

Ethnic Identity and Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Study of the Koraga community of South India

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The *Koraga* community is considered one of the most primitive communities in India. The etymological meaning of the word is not clear. However, scholars have observed that *Koraga* may be a corrupt form of the word *Kuruvar* (hill man). Scholars have also speculated that the name is indicative of sun worship. It may be noted that the cultural heritage also throws some light in this direction. According to the 1981 census, the population of Koraga was 15,146 and they speak the *Koraga* dialect.

Koragas are divided into a number of exogamous clans or sects. The clan is known as the *bali*. There are 17 *balis* found among *Koragas*. The *Koragas* are basically agriculturists and eke out their livelihood depending on forest produce such as bamboo, cane and creepers for basket making. *Koragas* sing songs and perform folkdances, rituals and magic to appease their deity for bountiful crops and to eradicate epidemics.

Koragas are deft in making baskets using creepers, canes and bamboos by splitting and weaving them artistically. Basketry is the main source of income of the *Koraga* tribal community as the scavenger and orderly profession have already been prohibited by the authorities. The skill of making baskets is transferred from one generation to the other. Even the children used to weave baskets. This paper discusses the intangible cultural heritage and the sustainable development of the *Koraga* community of South India.