



Kodava Christian Spirituality: An Exploration Of Indigenous Roots And Christian Values

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ABSTRACT

Coorg, a region in Karnataka, India, has a unique cultural heritage shaped by its indigenous communities, colonial history, and religious diversity. This article examines the history, cultural significance, and contemporary practices of Christianity in Coorg. From the arrival of Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century to the present day, Christianity has evolved distinctively in Coorg, influenced by local customs, colonialism, and globalization. Through a nuanced analysis of historical records, oral narratives, and ethnographic research, this study reveals the complex dynamics of Christianity in Coorg, highlighting its impact on education, healthcare, and social reform. By exploring the intersections of religion, culture, and identity, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the diverse cultural landscape of Coorg and the role of Christian spirituality within it.

Introduction

Tucked away in the picturesque hills of Karnataka, Coorg is a region steeped in rich cultural heritage and diversity. Among the various communities that call Coorg home, Christians have a significant presence, with a history dating back to the 16th century. Introduced by Portuguese missionaries and later influenced by British colonialism, Christianity has evolved uniquely in Coorg, blending traditional practices with local customs. This exploration delves into the fascinating story of a Christian Spirituality in Coorg, examining its history, cultural significance, and the lives of the Christian communities.

The Indigenous People of Coorg

The genesis of Coorg is a captivating narrative woven from the threads of geography, history, language and tradition. Coorg's unique blend of indigenous tribes, Dravidian influences and colonial legacies has shaped its distinct identity. From the brave Kodava warriors to the gentle rustle of coffee plantations, every aspect of Coorg's story resonates with an unmistakable charm. This exploration probes into the historical, cultural, and linguistic foundations of Coorg, unravelling the intricate tapestry that defines this captivating region.¹The Kodavas, the indigenous people of Coorg, have a unique culture that blends traditional practices with Christian elements. Christianity was introduced to Coorg by European missionaries, including Portuguese, Italian, and British missionaries, who arrived in the region from the 16th century onwards. The Christian influence has had a significant impact on Kodava society, leading to changes in areas such as caste, marriage, and women's rights.²The Kodava identity is a vibrant tapestry woven from the rich cultural, linguistic, and ethnic heritage of the Kodava people, indigenous to the picturesque Kodagu district in Karnataka, India.

Coorg the Kingdom of God

Coorg, also known as Kodagu, is like a heavenly paradise that seems to have been separated from the Kingdom of God. The small island of *Nisargadhama*, spanning sixty-four acres, is an exquisite haven of beauty like no other.³ The Brahmagiri Hills provide an unparalleled panoramic view of the breath taking, mist-laden landscape of Coorg.⁴ It has a rich cultural heritage shaped by its history, geography, and the

¹M.P. Cariappa, & C. Ponamma, (1981). *The Coorgs and their Origins*. (Mysore: Geetha Book House), p. 136.

²P.T. Bopanna (2009). *Rise and Fall of the Coorg State: Kodagu's Loss, Karnataka's Gain*. (New York, Rolling Stone), pp. 1-10.

³P.T. Bopanna(2023). *Coorg Land of Beauty and Valour*. (San Francisco, CA: Rolling Stone), p. 16.

⁴ M.N. Rajegowda (1986). *The Coorgs*. (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan), p. 23; I.M. Muthanna (1953). *A Tiny Model State of South India*. (Mysore: Tiny Spot). p. 99.

influence of various religions, including Christianity. The fusion of Christian and Kodava traditions has contributed to a distinct cultural identity. Christian missionaries established schools, hospitals, and churches, which have had a lasting impact on the region. Today, Coorg is home to several Christian communities, including Kodava Christians, Mangalorean Christians, and other denominations.

The Kodava Trinity and Ancestor Reverence

One of the distinctive aspects of Kodava culture is their reverence for ancestors and elders. They consider their ancestors as guiding spirits and their elders as living guides. The Kodavas have a local trinity, comprising: 1. *Kuladevi* (Kaveri): The patron goddess, 2. *Maguru(Igguthappa)*: The chief preceptor, 3. *Guru Karana*: The revered common ancestor and founder of the *okka* (clan). This trinity reflects the Kodavas' deep respect for their heritage and their ancestors, who continue to play a vital role in their lives.⁵

Ancestral Worship: A Cornerstone of Kodava Culture

In the rich cultural heritage of the Kodavas, ancestral worship holds a sacred place. This ancient practice is a testament to the community's deep reverence for their ancestors, who are believed to continue guiding and protecting their descendants even after death.⁶ An integral part of Kodava tradition ancestral worship, serves as a means to: Honour ancestors and show respect, seek blessings and protection, ensure family well-being and prosperity, maintain social harmony and balance.⁷ Through various rituals and practices, the Kodavas demonstrate their gratitude and devotion to their ancestors, acknowledging the significant role they play in their lives. This timeless tradition continues to be an essential part of Kodava culture and identity.

The three main types of ancestral worship are: 1. *Bakkil Puja*: This ritual involves offering food, flowers, and incense to ancestors as a mark of respect and reverence.⁸ 2. *Mandala Puja*: This ritual worship is performed to seek prosperity, happiness, and well-being from ancestors. It is an important ceremony to invoke the blessings of ancestors. 3. *Kula Devatha*: This form of worship involves reverence for family deities, who are believed to protect and guide the family.⁹

In Christianity, offering Masses for the dead is a long-standing tradition, particularly in the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and some Anglican communities. Offering Masses for the dead is a way to: 1. Pray for the repose of the soul of the deceased. 2. Assist the deceased in their journey to heaven. 3. Express condolences and support for the grieving family. The practice is rooted in Scripture: 1. 2 Maccabees 12:46 "Thus he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." 2. 1 Corinthians 15:29 "Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?"¹⁰

Rituals and Practices of the Kodavas

The Kodavas have a rich cultural heritage, reflected in their unique rituals and practices. Some of the notable ones include: 1. *OlyeKattodhu*: A ritual that warmly welcomes the bride to her husband's house, marking the beginning of her new life. 2. *Nalkare*: A ritual seeking blessings from elders, emphasizing the importance of respecting and honoring one's seniors. 3. *Ainmane Puja*: A worship ceremony held at the ancestral home, reinforcing the deep connection the Kodavas have with their ancestors.¹¹

Nature Worship in Kodava Culture

Nature worship is an essential aspect of Kodava culture, where the natural world is revered as sacred. The Kodavas worship various elements of nature including, Sun: symbolizing light and life, Fire: Representing purification and transformation, Water: Embodying the life-giving force of the sacred river Kaveri. The Kodavas have a deep reverence for the natural world, worshipping: River Kaveri: Considered a life-giving force.¹² Mountains: Such as *Bramhagiri* and *Tadiandamol*, revered for their majesty and spiritual significance. Forests: Believed to be inhabited by spirits and worshiped as a source of life and sustenance.¹³ Like Hindus, the Kodavas are polytheists, believing in reincarnation and the worship of multiple

⁵K.S. Singh (2005). *The Coorgs: A Ethnographic Study*. (Kolkotha, Anthropological Survey of India), p. 250.

⁶ B. D. Ganapathy (2003). *Kodava Ancestral Worship*. (Mysore, Karnataka Kodava Sahitya Academy), pp. 10-15.

⁷Ganapathy, *Kodava Ancestral Worship*. p. 123.

⁸Ganapathy, *Kodava Ancestral Worship*, p. 145.

⁹ C.P. Belliappa, (2007). *Kodava Religion: A Study of Animism*. (Mysore, Coorg Institute of Culture), pp. 180-185.

¹⁰*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1995). no. 1032. (Doubleday, NY: An Image Book), p. 291. "From the beginning, the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers and sacrifices for them."

¹¹ " K.V. Narayan (2010). "The Kodava Language: A Study of its Grammar and Vocabulary". *The Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, p. 150.

¹² G. Richter (1870). *Manual of Coorg: A Gazetteer of the Natural Features of the Country*. (Mangalore: C. Stolz), pp. 134-135.

¹³ Richter, *Manual of Coorg*, pp. 201-203.

deities. They also worship their ancestors, with a special shrine (*Kaimada*) dedicated to the clan's first ancestor, Guru Karana (*Karana*), on their ancestral clan lands.¹⁴

Chief Deities of Kodava

The Kodavas worship a diverse range of deities, reflecting their rich cultural heritage. Their chief deities include: Bhagavathi (Lakshmi): Goddess of prosperity and good fortune, Mahadeva (Shiva): The supreme god in Hinduism, Bhadrakali (Parvati as Kali): Goddess of time and change, Muthappa: A revered deity in Kodava culture and Aiyappa: God of the hunt.¹⁵

Devakad: Sacred Grove of the Kodavas

A remarkable example of the Kodavas' deep-rooted nature worship is their *devakad*, or sacred groves. Kodagu is home to an astonishing number of these sacred groves, with estimates suggesting one or more grove for each village, earning it the distinction of having the highest density of sacred groves in the world.¹⁶

Unfortunately, over the years, many of these sacred groves have fallen victim to encroachment, particularly for coffee cultivation, resulting in a significant loss of area. According to the latest available figures (1991), there are 1214 sacred groves in Kodagu, covering approximately 2500 hectares.¹⁷

Each *Devakad* is sacred to one or more deities, with the ancient belief that these forests serve as hunting grounds for the gods. Each *devakad* is managed by a local committee, with the responsibility (*thakkame*) entrusted to a specific *okka* (clan). As a result, hunting and tree felling within these groves are strictly forbidden. This has allowed the trees to grow tall and dense, transforming these groves into biodiversity hotspots.¹⁸

The Local God Igguthappa

Igguthappa, an incarnation of Lord Subramani, holds great significance in Kodava culture. As the god of snakes, rain, harvest, and rice, *Igguthappa* is revered for his role in ensuring fertility and prosperity.¹⁹

Worshipping the Spirits: A Vital Aspect of Kodava Culture

The Kodavas have a rich spiritual tradition, worshipping various spirits to seek protection, blessings, and harmony with nature. They believe in the spirits of departed souls who were prominent figures in the community and had done good deeds while alive. These spirits are worshiped and symbolically represented by a sanctified rock. Weapons made of wood or metal are kept in the *Kaimadas*, and family members gather annually to remember their ancestors and offer prayers.²⁰ Their spiritual practices include rituals like prayer, music, dance, and offerings of flowers, food, and incense. The Kodavas worship a range of spirits, including: *Bhuta*: Malevolent spirits; *Daiva*: Benevolent spirits; *Aradhana*: Spirits of ancestors and *Kula Devatha*: Family deities.²¹

Animism in Kodava culture

A belief in innumerable spiritual beings concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming human interests is called Animistic belief surveyed by Sir Edward.²² In the Kodava community, as a mark of respect, younger people touch the feet of their elders when they meet socially or during auspicious occasions. Elders invoke their ancestors when they bless those who touch their feet. Kodavas are primarily ancestor and nature worshippers. The *karanava*, the first ancestor or founder of the *okka*, is revered as a god.²³

The Ainmane Ancestral Home of the Kodavas

The *Ainmane* is a sacred institution in Kodava culture, representing the ancestral home where family traditions and values are preserved. Every *Ainmane* has a dedicated shrine or sacred space where prayers and ritual offerings are made to honor the ancestors.²⁴ *Ainmanes* are typically oriented eastward, symbolizing the

¹⁴N. Bopanna(2009). *Kodava Culture and Religion: An Anthropological Study*. (Mysore:Coorg Institute of Culture),pp. 210-215.

¹⁵C. Ponnappa (1983). *Chief Deities of Kodavas*.(Mysore: Karnataka KodavaSahitya Academy), pp. 15-16.

¹⁶Belliappa, *Kodava Religion*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁷ N. Chinnappa (2003). *PattolePalame: The Lore of the Kodavas*.(Mysore, Coorg Institute of Culture), pp. 120-125.

¹⁸Chinnappa,*PattolePalame*,pp. 150-155.

¹⁹Ponnappa, *Chief Deities of Kodavas*, pp. 30-32

²⁰ B.D. Ganapathy (2003). *Kodava Ancestral Worship*. (Mysore: Karnataka KodavaSahitya Academy), p, 167.

²¹S. Chengappa (1984). *Worship of Spirits by Kodavas of Coorg*.(Mysore: Karnataka KodavaSahitya Academy), p. 45.

²²Belliappa, *Kodava Religion*, pp. 120-125.

²³Belliappa, *Kodava Religion*, pp. 160-165

²⁴Chengappa, (1988). *Ainmane of Kodavas*. (Mysore: Karnataka KodavaSahitya Academy), pp. 12-15.

dawn of new life and the connection with the divine. This eastern orientation also allows the morning sun to illuminate the sacred space, filling it with light and energy.²⁵ Each day begins with a sacred ritual, as elders open the main door of the *Ainmane* and offer prayers to the sun, seeking blessings and guidance. Additionally, every *Ainmane* has a sacred lamp, positioned eastward, which is lit and prayed at dawn and dusk. This lamp serves as a witness to important life events, including naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals.²⁶ The *Ainmane* is a testament to the Kodavas' deep reverence for their ancestors and their cultural heritage. These ancestral homes continue to play a vital role in preserving Kodava traditions and values.²⁷

Cross-Cultural and Religious Influences on the Kodavas

An examination of the socio-religious practices of the Kodavas reveals the significant impact of cross-cultural influences. Acculturation, the process of cultural exchange and adaptation, is inevitable, and the Kodavas are no exception.

Evolution of Kodava Spirituality

Originally, the Kodavas were nature worshippers, revering the land, forests, and rivers. Over time, their spiritual practices were influenced by: Hinduism: The dominant religion in the region, which introduced the worship of deities like Shiva, Vishnu, and the goddess Kali.²⁸ Islam: Which arrived in the region through trade and cultural exchange, introducing new spiritual practices and traditions. Christianity: Brought by European colonizers, which had a significant impact on the local culture and spirituality.²⁹ European colonization and missionary activities have significantly impacted Kodava culture. The early Christian influence in Coorg dates back to the 16th century, when Portuguese missionaries arrived and established churches, converting some Kodavas to Christianity.

These cross-cultural influences have enriched the spiritual practices of the Kodavas, creating a unique blend of traditions and beliefs. Our concern here is to highlight the influence of Christianity on Kodava Culture.³⁰

Indigenous Converts

Many indigenous people in Coorg, including the Kodavas, converted to Christianity. This was partly due to the influence of British missionaries and partly due to the social and economic benefits that came with conversion.³¹ The earliest indigenous converts to Christianity in Coorg were primarily from the Kodava community. These conversions date back to the 16th century, when Portuguese missionaries first arrived in the region.³²

Kodava Christians

Kodava Christians are a community of Christians who belong to the Kodava ethnic group, native to Coorg, Karnataka, India. Kodava Christians are the largest indigenous Christian community in Coorg. They have a unique cultural identity that blends traditional Kodava customs with Christian practices. Kodava Christians have a unique history that dates back to the 16th century, when Portuguese missionaries arrived in Coorg. Many Kodavas converted to Christianity, and over time, they developed a distinct Christian tradition that blended with their native culture.³³

Christian Denominations and Missionaries

Various Christian denominations have been present in Coorg, including Roman Catholic Church, Church of South India, Pentecostal Church and missionaries from Portugal, France, and Britain have contributed to the spread of Christianity in Coorg.³⁴

Jesuit Presence

The earliest recorded Christian presence in Coorg dates to the 16th century, when Portuguese missionaries arrived in the region. These missionaries, primarily from the Jesuit order, sought to spread Christianity among the local population. Fr Jerome de Silva (16th century), a Portuguese Jesuit missionary established the first Christian mission station in Coorg. In the early 17th century, Jesuit missionaries established a mission station in Coorg, Fr Joseph de Castro a Jesuit missionary, built the first church in Coorg. The Jesuits also

²⁵Chengappa, *Ainmane of Kodavas*, pp. 25-30.

²⁶Chengappa, *Ainmane of Kodavas*, pp. 42-45.

²⁷ C.P. Belliappa, (2000). *Ainmane*, (Mysore, Coorg Institute of Culture). pp. 150-160.

²⁸Chengappa, *Ainmane of Kodavas*. pp. 42-44

²⁹K.B. Ganapathy (1993). *The Cross and the Coorgs: A Christian Saga in Coorg*. (Mangalore, Karnataka Theological Research Institute), pp. 1-5.

³⁰ P.T. Bopanna (2001). *Cross-Cultural Influences in Coorg*. (Mysore: Coorg Institute of Culture), pp. 15-20.

³¹Bopanna, *Cross-Cultural Influences in Coorg*, pp. 30-35.

³²P.T. Bopanna (1990). *Indigenous Converts: The Virashaiva and Christian Movement in Coorg*. (Mysore: Coorg Institute of Culture), pp. 25-30.

³³Ganapathy, *The Cross & the Coorgs*, pp. 10-20.

³⁴Ganapathy, *The Cross & the Coorgs*, pp. 50-100.

built other churches, schools and hospitals, and began to convert locals to Christianity.³⁵ However, it wasn't until the 19th century that Christianity gained significant traction in the region.³⁶

Italian Missionaries

During the 18th century, Fr Giuseppe Castagna an Italian Carmelite missionary established a mission station in Coorg.³⁷ His missionary work contributed to the spread of Christianity in the region.³⁸ The Italian missionaries, particularly from the Carmelite order drawn to the region's natural beauty took up this opportunity to spread Christianity among the local population. They continued the work of the Jesuits, establishing new mission stations and converting more locals to Christianity.³⁹

Notable Constitutors to the Coorg Mission

Fr Antonio Moscheni⁴⁰ has an unparalleled and unique place in the development of Christianity in Coorg, Karnataka, as a Jesuit missionary and artist. His significant contributions to the region include, the establishment of churches and chapels showcasing his architectural and artistic skills. He created beautiful frescoes, paintings, and sculptures in various churches and institutions in Coorg, which are still admired today. Some specific locations in Coorg where Moscheni's work can be seen include St Michael's Church in Madikeri, a beautiful Gothic-style church built in the 19th century; St Joseph's Church in Sunkoppa; the Chapel at the St Joseph's Convent, Madikeri and Virajpet; Christ Church, Madikeri and St Anne's Church, Virajpet.⁴¹ Moscheni contributed to the development of Catholic education in Coorg by establishing schools and educational institutions. He also engaged in social work, helping the poor and marginalized communities in the region.⁴² Moscheni's work can also be found in other churches and institutions in India, including the Hospital Chapel at Kankanady, the Church of Most Holy Saviour in Agrar, and the Holy Name Cathedral in Mumbai. He passed away in 1905 in Cochin, Kerala.

Church Missionary Society

The British East India Company's expansion into Coorg in the 19th century brought new opportunities for Christian missionaries. British missionaries, primarily from the Church of England, established new mission stations, schools, and hospitals, further expanding Christian influence in the region. During the British colonial era, Coorg became a hub for Christianity. At that time Coorg was a princely state under British paramountcy.⁴³ This period saw significant British influence on Christianity in Coorg. The British established several Christian missions in Coorg, through Church Missionary Society (CMS). CMS which was established in 1799 in London, which was a prominent British missionary organization that aimed to spread Christianity worldwide. In 1834, it extended its operations to Coorg, making it one of the first British missionary societies to work in the region. CMS missionaries preached the Gospel, established churches, and nurtured local Christian communities. The CMS founded schools, colleges, and training institutions to provide education and skills to the local population. CMS missionaries established hospitals, dispensaries, and healthcare programs to address the region's medical needs. The CMS worked to alleviate poverty, promote social justice, and empower marginalized communities.⁴⁴ Notable among CMS missionaries who contributed to the Coorg Mission is Rev. G.D. Mackenzie who made significant contributions to education in Coorg by

³⁵ D. Kamath & H. Fernandes (1955). *The Burning Bush: A History of the Karnataka Jesuit Province of the Society of Jesus*. Vol. 1 & 2. (Bangalore: Loyola Mandir), pp. 125-127.

³⁶ Bopanna, *Indigenous Converts*, pp. 40-45.

³⁷ Bopanna, *Indigenous Converts*, pp. 40-45.

³⁸ R. Eric Frykenberg (2008). *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to the Present Day*. (Oxford University Press.), pp. 155-160. John Abraham, *The Carmelites in India: A Historical Overview*. (Carmelite Provincialate, 2013), pp. 15-29; K.S. Singh, *Coorg: The Land of the Kodavas*. (Kolkotta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1992)

³⁹ Chengappa, *Christianity in Kodava*, pp. 35-40.

⁴⁰ Fr Antonio Moscheni was born in Stezzano, near Bergamo, Italy. He was educated at the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo and later studied in Rome. Before joining the Jesuits, he was a talented painter, and his work was in demand in Bergamo and surrounding areas in 1889, Moscheni joined the Society of Jesus and was sent to India in 1898. He is famous for his beautiful frescoes in the chapel of St. Aloysius College in Mangalore, which he completed in just two and a half years. His paintings depict scenes from the life of St. Aloysius, the Apostles, and the life of Jesus. Moscheni's work can also be found in other churches and institutions in India, including the Hospital Chapel at Kankanady, the Church of Most Holy Saviour in Agrar, and the Holy Name Cathedral in Mumbai. He passed away in 1905 in Cochin, Kerala (J. Coelho [1991]. "Inspired Jesuit Painter and Artist", *Jesuit Profiles*, pp. 289-297).

⁴¹ Ganapathy, *The Cross & the Coorgs*, pp. 101-130.

⁴² Bopanna, *Cross-Cultural Influences in Coorg*, pp. 60-65.

⁴³ P.T. Bopanna (2010). *Coorg: Land of Beauty and Valour*. (New York, Rolling Stone), pp. 101-110.

⁴⁴ *Missions to India* (1881). CMS Archive Section VI. (London, Adam Matthew Digital), pp. 50-100.

establishing the first English school in the region. Rev. Thomas Hodson⁴⁵ Wesleyan Missionary, worked in Coorg from 1834 to 1842.

London Missionary Society (LMS)

The London Missionary Society established in 1795, was a prominent British Protestant missionary organization that aimed to spread Christianity worldwide. In the mid-19th century, the LMS established a mission station in Coorg which marked the beginning of an era in the region.⁴⁶ Rev. William Campbell and Rev. James Barker were pioneering LMS missionaries who arrived in Coorg and played a key role in establishing the society's work and contributed significantly to the growth of Christianity in the region. Their main work was to preach the Gospel and work for evangelization. They also established churches, nurtured local Christian communities, founded schools, hospitals, dispensaries, healthcare programs and training institutions to provide education and skills to the local population. They laboured to alleviate poverty, promote social justice, and empowered marginalized communities.⁴⁷

Colonel Mark Cubbon

One among the notable British missionaries and officials who contributed to the spread of Christianity in Coorg was a British administrator named Colonel Mark Cubbon who played a significant role in shaping Coorg's history. He served as the Commissioner of Coorg from 1834 to 1859 and was also the Commissioner of Mysore. During his tenure, Cubbon implemented various reforms, including the establishment of a model civil service system made up of native Indians, which was a significant step towards Indianization, he promoted law-and-order, created a judicial system, made economic reforms, and developed the infrastructure such as constructing roads and bridges.⁴⁸ He was a strong supporter of Christian missionaries and their work in Coorg.⁴⁹ He encouraged the establishment of educational institutions, hospitals, and other social services by Christian missionaries. His administration also saw the introduction of coffee plantations in Coorg, which became a major industry in the region.⁵⁰

Christian Spirituality on Kodava Religion

The arrival of Christianity in Coorg has led to a fascinating blend of traditions. The Christian influence on Kodava religion can be seen in:

Syncretism: Kodavas incorporated Christian practices into their existing rituals and festivals. When Christianity was introduced to Coorg by European missionaries, the Kodavas incorporated Christian practices into their existing rituals and festivals, creating a distinctive form of syncretism. Examples of Syncretism in Coorg. Kodava festivals with Christian elements: the Kodavas celebrate traditional festivals like *Kailpodhu* (a harvest festival) and *Kaveri Sankramana* (a river festival), which have been infused with Christian elements, such as prayers and hymns.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Thomas Hudson was born on February 9, 1804, in North Scarle, Lincolnshire, UK, and died on September 9, 1882, in England. He worked in India, specifically in the Wesleyan Canarese Mission, at the Bangalore Petah and Gubbi, from 1829 to 1878, with a break from 1843 to 1853 due to health issues. ⁴⁵Hodson was a linguist and a Kannada scholar, fluent in Tamil and Bengali as well. He helped establish the Wesleyan Canarese Chapel at Nagarhpate in the Bangalore Petah and wrote "An Elementary Grammar of the Kannada, or Canarese Language" in 1864. During his time in India, Hodson was involved in various activities, including: his Missionary work involved preaching in the streets of Bangalore Petah, spreading simple Christian concepts. Hodson contributed much for education by starting an Anglo-Tamil school in the Bangalore Civil and Military Station and a Canarese school in the Petah. He was a writer and authored "Old Daniel, or, Memoir of a converted Hindoo" in 1877, which provides insights into village life in 19th-century Mysore State. (A. William (1850). *A Mission to the Mysore with Scenes and Facts Illustrative of India, its People and its Religion*. [London: Partridge and Oakey]. pp. 163-164).

⁴⁶ Unknown author (1927). *The Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*. (Melbourne: Hassell Street Press), pp. 20-30.

⁴⁷ Unknown author (1927). *The Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, pp. 31-40.

⁴⁸ John Garrett (1849). *The First Canarese (Kannada) translation of the Bhagavad Gita*. (Bangalore, Wesleyan Mission Press), pp. 50-60.

⁴⁹ J.J. Higginbotham (1874), *Men Whom India Has Known: Biographies of Eminent Indian Characters*. (Madras: Higginbothams), pp. 200-250

⁵⁰ K.N. VenkatasubbaSastri (1932), *The Administration of Mysore Under Sir Mark Cubbon*. (London: George Allen & Unwin), pp. 50-60.

⁵¹ M.M. Jacob (1993). *Christian Influence on Kodava Religion: Syncretism in Kodagu*. (Bangalore: Christian Literature Society), pp. 50-65.

Christian-Kodava wedding rituals: Kodava weddings often blend Christian and traditional Kodava customs. For example, the wedding ceremony may include a Christian prayer service, followed by traditional Kodava rituals like the exchange of marriage vows and the tying of the *Pathak* (a sacred thread).⁵²

Use of Christian symbols in Kodava rituals: Christian symbols like the cross and images of saints are often incorporated into Kodava rituals and ceremonies. For instance, during the Kailpodhu festival, Kodavas may carry crosses and images of saints in procession. The Christian influence has brought about changes in areas like caste, marriage and women's rights. The fusion of Christian and Kodava traditions has contributed to a distinct cultural identity.⁵³ Some notable indigenous kodavas who contributed their mite to Christianity are Mathew Nittaniah, and Thomas Appaiah.⁵⁴

Impact of Christian spirituality on the Kodava Culture

Christian Spirituality has had a significant impact on the Kodava culture, particularly since the 19th century when Christianity was introduced to the region. Here are some ways in which Christian spirituality has influenced Kodava culture:

1. Blend of traditions: Kodava Christians have blended their traditional customs and practices with Christian spirituality, creating a unique cultural identity.
2. Shift in worldview: Christianity introduced a new worldview, emphasizing the importance of faith, compassion, and service, which has influenced Kodava values and practices.
3. Changes in social norms: Christian spirituality has influenced social norms, such as the emphasis on monogamy, the role of women in society, and the importance of education.
4. Influence on art and architecture: Christian spirituality has influenced Kodava art and architecture, with the introduction of Western-style churches and Christian symbols.
5. Rituals and practices: Christian spirituality has introduced new rituals and practices, such as baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist, which have become an integral part of Kodava Christian life.
6. Community building: Christian spirituality has fostered a sense of community among Kodava Christians, with the church serving as a central gathering place for social and cultural events.
7. Education and social service: Christian spirituality has emphasized the importance of education and social service, leading to the establishment of schools, hospitals, and other social institutions in the region.⁵⁵

However, it's also important to note that:

1. Cultural erosion: The influence of Christian spirituality has also led to the erosion of some traditional Kodava customs and practices.
2. Tension between tradition and modernity: The blending of traditional and Christian practices has sometimes led to tensions between those who emphasize traditional customs and those who adopt more modern, Christian-influenced practices. Overall, Christian spirituality has had a profound impact on Kodava culture, shaping the community's values, practices, and identity.⁵⁶

Coorg Home of Christian Communities

Today, Coorg is home to several Christian communities, including: Kodava Christians: Descendants of indigenous Kodavas who converted to Christianity. Mangalorean Christians: Migrants from the Mangalore region who settled in Coorg. Other Christian communities: including Protestants, Catholics, and other denominations.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Christianity in Coorg is a vibrant and diverse faith community that has evolved over centuries, shaped by the region's unique cultural heritage and history. From the arrival of Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century to the present day, Christianity has played a significant role in shaping Coorg's social, cultural, and economic landscape. Through its rich traditions, rituals, and institutions it has provided a sense of identity, community, and purpose for countless individuals and families in Coorg. As Coorg continues to navigate the complexities of modernity and globalization, the Christian community remains an integral part of the region's fabric, contributing to its rich cultural tapestry and serving as a beacon of hope, love, and service to all.

⁵²Bopanna, *Coorg: Land of Beauty and Valour*, pp. 145-160.

⁵³Ganapathy, *The Cross and the Coorgs*, pp. 100-150.

⁵⁴S.J. Stephen (2008), *Caste, Catholic Christianity and the Language of Conversion*. (New Delhi: Kalpaz), pp. 100-150.

⁵⁵P.M. Joseph, *Kodava Christians: A Study of their Cultural Identity*, pp. 50.

⁵⁶Bopanna, *Rise and Fall of the Coorg State*, pp. 50-100.

⁵⁷Ganapathy, *Coorg Home of Christian Communities*, pp. 50-100.