

Reviving The Traditional Art of

TODA

'Shalom' Product Catalogue 2013





Toda Settlements

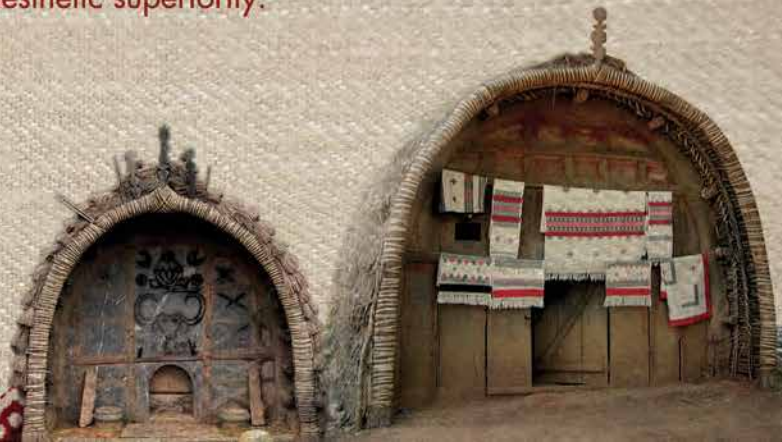


The Todas

Tribal Embroidery of Ooty, Tamil Nadu

Udagamandalam or Ooty, is a key mountain resort as well as the capital of the district of Nilgiris in Tamilnadu, India. Nilgiris, or the 'Blue Mountains' is home to the indigenous community of Todas.

The Todas are a small and closed pastoral community and their traditional occupations have largely been limited to subsistence agriculture and cattle herding. The women in the community have inherited the skill of intricate embroidery which stands out for its complexity and aesthetic superiority.



TODA EMBROIDERY

The origin of the embroidery known as *Pugur* (or flower) in the native tongue is yet to be established but it reflects the influence of European settlers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The distinctive feature of the embroidery is that the patterns are based on thread counts unlike modern embroidery, which is dependent on set patterns and drawings. What is even more interesting is that indigenous Toda women without modern numerical literacy skillfully embroider patterns with geometric precision without any external aids such as scales or patterns. Yet another feature of the embroidery that distinguishes it from modern embroidery is that the reverse side is equally beautiful with no tell-tale signs of hanging threads and knots. Naturally this requires significant time and effort but the beauty of the final product fully justifies it.

The embroidery is done on specific fabrics with specific colours. The primary colours used are red and black and the thickness of the thread ensures that the pattern is finished with an embossed look. Traditionally, the hand woven white base cloth and the threads were supplied by '*Chettiars*' (merchant community) who brought the material from the plains.

The Todas have adapted to changes in the textile industry and have started using material produced by power looms and two - ply woolen thread for the embroidery.



MOTIFS



There are no pattern books for Toda embroidery. The patterns reflect the creativity of the Toda women who conjure up a pattern in their minds and then transfer it to a piece of cloth. Most of the inspiration is derived from nature, day-to-day life activities, mythological stories and the colours of the flora and fauna of the Nilgiris. Each embroidery tells the story of the particular region. The Buffalo horn is an important motif because the buffalo is sacred for the Todas. Other motifs used are the sun, the moon, the stars, flowers, mountains, valleys, snakes, rabbits and boxes.





TD 04

FABRIC

Matted and loosely woven cotton fabric is used as this facilitates the counting of woven threads.

The traditional shawl (*Poothkuli* in the native tongue) uses fabric with wide bands in red at both ends on which striking geometric patterns are embroidered. It is common to find more than nine intricate designs on a single piece







TD 07

TD 08

TD 09





TD 07

TD 07

TD 13

TD 10

TD 11

TD 09

TD 08

TD 12

 CUSHION COVERS

TABLE MATS







TD 15



SLING BAG



LAPTOP POUCH



TD 16





The Shalom Self Help Group was established in September 2005 with the broad aim of assisting women from economically challenged backgrounds to enhance their socio-economic opportunities. Giving an opportunity for the Toda women to turn their exquisite embroidery into useful products opens economic opportunities for the women. This is particularly important in the Toda community which is essentially patriarchal in nature. The privileged position of men in the community gives them the luxury of leisure while women work hard to sustain families.







This catalogue has been developed under the AIACA – RBS Tribal Craft Development project. The project aims to develop 3 handicrafts clusters in Wayanad, Nilgiris and Sitlingi.

Handicraft cluster development includes:

Providing alternative sources of income generation, promoting sustainable utilization of natural resources, and reducing forest dependency of the traditional artisans.

This also includes developing a strong value chain, building production systems, marketable product range for domestic and international markets and linkages for sales and finance.



