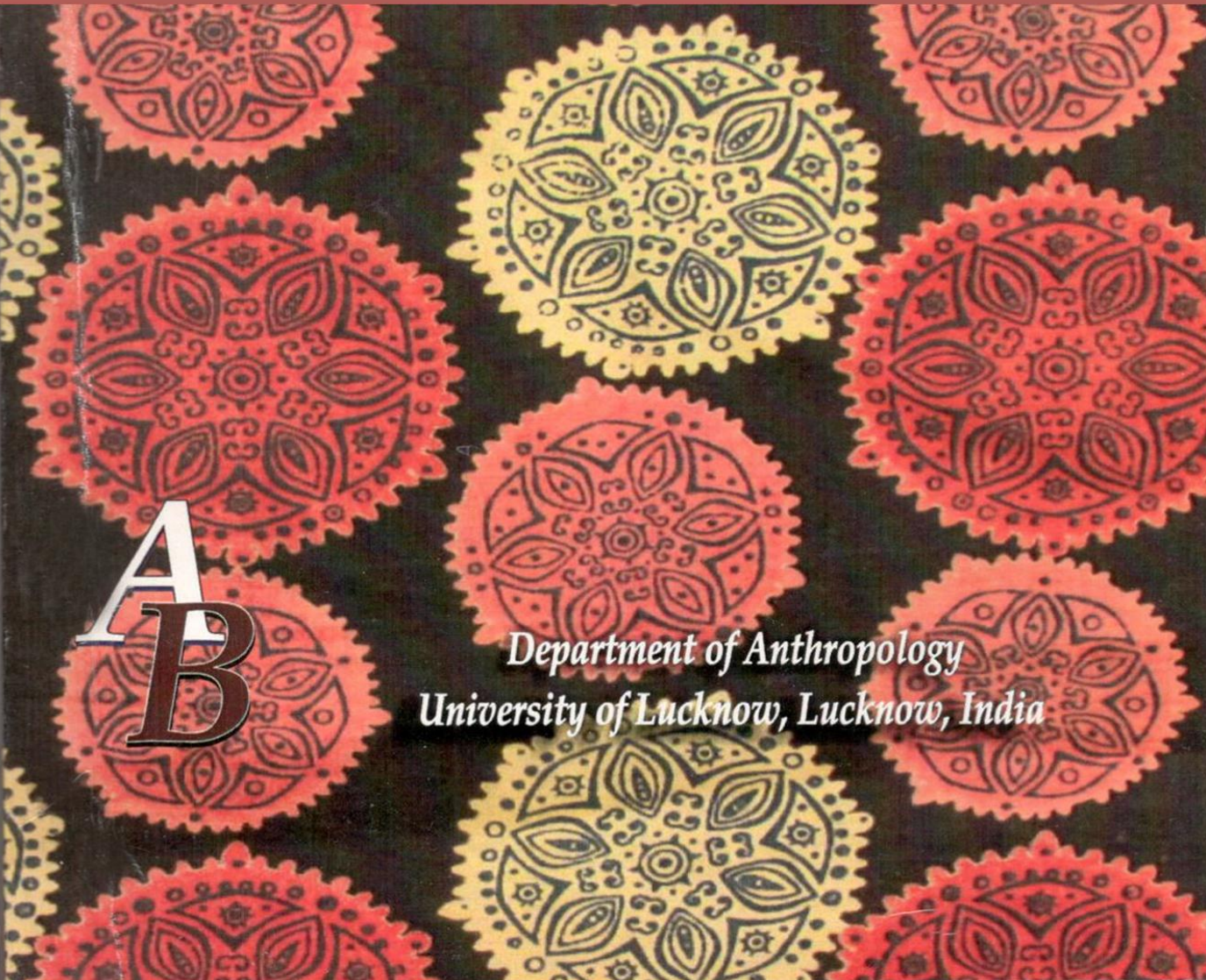


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CONTENTS

1.	Use of Social Media and Its Perceived Influence on the Academic Performance of University Students <i>SYED MOHAMMAD AZEEM</i>	5
2.	Effects of selected yogic practices on blood pressure among school boys. <i>DURVESH KUMAR & RAJENDRA SINGH</i>	13
3.	Urbanization and Marginalization: An Ethnographic Study of Assamese Waste-Pickers <i>ARIF RASHEED</i>	19
4.	History of Opioid Addiction and steps taken for De-addiction <i>ANKITA MISHRA, SYED ZIAUR RAHMAN & R. A. KHAN</i>	27
5.	Development of Ottoman Mosque Architecture in Istanbul <i>ASIF ALI</i>	38
6.	Psychological Facets of Spirituality: An Empirical Study of Pilgrims at Sufi Shrines <i>FAISAL HASSAN</i>	47
7.	Patriarchy, Employment and Mental Health among Married Couples: Empirical Perspectives from Uttar Pradesh <i>FARHEEN & NOOREEN ZAIDI</i>	76
8.	Policy Research: Effectiveness of private sector and NGOs in improved agricultural outcomes: A rapid assessment of global evidence. <i>DAUD SALIM FARUQUIE</i>	86
9.	Education, Employment and Quality of Life among undergraduates of the Indigenous Tharu tribe in Terai Region of Lakhimpur Kheri <i>MOHAMMED ARAFAT HASAN RIZVI & M. SHAFAY KIDWAI</i>	97
10.	Ruling on religious life of a pastoral tribe of Nilgiri hills: A study on cosmology and myth <i>KEYA PANDEY</i>	108
11.	Ecological Essence of Indian Constitution and Democracy <i>VAISHALI SAXENA</i>	124
12.	Cattle, Culture and Community: A Study on the Livestock Management in Himalayas <i>KEYA PANDEY</i>	128
12.	Report: International conference on “Interplay of Economics, Politics and Society on Development of a Nation” – ICIEPS-2017 <i>DAUD SALIM FARUQUIE</i>	144
13.	Obituary: Professor (Mrs.) Hamida Ahmad <i>DAUD SALIM FARUQUIE</i>	150

Ruling on religious life of a pastoral tribe of Nilgiri hills: A study on cosmology and myth.

Keya Pandey¹

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to comprehend and highlight the indigenous knowledge about the cosmology in the religion of the Toda tribe living in the Nilgiri hills of Tamil Nadu, India. Living in the forested areas of the upper Nilgiris, the Todas follow religious beliefs and practices, which are quite rigid. However, prior to an understanding of the traditions, customs, beliefs, and practices, which are the way of life for any tribal people, it is necessary to start from the beginning i.e. formation of their world or universe, in their own eyes. What they think about their universe or world, what are their stories and beliefs, regarding the formation of the universe according to their religion, in other words, the cosmology of their religion, is an important aspect of study, before understanding other elements of their society and culture.

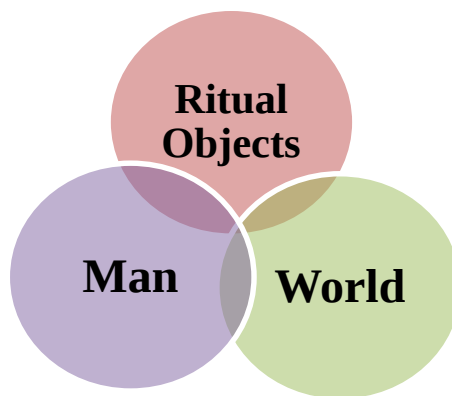
Keywords: Religion, Cosmology, Beliefs, Toda, Myths

In social anthropology, the meaning of cosmology has broadly followed the dictionary one and is closely connected to the empirical study of religions. To a large extent, the two words have been used interchangeably, depending upon theoretical fashions and the predilections of the anthropologist. Some have used it to mean no more than religion. Leach, for example, defined it as 'the system of beliefs and practices which social anthropologists commonly refer to as primitive religion'. (Leach, 1982)

If, however, one tries to abide by more rigorous definitions, then cosmology in anthropological usage is both more and less than religion. In some way or other, the study of cosmology means taking account of the relationship between the whole and the parts: the macrocosm and the microcosm. Because the word 'kosmos' can mean 'order' as well as 'world of order', in Greek thought microcosm signifies not only humans in relation to the universe but also any part of a thing, especially a living thing that reflects or represents the whole it belongs to (Guthrie 1962).

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Hocart was an early theorist who sought to elaborate this point. His aim was to establish that the root idea in human existence is the procurement of life. This, he claimed, is done through a ritual which derives its meaning from the 'life-giving myth'. Discussing Vedic religious principles and practices he states, *'the participants are deliberately seeking to establish an identity between man and the ritual objects, between ritual objects and the world, and so between man and the world, a kind of creative syllogism'* (Hocart 1970).



Various anthropologists have studied the religious practices of the Toda. **Anthony R Walker (2018)**, has discussed the vibrant beliefs in gods and goddesses of the Toda tribe. He explained the changing aspect of religious practices in the Toda tribe, and their continuing strong belief in their sacred dairy cult.

Perinchery (2018), in an article published in 'The Hindu' on 'Wisdom of the Wild' explains the quality of knowledge in Todas with their experiences. He focuses on the quality of experienced knowledge about plants and animals in todas.

Chhabra (2017) in his book *'The Toda landscape'* says about his whole journey of many years in all Toda hamlets of Ooty district. He discussed deeply ontoda clans, toda hamlets, their rituals, sacred things like- water, temple, buffaloes, priest, etc. in his book. He also explained how strongly toda tribe of Nilgiri hills interconnected with their ecology and how beautifully they are living with nature because of their eco-friendly culture. They worship nature and their hills, rivers, mountains, forests, animals, etc. they all are sanctities for them.

Anamica (2017) in her research paper entitled *'Socio-economic characteristics of Self Help Group Tribal Women in Nilgiri District, India'* says about the determinants of tribal women SHG members for joining SHGs. She discussed the participation of tribal women in decision making, socio-cultural linkage, intra- tribal communication, leadership abilities, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

Parthasarthy (2013), in the magazine *'The bluest heaven,'* in vol. no.1 the author article *'Primitive Tribal Group'* says about six PTG's of the Nilgiri district and their unique cultural traits. He mentioned because of these PTG's; the Nilgiri district has become an important 'tribal ethnic zone' in the world of indigenous heritage.

Chhabra (2013-14), article in "The bluest heaven" magazine vol. no.1, the author states *'Restoring the Toda Landscapes of the Nilgiris'* talked about toda ecology. He explained the importance of plants, trees, and animals of Nilgiri hills for todas and their relationship.

Selvaraj (2008), in his thesis titled *'Socio-cultural study of the toda - a primitive tribe of Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu'* talk about the social and cultural status of the toda tribe. In his study, he explains social behaviors and cultural rituals and ceremonies among todas.

Ravichandran. M (2004), in his study on *'Alcoholism among the primitive tribal groups of Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu'* says that many of them argued that their failure in their tribal culture encourages them to take alcohol. In the case of festivals, ceremonies, and family functions, avoiding alcohol with their kith and kin companionship is very difficult for them.

Walker (2003) *'The Toda people of South India -Between Tradition and Modernity'* mentioned that Todas society has a vast difference between traditional and modernity. Toda munds have largely disappeared and modern dwellings built of brick and cement, with tiled roofs; some would not be out of place in suburban Chennai or Bangalore. In 2000 there were 56 occupied Toda munds only.

Faggab Singh Kulaste(2003), in the press clippings *The Hindu*, Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs says about the tribal rehabilitation should be complete in all respects, including the provision of power, drinking water and access to nearby towns.

Many indigenous cosmologies have a logical structure to comprise human experiences in rational, spiritual, artistic, emotional and ethical manners and also to invoke an awareness to minimize negative environmental impacts, however with the present hastening social, economic, political, cultural and environmental changes due to globalization these cosmologies and the indigenous modes of life are increasingly endangered worldwide. We have to focus on this endangered indigenous tribe and their indigenous knowledge as soon as possible because this tribe is very less in number and changing their lifestyles and cultural traditions rapidly.

Tamil Nadu is one of the most important states of the southern zone in India, consists of significant tribal groups. According to the 2011 census, the Scheduled Tribe population in Tamil Nadu is 794697 (401068 males and 393629 females) constitutes 1.1 percent of the total general population. The literacy rate of the tribes is 59 per cent. 83.08 percent of the tribal survives in hilly/rural areas and 16.91 percent of them live in urban (town) areas.

The tribal areas of Tamil Nadu can be broadly divided into two major geographical dimensions such as the eastern coastal line and the mountainous regions of the north and west. The average elevation of the Eastern Ghats is 2000 feet and the highest peak is 6000 feet. This range is not continuous in Tamil Nadu.

The important hill ranges of Tamil Nadu are the Jawadhi hills and Yelagiri hills of the North Arcot district, the Kalrayan Hills of South Arcot, the Pachamalai, Kollimalai and Yercadu ranges of Salem, the Anamalai of Coimbatore, the Sitteri hills of Dharmapuri, the Palani hills of Madurai and the Nilgiris hills.

Categories of Tribal Communities in Tamil Nadu:

Based on Characteristics like certain primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large and backwardness, the Government of Tamil Nadu has so far identified 36 communities as tribals of Tamil Nadu. The list of 36 Tribal communities is given in Table 2.5. They are separately located throughout the districts of Tamil Nadu. Categories of Tribals in Tamil Nadu are:

CATEGORY I	CATEGORY II	CATEGORY III
Those who migrated to the hilly areas of the northern part of the Eastern Ghats in Tamil Nadu from the adjoining plains around 16th Century and mingled with the local inhabitants of those tribes like Malayalies of ITDP areas.	Those who originally belong to or had migrated to the part of the Western Ghats lying within Tamil Nadu those tribes are given below: (i) Todas (ii) Kotas (iii) Kottunayakans (iv) Kurumbas (v) Panias (vi) Irulas (vii) Kadars (viii) Sholagars etc.	Others found in the hilly areas and plains of other districts.

The details of Primitive Tribal Groups and their population in Tamil Nadu, 1961-2011 are stated in the table-1.0.

Table-1.0 Primitive Tribal Groups and their Population in Tamil Nadu, 1961-2011

Source: Census of India, 2011.

Population (in numbers)							
Sl. No.	Name of PTGs	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
1	Irulas	79,835	89,025	1,05,757	1,38,827	1,55,606	1,89,661
2	Kattunayakans	6,459	5,042	26,383	42,761	45,227	46,672
3	Kotas	833	1,188	604	752	925	308
4	Kurumbas	1,174	2,754	4,354	4,768	5,498	6,823
5	Paniyans	4,779	6,093	6,393	7,124	9,121	10,134
6	Todas	714	930	875	1,100	1,560	2,002
Total		93,794	1,05,032	1,44,366	1,95,332	2,17,937	2,55,600

Most of the tribes in the State are cultivators, agriculture laborers or dependent on forests for their livelihood. There are thirty-six Scheduled Tribes of varying numerical strengths in the state. Most of the Scheduled Tribes live in hilly and remote areas by primitive subsistence living and a large number of them are food gatherers by tradition and they are widely distributed in all thirty-two districts in Tamil Nadu state.

The Nilgiri Hills

The Nilgiri is the least populated district of Tamil Nadu with 7,62,141 (2001 Census). The Badagas, Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas. The Toda, Kota, and Kurumba tribes are living only in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu in India (District Handbook 2001). They constitute the dominant tribal group among other tribal groups in this district. This district has the maximum concentration of tribal population among the other districts of Tamil Nadu. According to 2001 census, the total tribal population in Nilgiri district is 28,373, which constitutes nearly 3.72 percent to the Nilgiri district population. Out of 36 Scheduled Tribes, the Government of India identified six tribal communities as Primitive Tribal Groups

(PTGs) on the basis of a *pre-agriculture level of technology, a stagnant or declining population, extremely low literacy and a subsistence level of the economy.*

These six Primitive Tribal Groups are;

- (i) Todas – exclusively living in the Nilgiri district.
- (ii) Kotas – exclusively living in the Nilgiri district.
- (iii) Kurumbas – exclusively living in the Nilgiri district.
- (iv) Irulas – living throughout Tamil Nadu state including the Nilgiri district.
- (v) Paniyas – exclusively living in the Nilgiri district.
- (vi) Kattunayakans – living in throughout Tamil Nadu state including the Nilgiri district.

The Todas of Nilgiri Hills

The Todas are the original inhabitants of Nilgiri Hills; they are the nature worshipping tribe living among the Nilgiri mountains in Southern India. They are one of the most picturesque tribes in India. They have their own language, rich arts, and crafts and a unique way of community living. The Toda people are a small pastoral tribal community. Before the 18th century and British colonization, the Toda coexisted locally with other ethnic communities, including the Kota, Badaga, and Kurumba, in a loose caste-like society, in which the Toda was the top ranking.

During the 20th century, the Toda population has hovered in the range 700 to 900. Although an insignificant fraction of the large population of India, since the late 18th century the Toda have attracted a most disproportionate amount of attention because of their ethnological aberrancy and their unlikeness to their neighbors in appearance, manners, and customs. The study of their culture by anthropologists and linguists proved significant in developing the fields of social anthropology and ethnomusicology.

Venugopal (2002), an article in *The Hindu* on 'Save Nilgiri Campaign' in his article declares that the United Nations proclaimed 2002 as the International Year of Mountains (IYM) to increase the International awareness of the global importance of mountain ecosystems.

Douglas (2002) in her book '*Natural Symbols explorations in cosmology*' has done a classic work and shows how certain forms of social life bring forth regularly the same varieties of symbolic expression. Though *Natural Symbols* is a book about religion, it is also concerned with secular symbolism. It has stimulated new insights and provoked reappraisals of current orthodoxies. Above all, it provides a way to think beyond our cultural prejudices.

Acharya (2002) in an article in *The Hindu* on the topic 'Where nature crises', says about the Todas of Nilgiris hills and their most prized asset buffalo and both are struggling for the survival.

Zvelebil (2002) in his article '*The various hypothesis of Toda origin*' noted that they are the last tribe of Irralities, Scythians, Arab Immigrants, of Babylonian origin, and they are ruminants of Alexandra the Great soldiers.

Sidhartha's (2001) in his article in 'The Hindu' magazine the author talk about '*Rituals that Time forgot*' and mentions that many of the traditional rituals followed among the tribes have forgotten. Santhal boys and girls are not allowed to see each other, but it has changed. The Siddis of Rajkot, the father of the Bride, tie the knot in a thread every day till the boy and girls are reunited, but at present, it is not in practice.

Anklesaria (2001) in his article in *The Hindu* magazine entitled '*Vanishing Life Styles*' says about tribal religions are animistic. The mountains and rivers, wind and rain, thunder, and lightning, have supernatural power in every facet of life. The Sun and Moon are the most sacred as one on the Bible would be for a Christian.

Rao (2000) in his article '*Fighting for the cause of Tribals and Environment*' says that at a time when environmental awareness was just a nebulous concept in the country, a Dehradun based Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) created a history of sorts by

successfully seeking judicial intervention in the cause of environmental protection for the first time in the history of Modern India.

Parthasarathy (2001) in his Ethnographic Report on '*Kurumbas of Tamil Nadu*,' states that the Kurumbas living in Nilgiris forest is different from the kurumbas living on the plains. They differ much in their native environment-oriented occupation. Kurumbas who speak Kurumbadi dialect and live on the hills near the forest are the original kurumbas.

Zvelebil (2000) in her paper on '*Cultural studies on the Nilgiris*' says that the assumption of the antiquity, the primitiveness of the Highlanders, contains the suggestion that the well-known economic and tribal symbioses of the various highland communities, like Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, and Irulas, have possessed a jaman-like relationship.

Omvedt (2000) in his article in Hindu magazine under '*Unfair The label*' says that it surprises the Adivasis still referred to as tribes and today they are classified as Scheduled Tribes. Today they are the minority in these regions also, losing most of their land and their livelihood.

Prince Peter (1955) in his study on '*The Todas*' makes some additions and connections to the W.H.R. Rivers book, about women's household duties. But this is income; women do the cooking in the ash and can handle and cook milk from the putir (ordinary non-sacred buffaloes). Women can also milk putir and even go inside a putir (buffalo pen).

Von Furer. C & Haimendorf (1954) says in Man's Journal under '*Hereditary Friendships and Inter-Tribal Sex Relations between Todas and Mudugas*,' that the Todas might have received the sickle-cell trait from older Southern Indian communities. They also wrote, many of the village headmen houses, but the wife remains in the house, and the Toda visitor assumes the role of husband.

Emeneau. M.B (1953) '*The Todas and Sumeria*' says that the Toda ritual involves utterances of several god names, which may derive from Sumeria. Thus traits of Sumerian culture can be seen among Todas, which cannot be either proved or disproved.

Mandelbaum (1941), his paper in the social science Vol. 43 on The BOBBS- Merriell reprint series entitled '*Culture change among the Nilgiri tribes*' reprint from American Anthropologist, states that how culture is changing in the tribes of Nilgiri hills. He talks about Todas, Kotas, Irulas, kurumbas and kattanayakas cultural change and reasons behind these changes.

Emeneau. M.B (1939) in his study about '*The Christian Todas*' says that dancing of tribe is a part of every social occasion. It is performed at religious ceremonies, but also at funerals. Every man, woman and child dances among the tribes, but, as far as the Toda Christian women are concerned, they never dance. Among the Christian Toda, these social customs have abandoned. Funerals and weddings conducted in a Christian fashion.

Emeneau. M.B (1939) in the Journal of American Folklore, observed that the subjects of the songs are a close match for the Toda culture and those interests. Every event in their lives is likely to be sung about on the spot or immediately afterward. Some songs will be remembered for weeks or years or generations, usually, because the events they commemorate are of sufficient importance to come to mind again and again.

Ross King. W (1870-1871) on the topic '*The Aboriginal Tribes of the Nilgiri Hills*' in the journal of the Anthropological Society of London explains that there is a striking similarity between the rites, practices, and monuments of the Todas and those of the ancient Celts of Britain. He also states all tribes of Nilgiri Hills- Toda, Kota, Irulas, and Kurumbas have a special characteristic, features, and peculiarities concerning their very curious social customs, religious rites, and ideas.

The pastoral Todas have lived on the high Blue Mountains of the Nilgiri Hills in South India. Todas shared the Nilgiri Mountains with other Scheduled Tribes, also like Kota, Kurumba, Paniyas, and Kattanayakas and communities called Badagas, who are dominant in overall population in Nilgiris. A Toda village commonly comprises six to eight huts for individual families. Mostly it is located at an elevation (slight) near the forest and a stream. A typical

Toda hut is in semi-barrel shape in which the barrel split longitudinally, but now no barrel-shape houses are present.

Presently, some Todas are working in the government sectors also, and they have a tie-up with the government agencies through which they receive loans for shawl embroidery works and sell them through these agencies. The majority of the Toda population is shifting their occupation from pastoralism to agriculture. They are also engaged in small-scale farming and produce vegetables and sell them in the nearby markets. Apart from pastoralism and agriculture, some women do house chores, taking care of children and guests and spend most of their time doing traditional Toda embroidery. Most of the women and girls are joined with Self Help Group (SHG), doing Toda embroidery and earned from that. The field centre shows that most of the selected population is involved in private jobs like driver, mechanics, milkman, shopkeepers etc. and their percentage is 52 %. 23% Todas are engaged in agriculture. No person found who was working in tea or coffee plantation.

Today the Todas are more educated and modern than many of his other tribal colleagues. Now they are engaged in agriculture and dairy farming. However, the majority of the Todas are educated now. Toda parents want their children to focus on studies rather than Toda culture and this is also one of the reasons why youngsters do not know much about their culture and religion. Most of the schools are situated in Ooty town and Toda children go by school buses. Private schools do not provide any concessions to Toda children. Most of the Todas are illiterate who belongs to age group of above 50 years.

The education status of Todas in which maximum number of todas came under high school which is 35.8 and minimum is 0.4. The field figure shows only one person is doing PhD in Toda communities. The sources of water in Todas are common tap, handpump, and stream. In most of the munds common taps are there like one in 3-4 outside the houses, not individual taps for drinking water. And for hand pumps it is one in each mund, but most of them are not in a working position. Some Todas are still using stream water because of no other source of drinking water, which is collected by the Todas in a big whole and then used for the drinking and other purposes which is unquestionably not good for Todas health.

Few munds have tap, and few munds have handpumps and few have both but not in working condition. The collection of water is done by the Toda women and for them it is quite difficult to collect water from distant places and then store. Todas are facing drinking water problems because of improper sources of water. Some Todas were using taps in munds for water collection and their percentage is 14.5. In most of the munds the handpumps were available but not in working condition, so handpumps were available but all were not in a working condition. Toda munds are terrible than sources of drinking water. There are few toilets in Toda munds which is made by the Todas only otherwise most of the Todas going for open defecation. Some community toilets are also there in few munds but either they are not in working condition or incomplete.

The condition of roads in some munds is bad in Ooty taluk while in few munds of Kotagiri taluk has no proper roads for Toda people. In few munds roads are available but they are in bad condition and dangerous also because those roads are filled with muddy water and full of cavities. Some munds have good roads upto the Toda houses but some have no munds. So, the condition of roads for Toda munds is not so good.

Divisions and Clans of Todas:

The todas call the places where their ancestors lived 'Nord'. Todas are divided into two important moieties with different clans inside these moieties. They have 15 patriarchal clans

and out of that 15 clans, 10 clans are of 'Thortharsh' i.e. Norsh, Karsh, Thorodr, Mehrdr, Kihrodr, Kerrer (Thortharsh), Pirgodr, Inkieth, Melgarsh, Thehfakh, generally, todas call them 'Thor kulas' and 5 are of Thevilth' they used to call 'Thevykula' i.e. Omkaarsh, Kehrrdr, Mothkyorh, Purekarsh, Nerrh (Thevilth). In earlier time the kodleim clan was also there but now it is extinct and todas said because of no male heirs it's extinct. There is a chart given below which shows the two moieties of the toda tribe.

Traditional drink and drugs of Todas:

Most of older toda women are using cream-colored powder perhaps it was opium and afeem mixed with the coffee powder. It is observed that usually some older women rub that powder on their gums and teeth, also taking with tea and coffee by adding this powder in tea and coffee. They are not using all these things publically but secretly inside their houses. In all toda houses men used to drink their local alcohol known as 'soori' which is made by the todas in their munds but not in all munds. In earlier days toda male and used to drink soori only but now boys and men consuming market alcohols also like beer, rum, and whiskey. In marriages, buffalo ceremonies and in other rituals related to joy they drink this local alcohol. Soori is made up of banana leaves, Jamun bark and jaggery then they mix these things with water and boiled in a sealed or tight container then keep that container inside the soil for 30 days. They are using these things because todas believed all things which are given by nature is good for us so, we are using for mild pains. According to the todas they started consuming alcohol and drugs from 30 years (approx.), earlier they only used to drink soori.

The Religion of Todas:

Perhaps todas are the tribe who are least interested to talk about their religion and Gods. Generally todas are avoiding these topics and don't want to share their logical structures behind their beliefs. Also, they never share their spiritual and cultural beliefs in one visit. According to the todas the priest (present) telling not to share anything about their Gods and religious things otherwise our God will punish todas in the form of problems. Presently most of the todas unable to explain their 12 logic behind their beliefs, only a few elders able to explain that. Also, todas are upset with the outsiders who interpret the information about todas falsely. Toda females mostly evade from the discussions about their community Gods and religious beliefs perhaps due to two reason- first, toda females have no roles in their religious system and worshiping and secondly, they don't want to say deep things and pass it on males. Older women participated more in the conversations.

The present depiction of Gods :

Todas have great faith in their gods and goddesses or we can also say that for todas nature is their God. Todas are taking their gods or, creators name in their prayers. Todas have prodigious faith on their community Gods/ Goddesses but they also show respect to the other tribal Gods of the Nilgiri Hills. There are six Gods in toda tribe on which todas believes i.e. Theyvagh (male), Teikirshi (female), Entrey (male), Konoshu (female), and Peeuf (male). The sixth God is Aen who was the father of these five gods and goddesses- Theyvagh (male), Teikirshi (female), Entrey (male), Konoshu (female), and Peeuf (male) and his wife are Thuthirg. The todas eminent god and goddesses are Aen and Teikirshi. 97.8% todas have prime belief in their own community God. According to them their temples and gods have some power and whenever anything happened they called toda priest and apologize for the mistake and promised to the god for not doing any mistakes in the future. 2.2 % of people primarily believe in other gods including Hindu gods like Lord Muneshwara, Murugan, Jesus, etc. and this 2.2% todas include females.

Religious System of Todas:

The milking, churning and lamping procedures of the dairy custom are the base of the greater part of the religious rituals of the Toda Tribe. The lives of the todas are greatly devoted to their buffaloes and their care through ceremonies.

The todas considered their sacred dairy as a temple also. They called that place a temple where the dairy process takes place like milking, churning, and lamping. The todas called their dairy as 'ti', usually contains two compartments one for lamping and another toda priest or palol. The conical temples are high in sanctity than barrel-shaped or small temples. It is believed that the owner of the Conical temples or 'Povarsh' are Thortharsh while thevilth are the serves the sacred temple and dairy as a priest or palol.

Todas considered their dairy items highly sacred and pure which is made up of bamboo only. According to them, bamboo is the purest form of wood and they are using materials made up of only bamboo and earthen pots inside the temple. The dairy items include all milking and churning pots, pots for making of ghee, the lid of the pots, churning sticks, and bent stick. The mud pots are known as 'pin', churning stick known as 'Muth' or 'mothu' and bamboo vessel for the priest is known as 'kani'. The dairy items are always inside the dairies and that never ever touched by the ordinary todas, only the priest could touch and use it for cleaning and cooking during his priesthood.

Todas life is very much devoted to their buffaloes and has long furious horns with big eyes and dull black skin. Their body is covered with yellowish-grey hair. Todas used 'er' for male calves while 'ir' for female calves. All the buffaloes have their own names which are given after their birth. Names are only for 'ir' and males have no name and no importance. Few male calves are there only for breeding. Generally, males calves are given by the todas to the Kotas.

Sacred Dairying Procedures/ Process:

The fundamental objectives of the todas sacred dairy working are for the priest or dairyman of greater ritual purity and to process their milk, buttermilk, butter and ghee inside the dairy temple. The dairying procedures in the dusk are more highly ritualized than those of the morning. In the evening the priest again bows down at the entrance of the dairy temple and touching his forehead to the entrance. Then touches the less sacred dairy equipment and then more sacred vessels. Then he fans up the fire inside the dairy temple and if required, make the fire again by special fire stick called 'Therz', then he lights up the dairy temple's lamp and salutes the lamp and the monny (bell) if available by his right hand as he had for the rising sun in the morning but now this time the priest start praying in front of the lamp. Then the priest starts praying by taking the name of his father and mother, the six Gods of that dairy temple, then sacred names of the munds, sacred clans and well being of buffaloes, pens, then pray for mountains, rivers, grasslands, for toda community, sun, moon, rain, etc.

After the prayer, the priest proceeds to churn the milk he had drawn in that morning. He stores the buttermilk and butter in the mandatory vessels, after this he sets off to milk the temple buffaloes in his charge. Then he keeps the buffaloes inside the pen for the night and salutes the pen by facing his face at the entrance gate and repeating the dairy prayer, he uttered during lighting the temple lamp. His ritual procedure or activities are complete now; perhaps he may prepare or eat his evening meal and sleep for the night either in the outer room of two-roomed dairy temple or if only one room is available in the dairy temple then in an unattached shed which is made by sticks, cane, grasses, and leaves.

Concept of lamp and monny inside the dairy temple:

The monny is a bell or bell-shaped which is made up of mixed metals - gold, silver, copper, brass and aluminium and kept inside the conical temples in larger munds. Earlier it's number was more when large conical temples were there but now it is hardly 8-10. Todas also believed that whenever anything wrong or mistake happened, the snake comes near the temple and this is a sign of mistake regarding the purity of the dairy temple. They used to draw an image of the snake also on the gate of the pen with buffaloes.

TODA COSMOLOGY

The todas are the true believers and worshipper of nature and their all stories, rituals and ceremonies are revolved around nature. The todas neither believe in heaven nor any place of hell. Instead, it describes two categories of place- 'Imunodr' that traditionally means 'the world of living' and 'Amunodr' means 'the dead world' of the todas. a) Stories behind the origin of Earth, buffaloes, and Todas: Todas believe that they are the first human of the earth and before todas only trees and water were there on earth. And they considered themselves as an ancient people and belonged to the Nilgiri Hills. The Todas, believe that the Goddess Theikirshy created todas and their sacred buffaloes in the great Nilgiris. Theikirshy first created the buffaloes by tapping her cane stick on the earth. Then she created the men by tapping at a place on the ground next to the buffaloes. From the right rib of a Toda man, she then created the first Toda woman and then divided the Todas into 15 clans and the buffaloes into sacred and ordinary buffaloes to serve corresponding grades of temple dairies. She also gave the sacred names or kwarms to each clan, to the sacred buffaloes, to the temples, sacred stones, streams, pools, swamps, pen-posts, and sacred bells, which are used in the sacred daily prayers. Theikirshy then divided the Todas into two different subdivisions— the Tharthor of ten patrilineal clans, and the Thevith of five patrilineal clans.

She also gave bows with the sacred names, to each clan, which are used in the 'bow and arrow' ceremonies that legitimize marriage during the 7th month of pregnancy. Some elders said those activities were a 16 form of divine play by Theikirshy and the todas went on to form the rituals and ceremonies of todas. There are some stories among todas that before Theikirshy, her father Aen ruled over the few existing Todas. This was the era of the Gods or the immortal human gods according to the todas who are like todas and lived on the same land with the same lifestyles as todas are living. Todas believed their human gods did not die they disappeared, and they are residing on the hill. One day, Aen called his daughter Theikirshy and told her that he had decided to set up an afterworld (Amnudur) where Todas live after death. Then he asked Theikirshy to look after the living world (Imnudur). So all toda men, buffaloes and trees came to bid farewell to Aen. Aen missed his favorite son, peeuf, and once he was drawing water from the sacred stream. He saw his son's shiny reflection in the water and thought he had fallen inside, and then he tried to reach for his son, at any rate, Aen wanted to get closer to his favorite son. Then Aen disappeared, and his ring left inside the water. Then todas took that ring from the water and kept it inside the toda munda (Nathanadmund). Later, Aen called his wife to join him as well.

A story for Pykara river: There is a story behind the formation of Pykarariver, snakes, and rabbits in todas. One time there were the two priests named Palloal, and Kothmak, once they went to Major Theemotrumund (toda village) to perform a pooja. To perform the rituals of pooja the Palloal had a basket in his hand which was made up of bamboo. At that time, a loaf of honeybees flew and passed. After seeing the honeybees they followed the honeybees by taking different paths into the forest in search of honey. Palloal collected a pot full of honey and hid it while Kothmak could collect only a little honey. When Kothmak asked Palloal that if he found honey or not then Palloal lied and replied that he didn't find any honey. Later when Palloal went the place where he hid that honey to get the pot of honey, suddenly the pot of honey broken down into two pieces as soon as he touched it and the honey turned into

water and started flowing. This place is called Koalicane. That two pieces of broken pot turned into snakes and started chasing Palloal. The Pollaol reacted by throwing a piece of black cloth that he was wearing and throwing it 17 away. The piece of cloth fell on a hare by accident then the snakes diverted towards hare instead of Polloal and then started chasing hare. The path that hare took became the stream of Pykara river. Then that hare hid behind the moon then the snake started trying to eat both the moon and the hare, and half-moon eaten by the snake. Due to this todas believe that whenever snake tried to eat moon the lunar eclipse comes.

The todas believe that on the day of lunar eclipse todas sit and shout together inside their houses so that the snake released the moon quickly. They believe that by shouting the lunar eclipse goes away quickly. On that day todas keep a copper plate filled with water outside their houses for the image of moon on the water inside the plate because they avoid seeing moon directly. Their all buffaloes inside their pen and they also tried to stay at home. Todas believe that the angry snake could harm pregnant women, so pregnant women strictly tabooed going outside the house during the lunar eclipse.

Todas believe that their gods who were born as todas are residing in the hills of the Nilgiris. Every Hill has names, and all belong to the toda deities. For todas these peaks are sacred because of the sign of their deities. According to the toda elders todas not even pointing fingers towards their diety peaks. They believe that these sacred peaks have great powers because of their gods. On plains, the temple or dairy are sacred for the todas. Todas used to cut the grass by their teeth before going outside the mund for some tour or another place and also for some important works due to the sacredness of the land.

Stories for sun, moon, and stars: The todas considered moon and sun supernatural because they are on earth before todas and provide light and heat to todas. Therefore todas salutes sun in the dawn and dusk because they believed that sun is very powerful, so they thanks the sun through salutes. Todas used to draw snake, sun, moon, and horns of buffalo on the stone of 18 the gate of pen. They also draw these images on the gate of the dairy- temple. There are no such stories for stars, sun, and moon Todas considered the moon as pure and sanctified and celebrated all festivals and ceremonies on full moon day. They have some decided days to enter the temple while other days they cannot enter inside the temple not even allowed to take bath on those days. And every mund has different days. There are no stories among todas for stars.

Todas considered the rainbow as a sign of joy and prosperity. According to them, their idea of house building came from the shape of a rainbow. They also mentioned that earlier they make barrel-shaped houses to protect themselves from chilled winds during winters and from big animals. g) Stones or 'Kal': Todas considered stones and rocks sacred because they believed that the stones presented on earth before the todas so, they are sacred also because once a toda priest made a curse when outsiders (Britishers and non- tribals) came near the dairy- temple of the todas then the priest throws sacred water from the temple on those outsiders and they became stones. They considered the stones in their all rituals and ceremony from birth to death and that stones are not common stones they are different and now rarely available in forests of Nilgiri Hills. Those stones sound like metal from inside, and todas used these stone in their temples- conical (on the top in circular shape) and barrel-shaped (leaf life stone).

Cosmo- Religious Beliefs in Life Cycle Rituals Of The Todas

If we are focusing on the cosmo- religious part of todas then we have to cover the life cycle rituals of the todas also for analyzing their beliefs and practices because cosmology revolves

around the rituals and rites. Todas live with their rituals and practices that trace significant events in every part of their life that includes pre-puberty rituals and ceremonies, puberty ceremony, marriage, childbirth, naming ceremony of the child, ear piercing and then death ceremony.

Cosmological beliefs and rituals in Birth:

Todas also have some ceremonies related to the birth of child, naming, ear-piercing, and puberty. Todas considered all these ceremonies in happy celebrations.

Birth of a child earlier takes place inside the house of the todas, but presently, most of the deliveries are taking place institutionally. Earlier deliveries were taking place at the house of the todas with an experienced midwife and older females. During the time of the labor pain, todas called a mid-wife who are exceptionally skilled) to attend the delivery. After the delivery, the midwife cuts the umbilical cord with a knife or sometimes used sharp stone and then gave a bath to the newborn with warm water. After the cutting of the cord and the removal of the placenta, the mother has also given a bath with warm water. After that male allowed to see the baby and the mother. One of the mother's close relative or female assistants take the placenta and wrapped in an old piece of cloth to burry without any ceremony to nearby shola or forest. If the child dies during the birth or stillbirth happened then that assistant wrapped the placenta and newborn in an old piece of cloth and buried together. Todas give more importance to the mother rather than newborn because according to them a mother could give birth to new babies, but a newborn cannot give back a mother; also the newborn has no social relations and identity until it receives its name after the birth.

ii. The face uncovering and naming ceremony of a child: The naming ceremony in todas called 'Vazthpimi' means 'namegiving,' and it is practiced in the third month or second month after uncovering the face of the baby. After uncovering the face of the baby boy the maternal uncle with other male relatives in the dawn takes the baby outside the house the first time after birth to show the hills, buffaloes, rising sun, forests, and relatives, after that touches the forehead of the baby on the outer gate of the dairy-temple and pen. Then the mun throw and catch the baby in the air three times and put some soil on the forehead of the baby near the temple by his thumb. Todas believed that these things make the boy courageous, stronger and powerful. They also said baby boy should first see his God, Hills, land, and buffaloes which are essential parts of the todas life. In this ceremony, the maternal uncle or 'mun' of the baby given a name and give a calf or gift a calf to the baby boy by saying 'pol udtodenin' that 20 means 'I have given a calf', then calls the name of the baby three times. Then mun gives blessings to the baby by touching his toes on the forehead of the baby. Then mun put three grains of barley inside the mouth of the baby and three grains throw away after the three circular rounds around the head of the baby. After the completion of the namegiving rituals of the child, the feast is arranged by the parents of the child according to their status and interest. After this ceremony, the child could start edible things or food. There is no naming ceremony for the girl child. Perhaps her mother takes the baby girl at dawn for the ritual entrance of the mund (a place which is particularly associated with the women, where all women remove their slippers also before entering the mund). She uncovered the baby girl's face and showed the dairy- temple, buffaloes, hills and other things inside the mund and then her father's sister or maternal uncle's wife, both called 'mumi' give a name to a baby girl. The calf is also not given to the girls as a gift like in the baby boys' case. For the evil eye, todas are using a bird's bone and a black stone that is purchased from the market and put around the wrist of the baby. Todas believed that if this stone and bone ring not used for the baby, then the evil eye comes over the child and makes him sick. Presently some todas are using black threads with amulets due to the influence of Hindus or other communities.

Toda marriage ceremonies are unique and fascinating for outsiders. Their marriage rituals are different from the other communities of the Nilgiri Hills. A marriage ceremony is a grand and important function of todas. They used to call their marriage ceremony as 'Pirisith' or bow and arrow ceremony.

Selection of spouse and engagement In earlier days a man's wife was already decided in todas when he was young. The elderly members of both families confirm the relationship between both the families and the couple, i.e. 'nizhtyam' called by the todas. The boy's family or parents fixed a date for visiting the girl's parent's house for the nizhtyam ceremony. On that decided date and day the boy, his father and a few clan members from the boy's side arrive at the girl's house. The nizhtyam is a small and simple ceremony including girls and boy's families. After reaching the girl's house the elders from the boy's side explain the purpose of the visit. Usually, males come to visit the girl's house for this ceremony; women do not accompany the men from the boy's family. The acceptance and agreement for the couple are generally marked by touching the feet and receive blessings from the elders also known as 'KaulKothie.' After the celebration, the boy's family leaves the girl's mund or village. The wife or Tozmokh after she attains puberty comes to her husband's house and doing all house chores and takes care of the boy's family as a family member. Then she starts visiting and staying in her husband's house perhaps after the age of thirteen or fourteen (after her menses). After that, she would be shuttled between her parent's and husband's house several times before pirisith or bow and arrow ceremony. Before the Pirisith ceremony, the relationship between a man and a woman after nizhtyam attains a legal status in the Toda community and the Todas give social consent for the couple to live together.

Procedure of Marriage The bow and arrow ceremony is an important and grand ceremony which is celebrated by the todas on the new full moon day in the fifth and seventh month of pregnancy. In this ceremony, all the toda relatives and non-toda friends are invited. Sometimes we can see foreigners (tourists) also because of the unique and fascinating toda marriage. This is a two days ceremony that starts from a day before marriage after full moon. If a child born to a woman who had not been given a bow, it would be an illegitimate child with no patrilineal name or affiliation. This ceremony is for the first child and need not be practiced in children with the same man. If a different man performs this rite again in next pregnancy then he will be the father and the father for all subsequent offsprings.

Divorce practice among the Toda The 'noyam' or traditional council (traditional council of toda elders to settle the disputes between todas) deals with the cases of 22 separation, divorce and other disputes related to the todas. This council includes three people from Tarther moiety and one from the Thevilth moiety and one member from the neighboring community, i.e. Badaga. Though divorces and crimes are rare in Toda families and society. In most cases, noyam or traditional council held due to some general issues in toda society like- if husband and a wife want to separate, if someone wants to live or marry some other's partner, divorce, fights between toda people, etc. Todas are free to choose their partners and free to live with anyone, and this freedom is for both the sexes either the individual is male or female. They are not treating a woman badly if she leaves her fiancé or husband and lives with the other man. Todas are free to live with any partner within their community.

Polyandry During the study, no polyandry marriages are seen among the todas. Presently they prefer monogamy, but pre-marital, extramarital and post-marital affairs are common and allowed in their society. Now, most of the todas said they are not practicing polygamy any more from so many years. Some of the todas even don't like to talk about polyandry system in todas because according to the people outside their community they considered and treat them like low-class people, for them in their society this practice is very bad and

they considered the toda women as dirty women. Mostly toda women avoid to talk on polyandry, and they don't like that practice also because they also want their rights and according to them polyandry is an unfair practice for them so, they prefer monogamy rather than polyandry.

Cosmological beliefs and rituals in Death:

Among all the crunch of life, death makes the additional rituals among the todas. The funeral ceremonies of the todas take many months to carry out. Todas are famous for doing two types of funerals- Green/ wet funerals or 'hasekedu' and Dry funeral or 'marrainolkedr'. Todas used the word 'kherr' for death and funeral ceremonies called 'etvainolkhedr'. Usually, todas burnt the dead bodies after the death with plenty of rituals. The dead body cremated at the end of the first or next day according to the time of the death and duration. Todas kept the dead bodies inside the house, not outside the house. After that dead body placed on the wooden platform or 23 cot with tied toes. The clansmen and relatives procession with the funeral cot by bowing down and touching their foreheads to the ground. Then body is carried on the funeral cot and preceded by the musicians. Earlier music was played by the kotas who in return received the corpses of the sacrificed buffaloes from the todas, but now kotas are not playing music in funerals, so now todas hire bands from the market of the Ooty.

The buffaloes sacrificed on the day of green/ wet funeral. Todas believed that buffalo accompanies the spirit to the next world, but the buffaloes should be female only. For the death of a man sacred buffaloes sacrificed while for domestic woman buffalo sacrificed. Nowadays they are not sacrificing buffaloes for everyone because of fewer numbers of buffaloes and restrictions from the govt on sacrificing of large number of buffaloes. If a deceased person was old and renowned person and demanded the sacrifice of the buffalo after his death than todas sacrifice buffaloes (domestic buffaloes) for him and her otherwise no sacrifices. No sacrifices of buffalo for the death of the children in todas. Nowadays buffalo sacrifice is practicing but not in earlier numbers. Todas never slaughter the buffaloes for sacrifice because they are highly sacred for them they sacrificed the buffaloes by hitting on the center of the head of the buffalo by the back part of an axe in one blow and usually one blow is sufficient. They are practicing one blow method so that buffalo do not bear the pain second time and forget all the things of living world. The todas called this ritual as 'tirkipti'. Todas closed the eyes of the buffaloes when they hit the buffalo. The hitting is done by the male member of the evilth moiety and after that the head of the buffalo corpse with male's waist while in the female corpse with the toe in apposition where the nose of the buffalo touches the toes.

After that one of the close relative as a funeral-goer (mostly brother and son) from the deceased person covered the body with a cloth and this ceremony is for both the sexes. Then the dead body is covered by the logs of 'Jamun trees' and a close relative make a fire by rubbing the fire stick with special grass because they thought this fire is sacred (traditional way of making a fire in todas) spreading ghee on the logs. Earlier on this day todas cut some hair of the deceased person for second or dry funeral but nowadays todas are not practicing the second funeral that's why they are not cutting the hair also. After the month of green funeral dry funeral takes place in which the hair of the dead person is wrapped in a putkuli (traditional toda shawl) placed in a hut first, then at the entrance gate of the pen mud of the pen thrown on 24 that remain and all the women started crying together. Earlier todas practiced sacrifices on the second funeral also, but now it's not practiced by the todas. Then an earthen pot has broken at the cremation spot. But presently todas are not practicing this dry funeral ceremony.

In the beautiful, scenic and green surfaced Nilgiris, the Todas are the peace-loving and nature worshipping tribe who are residing in a small 56 munda of Nilgiri Hills. They are nature-loving tribe with simple lifestyles. Toda tribe is the most fascinating tribe on which people are doing research and studies due to their unique rituals and outfits also. But hardly any authors had focused on the Todas' Cosmo-religious beliefs, so this study has focused an overview of Todas with their cosmological and religious beliefs.

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