



## Folk Forms of Karnataka



### Goravara Kunitha

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*Goggaya barthane* - Small children are usually easily pacified with the scary image of a man with big red eyes and bearskin headgear. Goravas are remembered for their distinct presence. They travelled from place to place blessing people and children. It is believed that when blessed by a gorava, fear is ridden from the body and mind. But as a folk dance form it is becoming popular only in recent times. The Goravara Kunitha serves a religious purpose more than that of an entertainment.

The Goravas are devotees of Lord Mylaralinga. *Kurubas* or men from the shepherding community dedicate themselves to their Lord and this folk form. There are several clans of Goravas - *Kardi Gorava*, *Kinnari Gorava*, *Kudure Gorava*, etc. Men give themselves up for this practice after undertaking *deekshe* or the process of initiation which is usually performed before marriage.

*Deekshe* is given on a preordained date in the presence of Lord Mylaralinga. The guru or head of the clan blesses and accepts the boy into the sect. A woollen blanket is presented to the person upon his undertaking the *deekshe*. Accessories such as *gante* (jingle), *jolge* (bag), *bandara* (sacred ash), *betha* (wooden stick), *dhone* (bowl), *damaru* (small drum), etc. are worshipped and presented to him. These accessories are crucial for him to carry on his life as a gorava. He is made to wear a red shirt and *kavade sara* (cowries necklace) and then takes an oath to serve the faith.



**MYTH**

The demon Tarakasura had become uncontrollable. Even the devas and gandharvas were scared of him. So Lord Shiva took the form of a gorava and annihilated the fierce demon. He then adorned himself with the blood of the demon to celebrate the victory over evil.

There is another interesting story. Once Shiva and Parvathi had a tiff. Parvathi felt that she was greater than Shiva. Shiva was disappointed and decided to teach her a lesson. He asked her to give him leave. She took bath, sanctified herself and the surroundings and offered *pada pooja*. Shiva then bid her goodbye and went to look after the 770 crore life-forms that he was responsible for. To do so, he changed his form and started travelling through all the worlds, playing the flute and the *damaru*. Shiva's *damaru* was so powerful that it shook the very base of gigantic mountains. Hearing this unparalleled sound, Parvathi closed the doors and secured them with huge boulders. Shiva then appeared before her and declared that if she was really greater than him, then she should not have got scared and closed the doors. Thus, he subdued Parvathi with this form.

### PRESENTATION

Goravara Kunitha is a traditional dance with religious implication that is performed at festivals, local fairs and also upon invitation in the houses of devotees of Lord Mylaralinga. At housewarming ceremonies, devotees invite goravas to their new homes - this is called *mane seve* or *ogu seve*. In the new house a black woollen blanket is spread and a small bowl is kept with milk; in it sometimes banana and *kajaya* are also kept. This offering is worshipped and then the goravayyas break into a dance around it. They perform rhythmically accompanied by the sound of their anklets and the intoxicating beat of the *damaru*. During the performance they sing praises of the lord and repeat *paraks*. As they dance they sit and eat the offerings laid out to them. They lie flat on their stomachs and eat the offering without touching it with their hands.

In public appearances and stage performances they present a different picture. The unruly behaviour exhibited at private functions is not seen here. The goravayyas - usually a team of 10 to 12 - stand in a straight line. The senior-most gorava or the leader of the troupe begins the performance by playing his *pilangovi* (flute) and then beats the *damaru*. The rest of the team join him. They start moving their legs forward and backward in accordance to the beat of the *damaru*. They move around in circles brandishing their flute and *damaru*. Their bright costumes are sure show-stealers. They dance, making big eyes and raised eyebrows to create a scare among the viewers.



Goravara Kunitha

The Gorava Katha Mela is more important than the Goravara Kunitha. Goravayyas are a storehouse of knowledge. They go from house to house and recite stories of the lord. These stories are of epic proportions and can be recited continuously for days. They mainly sing the praises and about the life of Lord Mylaralinga. Some goravas also sing stories of Matesami and Mahadeshvara also. As they sing they are accompanied only by the sound of the *damaru*. Sometimes brass *tala*, *dhamadi* and jingles are also used.

### COSTUMES

The costumes of Goravara Kunitha are very unique. Their distinct costume is the main attraction in this folk style. A white or yellow *panche/kache* and white full-arm *juba* are the basic clothing. On the *juba* a *banathu* is worn. It is a square piece of red cloth, with a hole in the center for the head to get in. This *banathu* is tucked in at the opposite tips to make it look like an inverted triangle in the front and the back.. On this a sash called *bandara seje* is worn; this contains the holy ash or *vibuthi*. Then two cross-belts or sashes covered with cowries are worn to form an 'x' mark on the front and the back. The neck is then adorned with *rudarakshas* and *kavadi adage sara* (necklace of cowries ). Over the hip the *bevrasa* or striped blanket is wrapped. Anklets adorn the legs. A huge chain with big jingles is worn on the blanket around the waist; this is called *gante sara*. The head is covered with a *rumala*, usually a white sari or *panje*. A headgear made of bearskin is placed on it. In the right hand *nagabetha* is held and in the left, a flute. The forehead is smeared with *vibhuthi* and the eyes are marked with white and red circles to create a scary look.

The costumes are elaborate and laborious to make. The *kavade* or cowries are symbolic of the teeth of Tarakasura. The *damaru* is believed to be the neck of the slain demon. The skin of the thighs is used to cover of the *damaru* at both ends. The intestine is used to bind the *damaru*. The *gonde* or thick thread used to create the sound is believed to be the thumb of the demon. The demon's blood is depicted by the red markings around the eyes.

### PUTTAMALLE GOWDA

When *Janapada Jatre* was launched on the footsteps of Vidhana Soudha, there were over 300 folk artists from every nook and corner of Karnataka. Only one senior artist was chosen to be honoured by the Chief Minister and that was Puttamalle Gowda. This octogenarian is still young in spirit; his energy and commitment to the chosen field is remarkable. Hailing from ChamaraJanagar, he has been bestowed with the Rajyotsava and the Janapada Academy awards.

#### *How did you begin work in this field?*

Goravara kunitha has been in our family lineage for ages. It has been passed from one generation to another. I was initiated into this at the age of 12 years. One of my uncles, Puttamalle Gowda, whose name I also share taught me the form and I took *deekshe* to continue the heritage.



### What do you mean by 'deekshe'?

When a person takes *deekshe*, his head is tonsured. Five married women come with *kalsa* and wash the hands, legs and back of the boy with turmeric paste and water. A *kankana* is tied around the boy's wrist. On a spread blanket, five *pava* of *akkis* are arranged and another *kalsa* with fruit, flowers and coconuts is placed. Now *mani kattu* is done, that is, a leaf, with a hole and a thread passing through it, is passed between the *kalsa* and the boy. The height has to be the same. Then the guru asks the boy a series of questions to which the boy replies. A sacred cow is dedicated to the village. *Deepa* is lit to conclude the rituals. Five weeks after this event, all are invited for lunch. The boy is presented with a *jolge*. Five morsels of food are given by each of the gurus. From then, the boy is forbidden from sharing his food with anyone.

### When did you start your own troupe?

I started my own troupe 30-35 years ago. Recently I have been chosen by the state government to teach 10 children this form, under the *Guru Shishya Parampare* scheme.

### What is the mainstay of Goravara Kunitha?

Once initiated into the form, we have to collect alms from house to house on festival days like Gowri Habba, Ugadi, Shankranthi, etc. We visit new homes on *Gruha Praveshams* and bless them. We are also invited to bless small children and women who are not able to bear children. We are believed to be the representatives of Lord Shiva; so we are invited to ward away evil on several occasions.

### Who performs this form?

Goravara Kunitha is restricted to the men from the Kuruba community only. The heads of all the clans were called by Lord Shiva and gifts were bestowed on each one of them. For instance, Halla Muttya was given *birudu*, Madival Machaya was given *medi sari*, Gankatakara was given *kumba*, etc. Then Kuruba Gowda was called and given a sword and *damaru*.

### Where is Goravara Kunitha famous? What are the different styles in this form?

It is very popular in the Chamarajanagar region. Another variant, performed by the devotees of Lord Mylaralinga, is very prominent in the northern parts of Karnataka like Hubli and Dharwad. But that Goravara Kunitha is entirely different. They wear only black costumes while we wear red. They wear a single cross-belt of cowries whereas we wear two cross-belts. They are considered superior to us. We have to pay Rs 1.25 as tribute every year to Lord Mylaralinga.

### In which cities have you performed?

Hyderabad, Delhi, Mumbai, Madurai, Cochin, Nagpur, Bhopal, Gwalior, etc.

### Tell me a little about your personal life

I was married at the age of 22. I have a son and two daughters. This dance has been my only source of income. The programmes are always uncertain; sometimes it is one in a month or four in a week. Now my son is carrying on the lineage.