CHAPTER 8

RELI GIOUS PRACTICES OF THE TODAS

8.1. INTRODUCTION

By the word religion, we generally imply devotion, piety, duty, attached to the worship of God, Creator and Ruler. In a recent work on the anthropology of religion, Wallace (1966) suggests the ritual is "communication without information," each ritual being "a particular sequence of signals which, once announced, allows no uncertainty, no choice, and hence... conveys no information from sender to receiver." In the present chapter an attempt was made to put forth particularly about the Todas rituals so as to show that their rituals are unique and they are performed for the overall well being of the whole community.

8.2. MAN IS A SPIRITUAL BEING

Man, the social animal, is also a religious or spiritual being and religion is a major concern of man. It is one of the earliest and the deepest interests of the human beings. Religion is universal, permanent, pervasive and perennial. Man not only, has biological, economic and social need, but also, what is known as a religious need. He has religious quest which makes him restless even beyond the satisfaction of his basic physical needs. Hence the
Biblical saying, *Man cannot live by bread alone*. It is also said that man from the earliest times has been incurably religious.

Religion is not a phenomenon of recent emergence. Its beginning is unknown. It is dateless. Some artifacts and evidences of the burial practices of Neanderthal man indicate that human being was a religious creature long before history began. The institution of religion is universal. It is found in all the societies, past and present. Religious beliefs and practices are, however, far from being uniform. Laws, customs, conventions and fashions, etc., are not the only means of social control. Overriding them all, are religion and morality which formulate and shape all of them. They are not only the most influential forces of social control, but also the *most effective guides of human behaviour*. The social life of man in addition to its economic, political, philosophical, scientific and other aspects has also the religious aspect. Not only religion has been in existence from the beginning but also it has been exerting a tremendous influence upon other institutions. Religious dogmas have influenced and conditioned economic endeavours, political movements, property dealings, educational tasks, ideological fervours, scientific inventions and artistic developments. Religion, which is based on the cultural needs of man, has added new dimensions to human life and human development.
8.3. Definition and the Basic Components of Religion

*Durkheim* (1912) in his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* defines religion as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.

Religion as we understand the term implies a relationship not merely between man and man but also between man and some higher power. *Maciver & page* (1959)

Religion is attitude towards superhuman powers – *Ogburn* (1950)

The social field of religion may be regarded as including the emotionalized beliefs prevalent in a social group concerning the supernatural plus the over behaviour, material objects and symbols associated with such beliefs - *Gillin and Gillin* (1950)

Religion is a system of beliefs and symbolic practices and objects governed by faith rather than knowledge, which relates man to an unseen supernatural realm beyond the known and beyond the controllable - *Arnold W. Green* (1956)

Religion is more or less coherent system of beliefs and practices concerning a supernatural order of beings, forces, places, or other entities - *H.M. Johnson* (1960)
Religion is a mode of action as well as system of beliefs, and a sociological phenomenon as well as a personal experience - Malinowski (1932)

8.4. TODAS RELIGION

Todas believed that Gods lived in this world before man existed. According to them both men and buffaloes were creations of God. They also believed the trinity like God, man and buffalo lived together in the Niligri Hills. According to them the God ruled the men. They also believed that Gods have lived some kind of life like Todas. Gods were connected with the hills and Todas believed that Gods dwell in the Niligris plateau.

The Todas believe that their first god was Pithi, who was born in a cave. His son On and his wife were the creators of Todas and their buffaloes. Todas also believe after on followed puv to the world of dead, called Amnodr, and he left, Teikiarzi, a goddess who ruled over the Todas. Because of her, most of Todas institutions have been ascribed. Among other Gods she predominates even Today.

The Todas believe that their gods are closely associated with the hills of Niligris. Every one of the gods has his hill and they believe that the gods dwell on the hills. Whenever they speak of gods they used to identify the god with the hill. The Todas also believed that the two river gods Teipakh and Pakhwar, are associated with two chief streams of the district. Todas believe
that there is an important feature common to all the hills in habituated by deities. Todas call the summits of gods in the stone circle pun.

8.5. Todas Pay Respect to Other Gods

Todas have great faith in their gods but at the same time they also show their respect to gods of other tribes on the Niligiris. It was observed that the names of Hindu gods have been mentioned during their ceremonies. In the present days the Todas worship the Hindu gods and it was observed that even in their house they have the photos of Hindu and Christian gods. During the study it was informed that they ear pierce the girls in the Hindu goddess Mariamman temple in Ooty. Like the Hindus they visit all pilgrimage centers and worship the Hindu gods and goddesses. They also visit Christian god and goddess and offer prayers. Even though they have respect for other gods, they can differentiate their gods from other gods.

The table 8.1 explains whether the Todas worship Gods other than their native God. Since the present generation of Todas had come of their traditional life and joined the mainstream in all walks of life, this attempt was made by the researcher. This data shows that, about 86.75 per cent of the Todas worship Hindu and Christian Gods. These Todas were of the belief that every God is the saviour of the universe and has eternal power, so they worship all the Gods apart from their own native God. But there were about 13.25 per cent of Todas people who do not worship Gods other than their
native God. Thus, this study clarifies that the Todas people prefer to mingle and take part in all the social activities of the non-tribal community.

Table: 8.1 Belief System of Worship by the Todas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Belief System</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other God</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>86.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Native God</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.6 IMMORTALITY

Todas believe in the immortality of the soul and its future. They have faith that death in the world is not the end of life but a beginning for another life after death. Their belief is based on two considerations, one is what they know and other is a sort of self-consciousness. The first one they know that the buffaloes were created by god. This faith has been developing due to the story told to them from incontrovertible sources. Regarding self-consciousness, they view about the feature entirely apprehension in other words not having fear about the feature. They also believe that both Todas and buffaloes are living in another the other world and they are certain that the departed soul will join their four fathers. Todas believe in transmigration of soul or body. The funeral service also favours the idea of transition of soul.
8.7. BELIEF WITCHCRAFT AND DEMONS

The Todas have faith and belief in witchcraft and demons. It is the nature of any primitive tribes. They also believe in something that unseen agencies. They have fear of witchcraft and they have belief in most of the demons. They practice demonolatry but not as much as other tribes of south India. Some Todas are believed to have the divine power, sorcerers and curing the diseases by ways of spells and rites. These Todas are different from dairy man or priest. There are some fore tellers, magicians and medicine men. The divine powers are called tevodipol which means “God- gesticulating men”. They got this special gift from their relatives or from grand fathers. Some perform divine- dancing and they are called teuol. It was interesting to see when they were possessed by a god or divine nature, they do not speak in their language but in a different language like Malayalam. The teuol is consulted when ever any miss fortune like sickness, death of people or buffaloes, failure of milk collection from buffaloes, disappearing bells and so on.takes place in Todas family

8.8. DAIRY

The dairy of Todas is known has ti which as two kinds of buffaloes, they are sacred buffaloes called persinir and other ordinary village buffaloes are called punir. The milk of persinir is used by the poojri or dairy-man polul. While the milk, butter and other related products of ordinary buffaloes are used largely for personal consumption of the persinir buffalo milk is used only by the priest for worshiping and making butter and ghee. The sacred buffalo’s
milk is not used by any ordinary Todas and they can enjoy only its milk products. Todas life is very much devoted to their buffaloes. There are many religious rituals in milking and churning the sacred buffaloes which are temple property and utmost care is taken by the priest or dairy man. In regard to ordinary buffaloes are called putiir they are kept in the village. These buffaloes looked after by the men and boys of the village and they are called parol. The milking and other milk relative products are carried out in the dwelling place. These buffaloes are treated in ordinary way and there is no special treatment like in the case of temple buffaloes. The Teivaliol and the Tartharol have different classes of sacred buffaloes; The Teivaliol has one class of buffaloes and the other hand the Tartharol has several classes of buffaloes. The buffaloes are not the property of the whole village or clan but they are the personal and family property especially the ordinary buffaloes are the property of the family. There are two types of Pens, one look like hut shape and other one is circular type with a conial roof and they are called poh and poli respectively. The conial pens were more in number in early days, but at present they are very few.

8.9. THE BUFFALOES

Todas buffaloes are one of the varieties of water-buffaloes. They are semi-wild and they attack strangers. There are many incidents where in Europeans were attacked and injured by these buffaloes. The male buffaloes called er and the female is called ir and calf is called kar it is quite interesting to note that these buffaloes have individual names and the names are given
when they were born. Many buffaloes have the same name and the names are only for female buffaloes. Many male calves are killed or given to Kota and only a few male calves are kept for breeding generally one male for fifty female. It is the belief that the first buffalo was the creation of the god on and his wife. On created sacred buffaloes and his wife created ordinary buffaloes.

8.10. THE TREATMENT OF TEMPLE BUFFALOES

The dairy activities starts in the evening by milking the buffaloes in the earthen pots and then coagulation starts by adding water and with butter. The churning continues till the butter is formed. The butter and butter milk kept in different appropriate vessels made by the Kota. The butter is kept on the fire till it becomes ghee, nei in their language. A small amount of ghee is kept for personal use of the dairy man and rest is sold in the market. It is interesting to note when butter is kept on the fire some grains or rice is boiled along with the butter. After collection of ghee, the boiled grain or rice call al remains in the bottom which becomes food for the dairy man.

8.11. THE TREATMENT OF ORDINARY BUFFALOES

The ordinary buffalo called putir is looked after by the male Todas. When people get up in the morning, the buffaloes are released from the pen and the cattle make their way to the place where milking is done. The calves released a little late and they are allowed to suck the milk. Since buffaloes are more in number many Todas men do the milking work and some one will churn the milk in the dwelling hut. But in dairy, the dairy man alone has to do
all the work related to milking and churning. On the other hand in the village they do these works as a team and the head of the family supervises the work.

When the milking is over, the ordinary buffaloes are driven to the grazing ground and they remain there till afternoon. When they return, they go to milking place and the routine work is carried out. The pasturing of the ordinary buffaloes is carried out by the young boys of the village. In all these works the Todas women do not have any role.

8.12. THE RITUALS IN THE DAIRY

As we are aware the dairy and buffaloes are closely linked to the life of Todas. The rituals of dairy are of religious nature and milk of the dairy is treated as sacred. There are different ceremonies before a person enters in it by purifying himself so that he can fit to see, touch and use the sacred things. Thanking ceremony, irpiluvsthi is an important ceremony in which a feast will be arranged. Dairy milk is used for this feast alone and it is not used by the Todas on any other occasions.

There are many ceremonies in regard to buffaloes which start with the birth of calf irpalvusthi performed on the fifteenth day after the calf is born. It is performed both for male and female calves of the scared buffaloes. It is performed on Sunday, Wednesday and Saturday after new moon day. After this ceremony the dairy man starts collecting milk from the lactating buffalo.
8.13. The Salt Giving Ceremony to the Buffaloes

The salt giving ceremony is carried out for both scared and ordinary buffaloes and it is to prevent any infection because of grazing in the open land. According to W R. River (1986:175) the salt is given to the buffalo for five times in a year both at head mund (tt mund) and in the ordinary village. The salt is mixed with buttermilk and given to the dairy buffaloes but in case of village buffaloes the salt is not mixed with the buttermilk instead the salt is mixed with the water.

The table 8.2 shows about the method of treatment preferred by the Todas for their cattle. The data shows that 88.08 per cent of them go for modern medicine, 9.27 per cent of them use to prefer to treat with their own native medicine and the rest 2.65 per cent of them adopt both the treatment. i.e. first they give treatment with their native medicine, if it does not get cure then they will go for the modern medicine. In general we found that majority of them accept the modern method of treatment to their cattle.

Table: 8.2 Type of Treatment Preferred for Cattle by the Todas Tribe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL No</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Native Medicine</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Modern Medicine</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>88.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In present days this salt giving ceremony takes place only twice a year, on the following Sundays or Tuesdays of the new moon for the scared buffaloes and any day is convenient for ordinary buffaloes except Tuesday and Friday.

8.14. POSITION OF MALE CALF

Todas do not give any special treatment for male calf as they give for female calf. Till fifteenth day ceremony both the calves are treated equally. They keep in the ratio of one male buffalo for fifty female buffaloes. The male calf is either killed or given it to Kotas. It was told in spite of pure vegetarian nature of Todas, once in a year an exception was given to the male Todas. All male adults join together in the ceremony of killing and eating the young male calf. The calf should be under one month old, and they go to the dark place of the village wood along with the calf. They kill the calf by plowing with a stick. The sacred fire is made and flesh of dead calf is burned. After roasting it the men eat dancing and shouting. Women do not participate in this ceremony.

8.15. BUFFALOES AND MILK

Due to scared nature of buffalo, the milk is also treated with sanctity. When compared to the present time the buffaloes were given more sacred status in the past. The Todas believe that the buffaloes were created by god and they were able to speak like men. Because of this nature even Today they treat buffaloes equal to the human beings. But due to economic reasons and modern food habits their cost of living was comparatively higher and so in
order to make ends meet they started selling the milk products of dairy buffaloes along with ordinary buffalo’s milk products. At present time none of the buffaloes are sacred; entire milk and milk products are sold in the market and co-operative dairy.

8.16. POLAL (PRIEST) IN THE TEMPLE

The priest or poojari is called palol and he belongs to Teivaliol, chosen by Tarthar members for their dairy. He can be palol as long as he wishes upto eighteen years and even he can continue if he likes. But at present many positions of palol are vacant in many dairies since people are not interested. In Todas every individual should be as palol atleast once in his life time. Some of them settled outside Ooty due to their employment and other reasons will hold the post atleast for a month in their life.

8.17. THE CONDITION OF PALOL

During the period of priesthood, palol cannot visit his house or any other ordinary village. Any outside work can be done only with help of other people who visit him. If he is married, he cannot visit his wife and his children. He cannot attend funeral ceremonies in any villages. If he prefers to attend he has to resign till second funeral. To become palol again he has undergo all the ceremonies. At present Todas do not prefer the priesthood because of the following reasons. They do not like to leave their children, and wife, and the income out of sale ghee which the palol is entitled to have become very minimum. The palol do not have any place or role in the naim or
council. He can appear before it in case he is present or his witness is 
essential. An ordinary Todas can visit the palol only on Monday and 
Thursday. If Todas like to meet him on other days, they can communicate 
standing away at the distance of one fourth of mile. If anybody touches the 
palol, he becomes like ordinary Todas and he has to perform all purifying 
ceremony to become a palol once again.

There are many regulations in concern with food. Any grain or rice 
used by him must reach him only through Badagas. Even the rice purchase in 
the market, should be done for him through Badagas only. He alone can drink 
the milk of dairy buffalo. He has to cook his food himself in the outside room 
of dairy. For the preparation of the food he cannot use chillies as long as he is 
a palol. The dress or garments used by him called tuni is in dark gray made at 
nulturs in Coimbatore district, as long as he is a priest and he cannot cut his 
nails or hair.

8.18. DISCUSSION

The religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to the 
sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden. The Toda believed 
that both men and buffaloes were creation of God they also believed that god 
ruled the men. The Toda believe that their first god was Pithu, who was born in 
a cave. His son ‘On’ and his wife were the creators of Todas and their 
buffaloes. Toda also believe after on followed puv to the world of dead, called 
Amnodr. But in the present days the Toda used to worship the Hindu god and 
goddess, it was observed that even in their house they have the photos of
Hindu and Christian gods. The Todas are in faith of immortality and they believe that death in this world is not the end of life but there is another life after death. Toda believe in transmigration of soul or body. The funeral service favour the idea of transition of soul is the *dogma*. The Toda are having faith and belief on witchcraft and demons and they have also have fear on witchcraft and the demons.

Since the Todas are the pastoral community tribes they maintain the dairy as the sacred place, they call the dairy as *ti* in which there are two kinds of buffaloes, the one sacred buffaloes called *persinir* whose milk and milk products are used only by the temple priest or dairy-man *polul* and other ordinary village buffaloes are called *punir* the milk and milk products of these buffaloes, are used largely for personal consumption.

As we aware the dairy and buffaloes are closely linked the life of Toda. The rituals of dairy are religious nature and milk of the dairy treated as scared. Thanking ceremony, *irpiluvsthi* is one of the most important ceremony in which a feast will be arranged. For these feast alone dairy milk is used and it is not used by Toda ordinarily in other days. There are many ceremonies in regard to buffalo which starts with the birth of calf *irpalvusthi* performed in the fifteenth day after the calf born. The salt giving ceremony will be carried out both for scared and ordinary buffalo The salt is mixed with buttermilk and given to the dairy buffaloes but in case of village buffaloes the salt is mixed with the water. This salt giving ceremony takes place twice a year, especially on Sundays or Tuesdays following of new moon day.
The priest or poojari is called *palol* he can be the priest as long as he wishes, normally the duration will be two to three years. At present many *palol* are vacant in many dairies since people are disinterested due to they wish to employ themselves in outside the villages and settled nearer to their work place. But at the same time each and every Toda male wish to holed the post atleast for a month in their life.