



Horse-frame made of reed—Mechamada *ainmane*

### TRADITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE AINMANE

The *ainmane* is revered and footwear may be worn only up to its front steps<sup>2</sup>—as is the practice in any holy space or building.<sup>3</sup> It is customary to use the right foot first to cross the threshold to enter the *ainmane* without stepping on the threshold.

The south-west direction is considered sacred and the south-west corner of the *ainmane*, called the *kanni mule*, is venerated as a sacred space dedicated to ancestors. The sacred *kanni kombare* is the room located in the south-west corner of the *ainmane*, and the sacred *kanni kamba* is the pillar located in the south-west corner of the *mund* in a *mund mane*. The

2. These days, in many *ainmanes*, footwear may be worn in the *kayyale*, but not in the *nellakki nadu bade* or in any other room in the *ainmane*.
3. In many areas, during the days preceding the local temple festival, when traditional restrictions (*devada kett*) apply, those not belonging to the *okka* are prohibited from entering its *ainmane*.

*naga sthana* (a platform with a stone symbolising the snake god placed on it) is usually located in the south-west direction in the yard outside the *ainmane*. However, the *devara kone* (*puje* room) set apart for worshipping deities in many Gouda *ainmanes* is not necessarily in the south-west corner of the house.

The *aimara*, *nellakki nadu bade*, *nellakki bolcha*, *kanni kombare*, *kanni kamba* and *kaimada* have a place in many of the traditions and rituals of the native communities of Kodagu.

Members of an *okka* come to their *ainmane* before commencing any new venture or taking part in an important event. Before entering the *ainmane* they go to the *kaimada* to offer prayers and seek the blessings of their ancestors. Then they offer prayers to their ancestors at the *kanni kamba*, at the *nellakki bolcha* and at the *kanni kombare* in the *ainmane* before taking the blessings of the elders present in the *ainmane*. If there is a *thuk bolcha* dedicated to the deity of the *okka*, prayers to the deity are offered there. These are important rituals for a newly married couple visiting the groom's/bride's *ainmane* for the first time. In the past, men going to war followed the same ritual, seeking the blessings of their ancestors, deities and elders in the *ainmane*.

The doors of an *ainmane* are invariably kept wide open all day long and shut only at dusk, after the *nellakki bolcha* is lit. In rare instances, where there is no member living in or near the *ainmane*, hired help is used to maintain it and the front door of the *ainmane* is kept locked.

The main door in front that faces east is used to enter the *ainmane*. In exceptional cases where the *ainmane* faces west or north, it is the entrance door facing east that is used for all ceremonial occasions, even though it is not the main door. Early in the morning, the front door (or the door facing east) is opened and a simple prayer is offered to the rising sun. In the past

in many Kodava *ainmanes*, women and non-Kodavas did not enter the *ainmane* through the main door but through the second entrance door to the left of the main door in the verandah, if there was one. Otherwise they used one of the other entrances—the door to the north of the house or the one at the back. (See footnote 25 on page 50.)

There are rituals and taboos associated with sitting on *aimaras*. On climbing up the steps to the verandah, the first *aimara* to the left (between the first two pillars to the left) is revered as the *karanavanda aimara* (*aimara* for the *karanava*). It is meant for the use of the *pattedara*, elders, honoured guests and the one possessed by the ancestor during *Karana There* (performance ritual in honour of the *karanava* of the *okka*). In the past, a fine reed mat was spread on it for guests to sit on.

The *aimara* running east to west on the north side of the *mund* in a *mund mane* and the one along the eastern inner wall of the *nellakki nadu bade* in an *othe pore* have special significance. As per custom, a newly married woman is made to sit on this *aimara* in her husband's *ainmane* on the day after her wedding. This is symbolic of her having become a member of her husband's *okka*. However, that is the only time when she may sit on it or on any other *aimara* in that *ainmane*.<sup>4</sup> When she dies, the corpse is laid in state on that *aimara* (as is that of any deceased member of the *okka*) if it is a *mund mane*.<sup>5</sup>

Except for these *aimaras*, all the other *aimaras* in an *ainmane* are used for general seating. Proper decorum has to be maintained while seated on an *aimara*. No one may ordinarily step on it or across it.

The *kanni kamba* is sacred to the memory of the *karanava* of the *okka* and is ritually saluted as in prayer during auspicious occasions.

4. She may however sit on *aimaras* in any other house.

5. If it is an *othe pore*, the corpse is laid on a cot placed in the east-west direction in the central hall.

Every day, at dawn and at dusk, a lady of the *okka*, dressed in the traditional style, sweeps the floor of the *nellakki nadu bade* and the *kayyale*. She sprinkles the area under the sacred *nellakki bolcha* in the *nellakki nadu bade* with a mixture of cow-dung and water to ritually purify the space, lights the sacred lamp and prays to the ancestors of the *okka*. Others in the *okka* also offer daily prayers to their ancestors at the *nellakki bolcha*. All important rituals, ceremonies (such as weddings), agreements, etc., are made in front of this sacred lamp which is considered a witness to the act. The flame in the sacred lamp is never allowed to go off on its own, because that is inauspicious; nor is it blown out, because exhaled breath would defile it. It is snuffed out with the fingers or the palm of the hand. The term used for ‘putting out’ the flame of the sacred lamp is ‘*dumbchiduva*’, a euphemism which literally means ‘filling it up’.

BELOW LEFT: *Gud* with sacred lamp and ancestor images—*Naliyammanda ainmane*

BELOW: *Gud* with sacred lamp and ancestor images—*Bommanda ainmane*



Where no one lives in the *ainmane*, members of the *okka* who live nearby take turns to sweep the floor and light the *nellakki bolcha*. If there is no member living near the *ainmane*, families of the *okka* who live far away agree to take turns to come to the *ainmane* and light the *nellakki bolcha* at least once a month on *Sankramana*<sup>6</sup> day and/or during festivals and ceremonies. There are also instances where a caretaker who lives in or near the *ainmane* lights the sacred lamp.

On all ceremonial occasions, members offer prayers to the *nellakki bolcha* and to the deities symbolised by the *thuk bolchas* hanging in the *nellakki nadu bade*. They also apply *bhasma* (sacred ash kept in the *bhasma kutt*) on their foreheads.<sup>7</sup>

In the past, when weddings were held in the *ainmane*, the *murtha* (ceremony where the bride/groom is blessed by all those assembled) was held in the *nellakki nadu bade*, with the sacred *nellakki bolcha* as witness to the ceremony. If it was a *mund mane*, the *murtha* of the groom (occasionally of the bride) was held inside the *mund*,<sup>8</sup> while the *murtha* of the bride and the joint *murtha* of the bride and groom were held near the sacred *nellakki bolcha* in the open hallway around the *mund*.

In Gouda *ainmanes*, in preparation for the wedding of a daughter/son of the house, a *hase* (decorative composition) is drawn by a male relative of the bride/groom or by a wellwisher from the village on a blackened part of the wall of the *nellakki nadu bade* near the sacred *nellakki bolcha*. The *hase* has sketches of a house, moon (for a bride), sun (for a groom), and flowers, etc., drawn in white chalk—symbols of a happy married life.

6. *Sankramana* is the first day of the month according to the traditional calendar in Kodagu—the day when the sun passes from one zodiac sign to the next.

7. This is probably a Lingayath tradition from the time of the Kodagu rajas who were Lingayaths.

8. Some *ainmanes* have steps to get down into the *mund* from the open hallway around it.

These days the drawing may be made on a black cloth which is fixed to the wall. We have even heard of a 'readymade' *hase* that is embroidered in white on a black cloth. The bride/groom sits on a mat in front of the *hase* for the preliminary wedding rituals.

Disputes within the *okka* are settled in the hallowed precincts of the *ainmane*. Vows are made in front of the *nellakki bolcha*, with its flame as a witness. In the past, when there were no courts of justice, anyone in the *okka* accused of a crime such as stealing, cheating or lying was forced to swear his innocence in a ritual called '*sathya pramana*' (swearing to the truth of a statement) conducted in front of the *nellakki bolcha*. Eight days prior to the swearing, the *pattedara* or *koravukara* would pray in front of the *nellakki bolcha* holding a strip of white cloth about 4 cm wide and 15 cm long across his eyes, and hang the cloth from the *bhasma kutt*. The suspect was then given eight days to think over the accusation. On the eighth day, at the appointed hour, the piece of cloth was set on fire in



*Hase—Nidyamale  
ainmane*

the presence of all the people assembled in the *nellakki nadu bade*, and the accused was made to touch it and swear that he was not guilty. It is believed that those guilty would invariably admit to the guilt at that point and accept appropriate punishment. If the person swore innocence and was later proved to have been guilty, he was ostracised by the *okka* and that was considered to be very severe punishment.

The daily *meedi*—a ritual offering to the *karanava* of a small portion of the food cooked that day—is placed in the sacred *kanni kombare*.<sup>9</sup> This is indicative of the belief that the spirits of their ancestors, to whom the members of the *okka* feel very close, are present in the *ainmane*. Even if *meedi* is not offered every day, it is offered on special occasions and whenever there is a feast. Women are not allowed to enter the *kanni kombare* during their menstrual periods, when they are considered to be ritually ‘impure’. Some of the rituals related to the *Karanang Kodpa* ceremony are also conducted in the *kanni kombare*.

People visit Thalakaveri on *Thula Sankramana*,<sup>10</sup> the day when Goddess Kaveri is believed to reveal herself in the water that bubbles up and gushes out of the Kundike (the small pond that is the source of the river Kaveri). They collect the fresh *theertha* (sacred water) from the Kundike and some of it is kept in the *kanni kombare* of their *ainmane*. This *theertha* is stored for use during purification and death ceremonies.

### CEREMONIES HELD IN THE AINMANE

Most of the native communities of Kodagu are primarily ancestor worshippers. Their ancestors are their guiding spirits while their elders

9. In rare cases where there is no *kanni kombare*, the *meedi* is kept in the central hall in a niche on its southern wall or near the *nellakki bolcha* or in the kitchen.

10. The first day of Libra, when the sun transits from the zodiac sign of Virgo to Libra.