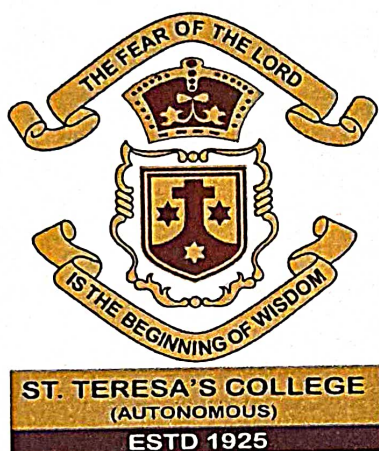


# **PRESERVING TRADITIONS: UNRAVELING THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE OF TUDAVAR**

A project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a B.A. Degree in History

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam

Affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam



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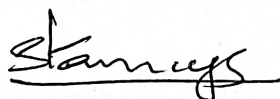
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**MARCH 2024**

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*K 8*

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project titled "Preserving traditions: unravelling the vernacular architecture of Tudavar" is being submitted by name in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a B.A. Degree in History of St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, is a bonafide record of the work done by the students under my supervision and guidance. No part of this work has been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree



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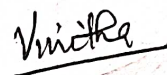
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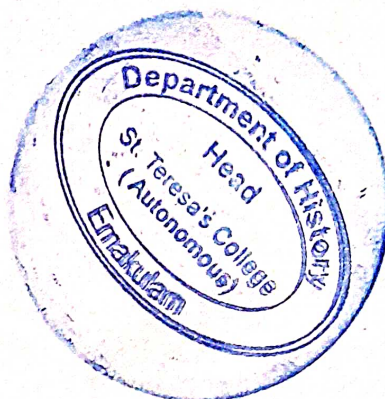


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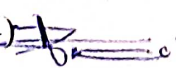


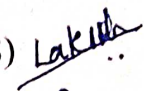



## DECLARATION

We hereby declare that this project titled "Preserving traditions: unravelling the vernacular architecture of Tudavar" is an original work done by us under the guidance of Dr. Vinita T Tharakan , Associate Professor, Department of History, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous). No part of this work has been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree.

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We take this opportunity to thank our guide Dr. Vinitha T Tharakan, Associate Professor, Department of History, St Teresa's College, for her continual encouragement and exceptional guidance throughout this project. She has gone to great lengths to go over the project and make any necessary changes when needed.

We are grateful to Dr. stancy S, Head of the Department, for her unwavering support and guidance. We would like to thank our class teacher Dr. Vinitha T Tharakan for her guidance and valuable suggestions.

We would also like to express our gratitude towards the staffs of special library for tribal culture ,Udhagamandalam,Tamil Nadu and Kirtads ethnological museum,kerala for allowing us to utilise their library. We would like to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the respondents for cooperating with us.

Last but not the least, we like to thank our families, friends, and classmates for their ceaseless support throughout the process of completing this project.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

India, a diverse land, boasts a rich tapestry of indigenous communities known as tribes or Adivasis. Scattered throughout the country, these tribes play a crucial role in preserving unique traditions, languages, and lifestyles. The term “tribe,” derived from the Latin word “Tribus,” originally denoted one of the three territorial groups that united to form Rome. India, often called a melting pot of tribes and races, hosts the world’s second-largest concentration of tribal population after Africa. As per W. H. R Rivers defined a tribe as” a social group of simple kind, the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government, and act together for such common purposes warfare”

Population comprising approximately 700 Scheduled Tribes, these communities constitute 8.6% of India’s population as per the 2011 census. Characterized by simplicity and distinct customs, traditions, and practices, tribes have historically lived in isolation in the country’s highlands and forests. Geographical isolation has defined their existence for thousands of years, with minimal communication with mainstream centers of civilization.

Today, as India evolves, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate tribes into the societal mainstream as rightful members deserving respect. This integration is essential for fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society that appreciates the rich cultural contributions of these indigenous communities. There are a numbers of tribes in India ,spread over different parts at different levels of socioeconomic development . They live all over the country from the foothills of the Himalaya to the land tip of Lakshadweep and from the plains of Gujarat to the hills in the north east.The prominent tribes in north India are the Asura ,the Saora, Oraon , Gond, Santhal ,Bhill in the central India . The south India tribes include Kurumba ,Irula ,Panga and Toda that is located in Tamil Nadu .

Tamil Nadu is located in the southern part of India. The Indian Ocean bounds this State to the east and south and by the states of Andhra Pradesh to the north, Kerala to the west, And Karnataka to the northwest Nilgiri located at the tri junction of three states and connect the Western Ghats with the Eastern Ghats. The Name ‘Nilgiris’ means Blue hills (Neelam – Blue and giri – Hill or Mountain) the first mention of this name has been found in the Silappadikaram. The state of Tamil Nadu has 32 districts. Among these 32 District, the Nilgiris

district has the largest population of tribes. In Nilgiri district there are six particularly vulnerable tribal Groups they are Todas, Irulars, Kotas, Kurumbas, Paniyas, and Kattunayakans. Todas are one of the tribes that live in the Nilgiris. The population of this tribe is about 2000 mund currently. The Todas live in 125 different settlements called “called “orlwash” in their native language, and other peopl” in Nilgiris. Their language is e generally call it as Toda language. Toda language is a protoDravidian language and does not have a script. This community consists of 14 clans. All the people living in a settlement belong to one family, and they are considered to be related to each other as they have a common ancestor. One clan people may occupy more than one settlement, but everyone in a settlement belongs to one clan/community. The Toda tribes have a close connection with nature, and most of the people are involved in buffalo rearing. This tribe has adapted to various cultures, education, and technological changes. Though they are modernized to some extent, they still believe and follow their customs and rituals.

## **Objective**

India is one of the few nations of tribal concentration and is also said to have the largest tribal population. Tribal's in India reflect the wider kaleidoscopic nature of Indian society, which in one hand is rooted in ancient traditions whereas on the other hand forces of modernization are working in tandem. Toda tribe is the most ancient and unusual tribe of Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu. They have their own language, secretive customs and regulations.

This dissertation concentrates on vernacular architecture of Tudava also known as todas who follows an exceptional culture and have a diverse form of tradition.

This includes:

- To study the historical background of the Tudava through books and online articles, how they formed a council and administrated themselves.
- To unearth the unheard history of Toda through the perspective of the present generation of the community.
- Unraveling the vernacular architectonics, planning and construction of residential dwellings also known as munds of the Toda community.
- To examine the traditional art of the Toda tribe which is the Toda embroidery, a form of hereditary art passed down through generations.

- A detail investigation on the ceremonies, festivals and customs followed by the Todas.
- To understand the social, economic, and political aspect of the Tudava community.
- To analyze the cultural perception of Tudava society.

## Literature Review

As mentioned earlier this dissertation focuses on the Toda community and their vernacular architecture. The Todas are acknowledged through numerous names like Tudas, Taudava and Tadar<sup>1</sup>. Toda families reside in permanent villages commonly known as “Mund” or “Madd”<sup>2</sup>. The earliest known use of the word Toda is in the 1830s. In 1834, the word Toda was found in the writing of H. Jervis. Toda is borrowed from Kannada<sup>3</sup>.

Books such as *Anthropology Of The Todas And Kotas Of The Nilgiri Hills; And Of The Brahmans, Kammalans, Pallis And Pariahs Of Madras City* written by Edgar Thurston and *Travels Amongst The Todas Or The Study Of A Primitive Tribe In South India, Their History, Character, Customs, Religion, Infanticide, Polyandry, Language; With Outlines Of The Tuda Grammar* by William E. Marshall helped greatly in understanding the architecture features of Toda construction. *The Toda Landscape Exploration In Cultural Ecology* by Tarun Chhabra and *Caste And Tribes Of Southern India* by Edgar Thurston provides an outlook into the historical background of the Todas. were studied for understanding the main and subtopics. gives reference to the administration and clan systems among Todas.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research project includes informal and descriptive approaches. It is informal in the sense that this work focuses on the indigenous architecture of Tudava community. In this project the objective sources were obtained through interview, online articles and published books.

Primary sources adopted for this research project includes interview with the present generation of the Tudava community. Field visit to Nilgiri were also undertaken to collect authentic data regarding the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> Ramen Lagachu, “Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity” *vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II) August 2020, pp.56-59*

<sup>2</sup> Saurabh Kumar Mishra, Suchi Priyadarshani, “LEARNING FROM VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE OF TODA COMMUNITY” *IJCRT, Volume 8, Issue 5 May 2020*

<sup>3</sup> “Toda”, in *Oxford English Dictionary*, February 2, 2024, [Toda, adj. & n. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary \(oed.com\)](https://www.oed.com/)

Secondary data used mostly include published books available from KIRTADS (Kerala Institute for Research, Training and Development studies of Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribes). In the circumstance of the non- availability of certain books, e – books available on the internet were accessed.

Magazine reports from various reputed media were also considered valuable in getting basic information about the topic.

### **Limitations**

Oral sources on this topic were very limited. Mostly, written sources were used to know more about the history of Tudava community. As a part of the field visit, an interview was taken. But current members of the tribe do not provide any kind of information regarding the construction of '*munds*' or history of their society.

The information containing culture and architecture of Tudava were collected from e-books and websites. The history of Tudava tribe is a mix of both myths and actual events. In this dissertation we have tried to deal with such myths separately, segregating them from actual events. Though written sources about Tudava society are the best source to study this topic, there is limitation to it. Since the topic is less studied, the scope for this topic for future research is abundant.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TODAS

#### Origin

The ancestral origin of Toda has been highly speculative which ranged from calling them as Miros (people who occupied Danube basin in neolithic times), Scythians, Vedic Aryan pastoralists, remnants of ancient Roman colony, lost tribe of Israel, etc. However, the linguistic and circumstantial evidences clearly suggest their South Indian origin<sup>4</sup>. The word Toda has been derived from the name 'Tundra' – the sacred tree of 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 Irulu<sup>5</sup>.

The Todas are acknowledged through numerous names like Tudas, Taudava and Tadar<sup>6</sup>. They reside in the hilly regions of Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, and especially around Ooty or Ootacamund. There are about 2000 of these people now. The Todas live in 125 different settlements called “*mund*” in Nilgiris. They have their different customs and rituals. Todas are widely known because of their embroidery skills.

All the people living in a settlement belong to one family, and they are considered to related to each other as they have a common ancestor. The Nilgiri Mountains house some tribal communities, such as the Toda, Badaga, Kota, and Kurumba. History says that these tribal groups have relied on each other for a long time for several kinds of services and merchandise in a highly complex network for trade. They are also associated with other groups such as Irulas, Pnias, Chettos, and Uralus. The Kota provided music for funeral services and works relating to thatching and wood, whereas the Badagas helped with artefact and food trades<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Periasamy, Kathiravan & Smk, Karthickeyan & Mathagowder, Iyue & Ragothaman, Venkataramanan. (2010). Toda- The Unique hill buffalo of Tamilnadu. Accessed on January 13, 2024  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336305729\\_Toda- The Unique hill buffalo of Tamilnadu](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336305729_Toda- The Unique hill buffalo of Tamilnadu)

<sup>5</sup> Ramen Lagachu, “Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity” *vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II) August 2020, pp.56-59*

<sup>6</sup> D Magimairaj, Dr. S Balamurugan, “Socio economic status and issues of toda tribes in Nilgiris district: A study *Volume 2; Issue 5; September 2017; pp. 104-106*

<sup>7</sup> K Lavanya Nair, Sneha B, Prof. George Sunny, “Cultural Documentation and Collection Development: Toda Tribes of Nilgiris *the Chitrolekha Journal, Vol. 6, Accessed on January 13, 2024*

## **Language**

Their language is called “*orlwash*” in their native language, and other people generally call it as Toda language. Toda language is a proto-Dravidian language and does not have a script<sup>8</sup>. These tribal communities are widely scattered and have diverse culture and practices. It is evident that these tribal communities belong to the Dravidian ethnic group, as their language has the Dravidian imprint and is similar to the languages of Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada. Out of the other four tribes of Blue Mountains, it is believed that Toda people own a rich heritage<sup>9</sup>.

It is, indeed, now known with absolute certainty to be a dialect of the development of Turanian speech styled Dravidian; the language of a group of primitive, illiterate, and perhaps warlike tribes who, between three thousand and four thousand years ago, migrated from tracts of Western Asia, and penetrating India, probably through Beluchistan and the natural water lines of the country, filled all its western and southern districts, pushing before them, in some period of their advance, the various tribes of the Kôl aborigines, some of whom, in slavery or menial conditions of life, survived as subjects of their conquerors.

The Rev. Dr. Caldwell has drawn attention to the remarkable circumstance that the closest and most distinct affinities to the speech of this race are those which have been discovered in the languages of the Finns and Lapps of Northern Europe and of the Ostiaks and other Ugrians of Siberia: and consequently that the Dravidian is proved, by 'language alone, in the silence of history, in the absence of all ordinary probabilities, to be allied to tribes that appear to have overspread Europe before the arrival of the Goths and the Pelasgi, and even before the arrival of the Celts.' The characteristics of the Toda branch of this race, form the burden of the following pages.

In the process of writing of them, I have grown to the very strong conviction that the people are a surviving sample of some portion of the Turanian race when in its very primitive stage. Without much exercise of the imagination, I can picture them the cotemporaries and neighbours, even perhaps the ancestors, of races of South- Western Asia which have made a figure in early history. There is much of the 'blameless Ethiopian' about them: something of the Jew and of the Chaldean in their appearance. I do not venture to hazard an opinion as to

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<sup>8</sup> K Lavanya Nair, Sneha B, Prof. George Sunny, “Cultural Documentation and Collection Development: Toda Tribes of Nilgiris” *the Chitrolekha Journal*, Vol. 6, Accessed on January 13, 2024  
<https://chitrolekha.com/v6n200/>

<sup>9</sup>Dr. M. Saraswathy AP, Dr. M. Renuga, “Anthropological Study on Toda Tribes of Blue Mountain, Tamil Nadu, India 2022; vol. 21(Issue 1): pp.119-125

their cradle-land. It is safer to draw attention to what, judging by appearances and customs, are their possible ethnic affinities. The Rev. Dr. Pope, in his contribution to this book, gives it as his opinion that the Toda language was originally old Kanarese, and not a distinct dialect. He thinks that the language has dwindled to a mere skeleton, as a result of isolation and consequent degeneration of the people. The early Indian history of the Todas has been as completely lost as that of the long-protracted period which preceded their migration to the Dekkan<sup>10</sup>.

## **Greetings**

They didn't wear footwear in older times and now don't wear them around or near the temple grounds since they wanted to respect the earth by touching it directly. When they enter their village, they don't wear footwear to show respect to the ground<sup>11</sup>

When a Toda meets a Badaga he bends down, and the Badaga, as a form of greeting and sign of superiority, places his hand on the top of the Toda's head. The Todas believe that their tribe has always dwelt on the Nilgiris, and that the other tribes came up from the plains. When the Badagas arrived on the hills, they put under cultivation land which previously belonged to the Todas (who claim to have originally owned the whole of the Nilgiris). As 'compensation allowance,' the Badagas give grain of various kinds (gudu) to the Todas in proportion to the abundance of the crop, only objecting, it is said, to do so when the crop is short. But there is reason to believe that the Badaga is not inclined to give as freely at the present day as in times gone by, and the Toda is commencing to be thrown on his own resources as a means of gaining the equivalent of his daily bread<sup>12</sup>.

Greeting another Toda member is considered very important in the culture of the tribes. There are two types of greeting methods '*etherth*' and '*kolwerth*.' *Etherth* is greeting by word, and *Kolwerth* is greeting by kneeling. Todas have different greeting words for every clan. The greeting words are different for every member depending on how they are related. Toda also kneels before their elders to get their blessings, apart from greeting words. While getting a

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<sup>10</sup> William E. Marshall, *Travels Amongst the Todas or The Study of a Primitive Tribe In South India, Their History, Character, Customs, Religion, Infanticide, Polyandry, Language; With Outlines Of The Toda Grammar*, 1873, p.05

<sup>11</sup> K Lavanya Nair, Sneha B, Prof. George Sunny, "Cultural Documentation and Collection Development: Toda Tribes of Nilgiris" *the Chitrolekha Journal*, Vol. 6, Accessed on January 13, 2024  
<https://chitrolekha.com/v6n200/>

<sup>12</sup> Praseetha M S, Dr. T. Dharmaraj, "Self Governing Body of Todas in Nilgiri District" *JETIR October 2018, volume 5 Issue 10*, Accessed on January 15, 2024  
<https://www.jetir.org/view?paper=JETIR1810332>

gift, the elder's toe touches the forehead of the person kneeling, and the fingers of the person kneeling touch the foot of the senior person. The Todas have about 1800 ancestor gods. Their religion is known as "orl" in their native language, which means "mankind"<sup>13</sup>.

### **Buffalo Rearing**

During the olden days, men were the earning members of the family, and their main job was to raise buffalos. The number of buffalos showed how wealthy the family was, so the more buffalos one had, the higher their status. There wasn't much requirement for any other economic activity at this time as they got everything required for survival from nature itself. They mainly focused on connecting to nature and enjoying it. Later as income became vital for survival, they started giving ghee alone as trade. The milk or butter was considered more sacred, and ghee was obtained after the butter melted, making it less valuable religiously. Following times, they started selling household buffalo milk<sup>14</sup>.

### **Gods and Myths**

Toda religious life and practices stem from a pantheon of gods. The heads of this pantheon are the goddess Tökisy and the god of the underworld Öñ. These two deities form the basis of many religious practices and rituals, but each Toda clan has their own *nòdrochi*, a deity seen as that clan's ruler during the time that the Todas and gods lived together. In total, there are between 1,600 and 1,800 gods. According to the Toda religion, Öñ and his wife Pinârkûrs went to a part of the Nilgiri hills, known as the Kundahs, and set up an iron bar from one end to the other. Öñ stood at one end and pulled buffalos out from the earth, which became the sacred buffalos. Pinârkûrs stood on the other end, and she pulled out the buffalos that would form the ordinary herd. The first Toda man also came from the earth, holding onto the tail of the last buffalo Öñ pulled out. He then pulled out a rib from the man and created the first Toda woman. The mountains and hills of their home region are a large part of their religion for two reasons: the importance of grass for buffalo herds and the belief that the hills are the homes of the gods.

There is a Toda myth that relates how the god Korattaibh once ordered a nearby giant-sized *maw(r)sh* tree (over 25 metres high, and with its canopy covering a large area) to attract bees so that honey might be collected from their lives. As was to be expected, following the

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<sup>13</sup> K Lavanya Nair, Sneha B, Prof. George Sunny, "Cultural Documentation and Collection Development: Toda Tribes of Nilgiris" *the Chitrolekha Journal*, Vol. 6, Accessed on January 13, 2024  
<https://chitrolekha.com/v6n200/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

divine command, swarms of *pezhtaihhn* bees (*Apis dorsata*) soon began to congregate around and on this tree.

The story continues: After some time, the bees built almost 300 hives (colonies) on this huge tree, causing it to bend under their weight. Since they saw that there would be so much work involved, one day Todas, Kurumbas and Irulas decided to cooperate in harvesting the honey. Todas were given the responsibility for making the ground fire that was to smoke out the bees, while the Kurumbas and Irulas climbed up the tree and began to gather honey. The work continued for most of the day, and as each hive was cut open, the combs full of honey were collected in baskets held just below the hives [Kurumbas still gather honey from cliff faces in this manner.]

Unfortunately, when most of the honey had been harvested, this tree, which had bent under the weight of the hives, straightened up, catapulting the Kurumba and Irula honey harvesters off its branches, causing them a considerable hurt. Indeed, so shaken were these Kurumbas and Irulas by the event that they ran away in fear. As for the Todas, they gleefully returned home, taking with them the entire harvest of honey!

This myth provides one explanation as to why Todas regard the *maw(r)sh* as one of their most sacred tree species, to which they often refer in prayers, it also suggests that in times passed, all the indigenous groups of the Nilgiris collaborated in honey-gathering activities. It is most likely that the Todas played the major role on the upper plateau, whereas the others dominated on the slopes. Although today Todas only gather honey from hives made by the *Apis cerana*, it is apparent from such stories and from well-known songs (such as the lyric *pezhtaihhn naihh*, ‘rock bee song’) that, in the not-too-distant past, they harvested honey from the *Apis dorsata* as well.

Given the sacred role that honey occupies in Toda life and culture, it is no great surprise that the mythical origins of both major river systems originating in the Upper Nilgiris are rooted in honey<sup>15</sup>.

There are a variety of myths as to the origin of the buffaloes of Toda inhabitants. It is believed that a god named “*Ennd*” came with his wife to the Blue Mountain and brought 1600 buffaloes with him, and his wife brought 1800-buffaloes with her. It is also thought that there was a honeycomb in the deep hills that was broken. The honey flowed down the slopes to quench the thirst of the buffaloes and this river was named as *pykkara*, which is even now a very popular spot among the tourists. According to the myth, it is from the last buffaloes that

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<sup>15</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, Vol II, Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1906, p.540

God *Ennd* created, - a man, and he was the first Toda man, which is why buffaloes play a major role in the Toda community.

From the early historical times to the present day, Toda people have a deep spiritual and religious connection to their land and to their main diety Teskesh. They believe their diety created the buffaloes and the grasslands for the buffaloes to graze. Toda community believes that their life does not exist without the presence of buffaloes with them. Todas never eat the meat of buffaloes and they never kill their buffaloes when they become old, they take care of them until they reach their heavenly abode naturally. Toda community states that they feel a strong positive vibration and presence of positive sensitivity in their land which is why they walk barefooted in their grasslands as a means of paying respect to it<sup>16</sup>.

### **Priesthood**

Any male in the Toda community can become a priest once they reach adolescence. Every man of the Toda community must serve as a priest at least once in their lifetime. To become a priest, a particular ritual is performed by the male. The male goes to the holy river and takes Mahonia leschenaultii, a torn plant, dips it in the river, sprinkles the water around his head, and chants mantras. A man can serve as a priest more than once or how many times they want to. The priest wears only shawls with black embroidery on them<sup>17</sup>.

The Toda priesthood includes five kinds of priests (dairy – men), who rank as follows in order precedence: -

- (1) Palal (priests of the
- (2) Vorzhāl
- (3) Kokvalikarpāl (at the Tärnāt mand)
- (4) Kurpulikarpal (at the Kandal mand)
- (5) Pālarpāl (called Tarvēlikarpal at the Tärnāt mand).

Palal and Tiriēri. -We visited a tiriēri (dairy temple or lactarium) at Paikāra by appointment, and on arrival near the holy spot, found the two pālāls (monks), well-built men aged about thirty and fifty, respectively, clad in black.

### **Ceremonies, Infanticide and Cremation**

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<sup>16</sup> Dr. M. Saraswathy AP, Dr. M. Renuga, "Anthropological Study on Toda Tribes of Blue Mountain, Tamil Nadu, India" 2022; vol. 21(Issue 1): pp.119-125  
<https://www.bibliomed.org/fulltextpdf.php?mno=64819>

<sup>17</sup> K Lavanya Nair, Sneha B, Prof. George Sunny, "Cultural Documentation and Collection Development: Toda Tribes of Nilgiris" *the Chitrolekha Journal*, Vol. 6, Accessed on January 13, 2024  
<https://chitrolekha.com/v6n200/>

Life event ceremonies are usually more highly ritualized for boys than girls. These include the first exposure of a baby's face to the outside world, the naming of infants and the ceremonial piercing of a boy's ear to signify ritual maturity. Girls were symbolically deflowered. Many of these customs are no longer practiced. In the late 1980s there were 64 permanently-occupied Toda hamlets, including three Christian ones. There used to be several dry season and wet season hamlets that were used when the Toda migrated with their cattle. These have mostly been abandoned, mostly because the grazing land is no good anymore.

It is possible that at their first arrival in the Nilgiri Hills, the Todas had few sources of food, and had a severe struggle for existence; that therefore adopted the practice of female infanticide, and that polyandry followed as a consequence. Twins are called *omumokh*, and it is custom to kill one of them, even when they both are boys. If they should be girls, it is probable that both would be killed, or, at any rate, would have been killed in the past<sup>18</sup>.

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. On the other hand, Dry funeral is performed after a few months<sup>19</sup>.

### **Clans and Divisions**

The Todas are divided into five clans, namely: Paiki, Pekkan, Kuttan, Kenna and Todi. The term Paiki arose among the Hale-Paikis of Naga and the Kumara Paikas of North Kanara. The Hale Paikis of Manjarabad is called Devora Makkalu or children of God, and the Paikis who take the lead among the Todas, for them the Palal or high priest is chosen, call themselves also Dev Mokh or children of God. Toda society is a patrilineage a descent group whose membership is based upon a rule of patrilineal descent. Patrilineal decent is a cultural principle that automatically affiliates childbirth through his male Ancestors. The Toda community is divided into two endogamous groups, namely Tharthazoll and Theveioll.

In some respects, the clan is a definite unit in the social organisation with a certain amount of power in regulating its own affairs, owning property and having in many cases social or religious usages peculiar to itself. The clan owns a number of villages and takes its name from the chief of these, the *studmad*. The clan system is territorial. The members of a clan have many common rights and privileges which bind them together, so the clan-tie has a real

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<sup>18</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, The Todas Macmillian and Co. Limited, 1906, pp.502

<sup>19</sup> Ramen Lagachu, "Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity" vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II) August 2020, pp.56-59

meaning. Property, however, as we shall see shortly, is largely centered in the family or the individual. The Peiki of Badaga classification are the Teivaliol; the Pekkan correspond to the Melgarsol, the people of Kidmad and Karsh being also usually included in this group. Kenna is the Badaga name of the Kaisol; the Todi or Tothi include two clans, the Nodrsol and the Panol, while the Kuttan comprise remainder of the Tarthar clans-viz, those of Taradr, Keradr, Kanodrs, Kwodrdoni, Pam and Nidrsi.

Each clan has divisions of two kinds called kudr and polm. The kudr is a division of ceremonial, the polm of practical, importance. Normally each clan has two kudr and two only and, as we have seen in Chapter XIII, these divisions become of greatest importance in connection with the irnortiti ceremony, the whole regulation of which is dominated by the division into kudr. In general, each kudr is named after its leading man, thus the two kudr of the Nordrsol are spoken as the kudr of Mudrigeidi (1) and Kerkkadr (2). The man who gives his name to the kudr is probably responsible for the general management of the ceremonies in which the kudr is concerned. The word polm means 'portion', and is the name of the section of the clan by means which is regulated the sharing of any expenses which fall on the clan as whole. Occasionally a polm is so poor that it cannot pay its share, and in one such case at the present time the polm, in this case consisting of two boys only, has been incorporated into another.

The number of *polm* in a clan varies greatly, from ten in the case of kars to one only in the pedrkars clan. There is no definite relation between the *kudr* and the *polm* as regards numbers<sup>20</sup>. 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 Tarther is greater than the Teivali on account of its superiority<sup>21</sup>.

## **Administration**

The Toda man is the head of the smallest unit of administration-the family or household. A hamlet does not have a headman; instead, the elders form the council. Any issue which is unsettled in the hamlet council will be brought to the clan council, which comprises of elders of the patriclan. Here, it is worth nothing that matriclan has no importance. This issue

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<sup>20</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, MacMillan and Co. Limited, 1906, p.540

<sup>21</sup> Ramen Lagachu, "Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity" *vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II)* August 2020, pp.56-59

unsettled in the patriclan are appealed to in the Caste Council called 'Noim'. The mod 'Noim' has both deliberative and judicial functions. It decides matters of clan concern and individual problems. 'Noim' is the council of elders, which can be compared to today's Village Panchayats. The Todas settled all their differences, problems and conflicts through the 'Noim' all these years. There was no need to have a police system or judiciary. The council acted as all the departments. The different life cycle rituals that are observed vary in details with groups and patriclans<sup>22</sup>.

The Toda tribe council isn't permanent body, but best a collection of aged Toda decided on men selected by using common consent for a specific dispute. The Government of Tamil Nadu currently blanketed a Toda guy as a member in its 'Tribal Development board'. Their sole career is livestock rearing and dairy. Toda tribal have taken up the career of farm animals rearing and dairy farming. Most of the participants have large herd of buffaloes. This Toda Tribal community sustains with their livelihood from milk merchandise. Toda Tribals have additionally developed information in silver smiting<sup>23</sup>.

Most of the Todas possess large herds of buffaloes, mint products are their main source of living. In the past, agriculture was completely unknown to the Todas, they were frequently migrating from one mountain area to that of another within the Nilgiri hills, as pastures in their vicinity began to fail. So, they never had a large established residence<sup>24</sup>

The Todas recognise the existence of the family (*kudupel or kudubel*) within the clan, meaning by this a group of people bound together by near blood kinship. As a general rule the family corresponds with the *polm*, but sometimes there Inay be more than one *polm* in the same family. It seemed to me that the term *kudupel* had not the same clear meaning as the *polm*. The family has no important function in the social organisation except in so far as it corresponds with the *polm*, but it is taken into account when the *polm* and *kudr* are readjusted. The term

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<sup>22</sup> Praseetha M S, Dr. T. Dharmaraj, "Self Governing Body of Todas in Nilgiri District" *JETIR October 2018, volume 5 Issue 10*  
<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1810332.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> D Magimairaj, Dr. S Balamurugan, "Socio economic status and issues of toda tribes in Nilgiris district: A study Volume 2; Issue 5; September 2017; pp. 104-106  
<https://www.multidisciplinaryjournal.net/assets/archives/2017/vol2issue5/2-4-156-853.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Dr. K. Govindaraj, Dr. S. Sridhar, "Sustainable Development of Tribals in Nilgiris: Special Reference to Todas Volume 9, Issue 4, 2019  
<https://www.pramanaresearch.org/gallery/prj-p737.pdf>

was chiefly used when the Todas were speaking of certain families as being noted in certain ways or as having certain privileges. Thus, some families are noted for their powers as sorcerers, and these are called *pilikudupel*, others are known as *manikudupel*, or chief families, whose members are important in government and can hold the office of *monegar* and serve on the *naim*.

Other families important in government whose members can serve on the aim or council are called *tinkaniputitth kudupel* or *tinkani kudupel* and *palutth kudupel*. The members of certain other families have certain duties of a lower order in connexion with the *naim*. They take messages and act generally as servants at the meetings, and the families with these functions are called *kavodeputipol kudupel*, or servant families. They are also sometimes called *armanol* or palace people, because at one time the Rajah of Nelambur in the Wainad put his buffaloes into their charge. The Todas have a *monegar*, or headman, who is responsible for the assessment which the Todas pay to Government for their grazing rights. The earliest *monegar* whom the Todas remember is Teitchi or Teiti (52). He was succeeded by his fourth son, Mutevan, who is still alive.

Though Ivievan is the *monegar* he is not the chief representative of his family on the *naim*, this position belonging to Kuriolv, the son of Pareivan and Persevan. Ivievan is helped in collecting the assessment by an assistant *monegar*, and till lately this place belonged to Parkurs of Kars. It does not appear that the *monegarship* is a real Toda office, but that the earliest *monegar* was appointed by Mr. Sullivan, the first British official of the Nilgiris. The family, however, to which the *monegar* belongs is called the *mani- kudupel*, which may mean the *monegar* family, but I could not discover definitely whether this title is older than the institution of the *monegarship*. It is possible that Teitchi was one of the chief men of the *naim* when the Europeans first came to the hills and that he was therefore appointed as *monegar*.

Though it is very doubtful whether the institution of *monegar* is not an innovation, and whether the Todas as a whole have properly any true chief, it is fairly clear that the clan and its divisions have definite leaders. Each clan has a headman or *etudol*, usually, it seemed to me, one who had come to the top by virtue of his character and ability I did not learn how far his position was generally recognised nor by what means he was chosen. It was quite clear, however, that the leading man might lose his position in old age or as the result of illness.

Under Sullivan, the new European administration appointed a toda 'headman' to whom he gave the title 'monegar' or monyxo'm in toda. The appointment of a single person as the

headman might have been for practical purpose, which aided British administration. As far as the British were concerned the post of 'monegar' was an important one, having political authority, which also involved collection of annual tax from the toda. The British brought in a system of land revenue whereby, the todas had to pay the tax. Toda community being a traditional community, which respected the ancestral culture and tradition, could not accept the 'new post' of 'monegar', a British servant as their leader. Therefore, the todas even rejected the title 'monegar'. Being conservatives, they rebelled against this 'power', which was in contrast to their 'inordinately' tradition-conscious society'. The todas were right in being indifferent to this community.

The most important feature of Toda government is the *naim* or *noim*, a council having a definite constitution. The *naim* proper has to do with the affairs of the Todas in general, and, in addition, more informal councils, consisting of the chief members of a clan, may be held to settle matters arising within the clan. It seems, however, that the supreme *naim* may sometimes be called upon to settle the internal affairs of a clan.

The *naim* of the general body of Todas should have five members, or, if more than five members, they should be drawn from five sources. Four of these sources are the Tarthar clans of Kars, Nodrs, and Taradr, and the Teivali clan of Kuudr. The fifth source is the Badaga village of Tuneri, from which a Badaga man may be sent to take part in the *naim*. He is only called upon to sit, however, on special occasions; and in the many councils which I saw during my visit a Badaga was rarely present. He probably only sits, as a rule, when questions arise which involve the relations between the Todas and Badagas.

The Toda representatives should be drawn from certain families of their respective clans. The Kuudr representative should belong to the family known as the *manikudupel*, and the representatives of Kars, Nodrs, and Taradr to the families known as *tinkanikudupel*. A few years ago, the Toda representatives were Kuriolv of Kuudr (52), Parkurs (8) and Piutolv (10) of Kars, Kudodrsvan (3) of Nodrs, and Ircheidi (20) of Taradr, though there was some question whether Ircheidi was on the *naim*, or whether his place had not been taken by Piutolv, the second Kars representative. There is no doubt that women have a subordinate position in the Toda community.

Usually the 'Noim' is attending by a minimum of six and maximum of fifty. Of course, there is no definite number prescribed. The members who gather in the place of meeting organized themselves in a semicircle on the ground, usually in a grassland meant for pasture.

The person with dispute or the groups who have the problem to be settled sit on either side facing each other or facing the semicircle. The discussion begins with one of the elders or leaders asking the one man or group who requested the meeting to be summoned to explain their charge against the other.

The accused is given a chance to defend. The parties are asked to move a little away from the meeting place, while the general discussion takes place regarding the issue during which the supporters of either group or person express their grievance openly and emotionally. The discussion gains momentum. After a long discussion and argument, a time of silence prevails, during which, the leaders start to express their views. Once the leaders begin to speak and take a more active part in the proceedings, the group listens to them carefully, at the end of which the judgment is given, which will be accepted by both the parties. The acceptance of judgment is vital once the judgment is clear. If no consensus is brought about, the leaders again allow the discussion and meeting to continue. If the solution is difficult, the time and date for the next meeting will be fixed and announced immediately.

At this time, the number of participants expected will be high and a well-disposed gathering is required. Usually the first meeting of the 'Noim' settles the conflicts successfully. A few rare cases require a second meeting. The members of the 'Noim' try to talk to both parties before then next meeting and try to compromise and reconcile one with the other. If the problem persists and if it involves the whole community they repeatedly meet until a consensus is reached. Once a clear judgment is given in the meeting of 'Noim', further discussion continues to determine the nature and extent of punishment to be imposed on the guilty party.

After deciding this, the two parties are recalled to the general assembly. Once the punishment is decided the two parties come back to the general assembly, where the leader of the opposite sub caste announces the judgment of the 'Noim' to the guilty man or the party, together with the fine, which it has decide to levy. Fines are of two kinds: (1) By offering one or two buffaloes-of which one is for the temple dairy and the other for the clan members. (2) By paying the cash fixed by the Council. 'Noim' is a meeting exclusively for the adult male members of the family or clan. From the elders of the council, to the general assembly, the offenders and the offender party all are male members.

There are several important places where the 'Noim' meets. The traditional meeting places are many. The most important one is the side of small hill, on the Wenlock downs, near the 16-kilometer post on the ootacamund - Gudalur Road. This place is still preferred for

important meetings. Specially to discuss temple matter regarding sacred dairies and sacred buffaloes this may be most of the population of Toda lives around this place<sup>25</sup>.

### **Property, Adoption and Debt**

Among the Todas, property may be held by the clan, the family or the individual. I am not clear whether there is any case in which property is held to belong to the Todas as a whole, or to either of the two divisions. There were two villages, Padegar and Ki Perththo, said to be common property, so that any one might live at them. At the time of my visit both were occupied by Melgars people, and I could not satisfy myself as to what was meant by saying that they were common property.

Descent among the Todas is always reckoned in the male line. A man is always of the same clan as his father, if by his "father" we understand the man who has given the bow and arrow to his mother at the *pursutpimi* ceremony. The Toda's ancient general name for the honeybee is *ehrrpraan*, although very few modern-day Todas are aware of this. The name is mostly used in prayers or songs, and its linguistic roots are certainly worth investigation. The Toda name for the queen bee of all species is *kehbmzaihnn*, as can be seen in many of the old songs that relate to honey. Some man from Teihhfakh clan who also went by this name.

It is clear that the custom of adoption of children is not practised by the Todas. They denied its existence emphatically, and I met with no instance which led me to suspect its presence in compiling the genealogies. If a child is left an orphan, it is looked after by the people of its clan, but it is always clearly recognised that the child retains the father's property, and belongs to the *madol* and *polm* of the father. There is, so far as I could ascertain, no religious custom which makes it necessary that a man should have children. The duties of a child at the funeral ceremonies can quite well be performed by some other member of the clan.

In general, land, the dairies of the chief villages, and some buffaloes may be said to be the property of the clan. The house, and probably also some villages, are the property of a family, and most buffaloes, household goods and ornaments are the property of the individual. The relation of the Todas to the land has been a much-discussed theme, and for many years after the first settlement of the hills by Europeans it was a subject of controversy. The fact that

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<sup>25</sup> Praseetha M S, Dr. T. Dharmaraj, "Self Governing Body of Todas in Nilgiri District" *JETIR October 2018, volume 5 Issue 10*  
<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1810332.pdf>

the Badagas paid what seemed to be a tribute of grain to the Todas was held to show that the latter were regarded as the "lords of the soil," and the view was strongly upheld that they should be so regarded by the Indian Government.

It seems to be not uncommon for a Toda to die in debt, and it is the duty of the sons to pay off the debts of their father. If there are no children, the payment of the debt is regarded as the duty of the brothers of the dead man. When children have to pay the debts of their father, they may give their services to others, receiving in return money and other recompense. The usual pay is six rupees a year, two cloaks and food. To this is often added the loan of a milking buffalo. This custom of working for another is called *kūlvatkerthchi* or *kūlvatkerthiti*<sup>26</sup>

## **Food**

The Toda's are strictly vegetarian. Their food is made with naturally available items, mostly from buffalos they raise. They are simple food items; one dish is Uduthwor which is made of rice to which buttermilk is added; with some chutney and ghee to accompany. The dessert they prepare when a guest comes is rice boiled along with jaggery and ghee. They are made of millets and ghee, similar to ghee rice. Ashukudi is another dish prepared by first roasting the millets, then honey and jaggery are added to it and rolled like laddoo. The traditional kitchen is unique for the Todas. Their utensils are made of brass. The male family members use big brass plates, while the women use smaller ones. After the use, the dishes are hung so that they don't touch each other<sup>27</sup>.

## **Clothing**

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<sup>28</sup>

Both men and women cover their bodies with a white mantle with blue and red lines, called putkūli, which is purchased in the Ootacamund bazar, and is sometimes decorated with

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<sup>26</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, Macmillian and Co. Limited, 1906,p.540

<sup>27</sup> K Lavanya Nair, Sneha B, Prof. George Sunny, "Cultural Documentation and Collection Development: Toda Tribes of Nilgiris *the Chitrolekha Journal*, Vol. 6, Accessed on January 13, 2024  
<https://chitrolekha.com/v6n200/>

<sup>28</sup> Ramen Lagachu, "Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity" *vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II)* August 2020, pp.56-59

embroidery worked by the Toda women. The odour of the person of the Todas, caused by the rancid butter which they apply to the mantle as a preservative reagent, or with which they anoint their bodies, is quite characteristic.

## **Medicine**

In 1930's there was an epidemic in Nilgiris where people were affected by diarrhoea, fever and cold. To save the Toda people from the disease, a European woman named Ms. Link took some Toda people to her place that was a few kilometres away from the mundh where she treated them with medicines. After the treatment, some people stayed with Ms. Link and as days passed by, close to 40 families were converted to Christians and from then on they are called as Christian Todas. The place where Christian Todas live at present is called as Toda colony. Though Christian Todas sustain friendly relation with the Todas, they never follow or celebrate Toda rituals and ceremonies. At present, there are close to 500 Christian Todas in Toda colony. There are many doctors, teachers and other professionals among Christian Todas<sup>29</sup>.

Tribal people are endowed with enriched traditional wisdom to use available resources around them. They are well versed in the usage of plant for treating various diseases. They have used powder or extract or paste form of the plant parts such as root, shoot whole plant, fruits and leaves etc., the recipe known by the tribal people was passed on only to their family members and community. Hence the knowledge is confined to particular people alone. The Toda tribe can identify plant species that are used for the treatment of fever asthma, cold, cough diabetes, diarrhoea, dysentery, eye infections stomach ache, wounds and snake bite. But these skills they do not use it for income earning purpose.

## **Games**

In one of these, called narthpimi, a flat slab of stone is supported horizontally on two other slabs fixed perpendicularly in the ground so as to form a narrow tunnel, through which a man can just manage to squeeze his body with difficulty. Two men take part in the game, one stationing himself at a distance of about thirty yards, the other about sixty yards from the tunnel. The front man, throwing off his cloth, runs as hard as he can to the tunnel, pursued by the

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<sup>29</sup> Praseetha M S, Dr. T. Dharmaraj, "Self Governing Body of Todas in Nilgiri District" *JETIR October 2018, volume 5 Issue 10*  
<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1810332.pdf>

'scratch' man, whose object is to touch the oth feet before he has wriggled himself through the tu an's.

Another game, which we witnessed, consists of trials of 'puss in the corner' and called kariālapimi, which was not included in the programme of sports got up for our benefit. We gave a demonstration of 'putting the stone,' and, if some future anthropologist finds this to be one of the Toda athletic sports, he must attribute its introduction to direct British influence.

Like the Todas, the Kotas indulge in trials of strength with heavy spherical stones, which they raise, or attempt to raise, from the ground to the shoulders, and in a game resembling the English tip-cat. In another game sides are chosen, of about ten on each side. One side takes shots with a ball made of cloth at a brick propped up against a wall, near which the other side stands. Each man is allowed three shots at the brick. If the brick is hit and falls over, one of the 'out- side' picks up the ball, and throws it at the other side, who run away and try to avoid being hit. If the ball touches one of them, the side is put out, and the other side go in.

A game, called hulikote, which bears a resemblance to the English child's game of fox and geese, is played on a stone chiselled with lines which forms a rude playing board. In one form of the game (pl. XXVII) two tigers and twenty-five bulls, and in another form (pl. XXVII) three tigers and fifteen bulls engage, and the object is for the tigers to take, or, as the Kotas express it, kill all the bulls. In a further game, called kotē a labyrinthiform pattera or maze is chiselled on a stone, to get to the centre of which is the problem.

## **Women**

It was informed that, in former times, certain men among the Todas were credited with the power to cast out devils by treatment with herbs, and that devils are still cast out of Todas who are possessed with them by certain Badaga and Hindu exorcists. The Todas treat mild cases of sickness with herbs, and a red stone purchased in the Ootacamund bazár; but serious cases are treated at the Ootacamund hospital. The Todas scornfully deny the use of aphrodisiacs, but both men and women admit that they take sālep misri boiled in milk 'to make them strong.' It is stated in the 'Pharmacographia Indica' (1893) that the "sālep of Madras is largely supplied from the Nilgiris, where it is collected by the Todas and other hill tribes." The district forest officer of the Nilgiris writes, however, more recently that there is now little or no trade, as the digging up of the roots has been prohibited in the reserve forests.

Toda women take part in agricultural operations, tend cattle, collect fire and fetch clean water. They participate in economic activities and observe rituals<sup>30</sup>. Daughters inherit nothing. They only receive from their parents what they are given as dowry (*adrparn*). Any property given to a woman as dowry goes with her if she changes husbands, but any ornaments or other property given to a wife by her husband are kept by the husband if the wife is transferred to another man or group of men<sup>31</sup>.

The dairy work is absolutely laid by the males. 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<sup>32</sup>.

Women carry two plaited ringlets; they make these ringlets with the help of curd which have been their key food ever since the birth of their culture. Toda people tattoo their legs and hands as part of their custom. Mostly, their ancestors have been barefooted. As they have to adorn themselves with what they can access within their land, they have been powdering the dry flower of the Gogil plant and use the powder as a bindi. They wear ornaments made of bronze (*venkalam*) like Kahoth- neck chain, pull- bangle, etc as they consider this metal as precious and this metal has been used ever since the birth of their ancestors.

Women play a major role in the Toda community. It is said that aftersunset, if there are no women in a particular mund, the entire people of the mund have to vacate the place and move to a different mund. They can return to their mund only after performing pooja in the temple on the next new moon day. Prior to this pooja, a baby girl has to clean the temple with scotch grass and she has to carry the dust in her dress. Only then the priest is supposed to perform the ritual. In the early days, even grandmothers were the heads of the settlements<sup>33</sup>. Toda women traditionally curled their waist-length hair, tattooed their arms and upper body and wore toga-like garments. They traditionally greeted male relatives older than them by kneeling and placing the relative's feet, one at a time, on her forehead. Women traditionally

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<sup>30</sup> Praseetha M S, Dr. T. Dharmaraj, "Self Governing Body of Todas in Nilgiri District" *JETIR October 2018, volume 5 Issue 10*  
<https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1810332.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1906, p.540

<sup>32</sup> Ramen Lagachu, "Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity" *vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II) August 2020, pp.56-59*

<sup>33</sup> Dr. M. Saraswathy AP, Dr. M. Renuga, "Anthropological Study on Toda Tribes of Blue Mountain, Tamil Nadu, India" 2022; *vol. 21(Issue 1): pp.119-125*

were segregated during pregnancy and birth so they didn't defile the hamlet. Both the males and females of the Toda community are addicted to liquor. The habits of smoking also prevail among both the sexes<sup>34</sup>.

The daily life of a Toda woman has been summed up as lounging about the mad or mand (Toda settlement), buttering and curling her hair, and cooking. The women have been described as free from the ungracious and menial-like timidity of the generality of the sex in the plains. When Europeans (who are greeted as swami or God) come to a mand, the women crawl out of their huts, and chant a monotonous song, all the time clamouring for tips (inām). Even the children are so trained that they clamour for money till it is forthcoming. As a rule, the Todas have no objection to Europeans entering into their huts, but on more than one occasion I have been politely asked to take my boots off before crawling in on the stomach, so as not to desecrate the dwelling-place.

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<sup>34</sup> Ramen Lagachu, "Social and Economic life of Toda Tribe: Their Historical Identity" *vol.10, Issue 8, (Series-II)* August 2020, pp.56-59

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **UNVEILING THE TRADITIONAL MUNDS CONSTRUCTION METHOD OF TODAS**

India's rich cultural vault encompasses a stunning array of architectural marvels. Among these, tribal dwellings stand out for their unique designs, construction techniques, and cultural significance. They use organic materials to their integration with the natural environment, these structures are a testament to the ingeniousness of tribal communities. According to Fank Lloyd wright "Comprising the dwellings and all other buildings of the people. Related to their environmental contexts and available resources they are customarily owner- or community-built, utilising traditional technologies. All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific needs, accommodating the values, economies and ways of life of the cultures that produce them". They use organic materials to their integration with the natural environment, these structures are a testament to the ingeniousness of tribal communities. Tribal dwellings are often constructed using locally-sourced, natural materials which not only reduces the environmental impact but also ensures the structure's longevity. These dwellings are designed to coexist harmoniously with nature. Their low-impact construction methods and use of organic materials help preserve the surrounding ecosystem. Each dwelling tells a story of the community's culture, traditions, and way of life. These structures are repositories of age- old knowledge and practices, passed down through generations.

#### **Construction Methods**

The Todas are also exceptional in-house construction which present a distinctive cultural tapestry characterized by their architectural style. The heart of Toda habitation is the "Mund" a term denoting their village or hamlet, which serves as a microcosm of their traditional way of life. They use to reside in permanent village called mand or madd having certain tract of grazing ground surrounding it. Their village or hamlet consist of Huts (Arsh), Diary temple (Palivarsh) and cattle -pen(Thoovarsh). Each mand usually comprises about five buildings or huts three of which are used as dwellings, one as a diary and other for sheltering the calves at night. Each minor division of the family has a house -Arsh-in the Mand, and a share of the village land.

Nearly every Mand, however, has its duplicate, sometimes its triplicate, to which the entire body of the inhabitants migrate at certain seasons of the year, both for the sake of fresh

pasturage and with the view of escaping the inclemency of situations which become exposed to the west-monsoon rain and wind<sup>35</sup>.

### **Arsh (Huts)**

The odorous abode of the Todas is called a mand (village or hamlet) which is composed of huts, Dwelling places, dairy temple, and cattle-pen, and has been so well described by Dr. Shortt, that I cannot do better than quote his account verbatim. "Each mand," he says, "usually comprises about five buildings or huts, three of which are used as dwellings, one as a dairy, and the other for sheltering the calves at night. These huts form a peculiar kind of oval pent-shaped construction, usually 10 feet high, 18 feet long, and 9 feet broad. The entrance or doorway measures 32 inches in height and 18 inches in width, and is not provided with any door or gate; but the entrance is closed by means of a solid slab or plank of wood from 4 to 6 inches thick, and of sufficient dimensions to entirely block up the entrance. This sliding door is inside the hut, and so arranged and fixed on two stout stakes buried in the earth, and standing to the height of 2 to 3 feet, as to be easily moved to and fro. There are no other openings or outlets of any kind either for the escape of smoke or for the free ingress and egress of atmospheric air. The doorway itself is of such small dimensions that, to affect an entrance, one has to go down on all fours, and even then, much wriggling is necessary before an entrance effected. The houses are neat in appearance, and are built of bamboos closely laid together, fastened with rattan, and covered with thatch which renders them water-tight. Each building has an end walling before and behind, composed of solid blocks of wood, and the sides are covered in by the pent-roofing which slopes down to the ground. The front wall or planking contains the entrance or doorway. The inside of a hut is from 8 to 15 feet square, and is sufficiently high in the middle to admit of a tall man moving about with comfort. On one side there is a raised platform or pial formed of clay, about 2 feet high, and covered with sambar (deer) or buffalo skins, or sometimes with a mat. This platform is used as a sleeping place. On the opposite side is a fire-place, and a slight elevation on which the cooking utensils are placed. In this part of the building faggots of firewood are seen piled up from floor to roof, and secured in their place by loops of rattan. Here also the rice-pounder or pestle is fixed. The mortar is formed by a hole dug in the ground, 7 to 9 inches deep, and hardened by constant use. The other household goods consist of 3 or 4 brass dishes or plates, several bamboo measures, and

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<sup>35</sup> Sivani Chougula, Unravelling the Unique Tribal Dwelling of India, Kaarwan, Accessed on January 15, 2024 <https://www.kaarwan.com/blog/architecture/unraveling-the-unique-tribal-dwellings-of-india?id=136>

sometimes a hatchet. Each hut or dwelling is surrounded by an enclosure or wall formed of loose stones piled up 2 to 3 feet high, and includes a space or yard measuring 13 x 10 feet.

### **Palivarsh(Diary Temple)**

"The dairy, which is also the temple of the mand, is sometimes a building slightly larger than the others, and usually contains two compartments separated by a centre planking. One part of the dairy is a store-house for ghee, milk and curds, contained in separate vessels. The outer apartment forms the dwelling place of the pujari or pālkārpāl (dairy priest). The doorways of the dairy are smaller than those of the dwelling huts, being 14×18 inches. The dairy or temple is usually situated at some little distance from the habitations, and strangers never attempt to approach too near it for fear of incurring the ill-will of the deity who is believed to preside within. Females are excluded, and the only parties who are free to come and go are the boys of the family. The flooring of the dairy is level, and at one end there is a fire place wo or three milk pails or pots are all that it usually contains. "The huts where the calves are kept are simple build- ings somewhat like the dwelling huts.

### **Thoovarsh(Cattle-Pens)**

"In the vicinity of the mands are the cattle-pens or tuels, which are circular enclosures surrounded by a loose stone wall with a single entrance guarded by powerful wooden stakes. In these the herds of buffaloes are kept at night. Each mand possesses a herd of these animals.<sup>36</sup>

These storms drive at times with such intense severity over the wilds, that although at the time, the actual thermal state may be far from low, yet the evaporation induced by the extreme violence of the rain is known to lower the tempera- ture of the body so as frequently to cause death to man and beast. Wild animals cower during these storms under the protection of secluded woods, or migrate like the Todas for the period of the monsoon season.

It is also a Toda custom to vacate a house, or even the entire village, for a certain limited period, if one of their number should have died, or sickness be rife amongst the community or attack their cattle. Most of these houses consist of only one room or cabin, but many are formed by the junc- ture of two, and sometimes even of three rooms in a line; each with its own door

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<sup>36</sup> Edgar Thurston, Anthropology of the Todas and Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills and of the Brahmans, Kammalans, Pallis and Pariahs of Madras City, Photo Print Survey Office, Madras, 1895

leading direct into the external air and unconnected with one another. The Toda name for a room and for a house is the same.

The rooms, though all of the exact same shape, vary somewhat in size; from five to six cubits square in area, and from five to six cubits high. Thus, a house of two rooms would be about 8 ft. by 16 ft.; and a house of three rooms would measure some 8 ft. by 24 ft. Each room holds one entire subdivision of a family. The roofs of all houses are thatched with grass called Avol and bamboo, fastened with split rattan, and are either constructed in curved outline like the tilt of a waggon, or brought to an angle at the top, with a wooden ridge-pole, similar to the form of construction met with in more civilised life. The first method of roofing-which is peculiar, not being found amongst any of the surrounding tribes-is that universally employed amongst the well-to-do. The latter, which is probably cheaper, and certainly more simple to make, but endures less the violence of storms, is ordinarily adopted by poor people, and for houses of a temporary nature requiring to be erected in a hurry.

The two end walls, which are invariably gabled, are made of very stout planking: and where the house consists of more than one room, the partition wall is of the exact same construction as the outer walls. The side walls, in the tilt-waggon houses, are formed by carrying the roof down to the ground, in which the ends of the curved bamboo rafters are all imbedded. At the line of junction with the earth, flat stones are used in order to throw the water off from the domicile. All the interstices and holes in the planking are carefully filled in with clay, mixed with cow-dung.

The doorway, presenting the appearance of a ship's port-hole, and about two cubits high by one and a half cubits broad, is to be found in the middle of the gable wall, when there is only one room to the house: if there are two or three rooms, the second and third doors will be found in the sides, so arranged that all the doors may be too leeward; usually the south or south-east. These doorways, which are closed at night with a flat stone or solid slab of wood, kept in place by a stick thrust vertically into the floor at either side of the opening, form the only passage for the household, and for light, smoke, and air.

The roof projects two cubits beyond the gable walls; thus, forming a pleasant open veranda facing the morning sun, and sheltered from the wind. Here the primitive family sit, air themselves, and perform various offices of a domestic and social (entomological) nature.

The people have been at much a pain to exclude every particle of external air from their dwelling: and were it not for cracks, caused by the contraction of the material of which they

are constructed, their rooms might have been rendered quite uninhabitable. As primitive folk, living in an elevated climate, have far more to fear from cold than from heat, these 'beehives' are, on the whole, well adapted for comfort and for the preservation of infant life. Indeed, the Toda name for a house and for a room being identical, and in part from the symmetrical arrangement of the door and veranda; also, from noticing that the second and third doors at the side, appear like an after-thought, out of keeping with the original design, and holding awkward positions in a house whose roof is continuous to the ground. This mode of small area is particularly utilized by a savage's house is utilised for cooking, eating, and sleeping purposes. Toda dwelling, shows the mode in which room is economised. Against the walls, at a convenient height over both store and fire-place, slips of split cane are fastened vertically, so as to form slings; into which firewood is neatly inserted, and in which it rapidly dries. The women are careful to keep a ply of dry wood in this manner: hence they are able to cook without making much smoke, using as they do, with a skill that seems to be the common property of all the natives of India, only one or two little sticks at a time. Nearly every Mand, and in some instances each house, is surrounded, at the distance of three or four paces.

by a low enclosure wall is built neatly but without cement. This wall, which in all cases bears the appearance of age, is so low (about 3 ft. high) as to preclude the possibility of its having originated in any defensive project, whether as protection from the attacks of man or the inroads of wild animals. Taken with the extreme narrowness of the gap left in it for egress, there seems no doubt of its having been designed merely to keep the half-wild cattle off the premises, lest they should trample on the children in their stampedes, or should rub their bodies against the low houses in their hours of ease. Neither the wall nor the enclosed area is in any degree sacred. In close proximity to the Mand will invariably be found the pound or pen pen-Tûel-into which the buffalos-Esm C Er a female-of the village are driven every evening on return from the grazing grounds. This pen, which varies in dimensions according to the wealth of the community in cattle, is fenced in strongly; in some places by a wall from four to five feet in height: at others by a fence of stout branches-when it is termed Men Tûel-according as the site happens to be prolific in stone or timber The herd of buffalos, being thoroughly competent to protect itself from wild beasts, is left in this pen without further protection, and, indeed, without any shelter, though the calves -Koan a male, Karr a female-whilst quite young are shut up at night in little huts situate close and often contiguous to the people's dwellings. Deserted cattle pens have at times been mistaken for Druidical circles. When the enclosure wall has been made of large blocks of stone, and where from paucity of material it had been constructed of double

rows of stone filled in with soil, and the earth had in due course been washed away, then the stones left standing would remain in very religious form. In addition to the dwelling houses just described, every Mand, without exception, contains a house devoted solely to the purposes of a dairy-pâthchi-consisting of two rooms milk-pâl-and for its conversion into clarified-butter. This building varies in size according to that of the village herd; from the dimensions of an ordinary house of two rooms, to one perhaps half as large again. It is situated somewhat apart from the Mand, and presumably for the sake of coolness-is generally found on a site which has been partially dug out from the side of the hill, on the slope of which the Mand is situated. The dairy is always enclosed within its separate wall, which is built very close up to it, and the outside of the wall often earthed in. The outer door is much of the size of those in ordinary dwellings, but that in the partition wall, forming the only means of access to the dairy room within, is of minute dimensions; probably one cubit high and about half a cubit broad. The typical plan of a Mand will explain the description which has just been given. The village itself is invariably situated in the open, exposed to the sun almost from daybreak to sunset, but sheltered by the hill side from the full force of the wind.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Willam E. Marshall, *Travels amongst the Todas or the Study of a Primitive Tribe in South India*, Longmans Green and Co., 1873, p.58

## **CHAPTER-4**

### **CONCLUSION**

India is a land of unique culture and comprises of various indigenous communities with rich traditions and customs. It has the second largest tribal population in the world, which also forms an integral part of the Indian society since ancient period. Among the tribes, Toda otherwise known as Tudava has an exceptional historical context and their origin can be traced from the mainland of ooty also known as udhagamandalam, which is a subdivision of the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu in southern India. 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. The administrative headquarters of the district is Udhagamandalam more commonly known to the plains people as 'Ooty'. 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 caste.

Based on the linguistic and circumstantial evidence, as well as the acknowledgment of the Todas through various names and their residence in the hilly regions of Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, it is evident that the Todas have a South Indian origin. Their unique customs, settlement patterns, and skills, such as embroidery, further support this conclusion. Additionally, their relationship with other tribal communities in the Nilgiri Mountains suggests a long history of coexistence and interdependence within the region. Therefore, the speculative theories regarding their ancestral origins outside of South India are not well-supported by the available evidence. Based on the linguistic analysis and historical references provided, it is evident that the Toda language is a proto-Dravidian language, indicating their affiliation with the Dravidian ethnic group

The evidence presented supports the conclusion that the Todas are an ancient tribe with deep roots in the Dravidian ethnic group, originating from Western Asia and settling in the Nilgiri Mountains of Tamil Nadu, India, several thousand years ago. Based on the cultural practices described, it is evident that the Todas have a deep sense of their ancestral connection to the Nilgiri Mountains and a strong belief in their historical ownership of the land. The

interaction between Todas and Badagas, including the gesture of the Badaga placing their hand on the top of a Toda's head as a form of greeting and sign of superiority, highlights the complex social dynamics between these tribes. The intricate rituals associated with receiving blessings and gifts from elders demonstrate respect for hierarchy and tradition. The traditional livelihood of the Todas, revolves around buffalo rearing, reflecting their close connection to nature and the importance of livestock in determining social status. As monetary pressures increased, the Todas adapted by engaging in trade, particularly with products like ghee.

The suggestion that the Todas may have practiced female infanticide and polyandry as a response to food scarcity and the struggle for existence upon their arrival in the Nilgiri Hills is a hypothesis that requires careful consideration and contextual understanding. In the case of the Todas, if they did indeed practice female infanticide and polyandry in the past, it may have been influenced by complex socio-economic and environmental factors. The Toda society is organized into clans, with each clan having its own distinct identity, leadership structure, and social customs. The five main clans are Paiki, Pekkan, Kuttan, Kenna, and Todi. These clans play a significant role in regulating social affairs, owning property, and upholding religious and cultural practices within the Toda community. The clan system is patrilineal, meaning that descent and membership are traced through the male line.

The Todas had an efficient and powerful self-governing body called “*Noim*”. It is a council of elders which can be compared to village panchayats. The description of the Toda attire reflects their simplicity and adherence to traditional garments. Both men and women also wear a white mantle with blue and red lines, known as putkūli, which is purchased in the local bazaar. The role of Toda women within their community is multifaceted and essential to the functioning of their society. Despite some traditional gender roles and practices, Toda women actively participate in various aspects of daily life, economic activities, and rituals.

Toda women engage in agricultural operations, cattle tending, and household chores such as fetching water and collecting firewood. They also observe rituals and play a significant role in the upbringing of children. However, it is noted that daughters inherit nothing from their parents and receive only dowry, which may impact their economic independence. One notable aspect is the taboo that prevents females from entering the dairy house, where dairy work is exclusively carried out by males. This reflects a gender-based division of labour within Toda society. Overall, Toda women play diverse and significant roles in their community,

contributing to both domestic and economic spheres while upholding cultural traditions and customs.

In short, the history of the Todas is rich and complex, reflecting their unique cultural heritage and traditions. Toda culture is characterized by its simplicity, traditional attire, and close connection to nature. While they have adapted to changes over time, such as transitioning from buffalo rearing to engaging in trade, the Todas have preserved many aspects of their ancient way of life. Despite facing challenges such as changes in economic practices and influences from outside cultures, the Todas continue to uphold their cultural identity and maintain their unique customs and traditions.

The architectural styles and cultural practices of the Todas were quite unique, but they are losing in on this traditional knowledge as in present times they are following the modern techniques of construction. Todas' villages, known as "Munds," consist of huts, dairy temples, and cattle pens, showcasing a blend of practicality and tradition. They collectively use mud, stones, dried grass and bamboo for constructing their huts that are symmetrically blended with the environment. The huts are usually at a height of 10 feet with an area of 160 square feet. Toda huts entrances are specifically decorated with primitive arts forms with respective means. These arts forms are actually the reminiscent of rock and mural painting that date back to early stone age period. the door has only three feet height and three feet width which is necessary to crawl in four to get inside the hut. These doors are constructed for protection from wild animal that roam around the hills. The huts are oval in shape with bamboo and thatch construction, featuring sliding doors and raised platforms for sleeping and cooking. The dairy temples serve religious and practical functions, while the cattle pens are enclosed spaces for livestock. These huts are also designed to withstand intense weather conditions and are well suited for their environment, reflecting a harmonious relationship with nature. Additionally, Todas have customs such as relocating during certain seasons and vacating houses in case of death or sickness. Overall, Toda's architecture and lifestyle embody a rich cultural heritage deeply intertwined with their natural surroundings. The Toda community are masters in cost-effective and eco-friendly architectural practices, utilizing natural resources efficiently and reflecting cultural sensitivity. Their unique Arsh-houses serve as an exemplary model for contemporary architects seeking alternative methods. Despite structural and stability concerns during crises, the tribal knowledge offers valuable insights into cost-effective and timely constructional practices, expanding the realm of architectural possibilities.

This project tries to unfold the historical background and architectural excellence of the Toda tribe who reside over the Nilgiri hills. They have a rich historical background deeply rooted in distinctive culture and unique tradition. Their distinctive architectural style, characterized by the iconic Toda huts, reflects both functionality and cultural significance. Despite facing various challenges including encroachment on their traditional lands, diminishing resources, and the impact of modernization. Economic pressures, changes in land use, and evolving societal dynamics pose threats to their traditional way of life. Striking a balance between preserving their unique cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary challenges remains an ongoing struggle for the Toda tribe. With their rich cultural heritage and unique socio-economic practices, the Todas stand tall against all odds and preserves their traditions in this ever-changing world. They continue to uphold their bond with nature and actively engages in agricultural practices, women independently undertake entrepreneurial ventures striving to improve their quality of life and enhance their socio-economic status. Furthermore, studying the Toda community is not just about enriching our understanding of human societies, but also about the imperative to preserve indigenous cultures for future generations.

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## APPENDIX 1- MAPS



Tamil Nadu in Indian Map



Tamil Nadu State



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Udhagamandalam

## Appendix 2- Pictures



Toda Village



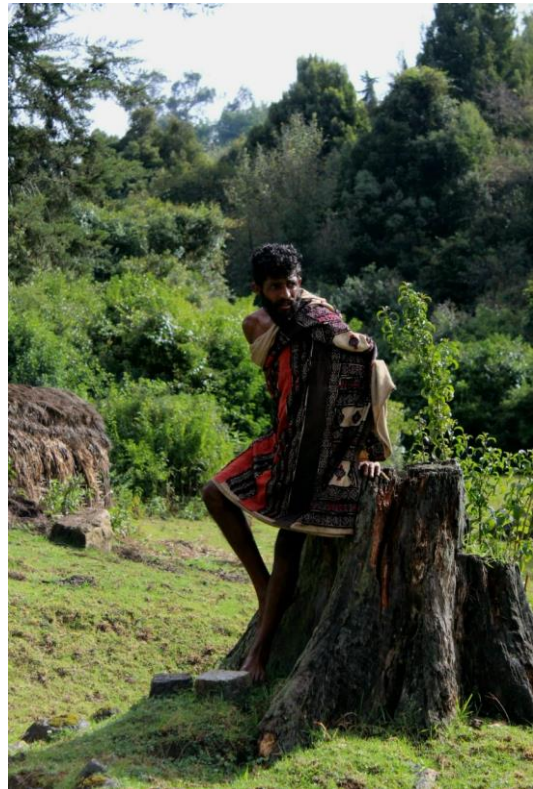
Toda Temple



Modern Dwellings



Pasture Lands



Toda Priest