

Culture



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By Edward Glanville
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"Not another book on the Toda!" Thus Anthony Walker introduces this most recent volume on a much quoted group. Yet the work is welcome as it complements rather than displaces much earlier work. In particular, it documents in considerable detail the many changes which have taken place in the more than 80 years since Rivers spent his astoundingly productive five months in the Nilgiri Hills (1901-1902). The documentation of social change and the updating of ethnography were not, however, our author's primary concern, but rather the correction of "the view of Toda society as an isolated, non-Hindu, 'tribal' people, comparable in some ways to those rigidly-bounded island societies which Rivers went on to study in Melanesia" (p.7). Parallels with the broader society outside the Nilgiris are emphasised and Walker quotes with approval the words of his teacher, David Pocock; "the failure to recognize that most ... [tribal Indians] are only people who have lost contact [with Hindu society] has been one of the reasons which retarded Indian ethnology and society as a whole." (p.VIII)

Anthony Walker, currently at Ohio State University, first visited the Todas in 1961 while a Commonwealth Scholar from Britain at Osmania University. Following completion of his B.A. in Indian cultural history, religion and philosophy, he returned to England where he began formal study of Anthropology at Oxford in 1963. He is well known for his work among the Lahu people of Northern Thailand and the aboriginal tribes of Malaysia. The present work on the Toda is a product of frequent short visits over a period spanning some 20 years but largely during the 1970s. The body of the text is based on library and field research up to 1981 but there is a brief postscript dated 1984. The analysis has been influenced especially by discussion with Dr. Paul Hockings, who has worked with the Badaga, Professor M.N. Srinivas as well as by Dr. Pocock.

In many ways a formal ethnography, much of the text is devoted to traditional features of Toda

social life, such as the activities of the sacred dairies, rules of ritual and social life, the phases of the life cycle and the symbiotic relationships which once existed between the Toda and neighbouring tribes such as the Badaga, Kota, Irula and Kurumba. This part of the book confirms, with some minor corrections, Rivers' classic text, though greater attention is given to the ecological setting.

It is good to know that in spite of a decline in pastoralism, the modern Toda are flourishing and maintain their ethnographic identity. Certain traits which originally brought them anthropological fame, such as polyandry, female infanticide and ritual defloration have been largely abandoned yet the socially recognized father continues to present a symbolic hunting bow to the pregnant woman and the distinction between biological and social paternity remains. The sacred dairies of every ritual grade except the highest, the *ti*, are still operated, at least sporadically, and the ceremonies associated with major life events continue to impress upon the Toda the vitality of their ancient beliefs. The goddess *Tōjisy* is still honoured as principal deity though Hindu deities and their cults increase in importance. In fact, twin ritual systems are customarily practiced in parallel by traditionalists, the old and those of popular South Indian Hinduism.

In a most valuable 53 page chapter devoted to "the changing Toda World 1819-1981", the ironic fact emerges that the preservation of the Toda way of life prior to Independence was largely a quirk of British enthusiasm for the preservation of Wenlock Downs, the traditional grazing lands of the Toda, as an area of natural beauty suitable for picnicking and fox hunting during the hot season. Agriculture was discouraged and thus an exclusively pastoral economy was preserved and with it, the traditional herding of buffalo.

Following Independence, various attempts were made by external agencies to improve the lot of the Toda, including the introduction of agriculture. Today many Toda practice market gardening, whenever possible employing non-Toda labour to work the fields. Population increase of other Nilgiri groups have combined with immigration from the plains to put pressure on Toda grazing lands. The Toda, like most other aboriginal pastoralists lacked formal title to much of the land grazed on a seasonal or occasional basis and Walker provides an excellent account of the continuing vicissitudes of Toda land claims.

Fortunately, the calamitous decline in population due largely to a venereal disease, has been arrested and the Toda today show a modest increase in numbers (to about 1,100 in 1975, up from a low of 484 in 1949). Much of this recovery is due to the efforts of a single Christian Toda, Evam Piljain-Wiedemann, whom Walker calls "truly the Florence Nightingale of the Toda" (p. x). Trained as a nurse in England and India, Evam initially offered her services without pay to staff a mobile medical unit in 1953. Her success was dramatic and the use of penicillin both reduced the overall death rate and increased fertility. This mobile unit, now staffed in part by Evam's sister is still vital to the health of the Toda.

Christian missionaries have long been active among the Toda and today there exists two distinct Toda communities, the traditional Hindu-influenced and the Christian, now numbering some 200 individuals. The persistence of ritual and language have been key to the preservation of tradition but in rejecting the sanctity of the dairies the Christian converts divorced themselves from the fundamentals of Toda culture. Toda language, too, has gone, largely due to the need of marrying outside the tiny Christian Toda community to other Christianized individuals of diverse background, such as Badaga, Malayalee and Tamil. The language of such marriages has invariably been Tamil, the *lingua franca* of the hills. Today few Toda Christians even understand the Toda language.

The relationship of the Toda with other Nilgiri peoples has changed since Rivers' day with the introduction of a cash economy and the political incorporation of the Toda in wider district, state and federal institutions. Ritually, the orientation of the Toda is increasingly towards incorporation within the overarching framework of South Indian Hinduism. The Kota no longer provide music at Toda funerals (Hinduised bands are hired instead) but they still provide some Toda with their cooking pots. The Kurumba are still feared for their magic and sorcery and they are frequently employed to combat sickness (alongside the modern clinic).

What then does the future hold for the Toda? As fewer and fewer herd buffalo, Walker envisions a time, perhaps not far distant, when the few remaining buffalo will be kept solely for ritual purposes. Beyond that, there may be a slow withering away of the dairy cult, a process which has already begun. If the dairy cult wanes, there will surely be a further

curtailment of other traditional rituals, such as has already happened to pregnancy, birth and funeral rites, and a slow redefinition of these along more Hindu lines.

In sum, "The Toda of South India" is a valuable supplement to Rivers' classic text. It shows an intimate familiarity with many aspects of Toda life and the author claims a number of Toda among his dearest friends. Yet the work is formal in presentation and one cannot help feeling an opportunity has been lost to convey more of the feeling of what it is to be a Toda today.

Jose HAVET, *The Diffusion of Power: Rural Elites in a Bolivian Province*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1985. \$18.00 (paper).

By Tanya Korovkin
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In the 1950's and 1960's the Latin American countryside underwent a profound change. Under a combined effect a technological modernization and agrarian reform the large manorial estates typical of the Andean region started to give place to smaller capitalist and peasant production units. The new social order was characterized by flagrant inequalities and widespread poverty. Nevertheless, it tended to be more stable than the manorial society which had given rise to vigorous peasant movements. What factors account for this greater stability?

Havet poses this question with regard to Bolivian experiences before and after the agrarian reform implemented in the wake of the 1952 revolution. His study focuses on changes in the relations of power in the province of Belisario Boeto which is located on the Eastern slope of the Bolivian Andes. Havet argues that the reform did not substantially improve the situation of the peasants who remained exploited and dominated by local elites. The nature of the latter and their relations with the peasants, however, changed considerably. The traditional landed elites gave place to a variety of new elites with diverse power bases and who employed "more sophisticated and less obvious techniques of control" (p. 6). The result was a diffusion of power previously concentrated in the hands of a small group of landlords, which in turn implied a greater social stability.