Chapter 2

TRIBAL POLITY-I

TODAS AND KOTAS

One of the most primitive tribe of the Nilgiris is Todas. The next in the list is the Kotas. As we have already seen in the first chapter, the cultural, socio-economic conditions of these tribes have an influence on the polity of these tribes. Among the six tribal polities studied in this research work, this chapter deals with the settlements, clans and political organisations of the two major tribes of the Nilgiris, the Todas and Kotas.

Todas

“High above the tropical plains of Tamil Nadu in South India rise the spectacular Nilgiri or Blue Mountains, above which is a temperate grass-land plateau. This is the home of the Toda, a small but highly distinctive community whose lifestyle for centuries has revolved around its herds of magnificent long-horned water buffaloes.”

The Toda settlements are found nowhere on the earth except in the Nilgiris.

The Origin of the Toda Self-Governing Body, the ‘Noim’

The Toda council, just like any other socio-political organisation in any human community has found its origin from the time it existed on the Nilgiris. There are different opinions expressed regarding the origin of the Todas, which ranged from Rome to Sumeria. The earliest written record we have of these people is a stone inscription in Kannada dated 1117. This inscription, which is to be found in the Chamarajnagar Taluk of Karnataka State, mentions the words ‘Todas’ and ‘Nila Mountain’. It relates how Punisa, “Minister of War and Peace” under the Hoysala King Vishnuvardhana (ruled 1104-1141) had frightened the Todas, driven the Kongas under ground, slaughtered the Poluvas, put to death the Malayalas, terrified King Kala and entering into the Nila mountain offered up its peak to the Lakshmi of victory. Again in the reports of the Christian missionaries which visited the Nilgiri Hills, the Todas find a place calling them in their records as Todramale or Todamala, in 1602-1603. The word Toda means simply ‘the men’ as they call themselves “o. t.”
Though the hills came under different rulers, there is no evidence to say that the Todas followed the governance of any of them. Instead, there are enough and more folk songs and stories narrating the efficiency of the Toda council in the past. Hence, it is clear that the local self-government of the Todas is as old as their existence itself.

**Socio-Political Organisation**

With the Toda living in the settlement, we can claim that a socio-political organisation of early Nilgiri dwellers began. From this point, we can trace man’s organisation of society for his settlement and his guest to administer the community.

**Toda Settlements**

Toda families reside in permanent villages or hamlets, known as ‘Mod’ or ‘Mand’ or ‘Madd’ or ‘Mandu’ according to the Badagas. ‘Munds’ are settlements across the grasslands of the high Nilgiris. Each ‘Mund’ has a certain tract of grazing ground surrounding it. Each minor division of the family has a house-Årsh- in the ‘Mand’, and a share of the village land 4. The Toda hut is barrel-vaulted shape, with the half barrel-shaped roof and sidewalls, which is a unique feature of Toda houses. The round part of the arched roof is made of rattan, supported by cross poles of hardwood or bamboo, and grass is used for thatching. Their main concentration is on the northwestern side of the Nilgiris now known as ‘Wenlock Downs’. The hamlets are not evenly populated. Some settlements or some families move from one place to the other during dry season in search of better pastures for their buffaloes. Every hamlet has a ‘Shola’ and a running water spring nearby. Each ‘Mund’ usually comprises about five huts, three of which are used as dwellings, one as a dairy and the other for sheltering the calves at night 5.

Now we can see as in chapter one, the five elements of Toda life which are:

1. a settlement
2. a number of dwellings
3. the economy that sustains this community
4. the buffaloes and its grazing ground and
5. a system of worship to keep this system going.
In pre-British period the whole Toda settlements were divided into four administrative divisions.

1. Todanad
2. Peranganad
3. Kundanad
4. Mekanad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nad</th>
<th>No. of occupied hamlets</th>
<th>No. of household</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Todanad</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peranganad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kundanad</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekanad</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
<td><strong>169</strong></td>
<td><strong>755</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Todanad**

This is the district of the Todas. The concentration of Toda in this district was noted in 1847 by a British Surveyor as mentioned in Ochterlony (1848: 54) and this was still the case in 1961 when the census-takers found that 57 out of a total of 73 occupied hamlets were located within the area of the former Todanad. Hence, this place became the head of the other Toda hamlets.

**Peranganad**

It is the district of 'the Great Ranga', named after Rangaswami Peak, seat of the deity of that name who is particularly worshipped by the Nilgiri Irula according to Nambiar and Bharathi: 1965:8. Peranganad is at the extreme East of the Nilgiris.

**Kundanad**

It is located in the South; it is in the district of the Kundah hills. One can find other Tribal Communities in this region.
Mekanad

It is in the southwest direction, which means ‘the western district’. Here too the people from the other communities live. For purposes of festivals and other important occasions, the tribes from different areas come together.

The above nadus were administrative division until 1882, when the British administration formed the three sub districts of Coonoor (East), Ootacamund (Central) and Gudalur (West).

To study the administrative system of the Todas, their decision-making equivalent to legislation, dispensing justice (judiciary) and punishment (penal system) we need to have a clear understanding of the social organisation of the Todas which is unlike the other tribes of the Nilgiris.

The Organisation of Toda Society

The Toda community is divided into two endogamous sub-castes; further, it is divided into exogamous Patriclan, which is again subdivided into ritual and economic units. Every Toda is also a member of an exogamous matrilineal clan.

The Sub-Castes

Among the Todas, there are two endogamous sub castes. They are:

1. Toroas and 2. Tow/Ilu (according to Rivers ‘Tarhar’ and ‘Teivali’)

According to Emeneau the meaning of Toroas is ‘tor’ means important person and ‘oas’ state of being. Thus ‘Toroas’ means important people.

2. Pilu-servants, tow - of the God’s, which means ‘Servants of God’.


These sub-castes perform complementary functions; the most striking contrast between the two Toda sub-castes is their differing relationship to the sacred dairy complex. The first sub-caste namely the Toroas people alone can own the most sacred dairy temples with their associated herds; whereas only Towfily men, ‘ the servants of the Gods’ may fulfill the highest priestly tasks associated with them. The ‘Toroas’ people frequently claim superiority over their sub-caste based on its ownership of the more sacred dairy
institutions, pointing to the lesser importance of Towfily dairies and herds as evidence of that sub-castes inferiority. They argue also that Towfily people, as the providers of ritual specialists, are rightly to be regarded as their servants.

The Toroas people enjoyed an absolute numerical as well as ritualistic predominance, as three quarter of all Todas belong to this sub-caste. Towfily women may not enter Toroas hamlet, while there is no restriction on Toroas women visiting Towfily settlements. Similarly if a Toda attends the funeral of a member of a sub-caste, he incurs the special funeral pollution known as koticil ‘köt’ funeral, ‘ícil’ pollution which pulls him down to a low ritualistic status, whereas Toroas Toda is not bound by such restriction.

Another such discrimination is that, a high-ranking dairy man-priest called ‘wisöt’ is free to visit any Toroas hamlet, but if they visit a Towfily settlement, they are immediately defiled and lose their priestly status. Thus, Toroas and Towfily are separated by their endogamy by different ritual procedures. If not for their complementarity in respect to the sacred dairy organisation at its highest level, the Toda society would not have survived. The two sub castes need to co-operate in the performance of any ritual, specially the funeral rite, which is the most highly ritualised ceremony of the Toda rites.

The Patrilineal Clans

Each of the above-mentioned sub-caste according to Toda society instead of sub caste they are called ‘moieties’, which in the anthropological writings, ‘moiety’ is divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal and matrilineal clans, called ‘mod’. The Toda word mod, which the Todas use for Patriclan, has a number of other meanings such as a Toda hamlet, a dairy complex, and a funeral place. The word ‘modo.t’ meaning man or people of the mod is used only in reference to a partrilinear clan.

Toroas moiety has ten clans and Towfily has only five. This particular affiliation is determined at a rite performed during a mother’s pregnancy when a man, formally accepts paternity of her unborn child. Adoption is unknown. Hence, the only means by which a male member obtains paternity is by birth. A woman, like other Hindu organisations is incorporated by marriage into her husband’s clan, while retaining some ties with the clan into which she was born.
Toda Patriclan - Names in Parenthesis is according to Rivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Tóroas</th>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Töwfily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Nos (N_drs)</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ki.wir(kuudr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Kás(kars)</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pi.r(piedr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tórór(Taradr)</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Omgás(Umgas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mór(Medr)</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mortxör(Keadr)=kör(Keadr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Köror(Keradr)</td>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Pörxas(Pedrkars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kerir(Kerer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Pirgor(Purgodr)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Inkity(Inkitj)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Nirus(Nidrsi)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Metgas(Melgars)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idea of hierarchy with regard to patriarchal society is so very negligible in both the sub-castes. But the ‘No’s’, one of the ‘Tóroas’ Patriclan enjoys a ritual primacy in the Toda community because of the fact that they believe Töskey, the great goddess of the Todas was the first ruler of ‘No’s’ and has chosen this group of people and blessed this chosen clan with exceptional gifts. The name of each clan is obtained from the name of the chief settlement. When a settlement moves away to a new habitation, then its funeral place also changes. All these Patricians possess a number of settlements, grazing land and dairy complex. Some of the hamlets are used only for ritual requirements.

The names of the patrilinear can also change group according to the legendary story (pörxas), direction of the district (pürgor') northwestern area of the Nilgiris. A girl child is patrilinear until her marriage. Since child marriage was a common feature, she becomes a member of her husband’s clan even as a young girl. Though she stays with her parents even after her marriage until she attains puberty, she belongs to the husband’s clan. If she happens to die, at a young age, the father-in-law performs the funeral rites and not the father, and the corpse is burnt at the female funeral place in the husband’s hamlet. If the husband’s place is far off, the body may be cremated in
the funeral place of the girl's hamlet but not exactly in the place where the traditional cremation takes place, since that ground is reserved only for the members of the patrilineal clan.

A Toda woman often marries more than once. In this case, she can marry a man of her husband's clan or any other but not the same as her father's clan. The right to expel or reinstate a man into the clan is in the hands of the caste council, which is called a noim.

Subdivision of the Patrilineal Clan

Each clan is subdivided into

1. 'Kwir'  2. 'Pólm'  3. 'Mod' (hamlet)  4. 'As' or 'kwidbil' (household)

1. 'Kwir'

It is a ritualistic division. The clan is broadly divided into 2 segments called 'kwir', which means 'horn'. This group is brought into the picture during the ceremonies concerned with offerings made, in order to bring to an end the suffering or to make expiation. It can also be compared to a peace offering. During this ceremony, the
two-'kwir' divisions take complementary roles. When one group is hurt, the offender 'kwir' offers the expiation while the other will receive the offering. Thus, peace is brought about. The membership of this kwir segment is obviously the close relatives of a family who support them at times of troubles. Each 'kwir' will have an elder who decides, and discusses the problems with his members.

2. 'po'lm'

It is an economic division or unit, which means, "Portion" in Toda. This is the second type of subdivision. Some Patricians have two or three or even up to 5 'po'lm'. This division is comprised of only male members. Since it is an economic division, it operates when clan expenses arise during ceremonies, collection and the repair/maintenance of a dairy, payment of fine etc. This 'po'lm' acts as a treasury where it collects kind/cash during offering, fine or sale from the clan property such as timber, dairy milk and then spends it on the above-mentioned items. General expense is met by these 'po'lm' for the items used in common. The 'po'lm' comprises of joint family members for 3 generations. The purpose of this unit is to maintain the economic condition of the clan. When a 'po'lm' becomes bankrupt, it ceases to exist as an independent 'po'lm' then it merges with another 'po'lm' normally having some ancestral link. If a Patrician 'po'lm' is unusually large in size, a re distribution is made in order to maintain the balance of size. The joining of two 'po'lm's and redistribution and bifurcation of a large 'po'lm' into two or three are done within the kwir or Patrician. This is done in the caste council only when there is a dispute.

3. 'Mund' the Toda Hamlet

Each Patrician owns one or more hamlets, and usually up to 8 hamlets. They also own hamlets for seasonal migration or for grazing purpose. A Toda belonging to a particular clan can reside or even settle in any of the hamlet belonging to his clan whereas a Toda from any other clan can live there only for some time, that too only when invited by the clan of that hamlet.

The function of the hamlet is to take care of the buffaloes owned by the families. The Patrician cares for the temple and sacred buffaloes in common. Other buffaloes of a clan is pastured and penned together but each family milks its own buffaloes while
the dairy priest milks the temple buffalo. Apart from selling the milk and its produce by the family, the temple priest distributes the income from the dairy buffalo milk to the members of the hamlet. Now the hamlet is owned by the adult males of each hamlet but it was not so in earlier days. The hamlet, the grazing land, funeral place, dairy temple were used by all and owned by none. The Todas never felt the need to obtain the ownership. They lived commonly. No hoarding, no selfish possession was seen in Toda society, until the British arrival, which allocated to each hamlet certain tracts of pasture around it. Of late one can see Todas engaging themselves in agriculture and occupying the land allotted to them. Today the land is divided legally among the married men and they are then confirmed with the hamlet membership.

Hamlet is a unit of Patrician, invariably all the members of a hamlet belong to the same Patrician.

4. 'Kwidbil' the Toda Family

'Kwidbil' or 'as' which means a Toda Household. The lowest unit of Patrician subdivision is the individual household who live in a single hut, which includes every member of a joint family. The Toda family was both polyandrous and polygamous. This forms a simple household. According to Walker Antony, in 1981, there existed only one polyandrous household. Monogamy has become the norm of the day 14.

Kwidbil means parents, siblings, uncles, etc. Hence, though earlier family was considered as the basic unit of Toda society, now it is a household with a nuclear family and has become the basic unit of Toda Social organisation.

The head of a family is always a man like that of any other community. In modern days when the head of a family dies, his property such as ornament, bells of buffaloes, personal jewellery, buffaloes and land are distributed among the sons.

The Matrilineal Clan

Apart from the patrilineal bond, every Toda belongs to an exogamous matrilineal clan called his/her 'polyól’ as Emeneau calls it and piiliol as Rivers calls it. ‘Poly’ means sacred dairy; it can also mean house and ‘ól’ means the men or people. Hence, the meaning of the word ‘Piiliol’ could be the men of or members of a house hold to which the person belongs.
Matriclan is not as important as Patrician and do not possess a land, hamlet or funeral place of its own. In all the aspects of economic, ritual and judicial areas, the Patrician is prominent. The matriclan gains importance only during marriage. The commonly known matriclans are:

Tör0as have five marticlans.

1. Kwaten- named after a Toda culture hero

2. Pi-s - named after the Sun

3. Moxoïtkóc' - "heated the boy at the fire"

4. Tukuty - pride

5. Kafastwirk - name of a tree

Töwfily people have six matriclans, which are extinct today.

The Toda relationship is slightly different from that of the other community. The father and father's brothers are considered as father just as mother and mother's sister is mother. Hence, the parent's siblings of the same sex are considered as parents. Moreover, opposite sex are uncle and aunt, i.e. Father's sister is aunt and mother's brother is uncle and their children are 'cousins'.

![Family Tree Diagram]

Aunt (Fr.Sr.) Father(Fr.Br.) Father

Mother(Br) Mother(Sr.) Uncle

Cousin Sr. Br.

(mociny)
This kind of relationship may be due to the polygamy and polyandry that existed in the Toda society. There is no relevance given to biological father and mother.

Elder brother of father-Perwidin(big-who-is father)
Younger brother of father- Kirwidin(small-who-is father)
Elder sister of mother- Perwidaf and
Younger sister of mothr- Kirwidaf.
Uncle = 'mun' and called as 'muma'
Aunts = 'mimy' and called as ‘mimya’
Cousins = ‘mociny’  

Marriages between the brother and sister are strictly prohibited where as they consider it ideal if the cousins get married. A Toda is free to get married to others too, but preference is for the cousins, which is similar to that of Hindu Society.

It is obvious from the above details, that the social organisation has a very important role in the political affairs of the Todas. The membership superiority of the clan, the role of the council, the participation of women in the ceremonies all depends upon the different clans to which a Toda belongs. Hence keeping the social organisation as a base, one can study the political system of the Todas known as ‘Noim’.

‘Noim’ the Toda Self Government

The Toda administration as far as a single hamlet is concerned is an internal one. The elders of the clan come together in an informal council. This council consists of the elders of the Patriclan of that hamlet. Earlier there was a clan headsman up to the beginning of the 20th C. However, later in the mid 20th C such headsman was not in a hamlet. Instead, a council of elders functioned as the administrative body. The decisions made by this council were regarding paying collective fines, arranging for a ceremony, marriage settlements etc.

It is possible for a Toda man to be without Patriclan affiliation at all, but still be reckoned a member of the Toda caste. This occurs when either he himself or one of his forbearers has been expelled from the Patriclan by a decision of the ‘Noim’.
The ‘Mund Noim’ Toda Village Council

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 noting that matriclan has no importance. The issues 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.

Both in sub-caste council and mod ‘Noim’ the influential man or group decide the matter at any time and any place. The procedure is similar to that of a caste council. However, the lower council has relatively little authority.

At its lower levels, though there are no headmen yet, the community possesses well-defined procedures for ensuring that its members observe caste norms, as well as for settling disputes between the individuals or factions and for deciding upon united caste action. The Toda judicial and administrative practices do not differ much from those of rural communities throughout the subcontinent in the ancient times.

‘Noim’ or the caste council, in the words of Walker Antony, is the council of elders which is called for, when the community needs to take a united action. ‘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. Probably this council satisfied the judicial need of the Todas.

Membership of ‘Noim’

In the early 19th and end of 20th C the ‘Noim’ consisted of five men who formed the council, drawn from five clearly specified Toroas Patriclans. They were the elders or elder representatives of No’s, Ka’s and To’ro’r and from Towfily Patriclan called ki.wi’r, and the elder from the Badaga Village of Tuneri. The five representatives from these subdivisions were necessary, but the participation of more representatives was not restricted. Hence, the Patriclans and the sub divisions of the Toda community played a significant role in the ‘Noim’.
The above said Toda representatives should come from chosen families ‘Kwidbil’. For Toroas it was the family of ‘tingonyxwidbil’, according to Rivers it is ‘tinkanikudupel’ and the Towaily representatives from the monyxwidbil (manikudupel). This is because the word ‘tingony’ means - small coin hence the family, which has received small coin from the Badaga headman ‘Manikar’. The Badaga representative should be the village headman of the Tunneri or someone appointed by him. Thus, the ‘Noim’ consisted of a minimum of five council members.

Though there are five elders, the influential men play an important role in the decision-making. The views of certain elders are crucial in any ‘Noim’ meeting. They automatically become the leaders or decision makers of the meeting. These members are neither elected, nor nominated by anyone. They become leaders by virtue of their intelligence, wise decisions and unique personality, which impose decisions on the others with much ease. Generally, these leaders are older men, influential and sometimes wealthy among the other Todas. It is not necessary that they always need to be wealthy. Even the poor elders make judgments. The factor that decides on the leadership is the experience and the wisdom the man possesses. This gift of wisdom is mingled with an efficiency of personal authority, with which he can speak, argue and convince firmly.

Women do not become a council member nor do they attend the deliberations of the ‘Noim’. They are not even summoned to the meeting place before the ‘Noim’. A woman’s advice is often sought not directly but through her husband or close male relative and if she is charged with an offence, it is her male representative who must appear before the ‘Noim’ and not she.

**Powers and Functions of the ‘Noim’**

The ‘Noim’ can be called for various reasons. Since it is a ritual, and economic body of the Toda community, the verdict of the council was valued. The usual occasion for such a meeting might be an individual’s breach of caste norms, or a dispute that was not settled at in the lower level. The ‘Noim’ can also be called for making a common decision or to come to a consensus as a community on a particular matter, like the finalising of the day and time for certain ceremonies such as conducting festivals, opening of a dairy complex and re-thatching of a dairy temple etc. Sometimes, they even decide whether some traditional practice is to be re considered or whether to accept the idea
or innovation proposed by some Toda thinker. Breach of any kind in living the norms of patriclan will also be discussed here. If an expelled Toda needs to be taken back into the patriclan or reinstalled into the ‘Mund’, the decision should be made in the council.

If a person becomes a Christian or a Muslim by conversion or if one is married from another community other than Toda community, he automatically becomes an outcaste and no longer is he considered as a member of a hamlet or a patriclan. Although no action is taken, still in certain cases, this branding as ‘outcaste’ is done through the ‘Noim’.

Other issues dealt by the ‘Noim’ are the conflict with regard to family, when not settled in the hamlet comes to the ‘Noim’.

When a man divorces his wife, the woman’s people usually complain to the ‘Noim’ or council. The husband pays a fine of buffaloes to the wife’s people.

If a Toda has breached or transgressed caste norms, one or more elders of the village may request a meeting of the ‘Noim’ to hear charges against him and passes a judgment. If a dispute between two individuals or factions have reached a stage when neither they, nor their family members nor their clan can resolve their differences, one or another party and in some cases both the parties may request that the dispute may be heard and resolved by the ‘Noim’. If a charge of sufficient gravity is brought against a member of a patriclan by his maternal uncle, and not resolved in the patriclan the uncle of the convict can request the ‘Noim’ to hold a meeting and impart justice.

In other cases, where a community consensus is needed, the persons, group, or patriclan who are involved in the ceremony or those interested in bringing about a change, or build the dairy may ask for a meeting of the ‘Noim’. When such meetings are called for, it is the duty of the ‘Noim’ to convene a meeting and discharge its opinion regarding the issue.

In all these above-mentioned situations the man, or group or clan or hamlet wishing to summon the ‘Noim’ puts forward the request, explains the situation and reasons for it before an influential man of the opposite sub-caste. This man will arrange the meeting, fix the place, date and time and inform the parties concerned. This is an occasion where the sub-castes interact. On the day and at the time appointed for the meeting of the ‘Noim’
all men involved in the case, together with any others interested, assemble at the chosen spot. Ample time is given to both the parties involved in explaining the case. After listening to the explanation, the council pronounces the judgment.

**Crime and Punishment**

After listening to the dispute, from both the parties, an elaborate discussion takes place during which all the members involved in the problem or decision speak and even shout. The council listens to the discussion, raises questions and seeks clarification if needed, and then with majestic personal authority speaks firmly and everyone else listens and obeys.

Usually the 'Noim' is attended by a minimum of six and a maximum of fifty. Of course, there is no definite number prescribed. The members who gather in the place of meeting organised themselves in a semicircle on the ground, usually in a grassland meant for pasture. The persons 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 starts 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 conflict successfully. A few rare cases require a second meeting. The members of the ‘Noim’ try to talk to both parties before the 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.

In a personal conflict if the dispute continues to persist, the problem is taken to the senior Badaga of the close-by Badaga ‘Hatti’. Todanad people go to the headman of Sholur, the Badaga village closest to the main concentration of Toda hamlets. The Badaga elders arrange this meeting and the Todas are invited. Even if this joint council fails to reach a decision, the matter is taken to the village of Tuneri where the final-Toda-Badaga joint council will meet. The decisive voice in such meeting belongs to the Tuneri headman, who, as Paramount Chief of the Badagas, the dominant caste, is the supreme secular authority among the traditional Nilgiri people.

The Badagas are the majority of the population on the Nilgiris. They have a more organized system of punishment and judgment of the guilty. Probably the Todas felt that the Badaga headman would be a better judge, to deal with their affairs. Even more, what the Indians did after the coming of the Europeans; the Todas did partially by handing over the affairs to the Badagas.

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 decided 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.

Sometimes out of the two kinds of punishments only one is imposed. In certain cases according to the severity of the offenses both may be demanded.
The offended Toda community shares the cash fine. If the amount of fine levied is small, the representatives of the Patrician elder men share it. Cash fines varied from one annas to four annas in olden days and Rs.3/- to 100/- in the modern days. Once the fine is announced and the party is not able to pay, they plead before the council to reduce the amount. Once it is reduced, the payment should be made immediately. In rare cases, with formal request a stipulated date will be given by which the guilty should pay the fine.

In the case of buffaloes, the ‘Noim’ fixes the specific time to hand over the animal to the injured party. The guilty is expected to hand it over without delay or further excuse. There were instances where the punishments were more severe than the fine of buffalo and cash. The man or men may be expelled from the ‘Mund’ by the decision of the ‘Noim’. The ‘Noim’ can expel a man only if his maternal uncle has brought a charge of sufficient gravity against him. This expulsion effectively prohibits him from full participation in clan rituals in the dairy belonging to the patriclan.

A man can also be expelled from the patriclan itself. This is more severe and serious and the restrictions imposed by the ‘Noim’ will fall upon all the heirs of this expelled man. The marriages will not take place according to the Toda customs, the funerals will not be in its proper funeral place and he will not have any access to any Toda dairy. In short, he becomes unwanted to his community. He has been ex-communi­cated.

A Toda expelled by the ‘Noim’ can be reinstated into his patriclan only by the decision of the ‘Noim’. The expelled man cannot appeal to the Council himself and he will not be heard by the elders. A son or other male descendant of the expelled man should propose the plea for reinstatement into the patriclan. Antony Walker narrates an incident of reinstatement that occurred in 1962.

The reinstatement is simple. The expelled man should pay a fine decided by the ‘Noim’, which will be shared by the members of his patriclan and the buffaloes given to the temple dairy. The expelled man is led to the threshold of the dairy in the head hamlet by a number of patriclan men. All bow down in front of the doorway, the men who accompanied the expelled man pray over him, and then he becomes a part of the clan again.
When the ‘Noim’ is summoned for a specific problem many a time and if either of the party is not satisfied, the fine will be increased with each appeal. Below the caste council ‘Noim’ there are assemblies of each sub-caste and of various particulars. An assembly of the men of Tór0as is known as a To’r ‘Noim’, while that of Töwfily sub-caste is a Töw ‘Noim’. Any particular assembly is a ‘mod Noim’. Sub-caste assemblies are seen to be rare occurrences, since they deal with problems concerned with sub-castes alone. The conflicts between the sub castes are taken to caste council.

**Place of Meeting**

There are several important places where the ‘Noim’ meets. The traditional meeting places are many. The most important one is the side of a 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 matters regarding sacred dairies and sacred buffaloes. This may be because most of the population of Todanad lives around this place.

Another favorite place chosen for meetings especially on Tuesdays is a grassy spot near the general Hospital in Ootacamund. Apart from these places, the ‘Noim’ can meet in the nearby grazing land of a Toda ‘mund’ where the dispute occurs. Normally the elders find a place where it is a pastureland, grassy and open space so that it can accommodate all the people from different ‘mund’ to participate in the discussion.

There are exceptional cases where women attend a ‘Noim’, sitting in front of the semicircle. Probably this happens if she is an influential woman. There is only one reference regarding a woman attending a meeting. Frequently meetings were held in her hamlet ‘Na_t’s’ says Emeneau. Her name was ‘Pilyars’ wife of one ‘Poloryfin’ of ‘Mö.r Patriclan’. Her name is still spoken of and referred to as a woman of wisdom.

**Women’s Role in ‘Noim’**

Women in general are viewed as a source of ritual impurity in Toda society. The positions of the Töwfily women are still worse, since they are considered as inferior to the Tór0as women. The patrilineal clans of the Todas are superior to the exogamous matrilineal clan. The Todas generally do not speak of the matriclan since each clan is associated with a story projecting the stupidity of the matrilineal clan. Unlike the
patricians with their hamlets, dairies and funeral places, the matriclan own no property and are not identified by any locality. They have no say in economic, ritual and judicial matters. This shows the poor or inferior position of women in Toda Society. The only time when matriclan gains equal importance as that of patriclan is in the matters of marriage.

The lowest level of Toda social organisation is the household. The male member, usually the father of the family takes the first place. Nowhere does a woman head the family except if she is a widow- and that too only until her son is an adult. Even the property belongs to the son of a widow and he is expected to manage it for the benefit of his household. When the head of the family dies, the eldest son receives the father’s property, which includes buffaloes, pastureland, equipments and jewels. The daughters receive nothing of the household inheritance. Apart from her personal jewellery, she owns nothing in her own right.

This proves that Todas are a patriarchal society. The man is the head of the family. The eldest son inherits the property. The women get only jewellery. Even a widow is under her son’s governance when he comes of age. Primogeniture is the law in this tribal society, as in many advanced modern societies.

‘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 offended party all are male members. Even if the need arises in the ‘Noim’, a woman will not be called for the deliberations. Suppose, a woman is wise and her advice is needed, she is consulted before the appointed day of the ‘Noim’. On the day of the gathering, her husband conveys to the elders and to the general assembly her views, advice or suggestions. If she is a widow, the same is done through the closest male relative belonging to her husband’s family, or if she has a male heir, her son would do the same. If the women is unmarried, one of the male members of the family, either father, brother or uncle would do this work of conveying the idea to the council.

In case a woman is guilty, accused of, or involved in the conflict, it is not she who attends the caste council meeting but her husband, son, or male relative as the case may be. The man will speak for her and accept the fine or punishment proposed by the council.
There has been a case when a woman took part in the ‘Noim’, as mentioned earlier Todas still talk about and sing of a remarkable woman named Pilayars, wife of one Polloryfin of ‘Mor’ Patriclan, whose advice was sought in disputes and who would even attend the deliberations of the ‘Noim’, seating her in front of the semicircle of men. So influential was the woman that meetings of the ‘Noim’ frequently were held in her hamlet. She might have lived in the mid 19th Century.

**From Birth to Death under the Influence of ‘Noim’**

Just as most of the rites of important stages of Toda life involve buffaloes and dairies, each eventful growth of Toda’s life is marked by the presence of ‘Noim’ the Village Council. Buffaloes are slowly vanishing but not the involvement of the village heads.

**At Child Birth**

The pregnant woman is kept aloof from the hamlet for fear of pollution. Though this is not in practice now in all the hamlets yet some ‘munds’ still follow it. If this ritual is not followed, the chief ‘Noim’ members call the husband for a meeting. This is a surprising fact, since the tribal society seems similar to the Hindu society in this matter.

Before a woman gives birth to her first child, the rite of ‘pisitt’ an act of giving a bow, must take place. This rite determines or is considered by the elders as the all-important social sign of paternity of the unborn child and therefore its importance in Toda Society. If a child were born to a woman who has not been given a bow, the baby would be a ‘podmox’ illegal baby, with no patriclan affiliation according to the village council.

A recent trip to Kodanad ‘Mund’ by the research scholar resulted in a curious incident concerning this rite of bestowing a bow to a legitimate child about to be born who was rejected by the ‘Noim’ of the ‘mund’. The Toda wedding festivities could be said to begin with the pregnancy ceremony, as there is no ritual when the husband and wife start to live together. The Toda call the rite of Paternity ‘purshutt’, or the act of giving the bow.
The girl, in the above mentioned incident, had conceived before marriage following the Toda custom. The man had also agreed to marry her. As it is the custom, all the arrangements were made for the marriage on the seventh month of the pregnancy. However, the council as well as the villagers objected to this wedding. The reason was that the girl and her family were converted Christians. There are ample examples of ex-communication pronounced on the converts.

Early in the 1950’s, the Toda community decided, through its caste council the ‘Noim’, to abolish the institution of the pollution hut, because of the discomfort the hut caused the women. This decision was accepted by the elders and traditional Todas and came into practice after 10 years.

**Naming Ceremony**

The naming ceremony is called ‘tezhantu pimmi’. A Toda child is recognised as a social being only after the naming ceremony. Between one to three months, the child is taken to the Toda temple for naming. Until then, the child is kept covered completely by an adult’s cloak whenever it is taken outside the house. During the naming ceremony, the face of the child is uncovered. This uncovering is more formal for a male child than for a female. The dairyman officiating in the hamlet in the presence of a village elder ritually performs the uncovering. The priest himself, a council member or the child’s uncle performs this unveiling ceremony at the break of the day, and murmurs into the ears of the child some words explaining the beauty of the nature like, “see the buffaloes, see the fire” etc.

Thus, we see, the rituals followed during marriage, childbirth, naming ceremony are similar to rituals in any other society.

**Role of the Council in Initiating a Marriage**

The parents of the boy and the girl with the knowledge of the two hamlet councils arrange the marital alliance. Once they agree upon a girl, the boy’s parents visit the girl’s house. Here the girl does not have any freedom to reject this offer unless she has been promised to another. The boy’s father presents to the girl’s father a white loincloth, with which the agreement between the boy and the girl is confirmed to be fixed. If the girl’s parents want to reject the offer and have alliance with another, the
Caste council decides the fine, which has to be paid by the girl's party. It can be three or five buffaloes or cash fines as levied during recent times. The above said agreement takes place when the boy or girl is 2 or 3 years old!

When they reach maturity, if the young people want to dissolve this alliance, whichever party wants to dissolve, should pay the compensation- 'ter' traditional compensation in buffaloes to the other, the number of buffaloes or the amount is again decided by the council. The council takes into account the number of gifts offered by the boy's house to the girl every year, since the marriage is fixed and takes into account the buffaloes offered by both the families for the sacrifice at funerals in the other's family. If both parties are in favor of the arranged marriage, the marriage takes place in the presence of the village elders. Once the girl is married to a boy, it is understood that she becomes a wife to his other brothers too. Of course, this polyandry is not in vogue today.

After a marriage has been arranged, if either the boy, or the girl, or the parents of either party do not want to proceed with the proposed marriage, the arrangement can be nullified before the girl has been taken from her father's house. If they decide to separate from each other, it should be decided in the caste council. The 'Noim' might fix a due 'ter', usually buffaloes.

'Noim' and the Inter Sub-Caste Unions

If a man of opposite sub-caste gets interested in a Toda woman, he has to get the permission of her husband and then present an embroidered shawl to both husband and wife. If the woman wants to have alliance with anyone in the other sub-caste, he should pay the compensation decided by the council. The new sub-caste man to the already existing one pays this compensation. This is similar to the relationship in certain caste societies of India, in an early account for e.g. 'sambantham' among the Nambodaris and Nair women. Of course, during later years, this practice ceased to exist.

Old Age

In any community, age certainly enhances the individual's influence in that particular community. So also, it is among the Todas. For women there is no marked change in the status. However, as far as men are concerned age is one criterion to be a valid member to the Toda 'Noim' or Council. Women have no direct influence in the 'Noim'. As the men grow old, they gain respect from the members of the 'Noim'.
Death

The influence of the 'Noim' extends up to the funeral rites. The priest is the main officiating person in this ceremony. Yet, the elders of the hamlet, come together, decide and perform the funeral. The first funeral takes place, after few days of 'first day funeral'; the second ceremony usually takes place after gathering the relics of the cremated body. Usually after a few months, this ceremony takes place as decided by the council. Even in death, the village council has a say and its decision is considered final. As mentioned earlier, an expelled candidate of the patriclan would not find a burial place in the traditional funeral ground according to the decisions of the 'Noim'.

Toda Administration during British Period

Under Sullivan, the new European administration appointed a Toda 'headman' to whom he gave the title 'monegar' or 'monyxo'm in Toda, just like the Badaga headman. So far, the Toda Council functioned under a council of minimum five and a Badaga headman was considered as the supreme authority with regard to justice. 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. 'Lords of the Nilgiri Soil' owning the whole hills, had to pay tax for their own land, if it were to be used. 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' as Walker calls it. The Todas were right in being indifferent to this post, for it was created ignoring the sentiments, practices and social organisation of this community. This appointing of the first officer 'Teity' of 'Ki.wir' clan, without consulting the 'Noim', which was the usual practice of the Todas, definitely hurt the feeling of this community. This informal appointment of the 'monegar' became almost hereditary during the later years.
Of course, in the later years, in 1960’s, this hereditary system ceased and the most influential Toda became the ‘monegar’. Todas never accepted ‘monegar’ as their leader but as a servant to perform certain intermediaries’ function between them and the British. The ‘monegar’ of the British did not play a crucial role in Toda Society!

As regards the meetings, decisions, justice and punishment the Todas never approached the newly constituted ‘monegar’, instead, they held on to their traditional caste council ‘Noim’. The ‘monegar’ was free to attend this meeting of the council and if he was influential, he could even speak and decide. Nevertheless, the fact is clear that the ‘Noim’ never depended on the ‘monegar’. As it was in the Pre-British period, the unresolved problems and issues were brought before the Badaga Council. The Badaga headman of the nearby Toda mund continued to be the supreme authority in imparting justice.

The issues were resolved within the hamlet, patriclan, ‘Noim’ or Badaga council as before. Rare incidents of appealing to British Courts were seen. This was because of the same reason that the traditional minded Toda Community could not integrate the British and their organisation easily into their life. Later on when the jurisdiction over the hills was divided into three sides, with most of places of Peranganad under Coimbatore, the Toda community was completely neglected. Hence, the British interference in the Toda life was reduced and Todas tried to remain aloof from the British. The non-interference of the British Police and court is obvious when we see the reference made by Grigg 1880; 299 regarding the massacre of 58 Kurumbas in 1835 by the combined force of Badagas and Todas- for fear of witchcraft which went unnoticed by the British.

There are stray references where the Todas go to court, or are pulled into court, or dealt by police on the dispute over the ownership of some buffaloes says Breeks: 1873:9. Normally the Todas prefer to settle their disputes within their own community. This shows their trust and confidence in their traditional practice of obedience to the Council.

**Todas after Independence**

India got independence in 1947. The government of India took over the administration of the country into its hands. This political transfer of power to an indigenous gov-
government did not bring about any change in the Toda administration, since they had never got into the mainstream or British administration earlier. They worked out their own way of living. On the other hand, the Toda community did not stand a chance in the political arena because of their low numerical existence of about 500 or 600 Todas and the voting system gave ‘one man one vote’. Thus, they could not stand the political influence of the Badagas who were 60,000 according to 1991 census. Today there are about a 1600 Todas.

The ‘Noim’, continued as before but not with such intensity. The Todas had to lose their land because the government assigned 154 acres of Toda ‘patta’ land as cultivable land. For once, the masters of the Hills had to restrict their land ownership to the government orders. Though India’s National Forest Protection Act declares that the hill stations should have sixty per cent undisturbed forests, the Todas have no right to enjoy its produce. In addition to this, they had to abandon some of their most sacred temple dairies when water from reservoirs flooded the Mukurti, Paykara, Parsan’s Valley and Glen Morgan areas. Tea estates and major townships such as Udhagamandalam, Coonoor and Wellington have also encroached on several of Toda’s sacred sites. Todas like many other tribes, attach a degree of sanctity to various topographical features around their temples. They would ask the incredulous question the “Red Indian” asked his White annexationist: “But how can one buy the sweet air, the bubbling water and the warmth of the land?”

Todas lived a happy and peaceful life in the Hills unaware of and undisturbed by the concrete cities, hydel dams and neon lights. They lived with their simple faith, loving the nature, preserving it and respecting it. They lived by the blessings and power of the ancestors. “To us the ashes of our ancestors are sacred and their resting place is hallowed ground. You wander far from the graves of your ancestors and seemingly without regret. Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant-lined lakes and bays.”

Summing up

Toda society has a unique culture of its own. Made even more unique by the Self-Governing Body of the Todas - the ‘Noim’ that was efficient, influential and powerful.
Toda Village Council 'Mund Noim'

Kota Village Council 'Koot'
Every aspect of a Toda life cycle was decided by or at least informed to the ‘Noim’. Every event of the village was discussed in the larger council gathering. ‘Noim’ was instrumental to keep the Toda community united and has enabled its members to follow traditions and customs through its efficient judgment and advice.

At present, the intensity of Toda council controlling its community has weakened many of the norms and the Toda traditions have been abandoned. Some are definitely for the development especially for the freedom of women. Since 1871 we see a gradual fluctuation in the Toda population.

Kotas

The Kotas are another primitive tribe of the Nilgiris, who lived along with the Todas. The number of the Kota population is very small compared to the other tribes of the Nilgiris. They live just in seven hamlets. Nowhere else can we see a Kota settlement on the earth except on the Hills. The Kotas have a L.S.G. system of their own.

The Origin of the Kota Self-Governing Body, the ‘Koot’

According to the Badaga legends, the Kotas co-existed along with the Todas at the time of their arrival. The Kotas led a settled life since hundreds of years. They were the artisan group of tribes who were well versed in pot making. There are so many archaeological objects obtained during various excavations of the Nilgiris. Excavations of the megalithic sites in the Nilgiris date back to 100 A.D. or perhaps even earlier, have yielded rich finds of distinct pottery. Identifying these potteries as the Kota work, the period of the Kota existence can be decided as first century A.D. or even earlier than that. No doubt just like any other human community, which forms its own government, the Kotas also had their own council of elders. This self-governing body of the Kotas came to be called as ‘Koot’ or ‘Kutm’ in their language. With the origin of ‘Koot’, the members of the same dealt with the socio-political and religious issues. This organisation enabled a peaceful co-existence among the members of the community and the other tribes of the Nilgiris since early centuries. In order to study the organisation, legislation and execution of laws and rules of the ‘Koot’, it is necessary to know the structure of the Kota villages and the social customs, which prevailed in these villages.
Socio-Political Organisation

Kotas are found only in seven villages of the Nilgiris. Their population is small numbering around 700 in the early years and 1835 according to the last census. The Kota villages or as they call ‘kokkal’ are: 1. Kollimalai 2. Sholur kokkal 3. Gudalur 4. New Kotagiri or Aggal 5. Kil Kotagiri 6. Tiruchigadi 7. Kundah Kotagiri.

The old ‘Aggal’ village of Kotas was shifted due to the problem of earthquake, to a new-elevated layout with new houses with a new name of ‘New Kotagiri’. Those who occupied New Kotagiri strictly continued to follow ‘Keri’ System.

Next to the Todas, the Kotas are considered as the primitive tribes of the Nilgiris. The tradition says Kotas once lived on a mountain in Mysore called ‘Collimalay’ after which they named their first village, which was built on the Nilgiris.

The following statistics show their increase in the rate of population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of settlement / Kota name</th>
<th>No. of household</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kollimalai = kolmel</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sholur kokkal = kurgoj</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gudalur = kalac</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Ktg (aggal) = Porgar</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kil Kotagiri = Kinâr</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiruchigady = Ticgar</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kundah kotagiri = Ménâr</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>342</strong></td>
<td><strong>923</strong></td>
<td><strong>912</strong></td>
<td><strong>1835</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Todas say that the Kotas were brought from the plains to work for them, which is probably true. They occupy seven villages each called Kotageri or Kota Keri. The Kota political system is closely related to their social and religious system. To begin with, the family represents the basic unit of Kota Social Organisation. The senior male member in the household is recognized as its head. Kota Society follows patriarchy just like Todas.
The setting of the houses in rows in a Kota village also is an important feature of Kota polity. The village is called ‘Kokkal’. Sholur Kokkal is one of the oldest. Each village is subdivided into ‘Keri’, which means street. All the houses are aligned facing east, with rows of houses. A particular lineage or clan occupies each ‘keri’. Each ‘kokkal’ calls the ‘Keri’ by three names according to the direction of the street. Since the ‘kokkal’ is normally a slope of the hill, the ‘Keri’s’ are called as ‘kil kerf’ which means the street which is below, ‘nadu ker’ meaning the middle street, ‘pibber ker’or ‘mel kerf’ above, ‘aker’- that street, ‘iker’-this street ‘koreker’or ‘gager’-last street.

The direction of building a house, its location, plan and place are first consulted, discussed and decided with the priest of that particular ‘kokkal’. A certain clan occupies each ‘keri’. Hence even marriage is always through their ‘Keri’ system, in which the boy and girl living in the same Keri cannot marry, where as from the other Keri of the same ‘kokkal’, they can.

A member of a ‘Keri’ itself is a social grouping of relatives. It is also a local unit or ward within the village. A man’s Keri is determined by his birth, irrespective of where he lives or whether he changes his residence. Thus, family clan and group are geographically and architecturally situated to make relationships and administration simple easy and clear.

Membership of ‘Koot’

Each ‘Keri’ has a head and each village is controlled by an elder male member, belonging to the Kota community who lives in ‘mel-kerf’ upper street, who is the head of the ‘mel-kerf’ and is called by the name ‘Ammarger Naatamkar’. He is also the head of all the ‘Keri’. All the responsibility to set right any family problem with the family and among other members is assigned to him. This village head is also addressed as ‘Gothkaran’. The position of ‘Gothkaran’ is hereditary. The ‘kokkal’ will have a family in which the ancestors would have preserved and traditionally kept a little bag which has a gold coin. This is handed over to the eldest male heir of the family who becomes the ‘Gothkar’ of the village after the demise of his father. If the ‘Gothkar’ wants to withdraw from his office he can do so during the meeting at a festival called ‘Velaith Pam’ which is a harvest festival held during July-August.
Another important member of the Kota village council is the ‘Naduker’ head, the leader of the middle street. His role is only to help the ‘Ammarger Naatame’. He does not have powers to judge because he does not possess the bag or the coin. Even then, he is expected to be present in all the meetings of the Kota community of that particular village 39.

The other members of the village council include their priests and seven other elders known as ‘Natamkarar’ who are selected from few families of different ‘keries’. They are not elected based on voting or hereditary but selected by the priests of the Kotas. The Kotas dislike their disputes to be discussed and decided by any other tribes or even Badagas, hence they try to settle all their disputes among themselves with the help of the council. No woman can ever become a member of the council 40.

The Kotas have hereditary leaders; ‘Ammagar Natamkar’ from ‘melkeri’ and ‘Naduker’ from Nadukeri. The sign of power is a gold coin in a bag. They are independent in their governance and do not like interference from other tribes 41.

**Powers and Functions of ‘Koot’**

A ‘Koot’ is an informal council of Kota elders. This has the above-mentioned men as its members. Apart from its selected members, the eldest male member of each family will attend the ‘Koot’. He has the right to speak in the meeting. Even a young male member of the family can attend the ‘Koot’ if there is no father in the family. ‘Koot’ is the only body, which can settle the disputes between families, ‘keri’s and villages 42.

A ‘Koot’ of the Kota village can be summoned by anybody over any issue on any day. Normally this meeting is held on the 3rd day after the new moon every month. Now it is not so regular as before. This meeting is also called for before any important decision is to be made, to plan for a festival and to discuss any social custom or changes in the ‘Kokkal’ 43.

House to house, announcement of the proposed koot is made either by the one initiating the ‘Koot’, namely the aggrieved party or through the Gothukaran. On the appointed day, all the elders and the involved parties gather in the place and the discussion begins; the members present, and voice their opinion. The priests and elders
guide the whole proceedings with utmost care. After an elaborate discussion for about two and a half or three hours in the evening, the decision is made by the ‘Koot’. The decision of the ‘Koot’ is treated by the Kotas as a code of conduct.

All are expected to respect and obey the decisions made in the ‘Koot’. Any person who breaches a convention becomes the object of gossip and a target of hostile action. The ‘Koot’ like other village councils of the tribes do not maintain any records of the deliberations of the ‘Koot’, probably because the Kota language does not have a written script. All sit and speak but some stand in order to draw attention. If the problem is not settled in the village concerned, the seven-village council is summoned to deal with the case. After discussing the issue the seven village council passes the judgment. The members of the ‘Koot’ and the other members are expected to respect the decisions and the punishment pronounced by the ‘Koot’.

From the above we see that the ‘Koot’ is democratic in nature though the leaders are hereditary ones, the meeting itself and its methods are equal and free as in a democracy.

Place of Meeting

Every Kota village has a specified place of meeting. Since they have isolated villages, each village has three temples dedicated to their god ‘Ayyanor’, goddess-‘Amnor’ and son god- ‘Kunnayyanor’. It is in the front yard or in the grassland, which is in front of these three temples, that the council meeting takes place. Usually the ‘Koot’ is held under the huge ‘Setgai’ or ‘pengai’ tree in the open grassland near ‘Aynor’ Temple or near ‘Mandukallu’ a stone-representing God ‘Kamnatraya’- so that the ‘Koot’ do not speak lies before God. Today this takes place on the Verandah of any convenient house or in a community hall.

Crimes and Punishments

‘Koot’ is the only method through which discipline is brought into the village. Just like Todas, there was no police or court. ‘Koot’ functioned as a judicial and a defense body. The issues, which the ‘Koot’ dealt with, were:

- Look after the law and order of the village and maintain peace.
- To deal with rare incidents of theft, cheating and murder.
- Deal with the stray cases of suicide and decide on their burial.
- To settle the extra marital quarrels.
- Find solutions for the disputes in the families or individuals.
- To settle conflict among the members of different ‘Keris’.
- Decide on fines, dues and contributions.
- Discussing festivals and marriages.
- Settle problems arising from marriage into a non-Kota community.
- To deal with conversion to Christianity.
- Breach of convention and tradition.
- Adultery
- The council of representative villagers decides divorces, and an elderly member of the community, after hearing the evidence, gives judgment.
- Settle the problems about funeral rites and graveyards.
- Decide on the use of forest produce.

During modern days they also discuss:

- The extent to which they have to involve in the politics and the benefits offered to them by the Government,
- The steps to be taken regarding the new immigrants specially when they are a threat to their community,
- The necessity of good education to their children
- Regarding the health problems and medical care.
- Environment concerns.

Since they are very sentimental regarding the survival of their culture, they revolt when this is threatened by the government or other people.

For major issues the elders of all the Kota settlements will assemble generally near New Kotagiri, near ‘Ayyanor’ temple. Often ‘night meetings’ are also held to decide the deviant behavior pattern of Kotas. In the event of a case, which cannot be settled by members of the council from a single village, delegates from all the seven villages meet together and deliberate on the issue.
Usually the punishments imposed are very simple. Since the families, or at least the mothers attach a great value to moral life and the younger generation respect the elders, the problems that arise in the ‘Koot’ are only simple violations of customs and traditions.

Generally, the punishments are fine paid in kind. Often they have to prostrate before the council or to the elders. If a man or woman fails to fulfill the regular norms of the society, he or she is suitably reprimanded and if the violation is serious, he/she may be ex-communicated from the Kota community usually referred as ‘Beratha’. Any discussion with the ex-communicated person is prohibited and considered to be polluting, until the person is readmitted into the community. He can be admitted only if he admits his guilt and takes an oath before the ‘Koot’ elders, that he will not indulge in such activities. The family or person ex-communicated should stay away from the village, sometimes even if he is in the village he and his family cannot join in any of the festivals, worship or any activity of the village. Sometimes the ‘Koot’ imposes a fine ranging from Annas in olden days and Rupees 12 to 14 today. There are incidences of ex-communications still prevalent, e.g. the family at Menar still remains expel from The Community because of the marital relationship with non-Kota Community.

Role of Women in the ‘Koot’

Women have no voice in the proceedings of any ‘Koot’ deliberations. She cannot even go near the place where the meeting is held. Her very presence in the place of meeting itself is considered as impure. Even if a case is charged against her, she does not attend the meeting. Instead, a male member of her family should represent her in the council, defend her cause and receive the punishments pronounced.

Kota Administration during the British Period

During the British period, the ‘Koot’ worked undisturbed. Though an elder man was appointed by the British for purposes of collection of revenue and as a messenger, the ‘Koot’ system was not dissolved. Among the tribes, kotas show a great deal of conservancy with regard to religion, social structure and political organisation. The British did not seem to interfere with the local administration of the tribes of the Nilgiris. Another reason for the successful functioning of the ‘Koot’ was that the Kota hamlets remained isolated from the other population of the district.
Kotas in the Post-Independent Period

After Independence, the idea of Village Panchayat has crept in, with a chairman for the Kota community and even for all the tribes. Inspite of government influence, and other external forces influencing the Kotas, the system of community gathering, decision by the ‘Koot’ continues, for example, Sholur Kokkal was added as a hamlet with Sholur Panchayat Revenue Village, with 98 house holds. Though they abide by the rules of the state, they maintain their identity and freedom in decision - making. There are also, educated Kotas who have political affiliation with the current political party members.

The ‘Koot’ as a political body reinforces often a higher degree of unity and cooperation among the Kota society, besides being an effective agency of social control. There are incidents when their culture, tradition, religion, name and land were endangered, they rose to the occasion, and as a single body, the seven villages protested and demanded for justice. For example, in 2000 when a non-tribal medical doctor uttered in the public meeting that ‘Kotas’ are suffering from AIDS disease “all the Kota villages rose to protest against him and submitted a petition to the District Collectorate and finally the doctor apologized publicly in front of the Kota leaders. 46

In 2004 when the non-tribal people occupied the agricultural land illegally, they fasted in front of the Collectorate 47.

Thus, the modernity or development in governmental machinery has not changed the attitude of Kotas towards their elders of the village and the ‘Koot’, which has been functioning even today. All the same the most extensive network of traditional ties of the Kotas with other Nilgiri people began to lose their strength by the 1950’s due to interplay of several modernising factors 48.

The Role of the ‘Koot’ in the Life Cycle of a Kota

Every aspect of Kota life revolves around their council from birth to death. The say of the ‘Natamkar’ is final. Of course, modernity has slightly influenced this efficiency of the Kota Council of Elders. The council members make almost all the major decisions regarding the important issues in the ‘Koot’. Any breach in the traditional customs and in these rituals of life cycle would be dealt with in the ‘Koot’. 
Toda Vs Kota

The Socio-Political Systems of the Todas and Kotas have certain features of similarity as well as difference. Regarding the similarities; both have leaders, not elected or nominated or selected as in modern societies but acquired through hereditary as in pre-democratic societies, especially feudal. There is no class system. To a very great extent there is no caste system either, but in the Todas there is a differentiating between patrilineal and matrilineal, where the patrilineal is considered superior to the matrilineal. In the Kota system, the upper street or row ‘melkeri’ is obviously superior to the ‘nadukeri’ and ‘kilkeri’ because the leader always is from the ‘melkeri’! In both societies, however, women play an inferior or zero role in politics and society. If we believe that tribal society treats women equally, here is ample proof that they do not. Women do not attend meetings; they are not members of ‘Noim’ or ‘Koot’; men discuss their problems; men settle their marriages; women are considered polluting during their menstruation and childbirth. They are not allowed to enter the temples. In every way, there is gender discrimination as in any other society. They do not inherit property. Their clans - the matrilineal- is not even spoken of among the Todas because it is a matter of shame. These tribal societies do not believe in the equality of the sexes or even in allowing them some role in governance. Only one reference of an old woman is found in the history of the Toda council, who was known for her wisdom and who pronounced judgment. This seems a token of gesture and not a symbol of equality of women.

The two tribes Todas and Kotas show a considerable ability to look after their own affairs. They settle disputes and quarrels by Council of Elders. Once a decision is made it is law for the whole group. There is unity among them. They follow their customs and traditions with amity. They decide and work their lands and cattle with a great amount of agreement. They conduct their marriages and relationships with felicity. Perhaps their system, simple, open, transparent and immediate - can be an administrative system that can be adopted by modern society which has become so complex and opaque, that it is no longer related to its society.

The role of women both in the Toda as well as Kota communities in the financial matters and self-governance is negligible. As far as working is concerned, they are hard
working. Of late, the Toda women are found themselves engaged in producing traditional embroidered pieces, like shawls, bags, and selling them through outlets and exhibitions. The Women’s self-help group in Tamilnadu has played a great role in strengthening the fabric of gender equality among the Toda community, and bringing economic independence to them.

There is an immediate need to educate the Toda and Kota community with regard to the richness of their own system of governance and about the need to uphold the same. However, there are a number of educated youth in these two communities, the women population calls for greater attention in the field of education and polity. A number of women are engaged through the self-help groups in the Nilgiris. Still the position of the women is not as empowered as expected.

A detailed list of Toda and Kota hamlets and their size is found in the appendix.

**Summing up**

Todas and Kotas are among the other primitive tribes of Nilgiris, who have organised themselves socially and politically. Toda conduct their administrative affair with the help of the Village Elders, the members of ‘Noim’ a hereditary body. In the same way, the Kotas execute their legislation of laws and rules through the ‘Koot’, which is a self-governing body of the Kotas. The patriclan of the Todas and the ‘keri’ system of Kotas play a significance role in the village council. There is a need to improve the village government in both the community and renew the good practices of both ‘Noim’ and ‘Koot’ inorder to foster better participation of the common mass in the Local Self-Governing of these two communities.
References

1. Walker, Antony, *The India Magazine of her People and Culture* - Vol. 5 by No. 7 June 1985 p.48


7. Walker A., op. cit., p.64.

8. Interview with Dr. Parthasarathy, TRC, M. Palada.


11. Interview with Mr. Raman Toda village head.


16. Interview with the Director of NAWA


18. Walker, op.cit ., p.94.

19. Ibid., p.93.

20. Ibid.,

21. Ibid., p.190.

22. Ibid., p.194.

25. Madras museum, op. cit.,
28. Tarun, op.cit., Front line, p. 89.,
30. A Documentation., Kota Pottery, Key Stone, p. 18
32. Director TRC Ooty, The Kotas of Nilgiris a profile, p. 70, 93.
33. Interview with Ms. Gomathi, a Kota informant.
36. Ms. Gomathi, op. cit.,
37. Jakka Parthasarathy, op. cit., Solur Kokkal
38. Ms. Gomathi, op.cit.,
39. Ibid.,
41. Jakka Parthasarathy, op.cit., Interview.
42. Ibid.,
43. Ibid.,
44. E. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India, p. 196.
45. Ibid.,
47. The Hindu, 9 November 2004, Coimbatore, p.3

48. Dharmalingam Venugopal, The Nilgiris Published by Nilgiri Documentation Centre, Hospital Road, Ooty.

49. The Hindu, 1 Aug 2004,
