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TheLocal

A U N I Q U E P E R S P E C T I V E O F T H E N I L G I R I S



pic: Staff Photographer

I love Ooty: The Local had an impromptu interview with the Venkats from KK Nagar in Chennai, who were in Ooty recently. The family was enthralled, they told us, with the natural beauty of the hill station. They shared some of their good and not-so-good experiences with this paper. The little one was especially delighted with her new acquisitions of the orange cap she bought here.

Dial 100:

Nilgiri Police - an overview



I love Ooty:

Full marks for Ooty town



Sons of the soil:

Snapshot of a local farmer



Rs 60/- for a kg of plums!

The book, *Kota Pottery*, published by Keystone Foundation, an NGO (Non-Governmental organization) who work closely with indigenous communities, said to be the first documentation on the special art of pot making by the Kota people of the Nilgiris district, records, 'Kota pottery has rare grace and poise. The lines are decisive, the curves are bold, lips are well defined and prominent, and it's dark skin full of vitality'.

The Kotas have co-existed with the other indigenous communities of the district for centuries. The close association with the Badaga and Toda community has been recorded by historian, Dr Paul Hockings (1980), thus: 'there is not a settlement anywhere on the plateau that would be more than a morning's walk from a Kota village and thus conveniently accessible to all Badaga as well as Toda settlements'.

Kotas have regularly supplied to the Badagas, all household pottery, daily vessels, oil lamps, clay smoking pipes; also, metal and leather goods and carpentry products. Apart from this, Kotas were also providers of music to Toda and Badaga ceremonies.

For this artistically inclined people with so much of skill and creativity in them, the art of pot making probably stands out as the most exquisite.

According to the book compiled by Keystone Foundation, pottery making amongst the Kotas is a collective enterprise in which both men and women participate.



pic and information: courtesy Keystone Foundation

Kota pottery

Men engage in the construction of the wheel and help the women in the digging of clay and firing. Shaping of the pots and padding on the wheel is done entirely by the women. Even though there are no restrictions, the book adds, to the involvement of men in making of pots, such instances are rare.

A potter woman never works alone. She has at least one helper, the research team from the NGO records, observing that the helper is also skilled but to a lesser degree. Her role is to turn the wheel while the master-potter shapes the pot. The co-potter, it seems always knows when to turn the wheel fast and when to slow it down when, apparently, finer movements are being executed! Common traits of Kota pots are that they are all burnished which means the pots are rubbed with a small round stone before the pots become absolutely dry. Burnishing thus, brings a shine to the

A potter is no longer a peasant or journeyman, as in the past, nor can he be any longer described as an industrial worker: he is by force of circumstances, an artist-craftsman, ...has been the chief means of defence against the materialism of industry and its insensibility to beauty."

-Bernard Leach

Traditions amid modernity:

Members of the indigenous Kota community seen carrying clay back to the village for use in their fascinating art of pottery.

surface, giving the pots better texture and longevity.

Clay collection during Kota festivals is considered auspicious and the ceremony is extensive. Sounds of trumpets assemble people to the central spot in the village. Men, women and children follow the musicians, who are the first to come out of the village, all heading towards the mud collection place. The priest's wife begins the digging followed by other women, to symbolize the activity. The men then take over the digging activity. The book records a happy and excited atmosphere throughout the entire process with laughter and intermittent music strains filling the air. (Note outsiders are not invited to such events and the study team, it seems maintained a careful distance). Finally, ferns are collected to line the heads of the women who will eventually carry the clay back to the village. ■

The
unique
rhythm
in the
Badaga
dance