

TRADITIONAL SKILLS AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF TODA TRIBES OF NILGIRIS –AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The tribal population is identified as the aboriginal inhabitants of our country. Census records 705 tribes as STs and among them 75 tribes are recorded as primitive tribal groups (PTGs census of India 2011). Mainly it is based on the criteria of their low level of Education, stagnant population growth and primitive economy. The tribal population is not a homogenous group and tribes differ in the economic social educational and other conditions. This article reveals importance and traditional skill of Toda and their economic life.

Keywords: Economic life, Embroidery, Nilgiris, Toda Tribal, Traditional Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

India has the unique distinction of having perhaps the largest biological and cultural diversities. The Nilgiri hills of southern India, a home for several tribal pocket representing different genetic isolates provides a genetic wealth to understand human evolution. Nilgiris is India's first biosphere. It has been declared as one of the 14 hotspots of the world because of its unique biodiversity. The Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu is home for the Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas, Paniyas and Kattunaikans tribes.

The term 'Tribe' originated around the Greek and the early formation of Roman Empire. The Latin term tribe has since been transformed to identify a group of persons forming a community and claiming descent from a common ancestor. Forest occupies a central position in the tribal economy and society (Refer table no.1).

Table 1- Tribal Population in Nilgiri District¹

Sl.no	Scheduled tribes	No.of households	percentage	population		Total	percentage
				male	female		
1	Todas	418	6.39	785	695	1480	4.98
2	Kotas	491	7.50	1009	976	1985	6.68
3	Kurumbas	2076	31.71	5196	5157	10353	34.86
4	Paniyas	1197	18.28	2795	2746	5541	18.65
5	Kattunayakans	452	6.90	824	805	1629	5.49
6	Irulas	1913	29.22	4219	4495	8714	29.34
		6547	100	14828	14874	29702	100

Sources: Nilgiris Adiwasi Welfare Association (NAWA) census-2011.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify traditional skills of Todas.
2. To study the economic life of Todas.

2. THE TODA TRIBES

The Toda people are a small pastoral community who live on the isolated Nilgiri plateau of southern India. Before 18th century the Toda coexisted locally with other communities including the Badagas, Kotas, Kurumbas- lived very happily helping each other. The Toda are known by several names like Tudas, Tudavans and Todas. They are found only in Nilgiri district. The name toda is supposed to be derived from word ‘tud’ sacred Tud tree of Todas. The linguist Emeneau (1958: 47-50) said that, Toda dialect is an independent language of the Dravidian family affiliated with Tamil-Malayalam. The uniqueness of the half barrel shaped houses given speculations regarding their origin ranged from Rome to Sumeria. The traditional jewelry is worn by both men and women. The Toda are a timid type of peace loving people. Theft and robbery are unknown to them. The Toda people are purely vegetarian. The Todas are the most fascinating and intriguing tribe of the Nilgiris. They are known for their barrel shaped homes and conical spired temple roofs made of intricately woven grazes. It is found that the Todas are deeply traditional; depend on the eco system for their survival.

3. ECONOMIC LIFE OF TODAS

¹ Sivasankaran m.s, and vadivel.c, international journal of current multidisciplinary studies (IJCMS), vol 2, issue 10, pp 470-475, October 2016.

Dairying is one of the most important and economically viable occupations for the tribal households. The most important domestic animal of Toda is the buffalo. They classify two types of buffaloes ordinary and sacred buffalo herds. The former type is owned by individual Toda family and the latter type is supposed to be the property of the clan. The Toda buffalo are semi-wild animals maintained by the Toda tribes of south India. The Toda economy continues to involve buffalo rearing. Toda tribal sole career is live stock rearing and dairy. Most of the participants have large herd of buffaloes. Toda tribal have taken up the career of farm animal rearing and dairy farming. This Toda tribal community sustained with their livelihood from milk merchandise. Their involved in cattle breeding they also sell buffaloes.

Points out that most of the respondents (40 percent) earn income through leasing of land. 36 percent of respondents earn income way of unskilled work. 12 percent of the respondent's income comes from government employment. 8 percent of respondents earn income from sale of milk per month and 2 percent of respondents earn income through buffalo sales and daily wage. It is dealt with traditional skill like Toda embroidery and Toda medicine (Refer table no.2).

4. TODA EMBROIDERY

Toda women do intricate embroidery on the surface of plain cotton material. Their traditional garment is of thick which is further embellished with hand embroidery. Woolen or cotton thread is used for this embroidery work. A variety of items like cell phone pouch, table cloth, scarf, shawl, skirts and tops, drawstring purse and bag, frocks, waist coat etc., are made.

This table indicates 53 percent of Toda women have income through embroidery from Rs1000 to 2000, and 14 percent of Toda women earn income from above Rs 3000. This income supports their family (Refer table no.2).

Table 2- Occupations and Earnings of Todas

S.no	Items	Amount of earned (in Rs)	No.of. Respondents	percentage
1	Buffalo sales	10000-20000	3	2
2	Sale of milk per month	1000-2000	14	8
3	Leasing of land	100000-500000	70	40
4	Daily wage	200-300	4	2
5	Unskilled work	5000-10000	62	36
6	Government employee	Above 20000	20	12
	total		173	100

Source: primary data

Table 3 – Embroidery and Earnings of Toda Women

Sl.no	Approximate income earned per product (in Rs)	No. of toda women employed	percentage
1	Rs. 1000-2000	66	53%
2	Rs. 2001-3000	42	33%
3	Above 3000	17	14%
	total	125	100%

Source: primary data

Since Todas worship the buffalo, the buffalo horn design is most important. One design has been named after ancient priest and another after a girl who fell from a precipice and lost her life. A clever effect of light and shade is produced by using alternating bands of color tapering from dark to light on the top half, then tapering again from light to lighter to dark along the bottom half along a whole row of identical motifs. Their embroidery consists of geometrical designs such as zig zag bands triangles, squares and dots. Todas are experts at cane craft churning stick used in their dairy based culture in the funeral rites they fashion a cane twig into an abstract buffalo head as a substitute for the buffalo sacrifice.

5. TODA MEDICINE

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, diarrhea, dysentery, eye infections stomach ache, wounds and snake bite. But these skills they do not use it for income earning purpose.

6. TODA TRADITIONS IN PERAL

Toda ecology faces an invasion. The sacred hill of Toda tribes are extensively quarried for stone. The bamboo reed seen in many shola is now restricted to some dense jungles on the south-west slopes. Todas have to go long distance for this bamboo reed. Mass planting of exotic trees like eucalyptus on adjacent hillsides led to its disappearance. If any species become locally extinct, their culture could collapse.

7. CONCLUSION

The Nilgiris, now a tourist place originally belonged to Todas. Encroachment from tourist poses threat to Toda population and their skill. Hence government must interfere and groom Toda tradition in the following way. Encourage Toda children to learn about Toda medicine, embroidery and making of hut (which is unique- oval shaped constructed of bamboo/woven with particular grasses) by giving stipend. To a certain extent, immigrants must be restricted to settle in Nilgiris to save tribal culture.

Subsidy must be given for the maintenance of buffalo and pasture land. Buffalo must be availed to Toda community. The major impact of mercerization accompanied by modernization will be on tribal community through the processes of land alienation, displacement and deprivation of the control and the use of natural resources, reduction in subsidies and rise in the prices of essential commodities and these needs are to be analyzed.

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