

Soňa Bendíková: Kotas of Blue Mountains: Myths and Legends

Abstract

The dissertation *The Kotas from the Blue Mountains: Myths and Legends* deals with the tradition of the Kota tribe living in the Nilgiri mountain range in southern India. The work discusses the oral tradition of the tribe on the background of the regional development in the last two centuries. The Kotas used to live symbiotically with a few other local tribes with whom they developed a unique system of barter trade and services. The microregion remained isolated until new settlers started to arrive from the valley (in the beginning of 19th century). The arrival of the people from the valley and of the English people in the course of the last two hundred years caused a significant change of all aspects of life in the Blue Mountains: economic, social, cultural and ecological.

This work has two aims:

- (i) to interpret the results of my fieldwork and to analyze the recordings of the remnants of the oral heritage of the tribe with approximately 2,000 members, and to do it on the background of the changes in the area; and
- (ii) to determine whether and how the Kota verbal arts has reflected those changes.

The work is based on the results of my field trips to the Kota and other Nilgiri tribes in the years 2001, 2003 and 2007. In 2007 my fieldwork was primarily focused on the collection of local stories in the Kota village of Kolmel. It was inspired by the fact that more than 70 years ago, M. B. Emeneau, a prominent linguist, collected Kota stories in this village, and then published them in his 4-volume *Kota Texts* (1944 a 1946). I expected that this would provide an opportunity to compare the old recordings with a new material.

In this work I have used the recorded stories and the additional film, photographic and verbal material collected during my field research. In order to answer the question asked at the beginning of this abstract I have analysed the collected stories and the additional material and compared them on the basis of the available theoretical literature, and in particular in the context of Emeneau's *Kota Texts*.

After having analysed the newly collected stories, I can conclude that the stories recorded during my trip are different from those collected by Emeneau in the *Kota Texts*. At the same time my analysis shows that the stories collected by me are new findings, which are not recent creations and which predate Emeneau's *Kota Texts*. It is because they do not refer to any modern historic events or any other recent changes in the area. Given the fact that story-telling is no longer a part of the present-day Kota culture, finding and recording the stories itself is a significant result of my work on this topic.