



## MARRIAGE CEREMONY OF TODA TRIBES OF NILGIRIS HILLS

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### ABSTRACT

*Marriage is one of the important social institutions. It is a means of establishing a family through which the society perpetuates itself. A successful marriage is presupposed trust, mutual affection, capacity to adjust and sharing the responsibilities equally, at every stage of the life. Marriage in India is regarded as one of the most significant life-cycle rituals and is a familial and societal expectation for Hindus. This social process is expressed in the form of rituals and symbols.*

**KEYWORDS:** Marriage, Tribes.

### INTRODUCTION

Marriages are a special occasion whose rituals are unique in every community of the world weddings are vibrant, intricately planned, culture-rich festivities full of celebration and tradition. In India itself, we can find thousands of different traditions and customs, behind which there are a variety of reasons and explanations. While the very essence of a Hindu wedding ceremony is the physical, spiritual, and emotional union of two people; it's also about the coming together of two families through prayer and celebration. The solemnization of marriage by observing either the religious ceremonies or certain secular forms prescribed by law is a symbolic expression of the fact that the parties are accepting each other as spouses or where they are of nonage, their parents or guardians deem them to have become spouses. The formalities of marriage prescribed by various Hindu communities in India are, in fact, varied and complex, their nature differing according to whether a particular community considers marriage as a religious or secular union. The marriage formalities in many communities are, indeed, a bundle of ceremonies involving religious, economic, legal and aesthetic motives thereby rendering the separation of legal requirements from their other adjuncts difficult. Every society has its own modes of living depending upon its socio-economic needs. The particulars of marriage rites vary a lot within the vedic texts though general outlines are more or less the same. The marriage practices depend on the situation and decision of both the parties.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on the following main objectives,

1. To identify the patterns of the Marriage in Toda society.
2. To explore various aspects related marriage as a social ritual of the tribes.

3. To find out the factors responsible for child Marriage in Toda society.

### SYNOPTIC VIEW OF THE TODAS

The **Toda people** are a small pastoral community who live on the isolated Nilgiri plateau of Southern India<sup>1</sup>. India. Before the late 18th century, the Toda coexisted locally with other communities, including the Badaga, Kota and Kurumba, in a loose caste-like community organization in which the Toda were the top ranking<sup>2</sup>. The Toda population has hovered in the range 700 to 900 during the last century. Although an insignificant fraction of the large population of India, the Toda have attracted (since the late 18th century), "a most disproportionate amount of attention because of their ethnological aberrancy" and "their unlikeness to their neighbours in appearance, manners, and customs." The study of their culture by anthropologists and linguists would prove important in the creation of the fields of social anthropology. The Toda society is a patrilineage i.e. a 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: a. Tharthazoll. b. Therelioll. Tharthazoll have 12 clans and the other endogamous division. Therelioll has only six clans<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> J.W.Brecks: Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris, Cultural Publishing House, Delhi, 1873, P.p.

<sup>2</sup> Emeneau, Murray B. Toda Grammar and Texts, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, (1984), Pp. 1-2

<sup>3</sup> W.H.S. Rivers, 'The Todas', Macmillan and Co., London, 1906, p.p.193-194.

### SELECTION PATTERN OF THE SPOUSE

Usually the Todas select their life pattern within their community, mostly among close blood relatives, about 82.25 per cent of the Todas selected their spouses from their maternal side i.e. the mother's brother's son or daughter. About 29.14 per cent of them selected their spouse from their paternal side i.e. father's sister's son or daughter. It was reported that 8.61 per cent of the Todas selected their life partner from new relation within their community. In majority of the Todas selected their life partners from their maternal side time of conducting marriage.

### MARRIAGE TIMINGS

The Todas celebrate the marriage only during day time. The marriage timings will fall between 12 noon to 2.00 p.m. The Toda marriages will be celebrated only during the New Moon day. The study found that 32.45 per cent of the marriages were held during 12 noon, followed by 29.14 per cent, 19.97 per cent, 13.91 per cent and 4.64 per cent by 12.30 P.M., 1.00 P.M., 1.30 p.m. and 2.00 p.m. respectively. Generally, the Toda marriages will be held before lunch time after the completion of the marriage a feast is hosted.

### MARRIAGE REGULATION

The Todas have very strict restriction towards the selection of life partner by the individual. No man (or) woman can marry a member of the same sub clan but they can marry from another sub clan. It is followed even today. There is also strict prevention for marriage between Taol and the Teivalion, because these groups are endogamous. Marriage with the same clan is considered to be a great crime and there is strict prohibition of sexual intercourse within the clan.

### CUSTOM OF INFANT MARRIAGE AND TODAS

The custom of infant marriage is well established among the Todas, and a child is often married when only two or three years of age. Usually parents arrange marital alliances for their offspring before the children are two or three old<sup>5</sup>. The father of the male arranges the marriages. It is the father of the male that seeks a suitable mate for his son. The father observes prevailing marriage regulations and taboos. First, the father will visit the female's parents and stay the night in the village, making all necessary marriage arrangements. He will be in the village of another clan due to clan exogamy. The father will return to his own village the next day. A few days after his first visit, the father and his son travel back to the village of the intended wife, taking with them a loin cloth as a preliminary wedding gift. The male then would salute the father, mother and brothers of the female, kneeling forward to be touched on the forehead with each

individual's feet<sup>6</sup>. The gift is then presented to the female. The father and son stay the night once again and return home the next day. Sometimes the girl will return home with the father and son to live with the family of her soon to be husband. But, usually the female will remain with her family until she has passed the age of puberty<sup>7</sup>.

The children remain with their parents until maturity. From the time of the child-marriage the boy has to give a tadrp (dress) as a gift, twice a year until the girl is ten years old<sup>5</sup>. After that, the male will bring a cloak, which is considered the common gift of the Toda. A year after the defloration ceremony, the female joins her new husband in his village. It is usually some years later, when the girl is about fifteen or sixteen that she joins her husband and goes to live with him at his village. The parents of the husband announce that they will fetch the girl on a certain day, which must be one of two or three days of the week, different for each clan. The husband, accompanied by his father and a male relative of the same clan, goes to the village of the girl, and the three are feasted with rice and jaggery; the husband puts five rupees into the pocket of the girl's mantle and then takes her home. There is no ceremony of any kind, not even the salutation such as was performed at the original ceremony<sup>8</sup>.

A group containing the husband, his parents, and a relative belonging to the same clan brings her there. Before leaving the female's village, he places five rupees into the female's mantle and then the group departs. Other than a simple feast and wedding gift, there is no ceremony. Both the male and female have the option to veto the marriage<sup>9</sup>. If either choose to do so, fines are levied, one buffalo if the male refused and five to ten buffalo if the female refuses. Usually, the marriage goes on as planned with the woman taking with her personal possessions. Women are inferior to men in the Toda culture. They are the ones who must move to the male's house and village after marriage. Women also are not allowed to do such activities as property holding, dairying, herding, family decisions, the naming of males, matters concerning migration, and building.

In Toda society marriage is initiated in childhood and completed at maturity, when the husband takes his wife from her parental home to his own Mund (village), but in ritual terms the children are as truly married as the adults. Korewily (bride price) and Arpin, (dowry) giving practice are followed strictly by the Todas in the form of giving (or) accepting buffaloes<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>Anthony R.Walker The Todas of South India: A new look, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1986, p.p.200-201

<sup>7</sup>Op.cit. W.H.S. Rivers p.p502

<sup>8</sup>G.N.Das, "The Rotarian" Todas in Changing Times" Vol. 90, No. 5, ISSN 0035-838X, May 1957, p.p.32-33

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. Anthony Walker, 1986: p.p.200-201

<sup>10</sup>K.M.Kapadia, Marriage and Family, Oxford University press, Calcutta, 1989, p.p.91

<sup>5</sup>William Rose Kings "Todas of South India" p.p24

The number of buffaloes given depends on the wealth of the parents of the girl and boy. Again, the female Toda would have already mastered a few domestic arts practiced by Toda women upon reaching adolescence. These tasks include, pounding grain, fetching water, sweeping, cleaning, mending, and embroidering. The only "fine art" that Toda women can really produce is embroidering. They celebrate their marriage after confirming the fertility. It is possible that the original alliance will be dissolved and a new one arranged before the young couple being to live together. If the girl refuses to join her husband the fine is heavier, and at the present time usually amounts to five or ten buffaloes, the number being settled by a council according to the circumstances of the people<sup>11</sup>. In 1902, the Todas, in petition to Government, prayed for special legislation to legalise their marriage on the lines of the Malabar Marriage Act. The Treasury Deputy Collector of the Nilgiris was appointed as Registrar of Toda marriages. No marriage has been registered<sup>12</sup>.

### PRE PUBERTY CEREMONIES

The first rite is performed by Inviting the girls maternal uncle to the girl's hamlet. The girl is allowed to take blessings by bowing down to all her relatives who are elder to her, but she will not receive any gifts, except from her mun. Later in the day, towards evening a man from exogamous clan: comes to the girl's house and lies with her for a few minutes on the sleeping platform by covering with his mantle without any sexual relation. The second rite is performed during the night by a strong physique man chosen to deflower the girl. This custom takes place before the girls reaches puberty. But at the same time the Todas do not perform any puberty ceremonies.

### PUBERTY CEREMONIES

As for as girls are concerned, this is the ceremony performed during her first menses, but there is no ceremony (or) rite to mark the attainment of puberty. However, during her first menstrual period the girls are kept aloof from her house for three days, and no cooking is performed in the place of her stay. During her stay there, food is served to her from her own house but milk, butter and buttermilk is restricted to her for these days. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day the girl is purification bath and allowed inside her house. Traditionally the girl is tattooed after puberty but presently they are not following this tradition. During her subsequent menses the Toda girl or woman is not excluded from her house and she will also perform all her duties in the house. She will also abstain

from sexual intercourse during her menstrual period.

### BOW AND ARROW CEREMONY OR MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Toda tribes have been practicing the traditional marriage style where celebrations take place not at the time of marriage but when the bride is pregnant. In a tradition of Toda tribes in Tamil Nadu, marriage of a couple is solemnized only after the bride successfully conceives the baby of her husband. According to the tradition, the bride after marriage stays with her husband for a month or two and then goes to her parents place. And when she becomes pregnant, a joint ceremony takes place called the bow and arrow ceremony. The groom goes to the forest and makes a bow and arrow from the tender stems of the tree and presents it to his bride. If the bride accepts it, that confirms that the baby in her womb is his and she accepts him as her husband. The ceremony organised at the beginning of the seventh month of pregnancy, is marked by traditional dance and songs by members with the clan wearing colourful shawls. The ceremony which is conducted a day before the full moon day also fascinated other people who witnessed it. The couple later take the blessings of the elders. Some of these marriages are also arranged when the two are still children<sup>13</sup>.

The Todas have very definite restrictions on the freedom of individuals to marry. One of the most important of these is that which prevents intermarriage between the Tartharol and the Teivaliol. No man or woman may marry a member of his or her own clan, but must marry into another clan. They have never married people outside their own community, and a strong prejudice against such marriages still exists<sup>14</sup>.

The problem of child marriage is very complex in nature. The impact of child marriage over the young bride's future is enforced widowhood, inadequate socialisation, education deprivation, lack of economic independence, psychological as well as marital adjustment, and Nutritional status as a result of early/frequent pregnancies in an unprepared psychological state of the young bride. Over and above, it is not only health hazard for young mothers but it has very adversely affected the national population policy of the government. History has witnessed several movements against child marriage. But none of them succeeded in its total abolition. It is still prevalent but in a sporadic form. In modern society, it is considered as an evil and its solution is yet to be evolved. The problem of child marriage has been a great concern for demographers because it is directly linked with high fertility rate. Various excuses are cited for defending child Marriage like custom, traditional practice; however, the truth is that these are only excuses to perpetuate the practice.

<sup>11</sup>JakkaParthasarathy, The Todas of the Nilgiri District, Tribal Research Centre and H.A.D.P Publication, Ooty, April 2007, p.p.62

<sup>12</sup>Edgar Thurston K. Rangachari, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol.VII, Government Press, Madras, 1909. P.p144.

<sup>13</sup>W.M. William Yeatts, Todas, in census of India 1931, vol:XIV, Govt. of India, Calcutta.1932.

<sup>14</sup>Walker, Anthony R. "The Truth About The Toda ", *Frontline, The Hindu*, (2004),

Child Marriage has its roots deep in the social psychology of the people. This practice reflects the inherently patriarchal nature of our society. The high rate of illiteracy is one of the key issues restraining the community's overall development

## **CONCLUSION**

Marriage is one of the important social institutions. It is a means of establishing a family through which the society perpetuates itself. A successful marriage is presupposed trust, mutual affection, capacity to adjust and sharing the responsibilities equally, at every stage of the life. Marriage in India is regarded as one of the most significant life-cycle rituals and is a familial and societal expectation for Hindus. This social process is expressed in the form of rituals and symbols. Every society employs certain forms of symbolic actions and physical symbols to communicate the values, expectations and ethos concerning marriage and family life. Todas are one of the most colourful and vibrant of the Indian tribes, have a unique culture of their own. Todas culture is an important grain of the mosaic of the culture of India. Their customs, traditions, language, food and dress habits, in short, their lifestyle is unique which does not have anything in common either with the population of plain areas or with the local tribes. So the need of the hour is to preserve the rich and fast diminishing cultural heritage of the tribes by making people aware and motivated towards it. Hence the need of media arises on this tribe to highlight the salient features of its values. The media can play a vital role for an exhaustive documentation of tribal values in the form of documentaries, which could be an important tool for future generations to know about its culture and customs.