

## Unit 8

# M. N. srinivas : The Coorgs

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### Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to,

- describe a Coorg village;
- outline the legacy of the Coorgs;
- describe and discuss the Okka; and
- discuss aspects of Hinduism.

## 8.1 Introduction

Coorg is a 'tiny' province in South India. To its north and east are the Kannada speaking districts of Mysore State and to its south and west Tamil speaking districts of Tamilnadu. Coorg is an inaccessible mountainous region with heavy rainfall, flooded rivers and dense forest.

The total land area of Coorg is 1,593 square miles of which considerable portion is under Reserve forest. Western Ghat mountains pass through Coorg. Brahmagiri and Puspagiri are important places on the main range of Western Ghats. The river Kaveri springs from Brahmagiri and Kanake, its tributary joins it at Bhagamandala. The rivers are fordable after rainy season. They are not navigable and their waters are not used for irrigation.

It is natural that the Coorgs have a distinct mode of life and culture as the region remained isolated for centuries because of its steep mounts and dense forests. But the Lingayat Rajas took advantage of this isolation and conquered the country in the ninth century A.D. they tried to keep it isolated as Coorg is a rice growing area. The people of Coorg had regular contacts with their neighbours and visited them to sell their surplus produce in Malabar market. They brought articles of their daily use in return for their rice. Their visits to Mysore and other religious places of Hindu shrines and temples were regular.

Richter, one of the earlier writers on Coorg reports:

"The general appearance of the country varies considerably in different districts. In the vicinity of Somwarpet, in the alternating with sloping glades, interspersed with clumps of forest trees resembling the finest

park in Europe. Bear Meraara, the hills are closer together and more abrupt, and the ravines deeper and more wild. Towards frazerpet, the country assumes the champaign character of Mysore plateau, with scattered solitary hills. South of Meraara in the direction of Virarajpet, especially in Beppunad, Kadiyetnad, the country is open, the woods are neither dense nor high and beautiful glassy downs, rise from extensive rice valleys". The eastern frontier between the Kaveri and Lakshamana-Tirtha exhibits an almost uninterrupted and impervious forest."

## 8.2 A Coorg Village

A village in Coorg is different from a village in Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Tamilnadu. It is "a group of houses and huts huddled together in a confined space with fields and gardens stretching all around". In Coorg proper every Coorg house is built on its ancestral estate and near it live the servants of the house who are generally of a very low caste.

The ancestral house is usually a substantial Building of stones and, mortar with solid carved wood-work. Masons and carpenters of Malabar build such massive houses. Coorg ancestral house resembles the houses of well-to-do Nayars. The house generally stands on an elevation and narrow high way walled winding lane and keep as many as 250-300 members.

The ancestral estate included some jungle, grazing land valleys for rice cultivation. The main building had kitchen garden near it. There was also a pond or well to provide water for domestic purposes.

The ancestral estate had a shrine dedicated the Okka ancestor. Some stones representing cobras were planted on the platform.

There are only two towns in Coorg. Mercara, the capital has a population of 7112 and Virarajpet has 4106 persons.

The language spoken by Coorg is Kodagi. It is an independent language. However, it is closely connected with Kannada and in part with the language of Malabar coast. Kannada was the official and court language of Coorg under the Lingayat Rajas. It is medium of instruction in schools today.

## 8.3 Legacy of the Coorgs

The Coorg lived in isolation for a very long time. In the ninth century A.D. They were attacked and conquered by the invaders belonging to the Changalva and Kongalva dynasties. The Changalvas occupied and established their rule in some areas of northern Coorg, with their capital at Bednur. The Kongalvas were in possession of some parts of the east. Both these dynasties became feudatory to the ruling Gangas of Mysore took the eleventh century. The rulers of these dynasties were Jains by faith. In the eleventh century they became feudatory to the Chungalva. In the meanwhile the Changalvas changed their religion and accepted Lingayatism or Sivism.

After the fall of the Gangas, a new dynasty rose to power in western Mysore called Hyosalas. The Hyosala drove the Cholas out of Mysore. The Changalvas refused to accept the over lordship of the Gangas and Hyosalas and claimed independence. Several battles were fought between these dynasties. Srinivas mentioned that these battles were important because the Coorgs fought these battles with the Changalvas against the invaders from Mysore. In the last battle the Changalvas ruler was killed and his elephants, horses and gold were captured by the Hyosalas. After this

defeat the Chandalvas withdraw into Coorg. In 1174, the Hyosala sent an army general called Battarasa to attack the Chandalvas and to drive them out of Coor. In the battle that follows Battarasa sustained heavy losses, but in the end he was successful in subduing the enemy. He established his capital at Balpore.

Allads of Coorg gathered together and fought against Battarasa inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. The Hyosala rule continued till it was attacked and subdued by Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan. The Muslim rulers took advantage of succession disputes and attacked Coorg. The prince of Bednur was transferred to Gorur and was put under confinement.

The prince of Bednur escaped from Gorur and reached Coorg. The Coorgs rallied round him and Vira Raja occupied whole of Coorg in 1834.

The prince of Bednur ruled Coorg till 1809. He had no male issue. This raised the problem of succession. The brother of dead king was triumphant in 1811 and when he died in 1820, his son, a 20 year old, Chkka Vira Raj was the ruler of Bednur. He was an incompetent ruler. He was sensuous tyrant. In 1834 the British annexed Coorg and thus it was the end of the rule of Lingayat Rajas.

- i) Thus, we find that the authority of Coorg chieftains or Nayakas was destroyed under the Jain invaders.
- ii) The administration was centralized.
- iii) A postal service was established.
- iv) Land survey was made; details of forms were recorded in the Hukum Nama.
- v) Serious offences like adultery, murder and theasion were heard by the Raja himself.

The struggle with Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan increased the sense national identity of the inhabitants of Coorg.

### Reflection and Action 8.1

Discuss about the leagacy of the Coorgs. In what way do you find it to be unique? Discuss and write down in your notebook.

Tippu Sultan died in 1799. At that time Vira Raja<sup>4</sup> was in power. He helped the English in their war against Mysore. Vira Raja died in 1809, leaving behind only daughters. This lead to the inevitable succession disputes.

## 8.4 Land Tenure System

The land tenure prevalent in Coorg was quite favourable for Coorgs to maintain and develop a military tradition of their own. Land revenue was the principal source of the Lingayat Rajas. The assessment of land was made on the basis of survey and the classification of cultivated land in Coorg. Similar survey was made during the reign of Linga Raja. This settlement was recorded in a book called the Hukum Nama. Most Coorgs held land under this military tradition. The term Jānma is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word Janma meaning birth. It was hereditary and the right to the property passes from father to his son.

After 1834, the British introduced the following changes in the Coorg society:

- 1) Abolition of slavery. Slavery was abolished through it did not affect the land holding Coorg. The slaves were free to choose their work.
- 2) Another important change was the introduction of coffee plantations. Coffee plantations increased the demand for labour. The slaves deserted their masters and joined the plantations.
- 3) Coffee became important next only to rice. Coffee plantation changed the face of Coorg. It brought foreign planters who settled down in Coorg.
- 4) Coffee plantation changed the master-slave relation. The slaves were no more bound to their Coorg masters.
- 5) Seasonal flow of labour from Mysore and other areas increased. Thus Coorg became a place for labour market.
- 6) Naturally coffee plantation brought money to planters and work to labourers.

According to 1941 census there were two sub-division among Coorg. The first division consisted of 41,026 and the second had only 666 individuals. The latter called themselves Amma Kudagas or Amma Coorg. The Amma Coorg are a highly Brahmanised group of Coorg society.

The Amma Coorg are said to be the descendents of a Coorg man and a Brahmin girl of Wynad. She was the daughter of Tayikat Tambiran. Tayikat Tambrain espelled his daughter from his house as she had attained puberty before marriage. To keep a daughter who attains puberty before marriage in the past was a serious offence. It was sinful and shameful. Born of this union came to be known as Amma Coorgs.

During the reign of the last Raja of Coorg, Amma Coorgs claimed to be kaveri Brahmins. They claimed to be the descendents of the Brahmin disciple of the sage Agastya, husband of kaveri, before the latter flowed away as a river.

In the recent past there were two subdivisions called Sanna Coorg and Malla Coorg. The Sanna Coorgs were the descendents of inter-marriage between the ruling Lingayats and the Coorgs.

## 8.5 Tribes and Caste in Coorg

There were more than forty tribes and castes in Coorg, but Coorgs were in regular contact with (1) the Brahmin priest (2) the Kaniyas or astrologers (3) Banna (Oracle) (4) Blacksmith (5) Carpenter (6) Goldsmith (7) Washerman (8) Barber (9) Poley or farm servant (10) Meda. In this section we discuss how Coorgs relate themselves to each of these caste groups.

“Under the Lingayat Rajas Coorgs formed the aristocracy. They held important acknowledge their dominance of taking over customs and manners and their speech”. The peasant castes of Karnataka and Gandas of South India tried to pass off for Coorgs.

The Coorgs were a compact unit in relation to other castes. The Coorgs were powerful, economically and politically. They engaged themselves in dancing, competitive games. They were skilful in hunting and soldering. These were the attributes of the kshatriyas of Vedic or classical caste system. Prof. Srinivas maintains that the resemblance between Coorgs and Vedic Kshatriyas is striking in the matters of values and “it is understandable that Coorgs should regard themselves as kshatriyas. He adds that Coorgs do not perform any Vedic ritual, vedic mantras. They do

not recite vedic mantras at the naming ceremony, at marriage or at the funeral. They abstain from eating beef. Their dietary includes pork and liquor.

The Brahmins, kaniyas and Bannas are three important castes in ritual context. The Brahmins are priests in great shrines at Tala kaveri, Bhagmandla and Irpu and at other small temples. The Coorg offer rice balls to their ancestors at the sacred place Tala kaveri. This is done under the guidance of a Brahmin priest. Payment to the priest is made annually at harvest. Every Coorg house in the village makes a certain quantity of paddy. The Brahmin is in no way different from other service castes.

Blacksmith & Carpenters: 1) Make agricultural implements and other articles of domestic use.

2) Build massive houses for Coorgs.

3) They make biers and palanquins used on ritual occasions.

4) A sickle used on the occasion of cutting of sheaves.

Goldsmith:

1) Makes articles of gold and silver ornaments.

2) Bores ears of boys and girls.

3) Ear boring was an initiation rite in the past.

Washerman Clothes washed by a Washerman are ritually pure such clothes must be worn on ritual occasions. His services are essential on ritual occasions.

1) Supplies clean clothes for bridal pair to walk on.

2) Supplies a cloth to spread on the bridal seat to cover the ceiling.

3) Supplies clothes at the village festival.

4) Purifies ritual pollution caused by birth or death.

Barber: The barber defiles a Coorg. The Coorg undergoes a ritual bath after his shave. Such bath restores the Coorgs normal ritual status.

1) The barbers services are indispensable at the time of birth and death.

2) Shaving is an essential preliminary act for men on ritual occasions.

Meda: The Meda is an artisan who supplies artifacts like baskets, fish traps and receptacles of cane, reed or bamboo.

1) His presence is indispensable at Coorg festival dance or hunt.

2) He brings a basket and bamboo vessel for the festival.

3) He beats his tom-tom.

## Reflection and Action 8.2

Is Srinivas writing about varna or caste? Justify your answer in writing and discussion.

Poleya: 1) The poleya farm servant observes ritual mourning for his Coorg master.

2) He is given gifts at the termination of mourning.

3) He holds torch at Coorg wedding.

4) He does most of the work on Coorg farms.

## 8.6 The Okka

The Okka is the basic unit of Coorg society. It is a patrilineal and patrilocal joint family. Only male members have any right in the right ancestral estate. Similarly, it is only son who can continue the Okka.

Women born in the Okka cease to be the member of their natal Okka on their marriage. Women who became members of their conjugal Okka do not have any special rights in their conjugal Okka. However, they may marry their husband's younger brother and retain their membership in their conjugal or in their natal Okka.

Sexes are segregated among Coorgs. The outer verandah may be used as a club for men only and woman use kitchen or some inner room to receive guests.

During the harvest festival and the festival of village deities men sing and dance and women watch them from a distance.

For men the ideals are strength, skill in fighting and hunting and courage. Killing a tiger or panther gets a man the honour of mangala ceremony. According to a proverb; Men should die on the battle field and women in child-bed.

Coorg men supervise the cultivation of land while low caste labourers do much of the work on the fields. The army has greater attraction for the Coorg.

"The Coorg Okka seems to be stronger and more sharply structured than the joint family in South India, with the possible exception of the matrilineal Taravad of the Nayers and the patrilineal Illam of the Nambudris. Other territorial groups among the Coorg are the Village and Nad. There are 35 Nads and Kombus in Coorg.

"Every society has a body of ritual and certain ritual acts forming the body of ritual repeat themselves constantly. Now only ritual acts, but also ritual complexes, which are wholes made up of several individual acts, frequency repeat themselves, several such ritual complexes and some individual ritual acts might be together knit into a still wider ritual whole which repeats itself occasionally."

For instance salutation is an individual ritual acts. It may be two kinds, simple and elaborate. In the simple ritual acts a man may fold his hands at his chest and utter Namaskar if the two person involves are equals. In an elaborate ritual act of salutation. The man may bend down up to his knees, touch the feet of an elderly man or woman and carry his hands up to his forehead, at least once. If a person is before a dity, he may bend down to touch the earth and carry his hand upto his forehead three times. Salutation of the elaborate kind is only one of several ritual acts in the ritual complex of murta is again a part of mangala.

### Box 8.1: Mangala and Coorgs

There are several kinds of mangala in the past, but now it has been narrowed down to mean exclusively marriage and this is a fairly recent phenomenon.

The astrologer selects the auspicious day and time to murta. Generally, it is performed in the central hall of the ancestral house. The house is colour washed and decorated. A pandal of five pillars is erected. Once of the pillars is of the milk exuding tree. Tom-toms are beaten by the

poleys servants and mudas. Four coorgs play their musical instrument called dudi. The songs sung on the occasion are traditional and are exaggerated. All this shows the social importance of the occasion. It also shows the movement of social status of the person undergoing the murta ceremony.

The person for whom mangala is to be performed is seated on a tripod stool stood in the central hall of the ancestral home. He is in a pure ritual condition as he had a shave and a ritual bath and is in his ritually pure robes. Two lamps are burning on other side of subject. A third stool covered with a red silk cloth is also there. On this stool in dish which contains a burning lamp placed on a rice platform and a vessel containing some milk.

Three women whose husbands are alive perform murta individually. The woman takes rice from the dish and sprinkles at the lamps some from over her shoulders. She then salutes the sun. She takes the vessel from the dish and causes it up to the subject's mouth. The subject sucks some milk from the spout of the vessel. The subject salutes the lamps. The subject touches the feet of the woman and she gives him/her some silver or gold coins blessing a long and happy life. In the past mangala was performed on various occasions.

**Examples :** (1) Ear boring mangala for boys and girls. (2) Puberty mangala. (3) First pregnancy mangala. (4) A woman whose ten children are alive. (5) Tiger mangala. (6) Plantain mangala. (7) House mangala. (8) Ox mangala. (9) Corpse of a bachelor. All these are defunct today. Mangala today means marriage mangala.

The external world is divided into two parts, the sacred and non-sacred. The term sacred includes good sacredness and bad sacredness. Good sacred means all forms of ritually desirable conditions like auspiciousness and purity forms of ritually undesirable states and condition such as in auspiciousness and impurity.

In Kodagi dialect pole means ritual impurity. Generally, its specific forms may be *kurudu pole* (blowing pollution or and *Tinga pole* (monthly pollution). *Kurudu pole* refers to the impurity of a woman in her monthly periods and *kurudu pole* is birth pollution. In the same way death pollution is called *Tike* and *Tomme* means mourning and *Namme* is festival.

All over India a higher caste person does not touch or come very close to a member of a lower caste because of the structural distance if it is very great. A higher caste person is in a condition of ritual purity in relation to a number of lower castes. The concepts of ritual purity and impurity systematise and maintain distance between different castes. The Brahmin is in the condition of ritual purity in relation to all other castes. The untouchables on the other hand are in a condition of impurity to castes above them.

The Coorgs regard their ancestral estate sacred. A Coorg is not allowed to walk wearing sandals. The most sacred places on the estate are the ancestor shrine and the cobra platform. A woman in her monthly periods may not go near the cobra platform as the cobra deity is very sensitive to pollution.

The ancestral house has an out house in which a woman stayed for three days during her periods. On the fourth month day she attained her normal ritual states after a bath.

Certain part of the ancestral house are more sacred than other parts. The central hall is one such place which is very sacred. In the western wall of the central hall is a niche for burning an earthen lamp. The lamp faces east, the sacred direction. This lamp is known as *Nallakk Boluk*. The south western room and the kitchen are also sacred.

The Brahmin priest may go into all parts of the ancestral house. The *polaya* and *meda* may go up to pavement in front of the house.

The concepts of ritual purity and impurity are intimately related to the permanent features of the social structure, like casts and *okka* and also to village they also occur in non- structural contexts.

A man is in a state of purity while praying or sacrificing to an ancestor or deity. He attains ritual purity by taking a bath, wearing ritually pure clothes. He comes into contact with a deity when he is praying. A mourner also offers food to the spirit of a dead person. He is also in an extreme condition of ritual purity though he is in ritual state of *tike*, death pollution.

Bodily emissions and waste matter are ritually impure. Intercourse makes a man and a woman impure and polluted. The priests at *ketrappa* have to observe continence during 21st days at the festival. They are required to sleep in the outer verandah where women do not enter. A call of nature pollutes a person. Spittle is also ritually impure. A man should not touch his teeth. *Enji* is the term for spittle in Kodagi. Nail and hair paring are impure. If scattered in the house poverty will result.

A Coorg may pare his finger and toenails. He cannot cut his hair. This is the job of a barber. The barber defiles a Coorg. The latter purifies himself by taking a ritual bath and wearing pure clothes. The place where the barber sat is purified; faces; urine semen menstrual blood, spittle and paring of nails and hair are ritually impure. Physical dirt is identified with ritual impurity.

Birth and death result in impurity. A corpse is ritually impure and contact with it results in pollution. The crow is associated with death and is also impure. The spirits of death ancestors assume the forms of crows on certain occasions particularly when rice balls are offered to them. If a crow seen mating brings death. He sends a false latter announcing his death. Mating of crows means their increase and it means a likely death of the person. If a crow falls on someone, s/he will have to dip in tank a thousand times.

Bad sacredness is a wider concept than pollution or ritual impurity. Degrees of ritual impurity are:

- a) Childbirth results in a mild form of pollution. Members of the *Okka* regain their normal status after 7<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> days the body on the 60<sup>th</sup> day. Temple visiting is avoided by *Okka* members.
- b) *Tike* or death pollution is an acute form of pollution while *purudu* pole are milk from it.
- c) *Madi* and pole are deviations from the normal. The washer man takes away clothes and returns *madivala*.

Ritual impurity, normal ritual state and ritual purity form a hierarchy. Normal ritual status is a mild form of impurity.

## 8.7 Aspects of Hinduism

The structural basis of Hinduism is the caste system. Caste system means a hierarchical arrangement of caste, with the Brahmin at the top of the



ladder and the untouchable at the bottom of it. Prof. Srinivas sees this as a fusion of Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit ritual and beliefs. It is common to come across castes with both Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit ritual and belief at the same time. These may vary from caste to caste and region to region. In this background it becomes easy to understand why some people worship trees, plants, mountains, rivers, caste ancestors and village deities etc.

Hinduism has a profound philosophy of its own. Its Upanishads, Vedanta and the mysticism of Bhakti Schools are well-known. Caste system has been so powerful that even some reformist sects have become castes. Jains and Lingayats are the examples. However, some lower caste groups by Sanskritizing their rites have raised their social status in the caste hierarchy. The Coorgs for instance.

It is also true that rites and beliefs have changed in the process of Sanskritization. This change may be seen within and outside Hinduism.

### Box 8.2: Analysis of Hinduism

The Sanskrit Hinduism has two aspects, the intellectual and the ordinary. The intellectual Hinduism has the Upanishads, the Gita and the philosophical systems and for the ordinary Hindus numerous feasts, tastes, vratas, pilgrimages, temples and shrines are the stuff of Hinduism. The great literary works like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas and the teachings of Saints are also there.

For analytical purposes Hinduism may be made into (1) All India Hinduism (2) Peninsular Hinduism (3) Regional Hinduism and the (4) Local Hinduism.

The ritual and cultural form of Sanskrit Hinduism may be spread all over India. The Brahmins share some Sanskrit ritual and cultural forms in common all over India.

Some ritual and cultural forms are peculiar to a particular part of south India, the Kaveri myth for instance.

Regional Hinduism refers to the ritual and cultural forms found in Malabar, south Canara and Coorg.

A small area in north of Coorg called Coorg proper comes under the local Hinduism.

All India Hinduism may be seen as having horizontal spread in which there is unity and solidarity among the Brahmins.

All India Hinduism spreads in two ways: (1) In the first instance the Sanskrit deities extended their ritual and cultural forms. In the second the groups undergo greater Sanskritization of ritual and beliefs. When the Sanskrit deities extend their area, these deities assume different forms in their travel all over India. In case of greater Sanskritization in groups inside Hinduism local deities assume "Sanskrit labels" the Vedic deity Kshetrपाल becomes Ketzappa in Coorg.

The All-India Hinduism absorbs local features with greater ease. The Kaveri myth is the example in which ideas of sin and virtue are attached to them. The Ganga myth becomes a model for the Kaveri myth.

According to Coorg folklore, Malabar Coast was created by Parashurama. Malabar is a strange country. The people here behave in an unpredictable way.

The Coorg folk songs report that deities migrated from Malabar into Coorg. They migrate to Coorg for shelter. Some important deities are:

- 1) Achehayya - - - Vishnu - - - a form of Bhagvati.
- 2) Achchayya - - - Laxmu - - - for Coorgs Laxmi is the wife of Madava.
- 3) Madava - - - Shiva - - - has a shrine in every nad.
- 4) Povvedi Bhagvati - - - (Parvati)- - - has a shrine in every village.
- 5) Kanyamatappa
- 6) Tirchanbarappa
- 7) Bendrukelappa
- 8) Pannangalamme (F)- - - kartandaokka- - - she is a deity worshipped by Poley lower cast.
- 9) Lgguttapa - - - for Coorgs he is Sulnamanya.
- 10) Pallurapa - - - for Coorgs he is Vishnu.
- 11) Tirndli pemmayya - - - he guards against man; the deity of epidemics.

Marriage is preferred condition among Coorgs. Social status of a married man is higher than that of a bachelor. There is no difference between married woman and a remarried widow.

The Brahmin and the Coorg are similar attitude towards widowhood.

The woman with all her ten children alive is entitled to a special honour.

The festival of arms comes at the end of the field season. The astroloser decides the day and time of worshipping weapons. The head of the Okka hands over the weapons from the ancestral building to Coorgs and says to them: "Fight a tiger and boar by stepping aside the charging lease. Do not underrate your enemy, fight him face to face, stand by your friend be obedient to the king and do forget god. "He fires a shot his gun in the direction of woods.

The head of the Okka is in charge of a pack of dogs. He feeds them regularly.

Competitions are held on the village green. Men shot at targets. Men are asked to cut through the three plantains stems planted very close to each with stoke of the sword. There are also a high-jump and stone throwing competitions.

All the adult males have to participate in the collective hunt. This is held after the festival of arms.

Coorgs believe than Aujiyappa, the son of Vishnu and Shiva, roams about forest at night whistling to the pack of dogs. The Coorgs offer clay image of dogs and horse in shrine in jungle.

The material orientation of cords culture is not a recent phenomenon. About 1300 Coorgs joined the army as soldiers to fight in the last war. It is interesting to note that the first Indian commander-in-chief of the Indian Army Journal K.M. Cariappa was a Coorg.

## 8.8 Conclusion

Preference for a particular way life expresses itself in belief, ritual and myth. Coorg is an agricultural country and the Coorg community is directly dependent on land. Coffee was introduced about a hundred years ago.

Coorgs were pre-occupied with the cultivation of rice from May to January. May was the proper time for the first ploughing of fields. Harvesting of the crop was done in January. After harvesting it was time to participate in the festival of village deities. It was also time for some men to go to Malabar for the sale of their surplus rice. Thus the social activities of a Coorg revolved round and adjusted themselves to the cultivation of rice and the sale of surplus in Malabar.

Rice field is the most important part of an ancestral estate. It is sacred a Coorg is not allowed to walk on it wearing his sandals. He is not allowed to enter the ancestral shrine or a temple with his sandals on.

Every stage of cultivation of rice is marked by a ritual. The main plot of the ancestral rice-field is ritually ploughed on a particular day and decided by the Brahmin priest of Sulnamanya temple. Regular ploughing takes place after the ritual ploughing on the New Year Day.

Stages of the cultivation of the rice crop are ploughing, sowing, plucking of young plants and their transplantation, harvesting, storing the crop in the granary. Then follows the Kaveri festival. A part of it is called bottu which is intended to protect the growing crop, woods on the estate.

Putri is another important festival of Coorgs when the paddy sheaves are ritually cut. The festival lasts for nine to ten days. Seven days previous to sheaf-cutting singing, dancing and playing games are the main activities. After sheaf-cutting there is a domestic feast, a dance and sports and a collective hunt and a dinner for the village or nad.

On the festival day, leaves of different plants and creepers are gathered. These are kept near a dish-lamp in a harvest-basket. In a new bamboo vessel some milk, honey and gli are poured and a new sickle is kept in it. The sheaf-cutter carries the bamboo-vessel to the field followed by other members. The rice plant is worshipped and everyone shouts poli, poli, deva (increase, increase, O God) and a shot is fired from a gun. The sheaf-cutter reaches home. His feet are washed and given milk to drink.

Prof. Srinivas opines that these rites performed at the harvest festival stress the great value of rice to Coorg.

On the New Year Day a cold of ploughed earth is brought home and deposited in the granary. At the sight of paddy in the ear, a man says "saw paddy in the ear O granary, there is going to be bumper crop". These become *akahaya patra*, the mythical vessel of increase.

## 8.9 Further Reading

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