



SHRI R. KRISHNAN KITNA (POSTHUMOUS)



Shri R. Krishnan Kitna was a distinguished Ajile Bottu artist from the Alu Kurumba community of Vellaricombei village in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu.

2. Born on 05th January, 1973, Shri R. Krishnan began painting in early childhood, inspired by elders who traditionally created this art on walls. His deep interest in the meanings behind motifs, stories and songs shaped a lifelong engagement with Alu Kurumba cultural knowledge, forest traditions and storytelling. Although his formal schooling ended in the eighth standard, his learning continued through practice, observation and close work with community elders, including honey gathering and traditional agriculture.

3. Shri R. Krishnan played a significant role in revitalising and promoting Ajile Bottu painting. From the late 1990s, he participated in surveys and community initiatives with the Keystone Foundation. In 1999, he joined artist trainings led by C.P Ramaswamy Foundation and was identified as the senior master artist who trained other younger community members. Subsequently, he formed the Ajile Bottu artist group in 2004, along with a few other senior Alu Kurumba artists and knowledge holders. He has contributed to several publications on Alu Kurumba community knowledge, such as *Deva Shole* (2008), *Folk Tales from the Nilgiri Hills* (2015) and others. He conducted workshops, exhibitions and training programmes across India, sharing both techniques and the cultural narratives embedded in the paintings.

4. Known for his use of natural pigments in his art form and his skills as a storyteller, Shri R. Krishnan also mentored younger artists through intergenerational training. His work received recognition from institutions including the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre (Chennai), Tribal Research Centre (Ooty), Dakshina Chitra Heritage Museum, KIRTADS (Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development Studies of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), Kerala Lalithkala Akademi, Research Centre for Asiatic Culture, and the Adivasi Academy, among others. He remained dedicated to teaching and sharing Alu Kurumba art forms until his passing in 2025, while in the midst of a training programme in one of the Alu Kurumba villages. His life's work stands as a testament to the resilience of Indigenous knowledge systems and the vitality of Kurumba artistic traditions.

5. Shri R. Krishnan passed away on 20 March, 2025.