



## **The indigenous badugar of the Nilgiris**

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### **Abstract**

Nilgiris district, also called as „The Nilgirs“, hills“, is one of the smallest District of Tamil Nadu. Etymologically the word „Nilgiris“ means, Blue Mountains“. The district is a hill area of 2549.0 sq.kms. located between 11° 10' and 11°30' N latitude and between 76°25' and 77° 00'E longitude at the junction of the Eastern and the Western Ghats, the two prominent mountain ranges that run almost parallel to the coastline of peninsular India. With an average elevation of 6500 ft. the Nilgiris District is bound on the west by Kerala on the north by Karnataka, and on the Southeast by Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. It therefore occupies the highest and Western most part of Tamil Nadu. The aborigines of the Nilgiris are the Badugar, Todar, Kotar, Kurumbar and Irular. The tribal people differ in their social organisations and marital customs rites and rituals, foods and other customs from the people of the rest of the state. Most of the tribal people speak in their own languages. The culture of these communities, their traditions and practices pervade almost all the aspects of Indian culture and civilization – as the community of the Great Badagas. The study is focused on the Indigenous Badugar of the Nilgiris. My concern at present is of the aboriginal Badugas, from 1812, William Keys to Paul Hockings, and thereafter up to 2007 A.D. all the Westerners had supposed the Badugar, the northerners or migrants from Mysore considering Bada, the north in Kanada and hence Badagas, northerners is an old unestablished theory, at present they are called Badugars because of their Badugu language. As their language is Badugu' so they are Badugar and not migrants.

**Keywords:** Nilgiris, badugas, tribes, migrants, indigenous

### **Introduction**

Nilgiris district, also called as,, The Nilgirs“, hills“, is one of the smallest districts of Tamil Nadu. Etymologically the word „Nilgiris“ means „blue mountains“. The district is a hill area of 2549.0 sq.kms. located between 11° 10' and 11°30' N latitude and between 76°25' and 77° 00'E longitude at the junction of the Eastern and the Western Ghats, the two prominent mountain ranges that run almost parallel to the coastline of peninsular India. With an average elevation of 6500 ft. the Nilgiris District is bound on the West by Kerala on the North by Karnataka, and on the Southeast by Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. It therefore occupies the highest and Western most part of Tamil Nadu. The Badugar were also the original inhabitants of Nilgiris [3] (Francis. W.W, 1908, 128) as that of the aforesaid neighbours. Formerly they were pastor-swiddeners. Their population was 34,152 people in 1908. The most popular people in the Nilgiri district. My concern at present is of the aboriginal Badugas, from 1812, William Keys to Paul Hockings, and thereafter up to 2007 A.D. all the westerners had supposed the Badugar, the Northerners or migrants from Mysore considering Bada, the North in Kanada and hence Badagas, Northerners is an old unestablished theory, at present they are called Badugars because of their Badugu language. As their language is Badugu' so they are Badugar and not migrants.

The above said view as Notherners was totally erased by Halan as they were the aborigines of the Nilgiris, Jakka Parathasarathy has considered them the original inhabitants in the Nilgiris.[8] Since time immemorial till 1799 A.D. the Nilgiris was a part and parcel of the Mysorean hegemony.due to the religious conflicts between the

Vishnavas and Sivates i.e. the Lingayats at Mysore the later were sent out from Ummattur over the Nilgiris.[11](Paul Hockings, 1980, p.18)They came under their chief after 1610 A.D. with Parivars (their own people, follower, supporters and servants) and gradually established their rule over the aborigines. The chiefs and his 'Parivars' were belonged to several sects or groups of the Lingayats faith which was founded in 1160 A.D. by the great saint Basaveswara at Mysore. Their mother tongue was Canarese whereas the parental language of the Badugas is Badugu. All the western writers had considered the migrant Ummattur chief and his retinue with that of the aborigin Badugar as of the same stock, forgetting the ancientness of living of the Badugar century earlier to 1610 A.D.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To represent the unique Baduga community as a traditional community of southern India in to the forefront
2. To process the fundaments of Baduga culture through the traits of casts advocated by veteran social scientists.
3. To show the contour of Baduga not migration

### **Methodology**

The primary source is field data collected from the community on different socio-economic and cultural aspects of their folklife. The secondary source constitutes the research works conducted in similar aspects on Badugas. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative methods are employed in the research process. The research tools like questionnaires, both oral and written interviews were used in data collection. The data is checked for authenticity

through the method of triangulation. Analysis and interpretation are done in the light of latest discourses in social sciences.

## **Discussion**

Several Scholars had treated the indigenous Badugar as migrants, assigning various periods but they have been unable to determine a definite year till date.

The word „Badaga“ means „northerner“ indicating that they came from southern part of Mysore region [2] (Breeks, 1873, p.128). So, the natives of Nilgiris call them as Badaga, the northerner for the original home of these migrants is situated north of Nilgiri region. Before going into the supposed migration of the Baduga community has to be briefly discussed below.

With regard to the theory of supposed migration, the Western writing of the plateau and of its then undeveloped mankind which has no documentary evidence was due to the non-writing nature of tribes. The deficiency in scientific enquire and lack of investigation of the early Western Surveyors perfunctorily relied on the non-informative oral say of the few upland people to form their supposed migratory theory of the Badugar, which is subject to severe scrutiny. Altogether, though the old writers had to trust mainly to spoken details, yet the verbal data to which they had to trust, must have been of a much higher kind than the ordinary discourse. “they were so called from their having settled on the plateau from the northward i.e. Woomatoor, speak the Cannady language and are the Principal inhabitants..... the Lingbund and Thoreas likewise speak the same language and cultivate the land.”<sup>[5]</sup> (William Keys, 1814 in H.B.Grigg Manual, madras 1880. Appendix: XLVIII)

This statement has pellucidly demarcated the people into two categorical divisions, one -the Principal inhabitants and another, the non-Principal Lingbund plus Thores, though both the groups cultivate the land. But, “both the groups likewise speak the Cannady dialect” was the glaring err in it. The mother tongue of the main class is Badugu and modern Kannada is the language of the second band. It is apparent that these three denominations are basically different castes/communities of Hinduism. When their languages and cultures are different the people are unalike. The irrefutable fact in the above affirmation as far as the Nilgiri is concerned, that the chief inhabitants were the aborigines and the ‘second sections’ were the expanders from Woomatoor and other parts of Mysore, on their own Linguistic and political territory.

A subscriber in his copy of a letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 1819, to the editor of the Government Gazettee, also without any analysis of the differentiations in their language and culture had a hasty predilection of them as one social unit and said that they have emigrated from the neighbourhood of Mysore 300 years ago.<sup>[5]</sup> (H.B. Grigg’s Manual 1880) His incomplete but inelegant view would have been put into strict scientific enquire for its historicity by the subsequent surveyor Evans Macpherson. He too by his speedy misidentification had superficially amalgamated the incoherent sectors as of similar nature. According to him, Badughers had a tradition amongst themselves, they have migrated from Mysore many years ago. But he had confessed, “I am sensible the above account is very imperfect and yet with little calculated to give a proper description of the hills or the manners and customs of its

inhabitants.... I must solicit a partial perusal of the remarks.” again he had expressed that, “I can do the subject with little justice ..... but with much diffidence” and imposed the incompatible antiquity of the second groups over the native Badugar. Because of his uncertainty of truth, he had requested for a partial examination of his remarks. His behest would that of the second unity only. But the reality was the incredulity in his statement. B.S.Ward would have yielded to the plea to erase have migrated from Woomatur. The Woomatur migrants were the people of the second wing as mentioned above. The said surveyors were not the academicians or critics. When they had not surveyed an acre of the plateau as Mr. J.Sullivan accused how would they have penetrated into the antiquity of the aboriginal Principal group?

The valid or invalid army men also had contended with the misconceived origin of the first unit without any fresh finding. The civil administrators too had endorsed it. The missionaries also had their share in fixing the ancestry/migratory state of the first group. “missionaries record what an anthropologist finds vastly inconvenient to his theory, they may be dismissed with a sneer at missionary evidence or may be ignored. Like all other class of men, they have their own iota. The penultimate leftouts were the anthropologists, who have tried in various angles only on the preconceived infections theory have not arrived at any definite conclusion. So that the intricacy should finally be dispelled by the Historians.

## **I earnestly solicit an examination of the identical statements**

1. The Burghers or Vuddaghurs,” signifying literally people of the north, are supposed to have emigrated to the Nilgiris from the northern part of the Mysore or Canara during a season either of famine or political persecution.<sup>[10]</sup> (Ouchterlony,1847:58)
2. They are supposed to have migrated to the Nilgiris from Mysore. <sup>[2]</sup>(Breeks J.W.,1873:4)
3. The Badagas or Vadagas are supposed to have come from the north.<sup>[6]</sup>(Hunter W.W.,1886:67,310
4. The word Badaga means “people of the North and hence it is supposed that they have come originally from the North, probably the northern part of Mysore and Canara.<sup>[12]</sup>(Sheering M.A.,1974:171)
5. We are thus left with the presumption that the Badaga are so called because of their Northern origin. These views are indecisive. When ‘Bada’ means north in Kanada and Badaga, the northerners, then the northern migrants to Karnataka are also Badugar’. Why no one has cared to dispute the supposition? A proverb states, “All are presumed good, till they are found in a fault”

## **Now the flaw is because of the following vindications**

1. Supposition, is not the fashion of writing history in the present day.
2. It was far more extensively used owing to the paucity of the penmanship of the above authors
3. Here the most remarkable fact is one writer quoting another who has quoted another
4. The deduction of the Western writers was sequacious, stereotyped and impetuous, which had proved that there was no principle of independent research and investigation

5. This has been the same status quo maintained by the Gazetteer of 1995, Paul Hockings in his anthropological work, "Fieldiana of 2001, Feb 28<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Jakka Parthasarathy (the Badagas of the Nilgiri District 2008) and B. Balasubramaniam( Pame, 2010

## Discussion

According to J.S. Bhandari, "The principle of investigation is to be obtained from independent accounts of different people and such accounts are to be cross-examined for any discrepancies and in such discrepancies all attempts must be made to direct corroboration i.e. obtaining the same information in different ways."<sup>[1]</sup> (Bhandari J.S.,1997:XV) All the Western writers, till today have not attempted to find out meticulously the ancestry of the aboriginal Badugar in this systematic approach of finding actualities. Instead, they have tried in a circumlocution manner to benefit the supposition theory of the previous writers. So, the unhealthy migratory theory which has been formed by an inaccurate finding on the foundation of salt.

The early western writers had identified them Bergiers, Bergies, Burghers and Burgess due to their inhabitable land, its topography, climate frost and fort.

Berg- Mountain or mass of ice <sup>[9]</sup>(Onion C.T., 1965)

Berg- a mountain or hill. On account of this the early colonial writers had labelled them, the residents of the mountains or hilly frost land as bergiers or Bergies.

Burg- a fortress or walled town

Burg- the name fortress or walled town is also extended to the country about such a fortress. Hence Burgess means the inhabitants of a borough fortress town. The early Western writers might have called them 'Burghers and Burgess', because of their habitations were encircled by such forts in the Nilgiri

Burgess- Means a citizen or a Native. It suggests that they were the citizens of the high altitude or citizens of those forts. According to the report of Father Finicio 1603 they were called the "Badger" (Prof.Jarl Charpentier- Father Fenicio's visit to the Todas in 1603, University of Upsela, Introduction,1933:193) it means merchants or middle men in the barter system between parties. Vaduga was a subdivision of the Banajiga caste of merchants and traders in Karnataka. Baduga was a pastoralist and swiddener. His well known trade was barter before 1822.

The Western writers had never established the northern migration of the Badugar. Their concept and concord were based on the supposition and of ambiguous terms. The supposed theory of migration of the first category from Mysore over the Tamil region is herewith of the first category from Mysore over the Tamil region is herewith defaced, because such a theory was supposed on the supposed identity of both the different groups as one unit. To obliterate it the modern Kannada speaking people along with their chiefs, hunters, tax collectors and servants who have expanded over the plateau with dissimilar social order, religion and culture from that of the first unit are to be segregated. a careful adherence of this motif would provide the nativity of the common Badugar.

## Discussion

Which is a tribe or who are all tribes? This question has at times been asked but no standard term has been agreed to denote the people, who are classified as of tribal origin." In Indian languages we do not have any synonym for the word

tribe. "the trem tribe used to mean the primitive or barbarous communities by the colonial masters, J.H.Hutton (1946) <sup>[7]</sup> has submitted the term, primitive tribe for forest tribe. According to G.S.Ghurye, (1977:3)<sup>[4]</sup> the term primitive tribe was often used by Westerners to identify " a primary aggregate of people living in a primitive or barbarous conditions under a headman or chief .... Various anthropologists define tribe as people at earlier stage of evolution of society. This moralistic overtone was later on reduced by using terms like 'pre-state society,' 'pre-literate society,' 'folk society or simple society.'<sup>[13]</sup> (Vidyut Joshi, 1998:16) They were also known as aborigines. Words such as Adivasi, vanavasi, indigenous, adimjati, Girijans and unadvanced are also used to specify the tribe. But all the impressions accept some common features of Badugas are as follows:

1. **Definite Geographical territory:** they had been living in the Nilgiri and no other habitat outside its territory
2. **common name:** Badugar is the common name of their community. Those who do not take the name are outsiders of their society
3. **Common language:** Badugu is their common language, rich in idioms proverbs, folk songs, legends and moral dictates etc. tribal languagees have no alphabet. They socialize only through their language. It is the cultural identity of their homogenous group which is a tribal feature.
4. **common occupation:** it was forest-collection, herding plus swidden farming. Their agricultural tools and implements were sedentary
5. **lineage and clan society:** the tribes of india are divided into lineages and recognise both the types of kinship consanguineous and affinal. Among the Badugar it is based on the common ancestor from the nuclear family to agnates and cognates. Kinship terminology is based on blood relationship, patrilineal and matrilineal. There are two or more clans constitute a village each clan occupied a definite area within the village which is divided into units. The boundary is clearly enmarked which the Badugar call 'Unde'.
6. **Isolation:** Until the occupation of the British in 1822, the inhabitants are in the secluded district. The Burghers for several centuries secluded from the rest of the Indian world
7. **Sense of belonging or unity:** they always feel oneness among them. When there is any crisis the entire community gathers together to face the situation and also shares the sorrows and happiness of the individuals in the villages or community. Their houses are not separate tenements but a line of dwellings under one continuous roof and divided by party walls.
8. **Religion:** their spiritual character is based on their obedience to Hinduism. They are polytheistic, pantheistic and monotheistic in nature. The Badugar too worship it at home and also in their temples. They have crossed from idolless to idolators. Their religion is characterised by beliefs which are fulfilled by rites. Their ancestors come in a large share of honour and such devotion signifies animism, which is akin to primitive tribal religion.
9. **Superstitious:** their beliefs are based on magic witchcraft and chanting of charms. they are outside the range of scientific observation and believe in witchcraft to a deplorable extent, and are fully persuaded. The

- Burghers are the most superstitious race. Several of their festivals are officiated by the Kurumber.
10. **Timidity:** they were not warrior class, never served as soldiers under the Mysorean dynasties. Their known hunting weapons were primitive. The 'Marves' (Badugar) are a timid race
  11. **Marriage and Divorce:** the initiative for the marriage is taken by the groom's parents among the tribals and this is the same among the Badugar. The payment of bride-price,rather than dowry is often cited by Indian anthropologists as tribal practice. Similar practice is prevailing among the Badugar. Widow remarriage is universal among the tribal people in India. In the Badugar society, no stigma is attached to divorced women in the event of their remarriages. Pregnant women coming forth to accept a man as father to her would be child is a primitive trait.
  12. **Folklore:** their folk life is surrounded by songs epics ballads legends tales folkplay, riddles and recreation. This is the mirror of their tribal life." A large number of folk tales clearly indicate their literary origin impact of mythology, the value orientation of time and tradition depth.
  13. **Common culture:** An unique culture meant for their own and no other community bears this culture, other than a few similarities among their neighbouring tribes.
  14. **Panchayat:** Till this day they had been practicing their own panchayat system and have their village headman, commune heads, divisional headmen and the paramount chief. The leadership is tribal, time honoured and independent.
  15. **Disposal of dead:** the Badugar had been cremating the dead. "Cremation is a common practice of the South Indian Tribes." inclement weather and epidemic death made cremation impractical sometimes. Then they ought to opt for burial with the tribal rituals.

### Conclusion

The basic identity of a tribal group is its continuity of ethnicity. It keeps the grounds bound together by a number of ties, namely culture, language, religion customs and traditions". It is a group of people having common language, customs and practice inhabiting a particular geographical area. Hence, the Badugas were originally hill tribes. The Badagas were described as 'Primitive Tribe' by the British Government. The State of Tamil Nadu made a recommendation for inclusion of 'Badagas Community' in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tamil Nadu, vide letter dated 27 July 1990. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs brings forth the earlier proceedings connected to the inclusion of 'Badaga Community' in the list of Scheduled Tribes in the State of Tamil Nadu. The Registrar General of India appears to have raised some objections on the issue of including Badaga Community under Scheduled Tribe. A section native community is not in favour of their inclusion in the Tribes.. The State Government was called upon to submit a fresh proposal taking into account the observation made by the Registrar General of India. Representations dated 28 October, 2013 and 8 November, 2013 submitted by the Badagas is now pending with the authorities. They were forwarded by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, to the Secretary, Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department (Tamil Nadu) for follow up action. Hence, the ethnography of Badaga community when processed through the above

criteria that stand as parameters for being a tribe or migrated dilemma may be solved. Today the Badugas have been included in the Data Base of World's Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations Mountain Partnership.

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