The Black Cow's Footprint

Time, Space, and Music in the Lives of the Kotas of South India

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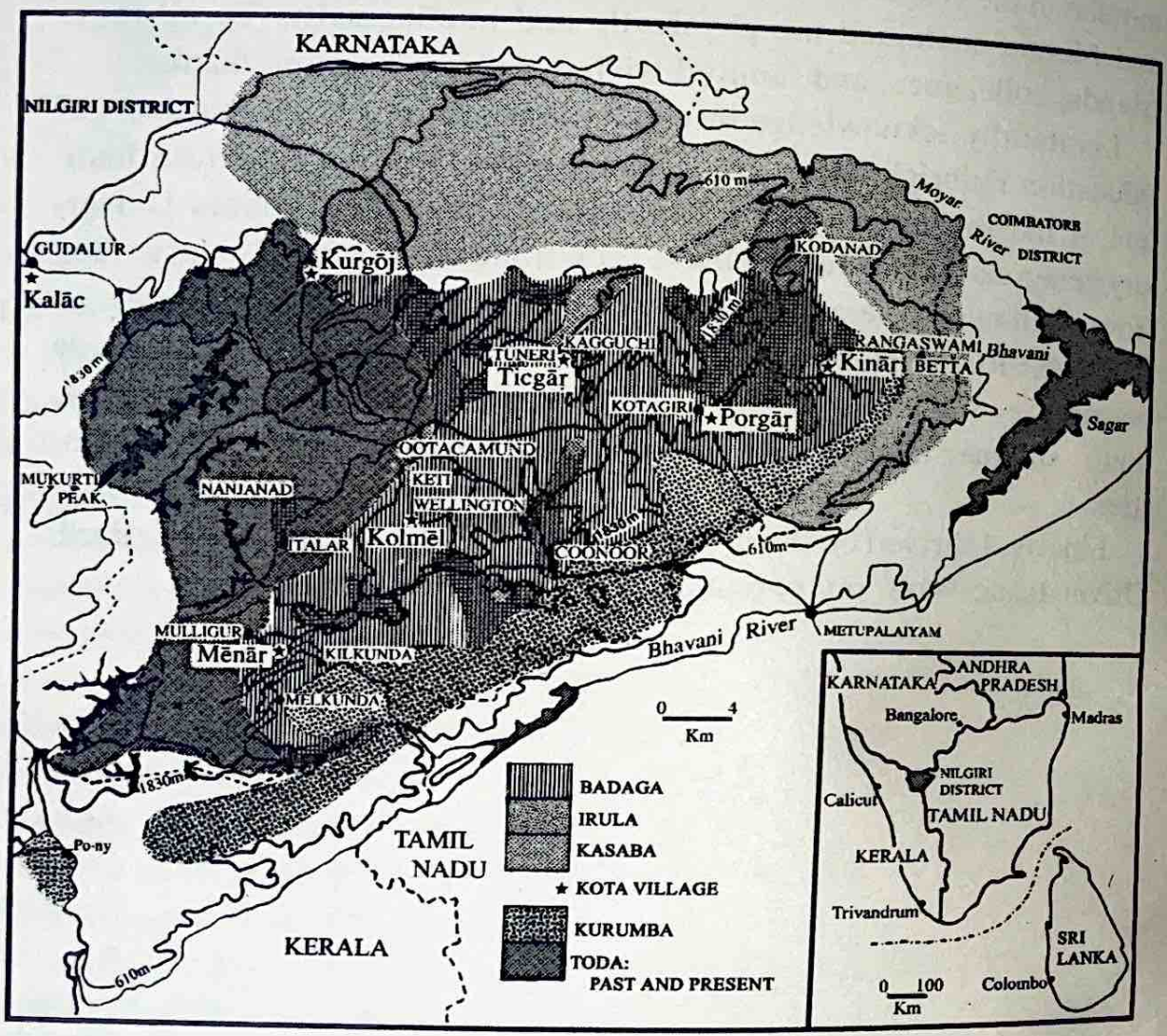

Map 1: Areas Related to Nilgiri Groups
(courtesy William Noble)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Of Kotas and Cows

"The first step to knowing who we are, is knowing *where* we are, and *when* we are." John Cleese, playing a school headmaster in the 1985 film *Clockwise*, admonished a recurrently tardy school organist with these stern words, which raise a general question: how *do* particular aspects of negotiating "where one is and when one is" contribute to the ways in which humans constitute themselves as individuals or groups? This book is an inquiry into the ways in which the Kotas, a South Indian minority community, make and remake aspects of themselves and their world through music, dance, and other activities. My approach is guided by themes in Kota worship and mortuary ceremonies and motivated by an interest in how aspects of space, place, and time are socially deployed or constructed.

The Kotas live in the Nilgiri Hills, a region bordering the South Indian states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. Distributed in seven villages and numbering less than 2000 at the time of writing, the Kotas are dwarfed by the population of surrounding indigenous and immigrant peoples. Long known for their participation as artisans in a system of inter-community exchange, the Kotas now balance their involvement in village matters of ritual, craft, and music with their needs to make good in a modern urban economy. They avail themselves of opportunities afforded them by way of education as well as by employment in nearby towns and cities as far away as Delhi and Bombay. They speak multiple languages: Kota (*kō mānt*), which is their own Dravidian language; Tamil; a number of other regional languages, notably Badaga; and a few speak English and Hindi as well. This complex interplay of local "traditional" concerns and modern socio-economic ones gives rise to perennial anxieties over "who" the Kotas are and should be.

The musical and ritual activities considered here occupy a common spatial and temporal world. Analyzing this world—seeing how Kotas organize and execute their actions in time and space and how they attribute meaning to their activities—yields subtle insights into Kota creations of self and group. In Kota dance, for instance, the order and location of male and female dancers differentiate Kota performances from those of others in the region while upholding more general principles of Kota socio-cultural organization. Kota men, who always dance first, separate themselves from women, just as in virtually all arenas men are supposed to act before and be physically higher than women. In contrast, men and women of one of the other local "tribal" communities, the Paniyas, dance in separate circles, but simultaneously; and those of a third, the Irulas, dance at times separately, at times intermingled in the same circles, and sometimes even concentrically. Hence, Kota dance style spatiotemporally maps one aspect of Kota social organization while differentiating Kota dances from those of Paniyas and Irulas.

The organization of Kota instrumental music also bears on distinguishing individuals and groups. I was initially struck by the apparent looseness with which some melodies performed by double-reed players in several Nilgiri Hill communities fitted their accompanying drum patterns (CD 1). I wondered how Kota musicians coordinated some of their more free-floating melodies with the accompanying drums, for at times they didn't seem coordinated at all. Most experienced performers, I learned, orient their melodies around structural drum beats, what I call "anchor points," and more or less fit the rest of the melody in the intervening spaces. Less experienced or talented performers are less able to keep melody and percussion in phase, thus giving the impression that the melodies and drum patterns are not connected. The melody and the percussion ostinato represent two ways of getting from Point A to Point B in time, one through the fluid, inconsistently metered presentation of pitches in sequence, the other through the somewhat more regimented flow of metrical drum strokes.

The problem of combining melody and percussion ostinato leads a musician to multiple possible solutions—choosing different points as A and B—as he attempts to keep the melody in phase with the drums. Each solution constrains how the repetition of the melody in the next cycle will coincide with the drums. These solutions ground intersubjective bonding as teams of two *koḷ* (shawm) players strive for the musical

and cultural ideal of perfect unison. What it means to be united and divided is an issue of debate among the Kotas and serves as a principle theme of this book as well. The musical solutions for playing "as one" come to define sets of individuals or groups in terms of their musical styles over time, as one generation succeeds another. Musical style also congeals according to residential patterns: villages or sets of nearby villages tend to play the same melodies in the same ways.

One of my aims in this work is to refine the study of what is, sometimes too causally, termed "identity." Musical activities contribute to a sense of individual and social belonging at many analytic levels. I also wish to push the limits of a musical disciplinary perspective by giving substantial analytic weight to non-musical activities. In considering matters of order, for instance, it is important to note not only how a Kota musical piece is located within a sequence of possible pieces, but also how it relates to a sequence of other more complex events that may or may not include music: cooking, processing, consulting a diviner, or cleaning a house.

The term "spacetime," which I have adapted from the work of anthropologist Nancy Munn, conveys some of the linkages between these domains of experience. A "form of spacetime," a "spatiotemporal form," or simply "a spacetime," will henceforth refer to some definable pattern with respect to both time and space within which a set of related events is performed or, in the case of natural events, perceived to occur.[1] I consider "pattern" in the broadest sense. Unpredictability is a pattern, for instance, which pertains to the sequence of funerals performed over the course of a year; the spacetime of funerals thus differs from those of events that can be planned. The events that constitute a pattern may vary in number or magnitude; the length of time and expanse through space may similarly vary. A form of spacetime may also involve the patterning of a related set of virtual events, that is, events which are remembered, evoked, described, or metaphysically accomplished through ritual. The landscapes marked out by processionals; the range of extramusical events to which musical performances refer; and the phenomenological shape of music's intended effects, such as transformations of the spirit (*āvy*), are all forms of spacetime in my usage.

Four spatiotemporal forms are particularly important because they appropriately describe salient aspects of my Kota data, usually correspond with Kota ideas of (if not terms for) what they are doing, and help me specify particular aspects of Kota subjectivity and identity. These

are: (1) "anchoring," latching on to and organizing events around selected moments and places; (2) "centripetence," moving physically and morally to the center, de-emphasizing differences and, in Kota terms, "making god" (*devr gicd*); (3) "centrifugality," moving outward from the village during a funeral and drawing attention to the identity of the individual; and (4) "interlocking," formally joining complementary components—village, kinship, affinal, or households units; and musically, drum parts.[2]

These forms (which are also processes) are interrelated. So, for example, the individuation of identities/subjectivities in (3) is the basis for bringing people together in (4). Though they exhibit some cross-cultural validity, the four forms do not operate autonomously in any one cultural context; nor are they, obviously, the only processes that observers or social actors may discern. I have attempted to lay out these processes simply in Table 1. It is the task of this book to show the myriad ways in which these forms act in combination and convey some of the subjective subtleties they would seem to produce for the actors involved.

Table 1: Spatiotemporal Forms of Identity (Skeletal Version)

Spatiotemporal Form	Ceremonial Association	Aspect of identity
anchoring	—	sense of grounding
centripetence	god ceremony	wholeness and sameness
centrifugality	mortuary ceremonies	individuation
interlocking	mortuary ceremonies	wholeness and difference

We may take it as axiomatic that agents always have at their disposal multiple, often competing, ways of organizing themselves in space and time, among which they must choose. Choosing is an act of staking claim, differentiating one person or group from another, creating a sense of order for a particular purpose. What differ from culture to culture and analytic domain to analytic domain are the possible models, systems, or points of reference available to actors and the socio-historical or, in the musical case, aesthetic conditions under which they make choices. Points of reference, or "anchor points," then, need not be short term and perceptual, as they sometimes are in Kota instrumental music. They may also include longer-term destinations in processions or even pilgrimages, and dates or events in the calendar year.

Members of many religious communities have engaged in heated disputes over matters of which calendar to use and how to calibrate the dates (see Duncan 1998) because they have recognized the ways in which control over the calendar is linked to vital aspects of "who they are," to hark back to the phrase of Cleese's character. The Kotas, too, recognize this connection and have made strategic use of their choices—most remarkably by shifting the ritual constitution of the "new year" from the first sowing ceremony (in the 1930s) to the god ceremony, the major annual ceremony for the Kota gods. The reasons for this are complex and must be treated in detail elsewhere. Kotas were able to manipulate their cycle of activities over the course of the year, giving less weight to one moment in the cycle and more weight to another.

These musical and calendrical examples of "anchoring" suggest that identity and subjectivity are to be found in continuous processes of dislocation and relocation. A musician strays from the metric cycle, only to return to it in certain places. Kotas appear to have changed their minds about where the year begins, but they have not given up the idea that the calendrical cycle has a beginning.

The reader may have guessed at this point that I am using "anchoring" as an enabling metaphor, one that provides windows of insight into those aspects of group identity or individual subjectivity that can be described in spatiotemporal terms (cf. Tambiah 1985a). It is not my task to catalog all the kinds of musical and social anchoring there could possibly be, nor is it my aim to align the examples in order to search for cultural essences in their homologies. Rather, I wish to explore the implications, for the Kotas, of this and other spatiotemporal forms, which are, I believe, part of much human experience.

Anchoring implies arriving somewhere at some time. The tales of Kota arrivals in their seven villages provide a qualitative perspective on the process of anchoring. In a prominent story, from which this book's title is drawn, a divine black cow of ancient times indicated with its hoof where each Kota village (*kōkāl*) should be founded. On the sites of these "black cow's footprints," the ancestral village founders built their dwellings. The founders' descendants continue to reside in each village's respective "house of the erected post" (*kab iṭ pay*) built on that original spot, which constitutes a center of moral gravity. People treat the area and those who live within it with special respect. Ceremonies often begin or end there.

The Kota story of the black cow's footprint cements a relationship between a people and their land by using an ancient pan-Indic sign of divinity, the cow. Two common folk etymologies for the word *kōkāl*, "cow leg" and "Kota place," further reinforce this relationship and give voice to two formal kinds of identity claim. One claim is individuating: Kotas assert themselves as a unique indigenous "tribal" community given divine mandate to inhabit seven villages in the Nilgiri Hills. The other is integrative: the bovine theme invites Kota membership in a "sacred" world that encompasses many communities across the subcontinent, especially those who call themselves Hindus.

Permutations among the paired processes of integration and differentiation, and centripetence and centrifugality, contribute to the ways in which Kotas constitute multiple kinds of subjectivity, social units, and identification as a whole community. The processes of organizing dances, setting a ceremonial date, and founding the village all exemplify the point that people in some sense find themselves when they latch on to, or anchor themselves in, specific times and places. The Kotas became fully Kota when they arrived in their villages.

The Major Ceremonies

Centripetence and centrifugality are broad ways to describe physical and moral modes of orientation in the two major ceremonial complexes, the "god" (*devr*) complex epitomized by the god ceremony, and the "death" (*tāv*) complex consisting of a cremation and a secondary mortuary ceremony. Collectively, these take up somewhere between three and six weeks of the year; they cost the most money, involve the most detailed ritual activity among the largest number of villagers, require the greatest degree of behavior modification, and involve the most significant music of all the year's observances. The ceremonies are compelling and crucial to understanding much of Kota culture and society. "Ceremony" here refers to a performance unit that encompasses smaller units of discrete actions, which I shall call "rituals" and which Kotas term *cātrms*—which are prescribed by rule.[3] By "ceremonial complex" I mean the set of all ceremonies and rituals that Kotas understand as belonging under a particular rubric.

The god ceremony takes place over 10–12 days in Kolmēl village, my main field site. At this time Kotas constitute the presence of their

three main gods through moral, unified behavior and attractive music and dance. The ceremony's date is finalized after elders witness the first waxing crescent of the new moon in December–January. But well before this, a spirit of anticipation fills the air as villagers gather wood in preparation for the all-night dancing around bonfires and purchase provisions for special meals. They prepare their ceremonial dresses and dance costumes, buy new street clothes for the final days, and rehearse some of the more rare or difficult pieces of "god" repertoire by singing, whistling, or playing softly on the bamboo clarinet (*pulāng*). As the season approaches, members of the village gradually begin to conduct themselves within the village boundaries with heightened care and respect, entailing vegetarianism, less drinking and feuding, more wearing of "traditional" Kota clothes, and remaining barefoot within the village. Ritual officiants and then the rest of the villagers clean and purify their houses using special plants. This process of anticipation and ritual lead-up over the course of weeks and days is a form of "anchoring."

In the initial rituals, certain individuals create and transfer a series of special fires, some of which are conduits for divinity. The first significant musical performance begins immediately after several of the fires have been lit and transported from one place to another in the village. The "house of the erected post" plays a key role here, for in front of it, in the *gagvāl*, musicians anchor the first part of the ceremony in the domestic part of the village. They play a series of cascading blasts on their brass trumpets (*kob*), forcefully beat their frame and cylinder drums (*tabaṭk* and *par*), and blow their shawms (*koḷs*). The special term for this powerful act of commencement, *ōmayṇ*, "sounding as one," embodies key social values which resonate throughout Kota culture in rituals, moral tales, and everyday practices. The musical sounds not only alert the surrounding communities of the ceremony's onset, they are also believed to extend into the heavens, where god hears the forceful blasts as invitations to enter the village. Kotas project their music centrifugally; those who hear it respond by moving (from the Kota village perspective) centripetally.

That night, and on subsequent days, villagers attempt to read signs from the father god (*ayṇōr*) through the words of the diviner, or *tērkārn*.[4] Kotas express their joy, unity, and respect for god, as well as entertain him by performing instrumental music, dancing, and singing (CD 2). A

number of instrumental pieces are linked with particular ritual actions such as food-offering and bathing; others index shared tales of moral value which remind villagers of the link between community integrity and divine power. Temporal implications of musical performance that extend beyond the configuration of musical elements, then, include the momentary appropriateness of a piece in its ritual context and the time in the past to which that performance refers.

As the days progress, activity shifts from the domestic area to the temple area in the center of the village. This is another example of centripetence; here the agents are members of a Kota village. As villagers come together in the center, so too do the three gods enter the three temples in the center of the village. The three main Kota gods in Kolmēl village are Doḍaynōr ("big" father deity), Kunayṇōr ("little" father deity), and Amnōr (mother deity). (Kotas have also incorporated additional deities into their pantheon, both within and beyond the confines of their villages, and they travel to temples and festivals of others to participate in worship as well.) Kotas use the phrase "making god" (*devr gicd*) to refer to the performance of the god ceremony for the three gods. Part of this "making" once consisted of re-thatching the temples. In the case of the modern cement temples, Kotas perform emotionally charged commemorative rituals that culminate in the throwing of thatching materials on the roof of each temple. At such moments, the upward motion is highlighted by the *koḷ* players, who interrupt their "temple-opening tune" with a piercing tremolo on the highest note of the instrument (CD 3). Kotas give repeated emphasis to certain such aspects of orientation and motion, both horizontal and vertical, in their rituals.

Along with the instrumental pieces which refer to narratives, and the ritual of re-thatching, Kotas use many god ceremonial activities to gain experiential access to a virtual, if lost, utopia. The acts index aspects of what Kotas view as their traditional past. Throughout the ceremony, Kotas articulate structural sections of the ceremony with pieces of musical repertoire and dance. The commencement of the ceremony's final segment is demarcated with a women's dance, which accompanies the process of removing precious metal offerings from the face of the temple. Kotas feel dispirited at this juncture, for their return to everyday affairs and the departure of their gods is imminent. Transitioning to the quotidian is centrifugal in this case. Kotas spend the last days of the god ceremony in their domestic areas once again, where they dance, sing, and play games.

"Death" ceremonies are of two kinds: the "green" funeral (*pac tāv*) in which the corpse is cremated, and the "dry" funeral (*varldāv*) in which relics of all those deceased over a period are recremated. This latter ceremony, which may last up to twelve days, serves as the formal end of death in a village: the souls of the deceased are made to reach the land of the dead; the widows and widowers are given license to remarry; and the villagers are free to celebrate the god ceremony again.

As in the god ceremony, instrumental pieces in both kinds of mortuary observance demarcate and contribute affective and indexical meaning to structural sections of ritual. The green funeral begins with the sounding of drums and a horn (*kob*) to announce the death. As the corpse is washed and ritually prepared for transport to the cremation ground, musicians perform a selection of lachrymose melodies at will, occasionally inserting a ritually specific one to correspond with the ongoing action. Special pieces are associated with the motions of mourners carrying the corpse. Musicians play as others carry the corpse through the threshold of the house, out of the front yard, into an intermediate zone beyond the village, and finally to the cremation ground, where musicians play the "bier lighting tune" (CD 4) more or less at the right moment. No music follows the cremation. Music, then, adds substance primarily to centrifugal ritual action during the funeral. Villagers return home quietly, then purify themselves appropriately, and eat a special meal.

The dry funeral begins with a ritual of pouring millet on the ground in front of the houses of each of the bereaved. The action of pouring, the ritual accompanying it, and the special melody played at this time, are intended to bring the spirit of the dead person into the memorial millet. The millet is subsequently processed and incinerated along with bone remnants that were preserved from the initial cremation. A second class of melodies is used near the peak of the ceremony to call all the spirits of the dead to the dry funeral ground in order to welcome the recently deceased into their midst. The fact that constituting the spirit in millet and sending it off to the land of the ancestors are related rituals is phenomenologically reinforced by a similarity in the two rituals' melodies that Kotas themselves recognize (CD 5, 6). One aspect of what we could call funerary musical spacetime consists in this process of calling the spirit forth and then sending it thither.

Just as in the green funeral, during which a bier is set up in front of the deceased's home, in the dry funeral "biers" (actually chairs) are

erected and decorated with all manner of colored ribbons, umbrellas, photographs of the dead person, colored cloths, and, most importantly, ritual objects that signify the deceased's gender, status, and personal habits or preferences. Many if not all of these items are cremated with the "bier," relics, and millet at the ceremony's climax. In this sense, through funerals Kotas symbolically individuate the deceased and emphasize the separation of the individual from the living, while at the same time enhancing the transition of that individual to the community of ancestors who are believed to live on in the land of the dead, or "that land" (*ānāṛ*). Songs sung at dry funerals are the same as those of god ceremonies, for through the funeral the soul of the deceased is being "entrusted" (*opicd*) to god. The funerary complex thus provides a formal structure through which Kotas progress spatiotemporally from mourning to celebration, with a great deal of subtle mixing in between. Kota understandings of their melodic genres and rituals composing the ceremonies also reinforce the complexity of this affective contour. The spatiotemporal progress in the god ceremony is somewhat the reverse; after proceeding from the everyday to the blissful, the turning point (when metal offerings are removed from the temple) is one of mild dejection. Yet the dancers and musicians are carried forward by the momentum of the occasion for several more days of rituals and music before the ceremony finally ends.

In contrast to the abstemiousness of participants in the god ceremony, those at the dry funeral are free to eat meat and (especially men) to consume alcohol. Various rituals of what I call "interlocking" emphasize the interconnectedness of the whole Kota community. After the rituals at the dry funeral ground are completed, for instance, all return to the village grounds for a concluding set of dances in which a male representative from each of the seven villages dons a costume and joins in a special "community costume [dance ritual]." This *jādykupāc* is defined by representational participation and the interlocking of villages and, thereby, kin groups, rather than by particular steps or accompanying melodies.

The dry funeral has been the subject of ambivalence and debate in a number of villages since the 1930s. The activities at stake have been of a sort with those that Hindu reformers since the late nineteenth century have attacked, partially as a response to challenges presented by complex interactions with the West, with missionaries, and particularly with

the British. These have included the slaughter of cows and buffaloes, public consumption of alcohol, engagement in unruly activity, and amorous adventures which were, it seems, loosely concealed. The solution taken up in one village, Porgāṛ (New Kotagiri), was to discontinue the ceremony entirely.

In brief, then, ceremonies in the "god" complex are physically and theologically centripetal affairs that serve to consolidate villages into wholes and assert continuity of the community; through the god ceremony Kotas articulate unities of communal sameness. Funerals, in contrast, are centrifugal and embody social principles of difference and change on many levels. But unity is not absent from funerals. An emphasis on differences defined by such things as kinship, gender, and residence makes it possible to define community relationships through forms of "interlocking." In ever-changing ways Kotas constitute themselves in relation to both divinities and spirits of the dead—the metaphysical foci of these two kinds of ceremonial complexes. The oscillation between stressing identity among individuals in one ritual complex, the god ceremony, and differences among them in another, funerals, does not create a contradiction. Rather, it defines the shape of an important aspect of Kota temporal experience, one that is reinforced by the sequential form in which Kotas perform musical pieces, and the "meanings" of these pieces (i.e. well-known specific references or intended functions) as they are apprehended in time.

* * *

The Kotas belong to a discrete and highly reified social category in India, the "tribe;" in Hindi and Tamil *ādivāsī* (original inhabitant); or Tamil, *paḷankuṭi makkaḷ* (ancient-race people)—Kotas comfortably use the terms from all three languages.

The Kotas as a Tribe

"Scheduled Tribe" is a census category applied by the Indian government to communities such as the Kota who are regarded as autochthonous to a region, and who many believe preserve an ancient way of life. No definitive criterion determines who does or does not warrant the tribal designation. Tribal status is a matter of political and cultural debate in which distinctions may turn on matters of cultural knowledge involving musicianship, artisanship, and premodern technologies.

The term tribe now used in India is partially colonial in origin. Historically rooted in colonial social classifications in Africa (Cohn 1987a, 201–23), "tribalism" initially meant the maintenance of a way of life based on ethnicity and membership in a kin-based community (a *tribe*). Later it came to mean "obnoxious modes of behavior in multiethnic circumstances that threaten and endanger normal coexistence among persons from different ethnic groups" (Ekeh 1990, 688).

This idea of tribe, born from the inability of the British to control their "frontier" populations, has become less salient in some parts of post-independence India, where tribe has come to signify the indigenous or authentic. Unlike in Africa, where the term has been abandoned by many as politically incorrect, the tribal designation is assumed with pride in India by communities that use it to court special treatment. The line of distinction between tribes and castes has been historically difficult to draw and frequently remains a bone of contention as local communities struggle for access to resources, education, and jobs.

The relevance of the tribal concept for this book extends beyond mere contextualization, for it exemplifies the way in which identities are founded on particular sorts of spatiotemporal claims. In asserting themselves to be tribal, Kotas affirm special historical rights to the lands they inhabit. Since the ancient places of tribal peoples were supposed to be pristine forest lands, expressions of tribal identity frequently involve the manipulation of forest imagery. Modern tribal peoples such as the Kotas have domesticated the pejorative connotation of "wildness," transforming it into a form of cultural knowledge: how to survive, how to be "natural."

Kotas are accustomed to deploying representations of tribals for non-Kotas. One Kota ritual specialist from Mēnāṛ village, named Angarn, exaggerated when he said, "You can discern an *ādivāsī* because he will be roaming the forest collecting honey and things." Unlike the "modern" person, who shoots with a gun, the *ādivāsī*, Angarn explained, uses a bow and arrow. While Kotas in fact use rifles and not bow and arrows, they remain self-reliant in many other areas and make most of their musical instruments.

The framers of the Indian constitution realized that modern life was going to impinge increasingly upon tribal people, their physical environments, and their customs. They entrusted the nation with the responsibility of seeing to tribal welfare and "uplift" by providing educational

opportunities, jobs, and medical attention (see Mehta 1991, 172). The Kota community acutely feels the effects of swelling populations around them. Industry has expanded, land and resources are scarce, and tourism is intensive. The administrative center of the Nilgiri District, Ootacamund (also known as Ooty), is a resort town. Squeezed and threatened, the Kotas lament, at times, the small size of their own population—which was about 1,500 in 1990—and frequently debate the future of their community. Maintaining their villages as primordial Kota places, ideologically anchoring themselves in a premodern time, and emphasizing the distinctiveness of their "culture" (Ta. *kalāccāram*) through such forms as music have been essential to the Kotas as they constitute themselves as a viable, moral community in twenty-first-century India.

Tribal Status, Kota Music, and Power

Aboriginal status, in the view of many Kotas, imbues both gods and music with a significant measure of potency. Not only do Kota gods prefer the music of their tribal devotees, even some deities in temples erected by immigrant plains-dwellers favor tribal music over the music of their Tamil patrons (see Wolf 2000/2001a). Perhaps this is because, as one Mr Rajan—known as "Dancing-ground Rajan" for the location of his home in the village of Mēnāṛ—believes, all *ādivāsī* music shares an intense emotional quality. Some even hold the view that animals partake of this aboriginal potency. The Kotas' own "country cows," for instance, are likened to *ādivāsī*s and praised for their "power" even though they produce less milk than larger, cross-bred, foreign cows. Rajan linked the "power" of *ādivāsī*s to matters of character: "They will not be proud; they will be 'open.' They are always 'frank.' They will not express excessive rage. They will eat and sit quietly. *Ādivāsī*s will observe new events carefully, they will not leave old ways behind, they will be self-restrained (*kaṭṭuppāṭu*)." Rajan implies that "tribalness" involves a form of morality, a respect for the past, an acute sensitivity to activities in the world. Angarn raises similar points aligning several etymologies of the Kota ethnonym, *kōv*.[5] "In Tamil, *kō* means king. Another meaning of *kō* is cow. Among us, *kōv* means 'behaving properly.' If a Kota person is not acting justly, we will ask, 'Are you a *kōv*?' The *ādivāsī*s used to live in the forest, so they know the proper way to conduct themselves. The others don't. This is the difference."[6] As the

anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has observed in another context, such "verbal iconicities . . . provide compact instances of the differentiating character of origin myths . . . and legitimate the moral boundaries of culture" (Herzfeld 1997, 69).

Kotas embrace positive tribal images and reject negative ones. According to the respected musician K. Puccan, Kotas stopped playing music for their Toda tribal neighbors after they were alerted to a Toda claim—allegedly made when Queen Victoria summoned groups of *ādivāsī*s to Madras during a late-nineteenth-century visit (which she never made)—that the Kotas were hired workers whom they brought to the Nilgiris from the plains. Puccan recalls becoming aware of this disinformation in 1952, when his village mates were trying to gain admission for their children in a special tribal school. They found a record of the claim in an Ooty library, revealing what they perceived as a Toda stratagem to portray the Kotas as plains people rather than tribals, and thus exclude them from the school. As Puccan explained subsequent events (in Tamil):

> In 1956, Jawaharlal Nehru came here. As many *ādivāsī* things there were, we took and showed to him. We asked, "before we came, what were they [Todas] doing? Where was the churning staff for the milk? Without knives how did they cut the bamboo?"[7]
>
> He [Nehru] saw everything: the fire starting [i.e. by friction using tree roots], our 'dress,' 'dance' [using the English words]. One person helped us file a suit against the Todas. In the Sessions court there was a judicial enquiry.
>
> He passed a judgement. Who? Nehruji, "you [Todas] are not *ādivāsī*s, you only are the immigrants. They [Kotas] are the *ādivāsī*s."

Puccan went on to say that the Todas do not know music and did not learn from the Kotas: "They're simple forest dwellers, where would they learn?" Puccan here strategically deployed several locally relevant ideas of tribe as proof of indigenous status in the region. Kota "tribalness" is encoded in items of indigenous manufacture and in the performance of music and dance. Embraced are the nobler characteristics of tribal identity: self-sufficiency as evidenced by tool making; artistic prowess and creativity as proven by the ability to play unique music and perform dances. Puccan projects negative, primitive stereotypes of the tribal onto the Toda, in this case (as Puccan portrays them here) the Nilgiri equivalent of the country bumpkin.

India's tribes are Janus-faced, signifying both the organic, natural rootedness of the nation in a diversity of indigenous people, and disconcerting images of the backward, the primitive. When social actors deploy reified ethnic (and national) definitions to their advantage in one context (perhaps to gain political recognition), these definitions may return to haunt them in another, leading to "embarrassment" or "rueful self-recognition." Such sentiments lie at the heart of what Herzfeld calls "cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 1997, 6). So, while Kotas eagerly embrace primordiality for the "power" they think it confers, they dissociate themselves from "traditional" behavior that appears promiscuous and do not openly sacrifice animals—especially cows—in their villages because these behaviors are signs of tribal primitiveness (Kuper 1988, 60; 80–1; Tylor 1866; McLennan 1865). By stimulating processes of embracement and dissociation, "cultural intimacy" becomes deeply generative of diachronic processes. For the Kotas, cultural intimacy hinges on what it means to be a tribe.

Dubbed "sons" of the proverbial "soil," tribals have played a special role in Indian nationalist conceptions. At least since the time of Independence, Indians have celebrated the local arrival of a national figure with the music and dance of nearby inhabitants. "Tribal" arts are particularly favored not only because tribals anchor national identity in the local, and not only because they are aesthetically moving (as Rajan suggested), but also because the performance of such arts by different communities articulates a kind of organic solidarity and serves to enact India's credo, "Unity in Diversity." Although tribals are popularly represented in stereotypically simple ways, most tribal peoples themselves interact with the modern nation state in complex ways—they vote, listen to the radio, watch television or movies, and agitate for rights. They also consume local versions of commodities that are found widespread throughout the world—cassettes, Western clothing and shoes, and so forth. The Kotas see themselves as part of multiple communities: as Indians, as Indian tribals, as world indigenous peoples ("do you have tribals in your country?" they ask), and oddly, as people who have some natural kinship to Americans—both are "frank," as Rajan put it. Kotas see themselves as fundamentally integrated: ideologically and morally linked to multiple communities.

At the same time, Kotas enact strict practices of differentiation from others: kinship and marriage, for example, bind Kotas tightly and exclusively to one another. Movements in India and throughout the world to

break free of provincial, racial or religion-based constraints on alliances have not (yet at least) affected the ways Kotas operationalize their kinship. The spatial and temporal aspects of Kota kinship and marriage today tell us much about their contemporary self-conceptions.

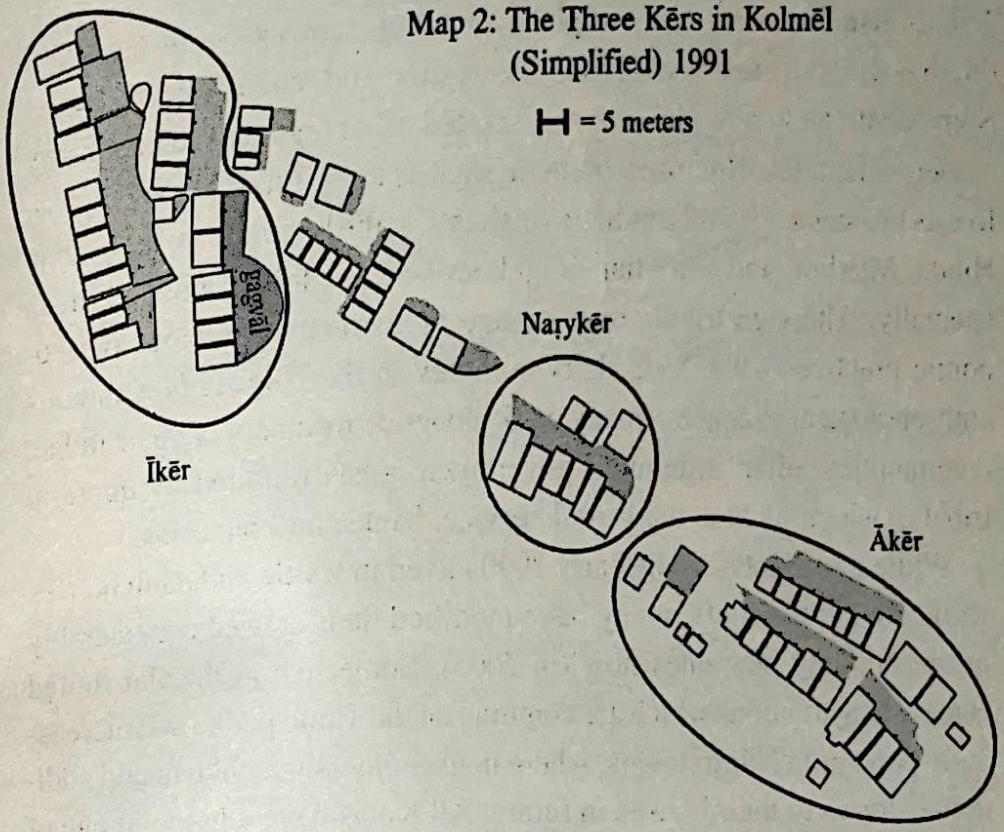
Kota Kinship and Spatial Organization

Kinship in the Dravidian Kota language follows what Lewis Henry Morgan called the Iroquois-Dravidian system, which is classificatory and does not distinguish between lineal and collateral kin. The entire community is so compact and interconnected that all men of the same generation are terminologically either older/younger brothers (*aṇ-karāḷ*), or they are brothers-in-law/affines (*ayḷbāvan*). Similarly, all women of the same generation are related to men as sisters or as wives/affines (*peḍ*).

Rows of houses, called *kēr*s, correspond with patrilines in the ideal system. Adjacent houses articulate brother relationships in a single generation. Houses further apart in a row, and to a greater exent on "upper" and "lower" rows of a gentle slope, map relationships of brotherhood further back in time. For the purposes of establishing who can be married to whom, each village has three *kēr*s and marriage is *kēr* exogamous. That is to say, "brothers" live in a row (or two) of houses, women whom they can marry live in a separate set of rows or in different villages.

No terminological distinction is made between men and women as couples who have actually undergone marriage rituals and those who are only potential marriage partners. The difference is recognized in practice, however, particularly now because the bourgeois Hindu ideal of one-husband one-wife is dominant. Nevertheless, the terminological system does relate to ritual practice in the diffuse ways in which affinity is articulated: some of these articulations are more marriage-like than others, and, historically, Kota marriage has never been a single, elaborate, binding ceremony, but rather a series of simple, easily reversible rituals performed over a course of days, months, or even years.

One aspect of the ritual simplicity of weddings is the lack of special musical repertoire. This stands in strong contrast with worship and death ceremonies, associated with which are highly specialized and internally differentiated repertoires. The lack of ritual elaboration for weddings corresponds with the more general lack of emphasis on the marriage



bond: Kotas self-consciously cite their freedom to marry and divorce at will as a distinctively tribal practice.

The nature of "alliance" is a major issue in the construction of identity in South Asia. Each Hindu caste follows its own rules for whom one may marry, although some version of the Dravidian preference for cross-cousin marriage is characteristic of South Indian and not of North Indian Hindus. (Muslims follow their own traditions.) The strength of the marriage bond is closely tied to status in high-caste and upwardly-mobile Hindu households. In contrast, Tribes and Scheduled Castes (Untouchables) are caricatured as lowly, uncouth creatures who cannot control their libidinous desires.

Tribal societies in India probably do accommodate a greater array of possible relationships between young men and women than do most conservative Brahman communities, to draw one of the starkest possible contrasts. The sheer diversity of local marriage practices among all the populations of the subcontinent, however, would militate against drawing meaningful distinctions between tribe and non-tribe solely on such bases.

"Tribal" Living

Tribals also live in a variety of physical circumstances. Some have distinctive foods, forms of clothing, plastic arts, and music; others do not. Some continue to live in relatively isolated tribal regions and lack many modern amenities. But many of them, such as those found in the Nilgiris, live as peasants, virtually indistinguishable in the bazaar from their caste Hindu, Muslim, and Christian neighbors—unless they choose to dress specially. Although tribals may engage in distinctive religious or economic practices—the Toda dairy complex in the Nilgiris is a famous anthropological example—many work alongside members of other Indian communities, often in tenured government posts (allotted by quota to tribals), which include the postal service, banks, and factories.

While most Kotas in the early 1990s lived in wattle and daub houses with ceramic tile roofs, many have modified their houses considerably or are building new ones now (in 2005). Some live in the flat-roofed cement constructions which are common on the Tamil plains and increasingly popular in Nilgiri towns, where householders may like to add additional stories to their houses in future. All Kotas have a home in one of seven exclusively Kota villages—even though some of them live close to their jobs, away from the village. Many Kota village houses have electricity, a few have telephones, and mountain stream water is available in a few common taps. Buses run near these villages, and a major town is never more than one hour away. Next to Kolmēl village, where I conducted most of my fieldwork, are teashops, provision shops, a tailor's shop, and agricultural lands owned by neighboring communities.

A wide variety of interests and economies intersect in Kota villages. While the inner workings of Kota rituals have little direct involvement with world events, the physical environment through which Kotas move on a daily basis—whether in ritual or casually—is thoroughly implicated in this wider sphere. One year I noticed that the local bus shelter was inscribed with a fictive bus-stop name in Malayalam: a film crew from Madras had taken advantage of the low site cost to make a commercial film in Kolmēl. Other modern structures had changed their functions: a disused solar power station became a young men's clubhouse.

Performance semiotics in public spaces have become more complex in light of political events that extend beyond the Indian nation's borders. In May of 1992, the Kotas were called to perform for the visit to

Ooty of the chief minister of Tamilnadu, M. Jayalalitha. On this occasion, one group leader wanted to ensure the excellence of the performance and proposed that the group assemble in Ooty beforehand to practice (this call to practice was a first in my experience). The group felt well prepared after a single day. A call was then issued from the chief minister's staff: the Kotas were to return and "practice" for two more days. "Practice," it turned out, meant that they would watch out for Sri Lankan Tamil militants, who might make an attempt on the chief minister's life (Rajiv Gandhi had been assassinated earlier that year). So the Nilgiri tribal folk are no mere isolates: they are very much "connected" with their immediate surroundings and implicated in far-reaching political circumstances.

Kota Music at Home

Kotas have been complexly "connected" with surrounding societies for a long time, but the nature of this connection has undergone mutation. In the copious ethnographic literature on South India's Nilgiri Hills, Kotas are renowned for their roles as musicians and craftspeople in a system of economic and ritual exchange which was already in decline during the 1930s and is now for the most part defunct. Nilgiri societies, once viewed as relatively discrete, each "exploit[ing] its particular ecological niche," are now better viewed as part of one larger Nilgiri society, like ethnic groups in the United States (Hockings 1997, 2). Kotas occasionally play music for the neighboring Badagas, with whom they once had hereditary, reciprocal relations; but they are now more likely to play for inter-tribal gatherings, political functions, Hindu temples, or the most important connoisseurs—themselves.

Since anthropologists once emphasized this system of exchange, they inadvertently created the impression that Kota music's primary importance was its part in a complex intercommunal transactional system. On the contrary, the moral focus of Kota music, for Kotas, appears long to have been a small number of ceremonies internal to the community—and many of the musical components of these ceremonies did not involve transactions with non-Kotas. So, despite the demise of the classic exchange system, the musical culture that Kotas value the most—which stays in their villages—remains vital, continuing to interpenetrate and give meaning to their rituals and everyday life.

This is not to say that indigenous music, as important as it might be in some contexts, is central to all areas of Kota life. Music's cultural meaning may sometimes be best explained by using phenomena other than music as points of departure. Kotas pride themselves on their multiple talents, their artisanship, and their ability to take up new jobs and excel at them against all odds. School, agricultural work, carpentry and blacksmithing, and day jobs leave little time for the kind of music-making Kotas regard as significant. Intensive, community-defining musical activities are fitted into the cracks, concentrated only during the god ceremony and during funerals. Musical performance is but one of many constitutive forms of action in these complex events. This is one reason for my focus on the spatiotemporal processes by which actions are carried out.

Kotas may have the opportunity to sing songs, to go to movies, or to listen to the tape recorder; men and women occasionally worship at Tamil temples, where they sing *bhajan*s and/or listen to recorded devotional music. But these forms of making and encountering music can hardly be combined with the making of music at god ceremonies and funerals to compose a single meaningful category—what ethnomusicologists sometimes call "musical life." One may sensibly study the "musical life" of professional musicians, as in Daniel Neuman's *The Life of Music in North India*, or of a subculture of self-proclaimed musicians. It doesn't make much sense to speak of the "musical life" of the Kotas because music-making is so diffuse.

Musical Spacetimes, Concepts, and Theories

Kota music-making can be described in relation to a number of spatiotemporal forms, some of which musicians may register their impact upon as they mature. Take for instance the sum total of all the places and times in which an individual finds it appropriate to perform particular pieces. As actors move through this structure—performing or listening to music in the proper times and places—they are both following culturally prescribed scripts and imprinting their actions on the memories of others, who will then either continue to follow or choose to depart from the models they have observed. Actors may establish new models for contextualizing musical performance by, for example, shifting the ritual deployment of a specific melody from one part of a ceremony to another, as has happened in Kurgōj village with an important dry funeral melody.

A more limited form of musical spacetime is created from the sequence of articulations (notes, drum strokes) in any musical performance. Movements of the musicians provide some of the spatial dimensions of such a spacetime, as do, in different ways, the breadth and distance listeners perceive when they hear musical elements projected from different locations. Musical qualities of pitch and timbre may differentiate one articulation from the next. Anchor points and first beats in percussion ostinatos hierarchically differentiate articulations as well.

In talking about musical processes, scholars, musicians, and other social actors frequently invoke larger spatiotemporal conceptions. In the Kota case, these conceptions are closely linked with bodily orientation and movement. When Kotas refer to a melody's upper register (*mēl dāk*), for instance, they use a metaphor that "mediates connections within [the] experience[s]" (see Jackson 1996, 9) of physically playing a melody and hearing it as a sequence in space. When a player performs in the upper register, he does so literally on the highest part of the slightly downward-pointed instrument. In similarly embodied terms, Kota dances and melodies both consist of sequences of "steps" (*meṭ*). Extending this imagery of stepwise increments, K. Puccan used the common South Asian simile of a melody as a "path" (Ta. *vaḻi*): one can traverse the village directly or via a circuitous route. Melodies as several series of note-articulations and paths as several series of temporary destinations are both flexible relative to fixed endpoints; these linked musical-spatial concepts reinforce the idea that Kotas think of some melodies as flexible, fluid, or malleable in an abstract spatiotemporal sense—at least in comparison with drummed ostinatos.

The question before us is how to relate these musically implied concepts to broader notions of time and space articulated in different ways in music, other action, or verbal discourse. Fig. 1 presents a model of Kota music situated at the center of four concentric layers. The first, or inner, layer is the immediate musical environment, the Nilgiri Hills. The music of the Kotas shares with that of other Nilgiri tribes a number of similarities, including but not limited to the phenomenon of the shawm melody "floating" over the percussion pattern. The second encompassing layer is the wider Indic musical environment in which, to use the same example, musical interest often derives from the interplay of a "free-rhythmic" melody with a more regular, "metered," accompaniment on the drums. The third layer can be viewed from two perspectives, geographical and theoretical, as suggested by the arrows.

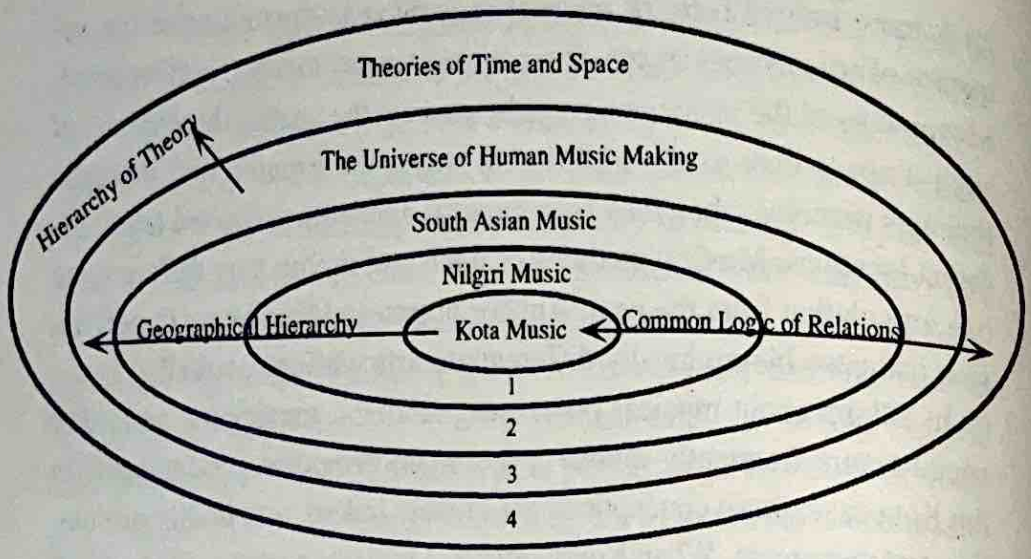


Fig. 1: Nested Hierarchies of Kota Music

Extending the geographical hierarchy we may free ourselves from the Indian subcontinent and consider Kota music simply as a kind of music in the world. In music theoretical terms, we may find that procedures in Kota music-making are encompassed within a larger universe of what many humans do when they make music. Abstracting our "floating" melody example further, for example, we find that throughout the world musicians often must coordinate among multiple rhythms that have more or less ambiguous or flexible rates of change (see Blum 2004, 240).

In what ways do Kotas recognize differences between melodic and percussive articulations of rhythm in their music? Obviously they must recognize some degree of difference or the issue of "anchoring" melodies to their percussion ostinatos would never arise. "Melody" and "percussion" can be rehearsed separately from one another as well, as when individuals practice a melodic instrument without accompaniment. The metrical underpinnings of some melodies, when the players are not guided by drum beats, are difficult to discern. The piece played on the bamboo trumpet, *bugīr* in CD 9, and Puccan's vocalization of the "temple-opening tune" (CD 10) both share an underlying ten-pulse metrical framework that is not easily recognizable when listening to either melody alone. Such solo melodies may lack obvious markers of meter because the musicians who perform them seem to be more preoccupied with matters of melodic contour and relative pitch durations than large-scale metric structures. *Koḷ* players orient some melodies to framing patterns of drum beats only when those beats are actually present. Puccan could

not, for example, indicate the main beats with his foot while playing the "temple-opening tune." The internal flexibility of melodies such as the temple-opening tune requires some external point of reference for that flexibility to make sense. Though dance tunes and simpler ritual tunes are, by and large, straightforwardly metric, some dance tunes also depart artfully from the main beat (CD 11).

The fourth layer in Fig. 1 moves beyond music to encompass concepts of spatial and temporal relations in other arenas of human activity. In Layer Four, our contrast between floating melody and relatively rigid percussion ostinato is reproduced analogically in the verbal concepts of Kotas, anthropologists, or theorists of time and space. Tantalizing comparisons can be made between our exemplary contrast and some of the anxieties Henri Bergson and others have expressed in their positing of essential differences between pure, undifferentiated "duration" experienced by a person internally, and time as segmented in the world around.[8]

In Layer Four, the hierarchy shifts from one of geography to one of theory. This is justifiable because the parameters of discussion in all four layers involve the logic of temporal and sometimes spatial relations. For example, the notion of a "path" links musical processes in Layer Three with the broader spatiotemporal conceptions of Layer Four. Terms for path are common in Kota and Tamil discussions of music and in languages associated with many musical traditions cross-culturally (e.g. Robertson 1979). In India, various words for "path" are used metaphorically for spiritual journeys or ways of accomplishing a goal. Another linking concept can be found in the English word "rhythm." In musical terms, rhythm has been described as a multidimensional phenomenon of "independent variables" such as duration, pulse, and meter (Powers 1986). But "rhythm" is also used by English speakers to describe both spatial and temporal relations in non-musical domains, from the simple "rhythms" of life to the "regularity in the way something is repeated in space" (OED s.v. "rhythm" 8).

In similar respects, aspects of temporal contrast in Kota melody and drumming—fluidity, flexibility, plasticity *versus* segmentariness, measuredness, regularity and rigidity—belong with the more general categories—conceptual, philosophical, or practical—that people use to talk about or organize their world. The larger point is that musical processes in time and space deserve consideration in the wider arena of discourses about action and events more generally. What Kotas actually do,

including how they use their categories and concepts, should be considered on par with Kota verbal explanations of what they do. For explanations are not "transcendent views that somehow escape the impress of social interests, cultural habits, and personal persuasions" (Jackson 1996, 1). If any area of human activity deserves such phenomenological consideration it is music-making.[9] We cannot expect any language to map adequately the territory of musical action, nor should we expect music-makers to index verbally everything important about what they do.

Human beings constantly juggle, choose among, or attempt to reconcile the many spatiotemporal representations which they form when perceiving and creating the rhythms of events in the world. Melodies, patterns of discrete drum, calendrical articulations, the flow of "everyday life," agriculture, or a ceremony, are all willful orderings of events or actions set against other possible orderings. These orderings are themselves situated in time and space and therefore subject to manipulation and change (see Munn 1992, 116).

The Village Council

In the context of this study, some willful orderings of events emerge from negotiations among individual agents in the Kota village council or *kūṭm* (from a verbal root meaning "to join or come together"). *Kūṭm*s, composed of men, are scheduled on fixed or ad hoc bases; they may be small or large, and include representatives of one village or all seven. In a god ceremonial *kūṭm*, Kotas actively listen to and interpret the words of the possessed diviner. Ordinarily, the *kūṭm* will entail a great deal of shouting and apparent chaos, especially if many men are present. Those known for their eloquent speech and fair sense of judgement may sway the others with their opinions. In the end, a group of elders will briefly separate themselves from the group to render judgement.

The subject of *kūṭm*s include choosing a date for a ceremony, punishing those who have violated custom, reconfiguring custom, resolving property disputes, deciding issues related to communal property or space (building, repairing, allowing the presence of outsiders), dividing costs or responsibilities for rituals or other village duties, and choosing village representatives (such as musicians) for a variety of public or government-related affairs. Kotas believe that faithfulness to the ways of the past will yield success and fecundity in the future. They decide

what constitutes such faithfulness through the *kūṭm* and share the widespread Indic belief that righteous action confers a sort of enabling power on individual and community. Kotas use the word *catym*—roughly, truth, genuineness, or virtuousness—to refer both to mode of behavior and its favorable result.[10] When Kotas use the term *catym*, they are always enacting a time-sense, invoking a form of morality whose value lies in its status as historically prior to any emerging present.

More than by people, *catym* is possessed by the Kota gods (*devrgūḷ*) and the ancestors (*ānāṭōr*): they are powerful, truthful, and ideationally rooted in the past. Kotas share with Hindus and followers of many religions a belief in a primordial period when men and gods were closer. During the god ceremony, Kotas strive for unified action through ritual, music, and dance, and for a oneness of mind, a state of agreement called *oḏop*. For they believe there has been a decline in righteousness and unity since the period of original union, at which time Kotas would also have possessed maximal *catym*. The god ceremony gives Kotas the opportunity to temporarily counteract what they perceive as a negative historical trajectory, and thus to make themselves whole and vital once again.

Catym is closely linked with a system of rules or customs called *kaṭs*. Kotas use these rules to define themselves as members of a moral community. Literally meaning "knot," *kaṭs* do "bind" Kota behavior; but, in *kūṭm*s, Kotas also negotiate and recreate their *kaṭs*. Music may be indirectly involved in this process as well, for in some villages (not Kolmēl) musicians play instrumental melodies to help induce possession in the diviner whom they will occasionally consult in village matters.

Kaṭs, which permeate everyday ways in which Kotas comport themselves, are spatiotemporally contingent. For example, one should not cross one knee over the other directly in front of elders or important ritual specialists.[11] During a god ceremony, a former Kota postman gesticulated at my wagging leg: my crossed knee was supporting my arm as I trained my video camera in the direction of the principal ritualists. I was sitting perhaps fifty feet away from the tent, within a broader area cordoned off at all other times of the year. Because of the ritual importance of the place and time—the center of the village during the god ceremony—and the personages involved, the "rules" became somewhat magnified, extending out in space. Although I was fifty feet away, it was as though I sat directly in front of the honored men. Similar rules

contribute to the structure of respect in Kota society, and their force is place- and time-dependent.

Ethnographic and Historical Issues

Ethnic Relations in "Traditional" Nilgiri Society

A nostalgia for things removed in time and space is partially responsible for an enduring Western fascination with the "native" inhabitants of the Nilgiris. This began with Father Giacomo Fenicio's visit to "Toda mountain" in 1603, where he found his first Toda, "a huge man, well proportioned, with a long beard and hair like a Nazarene falling on his shoulders" (Fenicio 1906 [1603], 724). The Todas appeared, "in accordance with the rumour, to be of those who were driven from the territory of S. Thome by the many wars in former times and scattered through these parts . . . a race of men descended from the ancient Christians of St. Thomas" (Fenicio 1906 [1603], 719). The promise of finding long-lost peoples who had escaped the passage of time captured the imagination of observers and, later, scholars.

The system of ritualized exchange also caught the attention of these observers. Todas were given pride of place in many early accounts. This must have bolstered their sense of ritual superiority, which they had already gained in the subcontinental context by adhering to vegetarianism. Even their musical behavior, characterized by their performing poetically elaborate songs (Emeneau 1971) and hiring Kotas for instrumental music, conferred high rank in the Indic context, where performing vocal music and acting as patron are both signifiers of status. Both Todas and Badagas paid Kota musicians, in part with sacrificial buffaloes, for performing at their funerals. As clients, instrumentalists, and consumers of cattle flesh, Kotas were constructed as inferior in the Indic code. It would be a mistake to assume that Kotas accepted inferior ranking, however.

Badagas, the other major Kota patrons of the recent past, are an immigrant cluster of castes who began arriving in the Nilgiris after Muslim invaders defeated the Vijayanagar rulers of the Mysore area in 1565. These "northerners" (the literal meaning of Badaga), fleeing south, quickly assimilated themselves with the local inter-tribal system, sometimes learned Toda or Kota languages (fluently), and eventually absorbed features into their own Kannaḍa dialect that could "only have

[been] acquired from the Nilgiri languages" (Emeneau 1989, 137). They now share a great deal culturally with the Kotas and Todas, including ritual practices such as the secondary mortuary ceremony (Hockings 2001, 62).

Interaction among Todas, Kotas, and Badagas has long been fostered by their spatial configuration: they are all concentrated in settlements on the Nilgiri plateau. The seven (largely endogamous) Kurumba tribes of gardeners and hunter-gatherers have been less directly interactive: they live on the edges of the plateau, on the steep slopes of the Nilgiris, and along the foothills in the Wynad area of Kerala just to the west (they also extend into Kerala and Karnataka states). Irula agriculturalist and gatherer subgroups are also distributed along the edges of the plateau and have been in structural positions similar to those of the Kurumbas *vis-à-vis* the plateau communities: they are regarded with fear as sorcerers. In the Wynad region of the Nilgiri foothills and to the west in Kerala live the Paniya tribe, who remain in abject poverty as "agrestic serfs" for landowning Badagas and the Chetti trader community. They have little interaction with Kotas, except perhaps those of Kalāc village near Gudalur town, and are musically quite different. The Kotas, Irulas, and most Kurumba groups share a great deal musically and employ cognate sets of musical instruments.

Two ritual-economic systems were in operation, one set on the plateau, another in the Nilgiri foothills and the Wynad region of Kerala (Bird-David 1997). The system on the plateau, at least, is represented by Nilgiri inhabitants as having been ideal and fair, only later becoming corrupted by selfish, avaricious, or status-seeking groups. The remembrance of the idealized inter-tribal system has generated what Michael Herzfeld calls "structural nostalgia," the "rhetorical longing," replicated in every generation, for a lost "reciprocity" (Herzfeld 1997, 111). This "system" now signifies traditional Nilgiri society, just as *jajmānī* in Hindu villages has come to symbolize "traditional India" (Fuller 1989). Kotas themselves maintain nostalgia for perfect reciprocity in the distant past, while many of them simultaneously feel they have been mistreated in more recent times.

In the "traditional system," families of Kotas called *muṭgārn* provided goods and services to the other communities. In exchange they received grain from the economically dominant food producers, the Badagas; clarified butter, sacrificial buffaloes, and sometimes raw foods from the pastoral Todas; and forest produce and services as watchmen from

Kurumbas. To Badagas, Kotas were essential providers of funeral and festival music, pottery, carpentry, thatching, leather and metal goods. Kota music, along with a number of ceremonial items, was also indispensable at Toda funerals. Although Todas considered Kotas ritually defiling, they accepted from them pottery (for use in the home and the less-pure Toda dairies), and depended upon them for axes, knives, and jewelry.

Kurumbas were feared as sorcerers but were nevertheless needed to provide Kotas with ritually important objects, which could only be obtained from the forest areas they inhabited. Kotas see Kurumbas as true jungle people, tribals' tribals. In contrast to the tall, somewhat light-skinned, reddish-complexioned Kotas and Todas, the Kurumbas are diminutive, dark-skinned, with curly hair and almost negroid features. These physical features of "forest people" appear again and again in Sanskritic writings over the centuries (Thapar 2001), which suggests that the broad pattern of spatial/social othering was deeply embedded in a shared subcontinental classification scheme and was not merely the result of later reifications (such as the census; see Cohn 1987b)—although these no doubt register in the more complex notions of "tribe" today.

Although Kurumbas were, and continue to be, feared, Badagas and Todas ranked them above Kotas, largely because Kotas were observed to consume the meat of cows (some have given this up), and at times, carrion (Kotas now deny this ever having been the case). Kotas in the 1930s began refusing to provide services to Todas and Badagas because they were discriminated against: the Nilgiris was increasingly modernizing, but Kotas were being denied admission to schools and even barred from tea stalls frequented by Badagas. Economic and demographic changes, combined with the increased availability of goods for purchase in the bazaar, rendered Kota services less essential. Kotas fought back by withholding their services as musicians. As the Badaga population grew out of proportion with that of the other communities of the hills, it was also no longer possible to maintain traditional relationships of exchange based on hereditary agreements between pairs of families.

The Nilgiris' physical environment most certainly influenced the ways that early writers represented Nilgiri tribals. Under British colonialism, many expatriates wrote letters describing the climate and countryside, which reminded them of England (e.g. Harkness 1832). The region still

retains now some of the beauty extolled in nineteenth-century accounts, but the landscape has also been transformed through the influx of significant populations from other parts of India and Sri Lanka, as well as by the cultivation and processing of tea, the introduction of non-native plant species, tourist development, and local industry—in particular, Hindustan Photo Films, the major national producer of photographic and x-ray films. Natural beauty played an important role in the construction of what Marie-Claude Mahias appropriately calls a "tribal sanctuary" in the Nilgiris. The beauty of the place drew people in. "The more the region opened up geographically, socially, and economically, the more the aboriginal peoples were seen as being different, primitive, associated with the jungle (or savage), and consequently the epitome of a tribe" (Mahias 1997, 326).

Aside from its "tribal inhabitants," one of the remarkable features of the Nilgiri district, given the quantity of literature written about it, is its small size, a mere 958 square miles. Triangular in shape, this hilly region, located in the state of Tamil Nadu, borders Kerala and Karnataka states to the west and north and lies at the juncture of the Western and Eastern Ghats, the two most prominent mountain ranges of South India. While forty per cent of this region lies above 5,900 feet, the elevation reaches its climactic 8,640 feet above mean sea level at Doḍḍabeṭṭa (lit. "great peak"), the second highest peak of Peninsular India (Lengerke and Blasco 1989). The Nilgiri district as a whole is populated by endemic animal and plant species that benefit from fertile soil, and until recently, abundant rainfall. The plateau surmounting the Nilgiri massif is blanketed with savannah grasslands said to be some 3,000 years old (Blasco and Thanikaimoni 1974); sporadic wooded areas, locally called *sholas*, are spread throughout the grasslands in hollows and ravines. The southern and western slopes of the Nilgiris, which were once covered with dense evergreen forests, have also been subject to transformation: many have now been leveled and converted into tea plantations.

The Nilgiri Hills are one of the favorite tourist spots in India, their importance for newlyweds comparable to that of Niagara Falls. (Each year, a few young brides tragically plunge to their deaths posing for honeymoon pictures at the edge of a precipice.) Since "tribes" of the Nilgiris remain important tourist attractions, the idea that the Nilgiri tribals continue their customs from time immemorial continues to be propagated. Several Toda hamlets are quite close to Ooty and frequently attract curious visitors; a center for Toda handicrafts, housed in a

cement, reverse-parabolic-shaped reproduction of a Toda house, similarly draws tourists interested in buying the characteristic Toda-embroidered cloth—now available as tote-bags and table runners. Kota villages receive less traffic, but still find a place on some tourist circuits. While living in Kolmēl I observed vans stop at the edge of the village, with lavishly dressed North Indian women emerging with their husbands for a timid glimpse of the natives. I felt like something of a zoo-keeper—or the wrong person for that cage—and most certainly spoiled the scene from the perspective of the tour guide.

Emerging Populations and Shifting Demographics

The British founded Ootacamund in 1827 as the headquarters of the Nilgiri part of Coimbatore district and later the summer residence of the Madras government. The Nilgiri district had come into the possession of the East India Company following the defeat of the Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan in 1799. Shortly after the first road to Ootacamund—already under construction in 1820 (Price 1908, 23)—was built, the demographics began rapidly to change: those who had inhabited the region for centuries quickly became a minority.

By the time of the 1881 census, the ethnic groups most closely associated with the Nilgiri Hills, the Kotas, Todas, Badagas, Kurumbas and Irulas, composed only 37 per cent of the total population of the Nilgiri district (Hunter 1886, 10: 308–9); in ten years the population had increased by 41,533 persons to 91,034—mostly consisting of new laborers who were attracted to the area for jobs on coffee and tea plantations (Hunter, 309). Badaga agriculturalists and cattle herders of this district have increased most dramatically in population, from an estimated 24,130 in 1881 (Hunter 1886, 309) to between 171,000 and 300,000 in 1997 (Ethnologue.com). By 2001, the total district population had reached an alarming 764,826. The Kota and Toda populations, in contrast, have not changed significantly: Kotas were counted at 1,065 in 1971 and were estimated to be 1,500 in 1990 by Dr P. Varadharajan.[12] This, if nothing else, would account for the intense degree of cultural concern within the Kota community over what it means to be Kota, what compromises need to be struck to succeed in the modern world (as a Kota), and the extent to which sharing of land, language, music, gods, and the purported realm of the dead might threaten or bolster the viability of the community.

The emergence of distinctive Nilgiri communities may be framed in

terms of two broad spatiotemporal processes: populations coming (or remaining) together and moving (or staying) apart. Reconstructing the histories of these populations is, in part, a matter of aligning these shifts with other significant events inscribed in stone, described in cave paintings, or retold in oral forms.

One method of reconstruction is through language: The Kota and Toda languages form a subgroup of the South Dravidian group of languages in South India, generally thought to have separated from pre-Tamil before the earliest Tamil literature, some 2,000 years ago.[13] Kotas and Todas may have migrated to the hills at least this long ago and remained sufficiently cut off from the mainstream population on the plains to develop their own languages independently (Emeneau 1989).[14]

The hills have never been entirely cut off from the plains, but neither have they been as integrally a part of a state network as they became after roads began to be built and transportation improved. It has long been accepted that the Nilgiris have been touched by warfare, traversed and populated by plains populations, and affected by state policies or taxes. Despite these interventions, there are few records of major upheavals, and the Nilgiri Hill communities remained stable enough to develop and maintain their own cultural characteristics.

Scholarship and Knowledge

The Nilgiri Hills are an excellent site for investigating the relationship between the history of scholarship and the emergence of particular forms of knowledge. The focus of earlier Nilgiri ethnography on the ritual and economic relationships among indigenes derived both from an abiding interest in India as a place whose principal defining feature for the West was "caste" and anthropology's heritage as a discipline searching for human universals—as well as cultural differences—in societies believed to be untainted by westernization or industrialization (thus the focus on tribes rather than on, say, Anglo-Indians). If these interests served as the engine for some Nilgiri scholarship—reinforcing such categories as "tribe" that continue to be used by local actors themselves—the scholarship thus produced also reflected back and influenced the course of research on South Asia generally. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the work of the anthropologist David G. Mandelbaum (1911–87), the first American cultural anthropologist to conduct fieldwork in India, and the Canadian linguist Murray B. Emeneau

(b. 1904), the first philologically trained North American scholar to take an anthropological interest in Indian culture, and to apply philological methods to unwritten Indian languages.

Emeneau used his three years' fieldwork on Kota, Toda, and Kodagu to lay the scientific groundwork for Dravidian historical linguistics. He is known for, among other things, his concept of India as a "linguistic area": the idea that the languages of the subcontinent, through mutual influence, attained distinctive areal features despite their origins in distinct language families. Aside from his numerous publications of a technical linguistic nature, his most substantial Kota work was a four-volume collection, *Kota Texts*, dictated in the Kota language by his principal informant, K. Sulli. Dravidian linguists continue to plumb the depths of these meticulously collected texts—and the accompanying grammar and phonology of Kota—for further understandings of the Kota language.

After completing his initial research on the Kotas (1937–8) and publishing a number of important articles on aspects of Kota culture and society, Mandelbaum deferred completion of his Kota book manuscript in favor of learning about the society and culture of India more generally. Although he never completed the Kota book, his field materials (copious notes, recordings, film footage) are so important to the historical framing of the present work that they, and he, merit additional consideration.

A student of Melville Herskovits and later of Edward Sapir, Mandelbaum arrived in the Nilgiris in April of 1937 after a brief stint in Kerala among the tribes of Travancore and the Jews of Cochin (Mandelbaum March 21, 1937; Mandelbaum 1939a; 1939b). He was drawn to the Nilgiris by his old colleague Emeneau and worked with Emeneau's English-speaking informant, Sulli. Sulli would come to the room of Emeneau, and later to that of Mandelbaum in Ooty, and provide information for a rupee a day. This allowed Sulli to take leave of his teaching job.

Mandelbaum's reliance on Sulli, whom he found largely accurate, was tempered by two traits, the tendency for "his recollection . . . to be neater and more integrated than was the historical actuality," and to portray himself "much larger in his account than he may have [actually been] in the event." Sulli's information was more reliable when he gave "an impersonal account of, say, ceremonies, [in which] these traits . . . [did] not prevail." Sulli's work with the scholars gave him the courage

to fight against some of the prevailing customs in his community (Mandelbaum 1960, 307). His first critical move was to cut his hair, for adult Kota men were expected to wear their hair long.

The 1930s was a time of stress for the Kotas of Kolmēl village: a decade after a lice-borne disease had decimated the village, there were still no ritual specialists to conduct ceremonies in the traditional fashion. Partly in response to this devastating event (which was believed to be evidence that the Kotas were committing some terrible wrong), and partly to improve their social status in relation to their Hindu and tribal neighbors, a movement arose to advocate worshiping a new set of Hindu deities while another movement arose attempting to modernize Kota ways—particularly in regard to the slaughtering of bovines, the seclusion of women during menstruation, and the male style of wearing the hair long. Sulli led in some of these reforms and was subsequently barred from joining in communal worship. Sometime during this period, Sulli composed a song decrying cow sacrifice that was recorded both by Mandelbaum and by the Dutch musicologist Arnold Bake. Three other men and boys joined Sulli in his separation from the village, one of whom, the late A.K. Rangan (who was about five years old when Sulli cut his hair) became one of the most popular and innovative Kota song composers, but, like his uncle, remained estranged from the village until his death (1997).

Fieldwork Background and Dramatis Personae

Having previously spent two years (1982–3, 1984–6) in South India studying the *vīṇā*, a classical stringed instrument, I returned there in September of 1990 seeking a different experience and the opportunity to use different analytic tools. My first four months of fieldwork were spent seeking a field site and attempting to gain a broad sense of local music-making in the villages of Kotas, Todas, Irulas, and Kurumbas. Traveling from village to village, I felt most welcomed in the seven Kota villages and was invited warmly to participate in activities related to both everyday life and death. The personal connections I was able to establish gave me confidence that I could conduct research effectively, and the richness of instrumental ritual repertoire in Kolmēl village struck me as unparalleled in all the Nilgiri tribal repertoires.

After my initial period of field research (September 1990–November 1992) I returned to the Indian subcontinent to take up a new project from November 1996 to February 1999, and spent an intermittent four months of this time in the Nilgiris, pursuing questions raised by my earlier research. Other brief visits and email correspondences after I began to write the present book allowed me to investigate matters relating to the calendar and agriculture that had eluded me on earlier visits.

During most of my field visits I resided in Kolmēl (Tamil: Kollimalai), a Kota village of about fifty households. In order to be productive and personally comfortable, I rented my own room in the largest house of the village, known as *bangḷo* (Bungalow), where I had a bed, desk, and shelves for books. A television and VCR allowed me to use "feedback" techniques, and eventually to create collaboratively a seventy-minute documentary of the Kota "god ceremony" (*devr*), with Kota-language narration.

While living in Kolmēl I participated in and observed all the major Kota ceremonies, learned to dance men's dances, and to perform on all their three types of drum (*dobar, tabaṭk, kiṇvar*). Since I was less successful in learning to play the wind instruments, *koḷ*, *pulāng*, and least of all the *bugīr*, I did not attempt to participate by playing these instruments in public. Working out the fingering of some pieces on these instruments helped me enormously in understanding and notating the melodies, however. In the course of my research I became familiar with a great number of songs and learned to sing them as well. No public venue as such existed in which it was appropriate for me to sing, but among friends, and in the context of clarifying a word or musical phrase, I had ample opportunities to sing with, for, and sometimes against, Kotas.

I was able to balance my privacy needs with my wish to take advantage of intimate village living by accepting the hospitality of the family of my friend, field assistant, and consultant, R. Kamaṭn (a.k.a. Duryodhana), who lived in a small, shingled, wattle and daub dwelling on the side of the village opposite the Bungalow. Duryodhana's mother, R. Mathi, cooked for us and I, in turn, returned the affection as a fictive second son, helping out with day-to-day grocery expenses and errands in town. Food is a medium through which Kotas articulate degrees of social/familial closeness. Every morsel of food Mathi cooked was suffused with the affection (*gav*) she felt for me—and she let me know it.

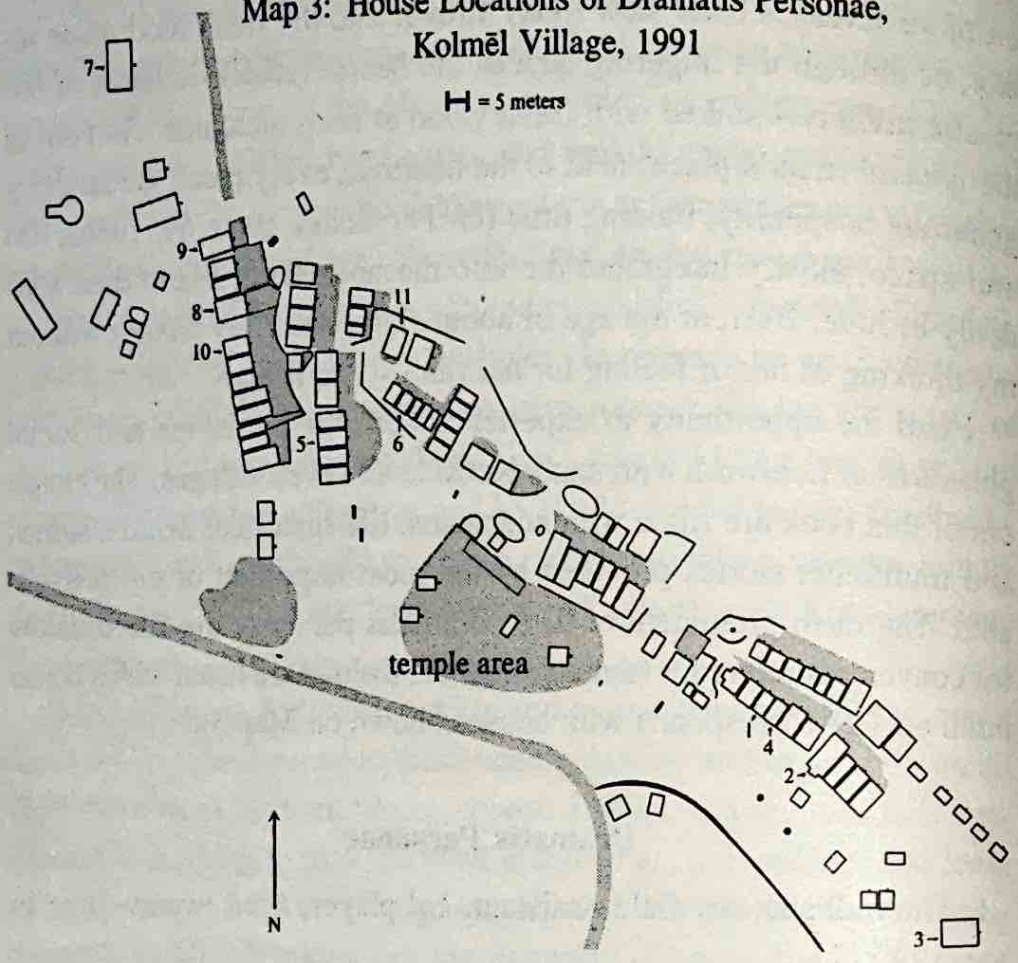
Food production embodies temporal continuity, whether through the bit of yesterday's bean stew (*udk*) thrown into the fresh food made today, or through the lingering heat in the hearth (*elkāl*)—a locus of domestic divinity—stoked with fresh wood at each mealtime. As I sat in the *gaṇcatī* (man's place) next to the hearth at every meal, the family's generous hospitality, binding time (cf. Fernandez 1966, 69; 1986a, 45) and space, slowly integrated me into the household. Mathi died suddenly in June, 2001, at the age of about sixty; not a day passes without my thinking of her or feeling for her family and friends.

I had the opportunity to experience both the hardships and social pleasures of fieldwork with many Kotas in all seven villages. The chapters of this book are filled with anecdotes, life-historical details, songs, and traditional stories provided by the most important of my consultants. The most prominent of these dramatis personae are listed below for convenient reference (those resident in Kolmēl are listed with a house number. {#} corresponds with houses shown on Map 3):

Dramatis Personae

1. Duryodhana: my field assistant, *koḷ* player, aged twenty-three in 1990 {1}
2. R. Mathi (deceased): Duryodhana's mother, composer of a few mourning songs {1}
3. S. Raman: Duryodhana's father, player of all instruments, singer, carpenter, and blacksmith. Aged sixty-five in 1990 {1}
4. K. Puccan (deceased): most respected *koḷ* player of all seven villages; elder, storyteller; classificatory elder brother of Raman. Aged seventy-eight in 1990 {2}
5. P. Varadharajan: Puccan's son; doctor; *dobar* (drum) player {3}
6. S. Cindamani: female singer, dancer, storyteller; originally from Kurgōj village. Daughter Meena married to late grandson of K. Sulli {4 and 5}
7. Caḷn (deceased): elder brother of Cindamani; former *mundkānōn* of Kurgōj village
8. A.K. Rangan (deceased): disenfranchized Kota man whose innovative songs were being sung by Kotas in many villages in the early 1990s. Nephew of K. Sulli {6}

Map 3: House Locations of Dramatis Personae, Kolmēl Village, 1991



The white rectangles in this map represent buildings, which are for the most part houses. Their fronts are indicated with a small knob on one end, usually facing north-east. The two leftmost and one rightmost building in the temple area are temples; the other rectangle is a structure on which Toda clarified butter offerings were once burned. The light shadow in front of most of the house rows are *kavāls*, or mud-packed yards.

9. K. Jayachandran: banker from Porgāṛ village, married to Puccan's daughter. Learned important pieces of repertoire from tape recordings of Puccan
10. Sakole: dancer, *dobar* player, my landlord. Aged ninety + in 1990 {7}
11. Va. Kamaṭn (deceased): former *mundkānōn*, childhood friend of Puccan, protagonist in construction of Tamil-style temple; reformer of rituals and customs, wealthy landowner {8}
12. Sridharan (deceased): *Mundkānōn* (~1990–2000) who left his post at the age of about thirty-three in 2000 and later committed suicide.

Sulli was his mother's paternal grandfather {9 is the *doḍvay* or *mund-kānōn*'s house}

13. Pa. Mathi: elderly female singer, dancer, ex-*tērkārc* (wife of *tērkārn*) {10}
14. V. Mathi (deceased): singer, lived in Ticgāṛ, used to visit daughter in Kolmēl regularly {11}
15. Richard K. Wolf: ethnomusicologist {7}

Kota Villages

Kota name (Tamil name): approximate locations with respect to Ootacamund

Kolmēl (Kollimalai): seven kilometers south
Mēnāṛ (Kundah Kotagiri): thirty kilometers south-southwest
Kurgōj (Sholur Kokal): twenty-five kilometers northwest
Kalāc (Gudalur Kokal): fifty kilometers northwest (nestled within Gudalur town)
Ticgāṛ (Trichygady): fifteen kilometers northeast
Porgāṛ (New Kotagiri): thirty kilometers east (just outside the town borders of Kotagiri)
Kināṛ (Kil Kotagiri): fifty-five kilometers east-northeast

* * *

This book proceeds theoretically from "stasis" to "motion," focusing first on "place" (Chapter 3), then "time" (Chapter 5), and then "spacetime" (Chapter 6). The structure is not rigid, however, for place, time, and spacetime are woven together throughout. Each chapter also lays groundwork for the next. My integrative approach also focuses on interconnections among different kinds of data—musical, ethnographic, historical, textual—rather than compartmentalizing them. I have presented both the data and the arguments in increments, revisiting themes, enriching models, and filling in details as the book progresses. Some may find the arguments and the evidence for these arguments technical at times, now and again engaging the specialties of the musicologist, the anthropologist, the South Asianist; but I have tried to lay bare the basic ideas of each chapter for all readers to understand. For those who wish to read the fuller ritual context for my discussion of the god ceremony and mortuary ceremonies earlier on, I recommend making a brief

detour to Chapter 7 right now. For others, the detailed treatment of these rituals might make better sense after having been introduced to the themes of these rituals gradually over the course of this book. The poetics of the book's organization lie in the simple fact that social life is learned as an amalgam, a network of relations, whose significance becomes clear only as one moves through the spaces and times of one's own life.