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Q8(a)

**Describe the nature of traditional socioeconomic interdependence among the Toda, Kota, Kurumba and Irula tribes of Nilgiri Hills. Highlight the changes occurring in these interrelationships**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Anthropology GS 2 · 20 marks · The structure and nature of traditional Indian social system

3.1 The structure and nature of traditional Indian social system-Varnashrama, Purushartha, Karma, Rina and Rebirth.

**Core demand of the question**

- Describe the traditional interdependence of Toda, Kota, Kurumba and Irula in the Nilgiris
- Name the goods and services that moved between them
- **Highlight changes:** plantation, British, Tamil Nadu economy, religion and law
- Use Rivers and later ethnography

**Revision summary**

- **Toda:** buffalo pastoralists; Kota: artisans and funeral musicians; Kurumba and Irula: forest producers and ritual-forest roles.

Exchange was a hill jajmani of dairy, pots, tools, honey and ceremony.

Rivers described Todas; Mandelbaum and Walker placed them in regional interdependence.

Tea plantations, cash, schools and ST/FRA administration broke the closed circuit.

Today they share markets and hostels more than ghee and pots.

**Introduction**

In the **Nilgiri Hills**, four named communities - **Toda, Kota, Kurumba and Irula** - once formed a small regional division of labour. **W. H. R. Rivers's** The Todas (1906) made the Toda famous; later work by **David Mandelbaum**, **Anthony Walker** and Indian ethnographers placed them in a **four-cornered exchange**, not in a museum of buffaloes alone.

**Body**

**Traditional interdependence**

- **Toda:** pastoralists of the upper plateau, buffalo, dairies as sacred, patrilineal moieties, vegetarian dairy ritual. They received grain, pottery, music and forest goods; they gave buffalo products, ghee, and ritual status as the "highest" in the local ranking some colonial writers loved.
- **Kota:** artisans and musicians of the same plateau, smiths, potters, and players at Toda funerals. They took Toda dairy gifts and agricultural produce; they gave tools, pots and ceremonial service.

- **Kurumba:** forest specialists, sorcerers or ritual guardians in some accounts, collectors of honey and hill produce, watchers of fields. They mediated forest and plateau.
- **Irula:** also forest and foothill, snake-catching and shifting cultivation in later descriptions, suppliers of forest produce and labour.
- **The pattern is a local jajmani of the hills:** not the north Indian priest-king-peasant set, but **pastoral, artisan, forest**. **Badaga** agriculturists (not in the four names of the question, but in the same landscape) later became the grain power of the plateau, which already shows the system was never sealed.

## Changes

British **tea and wattle plantations** took shola and grazing. Toda munds shrank; buffalo counts fell. **Christian missions and the Arya Samaj**, schools, and Tamil as the state language pulled Kota and Irula toward wage work. Kurumba and Irula entered **FRA, ST lists and forest-department labour**. Toda remain a small ST community with a strong tourist and heritage face; dairy ritual continues in shortened form.

**Walker** documented declining Kota service at Toda funerals. Cash, ration rice and town jobs replace ghee-for-pots. Intermarriage remains rare; interdependence is now **market and state**: the same PHC, the same plantation, the same reserved-school hostel.

- **Law:** all four are **Scheduled Tribes** in Tamil Nadu. **FRA** matters more to Kurumba and Irula forest claims than to Toda dairy. Tourism and an **ASI / state heritage** gaze freeze Toda as a symbol while Kota smithing becomes a dying craft.

The Nilgiri lesson for Paper II is **ecological caste-like specialisation without varna texts**, then **plantation capitalism** as the great breaker.

## Flow diagram

Toda dairy -> Kota craft ritual  
 Kota craft ritual -> Toda dairy  
 Kurumba forest -> Toda dairy  
 Irula forest -> Kota craft ritual  
 Plantation state -> Toda dairy  
 Plantation state -> Kota craft ritual  
 Plantation state -> Kurumba forest  
 Plantation state -> Irula forest

## Conclusion

Toda pastoralism, Kota craft and ceremony, Kurumba and Irula forest skill once locked the **Nilgiri plateau** into one exchange. Plantation, cash and the Tamil Nadu state opened the lock. What remains is identity, ST law and a thinner ritual traffic.

## Facts & figures

### W. H. R. Rivers

Published *The Todas* in 1906, the classic ethnography of Nilgiri buffalo pastoralists.

**Anthony Walker**

Restudied Todas and the Nilgiri inter-tribal economy, documenting decline of old service relations.

**Badaga**

Kannada-speaking cultivators of the plateau who became agriculturally dominant and must be remembered as neighbours of the four.

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