

Revitalising Toda Cultural Legacy and Knowledge System: An Educational Perspective

Dr. G. Sathiyadevi

M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., DCS., Ph.D.,

Associate Professor And Head, Department Of History,

M.R. Govt. Arts College, Mannargudi, (Affiliated To Bharathidasan University)

Tiruvarur District, Tamil Nadu.

E-MAIL: sathiyadevi72@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted on 22-03-2025

Published on 15-04-2025

Keywords:

Paramour, Stereotype,

Usurped, Picturesque,

Evangelical Zeal, Zenana

Mission, Offshoot,

Aborigines, Promiscuity,

Polyandry, Pastoralism,

Wifestealing.

ABSTRACT

The Random House Dictionary of the English languages (1972 : 1514) defined woman as “ the female human being, distinguished from man; and adult female person, feminine in nature, characteristics or feelings; a sweetheart of paramour, mistress a female person who cleans the house, cooks etc, a house keeper”. In recent years, studies in the sociology and anthropology of women have departed from the stereotype of women as passive partners of men in economics and family activities and highlighted their autonomy and role which is an important if not more so, as bread winners and so on. A few studies of tribal woman which have been published have dealt with division of labour, erosion of their status and rights and deterioration in their condition of work, as a result of the destruction of forests and exposure to market forces. However, crucial issues facing tribal women are yet to be explored. Thus, since the inception of human kind, woman has always formed an inseparable part of the society and culture. The Nilgiris (Sanskrit: giri means mountain, and nila means blue) have taken centre stage on the world's tourist map. In addition, it is well-known for its hydropower production, biodiversity, tea business, and tribal traditions. It has been attracting large numbers of visitors, anthropologists, biologists, linguists, and environmentalists due to its

breathtaking scenery and rich history. It does not, however, receive as many visits from historians as it should. Therefore, there are still some historical facets that need to be investigated in a real historiographic manner. The long-standing connection between the Todas and the Nilgiris is one example of this. This paper tries to engulf the empowerment of women and their education, in addition with the Toda cultural practices.

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15225207>

Introduction

The states of Karnataka to the north, Kerala to the west, and two districts of Tamil Nadu—Coimbatore to the south and Erode to the east—define the Nilgiris, which is the state's northeastern hill district. Five indigenous tribes, including the Bedagas, Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, and Irulas, had a unique home in the Blue Hills. The Wynaad (now the Gudalur taluk) was populated by Paniyas, Kurchers, and Wynaadan chetties. The Todas are thought to have been the first people to live in the hills. Herding buffaloes was the only work they did; they were strictly pastoral.

From the beginning of time, the Nilgiris had been inhabited by tribes. Prior to the arrival of the British, its history is unclear. The Europeans deserve the credit for discovering the past and producing a number of historical narratives. Numerous monarchs, including Cheras, Kongu chieftains, and subsequently Cholas in the early times, control the province. The Hoysalas and then the Vijayanagara empire ruled the region during the Middle Ages. Hyder Ali ruled the Nilgiris throughout the modern era after usurping the Mysore crown from the Udayars.

To increase its dominion, the British East India Company fought multiple conflicts against the local kings. Sullivan is appropriately referred to as the "Founder of Ootacamund" because he spearheaded a number of advancements. The Nilgiris became a district on August 1, 1868, after being split off from Coimbatore.

Todas live in the Picturesque and green surfaced Nilgiris. Toda settlements are called munds. The women have subordinate position in their community. The discrimination of male and female starts



right from birth. The birth of a boy is considered as a privilege but not of the girl. Toda women engage themselves with household work alone.

Toda women face many restrictions in their community. Sociologists and Anthropologists have carried out many investigations on Toda community.

Christianization Of The Toda Tribals

A new era in Indian history began with the arrival of Christian missionaries. They were fired with evangelical fervour, and their main goal was conversion. The circumstances that prevailed among the Nilgiri tribes were favourable and provided them with sufficient room to achieve their goal. It proved useful to impart knowledge. The missionaries openly interacted with the tribes and worked to better their economic and social circumstances. They also took the lead in eliminating numerous social ills that were prevalent among the different ethnic communities.

The peculiar social practices attracted the missionaries to the side of Todas and they started to convert in the Christianity. Number of missionaries came to the hills to spread Christianity among the tribes.

The Church of England Zenana Missionary Society arrived in the Nilgiris shortly after the Church Missionary Society in 1883. The Zenana Mission was an all-female missionary organisation that spread the gospel to immigrant women, both Hindu and Muslim, and then to the Todas, who were the aborigines. The Toda Mission, a branch of the Zenana work, was started in 1890 under the direction of Catherine F. Ling, a capable and vivacious missionary, whose successes in evangelism and education had a lasting influence on the socio-religious and economic customs of the pastoral Todas.¹

The Zenana Mission did not encompass the Toda Mission. The Zenana Mission focused its efforts on converting some of the Todas, or the aborigines of the Hills, to Christianity under the capable leadership of Ling. To provide for the material necessities of the Todas, Ling set up a dispensary, schools, and agricultural colonies. However, Ling was by no means the first missionary to work consistently among the Todas. After working with them for almost 25 years, the German missionary Rev. J.F. Metz sadly acknowledged that the Todas were still not convinced.

But the hard nut was destined to be cracked by the redoubtable woman Missionary, Ling.² Only in 1890 did the Zenana Mission take notice of the Todas. According to the narrative, a Tamil Christian



gave medicine and counsel to pray to Christ to a Toda man who had been unwell. The Toda seems to have taken that as a vow to God, since they regularly make such commitments. In order to offer prayers, the specific Toda visited the Tamil Church in Ootacamund for two consecutive Sundays. He then went to the Mission House to request instruction for his followers. It was a clear invitation to the missionaries to start preaching among the Todas. Ling was selected to work with them.³

The difficult task of introducing the alphabet to the Todas was taken on by the Zenana Mission. The Zenana Mission was given exclusive responsibility for the Todas' education starting in 1890. On the application of Ling, the Government made over a site at free of cost for the Toda school in Susugandi near Pykara, 18 Kilometres west of Ootacamund, in 1893.⁴

The Todas moved in large numbers during a particular time of year in search of new pasture for their buffaloes, which made the second school necessary. Seven kilometres west of Ootacamund, close to Governor Shoal, a second school was established. In a sizable Toda mund close to Conoor, Ling founded a third school. Three schools catering solely to Toda boys and girls existed by 1897.⁵

Ling visited and inspected the Toda Schools around twice a month. The purpose of the Toda Schools was not concealed by the mission. Ling placed her faith in the kids attending school. There were no fees at any of these three schools. In addition, she provided the student with free clothing and other school supplies.⁶ Ling was adamant that the Toda youngsters would experience "true conversion" as a result of the boarding school's Christian environment and regular instruction. After a torturously lengthy 14-year gestation period, the Toda fold finally responded. In 1904, Kishkar, a bright Toda youngster, became the first convert while pursuing his high school education at Tirunelveli. However, this sparked a flurry of protests.

All Toda schools were forced to close for three consecutive academic years when the Todas pulled their children out of the Mission schools. The Toda's animosity towards Conversion continued unchecked.⁷

Following a lull, some elder Todas asked Ling to reopen the schools because they recognised the need of education. In the academic year 1907–1908, Ling, who had been waiting to be invited, reopened the schools in Pykara and Glenmorgan⁸. Due to a lack of funding, Ling's 1914 proposal to establish a second school in Kundatholmund was not approved by the government.⁹



By the 1920s, all opposition to education had subsided, and a number of Toda girls and boys had enrolled in the residential school. The boys were housed in the boarding school of the church Missionary Society and Welseyan Mission, while the girls from Toda were sent to the Gell Memorial Boarding School. Ling has stressed the importance of teaching the Toda girls since the beginning of the Toda Mission in order to inculcate in them healthy habits and to eradicate what she believed to be unchristian aspects of Toda customs. Ling intended to address a number of issues, including wife capture, female infanticide, polyandry, promiscuity, and women's poor ceremonial position. Ling therefore established two schools just for the Toda girls. However, they did not advance and their existence was constantly unstable.¹⁰ Thus, Ling abandoned the plan to manage the prestigious girls' institutions. She sent the Toda girls to a boarding house at Ootacamund and the Kinloch School at Kandal, both of which are administered by the Zenana Mission.

Later, a number of educated Toda girls converted. Many of them received training as nurses, Bible ladies, teachers, and other professions. It is indisputable that the Mission provided the dispersed Todas with a rudimentary education, despite the fact that it had effectively employed education as a surefire method of conversion. The Todas gained awareness through education, which also enabled them to find employment outside of their traditional pastoral livelihood. It also made them want greater things and a better environment.

To stop the wicked custom of wife-stealing, the Toda women were persuaded to register their unions. Taking another man's wife and using her as one's own was a common practice among Todas. In those days, this was a socially accepted behaviour. The mission had instilled the educational quality to such an extent that, according to the 1961 census, all Christian Todas older than five had received an education, which was unprecedented for any tribal tribe in contemporary India.

The call of Ling, who became the torchbearer amid the benighted Todas, roused the pastoral Todas from their sleep.¹¹

Conclusion

This work focuses on Toda women's empowerment and their cultural practices in the Nilgiri District of Tamil Nadu. The dictionary defines the word 'women' as an adult female person,



distinguished from man by virtue of her feminine nature. It also denotes, studies from an anthropological and sociological perspective have departed from the stereotypical of women as passive partners of men. Today women are no longer conceived of as docile or subordinate to men.

This work is sincere attempt to throw the light on the development of Toda women on the Nilgiris.

Todas have been a pastoral society almost wholly dependent for their livelihood on their large herds of long horned buffaloes. In ancient days, Todas practiced polyandry as the main form of marriage, that is fraternal polyandry. Toda women are generally suppressed group have low status and are under subjugation oppression or under male dominance. Traditionally the freedom of movement was restricted for woman. They were not permitted to go outside their settlement except visiting their relatives.

Educated Toda men and women started to seek employment in the local industries. The Toda women also take effort for the improvement of their economic condition. Women's empowerment includes two components like attitudinal empowerment and material advancement. Women occupied the second position in the Toda social hierarchy. Womanhood was fundamentally associated with unalienable impurity. Emancipating the Toda women was one of the reformative measures taken by British administration, which disregarded the promise of nonintervention in India's socio-religious norms. The Voluntary agencies play an important role in helping Toda women.

Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare association and Tribal women self-help group also help the Toda Women. As the women are now helping in contributing to the families economically they have gained a better status in the family and society.

End Notes

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