

How does a Toda child become a Toda person?

Cultural information derived from linguistic texts about the Piš-itt rites ['social paternity rites'] of the Todas of the Nilagiris, South India

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Outline

Collection of texts narrated in their mother tongue by the Todas for over a decade gave us a rich source of information about their culture that might not have emerged from interacting with them in another language. The most recently collected (and translated) text about the so-called 'social paternity' declaration ceremony has revealed intricate details about this institution among the Todas. The native Toda phrase Piš-itt-t ('bow placing') (=PI ceremony) precisely demarcates this ceremony. In essence, only through this ceremony a Toda man declares admission of a child (that is in the womb of his wife) into his 'clan'. Without this ceremony, the unborn child will not become a Toda at all. The text describes various varieties and emergency provisions of PI-ceremony which all point out to the essential nature of PI-ceremony in admitting to Todahood the child-in-the-womb (as well as the future children) of a Toda woman. Alternatively, the PI ceremony could be interpreted as a ceremony that 'assigns' the womb of one's wife to his clan. Several of the intricate details of this ceremony came to light through a natural narrative by a native speaker of the Toda language.

The talk can be followed by a discussion on this topic in particular and Toda language and culture in general.