

## Social and Economic Life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity

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### ABSTRACT:

It is intended to highlight about the Toda community in Tamil Nadu viz. South India as a major tribal of Indian civilization from the remote past when the people belonging to different races and ethnic groups settled, and a composite culture was grown out of their living in close proximity for millennia. In the first part of the topic will hold a historical overview and some important measures. In second, a demographical and geographical syndrome will be expressed. Tamilnadu is meeting ground of diverse ethnic and cultural streams as well as the principal migrants have been the Proto-Australoid group, the Dravidians etc. In third, the theoretical understanding with the process of interaction between the Tribal and the non-Tribal is being carried on in Toda society even to this day. It is also explored in forth part in the topic that some factors witnessing to develop feudal behavior and socio-economic and political formation. Lastly, it will give a picture of realistic mind along with a kind of paternal bureaucracy as a measure of reconciling the internal contradictions within the ruling class along with a coercive authority and it manifested the ruling class interest *vis-à-vis* state. Moreover, some new findings and conclusions are to be drawn at the end.

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### I. INTRODUCTION:

The Toda tribe is a pastoral group inhabiting Nilgiri Hills of Southern India. The word Toda has been from the name 'Tundra' - the sacred tree of the Todas. The Ethnographers and Physical anthropologist hold a special attention in Todas as they belong to the Caucasoid racial stock that the same area of Proto-Australoid group like Badaga, Kota, Kurumba and Iralu. They preferred a tradition of polyandrous marriage. The language of Toda is very close to Tamil. Numerical strength of Toda population recently shows a sharp decline. Government of India has taken some important measures for increasing the population of this tribe. Geographically Setting The Nilgiris or Blue Mountains situated eleven degrees north of the equator, is one among the twenty one Nilgiris has been derived from the Sanskrit nila meaning blue, and giri meaning mountain within 71 districts of Tamil Nadu. It is encompassed by the lowlands of Tamil Nadu in the East, Karnataka in the North and Kerala in the West. The Nilgiris extends over an area of 2549 square kilometres (India, 1990:817). The administrative headquarters of the district is Udhamandalam more commonly known to the plains people as 'Ooty'. The district consists of several ranges of hills including a number of impressive peaks among which the Dodabetta is the highest. Ooty, the 'Queen of Hills stations' is a

favourite resort of the lowlanders during summer. The Nilgiris District comprises of four taluks Ooty, Coonoor, Kotagiri and Gudalur, of which Ooty is the largest and Kotagiri the smallest. The district is delimited into three State Assembly constituencies, They are, Ooty, Coonoor and Gudalur, the last having been reserved for the scheduled castes.

### II. OBJECTIVES:

The main objectives of the study are-

1. To study the traditional socio-cultural system of the Toda.
2. To find out the causes of changes.
3. To identify the areas where changes are taking place.
4. To find out causes of continuity of some aspects of religious life of the Toda.

### Economic and Material Culture

#### Occupation:

The Todas are pastoral tribe of India, one of the classic example of pastoral life. All their economic activity is centred around their buffaloes. They rear only buffaloes for milk. They made various products from milk such as ghee, cheese, butter, curd etc. which they sold or exchanged with the neighbouring tribal communities. Thus, the Badaga provide them with grains and other farm products and also act as middlemen between the

milk – selling .Toda and traders from the lowlands. The Badaga also pay an annual tribute of grains to the Toda. This has always been done in recognition of the supposedly original ownership of the region by the Toda and also in fear of Toda sorcery. The Kota, also of the Nilgiri Hills, is an artisan tribe and supplies the Toda with pottery and ironware and ceremonial objects. In return, the Toda give them milk and milk products and also the flesh of sacrificed buffaloes. The Toda have no weapons. Their degenerate clubs bows and arrows have ceremonial functions. The Kota supplies them with all the utensils they need in the domestic work and dairy operations. Socio-economically a symbiotic relationship is followed among the tribes of Nilgiri hills. The Todas enjoy the highest social status.

The dairy work is absolutely laid by the mails. Females are not permitted to enter the dairy house because of a taboo. Females are totally engaged in the household work like rearing of the children, fetching of the drinking water, collecting of fuels from forest and so on. Previously, the males used to cook, but now this task has been transferred to the females.

#### **Food:**

The Todas are purely vegetarians. Their favourite dish is rice, boiled in milk locally known as 'Jagari'. They also prefer curd, churned milk, plain milk. But they are trying to change in their food habit. Generally, the life styles of Todas are mainly based on pastoral economy. Occasionally, they eat meat of deer, but other meat is forbidden for them. Both the males and females of the Toda community are addicted to liquor. The habits of smoking also prevail among both the sexes.

#### **Settlement pattern:**

A Toda village is situated on the hill slopes. Generally, a village consists of ten to twelve huts. The huts are of two types. The first type is half-barrel shaped long huts measuring about **15 feet 12 feet**. The inner structure of the hut is made up of bamboo-splits or canes, over which dry leaves and branches of the tree are placed. A single low door is present at the front. Inside of the hut is obviously dark and stuffy. A hut is divided into two distinct portions – the inside room is used as workshop where the females do not get an entry. The outside room is for living and other household work. The second type of hut is not barrel – shaped. It is circular in shape and made of stone. The roof is very high and constricted gradually from the rounded wall. The type of hut is used to keep the sacred buffaloes.

#### **Dress and Ornaments:**

The Todas are simple people. The males use a long strip of white loin cloth which has to be thrown over the shoulder, after covering the waist. This is the traditional garment of the Toda. Sometimes they use colorful cloth for covering the upper part of their body and it is also found that women use long thick cloth covering almost the entire body. Nowadays, females have been found to use stitched garments. These are colorful blouses having shirt like lower part women like to decorate their bodies with tattoo marks. They used different types of ornaments like earring, nose-ring, nose pin, finger- ring, chain etc., which are usually made on silver, copper and iron. The Toda women are expert needle - workers. They can stitch fine designs on cotton cloths are woolen shawls, especially with red and black threads. Recently their embroideries have attracted the tourists and the community has been economically benefited.

#### **Social Organization:**

Todas are endogamous i.e. marriage occur exclusively within the tribe. They are divided into two sub-divisions called 'moiety'-Tartharol and Teivaliol. The members of Tartharol consider themselves superior than the Teivaliol. Therefore, the former remains in charge of the sacred buffaloes, whereas the workers come from the Teivaliol to after the herds. After the death of the father, eldest son inherits the rights exercised by him. It is also customary that the entire property of the family is distributed among the sons. Like the Hindu family, in the Toda society daughter do not have the right to property when there are sons, but if there is no son or male child in the family then the property is distributed among daughters. Even they can enjoy this property after their marriage. Sometimes it is observed that a portion of the property is given to the wife by her husband. But after her death the property automatically goes to the possession of her sons. Eventually, it is seen that the entire property of the family is distributed among the sons. The eldest son assumes the charge of the household after the death of the father and discharges his responsibilities in consultation with his mother.

#### **Clan:**

An excellent example of tribal organization based on two moieties is provided by the Toda of the Nilgiri Hills. Each moiety is sub – divided into a number of clans. The Tarther possesses twelve clans while the Teivali contains six clans. Each clan is exogamous, patrilineal and territorial in nature. A number of villages are found to be grouped under a clan where the names of the leaders of the respective village. Each clan further shows the existence of two

sub clans – Kudr and Polm. The Kudr regulates the ceremonial aspect of the clan, whereas the Polm keeps an account of finance. Clan divisions are seemed due to their bewildering communal ideology and manner and this division mainly based as per their labour division.

#### **Family:**

Generally, Todas have polyandrous type of families. A women with with her multiple husbands and children usually form this type of family. If the husbands are brothers, the family is called ‘fraternal polyandrous family’. Besides, compound families are found among the Todas. In this type, apart from a common wife, the husbands keep their individual wives to live together with their children.

#### **Marriage:**

Todas practice ‘fraternal polyandry’, wife of a brother is regarded as the wife of all brothers. Once the community used to practice female infanticide. Therefore, the number of females became gradually less than the number of males. As a reason of disparity in the ratio between male and female, polyandry got a sanction in the society. When the new system of law and order was introduced by the British, infanticide became a crime, and the sex-ratio got more or less equalized. Now monogamy is more or less possible in this society. Still go on practicing polyandry as a traditional custom. At the same time, availability of more females has urged the males to keep wives on individual basis and such practice has given rise to the compound families.

#### **Inheritance of Property:**

Authority in a family rests on the eldest male. Property passes from father to legal sons according to the rule of inheritance. Females have no right on property. There are three types of property among the Toda – Personal property, Family property and communal property. Personal property includes the clothes and ornaments. Family property comprises of hut, utensils and buffaloes. Besides, the homestead, pasture ground and sacred buffaloes those owned by the clan under the Communal property. On the other hand, inheritance of family property, the eldest as well as the youngest son get the privilege; both of them own one buffalo extra.

#### **Village Council:**

Administration of Toda village rests on a council, known as *Noym*. The Toda council is consisting of five members. Of these five members, three come from Tarthar moiety; one comes from Teivali moiety and the other comes from neighboring tribe Badaga. The representation of Tarthar is greater than the Teivali on account of its superiority.

Although theft and robbery are unknown to Toda, the other disputes like criminal offences and unsocial activities are dealt by the council. Besides, it organizes and conducts the communal ceremonies. Village is a primary level scope where many important roles are consisting till in the pace of modern.

#### **Death and Funeral:**

Cremation is the tradition among the Todas. The death body is covered with a new cloth and food and ornaments are also provided with the body. There are two types of funeral rites-Green and Dry. The Green funeral is performed immediately after death. In the green funeral, a few buffaloes are immolated with a belief that those buffaloes will serve the diseased soul in the other world. After cremation, pieces of charred bones and hair are collected. On the other hand, Dry funeral is performed after a few months. Dry funeral is usually organized collectively, where the chief-mourners of different dead persons join together. Funeral works are also shows their identification in society.

#### **Religion:**

Religion plays a strong role in society. The Todas are found to worship different gods and goddesses along with a large number of spirits. Of them, Tiekirzi is the most powerful goddess-the creator of earth and mankind. Numerous ghosts and evil spirits are considered to be responsible for bringing unnatural death, diseases, epidemic and loss of milk in buffaloes. The people have devised different rites, witchcraft and sorcery to get rid of them. The Goddess Tokisy is the most important as she is considered the creator and supporter of the people and their social and ritual institutions. Womenfolk are not allowed within the precincts of the dairy, temple as it is believed that they would corrupt the sanctity of the dairy. An egalitarian thinking also found in their society.

### **III. CONCLUSION:**

From the over and above, it is seemed that the traditional patterns of interaction and the changes that have occurred due to various influencing factors had been presented in the above analysis. For both the tribes it has been a transition from subsistence economy to that of the market. The emergence of surplus peasants and servicemen among the tribals is the result of forces of modernization including the efforts of planned development. The modern occupations provide cash to the tribals and what is more significant is that the tribals who lived an isolated life, zealously preserving their own set of values, were brought close to the more advanced people. This sort of culture contact was sure to have

an impact on the social matrix in general and, in the long run, their habits of life. This is true in the case of the Todas and good day will come when understanding when proper study of the topic have been completed.

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