



The marriage customs of Toads' Tribe – A Historical perspective

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Abstract

The list of approved Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in Tamil Nadu is given below Kattunaickens, Kolas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyans and Todas. Among the six Primitive Tribal groups, Todas, Paniyans, Kurumbas and Kotas are exclusively living only in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu.

The Toda munds (village) are located in remote regions in high altitudes. Due to introduction of cash crop cultivation in the Nilgiris, the ecosystem of the region has changed dramatically in the last 200 years. Earlier, the Todas grazed their buffaloes in valleys of rolling montane forests separated by grasslands. These grasslands have now been replaced by tea gardens or other invasive species like Eucalyptus. This loss of pastoral lands means that the Todas do not exclusively depend on pastoralism for their sustenance.

According to the Toda's tradition, the bride after marriage stays with her husband for a month or two and then goes to her parents place. And when she becomes pregnant, a joint ceremony takes place called the bow and arrow ceremony.

The groom goes to the forest and makes a bow and arrow from the tender stems of the tree and presents it to his bride. If the bride accepts it, that confirms that the baby in her womb is his and she accepts him as her husband.

Key Words: Primitive Tribal Groups, Indigenous, Munds, Bow and Arrow ceremony, Pastoralism

Introduction:

The Todas call themselves **awll(zh)**, meaning "the men" or "the people". The etymology of the word "Toda" remains uncertain. The Toda names for the other traditional Nilgiri peoples are **kwehnhf** for the Kotas, **kurb** for the Kurumbas, **erri** for the Irulas, and **mauf** for the Badagas.

Todas are one of the six indigenous tribes inhabiting the high mountains of the Nilgiris in the Western Ghats. The Todas are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group with around 1500 members. Based mainly on the Toda language's linguistic affinities with the common Dravidian languages of southern India, it has been suggested or even assumed that the Toda origin in the Nilgiris is not more than 2000 years old.

However, scientists at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru and Inter-University Accelerator Centre, New Delhi, conjecture that the discovery of evidence of "intense fire activity", along with signs of the presence of humans, herbivores, and grasslands in the Sandynallah basin in the upper Nilgiris in the Western

Ghats 3500 years ago is indicative of the movement of a pastoralist community along with their herds from a lower to the cooler higher realms to cope with the prevailing arid climate.

Review of Literature

Since the early 19th century, a great deal of misinformation has been generated about the origins and socio-economic institutions of the Toda people of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. But, for over a century now, following the arrival in the Nilgiris in 1901 of Cambridge University scholar W.H.R. Rivers, much painstaking anthropological and linguistic research has been accomplished. This has resulted, inter alia, in such books as Rivers' *The Todas* (1906), M.B. Emeneau's *Toda Songs* (1971), *Ritual Structure and Language Structure of the Todas* (1974) and *Toda Grammar and Texts* (1984), and this writer's *The Toda of South India: A New Look* (1986) and *Between Tradition and Modernity and Other Essays on the Toda of South India* (1998).

Marriage customs of Toda's

With a multiplicity of customs and rituals attached to its celebration, 'weddings' sometimes take peculiar and interesting forms in the mosaic of cultures constituting India. We look at courtship and marriage customs in some Indian tribes.

Capture, elopement, refusal and service are not words one would usually associate with a marriage, let alone a happy one, but a cursory look at some of India's tribal practices might make you think otherwise. Sexual relations and relations of love receive the sanction of the community through a bond of marriage—different kinds of festivities and rituals are attached to this celebration—which is brought about several factors ranging from historical developments, economy, geographical location, etc.

Toda clan system:

Membership of Toda society is hereditary, and the community is traditionally an endogamous one. Toda society is divided into two major endogamous divisions: Tawrrta(r)sh, with ten extant exogamous patrilineal clans, and Taihhfill(zh)y, with five.

These two major divisions of Toda society have distinctly different functions in relation to the sacred dairy-temples. Tawrrta(r)sh are the traditional owners of the to the most sacred of all Toda dairies, while only Taihhfill(zh)y males may perform the priestly duties at such fee institutions.

The Todas have very definite restrictions on the freedom of individuals to marry. One of the most important of these is that which prevents intermarriage between the Tartharol and the Teivaliol. These groups are endogamous divisions of Toda people. Although a Teivali man is strictly prohibited from marrying a Tarthar woman, he may take a woman of this division to live with him at his village, the man being known as the mokhthodvaiol of the woman. This connexion, which will be more fully considered the end of this chapter, may be regarded as a recognised form of marriage, but it differs from the orthodox form in that the children of the union belong to the division of the mother. They do not, however, belong to her clan, but to that of her legal husband. Similarly, the same kind of connexion may be formed between a Tarthar man and a Teivali woman, but in this case the woman is not allowed to live at the village of the mokhthodvaiol, who may either visit her occasionally or go to live at her village.

Kinship and Marriage

The members of his own clan are not the only kin whom a man is not allowed to marry. The Todas have a general term, piiliol, for those relatives whose intermarriage is prohibited. The term is applied by a man not only to the women whom he may not marry, but also to the families in general into which he may not marry; thus a man may speak of other men as his piiliol, meaning by this that he may not marry their sisters. This, however, is only a loose way of using the word, and, putting on one side this sense with which the word may be used, the following are the piiliol of a man:--

- i. The daughters of his father's brothers, whom he would call akka or enda, according to age.
- ii. The daughters of his mother's sisters, also akka or enda.
- iii. The sisters of his father and conversely the daughters of his sisters, ie., his mumi and his wankugh.
- iv. The daughters of the sisters of his father's father, i.e., of the sisters of pian. The relatives under the first head will be members of the same clan as the man, and the prohibition of marriage between piiliol under this head may be regarded as a restriction on either clanship or kinship.

Case Study in Avalanche:

The wedding took place on February 1st at Mulli Manth (a Toda settlement) near Avalanche, 30 kilometers from Ooty. Todas use the word “VilAmbuSathram” instead of the word marriage. To find out about this, Professor C. Chandrasekar, Department of History, Government Arts College, Dharmapuri, along with his research student V. Seenan and son C. Elandhirayan P. Thirupathi and R. Ramesh conducted a field study. The Todas Manth in Ooty, which can be called Garden Manth, has five months. One of them is Mullinadu Manth.

The VilAmbuSathram was held there for the groom from the Garden Manth and the bride from the Muthanadu Manth. The VillAmbuSathram means that the elders get engaged to the two as per their clan customs at a young age. Getting engaged is similar to getting married in their custom. Therefore, they will live separately after that. When the woman is seven months pregnant, the man calls his clan elders and announces that he will perform the Vilambu Sastra. If the woman does not become pregnant, the Vilambu Sastra will not be performed until the end, but she is allowed to start a family. They can start their life as a family. The Vilambu Sastra festival is celebrated on the first day as usual, where the elders will come and perform their rituals. The second day is the most important. In the morning, the bride and groom should come dressed in their traditional attire only.

Then the groom should go to the Toda temple in the soil and worship. A tree is carved in the shape of a square lampshade from a Naga tree or a Aduva tree near the mand with a small axe. A lamp made of ghee is lit on that tree. It is lit by the woman's father, a person of authority. At the same time, the groom should go to the nearby oasis and cut a plant called Perra in the local language and prepare it like a bow and arrow. The plant should be cut, peeled like a stalk, twisted into a rope and tied. They should not be tied with a separate rope. When they are tied and come to their hut, the bride stands near the Naga tree. Giving the bow in the bride's hand is called the Villambu Shastra. Through this, the purpose of this is to make the whole hut and the world know that the woman is the father of the fetus growing in her womb. After this, they consider this as marriage. There is no separate marriage. It is noteworthy that they do not follow the customs of the plains people like wearing a Thali or a Metti. After giving the bow to the Naga tree, the woman should sit and look at the lamp until her eyes water. When she looks at it, it is customary to pray for better future for her, says Mr. Pete Rose, the head of the Garden Mant.

Also, there is no dowry or giving of seethanam. The people of the tribe, according to their convenience, give the bride and groom whatever they have, such as household items and money, as a wedding gift. They should start their lives with that, says Manikandan alias NartheKuttan, head of Muthamad Mant. After this ceremony, the elders will sit separately and the women separately in a row in a meadow in the village mand. The groom should also fall at their feet and seek blessings. When they fall at their feet, they will take their big toe and place it on the bride and groom's head and bless them. After that, like a festival, men will gather in a circle and sing songs in the Todas language. We also see women singing songs. There are no such marriage practices in other communities. Some people misunderstand about this system and even propose the wrong idea that they start a family separately and get married after getting pregnant in the name of Villambu Shastra. The researchers should ask the people of the area about the

research and publish anything after reaching a clear conclusion. Otherwise, such misconceptions will lead to a misunderstanding of a society.

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