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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**NATURE, THE CRADLE OF TRIBAL ARTS AND CRAFTS OF KADAR IN ANAMALAI REGION –  
A STUDY**

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**Abstract**

The word ‘Tribal’ denotes a social group, comprising of series of groups, families, clans or generations, wherein their way of life still shows a particular deep-rooted inheritance and relation to an ancient past and by ‘Tribal art’ we mean artifacts and objects which have been practiced and produced directly by members of a specific tribal community. The name Adivasis is used in some of the states to refer to some of the tribal people expressing the meaning that people who have lived here from the beginning or from earliest times and in India there are millions of tribal people still living and thriving in the states of Madhya Pradesh, eastward to Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Assam, North-eastern states such as Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. There are some smaller groups of tribal people who live in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Mysore, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. These tribal people have produced a fascinating repertoire of their arts and crafts which have germinated from the womb of Mother Nature and present a rhythm of life and heartbeat of the Earth. The Western Ghats is globally recognized for their biological diversity and it comprises of impressive cultural diversity including a number of tribal communities as the tribal areas of Southern Tribal Pockets. Anamalai hills are the part of Western Ghats, recognized as one among 25 global biological hotspots. The Anamalai hills ranges consist of undulating and rugged terrain spread across the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. There are a diverse number of indigenous communities living in the Anamalais. Anamalais is worth to be designated as elephant reserve, water reserve, floral reserve and anthropological reserve as it inhabited by six indigenous people. They are Kadars, Muduvar’s, Malasar, Malai malasar, Eravalur and Pulaiyar which had home to more than 5200 persons living in 37 settlements of different ethnic origin indigenous communities

**Key words:** Western Ghats, Anamalai Adivasis, Todas, Kadars, Muduvar’s, Malasar, Malai malasar, Eravalur and Pulaiyar

## **Introduction**

Tribal art has played a crucial role in preserving the cultural heritage of various indigenous communities in India, while also contributing significantly to the country's economy. Its growing popularity has led to the development of various industries and marketplaces, providing employment opportunities and better remuneration for the tribal artisans. The continued support and promotion of tribal art can lead to the sustainable growth of these communities and the overall development of the country's economy.

Nature in all its surrounds the tribal men and women helping them to fulfill their urge for beauty. The sparkle of the green fields, the warmth of ripening corn, the colour and grace of birds and animals moving in the woods; the sweetness of the wild flowers and budding leaves, the aromatic scent of the earth after the rains, when peacocks dance, and the soothing songs of the rivers and waterfalls are all redolent with bright inspiration. Against this background, the tribals weave their legends and tales and continue the ongoing evolution of their expressions, observations and their lifestyles seeped in the very soil of the Mother Nature. The word 'Tribal' denotes a social group, comprising of series of groups, families, clans or generations, wherein their way of life still shows a particular deep-rooted inheritance and relation to an ancient past<sup>1</sup> and by 'Tribal art' we mean artifacts and objects which have been produced and practiced directly by members of a specific tribal community. Many of the tribal people are descendants of chiefs and warriors, of artisans and builders, of dancers and musicians, of priests, seers and healers. The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh are believed to be descendants of ancient rulers who lorded it over the forest areas. Though the majority of tribals today are engaged in agriculture and other pursuits such as creating a variety of crafts specific to their tribe and clan but one of the outstanding traits noticeable among a large number of them is their clan cohesiveness and traditions and there is a vocal approach in asserting their rights in continuation of their traditions amongst themselves as a whole. The epicenter of their cultural uniqueness remained restricted to their cluster of villages and

habitats where the plank of their lifestyle was based on close-knit family and clan living. A brief comparative account of the relationship between certain representative culture and craft patterns and ornament in the ancient past, and that of tribal India, will reveal a distinct sustained inheritance. This is of particular significance in other countries also, where tribal and clan groups have carried on to a marked degree and unbroken saga of refinements and customs of their ancestors, who lived in such far removed areas. We find, example, that all the world over, ancient civilizations have left to posterity many examples of man's creative achievements in the shape of his arts and crafts, scripts, ritualistic emblems, religious codes and several implements. As these objects have been gradually excavated, they have been the means through which the chronological stages in man's cultural development have been discovered. Amongst the tribal peoples, influenced by generations of certain design patterns and motifs that have come down through the ages steeped in customs, ritual, beliefs and environment, a familiarity and fondness for these design motifs and patterns have grown in the mind, and cling to it, becoming in time the accredited decorative forms, and gain group sanction. Verrier Elwin in writing of the artistic and creative work of the people in North-eastern states, "The arts are part of the mythology and draw their vitality from very ancient roots. Many of the traditional designs are symbolical in meaning and, though today only a few older women understand them, the whole structure, symbolism and detail of the designs are deeply rooted in the tribal consciousness. The same may be said of the music, the dance, the wood carvings, the ornaments, utensils and even weapons. They are a part of the heritage; they spring up in an ever new awakening, this is why the people have a fresh, original and very precious gift to bring to India." Their main quality is that they are self-created and have not been guided by extraneous accepted art standards and formulas, having grown from within themselves.

Nature has played big part in inspiring the tribal craftsman to reproduce its many beauties. In fact, Nature seems to have set the pattern for almost every creative urge and artistic endeavour, not only among tribals in India but throughout the world. The instinct

in man since early times has been to study his surroundings and he has both consciously and unconsciously absorbed a great deal in this process. This has filled him with many original ideas and thus satisfied his inner yearning to express himself in visual form. Amidst the overwhelming material or pattern, the attendant raw materials, and the colours all around him, he found that he could harness every facet of life, faith and special artistic needs to the abundance of Nature. In Western Ghats Anamalai region is the origin of Kadar are the Negrito reveling a fusion of several races. The word Kadar means Residents in forest Kadar is plural form of Kadar, so they are the sons of soils of Tamilnadu which they call themselves Kadar, others call them Kadir and Kadan. The Kadars are original inhabitants of Anamalai and resided in the forests next to Tops lip they were to be found in the Anamalai hills of Pollachi Taluk in Coimbatore district with the exception of a few who had migrated to Salem and Thirunelveli Districts in 1961. Anamalai hills which lie partly in the present Tamilnadu and partly in Kerala. They have their own dialect called as a Kadar dialect without script and the Kadar speaks Tamil and Malayalam.

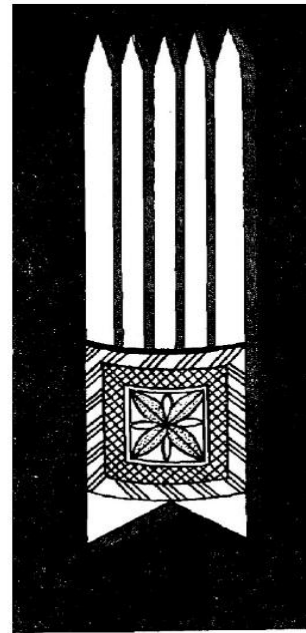
### **Artifacts**

The rich assortment of tribal artifacts include masks, utensils, basketry, wood carving, clay toys, floor and wall paintings, ornaments and headgears, musical instruments and their specially designed hutments

### **Wood Carving**

As tribal people live for the most part in mountainous and forest regions, it is not surprising that they have used wood for many purposes since past ages. Wood is perhaps the most wonderful gift to tribal artisans for expressing their love of beauty, and imprint on it their clan history, animating it with their own particular legendary motifs and figures. Their exploits, and the flora and fauna that are pertinent to their way of life and environment are all pictographically expressed. The tribal people therefore have a rich heritage in this very old craft of wood carving, and it has played a big part in their homes, ritualistic symbols,

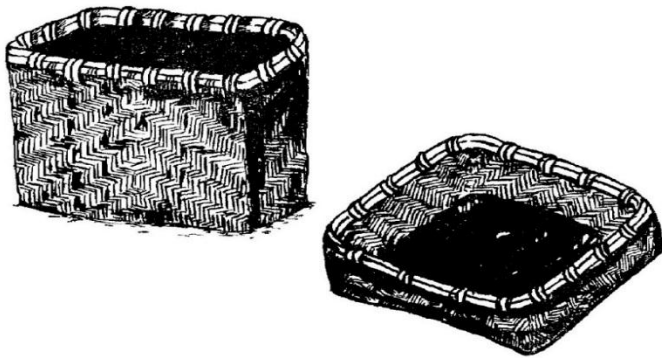
marriage palanquins, musical instruments, tribal chiefs' chairs, and many other objects of daily utility. In Kadar 'Comb' is one of the ideal products of their craft. Two types are made, one with four prongs and the other with numerous prongs. Both are struck with the hair sidewise and from the back part of the head. According to Kadar man should always make a marriage comb and present it to his intended wife just before the marriage or at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony and the young men vie with each other as to who can make the nicest comb.



Marriage Comb of Kadars

### **Basketry**

Another raw material freely available to the tribals is bamboo and tall grass with natural fibers as well as bark of certain trees has been used in many diverse ways since centuries. In Manipur, especially tribal women weave pretty baskets from the date and palm leaves, grasses and reeds, with attractive floral and geometrical patterns, motifs like checks, lines, spirals and circles. The shapes of the baskets vary due to multi-purpose as they are an essential part of the home and household.



Baskets made by Kadars with Ithai (Ochlandra Travancorica)

## Mask Making

Mask making is a popular feature in many tribes in India. In tribal prevailing thought, the attitude of destroying evil forces finds expression in the use of mask, which is commonly used in dance and pantomime. It is often hung outside a house or is reproduced in paintings on the walls. The psychological instinct to use every symbolic means possible to ward off evil spirits making something so fearsome that it will drive away the evil forces who are strong and devilish. By this means a sense of security and serenity is achieved. Most of the masks are made in garish and dull colours and full of animated faces with large furious eyes and threatening jaws. Some masks have comical faces and others are faces of calm mannerism. Amusing shapes of birds and animals are incorporated in these masks. In Kadar, tribal wear these masks while performing dances at festivals and make comic gestures with elements of fun and satirical imitation telling legendary folk-tales and ornamental styles. An important stimulus to artistic creation is found in the Kadar dances these masks are accompanied by elaborate dresses and ornaments.

## Clay Toys

Turning to clay some charming animals made in this raw material come from Western ghats parts of tribal areas in Tamilnadu and Kerala border. In the early times of Kadars created as symbolic sacrifice animals and birds and were usually made by rural potters with specifications of tribal needs and requirements particularly the bull, the goat, an elephant and a peacock. Most of the tribal clay objects have some utility purpose behind it and as they are also used

as storing urns, pots and pitchers for water and harvested articles or they were also created for the sole purpose of worship and meditation

## Tribal Paintings

The most popular and engaging tribal art form comprises of many stylized and iconic versions of paintings done by tribal artists, these are, Tanjore paintings, Gond paintings, Warli paintings, Saora paintings, Pithora paintings, Bhil paintings and Muria paintings done on walls, floors and paper or parchments using locally made Earth colours or colours made from flowers and leaves ground and mixed with rice paste and gum Arabic as binding agents. To begin with, the subjects of these painting were confined to the images of gods and goddesses, myths and folktales, birds and animals. . While the painting session is in progress the sing alongside creating a festive atmosphere and thereby they also describe the theme, rituals, folktales etc. and intricate decorative patterns are made in eye catching manner.

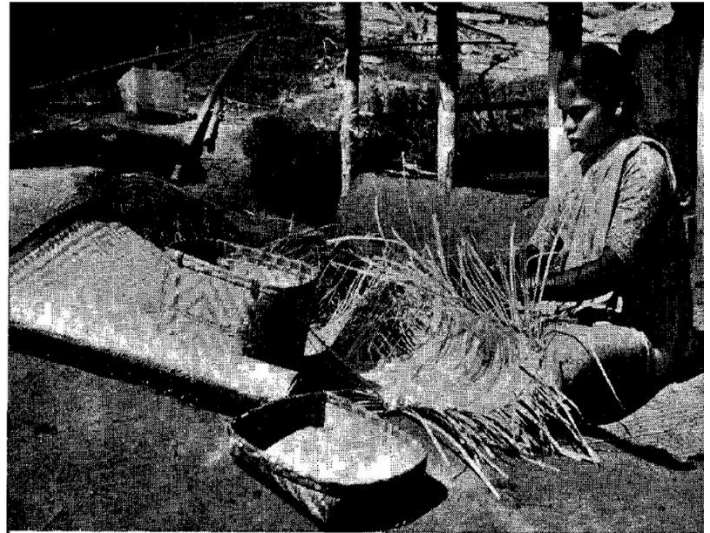
## Music and dance

Music and dance are indigenous and even the elders participate in it. The Kadars have developed well-formed diverse dance movements and orchestra. The musical instruments are made by them. The leather instruments made of wooden plank are used. The leather from black monkey is used to make instruments. The flutes are made from Vengai and Jack trees. The seven or nine holed flutes are called by them 'Karumbu'. When compared to other instruments it is hard to play. The main instruments of the Kadar are 'Udukku', 'Kendai' and 'Urumi'. The Kendai looks like a cylinder, which is played with stick called 'Kendai Kuchi'. In some occasions, Kendai is played along with flute. Urumi is also made from Vengai tree. It is smaller than Kendai and played on both the sides with sticks. When the two musical instruments are played the Kadar men and women dance according to the tune. Kummi, Kollattam, Oyilattam are the important dances performed by the ladies. The dances played by the gents are called kollattam, pandriyattam and mandhiattam. Kummi is played by the ladies without instruments. They stand round and sing songs merrily. The term Kollattam in Kadar language is

called 'Koliattam'. The ladies perform this slowly while the gents do faster. Oyilattam resembles the folk dances of plains, where the dancer should perform in the same standing position. Pandriyattam is performed by the Kadars along with music. It indicates the hunting of pigs. Mandhiattam is also performed along with the music imagining himself as monkey. This dance denotes their hunting profession.

## Houses

Kadars build their houses in the month of Chitrai corresponding to March-April. A pole is planted after offering worship to their Vana Thevathai with coconut, plantains and betel leaves. Both males and females participate in the construction of a house. The house is located in a raised platform which is about half a foot above the ground level. Their houses are rectangular in shape. The roof is made of twigs and leaves of a reed called, Ithai' (*Ochalandra Travancoria*). They are so inter-woven that the roofing becomes waterproof. The walls are also built with the same material. The hut need not have a door, but they erect a buffer screen or, thatti' to obstruct the front view. Sometimes a small raised pial or verandah may be constructed in the front. They then produce smoke inside by burning leaves, so that any vermins sticking to the leaves may be killed. This prolongs the life of the material used for the construction of the house. They use only mats made of thin tapes cut from the trunk of the reed called Ithai. They also make baskets out of them for their daily use.



Kadar woman weaving a mat.

## Conclusion

Tribal art has been a significant contributor to the Indian economy, particularly through the tourism industry. Many tourists are drawn to Anamalai Region, Coimbatore District, Tamilnadu to experience the rich cultural heritage and diversity that the country has to offer, including its tribal art. Tribal art is unique in its style, symbols, and colors, and tourists are fascinated by the stories and traditions behind each piece.

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House of a Kadar

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