



Available online at: <http://www.advancedscientificjournal.com>
<http://www.krishmapublication.com>
IJMASRI, Vol. 1, issue 1, pp. 85 - 88, Oct. -2023
<https://doi.org/10.53633/ijmasri>

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY
ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
(IJMASRI)**

ISSN: 2582-9130

IBI IMPACT FACTOR 1.5

DOI: 10.53633/IJMASRI

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ART HISTORY OF THE TRIBES OF THE NILGIRI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

Chandralekha S¹ and Dr. P. Kanagambal²

¹*Ph.D., Research Scholar in History, PG and Research Department of History, Government Arts College, Udhagamandalam-02*

²*Assistant Professor and Head, PG and Research Department of History, Government Arts College, Udhagamandalam-02.*

Abstract

This research work concentrated to reveal the art history of the Tribes in Niligiri District in Tamil Nadu. The Nilgiri District, situated in the lap of the Western Ghats in Southern India, is a melting pot of diverse cultures and traditions and is not only a heaven for nature enthusiasts but also a treasure trove of cultural heritage. Among the myriad of artistic expressions found in this region, three prominent crafts have gained recognition and admiration worldwide: Toda Shawls, Kota Pottery and Irula Drawing. The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes has a long and rich history. The earliest known examples of Toda embroidery date back to the 17th century. The Kota are a community of potters and blacksmiths. The artisans of this region are known for their exceptional skills in creating exquisite pottery pieces. Kota pottery is made from red clay and is typically decorated with black and white, and they also decorate their pottery with geometric patterns incorporating motifs of flora and fauna into their creations. The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes is a rich and diverse tradition that reflects the unique and diverse cultures and traditions of these tribes. It is a source of great pride for the people of the Nilgiris. These tribes have a deep connection to the land and their traditional knowledge is reflected in their work.

Keywords: Art of the Todas, Irula Tribes, Kota pottery, flora and fauna, pottery and geometric patterns.

Introduction

The Nilgiri District, situated in the lap of the Western Ghats in Southern India, is a melting pot of diverse cultures and traditions and is not only a heaven

for nature enthusiasts but also a treasure trove of cultural heritage. Among the myriad of artistic expressions found in this region, three prominent crafts have gained recognition and admiration worldwide: Toda Shawls, Kota Pottery and Irula Drawing.

The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes has a long and rich history. The earliest known examples of Toda embroidery date back to the 17th century. Kota pottery and ironwork have also been produced for centuries. Irula basket weaving is thought to be even older, dating back to the prehistoric era.

The art of these tribes has been influenced by several factors, including their environment, religious beliefs, social and economic structure. For example, the Todas are a buffalo pastoral tribe, and their art often depicts buffaloes and other animals. The Kota are a blacksmith and pottery tribe, and their art reflects their skills and knowledge of these crafts. The Irulas are a hunter-food gatherer tribe, and their art is influenced by their deep understanding of the Nilgiri forests. These crafts not only showcase the artistic prowess of the local communities but also provide a glimpse into the rich cultural tapestry of the Nilgiris.

Todas Shawls

The Todas are a pastoral tribe known for their unique culture and traditions. Their art is primarily focused on their religious beliefs and practices. One of the most notable forms of Toda art is their embroidery known as poothkuli. Toda Shawls, a traditional craft of the Nilgiris, is a testament to the weaving skills of the indigenous tribe. The Todas, with their unique culture and customs, have mastered the art of weaving shawls that are not only warm and comfortable but also visually stunning. Toda women embroider elaborate designs on their clothes and other textiles using a variety of stitches. They are known for their distinctive black and white embroidered garments, as well as their elaborate wood carvings and buffalo horn carvings. Toda embroidery is typically done on buffalo hide or wool. It is used to decorate a variety of items, including clothing, blankets, and bags.

Toda Shawls are characterized by vibrant colors, geometric patterns, and intricate embroidery, making them highly sought after by collectors and fashion enthusiasts.

The craftsmanship involved in making Toda Shawls is awe-inspiring. The weavers, often women,

use traditional handlooms and natural fibers to create these masterpieces. Each shawl tells a story – a story of the Todas' connection with nature, their beliefs, and their artistic sensibilities.

The Toda people, with the help of organizations like the Crafts Council of India, have been able to preserve and promote their weaving heritage, ensuring that these beautiful shawls continue to be cherished globally.

Another important form of Toda art is their wood carving. Toda wood carvings are also geometric in design, and often depict animals, such as buffaloes and goats. Buffalo horn carvings are typically used to make jewelry and other decorative objects. Toda men carve statues and other objects out of wood, which are used in religious ceremonies. Toda wood carvings are known for their bold and simple designs. The Todas also produce a variety of other handicrafts, including jewelry, pottery, and basketry. Their jewelry is made from silver and brass and is often decorated with intricate designs.

Kota Pottery

The Kota are a community of potters and blacksmiths. The artisans of this region are known for their exceptional skills in creating exquisite pottery pieces. They are known for their skill in metalworking and pottery. Kota Pottery is known for its distinctive red and black hues, which are achieved through a meticulous process of clay preparation and firing techniques. Kota potters use a variety of techniques to create their pottery, including hand-building, wheel-throwing, and slip-trailing. Kota potters produce a variety of items, including pots, bowls, and jugs.

Kota pottery is made from red clay and is typically decorated with black and white, and they also decorate their pottery with geometric patterns incorporating motifs of flora and fauna into their creations. What sets Kota Pottery apart is not just its aesthetic appeal but also its functional use. From intricately designed vases to everyday utensils, these pottery items find their way into both local households

and the global market, earning the admiration of art connoisseurs worldwide.

The Government of India, through its Ministry of Textiles, has initiated schemes to support and promote traditional crafts like Kota Pottery, ensuring the preservation of this ancient art form.

Kota blacksmiths are skilled in the production of a variety of iron objects, including tools, weapons, and jewelry. Kota iron tools and weapons are known for their durability and craftsmanship. Kota blacksmiths also create musical instruments, such as the ghatam (a clay pot drum) and the kanjira (a frame drum).

Irula paintings

The Irula are a community of hunter-gatherers. They are known for their traditional knowledge of the Nilgiri forests and their skill in tracking animals. The Irula do not have a strong tradition of visual art, but they do produce a variety of handicrafts, including basketry and weaving. One of the most notable forms of Irula art is their basket weaving. Irula women weave baskets from a variety of materials, including bamboo, reeds, and grasses. The baskets are often decorated with geometric patterns and animal motifs.

Another important form of Irula art is their rock paintings. The Irula have created rock paintings in the Nilgiri Hills for centuries. Irula Drawing is a form of traditional art that reflects their deep connection with nature and spirituality. Irula drawings often depict animals, plants, and geometric patterns, showcasing the tribe's close relationship with the flora and fauna of the region. These intricate drawings not only serve as decorative elements but also carry cultural significance. By the efforts of local NGOs such as the Nilgiri Documentation Centre have been instrumental in documenting and preserving the unique art forms of the Irula tribe.

Challenges in preserving the Tribal art forms

The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes is facing several challenges. One of the biggest

challenges is the loss of traditional knowledge and skills. As the tribes are increasingly exposed to modern culture and lifestyles, many of their traditional arts and crafts are being abandoned.

Another challenge is the commercialization of tribal art. In recent years, there has been a growing demand for tribal art from tourists and collectors. This has led to the production of mass-produced tribal art objects that are often of poor quality.

Preservation Efforts

Despite these challenges, in recent years, there has been a growing awareness about the importance of preserving these traditional crafts. Various initiatives have been undertaken to support local artisans, promote their skills, and ensure the continuity of these art forms. Government agencies, NGOs, and independent organizations have collaborated to provide training, financial support, and market access to the craftsmen, enabling them to sustain their livelihoods while preserving their cultural heritage.

Tourism also plays a crucial role in promoting Kota Pottery and Toda Shawls. By recognizing the historical significance of Kota Pottery, Irula Drawing, and Toda Shawls and supporting the artisans through sustainable practices, the Nilgiris district continues to thrive as a beacon of cultural diversity and artistic brilliance.

Conclusion

The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes is a rich and diverse tradition that reflects the unique and diverse cultures and traditions of these tribes. It is a source of great pride for the people of the Nilgiris. These tribes have a deep connection to the land and their traditional knowledge is reflected in their work. The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes is an important part of the cultural heritage and environmental significance of the Nilgiri District. Many of the tribes' artworks are made from natural materials and depict the natural world that is so important to their way of life.

In addition to the traditional art forms discussed above, the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes are also known for their music and dance. Their music is typically performed on traditional instruments, such as the flute, drum, and cymbals. Their dances are often associated with religious festivals and other important ceremonies.

The art of the Todas, Kota, and Irula tribes is a living tradition that continues to evolve even today. These tribes are working to preserve their traditional art forms, while also adapting them to the needs of the modern world. By appreciating and encouraging these artisans, we play a vital role in ensuring that these art forms continue to flourish and inspire generations to come.

References

1. Brecks, J. W. (1873). *An account of the primitive tribes and monuments of the Nilgiris*. India Museum, London.
2. Thurston, E., & Rangachari, K. (1909). *Castes and tribes of southern India*. Government Press, Madras.
3. O'Connor, J. F. (1975). *The Todas*. Oxford University Press.
4. Emeneau, M. B. (1977). *Toda grammar and texts*. University of California Press.
5. Hockings, P. (1985). *Women and work in a South Indian village*. Routledge.
6. Emeneau, Murray B. "The Toda Language." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series*, Vol. 51, No. 6 (1961), pp. 1-41.
7. Ramaswamy, S. (2004). *Passions of the tongue: Language devotion and power in Tamil India, 1320-1800*. University of California Press.
8. Srinivasan, D. (2007). *The Kota: Life, ritual, and religion in an Indian tribe*.* Routledge.
9. Ramaswamy, S. (2014). *India unbound: A history of modern India*.* Harvard University Press.
10. Fuller, C. J. (1980). *The arts and crafts of the Nilgiris*. Madras: The South Indian Textile.
11. Ministry of Textiles, Government of India.
12. Nilgiri Documentation Centre.
13. Crafts Council of India
