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Rituals of the Tribes of Nilgiris- Special reference to Todas and Kurumbas

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Abstract

Tribal communities live in about 15 per cent of the country's land in various ecological and geoclimatic conditions ranging from plains, forest, hills and in accessible .While some tribal communities have adopted a main stream way of life at one end of the spectrum, there are 75 PRIMITIVE TRIBAL GROUPS (PTGs), at the other who are characterized by

1. *A pre-agriculture level of technology*
2. *A stagnant or declining population*
3. *Extremely low literacy and*
4. *A subsistence level of economy*

According to Tamilnadu Government, there are 36 Scheduled Tribes, among them the Government of Tamilnadu has Identified 6 Communities as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs).

They are:

1. *Todas*
2. *Kotas*
3. *Various Groups of Kurumbas*

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4. Various Groups of Irulas

5. Paniyans

6. Kattunayakans

All these six Primitive Tribal Groups live in the Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu. All the Six Tribals have Inter Cultural Exchanges Among four PTGs. Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas and Paniyans live exclusively in the Nilgiris District. The other two, Irulas and Kattunayakans, live in Nilgiris district as well as other districts of Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: *Cultural Exchanges*, *Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas and Paniyans*, *Irulas and Kattunayakans.*

Introduction

TODA

The Toda society is a patrilineage that is descent group whose membership is based upon a rule of patrilineal descent. Patrilineal descent is a cultural principle which automatically affiliates a child at birth through his father to a descent group that consists of all kinsmen who are related to him through his male ancestors. The Toda community is divided into two endogamous groups, namely:

1. Tharthazoll
2. Thevelioll

Todas do not have specific term for these two endogamous divisions and in Anthropology these two divisions are usually referred to as “moieties”. Moiety can be defined as one of two clans or two phratries. A culture has moieties if it has only two clans or phratries, and every individual is member of one or the other. Each group claims themselves to be superior to other. The differences between these two endogamous divisions can be differentiated at a territorial (Toda munds) level. As per the Toda custom, the Toda women belonging to Thevelioll avoids visiting to the Tharthazoll. The restriction is said to be due to the fact that on one occasion a Thevelioll woman on a visit to a Tharthozoll mund, folded up a cloth, and placed it under her putkuli (Toda shawl) as if it was a boby. When food was served, she asked for some more food for the child, and on receiving it, exhibited the cloth. The Tharthzolls, not appreciating the mild joke, decided to degrade all Thevelioll women, Even today, though the Todas belonging to Tharthazoll are eagar to visit the women belong to Thevelioll, the Thevelioll avoid visiting the munds where Tharthazoll live.

The Toda distinguishes two kinds of relationship within a family, consanguinal (through marriage) which integrates their emotional base. The Todas child learns his first

lessons of family etiquette and manners besides the knowledge of buffalo herding and of late about the techniques of growing different crops on their agricultural land. The male members in the family do the work of milking the buffaloes, supplying the milk to co-operative societies, while the Toda women see to domestic chores and agricultural operations besides their traditional embroidery work. In a Toda family the elder man, being the husband, father of the children and the eldest brother of the extended family in the head of the household and occupies a position of authority as a decision – making force. The women do not have the legal rights to share the property of their parents except allowing their husbands to accept dowry in the form of buffaloes. The women are not allowed to participate in their family religious activities and they have no role in the political sphere of the traditional Toda council. The Todas women are excluded from any share in the work of the dairy connected with the sacred buffaloes, but they are also prohibited from any part in the milking of the ordinary buffaloes or in the churning of the milking of the ordinary buffaloes or in the churning of the milk which is performed solely by males. The dominant high status of neighbouring Hindu and Christian women influenced many Toda women and they decided in their self help group meetings that they must changes the attitudes of their men towards women and also ask for legal rights to parental property for women in the family. Toda women reminisce over the past, when they were exempt from household chores and duties, and she was served by her man, whose duty was to prepare and cook the meals, and it was also her privilege to be carried on the shoulders of her husband when she made visits or journeys from one mund to another mund. With the feelings that they (women) cannot change the chauvinistic attitude of men the Toda women even approached Government authorities to reform their customs and to enhance the low status of Toda women". The Toda women recently joined The Hill Women's Front (Malayaaga Maathar Munnani) with demands of high status for women in Toda society and for their basic needs including marketing facility for their embroidery. A few Todas who embraced Christianity, in order to avoid traditional rituals like pre-puberty defloration, negligence of formal school education, have established their own families away from the traditional family organization. The family life of the Christian Todas is to a greater extend different from the traditional Toda family in the functions of enculturation and socialization of the child.

KURUMBAS

Broadly speaking, ritual is any prescribed way of performing some act. Ritual is regarded as being symbolically more complex and involving more deep social and socio-

psychological concerns. Ritual also means a single at of a religious performance that is ceremony. with ritual is often used interchangeably. It is usually regarded by some anthropologists as a category of behavior on which case it may be defined as a form of ceremony characterized by its reference to mystical or religious notions, lands or agencies. Now in this chapter we will discuss about Life Cycle Rituals among the Kurumbas of Nilgiris district.

ALU KURUMBAS

In every Alu Kurumbar settlement one or two small huts are built for the exclusive use of women during the period of menstruation and delivery. The first delivery takes place in pregnant women's parental house. During the delivery period, the pregnant women has to stay in secluded hut, by using as bed the ele-cunde-mara tree structed for the purpose is again thatched by using manandu leaves and bambiullu dry grass.

Alu kurumba trained Dai (mid-wife) conducts delivery. The pollution, after the child birth ends seven days. On eighth day mother and baby returns to home and mother's brother and his wife perform a purificatory ritual. He prepares the sacred water by dissolving the bark of tuda tree, tudapatta and spray the solution on the mother and baby infront of settlement elders and baby's father's clan people.

When a girl attains puberty, the Alu Kurumbas call her as Keriyayidho or doddamanu siyayidhu'. She will stay in a separate, seclusion hut for 15 days. The mother provides food three times a day in a plate and tumbler which are kept separately in the hut. On 16th day, the girl is given bath, returns to her home, gets a new clothes, new ear rings, nose ring and bangles.

For marriage the parents of the boy will take initiative. The parents of the boy meet the headman called 'Mudali' and with his permission they will go to the house where an eligible girl is residing. The parents ask the girl's father, "Its there any young cow or goat in your house for sale. The father of the girl understood that they are asking for a bride. If he agrees and say yes I have cow'. then the parents of the boy after 15 days again visit the same house and accept the feast The Alu kurumbas have two death ceremonies, one at the time of death, they elaborate funeral rites and another called 'Gurumane' which they perform once in a year or once in two years by the whole "The Alu kurumbas believe in two souls, one is the Big soul (dodda ujeva). and small soul (kunna ujevu). At the occurrence of death, the Big soul along with the visible shadow leaves in the dead body until the moment of cremation. Then the small soul is said to quit the body and take up its home in a long water-worm people

which after every death is placed by the Aim Kurumbas inside a dolmen (nalupadi) located near the cemetery. Here, the small soul dwells, but it may also leave its abode and hover around, although not however beyond the boundaries of the cemetery. The separation of the small soul, which is bounds to the earth, from the Big soul lasts till the celebration of the dry funeral and then the small soul and the invisible shadow are said to unite themselves with the Big soul and the visible shadow to form an inseparable unit for ever".

Mullu kurumbas

The Mullu Kurumbas strictly observe pre-delivery rituals and post delivery rituals to pregnant women. The child-birth takes place in pregnant mother's parents house itself, but the pregnant women is considered to be under pollution for 21 days until she is given a birth. On 22nd day the mother and child are given sacred bath by using stream water. The name giving ceremony is performing during 7th month after delivery. For the first child, the name is chosen by the maternal uncle. It is not the practice with Mullu Kurumbas to have cradle for the child. In third gear of the child, it is customary to have the tonsure (head shared) ceremony for both male and female children and the ear-lobes pierced ceremony is to be performed for only female child. For naming ceremony and ear-piercing ceremony a non-vegetarian feast is given to close relatives and friends.

When a girl attains puberty, she is asked to stay in secluded place in one corner of the verandah of the house for 7 days. During all these 7 days, she is given a good item called by them as 'pittu' made up of rice flour and jiggery. On 8th day, she is given an oil bath. The maternal uncle plays an important role in performing puberty rituals on 8th day by presenting new clothes to her and bearing all expenditure of vegetarian feast to invitees.

BETTA KURUMBAS AND JENU KURUMBAS

Betta kurumbas and Jenu Kurumbas resemble on in performing life cycle rituals. They observe pre-delivery and post-delivery rituals to pregnant women. The first delivery takes place in pregnant woman's house. After the child birth, naming ceremony is observed on 21st day, and tonsure ceremony is observed on 21st day, and tonsure ceremony is observed for male and female children inside the community temple. Puberty rites area observed for females. When a girl attains puberty, she is made to live in a new hut built by her elder brother for the occasion and there visited by her relations. After 9 days she has a bath and is allowed to return home. Marriage occurs after puberty and the match is made by the boy's marriage. During the Marriage, the girl's mother provides a tali and new clothes for the boy and the

latter's parents contribute new clothes and brass ornaments for the girl. Under erected panda: amidst traditional music, the groom ties tali around the neck of the bride. A non-vegetarian feast be given to all the invitees. The expenditure of marriage feast is by both sides in marriage. Nuptial ceremony is performed at bride mother's residence. Both Betta Kurumba and Jenu Kurumbas bury the dead. Now a days if very old people die, they are creamated. After the burial, the buried place is marked with a stone. The way the funeral rites celebrated by the Jenu Kurumbas are unique when compared with Betta Kurumbas.

URALI KURUMBAS

Urali kurumbas are in small number living only in Pandalur taluk, They speak Kannada language and having close resemblance with those Kurumbas who are dwelling in Bandipur wild life sanctuary of Karnataks state. The Urali Kurumbas strictly follow the concept of purity and pollution. They never observe any pro-delivery and post delivery rituals but restrict the solitary movements of the pregnant woman. The delivery takes place in secluded hut and they obseve 15 days birth pollution.

Pregnancy and Birth

The major relief comes to a young wife when she becomes pregnant. Her first pregnancy is in direct proportion to her place in family and the pregnant woman whose child is the presumptive asset to her family, in watched over with great solicitude from the sixth month onwards, the pregnant woman, referred as vorapendatti, expresses desire for certain edibles like rare roots, birds, animals. If these could be procured from the forest, the husband satisfies her wishes. If these could be procured from the forest, the husband satisfies her wishes. The pregnant woman count ten moons to pregnancy, counting from the last menstruation. She sometimes keeps wooden sticks as counters. If the parents of the pregnant woman are alive and could afford to maintain their daughter during and after child birth the daughter is taken their home for the first delivery. If the parent's house is in the same village she just goes to their house, if she has to walk several Kilometers to reach her perent's house, either the husband or her parents accompany her, otherwise, the delivery takes place in the house of husband.

The baby is born. The women who are assisting the delivery throw the cold water on the baby to provoke crying. The baby cried. Usually the cord is tied which stops the blood flow through it, and cut with a piece of bamboo and the baby began to breathe. A piece of cloth burnt to ashes mixed with castor oil is applied to the child's naval cord cut till such time

as the cut dries up. The Irula women know that the cord contains no neves, and cutting of it is does not hurt either mother or child. The cord is considered to be good thing and is buried under the honey pot placed at the entrance of the hut. The women who assists the delivery puts the placenata in an earthern pot and is buried with in the solitary hut at the opposite side of the entrance in the ground, which may not be dug by animals.

The ritual of naming the child also takes place on 7th day at child's mother's house. The Irula term for this ceremony is peridugadu or more often 'gunju thumburadi. The priest, village irula head, mother's brother, child's mother's mother and few close affinal relatives and friends were called for the ceremony. The function starts at about 5.00 p.m. The mother will sit with a child at one corner facing the entrance door of the house and before them the ceremony taken place. After litting the oil lamp, the priest places a small pot of honey on the ground. He drops the grains of ragi and samai into the honey which represents the child on the honey. Then he enquires the father of the child, the name to be kept to the child. After hearing from the father, the priest announces that name thrice aloud by keeping his mouth closer to the honey pot. he puts 'vibuthi' sacred ash on the face of the baby. Now the child is named.Then mother's brother presents 4 bangles to the mother, referred as Volai. She immediately puts to the child each hand two bangles. The female child will continue to wear the bangles throughout her life, if she never becomes widow, whereas a male child removes them at the age of three. Then the mother's mother presents bamboo-made-cradle for child's sleeping use. Then the father of the child takes the child in his lap and ties a piece of unbleached cotton black thread called as nodukkanni round his/her waist. If the child is male he will continue the nodukanni throughout his life, while if the child is female, she has to remove this on the day of her puberty.

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