential, for upholding the heritage of the tribe and enhancing our knowledge of artistic expressions. By promoting the revival of Kurumba art, we can ensure that this valuable cultural legacy continues to inspire and enlighten generations. These efforts are vital in ensuring that the rich tapestry of India's tribal art continues to thrive and inspire future generations.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

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