Chapter 4
TRIBAL POLITY-III
BADAGAS

The Badagas are the largest indigenous community among the tribal groups on the Nilgiri hills. As discussed earlier, the Badagas migrated from the plains of Mysore to the North of the Nilgiri Hills, in the decades following the Muslim invasion that destroyed the great Hindu empire of Vijayanagar in 1565 A.D. The Badagas were leading a settled life with the Todas for more than 150 years and were in contact with the Europeans for about 150 years. The other tribes inhabiting the Nilgiris for centuries had maintained a well-balanced system of communal relations with the Badagas. The Badaga society has undergone significant changes in the second half of the Nineteenth century.

The Badagas settled on the hills and began cultivation with a mutual inter-tribal relationship with the other inhabitants of the hills. The Kota legend records this. “If you are to go on making cultivation on the lands of our district and eating and prospering, to us Kotas you must give a tax of grain said to be one quarter of the yield. To the Todas you must give a winnowing basket of grain to each house. To the Kurumbas you must give the village tax of four annas and a meal paid by each house.”

This shows clearly that the Badagas are later entrants to the Nilgiris. It also shows that the Kotas, Todas and Kurumbas were in positions of power to demand tributes from the Badagas. Later this equation was changed and the Badagas claimed to be superior to the other tribes. The above statement quoted, shows this was not always the case.

In return, the Kotas who are known to be great artisans were to provide implements to the Badagas, Todas supply cane, churning stick and milk. The Kurumbas had to keep watch so that no one would attack the Badagas. They ate in Badaga houses and remained there, watching over their house. Here again can be discerned a system of mutual co-existence with the new comers and the relationship was amicable and not hostile, which speaks well for all these tribal communities.
Living amidst the tribes, the Badagas gradually lost their former identity as the 'Okkaligas' or 'Lingayats' of Mysore. Instead, they became a tribe among tribes and remained so until 1947. The Government of India has not designated the Badagas as a scheduled tribe.

This study will examine the population, settlements, polity and governance of the Badagas in the following pages.

### Badaga Proportion

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Sources census of India: Hockings 1980.

### Badaga Settlements

The Badaga settlements are located between 2000 to 3000 M.S.L, which accounts for their success in the agriculture. They prefer to live in close-knit community; hence, they build their houses in a row. A Badaga hamlet is called as ‘hatti’. Each ‘hatti’ consists of a number of houses.

### Socio-Political Organisation

Badaga family is joint patrilineal. On the death of the founding father, the brothers are expected to leave his house and establish separate homes. The dispersal of the household has many causes.

1. **Architectural Cause**

   Each Badaga house ‘mane’ has three or four small rooms. In order to make the living comfortable and to overcome the difficulty of shortage of space, the elder brothers of the house move out.

2. **Legal Cause**

   According to the Badaga law and custom, the youngest son should always inherit the father's house and he should take care of the old parents. Financial provision should be made for the older brothers to build separate houses.
3. Psychological Cause

Total lack of privacy and elder brother’s uneasy feeling of indebtedness to the youngest brother who legitimately owns the house \(^1\) leads to the elder brother leaving their parental house. All the Badaga household belonging to one lineage lives in the same ‘hatti’, and they form nuclear families as the father of the family dies or even before it \(^2\).

'Hattis’ the Badaga Hamlets

The basic unit of the Badaga Social organisation is the family. The eldest male member is the head of the family. Many such families ‘mane’ constitute a ‘hatti’ or a village \(^3\). Unlike the ‘Toda Mund’, ‘Kota Kokkal’ or ‘Irula Mottas’, the ‘Badaga hattis’ have a number of houses, built in lines. Every family belonging to a particular ‘hatti’ invariably belongs to same clan. All living in a ‘hatti’ consider each other as brothers and sisters. There is no possibility of having matrimonial alliance among them. Each ‘hatti’ has a temple of its own, a tree under which they have meetings and a burial ground where they bury the dead of that particular ‘hatti’ \(^4\).

Badaga houses are built of mud, stone pillars and tiles. All the houses are similar and built lengthwise, with each room one behind the other. They have an upstairs ‘attic’ to store their traditional things. Of late, these kinds of houses are gradually disappearing and instead modern houses are built.

The Caste System of the Badagas

K.P.Bahadur uses the word caste or sect; Hockings uses the standard term in anthropology for a social unit made up of a cluster of clans ‘phratries’ for the different groups of Badagas. This chapter deals with the different divisions that go into the making of the Badagas. The life styles of the different groups are analysed.

The Badaga society too has its own peculiar caste system. The diet of the Badaga reveals the position of his caste in the society i.e., either high or low depending upon the food habit, he adopts. Among the Badagas the vegetarians are of high caste and others are inferior to them.
The Badagas have six main divisions; five of them are considered as high caste. They are called ‘Wodaya’, ‘Haruva’, ‘Adhikari’, ‘Kanakka’, ‘Gowda’ or ‘Badaga’ \(^{19}\). The Toreyas are considered as inferior to the others. The whole community is broadly known as the Badagas. For an outsider, it may not be possible to discriminate one from the other.

**Udaya**

The other sects of the Badagas consider the Udayas as the aristocrats. They are said to be a branch of the ruling family of Mysore \(^{20}\). The Udayas are Lingayats, or the ‘Veera Saivaites’. They are commonly called ‘Lingakattis’ for they tie a small pendant in the shape of Shivalinga around their neck. \(^{21}\). The Udayas do not dine with the other castes, as they consider themselves as ‘Gurus’ or Priests. They are strict vegetarians. Their important festival is ‘Mahasivarathri’. This festival is celebrated on the birth star of Lord Shiva, which usually continues for five days with pomp and splendour. On the last day of the celebration, boys who have completed 12 years of age are given a small pendant of Shivalinga by the priest to be tied round their neck. Some of these

**Badaga**

Lingayaths have matrimonial contact with the Lingayats of Mysore. Such people are not considered as Badagas by the rest of the society \(^{22}\). These customs show that the Udayas belongs to the greater caste system of Hindus across India.

**Haruva**

Next in the rank, come the ‘Haruvas’. The name ‘Haruva’ is derived from the Canarese word, which means ‘to be or to pray’. They acted as the priests of the Badagas \(^{23}\). They are strict vegetarians but are not ‘Lingayats’. They claim themselves as Brahmins and they wear a sacred thread across their left shoulder. However, they cannot be called as Brahmins for the simple reason that they have no special ceremony for investiture of the sacred thread. Added to that they have only one thread around their shoulder, whereas Brahmins generally have three strings before their marriage and four afterwards. They do not consider themselves as twice born. From the folklore of the Badagas, we come to know that their first settlers did not bring any womenfolk. Therefore, they entered into marriage relations with all the other sub-sects except the Torayas \(^{24}\).
Adhikaris

The ‘Adhikaris’ are the next in the hierarchy of the society. The name is derived from the Tamil word ‘Adhikari’ which means, Chieftain. Probably they must have acted as Chieftains and Masters at the time of the migration to the hills. They are also strict vegetarians but marriage tie-ups are allowed with the other five sub-sects but not with the Torayas. ‘Adhikaris’ are divided into two sects -

(a) ‘Lingadhikaris’ who wear ‘Lingam’ and
(b) ‘Maitadhikaris’ who come from the village of ‘Nellithorai’.

Kanakkas

The Kanakkas are said to be the accountants and the surveyors of the land. The Kanakkas were solely responsible for maintaining the accounts and the land survey. According to Paul Hockings ‘Kanakkas are brought from the plains to maintain the accounts of the Badagas. Their early writings and accounts are in Tamil and not in Canarese’.

They also acted as physicians and exorcists. They are the shrewd and cunning people of the Badagas. The Kanakkas first inhabited Jagadala, a Badaga village. The Kanakkas are the worshippers of Lord Shiva. They are non-vegetarians. They enter into matrimonial alliances with the other five sub-sects.

Badaga or Gowda

Almost 80% of the total Badaga population of Nilgiris is the Gowdas. The word Gowda also points out to their derivation from the Canarese farmers and cattle breeders known by that name. They occupy about 300 villages in the Nilgiris. They intermarry with the other sub-sects, and except in name there is actually no difference between them either in the social customs or in their beliefs. The Badagas are mostly non-vegetarians. If a non-vegetarian Badaga girl is married, to a Haruva vegetarian boy then she should remain a strict vegetarian and her children are called ‘Haruvas’. On the other hand, if a Badaga boy marries a vegetarian Adhikarai girl, then she has to change her diet or can follow her vegetarian diet but her children will remain as non-vegetarians. Such incidences are common in the society. Once again the common belief that women are treated equal to men among the Badagas is only an idea but they are not treated so.
Toreyas

Toreyas are the lowest clan of the Badaga rank, and are not permitted to eat food with the rest of the community. They are said to have worked as guards and menial servants to other Badagas. Like all the other Badagas the Torays, too are primarily cultivators. In addition, they acted as the messengers of the Badaga society. For this service, they receive money and grain from each house. The houses of the Torayas were on the outskirts of the Badaga village, and they were considered as untouchables. They were given plots of land by the high castes to cultivate the necessary food grains, in return for their services. They are prohibited from marrying the other high caste Badagas. They are the endogamous sect and marriage between Toraya girls and boys of the same village are allowed.

Toreyas do a number of menial duties for the Badaga village. The Toraya was the village servant. He helped in carrying the corpse to the burial ground, conveyed the news of death from village to village and he was the first to be shaved when a death occurs in the village. He assisted the Badaga men in guarding the field in the night from wild animals and robbers. He escorted the women of the high castes when she visited her mother’s house. He was the personal attendant of the village headman called ‘Maniakarar’. Moreover, it was his duty to inform the surrounding villages about the date and time of the Panchyat meetings. He informed the decision of the Panchyat to the neighbouring villages.

Today their position and status is completely different from what they were in the beginning of the present century. They are no longer the servants of the rest of the Badagas. They do not shave their head for the death of a Badaga, nor do they convey the message from village to village. They are not living in the outskirts of the Badaga villages. They have their own villages and fields. Like the rest of them, the Toraya too, now a day are employed in offices, factories and schools. It is very difficult to distinguish a Toraya among the Badagas. That is because the food habit, the dressing and the dialect are the same for the Toraya and the Badaga. It is only with the help of the village from where he hails he can be identified as a Toraya. They too call themselves Badagas. An outsider cannot differentiate a Badaga from a Toraya.
Though they are considered menial among the Badagas, yet their position is far better in comparison with the schedule caste of other societies.

**Badaga Converts**

The Christian converts are considered by the rest of the society as lower in rank than that of the Torayas. They are treated as outcastes and in no social functions, the Christians are invited. The Christian villages are not considered as ‘Hatties’ or Badaga villages. There are a few villages around Ketti and Katteri where the converted Christians live. The Badaga Christians are the most advanced section of the society. They are the first to receive modern education to enter colleges and University. They are the big landowners and planters. They have advanced view regarding the status of women. In spite of their advancement in the field of education and economy, matrimonial alliances do not take place between the converts and the Badagas. For most of the Toreyas are the converted Christians.

The Badaga caste system looks very strange to an outsider, for inspite of distinct caste like Wodaya, Haruva, Kanakka and Adhikari they have different ‘Kulams’ or sects. There are a number of Kulams existing among them. Of these, sixteen seems to be prevalent. The members of a ‘kulam’ are considered as brother and they occupy certain villages, which are called as brethren villages. Marriage is not allowed among the brethren villages. This is in marked contrast to the other Hindu caste system, where caste is more powerful than the ‘Kulam’. To an average Badaga, the village from where he hails and the ‘kulam’ to which he belongs counts more, than the caste. This peculiarity of the caste system is the speciality of the Badagas of Nilgiris.

The Badagas consider themselves as superior to the other people. They address the non-Badaga by the term ‘Holaya’. Non-Badagas were generally not allowed to live in the Badaga ‘hattis’. Food and water are served to an outsider in separate utensils kept for that purpose. As days passed by this system also began to change. Now in the modern houses there is not much discrimination.

The Badagas show great respect and reverence to their elders. Members of the brethren villages address other male members as ‘Ayya’ -grandfather, ‘Mamma’- uncle, ‘Anna’- elder brother, ‘Thamma’- younger brother and females as ‘Ethai’- grand mother, ‘Mammi’- aunty, ‘Akka’- elder sister, ‘Ammai’- younger sister according to
their age. The youngsters salute their elders by bowing their head slightly and the elders accept the salutation by touching their head with their right hand and thus bless them.

Every Badaga village belongs to one particular clan or another, and hence is exogamous. In some ‘Gauda Hattis’ a few Haruva, Kanakka, Adhikari or Toreya families exist. The Social organisation of the Badaga Community lays the foundation to the political organisation. No doubt, the Wodayars play a superior role and the Toreyas an inferior. Even this system has a great influence in the marriages between the two sects. The sect decides the importance of a person in the political organisation.

**Political Organisation**

The Badagas had a chief for the whole community. Hockings calls this kind of political organisation in the words of anthropologists as ‘Chiefdom’, for they were under a Paramount chief. Tribes also had this kind of system where a single leader held the ultimate power of control.

The Badaga Panchyat system had different tiers. They had their own version of democracy administered by the elders through their Panchyat System. The Badaga administration worked according to the four hill regions - ‘Na:kubetta’- Todana:du, Te:kunadu, Poranga:du and Kundena:du- the Toda divisions.

In each of these places there were many Badaga families belonging to different clans. Each place consists of 30-40 ‘hattis’ with each ‘hatti’ having 4 to 5 houses in the early years, where as now each ‘hatti’ consists of 80 to 100 families. A single person from the clan, which has the largest number of houses in a ‘hatti’, became the headman of that ‘hatti’. Thus, the clan having largest number of houses on the ‘betta’ meaning hill could become the headman of that ‘betta’. There are many villages on a hill and each village has a headman. These headmen of other villages function under the headman of the ‘betta’. Ultimately the four heads and council members of four ‘bettas’ - mountain council or all-Nilgiri council are subordinates to the single ‘chief’ or headman of the whole Badaga community. At present Mr. Ayaaroo is the headman of ‘naakubetta’.

The office of the headman was hereditary in each small community as well as in all the four divisions of Nilgiris, e.g. even today, the headman of Tuneri village continues
'Naakubetta' Meeting
to be the headman of Todanadu. Moreover, he is the paramount chief of the entire Badaga Community.

**History of the Political Organisation of the Badagas - The ‘Manta’**

According to the Badagas, ‘Naaku Betta’ denotes the Nilgiris. During 1991, there were 425 ‘Badaga Hattis’. When two tribal groups live in the same region, problems might arise between them. The Badagas entry into the Nilgiris helped resolve such problems. In fact, they became the chief negotiators between tribes. Thus, the Badagas used their positions as new entrants in a very diplomatic and fair way. The Todas and the other tribes wanted them as peacemakers because of their ability to decide wisely.

The early Badaga settlers on the hills filled the power vacuum, which existed among the tribes before the coming of the Badagas. Among the early names of the Badaga leaders, Hucchi Gauda is remembered until today. He became the first headman, founded the first settlement at Tuneri, and is considered as the ancestor of that village which gave rise to eighteen successive headmen who were also the paramount chiefs of the entire community and even for the Kotas, as well as a court of last resort for the Todas 46.

**Hierarchy**

At each level - village, commune, division and entire community, the responsible headman or the affected party can call together a council ‘manta’ where the elders and elder sons of the families will gather.

Every case has to pass through this hierarchy of councils. If the lower level of ‘manta’ cannot solve the issue, only then it will be taken up to the next council. The case cannot be taken up in the highest level of meeting where the whole community is involved, unless it is an issue concerning the whole Badaga Community-all the four ‘bettas’. 47

If a judgment is not satisfactory to the disputed party only then, they can appeal to the next higher level of council. At each level, the headman is obliged to confirm that the case has passed though the lower level of councils.

Another unique aspect of the Badaga law is that if the headman of a higher level finds that the judgment passed by the lower level council is wrong or unsatisfactory,
they can punish the headman who gave the verdict. This acted as a check on the headman at each level, to be impartial, just and correct in decision-making.

The Badaga Community Council

Powers and Functions of the ‘Manta’

When a dispute arises between two persons or between families or parties the village headman calls a council of head, from each household who inevitably should be the male headman of the family. The whole procedure takes place under his ‘gaundike’ or headmanship. Another elder of the village who is considered wise will assist him.

If the conflict is between the villages then the headmen of both or as many villages involved form the council. After listening to the discussion from both the parties, and the witness the headman will pronounce the punishment after consulting his other members. Even if Kotas or Todas are involved in the dispute, their headmen will also be present.

During the proceedings, no woman is allowed to attend the meeting. If they happened to be the witness, they can speak to the headman in private. Toreyas are allowed to attend the council but cannot take active part in the deliberations. Male witnesses are expected to come and this they believe would make the deliberations easy and faster.
Children do not come to this council. A man’s family or lineage or friends normally support him in any dispute and provide most useful ‘witness’ in the form of evidence, written documents, bill, receipts etc. Besides their testimony, re-enactment of events, oath-taking to test a man’s innocence and using god as an instrument, postponement of the case to get evidence were also the methods used in finding out the truth.

There is an interesting incident, which the Badagas of Nadukkal, a village near Kotagiri, recall even today. This incident shows clearly the time taken by the responsible Village Council to impart justice to the victims. The narration of the incident goes thus; certain brothers had a dispute regarding the buffalo. The younger brother had taken the good buffalo of the elder brother in his absence and left his own less productive buffalo in the elder brother’s stable. On his return, the elder brother identified his buffalo by tasting the milk of his own buffalo. When the younger brother refused to return the buffalo to the elder brother, he sought the help of the Village Council. The wise village head delays the judgment. The village head calls both the brothers to his house on three different days. Each time the brothers came to his house he got different kinds of meals prepared for them. Each time the elder brother was able to identify the grains and greens used in the meal just by tasting the food. Every time the elder brother said about the correct edibles used, the younger brother disagreed with him and mentioned some other names of the grains and greens. The village head realised that the elder brother had a better sense of taste and the taste of his buffalo’s milk definitely should be apt. Hence, the village head passed the judgment favouring the elder brother. This indicates that there were wise and prudent councils in the Badaga community. Many such illustrations and tell-tales among the Badagas show that they had a strong Village Council to settle the matters.

Crimes and Punishments

There were occasions when one party was punished, but punishing both the disputants was also in practice. Usual issues for which the council met were; murder, theft, influencing the other for suicide, rape, land dispute, breach in obeying customs and traditions, illegal marriage and also the disputes unsettled in Toda ‘Noim’ and Kota council, for similar offences find place for discussion in Badaga Council.
If there was a planned murder of an adult, the culprit would be hanged. Though there was a judgment of this sort, there is no reference or proof of such crime committed in the past. Instead, there are incidents of unpremeditated murder, for which the accused had to remain in servitude to the victim’s family. Later on during the time of the British, when the use of currency came into existence the punishment was changed as a fine of Rs.48/- to be paid to the council.

Inducing or causing someone to commit suicide, was also as serious an offence as murder and the punishment was servitude to the victim’s family as in the case of murder or a fine of Rs.48/- to be paid to the council.

Failure to obey an important order of the headman results in ostracism. The other issues that bring the punishment of ostracism are, disrespecting the council, failure in paying the fine decided by the village head, and rape of a father’s wife. If ostracism was the punishment pronounced in the early days, the British period replaced it with a fine of Rs.48/-, which had to be paid to the council.

For the rape of a son’s wife, the punishment decided in the council was a fine of Rs.24/- or less. This punishment could be reduced if the woman had consented. For the rape of a brother’s wife, a minimal fine was collected.

The punishment for beating a victim with leather or any other object was considered as a crime and the severity of the punishment was more. The accused has to shave his head in front of the people of the village. During the later days, this punishment was replaced with a fine of Rs.24/- to the council.

If a woman beats a victim with a broom, she is made to parade through the village with a basket of ash on her head. Of course, this also was changed into a fine of Rs.24/-, which will be paid by the woman to the council through a male member of her family.

For minor misdemeanor, the guilty should bow down inside the circle of the council while all the members of the Village Council are gathered for the meeting. Murder and inducing suicide are considered as serious offences. Whereas attempted suicide is not considered an offence.
Though sometimes the above norms were followed in predicting punishments, normally the punishments were not a fixed one. The headman could alter or change the method of punishment in each case according to the circumstances, the background of the accused, the economic standard of the parties and the severity of the crime.

The local administration of the Badaga hatties as well as the naaku betta was a successful one. The villagers respected the elders and the council and they commanded respect from the people. The judgment of the Badaga headmen must have been so efficient, that the Todas and the Kotas approached the Badaga Heads to settle their problems as well. These aborigines or the tribes of the Nilgiris who in fact owned the whole of Nilgiris, before the coming of the Badagas, have in due course of time accepted the supremacy of their decision-making or Legislation. The reason may be that the Badagas formed the majority population by then. They are the ones who introduced the art of cultivation on the hills. Therefore, the Todas and Kotas might have regarded the Badagas superior to them. There are also evidences where the Badaga chiefs imparted wise judgments in their own community as well as to the Tribes.

**Local Administration of the Badagas during British Period**

Badagas were the masters of the Nilgiris, since their settlement on the Hills. However, after the advent of the British on the hills, the British ruled Badagas indirectly but their administration had no effect on the Badaga Village Council. They did not patronise the British legal system, instead, they kept away from it and its officers. They preferred to have their own traditional system of village maintenance. The office of village headman continued to exist in their village government and the British gave this headman the title ‘Manegar’. ‘Manegars’ according to the British were the ‘gaudas’, or headman at the commune level.

Until the end of the 19th Century, this system of having ‘monegar’ prevailed. However, towards the end of that century, the District Collector in the main communes appointed ‘monegar’, and the village head was selected by the Badagas both at the village and at the commune levels and received the title ‘Sub-monegar’ and a small salary from the British. The British also created the post of accountant called ‘Karnam’, to keep village records.
Though the tribes as well as the Badagas of the hills were alien to the election and real politics, after the British arrival and the First World War, the elected Panchyat became the official organ of Local Government. The Village Panchyat though functioned as a governmental body, almost all the powers of decision-making remained in the hands of the traditional headman and his council. The only difference was that criminal cases were to be reported to the police and were dealt in the law court but small cases were settled by the headman himself.

In spite of British influence, the village folk respect their headman and obey his commands. Their community spirit was not disturbed much by the British laws and rule.

**Badagas in the Post-Independent Period**

In the name of modernity and education, the Badagas appeal to the courts. They also feel that their system of Village Council was more effective, easier, impartial and faster than the judgment or court proceedings of today.

After Independence, the Panchyat system continued, with many powers vested in its Local Administration. The Badaga community holds the name of their ‘commune’ high. So any crime however serious or trivial it is, they prefer to settle it among themselves with the headman and the Village Council, instead of dragging the whole problem into a police station or to a court. They do not like to wash their dirty linen in public, and thus they protect the name of their village from the dishonour of a police investigation and loose gossip. This is the same reason, why in modern times they try to resolve their cases in the lower level of councils, and prevent it from reaching higher councils.

In spite of settling most of the cases within the local council, there are quite a many cases, which are judged by a law court. This kind of administration is called as ‘ambilegal’ by Paul Hockings in his Ancient Hindu Refuges.

Even today, the Badagas prefer to settle their matters in their Panchyat than to appeal to the courts. This shows the efficiency and swiftness of Local Government in the community.

As far as politics is concerned, there are MLAs and MPs from the Badaga community since 1935 and 1955 respectively. The first Badaga to enter Politics was H.B.Ari
Gowder, a university-educated Gouda. He was from Hubballthalai village, Nilgiris, the eldest son of Belli Gowder, who was the then Railway contractor. He served as:

(a) A member of the Madras Legislative Council (M.L.C.) for more than a term.

(b) As member of Madras Legislative Assembly for more than a term.

(c) As the Founder-President, Nilgiris Co-operative Marketing Society (1936).

(d) President, Nilgiris Board, for several terms with almost the same powers as the Collector.

A Congress candidate defeated him in 1946 but in 1952-57 he had another opportunity to become M.L.A. as an independent candidate.

Apart from his achievement in the political arena, he was considered as the 'uncrowned king of the Nilgiris' according to Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, the then Chief Minister of Madras Presidency. He could command and demand the Badaga community, and they obeyed him.

Coming back to the Local Government among the Badagas, the village headman holds the power except in serious cases such as murder.

Even today, the Badaga meetings take place periodically, "thousands of Badagas both men and women gather in a place, clad in their traditional attire, from various parts of Nilgiris to discuss their problems". This meeting is called as "Badaga Convention". The Badagas call it as ‘Naakubetta’ meeting, in which even Badaga Women take Part. In this, the headman of all the four ‘Nadus’ occasionally meet in Udhagamandalam when called by the paramount chief of the Badagas, 'naku betta gauda' literally meaning four mountains' head man.

During the initial days, the British administrators thought it expedient generally to leave the tribes alone, because the task of administration in the hill areas was difficult and costly. Secondly, it was considered desirable to keep away the tribes from possible political influence from the world outside. Thirdly, some of the British officers genuinely felt that left to themselves the tribal people would remain a happier lot. The Scheduled District Act of 1874 had kept most of these areas administratively separate. The same
situation was allowed to continue under the Government of India Acts 1909, 1919 and 1935. It was after Independence that the active participation of the tribes in the Local Governments is seen in a great number. Of course, there were few political personalities in the Nilgiris in the Badaga community as mentioned earlier. The role of Akkamma Devi, the first and the only Badaga woman as the M.P. cannot be left unnoticed.

**Inter-Communal Relationships**

The Badaga community, from its existence on Nilgiris had a cordial relationship with the rest of the tribal communities. There was a mutual dependence on one another. The Todas supplied milk and ghee to the close by Badaga ‘hattis’, to the Kotas, Irulas and Kurumbas. In return, the Badagas gave grains and vegetables to the Todas. In the political arena, the Todas invited a Badaga village head during the council meeting. Even if the decision-making or coming to a consensus was found difficult in a Toda ‘Noim’, a Badaga village headman was called into the Noim to handle the difficult task. The verdict passed by the Badaga headman was considered as final.

The Kotas supplied iron implements, silver ornaments and mud pots to the Todas, Badagas, Irulas and Kurumbas. The Badagas shared grains in exchange. Even the Kotas invited them to their annual festivals. The Kotas played instruments for the Badagas for their funeral and festivals.

The Irulas and Kurumbas brought forest produce - honey, bamboos to the Todas, Kotas and Badagas for which in return they gave milk products, iron implements, mud pots and grains from the field respectively. The Kurumbas also had an added duty of protecting the Badaga hatti from the magical spell of the other Kurumbas. Often the Kurumba ‘Combaiss’ are found very close to Badaga ‘hattis’. They were even sleeping on the verandah of Badaga houses. The Kurumbas played instruments for the Badaga dance. There are also evidences to show that the Kurumbas treated other tribal members for their illness, since they were well versed in the use of forest products. They knew the roots and leaves, which could be used as medicines. The Kurumbas had the ability to cure simple illness using forest produce.

The Paniyas lived away from the above-mentioned communities. They had dealings with the ‘Kattunayakans’, a few Toda hamlets, and one Kota village, which are situated near the paniya settlements around Gudalur. The festival of ‘Vettaikkara Appan’
Toda, Kota, Paniya, Irula, Kurumba and Badaga celebration
Nambalakkotai is an example of inter-communal harmony among the tribes. During this festival, the Paniyas alone have the right to enter into a ‘chetti’s’ field and gather three huge bundles of paddy, after a ceremony is performed by the ‘moopan’. This Paddy is then taken to three important temples of Gudalur where all the other tribes including Badagas gather there to celebrate a feast and a common meal. After the celebration, each family takes a sheaf of paddy to their home, which will be tied on the roof until the next festival. The common meal signifies their equality and inter-communal harmony among the tribes. The inter-ethnic alliance of the tribes and tribal movements in Northeast India emerged under the impact of a number of socio-political and administrative factors. The same inter-communal harmony of the tribes of the Nilgiris would help them to improved socio-political growth in the hills.

**Summing up**

The political organisation of the Badagas shows a constant and steady growth in its nature. The caste system, which was the basis of membership in the ‘manta’ or the Badaga Council gradually, disappeared. Though the ‘Toreyas’, were not allowed to take active part in the meeting the situation has changed now. As compared to the tribal polity, the Badagas too show a great extent of similarities with them, for example - they still have the council meetings, the decisions of the village head is considered as the ultimate and they follow the punishment given by the council. The system of excommunication continues, especially in the cases of conversion into Christianity and marrying from other sects.

The position of women among the Badagas was not much better than the other tribes. There was no woman council members in the Village Council. She could not even participate in the proceedings of the meetings. Even if one of the parties happened to be a woman, she cannot be present during the proceeding.

The Badaga community deviates from the tribal communities with regard to the swiftness in progress. They came as immigrants, but today they are the wealthiest planters. They came illiterate, but now the majority of the Badaga population has availed the educational facilities on the Nilgiris as well as in the neighbouring district of Coimbatore. The Badaga women today sit along with their male counterparts in the ‘naakubetta’ meeting, which even today the other tribal communities do not do. Most of the Badaga
girls are sent to schools just like their boys. Of course, early marriages still continue among them.

As far as the political system is concerned, the Badagas follow a very systematic, periodical structure, which keeps the whole community, united under a Chieftain. There are many aspects, which the modern Panchyat can look up to in a Badaga community.
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