

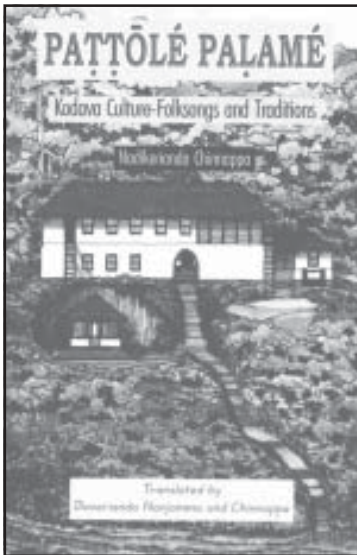
Pattole Palame: Kodava Culture - Folksongs and Traditions

Compiled by: Nadikerianda Chinnappa,

Translated by: Boverianda Nanjamma and Chinnappa,

New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2003, Pages xxxviii + 718

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The **PATTOLE PALAME** is a record of the culture of the *Kodavas*, compiled in the late 19th and early part of the 20th century by **Nadikerianda Chinnappa (1875-1931)**, a sub-inspector of Police and a prosecuting inspector. He had enough opportunities to travel all over Kodagu, mainly on horseback, and observe the customs and traditions of the land. . Mr. Chinnappa's travels in Kodagu land and his interest in Kodava culture spurred him to to acquire a deeper knowledge of these people's customs, language, songs and dances. He enjoyed singing Kodava ballads and beating the *Dudi* (*Kodava drum*). He was also fond of taking part in Kodava folkdances during festivals. His passion for Kodava songs and folklore prompted him to start collecting them. He compiled all the material he had collected;

the history, customs and songs of the Kodavas and named it ***Pattole Palame***. The then Government contributed towards the cost of publication and the ***Pattole Palame*** was published by the compiler himself in 1924 in Kodava language with Kannada script, as there was no Kodava script as such. Later, the work was published three times by different agencies.

The compiler himself tried to translate this into English but he passed away while the work was in progress. After a few decades Mrs. Nanjamma and Mr. Boverianda Chinnappa, the grandchildren of the author, translated this into English successfully.

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Pattole Palame literally translates as **Silken Lore**, which means Patt= silk, Pole = like, Palame = traditional sayings)

Words that are as smooth as silk.

It also signifies (Patt +Ole = Palm + Leaves, Palame = traditional words) **Words written on smooth, silken palm leaves.** Yet another interpretation is

(Patt + Olel = Inside palm leaves, Palame= words)

Words wrapped in silken palm leaves

that is, like valuables that were generally wrapped in silk in the olden days.

The translators opine that the compiler might have chosen this title from Kaiyyandira Appayya's songs, where the words mean

Documents of stories and sayings related to a family or community, recorded on silken palm leaves.

The book ***Pattole Palame*** describes the folk life of the **Kodagu** where, The sacred waters of our mother-goddess Cauveri

Born of a miracle
 Flowed down the hill
 And severed Kodagu in half
 Like a lemon sliced
 And the slices placed on either side
 Like a coconut cut
 And the halves placed on either side
 This land was divided.

Coorg or **Kodagu** is a picturesque district in the state of Karnataka in South India. The *Kodavas* are a unique community with martial traditions. They are renowned as a handsome, brave and hospitable people. Many of their customs and traditions are quite different from those of their neighbours. A group of villages forms the administrative division called the *nad*. Traditionally, Kodagu was divided into eight *Simes*, each of which was a group of a few *nads*. Each *Okka* has its own headman called a *Koravukara*. He is usually the eldest male member of the *Okka* and guides the affairs of the *Okka*. *Kodava* women are held in high esteem. *Kodavas* are primarily ancestor worshippers. The important Kodava festivals are linked to the seasons and to their main occupations in the past: rice cultivation and hunting. *Kodavas* perform a variety of group dances, each for a particular occasion.

The original *Pattole Palame* compiled in 1924 covered a broad range of topics on the culture of the Kodavas, in six chapters:

1. A description of Kodagu and its history
2. Kodava Customs
3. Kodava Festivals
4. Songs of Gods and Goddesses
5. Songs of Heroes
6. Miscellaneous material, including proverbs, sayings and riddles.

This translation has omitted the sections in chapter 1 of the original compilation that contain the geography and history of Kodagu and the section in chapter 6 relating to caste taboos. A note on the geography of the land, a very brief history of Kodagu and a description of Kodava society and culture are provided as background information, which has provided a better base for understanding the rest. The translators in their introductory words say:

Our translation of songs faithfully follows the line sequence in the original, except where we have transposed a line or two, or added a phrase or line in order to clarify the text for the reader unacquainted with Kodava traditions. The compiler used either Kodava or Kannada words for the titles of sections or in describing a custom or tradition. We have used only the Kodava equivalents (where available) with English translation.

The process of translation of *Pattole Palame* is completed in two different stages. The Kodava verses are translated into Kannada and then into English. Since the Kannada script is used in the beginning, the influence of Kannada has certainly affected the translation. Probably because the compiler and the translators are both skilled in writing and hail from Kodava culture, the original thoughts are reproduced without much destruction in this English translation. There lies the real success of this pioneer work as far as Kodava culture is concerned.

Folk literature and traditional practices documented in such huge quantity is the first of its kind in this culture's tradition. This is the first time in the history of Kodava literature that its customs and literature have been introduced to international scholarship on such a large scale. Thus, the efforts of Nadikerianda Chinnappa, through his 1924 publication, have given him distinguished status in the field of culture documentation. With the influence of modernization, the customs and beliefs, and the rituals and practices of this people are fast changing. *Pattole Palame* was compiled in 1924, and it has been translated after about eight decades. Though the translators know that several ritual practices have changed or vanished or sometimes, new ones introduced, they can do little about it, because they have rendered a faithful translation of the original. Scholars who wish to use this as a data bank have to consider the fact that this book dates back to 1924. However, since the Kodavas have retained a lot of their old customs and traditions despite technological advances, this book still holds fairly true of Kodava culture of the present.

The main text of the book is organized into seven chapters, in which the 6th and 7th chapters are on proverbs, sayings, riddles and the appendix, which includes maps and photographs, and helps as additional information. The first five chapters provide ethnographic details of the Kodava community.

The very first chapter titled **Songs of the Land** describes the origin of **River Cauveri** and how the land was administered. A brief note is added at the beginning of each chapter, which provides information about the content and context of the translated songs. Though the observations and analyses are not based on any theoretical approach of folklore, the efforts to provide sufficient information helps the readers understand the background.

The second chapter is compiled in a very systematic way, providing details of Kodava customs. The rituals of birth, marriage and death are described and the verses translated into English in free prosody meter to provide the feel of the original text. Since Kodavas are martial heroes involved in hunting and war, the death of a young husband is a common phenomenon, and tradition has forced the acceptance of remarriages. The customs and rituals followed at such remarriages are narrated in detail. Thus, the reader gets a clear picture of the traditional backgrounds in a meaningful way.

The rich Kodava tradition is highlighted through its festivals. Festival performances such as dances and songs with their related myths, legends and the festival proceedings have been related. Kail Polud, Cauveri Sankramana, Puttari Polud, Sivarathri, Ugadi and Vishu Sankramana are the festivals commonly observed by all Kodavas. Kail Polud and Puttari Polud are associated with paddy cultivation, while Cauveri Sankramana celebrates the birth of the River Cauveri. Siva Rathri, Ugadi and Vishu Sankramana are festivals also celebrated in other parts of India. Kail Polud celebrates the end of the season of sowing and transplanting paddy and the beginning of the hunting season. Puttari is a harvest festival. This chapter comprises many songs sung during Puttari. They are associated with dance performances also. It also contains *nade* songs, stories and plays that are narrated during these festivals. **Kodici songs** are sung during Puttari, and tell about the beauty of the *Kodici*, the dancing girl and *Konda*, the dancing boy. Young boys dressed as *Kodici* and *Konda* dance to these songs.

The details of the festivals celebrated in every *nad*, the village, for the village deity and the other common festivals are also given in the notes, with the related songs translated.

The fourth chapter gives the details of the gods and goddesses of this tradition. This chapter consists of nine songs about various gods and goddesses who came to Kodagu and settled there to become local deities. **Kanartappa**, **Tiru Cambaratappa**, **Bendrukolappa**, **Igguttappa**, **Palurappa** and **Tirunelli Pemmayya** are the six gods and **Pannagalatha** is the goddess about whom the songs are sung in the Song of the Seven Gods. The other

songs compiled here are the **Songs of Five Gods, Three Gods, Two Gods, Song of Sartava, Song of Ketrappa, Song of Choli Povvediamme, Song of Ballattnad Povvediamme and Song of Omale Pudiyadi.**

The fifth chapter includes the songs of heroes like **Kanniyada Kamayya, Kaliyatanda Ponnappa, Nadikerianda Devayya, Kayyandira Appayya, Aiyya Kovira Appayya and Polledevira Appayya.** These ballads are tales of valour in combat, of intrigue, deceit, magical spirits and powers. They also give us an insight into the customs of the Kodava people, their daily life and beliefs and their social ties and responsibilities. For example, on page 616, the song that describes the social structure reads as:

**He cursed him
"Attached to this Okka
let there be *no more*
than one poleya**

Or take the details of preparing the funeral pyre as described on page 618:

**The youths of the village
Collected all the customary items
For the death ceremony,
Stacked sandalwood
And wood from mango trees
For the funeral pyre
And carrying the corpse
To the cremation ground**

As mentioned earlier, the last two chapters of this book give the details of proverbs, old sayings, riddles, beliefs and superstitions. The translation of such sentences and phrases into English is a real challenge; because they have functional importance and their functions vary depending on the context; and translation in isolation will certainly create confusion. The efforts of the translators are again worth praising here.

Photos, facsimiles in *Kodava* language, the bibliography, the key to the transliteration and the index added at the end of this book have fulfilled the editor's responsibility of furnishing such details.

The efforts taken by the translators of this marathon work are highly appreciable and command respect from the reader as well from the *Kodava* community. However, in the electronic era, as book production also demands a professional touch, a few observations are worth mentioning, without any lowering of respect for the great efforts of the compiler and translators.

Though the book is folkloristic in content, the author and the translators, with their limited folkloristic theoretical background and lack of professionalism in book production, have left room for certain limitations.

The ethnographic details of singers and informants are not furnished here. The songs are collected from different singers from a variety of contexts and compiled together as a series without specifying the context. The songs compiled here might have had variations and such variations are not highlighted. The songs were compiled in 1924 and have been translated now. Therefore, the deficiency in the collection/ documentation has carried to the translation too. The songs have musical meters and rhythmic phrases. The ethnic prosody is specific in its original form, but in translation as free meter is used, the beauty of the texture might have been distorted. This phenomenon is common in all such translations.

The editor's work lacks a professional touch. A change in the arrangement of Notes, End Notes and ethnographic details, plus details of the compilers and translators in a more orderly fashion could have provided a better design for the book. The book hardly finds any analysis and will serve as a good data bank. Because the *Pattole Palame* songs were collected in 1924, when our villages were still under the influence of the British and Indians were living with a feeling that their culture was being endangered and they were losing something traditional, the mere collection and documentation itself was felt very urgent and a sacred service to tradition. It was a romantic nationalistic thinking that provoked several authors to take up such compilation work as a measure of preservation, and **Nadikerianda Chinnappa** is influenced by this spirit in his **Pattole Palame**.

In a time span of over 80 years, a number of folklore theories have emerged and the international forum is demanding the exploration of local ethnic identity and the regional wealth of tradition. When regional language scholars also take interest in presenting their traditional wealth in the international forum, a stage for translations in English is well set. Such translations are proving very significant as they provide a broader base for micro and in-depth research studies from theoreticians in folklore discipline. Therefore, the efforts of the translators B. Nanjamma and Chinnappa are equally valuable as the work of the compiler.

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