CHAPTER - 5
CHAPTER 6

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter an attempt was made to describe the Todas life, together with their rituals and practices that mark major events throughout their life; this includes before puberty ceremony, puberty ceremony, marriage, birth of a child, naming ceremony, ear piercing ceremony, and death ceremony.

5.2. BEFORE PUBERTY CEREMONY

According to Antony R Walker (1986) and W.H.R. Rivers (1986), for a girl, there were two distinct rites to enter her womanhood. The first rite is performed by inviting the girl’s maternal uncle or mun to the girl’s hamlet. The girl is allowed to take blessings by bowing down to all her relatives who are elder to her, but she will not receive any gifts, except from her mun. Later in the day, towards evening, a man from the exogamous clan comes to the girl’s house and lies with her for a few minutes on the sleeping platform by covering with his mantle without any sexual relation. The second rite is performed during the night by a strong physique man chosen to deflower the girl. However, during my study, it was observed that the above-said rites are slowly
driven out and now-a-days only a few are performing this deflowering ceremony.

5.3. PUBERTY CEREMONY

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

5.4. MARRIAGE

Traditionally the marriage ceremony takes place only after becoming pregnant (ie) in the 7th month, but now-a-days the Todas use to celebrate the marriage rite during the girls 5th month of pregnancy. At the initial stage the relatives of the bridegroom with his father go to the girl’s village and the bridegroom puts some amount on the girl’s mantle and takes the bride to his home. At the girl’s house they feast with rice and jaggery.
At the birth of 1st child the pisitt (bow-and-arrow) ceremony is performed on the new moon day in the 5th or 7th month. This is a grand ceremony for which all relatives and non-Toda friends are also invited. This ceremony will usually take place in the noon hours of a new moon day. The bridegroom accompanied by his relatives proceeds to the nearby shola (forest) and cuts a niche and makes bow-and-arrow together and then he returns from the shola in a procession to the place (usually under the kiaz (naga) tree) where the rite takes place.

One of the ladies of the bow-giver’s partriclan brings to the tree a red earthen pot, a black earthen lamp, a wick, ghee for fuel and a variety of seeds and she places the pot on a flat stone at the base of the tree directly below the niche. Next she puts ghee into the lamp, lights it with a match and places it in the niche, finally she puts certain seeds and foodstuffs at the base of the tree; these are called ‘nine foodstuffs’ with a honey comb which is auspicious.

The pisitt ceremony is a simple function in which the bridegroom with his bow and arrow goes directly near to the kiaz tree with the niche, where the girl waits for him. The bridegroom who came with bow and arrow seeks the permission of the girl’s father by asking three times ‘Shall I give the Bow?’ and on receiving the reply ‘Give’, the girl asks about the details of the bow and arrow, and the husband says ‘The arrow is represented by a blade of grass called nark. Then a triangular niche had been cut in the kiaz tree,’ and she accepts the bow, raises it to her head and touches them with her fore-head and places it near the tree. She then sits and fixes her gaze on the lighted lamp for
a few minutes. The man from whom the pregnant girl receives the bow-and-arrow becomes the lawful father of the child. After this everyone starts to dance and sing together and all are fed by the husband’s people.

If a child was born to a woman who had not been given a bow, it would be a bastard (padmax) with no partriclan affiliation. This is performed only for the first child and does not extend to all subsequent children of those women, even those conceived after the bow-giver’s death. During another pregnancy, if a different man performs the rite, he will be that child’s father and the father of all subsequent offsprings.

5.5. BIRTH OF A CHILD

Delivery of child takes place at her own house, an experienced woman takes care of the delivery. In case of delicacy, old woman reputedly of exceptional skill (mid wife) is called to attend the delivery. After the delivery of the baby the midwife cuts the umbilical cord with knife and the baby is given bath with warm water. Once the placenta has been expelled out, the mother is given bath with warm water and only then the husband and males were allowed to see the baby and mother. The placenta is wrapped in an old rag and taken by one of the female assistants to a nearby shola where it is buried without any ceremony. If the child is still born or dies during birth, it too is buried without any ceremony, together with the placenta. In case of complication of delivery the Toda will give more importance to save the
mother at the expense of the child. The Todas are of the notion that a child has no social identity until it receives its name after birth.

It was observed from the study that in present days most of the deliveries takes place at hospitals and only very few cases of delivery take place at home. Like other communities the Todas also perform birth polluting event. All people and things with mother and child are kept aloof. The mother and child should move to puzhars (pollution hut) outside the hamlet. Depending upon the birth order of the child the length of the time of mother and child in the hut varies.

5.6. Naming Ceremony

The naming ceremony is called per vasthpimi “name we give” and this takes place immediately after uncovering the face, or a few days later.

In the case of boy baby, the father shaves the middle part of the head of the child who is brought from the place where buffaloes are standing in front of the house. The boy is named by his maternal uncle (mun) who promises a calf saying pol ud todenin, “calf one I have given”, then calls the name of the child, raising his foot to the head of the boy and touches his forehead. This occasion is called Kalkartiti. Three grains of barley are put in the boy's mouth and three into back-hair, and then these are thrown away.
After naming the child feast is provided depending upon the status of the child’s father. Only then the child is given food for the 1st time, having been suckled up to that day.

Before the boy is shaved, a bird’s bone called *matpul* and a stone purchased from the market called *kansutimani* are put around his wrist. It looks like a bangle, with the bone being cut into small pieces and strung alternately with pieces of stone. It is their belief that if this stone ring is not used, the evil eye (*kan*) will be cast on the child, making the child sick.

As far as girl child is concerned there is no naming ceremony. However her mother takes the infant at dawn to the ritual entrance of the hamlet, a place which seems to be particularly associated with women. As she uncovers the little girl’s face she shows her the dairy, buffaloes and other things of the hamlet, where she is named by her father’s sister (*mumi*) or the wife of *mun* who is also *mumi* of the girl child. But no calf is given as gift in the case of girl baby.

5.7. EAR-PIERCING CEREMONY

The ear-piercing ceremony is called *kevi kutitt*. This ear-piercing ceremony was performed for boys of the same patriclan together from infancy to 20 years of age so that their parents could share the expenses of the ceremony. Usually this ceremony will take place in one of the chief hamlets. But, now-a-days this rite is performed in any Hindu temple where they have more faith. Generally this takes place on Sunday or Wednesday. This
cemony must not be performed if there is kedr (ie) if there are unfinished funeral ceremonies of a member of the clan.

All relatives assemble together for the ceremony. The boys are dressed with the new ceremonial dresses for this ears piercing ceremony. Two men each for one ear perform the event. One is mother’s brother (mum) and the other is from Teivali if the boy is Tarharol and vice versa.

The piercing is done with a silver or gold ring depending on their economic status. After ear piercing, the boy salutes (Kalmelpudithti) all the elders. Each man raises his foot to the head of the boy and blesses him and offers gifts to the boy. After the boy salutes and takes the blessings of the elders, the boy’s father provides feast to the invited people. Then the celebrants sing and dance in their traditional way.

As far as the Toda girls are concerned, there was no parallel rite of ear piercing ceremony. But now-a-days the Toda girls are taken to the nearby temple accompanied by her maternal uncle and close relatives and the ears are pierced. Then they offer pooja to the temple deity in the sanctum and pray for the prosperity and seek the blessings.

5.8. DEATH CEREMONY

Among all the crisis of life it is death which generates the greatest profusion of rituals among the Toda. Usually the funeral ceremonies of Toda are carried out over many months. Generally the body is burnt, and this first
day funeral is called *hase kedu* also called green funeral. The death is called *kherr* and the body is cremated at the end of first day or the next day. The funeral ceremonies called *etvainolkedr*. Generally the Todas erect a funeral hut which is specially built for the reception of the dead body. This hut is usually erected within a stone circle found at the funeral place. The dead body is carried in a specially made *shola* wooden bier which is decorated with flowers. If the deceased Toda is wealthy then they will make a wooden cot which is well decorated with flowers and the body is cremated with the cot. The body is carried in the funeral cot preceded by musicians. The bearers chant "*Aw haw how, aw haw how!*" The clanmen of the deceased receive the procession formally, bowing and touching their foreheads to the ground.

In the past, music at Toda funerals was played by Kota who, in return received the carcasses of the sacrificial buffaloes. But today the upwardly mobile Kota no longer plays music at funerals and so todas have to look elsewhere for musicians.

Buffaloes are scarified during the wet funeral, in which the Todas belief is that it accompanies the spirit to the next world. These buffaloes must be female; if the funeral is for man, both temple and domestic buffaloes are sacrificed, but for a woman, only domestic buffaloes are used. Traditionally they sacrifice more number of buffaloes, but now-a-days they sacrifice at least two buffaloes at a funeral; one temple animal and one domestic animal for male, and one domestic buffalo for female. For a child, only a calf is sacrificed.
The temple buffalo is sacrificed first and then the domestic buffalo is sacrificed. Usually the Todas will not slaughter the buffalo for sacrifice, instead they kill the buffalo by striking it on the head with the back of an axe, and usually the animal is killed by one blow. The Todas call this killing of buffaloes as trkipti. When the buffaloes are sacrificed then the male corpse is made to clasp the right horn, of the sacrificed temple buffalo, but a female corpse is laid with its feet towards the buffalo and its two fore toes (tied together,) touching to the nose of the animal.

During the first funeral day a ceremony is performed which is called as kachiittthti (cloth giving ceremony). The essential feature of this ceremony is that a cloth is given by a near relative of the dead person to those who have married into his family, and the cloth is placed on the dead body by the wives of those to whom it is given. This ceremony takes place at the funerals of both sexes and for members of all clans.

Months later, the dry funeral marrainolked takes place, in which a relic (narskedr) of the dead person is made and is wrapped with an embroidered mantle (pukurupukuli) and placed in the hut, and then all the women will cry together. Then the relic is carried out and laid down at the entrance of the buffalo pen, and earth is thrown into the pen. During the dry funeral day also the Todas sacrifice buffaloes and the rites are concluded by breaking a pot at the cremation site. But now-a-days majority of the Toda tribals are not performing this dry funeral ceremony.
The life cycle ceremonies among the Todas are very few. If they find that a
girl is at the age of attaining puberty, a pre-puberty ceremony is celebrated. When
she attains puberty a celebration with their relatives is conducted and by giving a
purification bath she is invited to the house to do her routine work. The Todas
perform the marriage ceremonies during day time around 11:00 am to 1:00 pm with
the gatherings of friends and relatives. Among Todas they have practices of marriage
after the girl attains pregnancy; usually their marriages will be performed in the 7th or
5th month of the pregnancy. The highlight of the marriage is that the bridegroom will
give a pisitt (bow and arrow) to the bride under the naga tree where ghee lamp is
lighted. After the marriage the Todas perform their traditional dance and dine
together. The birth of child both for boy and girl treated equally till the naming
ceremony. Naming the boy will be a grand function with feast but for the girl, it is in
a simple way. Mostly the naming and ear-piercing for girls are carried in the temples
at Ooty. The funeral ritual of Todas is performed in a unique way. They are of the
belief that the deceased body should be accompanied with sacrificed buffaloes by
which the soul of the body will rest in eternal peace. Thus more than two buffaloes
are sacrificed for male and a single buffalo for the female.