



# Mourning Songs and Human Pasts among the Kotas of South India

## Citation

Wolf, Richard. 2000. Mourning songs and human pasts among the Kotas of South India. *Asian Music* 32(1): 141-183.

## Published Version

doi:10.2307/834333

## Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:9918824>

## Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

**Figure Captions for Mourning Songs and Human Pasts Article**  
**Richard K. Wolf (March 15, 2000)**

- Fig. 1 Since fire is an embodiment of divinity, special rituals accompany the lighting of special flames. In this photo one of the musicians makes fire for the dry funeral cremation by twirling a stick on the dried root of the *vag* tree (identified in M. Emeneau's fieldnotes as *Solix tetrasperma*). Pieces of cloth are used to catch the spark and kindle a larger fire. A similar process is used for producing a flame during ceremonies for the gods.
- Fig. 2 S. Raman making the inner ring for a *tabaṭk* (frame drum) in the *kol\_l*, or blacksmith's shop. Blacksmithing is one of the traditional Kota occupations and the smithy is treated as a place of divinity.
- Fig. 3 Singer V. Mathi rendering an *\_t!* (mourning song) in my office/bedroom in Kolm\_l village, May 1992. The physicality of "shaking" or "moving" evinced by the etymology of the term is evident in her performance, which involves significant movements of the hands and expressions on the face. Note also Mathi's jewelry, which is typical for Kota women.
- Fig. 4 Musicians perform the bier lighting tune as the funeral pyre is set ablaze. 1991 M\_n\_r village.
- Fig. 5 Family members congregate around a decorated chair—the bier (*katl*) for the dry funeral (*varld\_v*) of a deceased relative. Underneath and on top of the bier are symbolic items associated with the deceased specifically and with the history of the tribe generally. One of the baskets, for instance, contains millet (*vatm*), the ancient staple of the Nilgiris. The deceased's bone relics will later be placed in the striped cloth (*var\_r*) on the seat of the chair.
- Fig. 6 The highly decorated dry funeral biers are led musically on procession to the dry funeral cremation ground. 1991 M\_n\_r village
- Fig. 7 Men dance at the dry funeral ground. M\_n\_r village 1991.
- Fig. 8 Musicians tighten their drum skins before performing melodies to induce divine possession. The barechested gentleman in the foreground facing the fire is later "moved by the gods." Dry funeral ground, Kurg\_j village, 1997.
- Fig. 9 A photograph of Ticg\_r village, the village that once had "60 houses" according to this mourning song.
- Fig. 10 Female dancer at dry funeral in Kurg\_j wearing a "coin necklace" of the type described in the "Puy Avo."

