Horrid sights and customary rights: The Toda funeral on the colonial Nilgiris

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On the 19 April 1897 the Nilgiri News announced: 'To many of our visitors, who have never seen the peculiar burial ceremonies . . . of the Todas it may be of interest to learn that a young Toda man died yesterday at "Barkoos-mund" kust this side of the Lawrence Asylum and within a three mile drive of Ooty. The Kadoo takes place on Wednesday next at Minickmund just beyond the Mysore Maharajah's palace.'[1] Five days later, an angry and disappointed corespondent wrote that the event had actually taken place on Tuesday 'and the result was a great number of people were led a dance for nothing'.[2]

This paper explores the social context of ethnographic 'curiosity', collection and science. It looks at the funerary ceremonies of the Toda communities, the *kedr*, and the various ways in which settler society on the Nilgiri hills of South India reacted to, understood and appropriated the ceremonies during the nineteenth

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Abbreviations: MBR–Madras Board of Revenue, *NN–Nilgiri News*, OIOC–Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London, *SIO–South of India Observer,* TNA–Tamil Nadu State Archives, Madras, PMBR–Proceedings of the Madras Board of Revenue, PMJD–Proceedings of the Madras Judicial Department, PMRD–Proceedings of the Madras Revenue Department, UDR–Udhagamandalam District Records, Udhagamandalam, WEC–Walter Elliot Collection, OIOC.

[1] *NN*, 19 April 1897, p. 6.
[2] 'Disappointed Globe Trotter', *NN*, 24 April 1897, p. 3.

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century. In the 1840s, the *kedr* were condemned as 'degrading and senseless ceremonies'[3] by the Court of Directors who ordered the practice to be completely suppressed. From the 1830s the *kedr* became a space in which incipient settler society sought to make sense of itself and the indigenous communities who occupied the hills. The 'experience' of the *kedr* was connected through high and low-brow textual accounts, both 'scientific' and partial; these texts comprehended and explicated the *kedr* both as a facet of a specific, local settler identity and made connections with other colonial interventions in which settler society collided with an indigenous population.

By examining the multiplicity of voices that expressed opinions on the *kedr*, both official and private, judicial and ethnographic, I want to explore the *kedr* as a part of the local history of the Nilgiri mountains—as a case study elucidating a far broader history of colonial policy toward, and discursive conceptions of, 'savagery'—and as part of the development of cultural preservation as a component appropriate to colonial government in British India. The preoccupation of settler society with the *kedr* was a part of the moment which saw a sharpening distinction between the terms 'caste' and 'tribe', previously used interchangeably, but increasingly used to denote qualitatively separate 'types' of enumerated communities.[4]

On the Nilgiris, as elsewhere in India, writing on encounters between communities, in particular those categorised as tribal as opposed to caste, and authors of travelogues, sporting narratives and ethnographies were dominated by the trope of the extraordinary. Rituals were 'spectacular', hunting practices, otherwise considered illegal and rapacious, were 'magnificent', as if performed by these communities solely for the edification and wonder of the narrators.[5] This transformation of the everyday into the phenomenal is conspicuous throughout the nineteenth century in descriptions of Toda physiognomy, ritual and their occupational sites or *munds*.

From the point of view of the Todas, spectators at the *kedr* entered upon the margin of an elaborate, ritualised event. They were representative of an authority which sought to survey and control the ceremonies and participants but were also perceived as a source of commercial gain; the spectators were dependent upon hill community informants and willing to pay in order to find and view the *kedrs*. Little textual evidence exists on the Todas and the other hill communities who participated in these events, save occasional petitions and depositions written at the point of refusal and resistance. The Todas both incorporated and engaged with the presence of spectators and strategised around consecutive stages of state

[3] E.P. Thomas, Collector of Coimbatore, to Government, 7 September 1859, PMJD, 24 September 1859, no. 26028, pp. 81–82, OIOC.

[4] A. Beteille, 'Construction of Tribe,' *The Times of India*, 19 June 1995; Virginius Xaxa, 'Transformations of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 June 1999, pp. 1519–24.

[5] See A. Prasad, 1996, Forests and Subsistence in Colonial India: A Study of the Central Provinces. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University.

legislation and authoritarian surveillance. These strategies were not expressed through a homogenous community identity, but articulated internal differentiation within the community very often according to degrees of state co-option of local 'bigmen'.[6] Beyond very limited evidence, however, there is no direct evidence of how the Todas, and members of other hill communities, saw the ethnographers, photographers, sketchers, police and civil servants and bystanders, both Indian and European, who crowded, and even transformed, many of their ceremonies.

The Nilgiri *Kedr*

The two types of funeral ceremonies under discussion can be crudely described as cremation and memorial. During the first, cremation rituals, or *etvainolkedr*, some 'relics' of the deceased were taken and carefully preserved: hair and nails before cremation and fragments of bone and skull from the ashes after cremation. These fragments, along with those taken from other individuals who had died over a certain period, became part of the far larger *marvainolkedr* where they were burned. Both ceremonies involve a complex and varied set of rituals. Important *marvainolkedr* lasted for up to three days. The *kedr* and in particular the larger and more elaborate *marvainolkedr* provided a forum for the intersection of the extensive networks of communication, supply, exchange and redistribution that existed between the hill communities. Members of the agrarian and artisan Kota community supplied music for the event and in return for their performance and gifts, took the buffalo carcasses for meat and hide. Members of the agrarian Badaga communities and the gatherer, swidden cultivator Kurumba communities of the lower slopes of the hills, attended the funerals and both supplied and kept various objects used in the ceremony between events.[7] It was within this network that colonial authority and public spectatorship took its place from the 1830s onward.

A number of buffaloes, the basis of the Toda's pastoralist subsistence, were killed before the cremation at the *etvainolkedr* and before the burning of the relics at the *marvainolkedr*. At the largest types of the *marvainolkedr*, the slaughter was preceded by what became the principal spectator event of the ceremony—a display honed long before the colonists and ethnologists arrived on the hills—the herding of the buffaloes into a stockade into which young Toda men would leap and harry the animals, hanging on to their horns and pulling their heads down to submission, before releasing them again. The death blow was administered later by a single strike between the eyes of the buffalo from the back of an axe.

The sites of the *kedrs*, called *kertnódr*, were many and varied. Each clan had at least two and often more *kertnódr* for the *etvainolkedr* ceremonies, using the principal one for the *marvainolkedr*. The relationship between the two ceremonies

[6] 'Big Man' is a deliberately vague label, used in order to avoid the term 'elite', normal usage of which signals a definable social strata with a differential control of resources and production compared to the rest of the community.

[7] W.H.R. Rivers, *The Todas*, London, 1906; A. Walker, *The Todas of South India. A New Look*, New Delhi, 1986.

was complex and determined by codes of segregation, kinship and the age and sex of the dead.[8] The course of ritual at each *kedr* varied according to the patrilineal and matrilineal clan affinity of the dead, their age, status and gender.[9]

To the colonial audience, none of the preparation, organisation, social processes or ritual segmentations of the *kedr* had any meaning. To them, the *kedr* was an isolated, contextless event, bounded only by their attendance and their subsequent departure. The information that a *kedr* was about to take place may have been procured from an informant or simply from a newspaper advertisement, like the one quoted at the beginning of this paper.

The Ethnographic Event and the Ethnographic Institution

'It is quite evident that the spectatorial lust is a most serious factor in imperialism.'[10]

The *kedr* account, as a credible text of empire, aligned local history, incipient institutional ethnography and expressions of colonial judicial authority. As early as 1846, a gentleman ethnographer who attended the event stated that he had been informed by 'residents here that . . . [the funeral] . . . was an extraordinary scene and worth witnessing'.[11] The account makes clear that an audience, and the expectation of an audience, had already formed around the event: 'There were very few Europeans present—3 only, and perhaps a dozen servants from the Cantonment. I believe it was not generally known that the ceremony was to take place, or perhaps the attendance had been greater.'[12]

Event accounts formed the basic unit of collection centralised in incipient metropolitan institutions from the 1830s onwards and, between 1830 and 1860, furnished the preoccupations of a colonial state which expressed its authority through invigilation, information gathering and suppression of specific 'objectionable' and 'barbaric' practices: in India, human sacrifice, infanticide and Sati.[13]

The institutional and administrative collection of ethnographic encounter narratives began in 1835–37 with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aborigines. This Committee set out to draw together a vast corpus of ethnographic material indicative of the present state, and therefore the definition of, the 'aboriginal' and to frame the obligations of an increasingly territorial and governmental colonialism towards its resident subjects. A key lobbyist for the Committee, Richard

[8] Rivers, 1906.

[9] A. Walker, 'Toda Society between Tradition and Modernity', P. Hocking, ed., *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biogeography of a South Indian Region*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 201.

[10] J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism, A Study*, 1902, quoted in A.E. Coombes, *Reinventing African: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, Yale, 1994.

[11] Athenaeum, 29 September 1846, Walter Elliot Collection Eur. Mss, D318, OIOC.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] C.A. Bayly, 'The British and Indigenous Peoples', in M. Daunton and R. Halper, eds, *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850*, London, 1999; R. Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial Indian*, New Delhi, 1998.

Hodgkin, subsequently founded the Aborigines Protection Society with Buxton, the Chair of the Select Committee as President.[14] The 'Protection' of the aboriginal was as concerned with protection from barbarism as it was from ruthless colonialism. Reform and improvement, focusing upon the elimination of specific barbaric practices, and therefore the collection and publication of information on those practices, formed a central component of the Society's activities. In 1842, the Ethnological Society of London broke away, its founder, Richard King, feeling that the 'the ethnologist . . . became disfranchised [sic]' by the 'philanthropy' of the reformist Aboriginal Protection Society which neglected the more important 'promotion and diffusion' of ethnology.[15] He wished the Ethnological Society of London to embrace the publication of work 'previously thought to be too dry, too simple in it's results' and veered the society away from 'startling induction from wild theories'.[16] In the 1850s philology based, migratory metanarratives, as concerned with the past of the savage as their present[17] were replaced by simpler, first person narratives of specific events. Categories of ritual and social behaviour—marriage, religion, priesthood—were distilled from events accessible in classical texts and sought out as remnants and survivals in contemporary savage custom.[18]

The civilised past would be elucidated through the uncivilised present, or rather through fragments of the barbaric present, discovered and distilled into text by colonial ethnography. This paradigm prefigured the event as both the central analytic and representative element. Concomitant to the event as textual representative of both the savage and as the mode of encounter, was its role in accounting for the stasis of the living savage. Why had they remained at the stage through which civilised nations had passed? One theory which further fixed the gaze of both scholarship and authority upon the event was that the answer lay in the ritual itself. Whereas the superior, analytical mind of the European had questioned and strayed from ritual thereby precipitating social and technological change, the slavish observance of custom bound primitive societies to primitivism.[19] The event

[14] H.R.F. Bourne, *The Aborigines Protection Society: Chapters in its History*, London, 1899.

[15] R. King, *Address to the Ethnological Society of London. Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting on the 25th May, 1844*, London, 1844.

[16] King, *Address to the Ethnological Society.*

[17] Typified in the work of H. Congreve, 'The Antiquities of the Neilgherry Hills, including an inquiry into the Descent of the Thautawars or Todas', *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, no. 32, 1847, pp. 77–147; Schmid, 1848, 'Dr. Schmid on the Tatar origins of the Toda, advanced by Cpt. Congreve, in a letter to the Revd. William Taylor, Ootacamund 12th December, 1848', Walter Elliot Collection, Eur Mss. D318, OIOC; J.A.R. Stevenson, 'Account of the Todas or Todawars', *ibid.*, 1849; William Taylor, 'On the supposed early Celtic or Sythian Vestiges, remaining in the Various Parts of the Carnatic', *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, no. 14, 1847, pp. 78–97. The Nilgiri Tribes were believed to be Sythic or Turanian (related to Celts of the West) displaced, with others like them, to the hills and forests by later waves of more aggressive and progressive Aryans.

[18] This form of analysis reaches its zenith with James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890.

[19] John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man. The Mental and Social Condition of Savages*, London, 1882.

was therefore at once typical and exceptional, it was both representation and analytical, strange and comprehensible. The event encounter became both the dominant mode of representing the savage and the locus upon which, and within which, colonial authority sought to impress itself.

Official Cognisance

It was as one such loci that the *kedr* was brought to the attention of the Court of Directors in 1856, among other 'objectionable practices', in a report on the Nilgiri hill tribes by E.B. Thomas, Collector and Magistrate of Coimbatore. The customs which he singled out for suppression were Toda infanticide, Badaga 'bride kidnapping' and the burning of cloth and the slaughter of buffaloes at, respectively, Badaga and Toda funerals.[20]

Thomas claimed to have already achieved a degree of personal influence among the Todas signalled by his ability to influence the *kedr*:

> The Todas at every funeral used to sacrifice 20 and 30 fine buffaloes . . . the loss of property was great and the mode of sacrifice [is] a brutal and savage one—the animals were clubbed, not to death, but to inability to move, by a broken spear and then left to die in agony. With some difficulty I have persuaded the 'Todas' to give me their word and signature, willingly that in future one or two, at most, will be sacrificed at every funeral . . . they have kept their word for two years now, and appear now glad of it.[21]

In response to Thomas' report, the Government of Madras recommended a total suppression of the slaughter at Toda funerals. This order was approved by the Court of Directors in 1857,[22] and was communicated to the Todas.[23]

Thomas' assertion of his personal influence, was jeopardised two years later when, in response to a petition of appeal from the Todas, the Madras Government remitted a fine of Rs 109 which Thomas had imposed upon 12 individuals for sacrifices that had taken place on two different occasions in 1858. The petition itself demonstrates that the Todas were apparently less impressed by Thomas' 'influence' than he imagined and were familiar with the hierarchy of control to which he was subject. The remission of the fine signals governmental ambivalence on the question of suppression and highlights a discrepancy between the local and centralised expressions of colonial governance over the *kedr*. The Madras Government was happy to support Thomas' personal adjudication only as long as it remained a local, personally mediated and uncontested expression of the better influence of the civilised over the savage. If tested, however, authority and its

[20] E.B. Thomas to Govt., 25 June 1856, PMJD, 12/8/56, nos 7–8, pp. 2549–57, OIOC.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Court of Directors Dispatch, 12 August 1857, no. 12, TNA.
[23] PMJD, 5/5/58, nos 39–40.p. 183, OIOC.

impositions, after 1858, could not be sanctioned by the higher, executive functions of the Madras government.

Responding to the removal of the fine, a slight to his own local authority, Thomas claimed that as a direct effect of the indulgence the delicate and personal nature of his authority over the Todas had been unbalanced and the sacrifices had resumed:

> Taking advantage of my absence of England, [the Todas] sent in the petition, (evidently written for them); and emboldened by the fine (they had voluntarily submitted to) being entirely remitted, they have now reverted to their barbarity and as I have no means of punishing them otherwise than by fine, I feel my hands tied in the matter, much to my regret; persuasion has of course been tried, but with only partial effect.[24]

The Board of Revenue, whilst maintaining that Thomas had 'exceeded just limits' in imposing the fine, did admit that, 'he has, for the moment, lost his influence over the Todas . . . . He should . . . inform the leading man among them that . . . the Governor in Council regards the cruel practice of killing buffaloes by a lingering death at funerals with the same disapprobation as before.'[25] These instructions to Thomas raise an interesting question about the deployment of colonial authority on the Nilgiris. How was Thomas to rally the informants and the information which had automatically to prefigure any surveillance and regulation of the *kedrs*?

Not residing on the hills, Thomas relied upon the information communicated by Soondra Moodelly, the Tahsildar attached to the Nilgiri taluq headquarters in Ootacamund. Moodelly submitted a substantial report on a funeral which had take place 'cladestinely in a shola, 8 miles form Ootacamund' on 16 August 1859.[26] Acting on his orders, a deputation brought back to the Cutcherry a group of Todas, including a man called Aknaud Tody, three unnamed members of the Kota community and six buffalo hides confiscated from them with news of six more hides which had already been taken to the Kota village of Sholur. By interrogating this group, Moodelly established the names of the two Todas for whom the funeral had taken place, and stated that Aknaud Tody and Carooppavanoo, who were respectively the uncle and younger brother of the two deceased, were primarily and jointly culpable for the slaughter. One other Toda, Bellavanoo, 'a chief man' without whose consent 'the [other] Todas would not have dared to make the sacrifice' was accused of assisting in the slaughter. Moodelly writes that upon meeting the deputation from the Cutcherry, Bellavanoo had concealed himself in a nearby shola, an evasion that suggested his involvement. Bellavanoo himself, however, denied having attended the *kedr* or having been privy to any information concerning it.[27]

[24] E.B. Thomas to Government, PMJD, 24 September 1859, nos 26–28, pp. 81–82, OIOC.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Translation of an *urzee*, by Soondra Moodelly, 30 August 1859 in PMJD 24 September 1859, nos 26–28, pp. 81–82, OIOC.

[27] *Ibid.*

The informants who implicated Bellavanoo were two of the chief village officers on the hills, Goondookullun, the Toda *Monigar* of Merkanad and Patha Gowdeh, the *Monigar* of Todanad. The testimony of these two men is especially interesting. Neither was present at the funeral, Goondookullun had gone to Ebanad, a hamlet in Todanad, and Patha Gowdah was 'at the Cusbah' at the time of the *kedr*. Both village officers, however, confirmed Bellavanoo's guilt as party to the slaughter.[28] The denouncement of a Toda 'chief man' by two *Monigar*s (one a Toda himself who had in the past resisted the Government[29]), to colonial authority reiterates the dependence of authoritarian cognition of the *kedr* upon the existence of factional divisions, in this case an apparent conflict between local big men, which facilitated the provision of information. Bellavanoo held no official post but his influence within the Toda community, evidence of his culpability, was affirmed by both *Monigar*s. Could this have been indicative of a tension between the 'village officers', nominally the employees of state, though relying for income upon their ability to exercise influence over inter and intra village affairs and production, and those members of the hill communities whose authority received no sanction from the government but who were perceived to pose a potential threat to the state sanctioned authority of the *Monigar*s?

This conflict, or at least complexity, in the arrangement of power within the hill communities, whilst allowing the state an information inroad, obscured questions of discipline and accountability. Following the Board's instructions for a reprimand of the 'leading man', whom was Thomas to chastise and remind of the Governor's disapprobation? The Collector's response reveals this difficulty in linking the intelligence available to punitive measures. Having imposed fines—a disciplinary measure which did allow for a finer distinction of individual culpability and punishment—on 12 individuals in 1858, one year later, he sought permission to withhold the annual payments of Rs 150, an amount set to compensate the Todas as an entire and undifferentiated 'tribe' for the loss of the land on which the Ootacamund cantonment was built, if the buffalo slaughter was not stopped entirely. The absence of nodal points of accountability among the Toda community undermined the possibility of rule enforcement or the punishment of transgression.

The moment of the Madras Government's determination to suppress the funerary sacrifices completely, however, was brief. In 1858 the Queen's Proclamation provided for a relaxation of the Madras Government's indignation and in 1859 total suppression was abandoned, giving way to ordering and invigilation. The Madras Government grudgingly agreed to 'permit' the buffalo killing to take place on the repeated condition that the slaughter be confined to two buffaloes and that the

[28] E.B. Thomas to Government, 7 September 1859, PMJD, 24 September 1859, nos 26–28, pp. 81–80, OIOC.

[29] Goondookullun/Goondoogul was the Monigar of Merkanad in 1837, who refused to accept the money offered to the Todas as compensation for the land appropriated by the Company for the Ootacamund cantonment, see chapter one, Deborah Sutton, *Other Landscapes: Hill communities, Settlers and State on the Colonial Nilgiris, c. 1820–1900*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

animals were to be put to death immediately, avoiding the 'lingering death' described by Thomas in 1856.[30]

Toda communities began to take an active part in negotiating official sanction for the *kedr*. In 1869 official cognisance of a *marvainolkedr* was afforded only because a group of Todas approached the Collector, James W. Breeks, claiming the right to kill 24 buffaloes for the 11 Todas who had died during that year.[31] The Collector was baffled by their request, having no knowledge of the 1859 government order the Todas now appealed under. He eventually discovered an old official communication from E.B. Thomas to the Ootacamund Tahsildar which mentioned the permission to kill two animals. Breeks, an amateur ethnographer himself,[32] attended the funeral with Rev. Friedrich Metz, a German missionary from the Basel Mission in Keti, whom, he believed, was 'intimately acquainted with the Todas, their manners and their customs.'[33]

The tone of Breeks subsequent report is strikingly different from Thomas' account of a decade before. No Todas are named and the place of the funeral is not specified. In this account, more a descriptive ethnography than Thomas' staccato account of a misdemeanour, the number of buffaloes killed are not mentioned and surveillance limited to the question of 'unnecessary cruelty' which accompanied the penning and slaughter of the buffaloes:

> In spite of Mr. Metz's warning that there was to be no unnecessary cruelty, I saw enough to make me think it desirable that a European in authority should be present . . . I would suggest that the Assistant Superintendent of Police should be present at all such ceremonies . . . .[34]

For the ritual itself, however, Breeks expressed appreciation: 'Until the Priest announces the proper time for the sacrifice, . . . the young men, with their clubs, dance in the kraal, and drive the animals round and round, while a stray one turns and charges—a danger which the men skillfully ward off with their clubs.' He concludes that the use of clubs 'cannot, consistently with the safety of the performers, be altogether prohibited'.[35] The Board of Revenue confirmed Breeks' recommendations. Permission would be granted to hold the ceremony on condition that the Todas informed the Collector of the time and place of the proposed *kedr*. A separate license was to be applied for and granted on each occasion that buffaloes

[30] PMJD, 24 September 1859, nos 26–28, pp. 81–82, OIOC.

[31] J.W. Breeks to government, 30 January 1869, PMJD, 3 March 1869, nos 22–23, pp. 421–22, OIOC.

[32] J.W. Breeks, *An Account of the Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris, India Museum*, London, was published posthumously in 1872 by his wife.

[33] J.W. Breeks to Government, 30 January 1869, PMJD, 3 March 1869, nos 22–23, pp. 421–22, OIOC.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*

were to be killed.[36] The 'horrid sight' of 1846 had been replaced by a description of a skillful and masculine display by 'performers'.

Two emphases were at work in the government's condemnation of the *kedr* ceremonies during the nineteenth century. The first, and initial, logic of suppression which had motivated Thomas' attempts to suppress the slaughter and the introduction of a pass system which would limit the killing to only two buffaloes at any funeral was wastage, both of Toda resources and government revenue. The second emphasis was cruelty, which determined the tone of every report after Thomas'. Subsequent official and newspaper reports and ethnographic accounts focused almost exclusively upon the 'mistreatment' of the buffaloes before they were killed, not the act of killing per se.[37] In ethnographic accounts, wastage, far from being condemned, was read as a sign of authenticity.[38] Why was the focus of authoritarian attention cruelty—an imprecise and contentiously debated measure of moral behaviour—which the judiciary had few legislative tools and little inclination to limit and not the more tangible grounds of waste? The destruction of the buffalo represented the annihilation of a potential source of revenue, yet government showed little interest in that facet of the slaughter. The history of the state cognisance and invigilation of the *kedr* highlights the differential attitudes of a colonial government toward conspicuous consumption. In early modern Europe, the suppression of conspicuous consumption of local surplus by the state served both to protect taxable resources and to depress horizontal, village based relationships which could potentially threaten the fragile village-state hierarchy.[39] The colonial state in British India, as well as lacking the convergence between state and religious institutions which in Europe organised the dissuasion against extravagant surplus consumption, had less interest in suppressing lavish rituals than it did in attempting to place representatives and representations of colonial authority within the sphere of those rituals. The colonial state had more to gain from the accumulation of symbolic capital[40] than it stood to lose in the way of revenue through the slaughter of a few hundred buffalo.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] An important aside is that Christian Missionaries on the hills undertook economic, and not primarily moral, arguments against the *kedrs*. The missionaries achieved a far greater degree of impact on the ceremonies by the introduction of the divisive idea of 'rich' and 'poor' Todas, and appropriate and differential ritual behaviour, F. Metz, *The Tribes Inhabiting the Neilgherry Hills*, Mangalore, 1864. Two Church of England Zenana Missionaries, Ling and Macdonald, arrived on the hills in 1886 and pursued an effective campaign against the *kedrs* along these lines. Based in the munds, after a Government grant of inalienable Toda lands in 1893 (MRDP 26 May 1893, nos 459, OIOC), their story belongs principally to the early twentieth century, and its beginnings will be circumvented here.

[38] The phrenologist W.E. Marshall believed that the slaughter of 'old and barren cows' was a recent corruption, 'a commercial gain for moral loss', Marshall, A Phrenologist amongst the Todas. Calcutta, 1873, p. 184.

[39] D. Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and village discourse in Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge, 1984.

[40] This phrase is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Trans. G. Raymon and M. Adamson, London, 1991.

The *Kedr* Spectacle: Colonist Performance at the *Kedr*

In this section, I want to explore how colonial spectatorship organised itself and its perceptions of the *kedr* as an event encounter. What did the *kedr* come to mean for those to whom it was a disembodied event? How did it fit within the ideologies of settler society?

From 1878, at least, coming funerals were advertised as attractions in the local English press.[41] Local newspapers carried frequent accounts of the ceremonies, including eyewitness narratives, debates on the morality of the event and news of accidental gorings which took place when the buffaloes were caught and killed.

The history of encounters between indigenous ritual performance and colonial spectators has received little attention. One anthropologist, J.J. MacAloon, has summarised such an encounter:

> 'exotic' rituals may be perceived as spectacles by outsiders who happen upon them—explorers, tourists, or anthropologists. But these outsiders commit a 'genre error' . . . . Since their roles as observers are not built into the structure of the performance itself, outsiders typifications of ritual events as spectacles are at best metaphorical, or rhetorical.[42]

It is, of course, the case that the visitors to the *kedr* had no part within it, as they first found it. It is also absolutely true that the spectators looked at the *kedr* through lens' which made the rituals comprehensible: analogies with classical mythology and ethnographic accounts from wherever they were available. However, I would argue that the spectators did, over time, become a part of the *kedr* event, which was as adaptive and reflexive as any form of public ritual or festival. The *kedr* was also co-opted as a referent of the discursive cosmologies through which elite settler society attempted to construct a relationship between itself and the indigenous inhabitants of the Nilgiris. In placing, and comprehending, the Todas at the *kedr*, the settlers were placing themselves on the hills and within a wider colonial moment. The kedr allowed the anxieties of both 'heritages', those of local and global colonialism, to be safely addressed. The *kedr* was both a 'real' site where material such as photographs, sketches and trinkets could be collected and a vicarious experience which was accounted and recounted in journals and newspapers in the style of an encounter by authors who had never actually attended the ceremonies.

Two Victorian preoccupations were satisfied at the *kedr*, ethnology and mortuary ritual.[43] British Victorian society developed extravagant and macabre tastes in

[41] *SIO*, 23 February 1878, p. 7, col. 2.

[42] J.J. MacAloon, 'Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies', in J.J. MacAloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle. Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, Philadelphia, 1984, pp. 241–80.

[43] See R.W. Rydell and N.E. Gwinn, eds, *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World*, Amsterdam, 1994; C.A. Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Fairs: India

death ritual which extended beyond domestic practise: funerary accounts are ubiquitous in nineteenth century travel literature on India and elsewhere.[44]

The tone of *kedr* descriptions was sensual, emphasising a sense of barbaric 'display' in which the European was an overwhelmed and reactive spectator:

> About 2 o'clock pm a general bustle seemed to prevail amongst the Todas, they being all in motion, discordant music struck up, tom-toms, horns, and other deafening sounds. Then a movement of the herd of buffaloes toward the enclosure commenced . . . the band of men that surrounded them closed in upon them and began to belabour them with their heavy clubs, when a terrible scene of confusion ensued, the crowd shouting, the Buffaloes bellowing, and the horrid music tending to increase the excitement . . . several of the poor animals fell, and were trampled upon by the others, all were desperately beaten by the Todas, some to death.[45]

The idea and accusation of cruelty, derived from the familiar debates on sport and more particularly hunting, moved the event towards a moral space familiar to a European audience. The themes of masculinity and contest, which were increasingly impressed upon accounts of the chase and capture of the buffaloes, insinuated the violence at the *kedrs* into a legitimate metaphor for honourable encounter between man and nature. In 1897 a correspondent of the Nilgiri news wrote:

> Several people labour under the delusion that the chief part of the fun lies in the cruel slaughter of buffaloes. No refined European would go miles to see such a butchering . . . . The slaughtering does not take place till the end almost and then due notice is given when the onlookers . . . [may] . . . leave the spot . . . . The slaughtering of the buffaloes is not attended with any cruelty; the successive collectors we have had, have all insisted on a painless death . . . . Some ladies who do not object to a pigeon, grouse or pheasant shooting, cry out at the idea of a buffalo being slaughtered; these women will stand by and see dozens of innocent birds cruelly hurt, and enjoy the scene.[46]

The question of cruelty was frequently debated in the local press. The Nilgiri chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, formed in the 1870s, was called upon to prevent and attempted to intercede at the *kedrs*.[47] The accusation of cruelty, however, was never sufficient to undermine the presence of

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at World Fairs', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, 1989, p. 214; Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*.

[44] James Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, Newton Abbot, 1972; Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1865–1843*, Chicago, 1997, p. 66.

[45] Athenaeum, 29 September 1846, in WEC Eur. Mss, D318, OIOC.

[46] 'Disappointed Globe Trotter', in the *NN*, 24 April 1897, p. 3.

[47] *SIO*, 30 January 1886, p. 9, col. 2; *SIO*, 7 February 1891, p. 8, col. 1.

spectators at the *kedr*. The *kedr* was a bounded, manageable curiosity which lay outside the dominant norms of the colonising society. Indeed, it was the separation of the exceptional, 'savage' space of the *kedr* that accounted for its attraction to spectators. The *kedr* of the 'harmless race'[48] of Todas, unlike the blood sports of English working class, were never perceived of as threatening, riotous assemblies the attendance of which by 'gentlemen' was roundly condemned.[49] In the local context of the Nilgiris, the elite anxiety which might have attached itself to buffalo slaughter and the accompanying crowds was far more keenly felt about the three settlements' bazaar or 'native' areas which were a constant source of disquiet among the European elite. The unease surrounding these areas of the settlements, indispensable as a pools of labour and market activity, ranged between a constant preoccupation with sanitation, occasional concern about the blurring of racial/cultural boundaries[50] to sporadic hysteria over the threat of anti-European violence. In September 1880, rumours of an uprising in the Ootacamund bazaar led to the upper echelons of the European society, including the visiting Governor of Madras, the Duke of Buckingham, locking themselves in government office cellars and a few days later a perplexed delegation from the Muslim community of Ootacamund arriving to swear their continuing allegiance to the Empress.[51]

As well as a pervading paranoia of native violence there was an acute anxiety over the threat of the uncontrollable visual horrors in which India was considered to abound. In 1877, an unfortunate, if oversensitive, daughter of a local planter 'fell into hysterics and died' after seeing a naked corpse being carried through the bazaar in Ootacamund.[52] The idea that a visual experience could jeopardise physical well being had a substantial genealogy in Europe.[53] In India, and most particularly in the hill stations where lines of segregation were, at least in principal, drawn more distinctly, the degree of racial and cultural otherness caused these threats to be taken even more seriously.

In contrast to the unpredictable, impinging and disordered visual threats from the bazaar, which could endanger the hapless, cultured European at any time, the *kedr* provided the thrill of the macabre and exotic within the exonerating parameters of science and authoritarian moderation.[54] After the initiation of police surveillance in 1869, subsequent official reports and ethnographic accounts

[48] Marshall, *A Phrenologist*, p. 185.

[49] H. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*, Penguin, 1987.

[50] An editorial in 1888 reported that children of 'obviously pure European parentage' had been found 'clad in native costumes and in companionship with children of dusky hues', *SIO*, 25/8/88, p. 4, col. 4.

[51] *SIO*, 1 January 1881, p. 6, col. 2.

[52] *SIO*, 23 May 1877, p. 3, col. 4.

[53] U. Rublack, 'Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany', *Past and Present*, no. 50, February 1996, pp. 84–110.

[54] A Collector claimed Police presence would cause 'the objectionable features . . . to disappear', PMJD, 30 March 1886, no. 834, pp. 119–21, OIOC.

strongly prefer that European authority had moderated the savagery of the event.[55] In 1886, the Government ordered a crucial realignment of responsibility, one which could be afforded to the 'savage' but never to the European poor. Henceforth it was the police officers present who would be 'held responsible for any cruelty', not the Todas themselves.[56] The notion of the morally insentient savage and the desire of colonising Europeans to look upon that savagery absolved the Todas from any restriction on the basis of the self-repression so central to the development of the notion of animal protection in eighteenth century Europe.[57] Government orders broadened the role of the police to include the protection or the 'people assembled' as well as the prevention of cruelty. The colonial government, from then on, invigilated the *kedr* as an event and expressed a responsibility of the state towards those assembled as spectators and to its 'proper' execution.[58]

Accounts of the *kedr* provided a space for the expression of the tensions and ambivalence intrinsic in the colonial experience. Individuals sought to behold, admire and describe the *kedr*, but were themselves part of a far larger historical moment, that of a 'progressive' intervention, compelled to recognise difference and resistance as obsolescence and savagery. Settler society on the hills existed in a state of, often nervous, tension with the indigenous occupation of the hills. The grazing practises of the Toda communities were regarded as indiscriminate and wasteful. The swidden cultivation practised by Badaga, Irula and Kurumba communities was condemned as an impediment to the colonisation of land on the hills by planters and formally banned in 1862. The tone of governance on the Nilgiris during the nineteenth century was ambivalent as the revenue authorities sought to negotiate a practice of governance between the principle of the protection of aboriginal land rights and the promotion of colonisation.[59] The Toda *kedr* became a significant space in which settler identities were formed that could comfortably account for the indigenous presence on the hills.

Accounts of the *kedr* gave textual space for the expression both of colonial guilt and of imperial faith, affirmations of the 'truly British feeling'[60] which would protect the colonial project, and the authors, from the documented brutalities of past imperialisms:

> any attempt to coerce [the Toda] would soon break his fine spirit and end in the extinction of his race, and name. Look to America and see what Spain as done for the Incas, it is with pride I resort from such contemplations to the humane, and generous policy adopted toward this interesting people by their rulers;

[55] J.D. Rees, 'An Indian Funeral Sacrifice', *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 31, January–June 1892, London; Marshall, *A Phrenologist*; J. Shortt, An Account of the Tribes on the Neilgherries, in J. Shortt, *The Hill Ranges of Southern India*, Vol. I, Madras, 1870. 1868; Metz, *The Tribes Inhabiting.*

[56] PMJD, 30 March 1886, no. 834, pp. 119–21.

[57] Ritvo, *The Animal Estate.*

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Sutton, Other Landscapes.

[60] Unpublished paper by D.S. Young, 22 May 1827, West Papers, Mss Eur. D888, OIOC.

> their hereditory rights and immunities have been sedulously upheld; they are free from anything like foreign invasion . . . .[61]

The act of witnessing the *kedr* allowed a recognition and sympathy of the colonising self in the other, as a past echo of Europe's own colonisation provided a lens for comprehension, and importantly, a salve to the anxieties of domination. The *kedr* was reminiscent of 'the rites that went on under the shadow of the German or Gaulish Forest, and may have been witnessed on British Downs by cultivated Romans with the same feelings of half-contemptuous curiosity with which Englishmen now watch these savage ceremonies on Indian mountains'.[62] Sympathetic identification with and protection of the *kedr*, and through it the Todas, was dependent upon its comprehension as a remnant, a moment of the past in the present. Like the Todas themselves, isolated and noble, the *kedr* 'conveyed an idea of something immeasurably primeval and antique . . . utterly isolated . . . like the debris of a pre-existing organisation . . . .'[63] It was through this event, therefore that the Todas could be, and should be, encountered and understood, not through conflicts over grazing or land sales. This extravagant affinity, stirring colonial anxiety with senses of European pasts and ideal spaces,[64] were mechanisms for abstract recognition, not expressive of a coeval or lateral relationship. The Todas could be as immediately and unproblematically reviled as 'barbarians . . . as fearfully dirty . . . as any savages that crawl the earth'.[65]

The trope of decline, common to descriptions of many indigenous groups whose lands were colonised, is conspicuous in the vast majority of nineteenth-century accounts of the Todas. The Todas were presented as a degenerating race; formerly settled agriculturalists who had lazily regressed and dragged the communities subsistence back into pastoralist barbarism.[66] In 1857, Baikie claimed, enhancing the credibility of his own ethnography, that: 'in late years [the Todas] original simplicity of character has sadly deteriorated, and they are now only like the generality of the native inhabitants'.[67] The trope of decline, aside from providing scientific fillip, privileged the role of European intervention and the duty of European agency in providing cultural salvage. The Todas were passive victims of 'Europeans who are pauperising them with their constant gifts . . . . Their constant cry for "elam" (alms) indicates a degeneration of character resulting from the

[61] *Ibid.*, a later author asked would the Todas 'perish like Red Indians of America or the aborigines of Australia?', Geofry, *Ooty and her Sisters, or Our Hill Stations in South India*, Madras, 1881.

[62] M.J. Walhouse, 'A Toda "Dry Funeral"', *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. iii, April 1874.

[63] 'The Aboriginal Races of India' a print cutting, Aboriginal Caste Book, Vol. I. WEC, OIOC.

[64] See H. Liebersohn, 'Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Toqueville, Chamisso and Romantic Travel Writing', *American Historical Review*, June 1994, pp. 746–66.

[65] E.F. Burton, *An Indian Olio*, London, 1888.

[66] 'Viator' in *The Native Herald*, Madras, 3 February 1844, no. 3, Aboriginal Caste Book, Vol. II, WEC, OIOC.

[67] R. Baikie, *The Neilgherries: Including an Account of their Topography, Climate, Soil and Productions, And the Effects of the Climate on the European Constitution*, Calcutta, 1857.

curiosity they excite among all foreigners.'[68] The degeneration of the Todas was only 'in keeping with the deterioration among other aboriginal tribes where Europeans have colonised'.[69] The *kedr* debate allowed settler society a chance to ruminate on the impact their presence had upon the hills. It provided a bounded space within which the colonial project could be conspicuously berated. Europeans could condemn themselves as 'invaders . . . [who] . . . have filched from . . . [the Todas] . . . their hills and valleys . . . and destroyed the freedom and comfort of the segregated life which all barbarians so love and enjoy'.[70] In a poem sent to the South of India Observer staged as a 'Toda harangue', a dead Toda returns to condemn the living tribe as the last of the 'Toda nation':

> Have we not raised the funeral pile high for our brothers souls,
> And slain the mighty hecatomb, where now their carriage rolls,
> ah! ye know not all the glory, all the fury of the fight,
> With a hundred mighty buffaloes to slay before the night,
> When each young man with his own club must crush on maddened beast,—
> And then came the music, and the revelry and feast . . .
> 'What could we do? The *Kompani* was far beyond our power,
> They said the land was theirs—'twas ours, and is unto this hour,
> But we were simple pastoral men, they kings had overthrown;
> *We* were soft as melting ghee, the white men hard as stone[71]

Using classical Greek[72] and contemporary North American comparisons the author projected his knowledge, and guilt, onto a Toda voiced acceptance of inevitable submission. The poem, although melodramatic, is an internal dialogue, it is bounded by historical inevitability. All the 'white men' are really guilty of was intrinsic superiority. The Todas were regarded as morally, physically and culturally vulnerable.

Ethnographic texts constructed the *kedr* as a fossilisation of now obsolete religious grammars comprehensible through the use of classical texts. This fossilisation implied a rupture between meaning and symbol that effectively removed the Toda subject from any meaningful, private relationship with the ceremony and centred the ethnographer's text as the only possible sentient representation of the event. Relying upon Egyptian and Semitic analogy to interpret funerary ceremonies Breeks surmises:

> All the striking symbolism of their funerary rites have no meaning for the present generation. Like the numerous gods who are never worshipped, and

[68] J.S. Chandler, 'Aborigines of the Nilgiris in South India', *Scientific American*, 29 September 1900, pp. 203–04.

[69] 'Viator', in the *Native Herald*; Congreve 'The Antiquities of the Neilgherry Hills'.

[70] Burton, *An Indian Olio*, p. 139.

[71] 'The Toda Chief', by Wilken, *SIO*, 18 May 1882, p. 8, col. 4–p. 9, col. 1.

[72] The hecatomb was a Greek public sacrifice of one hundred oxen.

> the preparatory penances of the priests who performs no priestly offices, these are but the strangely suggestive relics of a bygone faith.[73]

The *kedr* was a shell, a hollow performance of rites to which the Todas were no longer substantially and meaningfully attached. W.E. Marshall, an amateur phrenologist, keener to explore physiognomic determinants of social behaviour than understand too deeply the course of Toda ritual, presented the second day of a *marvainolkedr* in the manner of stage directions:

> scene:- The circular pen, of about thirty feet diameter, with surrounding wall, of unusual strength and neatness, . . . on which a dense crowd of people—Todas, Kotas, Badagas, and others are seated, each man with a staff and toga.[74]

Ethnographic analysis, therefore, detached the indigenous participant from ritual and aligned the ethnographer observer as the sole agent of comprehension at the *kedr*. The ethnographic observer, however, was finding it harder and harder to maintain a posture of detached sobriety from the event. The Todas did not disguise their awareness of the spectators' presence. Participants were prepared to 'corrupt' ritual displays of grief by looking up and catching, and therefore embarrassing, the observer's eye. Marshall claimed he was informed that 'in the midst of crying [the Todas] would hold out their hands for a present.'[75] In the last years of the century, Edgar Thurston, Superintendent of the Madras Government Museum, supplied as anecdote the story of a group of 'stalwart buffalo catchers . . . [who] . . . turned up at the bungalow for a pour boire in return, they said, for treating us to a good fight'.[76]

By the 1890s a *kedr* was described as resembling 'a great fair'.[77] Far from being a secluded fossil of barbaric practise, the larger *kedr* had become busy marketplaces where along with trinkets and snacks, ethnographic favours were also sold. Official co-option of the *kedr* reached an apogee in 1900, with the demarcation of land required for the performance of the *kedr*s as one of the final acts of the forest survey and reservation on the hills. In Nanjanad circuit, just over 100 acres, spread over six plots were excluded from forest reservation, on the grounds that they were 'Places where Todas perform their funeral ceremonies.'[78] The Todas themselves presented no claims to the sites, usually a procedural necessity during forest reservation, and their demarcation was completed entirely by the officers of the forest survey as 'places of public utility'.[79] This demarcation of rights is

[73] Breeks, *Tribes and Monuments*, p. 26.

[74] Marshall, *A Phrenologist among the Todas*, p. 181.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 183.

[76] E. Thurston, 'The Todas of the Nilgiris', *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum*, Vol. iv, no. 1, 1896, pp. 1–21.

[77] Anon, 'The Todas of the Nilgherries', *The Dublin Review*, 3rd Series, Vol. cx, July–October 1892, pp. 449–51; Rees, 'An Indian Funeral Sacrifice'.

[78] PMRD, 26 March 1900, nos 295, 295A, pp. 784–801, TNA.

[79] *Ibid.*

exceptional in the course of forest survey and reservation on the Nilgiris. In other cases, rights to worship, and permission to collect material for sacred purposes, was denied or admitted only under special, restrictive license. This appropriation of the *kertnódr* represented a domestication of the *kedr* that problematised the barbarity and secrecy, the latter more a motif than a reality, which had made the early *kedr* accounts so compelling. The buffalo slaughter at the *kedrs* belonged to a wild and fascinating space, not an officially designated and sanctioned area of 'public utility' and hill station heritage.

By the end of the century the *kedr* as an ideal and idealised space of barbarity, ethnology and invigilation was beginning to show signs of stress. Attendance required the leisured visitor or resident only to read the local newspaper and commence to a demarcated area which was under the control of the Forest Department, to watch a well attended event mediated by police and magistrates.[80] The belief that insentient savage nobility, ethnic discovery and authoritarian surveillance could intersect without affecting the fragile integrity of each was no longer supportable. The Todas had perceptively contested invigilation and openly performed for and prospered by ethnographic spectatorship.

Reaction and Resistance

The passes, intended as a measure to enforce centralised cognisance and surveillance of the course of the funerary ritual, were immediately compromised, not by resistance, but by absorption. Applications for passes to hold the ceremonies increased over time, from one in 1869, the year of their introduction, to 36 in 1872. During the years 1869 to 1874, 67 licenses were granted, permitting a aggregate slaughter of 254 buffaloes, a number far in excess of the Government's legislated two per ceremony.[81]

Did the Todas application for passes constitute a submission? Or was their cooperation an expedient acceptance of the information networks which had created a public around the *kedrs*? Some of the ceremonies, especially the smaller *etvainolkedr* could easily have taken place without any official cognisance, but the opening of the ceremonies as an attraction to the European community on the hills, and the extensive preparations for the larger ceremonies,[82] made a certain degree of negotiation inescapable. The number of passes applied for, however, 36 in 1872, to slaughter 120 buffaloes, must have included smaller *kedrs* which took place away from the gaze of either the authority or casual spectator. Alternately,

[80] Accounts refer to the Kota bands, who supplied the music for the event, coming accompanied by policemen, Thurston, 1896. In 1892, the killing of the buffalo was postponed until the Collector arrived to invigilate, *SIO*, 1 October 1892, p. 8, col. 2.

[81] Cockerell, Collector of Coimbatore, to Government, 17 October 1874, PMJD, 27 October 1874, nos 142–43, OIOC; Rees, 'An Indian Funeral Sacrifice'.

[82] The length of time for required for preparation of large *marvainolkedr*s was estimated at three months by two Badaga *Monigars*, C.D. MacCleane, Acting District Magistrate, to Government, 14 December 1886, PMJD, 30 March 1886, no. 834, pp. 119–21, OIOC.

the Todas did not apply for a pass for every substantial *marvainolkedr* which attracted public attention. In 1886 the District Magistrate of Nilgiris, C.D. Macleane, attended a funeral only because he saw a notice for it in the local Ootacamund newspaper.[83]

The Todas, therefore, while accepting the application for licenses as a facet of the funerary preparations did so only on a selective basis, shutting out authority from the events when it suited and paying no attention to the official limit of two buffaloes per ceremony. The acceptance of the passes was dependent, not upon submission to authority, but the integration of the licensing system as a facet of legitimacy within the Toda communities during the organisation of forthcoming *kedrs*.[84] That the process of obtaining sanction for the funerals was the subject of contestation within the Toda community is demonstrated by two petitions, from 1879 and c. 1900, which complained that village and Cutcherry based officers were manipulating the licensing system for nefarious ends.[85]

The acceptance of the licenses within the social dynamics of the Toda community was dependent, however, upon slack regulation from the Ootacamund Cutcherry. In 1875, the Madras Government reprimanded the Commissioner's Officer for lax enforcement of the licensing system and the inconsistent attendance of the Assistant Superintendent of Police at the *kedr* ceremonies, and reiterated that the purpose of the licenses was to 'reduce this wasteful and barbarous practice to a minimum'.[86] The subsequent reassertion of authoritarian control was met by a direct contestation of the license system by the Todas. Pettha Todi, the 'Chief Head man', engaged the services of A.S. Cowdell, a prominent European Ootacamund Solicitor, to represent the 'entire tribe' to government and protest against the licensing system as causing 'considerable delay and inconvenience'[87] and as representing an illegal government interference in 'Toda theology' and the place of the *kedr* buffalo sacrifice within it.[88] Cowdell opened the *kedr* debate to far broader categories of governance: buffalo slaugther was a 'time immemorial . . . custom' and as such was necessarily underwritten by the 'liberty of worship' guaranteed to all colonial subjects.

This representation introduced a manipulative engagement with the 1859 *kedr* legislation. The petition claimed that the Todas had already been 'restricted' against their established practice of determining the number of buffaloes to be slaughtered according to the number of relatives of the deceased, to 'sacrificing two Buffaloes to Putcha Kadu and two to Varal Kadu [two principal deities] upon the death of

[83] *Ibid.*

[84] An example of licenses being contested within the Badaga community takes place in 1879 when the *Monigar* of Ketti petitions the Commissioner not to issue a rival car with a license during commemorative funerary rights, Miscellaneous Letter Book, 1879, UDR.

[85] Petition dated 6 May 1879, in Land Revenue Records, 1879, UDR; Petition, date unspecified, *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum*, Vol. iv, no. 1, 1901.

[86] PMJD, 27 October 1874, nos 142–43, OIOC.

[87] A.S. Cowdell, Attorney for the Todas, to D.F. Carmichael, Chief Secretary to Government, 13 July 1875, PMJD, 2 August 1875, nos 3–5, pp. 936–39, OIOC.

[88] *Ibid.*

any member of the tribe',[89] doubling the number of animals actually permitted for slaughter by the 1859 orders.[90] This codification, which took advantage of the imprecision of colonial knowledge, was fused with an assertion of the rights admitted to British Indian subjects by the Queen's proclamation of 1858 which called into question the legislative basis of all existing restrictions. In British India, prevention of cruelty to animals and provisions for prosecution were incorporated into the Police Act but the powers of this bill were limited to towns.[91] No legal provision existed, therefore, for prosecution of the Todas on the basis of cruelty. Pointing out that the current restrictions could 'not be on the grounds of cruelty, as the same principal would apply to the sacrifice of two buffaloes as of a larger number', Cowdell added that the grounds of waste, as well as being a restriction without legal ground since both the buffaloes and the ground on which they were killed were Toda property, was economically unfounded given the usage, for meat and leather, of the buffalo corpses by the Kotas who attended the ceremony and the function served by the selective slaughter of non milk giving cattle in a pastoral economy. The Petition ends by invoking the custom of *hijrat*, threatening that the 'whole tribe of Todas intend to emigrate to some other place where they may be allowed to perform the rites of their tribe without interference'.[92]

The petition represents a fascinating counter-assertion of the idea of customary rights and the utilisation, and manipulation, of the colonial legal parameters which constructed and textualised those rights. The Todas, through Cowdell, deployed religious belief, economic rationale, legal process and a pre-colonial form of resistance in addressing their grievances to the Government, indicating thereby the incredible complexity of the space of the *kedr* as an event and as an interface between settlement and hill communities by the second half of the nineteenth century.

In about 1900, a second contestatory petition ranges on the presence of the European audience whilst protesting attempts by the Collector to reinvigorate the existing restrictions on the total number of buffaloes killed at any one ceremony. One hundred and twenty Todas signed a petition stating: 'unfortunately for your petitioner community, it has of late years become the fashion for Europeans to attend the kedus as a kind of theatrical display got up for their benefit . . . .'[93]

This petition goes further, and acutely observes that it was not complaints of any spectator that generated accusations of cruelty, but merely the fact of European spectators being present at the ceremonies. Spectatorship past and present and

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] E.B. Thomas to government, 7 September 1859, PMJD, 24 September 1859, nos 26–28, pp. 81–82, OIOC.

[91] C.D. MacCleane, Acting District Magistrate, to government, 14 February 1886, PMJD, 30 March 1886, no. 834, pp. 119–21, OIOC.

[92] A.S. Cowdell, Attorney for the Todas, to D.F. Carmichael, Chief Secretary to Government, 13 July 1875, PMJD, 2 August 1875, nos 3–5, pp. 936–39, OIOC.

[93] 'A Toda Petition', *Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum*, 1898, Vol. 2, no. II, pp. 128–30.

the texts generated by ethnographic and curious sightseers were responsible for the discourse of cruelty which invaded and irritated the performance of the *kedr* rites, and not the rites themselves. These petitions, far from representing an autonomous sphere of authentic custom, were set out within the parameters and nomenclature of colonial legality. However, the defence of the *kedr* by members of the Toda communities as spaces of customary rights invaded by unlawful legislation and intrusive spectatorship represents a breaking of the circle of authoritarian and ethnological attempts to institutionalise the *kedr*; attempts which relied upon the insentience of the *kedr's'* participants and the assumption that the Todas would never engage with spectatorship on terms audible and comprehensible to the coloniser. Not only had the Todas noticed and embarrassed the eye of the spectator at the *kedr*, they now confronted and challenged the functions of formal governance.

The *Kedr* Eclipsed: Collection and Display

The *kedr* was too complex, too contested a sight, and site, to be restructured around ethnographic or judicial colonial authority. By the end of the century, the *kedr* was superseded by the creation of new rituals: organised collections and display that could incorporate the exotic colour of the savage while maintaining the symbolic precedence of colonial sovereign authority. The *kedr* as spectacle was eclipsed by organised events which bore a keener and less ambiguous impression of colonial sovereign authority than could be stamped upon the *kedr*. Staged performances of 'tribal dancing' were organised for the entertainment of the Governor of Madras, in 1880, and the Jubilee Celebrations of 1887.[94] These events were rituals in themselves, designed to centre the attention of spectators upon the representatives of government as spectators to a display of 'local colour' which did not require the interpretative mediation of the ethnographer or the ethnographic text. These events realigned meaning and performance for spectators and performers. To settler society, these events were orchestrated around familiar hierarchies and significant calenderical dates. To those who performed, the displays were meaningless and random.

Scientific observation at the *kedr* was replaced by the systematic collection and arrangement of material culture which could stand in for, and illustrate, 'tribal culture'. Physiognomic images and maps—descriptions, measurements, photographs, plaster casts[95]—of the bodies of 'tribes' eclipsed event narratives as race, and therefore body, fixated professional anthropology replaced the sensual genres of travelogue and event encounter ethnography. The *kedr* had been a poor subject of photography. The ceremonies were too complex and too animated to capture. J.W. Breeks managed to obtain what seems to have been one of the only

[94] *SIO*, 23 October 1880, p. 7, col. 4; *SIO*, 15 February 1887, p. 3, col. 1.

[95] *School of Industrial Arts, Madras, Quarterly Report for April–June 1867*. I'd like to thank Deepali Dewan for this reference.

photographs of the *kedr* taken in the nineteenth century. It shows the corpse's hand being made to clasp the horns of the slaughtered buffaloes. This stage of the ceremony was of considerable importance and it is unlikely that the Todas in the background would have had their backs turned from the proceedings. It is likely that Breeks had a living stand-in to play to the corpse to the (probably not faking) dead buffalo.[96]

On the hills, collection and display went through a dramatic reorientation. In the 1850s, a museum was planned for Ootacamund 'which will tend to create Native interest and open up the resources of the country'.[97] This museum and an agricultural exhibition which was being planned at the same time would 'be useful . . . though probably not at first quite understood or appreciated in its objects by the native land holders'.[98] The museums exhibits would be aimed at the hill communities; they would display the paraphernalia of civilisation for the edification and improvement of the indigenous communities. By the 1870s, the exhibitionary culture on the hills had reversed. It was the ethnology of the indigenous inhabitants, distilled into objects and images, which was to be displayed for the edification of the settler spectator. At the same time, the trope of decline underwent a realignment: it was no longer the demographics of the hill tribes which were declining but solely their culture. A number of authors commented upon the decline in the distinctiveness of the Todas, a fading of the qualities that had made them so attractive formerly. Thurston noted that:

> I was lately shocked to see a Toda boy studying in the third standard in Tamil, instead of tending the buffaloes of his mund. The Todas, whose natural drink is milk, now delight in bottles [of] beer . . . . Tiles and kerosine oil tins are substituted for the primeval thatch.[99]

The culture of the hill communities was now created a distinct thing, apart from the Todas themselves. Material fragments of that culture had to be collected and preserved from the 'corrupted' everyday life of the 'tribals'. All over India and other colonised societies, mundane objects were transformed into exceptional, collectable objects. They were made desirable through their association with the culture of tribal or peasant communities.[100] During the 'Toda dance' organised for the Governor of Madras in 1880, 'a silver necklace worn by one of the women . . . took his fancy as an oriental curiosity. The intrinsic cost of this ornament was estimated at Rs 60, but when his Grace's anxiety to become the possessor of it was perceived, of course an enhanced valuation was immediately put upon the

[96] Breeks, *Tribes and Monuments*.

[97] Collector to MBR, 12 May 1856, PMBR, 2 June 1856, no. 35, p. 8999, TNA.

[98] *Ibid*.

[99] Edgar Thurston, quoted in *NN*, 8 December 1897, see also R.F. Burton, *Goa, and the Blue Mountains*, London, 1851; Shortt, 'An account of the Tribes'.

[100] Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Fairs: India at World Fairs'.

ornament. The necklace was eventually purchased by his Grace for Rs 100.'[101] The 'intrinsic value' of the necklace was not just its weight in silver or its workmanship but the allure of its association with the Todas. The necklace became a fragment of the exotic within a global network of collectables and exhibition, representative and part of both 'Toda culture' and the relationship supposed to exist between that culture and the coloniser.

Collections of Toda jewellery and embroidery were sent to the Calcutta and Chicago Exhibitions of 1883 and 1892 respectively.[102] In 1892, a club 'used in massacring the buffalo at a green funeral' was among thirty specimens sent from the Nilgiris to the India Museum in Calcutta.[103]

Ornaments for these collections were bought off the bodies of Todas, Badagas and Kotas on market days in Ootacamund or obtained through *Monigar*s, a fact undoubtedly manifest in the 'authenticity' of collections they made.[104] These objects were requisitioned on the basis of a list sent from the government museum in Calcutta which had been worked up from existing exhibition and collection catalogues. The correspondence between Museum Curators and Collectorate Officials dealing with the collection of objects has a somewhat awkward tone. The demands of the museum were pedantic and stingy. The *Monigar*s who supplied objects were forced to petition repeatedly before they received payment. Prices to be paid were scrupulously controlled according to those given in the earlier exhibition catalogues. Prices, became the only proof of authenticity that museums, buying from a remote location, had. An object was what it was *because* it cost a certain amount. In 1883, a necklace specified at Rs 35 on a requisition list sent by the India Museum in Calcutta was bought for Rs 50. The Museum immediately returned it refusing to sanction the extra funds.[105] Compounding the anxieties created by the inability of the museum to recognise the objects by any other means, buying and selling eroded the authenticity of the material which was supposedly being 'rescued' from pristine, pre-monetary, indeed prehistoric, cultures and soiled the logic of the ethnographic exhibition. The embarrassment and tight fistedness which runs through these exchanges is a product of the troublesome proximity of commerce and science and the utter ignorance of the museum as to what the objects they sent for actually were. Publicly, this embarrassment could be concealed through a condemnation of the increasing greed, and therefore, corruption of the

[101] *SIO*, 30 October 1880, p. 7, col. 4.

[102] Anon., *The Society for the Encouragement and Preservation of Indian Art, Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of Embroidery by Indian Women*, at Cheshaw House, 142 Regent Street, London, 1893.

[103] PMBR (Rev. Settlt., Land Rev. & Agro.), 8 June 1892, no. 5022, mis, UDR.

[104] The *Monigar*s were village based revenue officers who were charged with a number of tasks: the collection of revenues and the provision of revenue information, the requisition of labour and supplies and the arrangement of guides and porters for hunters. The *Monigar*s were the only means the government had of exercising authority at a local level, yet the power of the *Monigar*s and the village accountants, the *Curnum*s, was to a large extent autonomous and very often self serving and 'corrupt'.

[105] Correspondence between the Collectorate and Bidie, Curator at the Calcutta Government Museum, Misc. File, 1880–83, UDR.

hill communities, proof positive of the need for museological freezes of their declining culture. Once acquired, these objects were reassembled within museums. Photographs illustrated and typified the association of particular material culture with named communities, while the objects collected were arranged as a culture group to best effect as a display.

Breckenridge has described the colonised and colonial assemblages of material culture appropriate to the westernised Indian and the Indophile English household. The westernised Indian was to be surrounded by the gentile accoutrements of civilisation while the collection of Indian 'bric-a-brac' testified to the knowledge and experience of the old India hand.[106] Like any idealised arrangement of material culture and society, however, it was easily disrupted, as the following example demonstrates.

In the early 1880s, a number of Todas were contracted by the agents of P.T. Barnum's circus as 'ethnological rarities'. These 'specimens . . . procured' as exhibits for Barnum's 'Grand Congress of the Nations', were first shown at a private exhibition for press and clergy at Madison Square Garden, New York on the 15 March 1884.[107] They subsequently travelled extensively in Europe, Australia and North America.[108] On returning to the hills in 1889, one or more of these men gained notoriety as the 'Travelled Toda'. The Travelled Toda returned to the Nilgiris with a command of English and his own collected fragments of European tradition which disconcerted the proper order of the *kedr* and the place of the Todas within it. A reporter with the local newspaper wrote:

> I was attending a 'kedr' or Toda funeral, when a piquant vision of female loveliness burst on my astonished sight . . . shading her bare head with a silken parasol, she wore a tight bodice, and a white robe of some gauzy texture descended to her ankles . . . .Judge my amazement when I leant that this pretty aristocrat was a Todaess! 'It is all my work,' said the travelled Toda proudly. . . . . 'When I have completed her education, I am going to take her to see the Queen.'
>
> 'Do you like this sort of thing?' I enquired pointing to the spot where a number of Todas were engaged in annoying the buffaloes destined to be slaughtered to the manes of the deceased, 'I don't like it one damn!' she rippled out in English with a vivacity which made me jump.[109]
>
> 'at the late kedr . . . the Travelling Toda . . . said, indicating his tribesmen with a contemptuous gesture, [these] are jungle men. You must not suppose the have any affinity to me. I'm an American.'[110] . . . 'He speaks in glowing terms

[106] Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Fairs: India at World Fairs'. pp. 213–14.

[107] P.T. Barnum. *Life of P.T. Barnum. Written by Himself, including his Golden Rules for Money Making*, Buffalo. 1888.

[108] Rees. 'An Indian Funeral Sacrifice'.

[109] *The South of India Observer and Nilgiri Express*, Saturday 13 April 1889, p. 3, cols 1–2.

[110] *SIO*. 2 January 1886, p. 8, cols 3.

> of the Queen Empress whom he had the happy fortune of seeing personally. He shows the eager crowd around him the Royal presents bestowed on him by Her Majesty. The rings he wears on his fingers . . . and his watch which bears the impression of a crown.'[111]

The Travelled Toda was not gentile and anglicised. His appropriation of western material culture was not a part of a broader acculturation into western tastes and aesthetics. The tone of the reports poked fun at his mannerisms, but it is clear that the Travelled Toda was laughing back. The Travelled Toda introduced a threat of reverse, of inversion as he owned, through object and language, fragments of the European metropolis, radically transforming them through new contexts and cosmologies entirely closed to the European spectator. His ordering of his experiences and his appropriation of European material culture disordered the ideal of the body and material culture of the savage properly entombed in ethnography and glass cases.

Conclusion

This paper has traced local and imperial cognition and commemoration of the 'savage' and 'tribal culture' from an event embedded within Toda society to off-site practises of cultural preservation. The grammars of understanding which rendered the *kedr* comprehensible and attractive to spectators also ensured the eventual collapse of the *kedr* as a spectator event. Spectatorship depended, and depends still, upon the stage-management of the 'otherness' of the attractive and engaging spectacle. This management was achieved for a limited time on the Nilgiris by interpretative lens in textual representations: the trope of decline, the moderation of authoritarian invigilation and the scientific distance of ethnography. These (mis)representations could not, however, be sustained; the system into which colonial society and authority sought to insert the *kedr* could not remain closed to the inevitable response and reaction that compromised and undermined the interpretations of the observer. The participants held the eye of the spectator and engaged with and profitted from the urges of the spectators to see, document and collect. This engagement broke down the pretence of distance between observer and participant upon which the event encounter relied. The living exotic must necessarily be obtained in snatches, a rule which applies still to contemporary idioms of travel and documentary representations.

The difficulties and compromises of staged representations, in museums and living exhibitions, on the other hand, were concealed; they occurred before the moment of display and were confined to the invisible procedures of collection and organisation. The means by which objects for museums were, and are, obtained are hidden below the completeness of displays which purport to represent a 'culture'. Any mismatch between the real and the representation is explicated by the

[111] *SIO*, 23 January 1886, p. 9, col. 3.

flaws of the former, never the collection itself, which if anything is a too perfect a representation, and salvage, of a fading cultural authenticity.

The *kedr* narrative, and those ethnographies which superceded it, illustrate the means by which a subject can be simultaneously written about and written out of a place as social agents. The history of the *kedr* as a spectator event and of cultural preservationism on the Nilgiri hills in the nineteenth century, evokes other contexts in which fragments of 'indigenous' cultures are absorbed and valorised as iconographies of belonging and nationhood by dominant social formations. The use of the idea of the Toda community as a motif in settler discourse on the hills ran concurrently with the development of material conditions that restricted and repressed their occupation and subsistence on the hills. Grazing grounds were appropriated and restricted, swidden cultivation was suppressed and the embedded inter-community economy of the hill communities atrophied as the hill economy reoriented itself around settler markets and cash crops. The emotional beration of the colonial intervention contained in many discriptions of the Todas and the *kedr* accommodated the anxieties of change without denting the conditions of oppression upon which the spread of the plantation industry and the solidification of colonialism on the Nilgiris, relied.