

**Identity and quality of life among Badagas in South India  
with reference to rural-to-urban migration and new media**

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# Abstract

The thesis is about the experiences of Badagas living in contemporary India as they navigate a society in flux, the extent to which change permeates and influences understandings of self and life. Badagas, like others in India, have been experiencing profound changes as new ideas, products, and ways of living have become widespread. An increasing number of people are migrating to cities in search of education and employment, and technologies such as new media now influence communication and interaction. To understand these new circumstances, the primary concern of the thesis is an investigation of the identities and life quality of Badagas in South India with reference to rural-to-urban migration and new media, an important case study of the impact of India's social and economic transformation on its people, and a timely update of the antiquated picture of Badagas in the literature. At an empirical level, the thesis unpacks how Badagas understand themselves and their lives in today's India. However, it is also about changing the ways they have been understood and represented in the literature. At a theoretical level, therefore, the thesis deconstructs and redefines the meaning of 'Badaga' portrayed in the academic literature, and rebalances inequalities of representation. The thesis, then, is an empirical and theoretical investigation of the meaning of being Badaga, a critical appraisal of previous writings combined with empirical research to advance new ideas.

To set the scene of the thesis, the first chapter introduces the Nilgiri and its peoples and their general depiction in the literature, and teases out some of the themes and styles which characterise writings. It also endeavours to identify what is already known about Badagas, and gaps in knowledge, to make a case for the empirical research in subsequent chapters. Chapter one highlights the numerous markers which have been used to differentiate Badagas based on the assumption in the literature that they are a distinct social group sharing a common history and culture. It also reveals the limitations of their portrayal based on the style and trends of social science in the first and latter halves of the twentieth century which reify a simple Badaga identity, an artefact which has since become a staple of the literature. Building on this introduction, chapter two reviews in further detail the diverse ways identity has been deployed in social science generally and the Nilgiri specifically, and the varied, loose, and contradictory ways the identities of Badagas have been documented. Similarly, chapter two also explores the varied meanings of quality of life and previous studies concerning Badagas. The chapter shows the majority of writings align with classical essentialist conceptualisations of fixity and rigidity,

and ‘the Badagas’ as a category of difference has been framed in terms of homogeneity as a bounded group, isolation in a unique region, and speculations of identity change which mirror old-fashioned views of bounded undifferentiated cultures coming into contact, namely a minority group adopting the culture of the majority, as if change among Badagas is a product of the colonial experience. Similarly, regarding their quality of life, the majority of writings are concerned with imperial history and Western culture to speak for Badagas, which positions the changed way of life in the Nilgiri after the arrival of the British as important and superior to the past. Collectively, chapters one and two show previous representation of Badagas, although a rigorous and meticulous attempt at documenting their rich culture and history, is unsatisfactory in both theoretical and practical terms when it comes to understanding identity and life quality, a failure to offer terms with which to understand their complexity and diversity.

The methodology of the monograph, outlined in chapter three, provides a contemporary social constructionist approach to iron out the epistemological problems discussed above. It begins with an overview of the multi-site approach of the research, designed to overcome the limitations of previous studies which regard Badagas and the Nilgiri as local and bounded in an isolated region, essentially the removal of geographical barriers to appreciate Badagas as dynamic and mobile and to capture new forms of identities in flux in multiple situations, namely rural-to-urban migration and new media, that transcend bounded spaces. The next section of the chapter introduces the thesis’s theoretical orientation, symbolic interactionism, employed to examine the shared subjective experiences, meanings, and lived experiences of Badagas in contemporary India with emphasis on agency, social process, and subjective experience, a deliberate move away from previous macro-level deterministic and functionalist trends in the literature. The remaining sections of chapter three describe the operationalization of identity in the thesis, data collection from forum posts and face-to-face interviews, data analysis involving coding and thematic analysis, and ethical considerations. The thesis’s methodology, then, is an interpretative group of complementary methods—multisite ethnography, symbolic interactionism, thematic analysis, and reflexivity—focused on analytically disclosing the subjective knowledge and meaning-making of Badagas, and thus providing greater flexibility in understanding their identities and quality of life.

Grounded on this methodology, chapters four and five empirically investigate the identities and life quality of Badagas in two connected locations in a multi-site approach, the first online with Internet forum users, and the second in the real world with rural-to-urban migrants in

Bangalore. Specifically, chapter four examines online portrayals and understandings of identity and life among Badagas in a virtual forum community, an online website with discussions in the form of posted messages, and the nature of the new type of community. It begins with a discussion of the paucity of media and visual studies of the Nilgiri and its peoples, the need for further research, and the role of media as a prime information source and facilitator of cultural change. Next is an analysis of the content of the virtual forum, a source of information about the goings-on of Badagas including their past and current circumstances which contain new material hitherto undocumented in the literature. As the first study of new media usage among Badagas, it shows they now have an online presence, a new type of Badaga social collective connected by online social interaction and notions of culture. Regarding identity, a strong sense of being Badaga was revealed in forum dialogues, as the study analysed how forum members articulated and expressed different understandings of their caste, reasserted perceptions of distinctiveness, and deployed identity strategically in activism when they constructed images of Badagas as victims of marginalization. While the findings seem to support, at least from the perspective of forum members, the reification of an overarching Badaga identity as something tangible, the forum discussions also revealed their abstractness and diversity, a heterogeneity of Badaga identities, particularly in lively debates and discussions in which images were contested, defended, and negotiated. Regarding quality of life, a negative depiction was a salient theme in forum discussions which centred on the demise and low profitability of agriculture, and there were also concerns about education and healthcare provision.

Next, chapter five is about rural-to-urban migration. It begins with a brief review of the literature about migration and the Nilgiri and Badagas, and then analyses empirical evidence using interviews with rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore to understand more about their experiences of leaving their villages in the Nilgiri and living in the city, personal meanings of being Badaga. A key finding was changing notions of what it meant to be a member of their caste as they engaged the city, as being Badaga was malleable and in a state of flux. It revealed a new identity and collective, City Badaga, characterized by shared experiences of living in the city as Badagas, a phenomenon unique to their caste and not reported in the literature on migration in other parts of India or elsewhere. The study also uncovered the ways by which Badagas constructed distinctions between themselves and others, the specific processes and contextual determinants of identity construction and change. A negative depiction of life in the Nilgiri continued to be a salient theme, although the migrants painted a picture of contentment

with life in Bangalore, particularly with employment, income, convenient-living, and access to education, grounded on notions of social mobility and personal growth. There was no evidence of any interference with their social and economic activities in the city or limits to their opportunities. In summary, the findings from the two studies show Badagas do not conform to the model of a closed and bounded tribal society in the Nilgiri with customary cultural prescriptions, the simplified view in the literature which ignores the complex lived realities of people with a Badaga heritage who have diverse experiences shaped by a range of circumstances. Instead, the findings reveal complicated, flexible, and pluralistic notions of identities and living circumstances which are thoroughly in flux and negotiated and contested across multiple spaces, characterised by openness and variation. Also, whereas the literature emphasised objective aspects of life quality, notably economy and standard of living, the thesis reveals subjective quality of life—their own perspectives of life and circumstances, and attention to subjective processes and meanings—an approach hitherto neglected in the literature.

The final chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the key findings followed by a consideration of their limitations as well as directions for future research. It discusses further the alternative conceptualisation of Badagas in the thesis as dynamic, fluid, and multi-site, much messier than conveyed in the literature. Also, as the thesis is about the lives of Badagas, it shows the research in Bangalore and the Internet forum revealed a rich array of information, a timely update as previous in-depth research was completed in the 1990s. The approach of the research means that the changes taking place in India and among Badagas are considered a cultural and personal process involving people and their understandings envisaged within their local settings and resources, and not simply about social and economic standards as often assumed in writings. There is no doubt Badagas are living in truly momentous times. Migration to urban areas and overseas, and the dramatic rise of technologies such as new media, grounded on broader transformation of Indian society, have shaped multifaceted changes in people's lives. The evolving local and global realities of the twenty-first century elicit fundamental changes in the meaning and expression of being Badaga, not only ways of living and social mobility but alternative notions of becoming and self-understanding.

# 1. Introduction

The Nilgiri Hills, known colloquially as the Blue Mountains, rise majestically on the plains of South India, a picturesque mountain-range cloaked by a greenish-blue mist and blossoming purple flowers. The temperate climate and seasonal rainfall make it a key coffee- and tea-growing region. It is also a popular tourist destination with a rich cultural and natural history that appeals to many Indian and foreign travellers. The Nilgiri and its peoples have had a long history in anthropology and social science, well known as the home to over a dozen indigenous tribes<sup>1</sup>. In the largely Western-generated literature, Todas have received the most attention as the focus of the majority of publications (Hockings, 2008), whereas Badagas, the topic of my research, have received less interest despite being the numerically largest community. Other groups such as the Chettis, Irulas, Kaadus, Kasavas, Kurumbas, Naikas, Paniyas, and Solegas on the lower slopes are relatively undocumented in academic literature.

This thesis concerns Badagas, namely their experiences of living in contemporary India as they navigate a society in flux, and the extent to which change permeates and influences their understandings of self and life. It is an important case study of the impact of India's social and economic transformation on its people, and a timely update of the literature as previous in-depth research on Badagas dates to the 1990s. Not surprisingly, like others in India, they have been experiencing and assimilating profound adjustments as new ideas, products, and ways of living have become widespread. An increasing number of young people are migrating to cities in search of education and employment and are finding their place in urban culture, and technologies such as new media are influencing how they communicate and interact. Migration to urban areas and overseas, and the dramatic rise of technologies such as new media, grounded on broader transformation of Indian society, warrant the research documented in the following chapters. At an empirical level, the thesis unpacks how Badagas understand themselves, the multifaceted changes to their culture and daily living in today's India. However, the thesis is

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'tribe' has fallen out of favour with social scientists. Also, there is disagreement and inconsistency in the literature concerning the categorisation of Badagas and other people as castes, tribes or other groups, and Nilgiri society as a caste or tribal society (Hockings, 1993; Mahias, 1997). Therefore, these terms are applied loosely and interchangeably in the monograph to highlight styles and trends in the previous literature with no implied meanings of perceived cultural or economic backwardness.



also about changing the ways they have been interpreted and represented in the literature. At a theoretical level, it deconstructs and redefines the meaning of 'Badaga' in the academic literature, and rebalances inequalities of representation. The ethnography, then, is a critical appraisal of previous writings combined with empirical research to advance new ideas. To set the scene for the thesis, this chapter introduces the Nilgiri and its peoples and their general portrayal by scholars to tease out some of the themes and styles which characterise writings. While I have attempted to be exhaustive, I do not track down every reference or expression as I deal with the influential writings and trends and central orthodoxy of representation.

### **The early literature**

Information about the Nilgiri and its inhabitants in previous times is scant. The earliest recorded description of the Nilgiri dates to the second century BCE in the *Srimad Valmiki Ramayana*, an ancient Sanskrit epic poem of India which narrates the journey of the Hindu Sage Valmiki. In European writings, the Nilgiri was first recorded in *Os Lusíadas*, an epic poem of Portuguese voyages during the 15th and 16th centuries, penned in 1572 by Luís Vaz de Camões (Camões, 1963; Hockings, 2008). There has been a handful of archeological studies and excavations of prehistoric material such as mortuary sites, rock art, and stone structures, but it is not known if they are connected to ancestors of indigenous peoples (Breeks, 1873; Congreve, 1847; Hockings, 1976; Noble, 1976, 1989; Zagarell, 1997). The earliest known written account of the local population was by a visitor in 1603. Father Giacomo Fenicio, an Italian Jesuit priest, is styled in the literature as the first European to set foot in the mountains and meet the tribes while searching for rumoured ancient Christian communities (Rivers, 1906; Whitehouse, 1873). In his letter written in the seventeenth century to the Vice-Provincial of Calicut, Fenicio documented his journey to the Nilgiri and observations of its peoples such as their settlements, population sizes, and lifestyles (Rivers, 1906; Whitehouse, 1873). The letter, albeit anecdotal evidence based on his trip, is an important first account of a topic which does not appear in the literature again until the nineteenth century when civil servants in British India published censuses, district gazetteers, and reports, and adventurers and missionaries published amateur writings (Breeks, 1873; Buchanan, 1807; Francis, 1908; Grigg, 1880; Jagor, 1876, 1879, 1882; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). These early writings were typically penned in a language and style characteristic of colonists and travelers prior to the professionalization of ethnography in the twentieth century, as anthropology was then evolving as an academic

discipline. Colonialism brought Europeans—who regarded themselves as ‘civilized’ and living in ‘modern’, advanced cultures—into contact with indigenous peoples whose appearance, beliefs, customs, and traditional ways of life were regarded as ‘primitive’. Early studies were based on the premise that indigenous peoples were changing, and that many faced extinction, threatened by Westernization. The early writings set the scene of later representations of the people in the literature by subdividing the population into different ‘castes’, ‘classes’, ‘races’ or ‘tribes’, an emphasis of difference to the British writers and also other Indians. The Nilgiri peoples were described as separate, peculiar peoples with distinct physical appearances and customs, notions of primitive tribes associated with the jungle (Brecks, 1873; Bühler, 1849, 1851, 1853; Hockings, 2008; Hodgson, 1849, 1856, 1876; King, 1870; Jagor, 1876, 1879, 1882; Marshall, 1873; Metz, 1864; Oppert, 1896; Ouchterlony, 1868; Sastri, 1892; Schmid, 1837; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). A brief review of the early literature was published by Hockings (2008), and a detailed bibliography by Hockings (1996).

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Nilgiri has become well-known in anthropology, and its peoples have since been documented in numerous ethnographies and reports dating back more than one hundred years. W. H. R. Rivers in 1906 wrote about the kinship and social organization of Todas, now a classic in anthropology for its novel approach to ethnography which later became standard practice in British social anthropology (Hockings, 2008; Rivers, 1906). Academic scholarship continued in the latter half of the twentieth century, steered by Murray Emeneau and David Mandelbaum at the University of California Berkeley. They visited the Nilgiri in the 1930s, and subsequently published numerous articles and books including seminal works on intertribal relations and Kota and Toda languages (Emeneau, 1938, 1946, 1971, 1989; Mandelbaum, 1941). The primary literature was then cross-referenced in a range of secondary literature including general anthropology textbooks, surveys of world civilizations, and reviews of Indian peoples and their cultures, a popularisation of the Nilgiri which aroused the enthusiasm of the younger generation who followed in the footsteps of the early pioneers (Hockings, 2008; King, 1870; Lubbock, 1870). An army of scholars have since marched over the Nilgiri from almost every possible research angle, and a recent innovation has been an inter-disciplinary interest—architecture, climate, human geography, prehistory, and zoology, to name a few foci—nicely brought together in a bibliography of ‘Nilgiriology’ by Hockings (1996). Thus the present thesis has travelled along a well-trodden path, but also focuses on the need for change in the ways Badagas are represented in the literature.

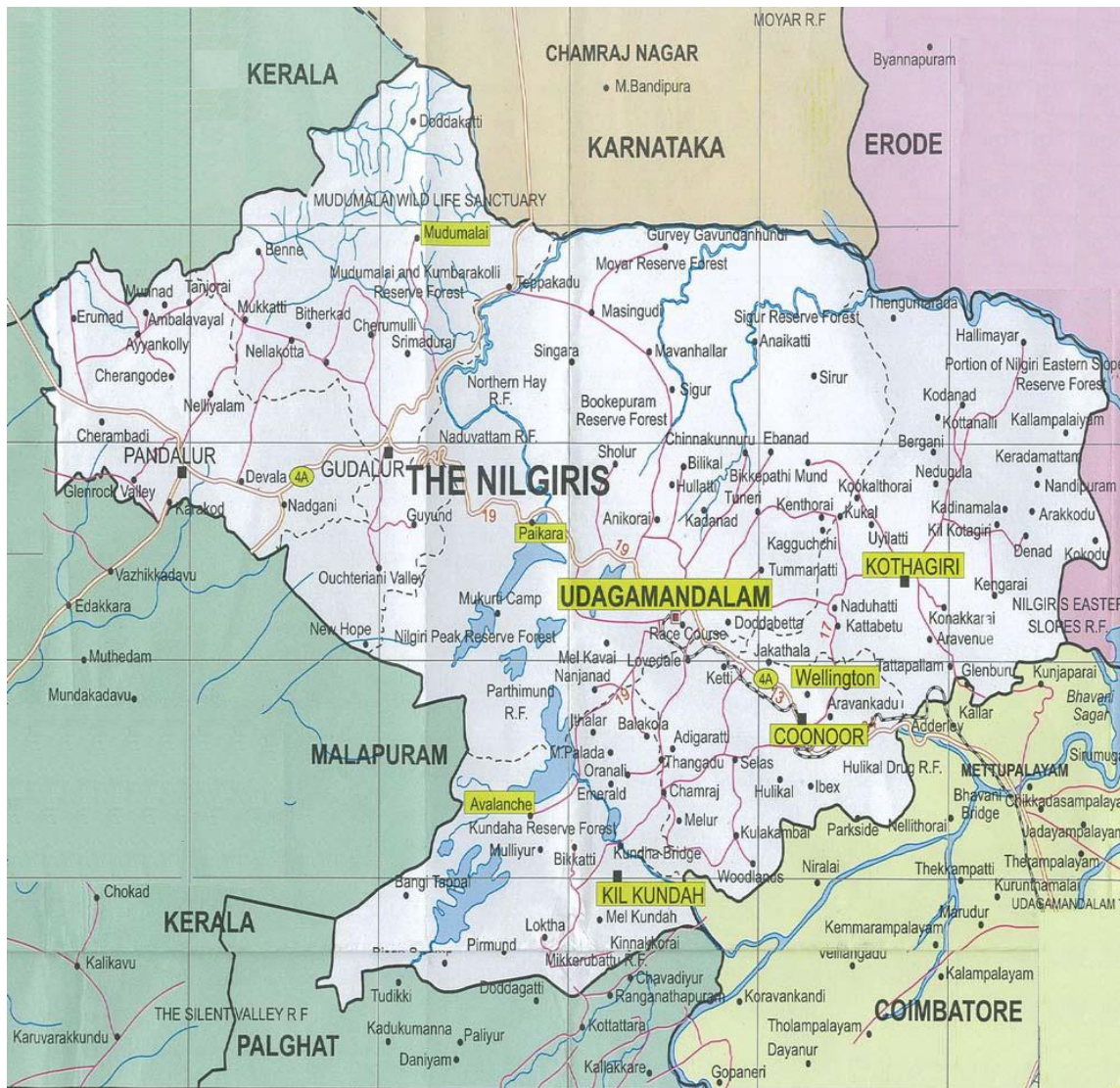


Figure 1. The Nilgiri Hills are located in the western part of Tamil Nadu, at the junction of Karnataka and Kerala, and are part of the Western Ghats mountain chain and Deccan Plateau. The area is bounded on the north by Karnataka State, on the east by Coimbatore District, on the south by Coimbatore District and Kerala State, and on the west by Kerala. The principal town and administrative headquarters of the Nilgiris District is Udhagamandalam, known formerly as Ootacamund (and colloquially as Ooty); other towns include Aruvankadu, Coonoor, Gudalur and Kotagiri.

Unfortunately a great deal of the early writings are based on old-fashioned notions of small-scale and isolated societies with exotic cultures and traditional lifestyles, and reflect the succession of earlier ideological positions in social science such as evolutionism, diffusionism, and functionalism.

### **Badagas**

There is agreement among writers that Badagas are a distinct rural community in the Nilgiri, a social group sharing a common history and culture framed in terms of categories of similarity or otherness. A recent estimation (Hockings, 2013) put their population at more than 160,000 people and 390 hamlets (assemblages of villages) each with several hundred inhabitants, but their exact size is unknown as they have not been enumerated by scholars or as a separate group in the Census of India since 1981. Parthasarathy in 2008 claimed he conducted a census of 113,980 Badagas and 302 hatties, but his methodology and data are not reported, and he is not a professional demographer.

Like many Indian peoples documented in the anthropological literature, Badagas have a classic ethnographer and then followers who take up particular issues. Although references to Badagas are made throughout the literature outlined above, serious academic research began recently in the 1960s when Paul Hockings conducted doctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley (Hockings, 1965). Hockings devoted his distinguished career to researching Badagas, and his books and articles have painstakingly recorded the intricacies of their way of life as well as the cultural ecology of the Nilgiri. His works include *Sex and Disease in a Mountain Community* (Hockings, 1980a), *Ancient Hindu Refugees* (Hockings, 1980b), *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biogeography of a South Indian Region* (Hockings, 1989), *Blue Mountains Revisited: Cultural Studies on the Nilgiri Hills* (Hockings, 1997), *Kindreds of the Earth* (Hockings, 1999), *Mortuary Ritual of the Badagas of Southern India* (Hockings, 2001), and recently *So Long a Saga* (Hockings, 2013). However, much of his work including recent books (Hockings, 1999, 2013) is based on fieldwork up to the 1990s. Other scholars have also published studies which tend to be short articles, but Badagas largely remain neglected by scholars. The remainder of this chapter reviews some of the themes apparent in writings on Badagas to exemplify the ways they have been researched and characterised. The aim is to summarise their general portrayal in the literature which is

scrutinised further in the following chapters. Importantly, established on the style and trends of social science in the first and latter halves of the twentieth century, the literature follows a certain genre which underpins the reification of a Badaga identity based on numerous criteria to differentiate between them and others which include caste, customs, economic organisation, folklore, folk medicine, house and village design, kinship, language, limited contact with 'lowland peoples', oral tradition, religion, responses to colonialism, ritual exchanges, territoriality, village government, and so forth. These themes, summarised below, are also relevant to understanding the literature on other peoples in the Nilgiri, as the writings tend to follow Malinowskian methodology and Radcliffe-Brownian theory, a legacy that was once the essence of the British tradition in anthropology. The following review also endeavours to identify what is already known about Badagas, and potential areas for further investigation, to make a case for the empirical research in the following chapters.

For example, one criterion of their distinctiveness is house and village design. A typical village has been described as consisting of: Several parallel rows of small houses, sometimes along the easterly leeward side of a hill slope for protection from monsoons; temples and shrines to Hindu gods; a village green for cattle grazing, social activities, and council meetings; and its surrounding fields and plantations (Hockings, 1980a, 1999). The naming of villages was based on topography, natural features such as animals, people, soil, and vegetation (Hockings, 1980a; Keys, 1812). In times past, the typical Badaga house was constructed with a thatched roof and wattle-and-daub walls (a construction material with a wooden lattice of branches and strips, also known as wattle, daubed with wet clay, soil, animal dung, and straw), and consisted of two rooms, a kitchen on one side opposite a multipurpose room joined by an arched doorway (Grigg, 1880; Noble, 1997; Ranga, 1934; Sastri, 1892; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868). Houses are now constructed with tiled roofs and brick walls, and some have two-stories (Nobel, 1997). My own observations confirm homes have amenities such as electricity, piped water, media such as television and radio, and access to public transport and services. The findings reported in the following chapters reveal some houses and villages have inadequate utilities, especially in remote areas. Prior to the twentieth century, the typical Badaga household was an extended family with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins; recently, nuclear families with married parents and their children have become popular (Hockings, 1999). However, my discussions in

the Nilgiri suggest this characterization in the 1990s overlooks the variability of family forms now present in the community, for example single-parent families and couples without children.

Another marker of the apparent distinctiveness of Badagas is religion. The majority of Badagas are followers of Shaivism, a popular sect of Hinduism, and nearly every village has a temple devoted to the god Shiva. The Shaivism they practice is typical of most Hindus in South India, although their 'village Hinduism' has unique features such as the worship of minor deities such as Badaga folk heroes regarded as founders of the community. Several hundred local deities have been recorded (Metz, 1864). An example is the Goddess Hette, the mythical founder of several villages, typically portrayed in folklore as the ideal Badaga woman, an epitome of perfection, and the guardian of health and agriculture, although there is variation of the myth (Belli Gowder, 1923-41; Benbow, 1930; Brecks, 1873; Grigg, 1880; Harkness, 1832; Hockings, 1989, 1999; Karl, 1945; Metz, 1864; Nobel, 1976; Rhiem, 1900; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). She is worshipped in an annual festival by thousands of enthusiastic devotees (Radhakrishnan, 2012a; Radhakrishnam, 2012b). A smaller proportion of Badagas (over 10,000) are adherents of Lingayatism, a distinct Shaivite denomination that worships Lord Shiva in the form of Linga or Ishtalinga alongside other departures from mainstream Hinduism. Several thousand people also follow Christianity as earlier generations of Badagas in the mid-nineteenth century succumbed to Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary activities, although only a small proportion converted to Christianity. The first missionary stations in the Nilgiri were established in 1846 and 1867 by the Basel Mission, a Christian missionary society of different Protestant denominations. The early Christianization campaigns caused conflict among Badagas such as exclusion of Christians from villages, hostility towards missionaries, and the destruction of a Mission's building in 1856 (Basel German Evangelical Missionary Society, 1856; Hockings, 1999). As time passed, Christians came to be respected as role models, and there were even attempts to integrate Christianity and Hinduism (Basel German Evangelical Missionary Society, 1850). The Missions have been credited for their social welfare activities, especially in education and healthcare (Hockings, 1999).

Badagas and other Nilgiri peoples have mutually unintelligible Dravidian languages, and only a few have been studied (Emeneau, 1989). Dravidian is a family of languages spoken in South India by 10 million people, and the four major languages are Tamil which is principally spoken in Tamil Nadu, Telugu (Andhra Pradesh), Kannada (Karnataka) and Malayalam (Kerala).

Badagu, also known as Badaga, is spoken only by Badagas, although the majority of people are bilingual or trilingual, typically fluent in Badagu, English, and Tamil. The origin and classification of Badagu is debated in the literature, and Hockings (1980a) suggests there are six dialects. It has been suggested Badagu is a dialect or variant form of Old Kannada retained from migrant ancestors from the Mysore region mixed with recent innovation and assimilation of linguistic characteristics of other Nilgiri languages, and therefore now a closely related yet separate language (Agesthalingom, 1972; Emeneau, 1938, 1939, 1967). However, since 1981, Badagu has been categorized in the Census of India in the ‘Kannada, Badaga and Kodagu’ subgroup of the Dravidian family which lumps together Badagu and Kannada speakers, which presumably means Badagu is regarded as a dialect of Kannada. An alternative perspective is provided by Pilot-Raichoor who argues Badagu is typologically very different to Kannada, based on her comparisons of Badagu and Kannada phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon; for example, Badagu contains many words of English, Persian, Tamil, and Sanskrit origin, and its core grammar converges with other Nilgiri languages, indicative perhaps of a separate language rather than a Kannada dialect (Hockings and Pilot-Raichoor, 1992; Thiagarajan, 2012). Badagu is not a written language, and oral tradition takes the form of ballads, curses, folktales, legends, omens, plays, poetry, prayers, proverbs, sayings, and songs (Haldorai, 2003; Hockings, 1988, 1997). Compilations and translations of the Badagu language have been painstakingly written and interpreted by Hockings (1988), and Hockings and Pilot-Raichoor (1992). Badagas, like other Nilgiri peoples, also have their own music and musical instruments such as the bugiri, a long flute-like trumpet made of bamboo or cane with holes (Haldorai, 2003). Some Badagas are accomplished singers, and have released albums in Badagu and Tamil for sale and distribution. However, research about Badagu is sparse, especially when contrasted to the Kota and Toda languages (Emeneau, 1938, 1971, 1974, 1989; Mandelbaum, 1941).

The history of Badagas has been separated from the history of other South Indians and Nilgiri peoples, although it is problematic to trace their past as no archeological or early records have been discovered<sup>2</sup>. Previous studies rely on analyses of oral tradition, transmission of cultural material passed down verbally from generation to generation. A well-known Badaga folk belief

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<sup>2</sup> Hockings (1988) makes the point Badagas had no prehistory in the Nilgiri as they are recent migrants, and therefore did not previously exist as Badagas; he reasons their colonisation of the Nilgiri and consolidation of various refugee groups into a cultural group are events that can be regarded as their prehistory.

is the notion of successive waves of migration in the sixteenth or seventeenth century which led to the founding of the Badaga community in the Nilgiri by migrants of Vokkaliga castes from the southern plains of the Mysore region; the migrants were granted permission to settle in the hills by a council of men from the Kotas, Kurumbas, and Todas, provided they paid an annual remuneration (Benbow, 1930; Emeneau, 1946; Francis, 1908; Grigg, 1880; Harkness, 1832; Hockings, 1980a, 1999; Nambiar and Bharathi, 1965; Rhiem, 1900; Sastri, 1892; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). A Kota folk story also recounts a meeting of a council of the three resident tribes with the first refugees and their pleas for land upon arrival in the Nilgiri (Belli Gowder, 1923-1941; Emeneau, 1946; Hockings, 1980a; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868). Badaga epic ballads, which last minutes to hours, retell stories of the origins and early settlement and of the Badaga community, and provides information about individuals, families, and important events such as names of ancestors thought to have founded specific villages. Several authors have published detailed analyses of these stories (Benbow, 1930; Francis, 1908; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909; Emeneau, 1946; Nambiar and Bharathi, 1965; Grigg, 1880; Hockings 1980a). For example, Hockings's (1980a, 1988) analysis of legends concerning intermittent migrations by the ancestors of Badagas shed light on their places of origin in Mysore, sequences of arrival in the Nilgiri, and formation of kinship and exogamy in newly-established villages. The majority of legends were stories of love, magic, mystery, and tragedy about the lives of migrants who founded and lived in the community, and others concerned political tales about Badaga chieftains and East India officials, and intertribal relations among indigenous groups. However, the legends lacked information about the actual migration as they focused more on the establishment of the Badaga community (Hockings, 1980a). The Todas, Kotas, and Kurumbas have origin myths about their creation of the gods (Emeneau, 1944, 1984).

There is a consensus in the literature that the supposed migration occurred in the 16th or 17th century (Baber, 1830; Congreve, 1847; Dulles, 1855; Harkness, 1832; Hockings, 1980a; Rhiem, 1900; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868; Stokes, 1882; Stuart, 1893; Sullivan, 1819; Ward, 1821). As some legends tell of people fleeing Muslim soldiers, it has been reasoned the ancestors of Badagas might have departed their homeland due to political turmoil and oppression, for example the Muslim invasion of Malik Kafur (Belli Gowder, 1938-41) or following The Battle of Talikota on the 26 January 1565 and the subsequent destruction of the Vijayanagara Empire (Karnata Empire), a renowned Hindu empire in the Deccan Plateau region of South India named



after its capital city of Vijayanagara whose ruins surround present day Hampi (Belli Gowder, 1923-1941; Burton, 1987; Emeneau, 1946; Hockings 1980a, 1999; Sastri, 2002). Some historians believe Muslim horsemen roved over the countryside after the fall of Vijayanagara and extorted money and goods from people, alongside robberies and plundering operations by gangs of warlords, events which concur with those retold in Badaga folklore. Kota folklore claims the Badaga refugees begged the ancient inhabitants to settle in the Nilgiri, ‘Because of the trouble Mohammedan made for us...we have come, making ourselves to escape. This country is yours...we are helpless. You must help us’ (Emeneau, 1946, p. 257; Hockings, 1999, p. 28). It seems plausible these events might have pushed rural Hindu peasantry living southeast of Mysore to the visible nearby hills; it certainly pushed other groups to Coorg to the west. However, putting a date and cause on the migration is problematic as there might have been several waves of migrants for different reasons (Hockings, 1980a). The early explorers Harkness (1832) and Ward (1821) noted Badagas had settled over many years, and Kota legends were explicit they came in succeeding years (Belli Gowder, 1938-1941; Emeneau, 1946; Hockings, 1980a). The Badaga Lingayats might have been one of the later groups to arrive, and therefore might have already been Lingayat as their religion is not practiced by the other tribes (Francis, 1908; Griggs, 1880; Hockings, 1980a; Sastri, 1892).

The legends also deal with other aspects of Badaga origins such as the beginnings of particular lineages and villages. They claim Tuneri was the first village established in the Nilgiri, and its founder and leader (the first Badaga settler) was Hućí Gauḍa, styled in the anthropological literature as ‘Paramount Chief’ and head of the Badaga community, a hereditary position passed patrilineally from father to son (Hockings, 1980a). Research on his family history has attempted to shed light on the antiquity of the community (Francis, 1908). Notably, Hockings (1999) estimated the date of Tuneri’s origin using family records of the birth dates of recent and previous headmen. At the time of his study, the incumbent headman was able to name nineteen generations of his forefathers, and by counting back 17 to 18 generations (based on an assumption of an average generation of twenty years due to low life expectancy and young marriageable age and first pregnancy prior to 1900). Hockings suggested the first headman might have been born in 1600 A.D., near the time of The Battle of Talikota in 1565.

Badaga legends, as with all legends, should be treated with caution. Oral history is not always based on actual events, and includes stories beyond the realm of possibility such as magic and

miracles, and therefore operates in the realm of uncertainty, never entirely believed by people but also never resolutely doubted; even real events communicated orally may be coloured by subsequent generations as people rarely remember details accurately, not the best method of obtaining factual data such as dates and places. Also, many localities in South Asia are associated with origin stories. For these reasons, I disagree with Hockings's (1980a) assertion that Badaga legends are 'prime evidence' (p.5), 'highly credible' (p. 3), and 'there is no doubt that before they settled in the Nilgiris the homeland of the Badagas lay in the Mysore Plain' (p.11), and Heidemann's (2014, p.94) confidence that 'there is no doubt that the origin of the Badagas is in the Kannada-speaking region north of the Nilgiri'. Similarly, other anecdotal evidence cited in the literature in support of the migration also seems unconvincing. Examples include the meaning of the Kannada word 'Badaga' as 'northerner' in Badagu, first reported by Father Fenicio in 1603 (Hockings, 1980a; Ward, 1821), interpreted in the literature to mean they migrated to the Nilgiri from the plains of Mysore just to the north of the Nilgiri Hills; hamlets in the Nilgiri which have similar names to Mysore villages from which settlers are thought to have originated; and the proposition that Badagu is an archaic dialect of Kannada spoken in former Mysore, suggestive of ancestral ties there (Emeneau, 1938; Hockings, 1997). Census and population data have also been used to support the migration theory. In the seventeenth century, according to the earliest known report by Father Fenicio, the Badaga population was about 500 in only three villages (Fenicio, 1603), regarded to be indicative of a recently-established settlement (Hockings, 1980a). According to the first rough British census in 1812 Badagas numbered 2207, and the villages 350, by then the numerically dominant community as the Todas numbered 179 and Kotas 130 (Hockings, 1980a). It has been suggested these data might reflect community establishment and growth from several homesteads following migration to several hundred villages (Hockings, 1980a). However, I believe the population growth could also have occurred in a pre-existing community and not only one established by migrants; it could also be that Fenicio's data were inaccurate. It is also not clear how Badagas increased substantially relative to neither the other tribes nor why those who fled villages in the plains did not return, as was the case with other groups (Sarada Raju, 1941).

It seems we can be fairly sure Badagas have a South Indian origin, but whether they are indigenous or nonindigenous to the Nilgiri remains an unanswered question. My feeling of the literature is that the migration theory has been readily accepted and then weak evidence found to

give it legitimacy. There has been too much reliance on folklore and the rough observations of Fenicio and early British census officials, coloured by political and religious ideology, and analyses of oral tradition of Badagas and other tribes seem rudimentary. Dialectology currently being pursued by Pilot-Raichoor could lead to alternative theories of Badaga origins as her findings of grammatical homogeneity of Badagu and other Nilgiri languages of the Kotas, Kurumbas, and Todas might indicate the Badaga community was created in the Nilgiri in ancient times (Thiagarajan, 2012). This proposition might also be supported by genetic studies which show Badagas share similarities with other Nilgiri communities, such as a high incidence of Sickle Cell Trait and HLA antigen distribution, although research is limited and discussed by researchers only in relation to possible early human migrations from or to Africa (Lehmann and Cutbrush, 1952; Vishwanathan, Edwin, Usha Rani, and Majumder, 2003; Vishwanathan, Edwin, Usharani, Majumder, 2003). Archeological research in the Nilgiri is also scant, and the evidence hitherto from archaeological sites (e.g. bronze utensils, effigy pots, weapons, sculptured stones) shows no relation with the known ways of the Nilgiri tribes (Mandelbaum, 1989).

Every Badaga I have spoken to believe their ancestors were migrants from the Mysore region. However, it should also be noted some people disagree with the migration hypothesis, and posit an alternative proposition of Badagas as aboriginal like the other tribes. However, their claim might have a hidden political agenda. Badagas are classed officially by the Indian government as Backward Class, regarded as socially disadvantaged and eligible for government assistance in education and employment, one of several official classifications along with Scheduled Caste (also called Untouchables) and Scheduled Tribe (aboriginal or Adivasi or tribal), special titles conferred by the Constitution of India which afford economic protection to tribal communities, in contrast to the general castes (the Hindu majority). Badagas claim their community elders in the 1950s rejected the Government's proposal of classification as Scheduled Tribe as it was perceived to be demeaning at the time. However, some Badagas have since argued for designation as Scheduled Tribe to secure a greater proportion of government jobs, university seats, and elected posts, and it is thought their case could be strengthened if Badagas are indigenous to the Nilgiri (Hockings, 1993).

Badagas have been portrayed as an agricultural community. However, much of the discussion emphasises the impact of the British Raj and its capitalist political economy on agricultural

change. In times past Badagas practised swidden cultivation (pejoratively termed slash-and-burn), subsistence agriculture which involved cutting and burning vegetation to clear small patches of forest cover (swiddon). Shifting cultivation was viable when land was plentiful and available for clearing without hindrance, as farmers frequently moved on to virgin forest (Hockings, 1999). Later generations established farmsteads with subsistence crops, but some swiddon cultivation continued close to villages until around the 1860s or so but was abolished by the colonial government (Grigg, 1880). For instance, the Madras Forest Act (1882) prohibited cutting timber in nearby jungles, and the Final Land Settlement (1881-1884) compiled a register of all land holdings in the district as the basis of an annual assessment of land revenues. Land holdings were restricted to a maximum of 500 acres. The earliest reports state they grew lentils, millet, mustard, rice, garlic, and wheat; raised buffalo, cattle, goats and poultry (Fenicio, 1603; Keys, 1812; Rivers, 1906; Whitehouse, 1873), and gathered jungle produce such as honey and beeswax (Buchanan, 1807). In the 1850s, agricultural practices changed from subsistence to cash crops (cabbage, potato) and animal products for sale in markets rather than local consumption (Keys, 1812; Krishnamurthi, 1953; Krishnaswami, 1947; Nobel, 1968). New varieties of fruits, grains, and vegetables such as apple, barley, beetroot, cabbage, oats, peach, potato, radish, strawberry, turnip, wheat, as well as ornamental plants, were introduced (Francis, 1908; Harkness, 1832; Hockings, 1973; Price, 1908; von Lengerke and Blasco, 1989). Commercial-style plantations were established in the 1830s. Since last century, animal husbandry declined due to the conversion of grazing land to plantations. In the 1910s, Badagas cultivated potatoes. The early twentieth century saw the emergence of wealthy Badagas following the establishment of Badaga tea plantations (Ranga, 1934), although there were also many landless labourers on coffee and tea gardens and plantations (Grigg, 1880). In the 1930s onwards, they changed from plantation production to smallholdings, typically less than one hectare for each family (Shaw, 1944). Another functionalist flavour in the description of agriculture among Badagas is the dozen or so festivals and life-cycle rituals such as the Great Festival which marks the beginning of the agricultural year in February and March, and the God Festival which celebrates the harvest in July and August (Hockings, 1980b), the portrayal of rituals in terms of their social functions and value to society as a whole over the individual.

Until the 1960s they cultivated tea and vegetables, and kept herds of buffalo and cattle for milk and other dairy products but not meat consumption. In the 1960s and 1970s, farmers

abandoned long-standing farming methods as part of the ‘Green Revolution’, a national programme of new agricultural techniques to increase production, for example chemical pesticides and fertilizers, high yielding varieties of seeds, machine-made terraces, irrigation methods, and quality control. Also, in the 1970s, the Crop Diversification Programme provided government support to encourage farmers to switch from potato production—which had become unprofitable with pests, low prices, and wildlife damage—to tea production with advantages such as relative absence of pests, easier field maintenance, regular plucking and income, and mitigation of soil erosion on hillsides (Mandelbaum, 1989; Neilson and Pritchard, 2009). Today, tea still comprises the mainstay of the Badaga rural economy (a survey undertaken in 2001 indicated 86% of Nilgiri tea smallholders grew only tea; Neilson and Pritchard, 2009). Other crops grown on a smaller scale include ginger, millet, wheat, and vegetables.

The livelihoods of farmers hinge on prices of cash crops in national and global markets which have been susceptible to significant variations. High tea prices in the mid-1990s supported high returns and rising affluence, but in the late 1990s onwards they dropped sharply when India’s share of the tea export market declined because of tea quality issues and rising competition from new tea-producing countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the countries of the former Soviet Union, and a global shift of tea buyers and sellers. Badagas were affected by these issues, and suffered economic hardship. Also, they generally have small production quantities constrained by small plots of land between one and two acres and limited capital, skills, supplies, market information, and high overhead costs. They compete with large tea estates owned by large tea companies with vast resources. Neilson and Pritchard (2009) provide a timely summary of the ‘tea crisis’ in the Nilgiri and its impact on the quality of life of the local people. They estimated the annual income of Badaga smallholders decreased 82% between 1998 and 2001, as average green leaf prices decreased 50% from Rs. 12/kg to Rs. 5.95/kg. To make up for lost income, smallholders took shortcuts such as abandoning agricultural practises such as regular pruning and pest and disease management, replaced hand plucking with indiscriminative shear plucking and shorter plucking cycles, and felled shade trees for timber, with consequences for the quality of tea they produced. Some families sold their land, and left the Nilgiri. In 2001, 60,389 tea smallholders were enumerated in the Nilgiri, but in 2006 the number had fallen to 50,329 (Neilson and Pritchard, 2009). A sizeable proportion of Badagas

have abandoned agriculture to pursue other professions. Therefore, even recent updates of their agriculture still emphasise macro-level constructions of a larger social order, first the British Raj and its capitalist political economy, and then globalisation and the world economy, broad focus on social structures that shape a primeval human society.

Another example of functionalist analysis in the literature on Badagas is the gift exchange and reciprocity among the Nilgiri peoples, influenced no doubt by the work of Mauss (1923) which showed gift-making performed the function of disposing of surplus produce and ascribed behaviour and relations between various categories of people. As the story goes, prior to the mid-nineteenth century Badagas and other tribes interdepended on economic and ritual exchanges of products and services, similar to gift and commodity relationships, and their social interrelationships were symbolized through ritual interaction (Gregory, 1997; Mauss, 1922). The arrangement was first documented by Fenicio (1603) and nineteenth century writers (Breeks, 1873; Harkness, 1832; Keys, 1812; Metz, 1864). Rivers (1906) published an anthropological analysis, and Mandelbaum (1941) provided an updated and refined view. It has since been extensively discussed and popularized in the literature, and is one reason the Nilgiri is well known. The early writings focused on the Nilgiri Plateau (Badagas, Kotas, Kurumbas and Todas); recent work reported on other groups such as the Chettis and Irulas on the lower plains of Coimbatore (Hockings 1980a), and Chettis, Kadu Nayakas, Kurumbas and Paniyas (Misra, 1972) and Badagas, Kotas and Todas in the Wynaad, a lower area to the northwest (Bird-David, 1997).

Although the tribes had multiple and overlapping economic and social practices, the literature accentuates the uniqueness and distinctiveness of their roles with the following generalisations, stereotypes and well-defined duties which have been repeated in many writings: Badagas as agriculturalists; Kotas as artisans, musicians and cultivators; Todas as pastoralists; and Kurumbas as food gatherers, hunters, swiddon cultivators, and sorcerers. Specifically, Badagas were the main agriculturalists in the Nilgiri, and the only group which produced a real surplus of grain which they traded at harvest time along with other items such as cloth, opium, potatoes, mustard, salt, sugar and dead cattle in return for various products and services, as they had no specialized craftsmen and the other tribes apparently grew barley enough for their own needs (Hockings, 1980a; Metz, 1864; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). The Kotas have been portrayed as the artisans, blacksmiths, builders, carpenters, leather-workers and potters of the

Nilgiri, as they were involved in carpentry and thatching, and manufactured and repaired tools such as axes, hammers, knives, iron jewellery, wooden items, utensils, umbrellas, and leather articles from buffalo hides, which they traded with the others, a jack-of-all trades (Metz, 1864; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). The Kotas were also musicians for Badagas until the 1930s as a Badaga custom required them to perform music at festivals, funerals, and weddings, and reciprocally they participated in Kota ceremonies (Brecks, 1873; Harkness, 1832; Metz, 1864; Ward, 1821). They also cultivated land and kept herds (Bird-David, 1997), and received from the other tribes the carcasses and hides of buffalos that had died or had been slaughtered at funerals. The Todas, numbering barely a few hundred, were pastoralists. Their traditional society was centered on their herds of buffalos which they ritualized through the care of the animals and dairy practices involving their milk, although they were vegetarians. They traded buffalos and dairy products such as clarified butter, butter milk, and milk, and also supplied Badagas with jungle-made products such as beds, baskets, and flutes in return for grain and cloth; they also cultivated land and were forest gathers (Grigg, 1880; Hockings, 1980a; Maclean, 1893; Marshall, 1873; Metz, 1864; Walker, 1986). Badagas donated grain to the Todas as symbolic remuneration for the land supposedly given to their migrant ancestors, and to protect themselves from Toda sorcery (Grigg, 1880; Harkness, 1832; Hockings, 1980a; Rivers, 1906; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868). As forest-dwelling people practicing shifting-agriculture, the Kurumbas (a cluster of several tribes) supplied the others with forest goods and hand-made items such as baskets, beeswax, honey, mats, nets, sleeping mats, timber, and umbrellas; participated in Badaga rituals, for example sowing and harvest festivals, and performing music at Badaga weddings and funerals in place of the Kotas (Grigg, 1880; Kapp and Hockings, 1989); and acted as sorcerers and healers as Badagas blamed the supernatural for human ills, crop failures, and negative life events. It has been widely reported in the literature that a Kurumba watchman was appointed to each Badaga commune as a spiritual guardian to defend against magical attacks of other Kurumbas by using his own sorcery, and played an important role in agricultural rituals of Badagas in return for a fixed quantity of grain from each household in the commune, a lifelong appointment which passed from father to son; indeed, many of the exchanges between the tribes were passed down generation to generation between lineages in the respective communities through patrilineally descending partnerships (Francis, 1908; Grigg,

1880; Hockings, 1980a; Noble, 1976; Ward, 1821). They did not provide labour nor engage in market transactions (Walker, 1986).

The overview above can be exemplified with Badaga-Kota relations, the closest and most complex ties between Badagas and other Nilgiri communities, as the Kotas performed a wider range of services than any other group; by comparison with the Todas and Kurumbas maintained simple relationships with Badagas. The Kotas in times past lived in villages interspersed in the Badaga community, and exchanged goods and services based on partnerships between specific families (Hockings, 1980a; Mandelbaum, 1956, 1989). As there was disparity in the population sizes of Badagas and Kotas, each Kota family maintained ties with perhaps 30 to 100 Badaga households in eight or nine villages (Hockings, 1980a; Mandelbaum, 1989) to equip them with products as well as music for Badaga ceremonies; in return they received an annual dole of food (grain, potatoes, mustard), clothes (acquired from Chettis trading partners) from their Badaga associates proportionate to the gifts received, and the carcasses of buffalo and cattle (Hockings, 1980a; Jarkness, 1832; Ranga, 1934; Thurston, 1909). Associates could not be changed unless agreed by mutual consent at a joint meeting of their village councils, and disputes were resolved at a village meeting (Hockings, 1980a; Mandelbaum, 1960). These ties were mutual obligations which bound specific Badaga and Kota families, and were inherited on either side through the male line.

These exchanges hinged on a hierarchy of social statuses according to beliefs of ritual purity (high social status) and pollution (low status), as first reported in writings by Keys (1812), Macpherson (1820), Ward (1821), and Metz (1864). The literature portrays Badagas as having influence and power in the hierarchy as they were the main cultivators in the Nilgiri (Hockings, 1980a). The Todas were also ranked highly, respected as people of purity for their strict vegetarianism and ritual practices; the Kotas were consigned to the lowest rung, disrespected for their tradition of eating meat of deceased or sacrificed buffalos which was a practice viewed as polluting by their neighbours, and their provision of music for ceremonies, especially funerals, regarded as a demeaning service, although the Kotas probably regarded the forest-dwelling peoples as the lowest ranked (Mandelbaum, 1956). The groups ranked higher in the hierarchy restricted their interaction with lower-ranked groups. The inferior status of the Kotas, for example, was evident in the following Badaga traditions: Kotas could enter and wander around Badaga villages but not enter houses or temples, as they were regarded as a source of pollution,



and interacted with Badagas on the veranda of houses, hence the derogatory Badaga term 'veranda son' for a Kota associate which denotes an inferior and subordinate status; Badagas did not touch Kotas, and, if they did so accidentally, a purifying bath was taken; Badagas did not give Kotas milk, regarded a sacred substance not to be consumed by impure people, and did not take cooked food from them nor enter their kitchens or temples; salutation of a Kota to Badaga was that of inferior to superior, for example bowing as a gesture of respect; and some Badagas denigrated Kotas, for example by ignoring them (Mandelbaum, 1989). However, strong bonds of affection existed between Badagas and Kotas evidenced by personal bereavement when members of an associate family passed away, help offered in times of need; and the resemblance of the relationships to kinship passed down in generations and lineages (Mandelbaum, 1989).

Scholars have debated whether the system in the Nilgiri was an early variant of the Indian caste system (Fox, 1963; Gould, 1967; Hockings, 1980a; Mandelbaum, 1941; Walker, 1986). Mandelbaum (1956, 1989) likened it to the classic jatis or jajmani caste system which prevailed over rural India in the nineteenth century, as they both consisted of separate social groups in a locality which were interdependent in multiple ways with occupational specializations, unique customs, and cooperative activities between families, namely provision of goods and services with some characteristics of a contract alongside wider and warmer relationships. That the tribes interacted in a generally friendly and peaceful social system has prompted some authors (e.g. Fry, Bonta, and Baszarkiewicz, 2008) to repackage it as a 'peace system' of neighbouring non-warring societies underpinned by certain psychosocial features which presumably helped to prevent warfare and promote a culture of peace. For example, they possessed no militia or weapons of war (Hockings, 1989). A possible reason for the peaceful relations in the Nilgiri was that the social relationships were valued and based on trust, as exchanges were not reciprocated for several months or more, and trading relationships were hereditary, passed from father to son, perhaps strong incentives against waging war (Fry, Bonta, and Baszarkiewicz, 2008; Gregor, 1990). However, there are exceptions such as cases of hostilities and tensions among the groups ranging from stigmatisation, for example the Kurumbas as food gatherers and inhabitants in jungles were stereotyped negatively as primitive hunter-gatherers and sellers of forest produce and mystical such as Kurumba sorcery, to violent retributions such as witchcraft murders of Kurumbas and Todas (Thurston and Rangachari, 1909; Hockings, 1980a). Also, the

above summary of gifting is based on uncritical acceptance by previous writers of generalizations which seem to exaggerate the differences between the tribes; they did not exclusively pursue the activities ascribed to them in the stereotypes, and descriptions of the groups seem contradictory. For example, all groups engaged in subsistence agriculture and hunting even though it is often claimed otherwise (Bird-David, 1997), and other people were also involved in the exchange of goods and ritual services even though it was often depicted simply as four or so groups and their interrelationships. As Hockings (1980a) points out, an adequate account would embrace nearly a dozen communities.

Like many of the accounts of change in the Nilgiri, similar to early anthropological studies which assumed indigenous peoples were faced with extinction as a result of Westernization, the traditional exchanges overemphasises the role of the British. According to early and later accounts in the literature (Keys, 1812; Tignous, 1912) there was no essential change in these relationships until the First World War (Hockings, 1980a). For the vast majority of people, the basic requirements of food, goods and services continued to be provided either by their own efforts or by their associates. Most Badagas had permanently severed gift and commodity relationships by the 1930s (Emeneau, 1938). Although the reasons are unclear, the literature emphasizes the new economic system in British India which was monetized, as the early reports since Fenicio do not mention transactions based on coinage; however, they might have used coins when they participated in the market economy on the plains. British involvement in India brought a new system of governance. The East India Company acquired the Nilgiri in 1799 under the Madras Presidency as part of lands annexed from the territory of Tipu Sultan, and British colonists settled in the 1820s onwards following visits by officials. John Sullivan, Collector of Coimbatore between 1815 and 1830, is usually associated with the beginnings of the principal towns Ootacamund and Coonoor, and the seasonal shift of the capital of Madras Presidency to Ootacamund (Emeneau, 1963; Price, 1908). The Nilgiri peoples and their lands were subject to a changing environment, including, for example, the establishment of the first coffee plantations near Coonoor in 1838 and 1840, followed by two plantations in Kotagiri in 1840, and commercial tea production in 1865 (Grigg, 1880; Tanna, 1969), buildings, factories, railways, roads, missionary stations, and a military base at Wellington. broader changes in British India such as social reforms, commercialization of agriculture, construction of infrastructure and transport networks, demarcation of sovereignty, land taxes, population

surveillance and other major changes in the local, national and global economies (James, 2000; Wolpert, 2009). Factories have been in operation in the Nilgiri for very long time and required a great deal of labour. There are many examples, such as a cordite factory established in 1903 in Aruvankadu (a small town in the Nilgiri) which manufactured gunpowder for arms and ammunitions; according to Hockings (2013), it is the longest employer of Badagas including several generations of some families, although only a minority gained jobs in factories; in 1949, Needle Industries (<http://www.ponyneedles.com>) was founded as a subsidiary of a major British manufacturer of sewing needles and knitting pins (Needle Industries, 2015), and was built on the site of a nineteenth-century brewery that also employed Badagas (Francis 1908; Hockings, 2013).

A cash economy apportioned market value to products and services, and access to local, national and global markets; the market price of the grain Badagas had donated to the others was apparently higher than the value of goods they received, which encouraged them to instead buy products in markets to satisfy their needs more cheaply (and also conveniently, as the old relations were relatively time-consuming; Mandelbaum, 1955). The first market place in the Nilgiri was the Ootacamund Bazaar established around 1825 (Hayavadana, 1908; Hockings, 1980a; Price, 1908), followed by other markets opened in Coonoor, Kotagiri, Wellington, and other locations; British administrators provided land for traders to open stalls (Baikie, 1857; Grigg, 1880). Some Badagas moved to other occupations. Hockings (1980a) argued the increasing Badaga population, and therefore increasing proportions of Badagas to Todas, Kotas and Kurumbas, would have been difficult and finally impossible to satisfy in the gift economy. His analysis of data from the Census of India show the ratio of Badagas to Kotas increased from 18:1 (1871) to 33:1 (1921) and 82:1 (1971), and the proportion of Badagas to Todas from 28:1 (1871) to 63:1 (1921) and 129:1 (1971). Relations with the increasing number of migrants may have also replaced the former exchanges (Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868; Mandelbaum, 1989; Heidemann, 1997). The role of the British in social change in the Nilgiri is a reoccurring theme in the literature. The Nilgiri became renowned in colonial British society for its principal hill stations which epitomised an enclave of British culture as well as a health and recreational resort for people seeking a haven from the summer heat of the plains (Kennedy, 1996; Mandelbaum, 1989; Shaw, 1944). Europeans and Indians moved to the Nilgiri, and comprised a sizeable part of the population (Heidemann, 1997). Hence the Nilgiri peoples were influenced

by South Indian and European cultures (Mandelbaum, 1941). When India attained Independence in 1947, economic and social change continued, for example national economic programmes such as the Five-Year Plans implemented by the Planning Commission led to increased agricultural production and industrialization; in the Nilgiri there was an upsurge of government projects including provision of agricultural assistance, education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Development of the tourism industry in the 1970s and 1980s spawned hotels, restaurants, and travel services, as the region's rich cultural and natural history appeals to many Indian and foreign travellers. These changes brought many new ways of living to the Nilgiri peoples. It should be noted, however, the dominant role of the British in social change in the Nilgiri, a recurring theme in the literature, might be an artifact of nostalgic British pride by writers, as change has always been part of the Nilgiri peoples and did not suddenly begin in British India even though the writings on the Nilgiri suggest otherwise. There has been a tendency of writers to categorise the history of the Nilgiri as principal periods such as aboriginal, colonial, and independence (Mandelbaum, 1989).

The organization of society around descent groups, primitive systems of kinship terminologies, characterised by common purposes such as marriage and administering property, is another classic example of the functionalist framework of the literature, influenced by Radcliffe-Brown orthodoxy and other perspectives (Lounsbury, 1964a, 1964b; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). Family ties (kinship) among Badagas have been classified by researchers with the Dravidian kinship system (Dumont, 1953; Hockings, 1980a; Hockings, 1982; Lounsbury, 1964a; Lounsbury, 1964b). It serves as a system of terminology in the literature to identify ancestors and relatedness, and in practice to arrange marriage, transfer land ownership, and assign responsibility for performing life-cycle rituals. A large joint family—an extended family arrangement of several generations living in the same home or neighbouring houses, usually headed by the oldest male—was common in times past, perhaps because swiddon cultivation and ploughing required several men (Hockings, 1982). Several joint families in a village descended from a common ancestor, usually a person remembered by villagers, comprised a minimal or minor lineage, regarded as an extension of the family. It was patrilineal as everyone lived in a single village (Hockings, 1980a; Rivers, 1906), perhaps to ensure sufficient manpower and detailed local knowledge (Hockings, 1982), and was the most important lineage for its members as it held the family together, although lineages of all levels could be invited to

attend family ceremonies. Minor lineages in neighboring villages with a common founder were grouped as major lineages, and major lineages in one or neighbouring villages with a common founder often constituted a maximal lineage. Several maximal lineages made up a clan based on actual or perceived common descent, typically a legendary ancestor, and the Badaga community consisted of forty-four clans (Hockings, 1980a). Groups of clans formed a phratry with an assumed kinship bond supported with a folk story of common origin, and the Badaga community had ten phratries in a social hierarchy (Hockings, 1980a). Hockings (1999) labelled them as phratries rather than subcastes as not all are endogamous and they have no forms of occupational specialisation. These larger social units have a complicated history and organization. In their folklore, Badagas, and all of South India, were thought to belong to more than a dozen septs, descent groups in which everyone was related (Hockings, 1980a). A key difference between these kinship groups was either exogamy, whereby marriage was allowed only outside the group, or endogamy, the practice of marrying within a specific group; generally, but not always, Badagas practiced exogamy up to the phratry, and their community was endogamous. Hockings (1980a; 1982) argued his model of social stratification, outlined above, did not fit the typical caste model (joint family, lineage, clan and jati or caste) that was prevalent in South India, perhaps because the ancestors of Badagas were migrants and separated from caste society. Details of lineage development and organization following the alleged founding of villages in the Nilgiri are examined in detail by Hockings (1980a, 1999).

Badagas have been characterized with the Dakota-Iroquois (bifurcate merging) kinship nomenclature which distinguishes between generations, maternal and paternal sides of the family, and siblings of opposite sexes in the parental generation (Murdock, 1949). The parents' siblings of the same sex (mother's sisters and father's brothers) are regarded as parents, whereas the parents' siblings of the opposite sex (mother's brothers and father's sisters) are in a different category regarded as uncle and aunt. Thus a Badaga calls his father's brother 'father' and father's sister 'aunt', and the mother's sister 'mother' and mother's brother 'uncle'. The distinction determined eligibility of marriage partners based on preferential patterns of bilateral cross-cousin marriage which is typical of Dravidian kinship systems generally: Selective cousinhood distinguishes cross-cousins, the children of the mother's brother or father's sister, regarded as true cousins and preferred marriage partners, and parallel cousins, the father's brother's children or mother's sister's children, regarded as siblings (brothers or sisters 'one step

removed') and not first cousins, and prohibited as marriage partners regarded as incestuous; in addition, Badagas could not marry members of their own patrilineage, children of siblings, nor partners of other members of their lineage (Dumont, 1953; Dumont and Pocock, 1957; Hockings, 1982). Therefore, a Badaga man was encouraged to marry his father's sister's daughter (FZD) or his mother's brother's daughter (MBD), and a woman was encouraged to marry her mother's brother's son (MBS), father's sister's son (FZS), or the brother of her brother's wife (brother-sister exchange). More distant relatives were also acceptable provided they belonged to an appropriate clan. Age was another criterion as Badaga girls married shortly after puberty, and boys in late adolescence, although age of marriage later increased to sixteen for young women and early twenties for men to comply with compulsory school attendance (Hockings, 1999). Marriage with a FZD was more common than with a MBD, for the following reasons: Status congruence, as bride-giving was regarded as demeaning as bride-givers had a lower social status than bride-receivers; and cross-cousin marriage reciprocity between villages that customarily intermarried, as a marriage replicated bride-giving in the previous generation (when a marriage was arranged, a bride was expected in return), for example a man who married his FZD was regarded as taking a bride from the same village, lineage, and family his grandfather gave a daughter in marriage (Hockings, 1999). However, marriage reciprocity was possible only in larger phratries, and restricted in smaller phratries. Hockings (1999) tabulated marriages in the 1960s in four villages, and noted they had exchanged roughly the same number of brides, although there were exceptions attributed to the number of marriageable-age women and reputation of villages based on hearsay or economic situation.

Patrilocality (virilocality), another preference of Badagas, meant the newly-married couple resided with or near the husband's parents in their village (and, if the house was large enough, his siblings and brother's family). The social status of a girl or women was determined by the village where she lived; as well as moving to live with her husband, the bride became identified with her husband's family, and her status determined by the clan and affluence of that family (Hockings, 1999). She also assumed his generation level as she relinquished membership of her family and lineage to join his, although it was alienable by divorce, unlike the man's kinship which was fixed. Badaga kinship also guided inheritance customs; an inheritance was passed down the male lineage to the sons, and only the youngest son was heir to the parental home (ultimogeniture), as his elder brothers were more likely to have married and built new houses

nearby, and sisters were married young, and as a younger man he was deemed better able to provide for his widowed mother (Rivers, 1906; Hockings, 1982). Nowadays, national laws give women equal inheritance rights. Patrilocality, the joint family, and brother/sister exchange at marriage were perhaps suitable for buffalo herding, ox-ploughing and swiddon cultivation which all required the availability of young men, typically brothers, and the latter to maintain a balance of manpower between two intermarrying families or settlements (Hockings, 1982, 1999). The kinship system might also have developed as a means of transferring cattle and houses (Hockings, 1999). Another marriage custom was a brideweath, cash or goods offered by the groom and his family to the bride's parents, typically food, tobacco, money, and jewellery. In later times, a dowry was provided by the bride's family (Harkness, 1832; Metz, 1864; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909), and in the 1990s involved substantial amounts of money, partly due to an excess of young women (Hockings, 1999), but no recent data exist.

Kinship underpinned the traditional panchayat system (Grigg, 1880; Mantramurti, 1981; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). Badaga society has been described as a chiefdom, a social hierarchy of authority and privilege monopolized by senior members of select families determined by birth and nearness by kinship, headmanships descended patrilineally within families. The headman of Tuneri, the first village thought to be settled in the Nilgiri by migrant ancestors, was also the Paramount Chief, head of the chiefdom and Badaga community and, ultimately responsible for its welfare as well as mediation with the other tribes and outside world (Francis, 1908; Hockings, 1980a). Each village had a headman, a respected and influential elder, usually the senior brother among the patrilineal descendants of its founder, aided by a small council of male elders of each lineage, the unit of village administration (Hockings, 1980a; Mastramurti, 1981; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). Clusters of neighbouring villages were grouped in a commune were under the headmanship of a commune headman who was also the headman of a prominent village, aided by a council of headmen of the other villages. A dozen or so communes were grouped together in one of four divisions of the Nilgiri, and one commune headman was also the divisional headman responsible along with his council for its communes and villages (Hockings, 1980a). The four divisional headmen comprised the all-Nilgiri or four mountain council headed by the Paramount Chief which considered matters pertaining to the Badaga community in general or between residents of more than one division (Hockings, 1980a; Mastramurti, 1981). The Paramount Chief also attended

Toda council meetings to help mediate their disputes (Rivers, 1906; Walker, 1965). Headmen wielded much power, and played a vital role in the general life of villages and community by settling disputes and offering advice on important issues (Hockings, 1980a; Mantramurti, 1981; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). The procedure of dispute resolution and punishment is detailed by Hockings (1980a) and Mantramurti (1981).

The customary uncodified village government existed until the end of the nineteenth century when it was diminished by the imposition of the modern legal system, although the arrangement was initially perpetuated in British India. The personage of Paramount Chief still exists today, but is confined to ceremonial duties and minor disputes (Hockings, 1999). Badagas are now participants in modern governance as legal professionals and politicians. Even so, some Badagas preferred the village headman to the modern legal system because they respected elders and tradition, resolved disputes timely and efficiently (often on the same day), unlike the modern legal system which could take several years, and were inexpensive compared to high legal fees (Mantramurti, 1981). Another reason is to protect a village's reputation as a police investigation and gossip is dishonour (Hockings, 1980a). Heidemann (2014) notes there are now two types of Badaga leaders: 'Traditional' leaders who preside over councils and have a hold in the villages, and justify their legitimacy based on local needs, and 'modern' leaders who belong to political parties with experience of dealing with local and state governments or are successful entrepreneurs. The traditional panchayat system is still active in many parts of the community, and in the late 1980s played a key role in a coordinated large rally to hand over a memorandum to the government with several demands to improve their quality of life (Heidemann, 2014). Many of the kinship rules were preferences rather than prescriptions, and not elaborated sufficiently to account for every eventuality; they were modified according to personal considerations, and there were many alternatives and exceptions; interesting anomalies are detailed by Hockings (1982, 1999). Nowadays it is becoming more common for people to choose their own partners, although arranged marriage still exists; the next chapter reveals young people are confused by traditional marriage rules. The above account is also influenced by Hockings's training in Radcliffe-Brown orthodoxy, which unfortunately followed a trend of kinship terminologies, marriage rules, and authority, whilst neglecting kinship practice in daily life.



Hockings (1980b) published a medical ethnography about Badaga folk medicine based on his research in the 1960s which implies a distinct approach to health and illness. Lay understandings of ill health were often deduced by logic and reasoning, for example bites, burns, and stings, and linked to diet and uncleanness, played out in social prohibitions and taboos of certain foods and behaviours. Health issues with no rational cause, especially mental health, were attributed to the supernatural such as astral influence, evil spirits, sorcery, and sins committed in previous incarnations. For example, chickenpox, measles, rubella, and smallpox were attributed to the goddess Mariamma, and they celebrated an annual festival to please the goddess with offerings (sacrifice) of goats and sheep, recitation of curative and protective spells, and fire-walking activities whereby devotees walked across glowing charcoal (Harkness, 1832; Ouchterlony, 1865; Stokes, 1882). Badaga therapists, mostly women, diagnosed ill-health and prescribed treatment, and there were three categories: Midwife, responsible for prenatal and postpartum care of mothers, children, and animals; herbal therapist, women that prepared and administered medicines using a large variety of freshly-gathered herbs, alongside other approaches such as dietary recommendations, management of wounds and broken bones, and massage; and exorcist, men that cast spells (mantras) and made talismans to ward off evil influences. It was also believed evil spirits could be exorcised by non-Badaga exorcists during a séance with trance, spells, singing, and either throwing the possessed person into a river or inducing the evil spirit into a lock of hair which was then cut off and nailed to a tree or corked in a bottle and buried. Case studies of spirit possession and exorcism are described by Hockings (1980b).

Hockings (1980b) estimated the existence of 50 to 100 practising therapists in the community. Each phratry had several therapists but most villages had none. He believed they practiced idiosyncratic folk therapies rather than a common medical system, for the following reasons: Virilocal residence meant local health beliefs were passed down by oral tradition as there were no medical texts or schools; therapists were secretive as they believed the efficacy of herbal remedies diminished when disclosed; and each therapist worked creatively. But does it mean caution is needed when interpreting Hockings's research, based on one village (Oranayi), and therefore not generalizable to other therapists? Also, Hockings did not explain why a therapist unwilling to disclose her secrets to other Badagas was willing to do so for him. It should also be noted the other tribes in the Nilgiri consulted Badaga therapists reputed for particular cures, and

similarly Badagas consulted their therapists (Rivers, 1906; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). Hockings (1980b) attributes the marked population increase of Badagas from 500 in 1603 to 2207 in 1812 to their indigenous medicine.

Badagas also performed health-related life-cycle rituals for pregnancy, birth, childhood, old-age, and death (Hockings, 1980b; Sastri, 1892; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). Examples of rituals included: Pregnancy diagnosis, when a woman with symptoms of early pregnancy did not wear clean clothes as comfort was thought to cause a miscarriage; naming ceremony, to name a baby before his fortieth day to symbolise transition to a social being; head shaving ceremony, when a child's hair was shaved within one year of birth; first tooth ceremony, when the first tooth appeared on a boy's jaw; and buffalo milking ceremony, between ages seven and nine, to introduce a boy to adult work (Hockings, 1980b). Badagas also had elaborate death and funeral rituals (Hockings 2001; Hockings, 2010). Examples include a custom known as 'watching the sick' when relatives stayed with a dying Badaga and sang epic ballads; a gold or silver coin covered with butter put in the person's mouth or tied with a cloth to the arm when death was imminent, a symbolic fee for the soul to cross over to the spirit world (Gover, 1871; Harkness, 1832; Hockings, 1980b; Schad 1911; Thurston and Rangachari 1909) and drops of milk and butter put in to the corpse's mouth to symbolise permission from the relatives for the soul to depart (Hockings, 1980b). Hockings (1980b) noted differences between Badaga, Ayurvedic, and Sidda medicine, as only 49 of more than 120 species he identified in a village were mentioned in books of Indian medicine, and they had a different usage. However, by the time Badaga folk medicine was studied by Hockings in the 1960s, only a handful of elderly therapists remained in the community. My enquiries in the Nilgiri suggest their folk medicine is extinct or never existed. Biomedicine is now available, first introduced by missionaries and the government hospitals founded in Kotagiri in 1832, Ootacamund in 1834, and Coonoor in 1839 (Basel German Evangelical Missionary Society, 1849; Karl, 1945; Mullens, 1854; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868; Sawday, 1884; Simon, 1940). There has been no recent research about folk medicine except a few studies of chemical properties of medicinal plants used by Badagas with potential therapeutic benefits (Madhunisha, Gayathri, Nirmaladevi, and Janardhana, 2012; Sashikumar, Karthikeyani, and Janardhanan, 2001), but the research is methodologically weak and in its infancy.

### **Concluding summary**

The introductory chapter has introduced Badagas and their representation in the literature. Since the work of Hockings, they have not attracted much serious academic attention as the majority of writings concern Kotas and Todas. Even so, the main themes apparent in the literature show advances in understanding have been made on several fronts including topics which have been well documented.

There is agreement among writers that Badagas are a distinct social group sharing a common history and culture framed in terms of categories of similarity or otherness. As shown above, numerous markers have been used to differentiate them including caste, customs, economic organisation, folklore, folk medicine, house design, kinship, language, limited contact with 'lowland peoples', oral tradition, religion, responses to colonialism, ritual exchanges, territoriality, village government, and so forth. Taken together, the rigorous and meticulous description and analysis in the literature documents a rich culture and history, a working sense of their character and distinctiveness. However, the picture is also simplified and misleading. Established on the style and trends of social science in the first and latter halves of the twentieth century, writings follow a certain genre which underpins the reification of a Badaga identity. This is rooted in the earliest writings by adventurers, civil servants, and missionaries in British India penned in a language and mind-set characteristic of colonists and racists when anthropology was evolving as an academic discipline with origins in colonialism, diffusionism, evolutionism, and primitive society (Brecks, 1873; Buchanan, 1807; Bühler, 1849, 1851, 1853; Francis, 1908; Grigg, 1880; Hodgson, 1849, 1856, 1876; 1832; Jagor, 1876, 1879, 1882; King, 1870; Marshall, 1873; Metz 1864; Oppert, 1896; Prichard, 1844; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). Later anthropological work signalled an improvement in terms of research methodology, but was still influenced by then-dominant functionalist and structural-functionalist perspectives. This is clearly shown in the analytical tone of reports reviewed above which emphasise a collective view of Badagas from the top down, an examination of their general arrangement in a close-knit and geographically bounded community that is institutionally defined and controlled, a framework that draws boundaries around Badagas and their society as a complex system with parts working together to promote solidarity and stability. The simple representation, essentially Radcliffe-Brownian, imagines Badaga society as a large organism consisting of systems and structured organization with constituent elements, namely

customs, norms, traditions, and institutions with specific functions that work together. The writings also contain a limited sense of agency, as people come across as puppets acting as their role requires. As anthropology was isolated as an academic discipline from both philosophy and sociology until recently, the literature portrays relatively fixed and concrete notions of reality which neglect shared subjective experiences, meanings, and lived experiences in daily life. The functionalist stance is evident in previous reports which impute as rigorously as possible each custom or practice and its position and effect in a supposedly cohesive, stable system. Examples include the primitive systems of kinship terminologies and ritual and economic exchanges which ascribe appropriate behaviour and relations and linkages between various categories of people, the organization of a Badaga society around descent groups characterised by common purposes such as marriage and administering property (Lounsbury, 1964a, 1964b; Radcliffe-Brown, 1952); gift exchange and reciprocity among the Nilgiri peoples, influenced no doubt by the work of Mauss (1923); the portrayal of rituals in terms of their social functions and value to society as a whole over the individual; and the practice and assumptions of the classic model of single-site ethnography which regarded Badagas and the Nilgiri as local and bounded in an isolated region contextualised through macro-level constructions of a larger social order, namely the British Raj and its capitalist political economy, broad focus on the social structures that shape a primeval human society.

Thus Badagas have been characterized as a distinct and fixed society in a microcosm that is patterned, structured, and stable. These representations are also applicable to the writings on other peoples in the Nilgiri such as Todas, which, similarly allied to a particular kind of comparative and empiricist method, come across as much of the same reporting, essentially repeating common themes despite their apparent focus on distinctive groups, as if the authors had to organise their work in a similar fashion to apply principles and laws of operation presumed applicable to all societies in order for their work to be accepted as anthropology and ethnography (Glucksmann, 2015; Leach, 1961). Although these perspectives began to wane in the 1960s, and are now effectively dead in anthropology generally, it is surprising they are alive in the literature on Badagas, and even come across as a staple of the literature. Yet many of these representations are second order theorisations devised and imposed by Western anthropologists rather than Badagas, a major limitation. The down-to-earth, normalized, and unquestioned vision of being Badaga by previous scholars shows a complete absence of

grappling with epistemological issues, as complex and multiple modes of identity have been reduced to a simple notion— ‘the Badagas’ as a culturally identical people in terms of similarity and difference with others. In many respects, the literature, for the most part written by white men visiting a strange, isolated place who took an exotic people as their specialty, emphasises the characteristics of a primeval human society (see, for example, Hockings’s 1980b descriptions of ‘exotic’ customs such as exorcism, sacrifice of goats and sheep, and fire-walking activities), and still comes across as if the anthropologist’s role is auxiliary to the colonial administrator. Questions about whether observed phenomena really constitute reality or a co-production in the minds of anthropologists writing in certain genres and academic fashions has never entered academic writings on the Nilgiri. This common representation of a reified Badaga identity in the literature raises more questions than it answers, largely because it takes identity as so straightforward and unproblematic, an illusion that has more weight than is actually present. It overemphasises social order and the organization of society at the expense of downplaying contradiction, independence, social change, and variation (Kuper, 1988). My discussions with Badagas revealed they certainly do not conform to the old fashioned style of Euro-American thinking which depicts them in simple, objective, and impersonal terms living in a sealed bubble of space-culture isomorphism.

My initial fieldwork also showed other accounts in the literature are anachronistic, as previous in-depth research dates to the 1990s and earlier. Not surprisingly, Badagas, like others in India, have been experiencing and assimilating profound changes as new ideas, products, and ways of living have become widespread. An increasing number of young people are migrating to cities in search of education and employment and are finding their place in urban culture, and the use of technologies such as new media influence how they communicate, interact, and understand themselves. Migration to urban areas and overseas, and the dramatic rise of technologies such as new media, grounded on broader transformation of Indian society, have shaped multifaceted changes among Badagas which warrant further research. To understand these changes, the thesis is about their experiences of living in contemporary India as they navigate a society in flux, the extent to which change increasingly permeates and influences understandings of self and life, an important case study of the impact of India’s social and economic transformation on its people, and a timely update of the antiquated picture of Badagas in the literature. As a starting point, the next chapter takes the view that there never has been

such a thing as a distinctive, reified Badaga identity and culture, and then scrutinizes the literature on identity to call for a more nuanced approach. It begins by reviewing the diverse ways ‘identity’ is deployed in the social science literature, and then turns to the varied, loose, and contradictory ways scholars have represented the identities of Badagas. Similarly, the remaining sections explore the varied meanings of quality of life, review previous studies of the concept concerning Badagas, and then elucidate its convention in the thesis. It brings a fresh perspective to bear on the meaning of being Badaga, and sets the scene for subsequent chapters which offer an empirical and theoretical revision of its portrayal in the literature.

## 2. Being Badaga: Identity and life quality

What does it mean to be a Badaga in India today, and how is it any different to being another person in the Nilgiri, South India, or beyond? How do Badagas live, and how is their quality of life? At first glance, answers to these questions might seem obvious and straightforward as the previous chapter reviews a rich literature about their culture and history. They have been characterised in the literature as a rural community in the Nilgiri of about 160,000 people with certain cultural and historical traits, a working sense of an identity. But answers are not so simple if we step back and think in terms of human diversity and contemporary cultural change. Badagas are a large and diverse group of people, and cannot be lumped together so easily. They are engaging new social landscapes. For example, an increasing number of young people are migrating to cities in search of employment, and are using novel technologies such as new media which influence how they communicate, interact, and understand themselves. Migration to urban areas and overseas, and the dramatic rise of technologies such as new media, grounded on broader transformation of Indian society, have shaped Badagas in multifaceted ways. Thus the meaning of being Badaga is much more nuanced than implied in the literature, and that previous research conducted up to the 1990s is in need of revision.

This leads to further questions. Is the distinctive identity of Badagas reported in the literature anachronistic or still being upheld? Have they given rise to new forms of identification? Or perhaps they only really existed as an artefact in the literature? As a starting point to explore the meaning of being Badaga in India today, this chapter introduces the diverse ways identity is deployed in the literature. It then turns to review the varied, loose, and contradictory ways scholars have represented Badagas which reveals no clear definition or conceptualization. As any future attempt to study their identity must, by necessity, be selective, it also clarifies the ethnography's theoretical grounding on symbolic interactionism, the sociological tradition which underlies most research on identity. Similarly, the remainder of the chapter explores the varied meanings of quality of life, reviews previous studies of the concept among Badagas, and then elucidates its convention in the ethnography.

## **Representing identity**

To situate the present study in social science ideas about identity, this section reviews the main research traditions apparent in the literature although they are not proprietary as scholars have weaved the concept into their writings in many different ways. Identity has a long history in the Western literature, and first appeared in philosophical writings at the time of the ancient Greeks. It is now topical in contemporary analytical philosophy, particularly the perennial philosophical problem of permanence amidst change. The term ‘identity’ is derived from the Latin root *idem* which conveys continuity and sameness. In an academic sense, it has evolved into one of the most widely studied subjects now central to current social science discourse (Appiah and Gates, 1995; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; du Gay, Evans, and Redman, 2000; Jenkins, 1996). This is perhaps not surprising considering the fundamental goals of anthropology, sociology, and cognate disciplines are to explore human diversity, the meaning of being human, and the ways individuals and collectives understand and construct themselves and others. Even so, academic usage of the term ‘identity’ is a recent occurrence, and is typically attributed to Sigmund Freud’s work on psychoanalysis in the 1920s, and Erik Erikson’s work on human development in the 1960s. Since then, interest has increased and diffused across disciplinary boundaries for a variety of reasons, for example the progress made by African Americans at achieving civil rights, topical issues such as ethnicity, immigration, racism, and multiculturalism, integration in Europe and further afield, and the expanding range of social and political identity concerns. The rise of feminist, post-colonial, and post-structuralist scholarship since the early 1990s has also contributed to the shift in the literature from similarity to difference.

As identity has been approached in myriad ways in the literature, there is a lack of clarity and consistency in its conceptualisation. To some extent, the many hats of identity reflect the concerns and diversity of disciplinary paradigms with distinctive empirical and theoretical traditions. While it is difficult to characterise the burgeoning literature, in general terms identity studies are organised around either notions of personal identity, the qualities that make a person distinctive (an individual’s sense of oneself as a separate person based on their unique own attributes), or notions of shared and social identity which emphasise social category or group membership based on a shared sense of self and sociality, essentially a group of people designated by a label that is commonly used by either themselves and others. Anthropologists tend to focus on shared and social identity, and many themes exist in the literature. Those



reviewed in the next section concerning the writings about Badagas include cultural identity, the distinctiveness of the group in terms of its cultural attributes; place and spatial identity, perceived images of places such as the Nilgiri based on their unique characteristics ranging from local to regional and beyond; and identity politics, political activity based on claims that prioritize their particular group identity and experience, particularly by those who feel they have been disadvantaged within dominant social structures. Another conceptual distinction of identity studies concern relation and context. Social identity is relational in the sense they are produced in interaction with others as representations of real or attributed differences, the establishment of criteria by which people represent themselves, and are contextual in the sense that they are socially constructed differently in different cultural contexts. Yet there are many research foci in the literature surrounding identity and the various factors and social contexts of its production, maintenance, and transgression. These include, for example, body difference, class, consumption, corporate identity, diaspora, economic change, ethnicity, feminism, gender, globalisation, global warming, health status, language, national identity, race, religion, sexuality, social class, social movements, social inequality, technology, terrorism, and so forth (Banks, 1996; Billington, Strawbridge, and Hockey, 1998; Craib, 1998; Edensor, 2002; Giddens, 1990; Jenkins 1996). There is also a flourishing literature on collective identity which delineates dynamics of groups and their cultures, politics, and social movements, which stems from classic sociological constructs like collective consciousness (Durkheim), class consciousness (Marx), Verstehen (Weber), and Gemeinschaft (Tonnies) (Melucci, 1989; Nagel, 1995; Taylor & Whittier, 1999; Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale, 1994). In India, given its diverse population, considerations of identity can be complex and multidimensional, encompassing caste, ethnicity, regional, and religious memberships which have been especially important in shaping the country's politics. Indian post-colonial identity, the representation of nationhood in colonial and postcolonial contexts, grounded on postcolonial studies, features prominently in writings about the post-independence nation-building effort and legacy of imperialism and globalisation, although not so much in the Nilgiri literature (Gottlob, 2011; Mondal, 2010).

While it is not possible here to systematically review all of the themes, frameworks and theories that underlie identity studies, in general terms they align with either classical conceptualisations which take essentialist perspectives of social category and rigidity and their

underlying structural and institutional forces, or contemporary social constructionist understandings which emphasise the dynamic and fluid nature of identity beset with contradiction and contestation, something that is constantly evolving and changing, as meaning is continuously being negotiated and revised. The latter theorises humanity as endlessly adaptive, and underscores recent work on the formation of cosmopolitan and multicultural identities in which ideas of rigid group boundaries have given way to fluidity and hybridity. Extreme versions of constructionism, associated with postmodernism, regard identity as not clearly and unambiguously defined but as inherently performative and transient and continuously changing; in other words, some scholars consider it to be a purely a theoretical construct imposed on the social world (Cohen, 2000; Giddens, 1987; Larrain, 1994; Rosenau, 1992; Sarup, 1996). Postmodernist constructions concerning fusions of multiple incoherent and unstable selves is often seen as a product of the formation of sociological notions such as diaspora, globalisation, post-colonialism, and transnationalism, and as a solution to the essentialist idea of an innate and stable identity that has been vigorously criticised.

These examples are only a taste of the many flavours of identity which have been weaved into the literature in recent decades. The abundance of studies—indeed traces of identity are sprinkled across almost all topics of anthropology and sociology and cognate disciplines—means it is a difficult and perhaps impossible concept to review. Some scholars have even called for the concept to be abandoned as it has become unworkable (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Though the burgeoning literature is remarkable and often enlightening, its vast scope and complexity certainly poses a challenge for the present study, as the above review shows identity has been applied widely, loosely, and in contradictory ways, the production of diverse meanings with no clear definition or conceptualization. Therefore, the present study's attempt to study the identities of Badagas must, by necessity, be selective, and thus the ethnography does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of the vast literature. Instead, the research is grounded on the sociological tradition of identity (symbolic interactionism), a major perspective within social science that underlies a great deal of interest in the topic, which is introduced in the following paragraphs as its theoretical underpinning.

The sociological tradition of identity research originated in the United States around 1870 in philosophical ideas about pragmatism advocated by John Dewey, William James, Sanders Peirce, and James Tufts. It was advanced in the academic work of early social scientists such as

Charles Cooley, William James, and George Mead, to name a few (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). For example, William James's (1890) analyses of multiple social selves, and Charles Cooley's (1902) looking glass self, which both refer to the ways identity is shaped by social context and the perceptions of others, are well known to social scientists. American sociologist George Mead is regarded as the founder of symbolic interactionism, and, as a leading American Pragmatist, also furthered the pragmatist movement with distinctive concepts of sociality. Mead's theory of the mind and self, the notion that the self emerges out of social process, was a major contribution to understanding identity. In contrast to earlier individualistic theories of the self which approached human experience in terms of personal identity or selfhood, Mead conceded that it arises in the process of social experience, especially communication ('symbolic interaction'), and then develops as a result of the totality of social experience and social relations with others; therefore, society is a processual whole in which people come to understand and define themselves through social interaction (Mead, 1934).

*Mind, Self and Society* (1934), credited as the basis of symbolic interactionism, details Mead's conceptions of the social self, notably how the mind and self are intelligible only in terms of social process and interaction between people and their social environment, and cannot be understood as independent of sociality. Communication, forms of 'symbolic interaction' (social interaction) that take place via shared symbols such as definitions, gestures, language, rituals, etc., presupposes a social context within which people interact, giving rise to meaning. In other words, there is no meaning of an object independent of the individual and their social interaction. Therefore, Mead posited that mind and self arise out of ongoing participation in social process, and rejected both the traditional view of the mind as separate from the body and the behaviourism approach which reduces the mind in terms of physiology and conditioning. In contrast to functionalism and behaviourism, symbolic interactionism regards the self not as a mechanistic or structurally determined object but as a fundamental and flexible structure of human experience that arises through interpretation and negotiation in response to other people and intersubjective relations. Self emerges out of "a special set of social relations with everyone involved in a specific social project (Mead, 1934, p. 156).

Mead (1934) also developed ideas about the distinction between two aspects of self, 'I' and 'me', a concept first introduced by William James. This illustrates self as a product of both the individual and their social situation, an active response to the social world rather than a passive

reflection of it. As Mead posited, "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Mead, 1934, p. 175). In other words, the 'me' is the social self, the socialised aspect of the individual based on the internalisation of social processes such as other people's attitudes shaped through inter-subjective symbolic processes, and the 'I', in contradistinction, is the individual's response to its situation, the part of self which responds to the 'me'. As the active aspect of self, the 'I' means the individual is creative and flexible and not imprisoned by mindlessly following social prescriptions, and it is this flexibility of alternative courses of action that "gives the sense of freedom, of initiative" (Mead, 1934, p. 177). The 'I' and the 'me' exist in dynamic relation to one another, a reflection of the dialectical relationship between the individual and society. Taken together, they form the self in Mead's social philosophy, as he stated "both aspects of the 'I' and the 'me' are essential to self in its full expression" (Mead, 1934, p. 199). These ideas are elaborated further in discussions of identity and reality in *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938). For Mead, the individual is not merely a passive recipient of social influence but an active participant constantly reconstructing their relationships with the social context. Reality is not simply out there, independent of the individual, but the outcome of their interrelations with society, and is socially defined; therefore, self cannot be understood as independent of social process. It is this reflexivity of self-consciousness that shapes the objectification of self.

Another prominent contribution from a symbolic interactionist perspective was advocated by Herbert Blumer at the University of Chicago, also known as the Chicago School. Blumer, in a series of articles and other works brought together in the book *Symbolic Interactionism* (1969), coined the term 'symbolic interactionism' and developed it into a cohesive theory with specific methodological implications. Blumer's symbolic interactionism centres on the processes people use to constantly create and recreate experiences in dynamic social interaction, the construction and negotiation of meaning and social realities by social actors as core elements of human communication (Blumer, 1969). Echoing Mead, Blumer posits that individuals have a self, something which they make of themselves, and that identity refers to the meanings or labels that one attributes to the self and the social expectations tied to them. Therefore, Blumer argued that self emerges from human association, and that the creation of social reality is a continuous process through collective and individual action. Self is regarded as a reflexive process, and not a structure, which means the individual actively interprets objects in the world and does not

merely respond in an automatic manner (Blumer, 1966). Self and society are continuously being created and recreated during ongoing social interaction, as common meanings and interpretations are developed and manipulated by those engaged in it. Society, viewed through the lens of symbolic interaction, is an outgrowth of communication and social interaction based on meanings, and, reciprocally, society is also basic to the development of self, as social interaction shapes society which then plays back on social interaction and self, each constitutive of the other. Self and society, then, are seen as pluralistic and reciprocal.

Stryker's (2000) work, referred to as the Indiana School of symbolic interactionism, puts importance on the role of social structure. Commonly known as 'structural symbolic interactionism', Stryker's approach attempts to bridge gaps between micro- and macro-concerns, and counter critiques since the 1970s of symbolic interactionism's neglect of social structure and broader societal issues, and therefore provides significant theoretical insights to expanding symbolic interactionist concepts. According to this perspective, individuals identify themselves and others in the context of social structure, and these identifications become internalized parts of self which build up as identities over time from the person to the situation and larger social structure, highlighting the reciprocity of the individual, self, and society. It also takes as its foundation the notion of social structures as durable and reproducible patterns of interactions and relationships, and society as composed of complex mosaics of large-scale structures such as communities, groups, and institutions, and their interactions and role relationships, cross-cut by demarcations such as age, class, gender, ethnicity, and religion (Serpe and Stryker, 2011; Stryker, 2008). Following in the footsteps of these earlier pioneers, the work of other scholars have also advanced a number of developments in symbolic interactionist theory and identity, including, for example, Anselm Strauss's work in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and *Mirrors and Masks* (1969), and Goffman's seminal book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959).

### **Badaga identities**

There has been no empirical investigation of Badaga identities per se. However, connections with identity can be teased out of the literature. A key line of enquiry concerns the construction of a distinct group—the Badagas—framed in terms of cultural categories of similarity or otherness. The previous chapter reviews numerous reports in the literature about categories such

as caste or ethnic identity, economic and ritual exchanges, folklore, folk medicine, hamlets and villages, house design, kinship, religion, language, oral tradition, responses to colonialism, village government, and so forth. When taken together, the literature implies Badagas are a social group with its own distinct cultural identity. Hockings (1968, 1988, 1993) speculated they were very much aware of their distinctiveness as a caste by having their own language, culture, and oral tradition about their ancestors' migration from the Mysore region to the Nilgiri, separate to the other local peoples. He also wrote Badagas identified themselves as Backward Class—an official classification conferred by the Indian government—which they regarded as 'culturally superior to, or not as primitive as' the socially disadvantaged Scheduled Tribes (Kotas, Todas, and Kurumbas) living in aboriginal conditions in the jungle. Other distinctions Hockings thought they were aware of included same-caste marriage based on endogamy; ritual purity and impurity which forbid intimate relations and intercaste marriage with other local peoples; characteristic dress and tilaka; birth and residence in recognised Badaga hamlets with distinctive architecture and place-names; and the ability of two strangers of the same phratry to trace a tentative kinship connection between themselves if they worked at the problem. In this way, a reified cultural identity of Badagas has been stamped on the literature during the last century as a hallowed method of identifying a particular social group in terms of customary characteristics shared among its members.

The literature's emphasis on kinship terminologies, marriage rules, and customary authority has also been pertinent to the construction of Badaga identities. Based on formal analyses of kinship in the tradition of Morgan and Levi-Strauss, which was in fashion at the time kinship research was conducted in the Nilgiri, the literature emphasises the togetherness of Badagas as having blood ties, same-caste marriage based on endogamy of caste, and prohibition of intimate relations and intercaste marriage with other local peoples. Kinship also provides a distinctively relational mode of identification which implies feelings of genetic relatedness and family ties to the group. Mandelbaum (1970) notes Badaga villagers tended to refer to themselves in conversations and dealings with other Badagas by the name of their phratry, as the unit was paramount to much of daily life, but the Kotas he studied tended to view all Badagas as one, regardless of phratry, a human tendency to make finer distinctions when relationships are more intimate, although people were sensitive to individual differences such as wealth. This representation can be reinterpreted as showing two fundamental aspects of identity and kinship,

one in terms of the exclusivity of the group as different from its neighbours based on the type of kinship system as well as genetics and common descent, and the other which relates to actual networks of relationships on the ground which people use to distinguish each other (Parkin, 1997; Hutchinson, 1995; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

However, these principles of descent described in the literature are based on old styles of thinking about primitive societies when blood, descent and territoriality were assumed to equate with race (Kuper, 1988). Even though Badagas and other South Indians had the same sort of descent system, which basically consisted of patrilineal and segmented lineage systems with ultimogeniture, and the chronologically junior line having status priority in most respects, the literature tends to separate rather than unite their kinship systems. Its kinship system has been written about as if it is rooted in a bounded tribal social system with discrete properties (Hockings, 1980a; Holy, 1996; Parkin, 1997). It is a theoretical approach to identity based on the idea that group membership is fixed and based on blood ties, and complements other unifying criteria proposed in the literature such as culture, language, and territory. Put another way, it's the same logic as claiming someone cannot be British or English or identified with a particular community or village simply because they were not born in those locations. The literature portrays Badagas as one large family united by the past (evolutionary origin, genetics, and shared descent) and the future (descendants not yet born, and kinship rules such as inheritance patterns), even though such a group is too large to maintain a sense of shared kinship, and not everyone is interested in or have access to information about common origins and descent and other criteria included in such operationalisations of identity. Some early writings by adventurers and missionaries prior to the professionalization of ethnography in the twentieth century even mention ideas of genetically transmitted physical differences between the peoples in the Nilgiri.

Applying the concept of kinship to identity is also problematic for other reasons. In earlier periods of human history, groups often intermingled, which means objective identification based on genetics and hereditary is unworkable. Also, there has been no vigorous use of kinship to debate Badaga identities, as writings do not incorporate the theoretical theme of identity with ethnographic derived notions of kinship, unlike recent and explicit approaches that have since been published on other cultural groups (e.g. Bestard-Camps, 1991; Bornemann, 1992; MacClancy, 1993; Parkin, 1997; Sutton 1997).

There have been reports of incidents when Badagas upheld and emphasised these markers of cultural identity. Reflections on these events are useful because they give a greater understanding of how Badagas self-identify as a culturally autonomous group. An early example reported in the literature is when several Kotas decided to wear turbans associated with Badagas, and were bullied to stop copying the habit (Mandelbaum, 1941). Times have changed, however, as my own observations show many young Badagas today do not dress or behave differently to the TAMILIAN majority, and share a wide range of attributes with other South Indians, as they are not distinctly 'Badaga'. Another example is a large rally on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1989 which involved a procession to the District Collector's Office in Ooty and the submission of a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu with demands such as classification as Scheduled Tribe and minimum prices for agricultural products (Heidemann, 2014). Since the 1990s, the date of the rally has been designated 'Badaga Day' to celebrate their culture, history, and political unity with activities such as communal food, dance, gatherings, prayers to the goddess Hetta, processions, public speeches, and worship of the bust of H. B. Ari Gowder (Heidemann, 2014).

There have also been subsequent demands and protests such as memoranda, small- and large-scale gatherings, and delegation visits to government departments and the Tea Board. These events, organised under the auspices of a reified Badaga identity, confirm that many people self-identify and align themselves as a unifying collectivity based on cultural distinctiveness of real or imagined shared beliefs and practices, boundaries based on some of the criteria reviewed in the previous chapter. According to Heidemann (2014), these events serve as public platforms which unite the community as a whole with feelings of oneness and self-representation, and mark their presence and visibility as a distinct group to the larger audience locally and further afield. 'This cultural display identifies groups, highlights cultural markers, and underlines political claims. Culture is externalized and becomes a thing that can be sensed' (Heidemann, 2014, p.92). Heidemann contends the central feature of the 1989 rally and memorandum was the experience of oneness, as the majority of Badagas congregated as a homogenous whole in one large space in close proximity and with coordinated behaviour, and thus the event can be regarded as a consensus among Badagas. Even years after the rally, Badagas still speak positively of the event because of its symbolic meaning of cultural autonomy, harmony, and solidarity (Heidemann, 2014).



Heidemann (2014) also emphasises the role of the state in self-representation as Badaga at the rally. The memorandum was handed over in a meeting between leaders of the Badaga community and the state government, and the document contained objectified descriptions of Badaga culture which were incorporated into government files, a hybrid of traditional and modern aspects of Indian society. Similarly, he interprets Badaga Day to be a celebration of both the cultural self and the state, as government representatives were welcomed and honoured at the event which symbolised traditional aspects of Badaga culture. Therefore, Badagas constitute a distinct group with their own cultural values and infrastructure but at the same time are integrated into the state. Another example is Badagas working as public servants and government employees, thereby representing both Badagas and the government in a single form and place. However, an inherent contradiction of this interpretation of hybridity by Heidemann is the reification of two forms of bounded cultures coming into contact based on assumptions of distinctiveness as separate entities, perhaps inconsistent with hybridity.

These events represent more than symbolic displays of identity maintenance and promotion. Cultural autonomy as Badaga is also constructed as a political identity. It is political because some people argue they should be designated as Scheduled Tribe, and utilise events such as the rally to try to achieve this goal. It is an attempt to advance within the political system based on distributive justice, one of the key principles of social policy in postcolonial India, and therefore can be regarded as 'identity politics' (Appiah, 2005; Chatterjee, 2004; Taylor, 1994). Through recognition as Scheduled Tribe, they hope to secure special provisions such as quotas for jobs in central and state governments and reserved seats in educational institutions, parliament, and provincial legislative assemblies (Hockings, 1993; Singh, 1994). Also, if their demands are met, the group's political strength in terms of its representation, and power to influence the Government to claim preferential entitlements and resources, will be asserted (Arora, 2007). As indigeneity typically connotes occupation of a specific territory, another implication of the Scheduled Tribe designation is an assumed innate connection with the Nilgiri. The proposed lumping together of Badagas with other Scheduled Tribes in the Nilgiri (Kotas, Todas, and Kurumbas) based on the essentialist notion of an autochthonous cultural history would also create new demarcations between them and other South Indians (Kenrick and Lewis, 2004; Plaice, 2006; Robins, 2003). As an indigenous group, clearly separated from other minorities, they would then be seen as deserving of distinctive rights (Barber, 2008). The current image of

Badagas as being intimately integrated with the general castes would be changed as Scheduled Tribes are generally portrayed in India as geographically concentrated and isolated in the hilly and forested terrain of the plateau regions of central and eastern India and in the north-eastern states (even though the populations grouped under the category are extremely diverse). Demands for designation as Scheduled Tribe can also be interpreted as grapples with self, such as questioning the value of being Badaga, and desiring identity change. It is perhaps contradictory that Badagas concurrently construct both positive and negative images of their caste at events such as the rally, the former based on feelings of pride and togetherness, the latter on disadvantage and desirability of a new identity to claim government entitlements, privilege, and recognition. Thus the perceived worth of being identified as Badaga relative to others is ambivalent. At a general level, the identity politics shows how Indian society revolves around highly contested and dynamic notions of identity such as caste (Bayly, 1999; Beteille, 1965; Dirks, 2001). Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes tend to be perceived by dominant groups as 'others' or 'different', a consequence of the Hindu Varna System which excludes, discriminates and isolates groups in the population on the basis of their caste, ethnicity and religion. Though equality is guaranteed constitutionally, and discrimination against castes is illegal, implicit discrimination still exists.

Yet Badagas are not alone in this endeavour. Since the categorisation of Scheduled Tribe in the 1950s, the number of communities listed in the category has increased over the years. Many groups have been reclassified as Scheduled Tribe, and there are currently several hundred groups clamouring for tribal recognition and special entitlements and protections (Arora, 2007; Baviskar, 1995; Galanter, 1984; Heredia & Srivastava, 1994; Jenkins, 2003; Kapila, 2004; Karlsson, 2001; Sengupta, 1986; Singh, 1994; Unnithan-Kumar, 1997). It can be situated in recent discussion in other countries about issues surrounding indigenous identities constructed at global and local levels, and the growth of indigenist advocacy and politics (Barnard, 2006; Geunther et al. 2006; Harris, Nakata, and Carlson, 2013; Harrison, 1999; Merlan, 1998; Povinelli, 2003). As in other cases, indigeneity as an identity has become a powerful tool that Badagas deploy for self-affirmation and political mobilization to influence the distribution of resources and power. The politics of being and becoming tribal in India today, grounded on constructions of caste, tribe, and indigeneity in colonial and post-colonial discourse, have been

the subject of intense debate but requires further elucidation in the case of Badagas (Appiah, 2005; Dirks, 2001; Mahias, 1997; Taylor, 1994).

Another representation of identity in the literature concerns place and region, ideas about the meaning and significance of the Nilgiri with implications for how its inhabitants are also portrayed (Cresswell 2004; Hague and Jenkins, 2005; Jones, and Garde-Hansen, 2012; Relph, 1976; Taylor 2010). These representations are grounded on the traditional emphasis in anthropology on spatially localized societies and cultures as objects of study. The Nilgiri is typically characterised as unique, a cultural enclave of more than a dozen hill tribes that have inhabited the mountains for centuries, and isolated until recently from the lower plains by a harsh environment—steep escapements, thick blankets of subtropical forest, dangerous animals such as snakes, tigers and leopards, diseases such as malaria, and Kurumba sorcerers—which permitted only brief and sporadic contact with the outside world and few long-lasting connections (Fenicio, 1603; Hockings, 1989, 1997, 1999; Rivers, 1906; Walker, 1986). This description in the literature comes across as something out of a Tarzan film! Other aspects of the Nilgiri, such as its climate and ‘environmental peculiarity and individuality’ (von Lengerke and Blasco, 1989, p. 62), are also regarded as distinctive within South India. The communities in the Nilgiri have also been spatially separated by researchers. Although any village of one group was within a short walk of the others (Mandelbaum, 1941), it is claimed they were territorially distinct: Todas lived on the western side of the Nilgiri Plateau at elevations ranging 2000 to 2400 metres; Badagas mainly inhabited the eastern half at elevations ranging 2200 to 1200 metres; the small Kota population was interspersed among Badagas; and Kurumbas lived mainly on the steep slopes of the Nilgiri at elevations ranging 1600 to 600 metres (Bird-David, 1997; Hockings, 1980; Kapp, 1978; Walker, 1986), shown diagrammatically in Hockings (1989, p. 366). Another separation is the Nilgiri Plateau, the top of the mountain range and its communities of Badagas, Kotas, and Todas, and the Nilgiri-Wynaad and its groups of Badagas, Chettis, Kotas, Kurumbas, Nayakas, Paniyas, and Todas on the lower western slopes a dozen kilometres down. Bird-David (1997, p. 6) even regards them as ‘two regional social worlds’ with significant differences, although almost all studies of Badagas concern the plateau and disregard the Wynaad (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1952; Misra, 1972; Bird-David, 1997).

The hills versus plains narrative, an extreme contrast of the highlands and lowlands, portrays the antiquity, peculiarity, and geographical separation of a long-lost island-like region,

and, therefore, the disconnection of its peoples and their cultures from those who bordered it. Singling out the Nilgiri along these lines stems from the rationale of the earliest known written account by Fenicio (1603), an Italian Jesuit priest who ventured into the mountains to search for rumored long-lost ancient Christian communities (Whitehouse, 1873; Rivers, 1906). This myth was sustained in the early writings of British officials and visitors when they portrayed the Nilgiri as a European discovery, a remote and static place that only came alive in British India, and romanticized its inhabitants as primitive tribes with peculiar features untouched by modern culture and society. For example, the Todas, a group of former pastoralists in the Nilgiri, have been likened to the Romans, Sumerians of Iraq, and lost peoples of Israel (Francis, 1908; Hockings, 2008; Peter, 1963; Walker, 1991).

Later on, academic writers also regarded the Nilgiri as developing on the periphery of Indian society, and not integrated with the state or peoples in the lowlands, unmoved by South Indian culture (Fox, 1963; Mandelbaum, 1989; Walker, 1989). Colonial rule and early anthropology attempted to map peoples with some putatively common characteristics in neat and tidy spatially-bound entities, thereby producing rigid identities. The evolution of the othering process of civil servants and visitors in the Nilgiri in the context of the history and development of anthropology during the 19th and 20th centuries has been nicely summarised by Mahias (1997). It is important to reflect on the dangers of these simple representations. The construal of the Nilgiri as isolated and unique framed Badagas and other people as primitive tribal groups separate from the 'lowland peoples' with bounded communities, extraordinary features, folk beliefs of separateness since ancient times, and intertribal relations fixed to narrowly-defined and formalised socio-economic activities, simple stereotypes which accentuate their distinctiveness from each other and other South Indians. This reductive vision reifies Badagas as culturally identical in terms of similarity with each other and difference with others through imposed identifications that developed within a specific history of Euro-American styles of thinking which then became a staple of the literature. The framing of Badagas in the literature in terms of these markers to differentiate between in-group and out-group members created complementary group identity boundaries and divisions which correspond to and even reinforce one another to imply a distinct and specific entity sharing a common history and culture, styled in the literature as 'the Badagas'. For these reasons, authors have tended to relegate the identification of Badagas to simple terms such as "there is hardly any doubt as to who is and is

not a Badaga”, “they constitute a distinct community linguistically, culturally, and socially” (Heidemann, 2014, p. 94), and “the community is a grouping where potential membership is the same as actual membership, no problem arises in practice over who is a Badaga and who is not” (Hockings, 1988, p. 2).

The scientific value of assumptions about antiquity and primitiveness spawned discussion of nineteenth century evolutionism, as the cultures of the Nilgiri peoples, and their languages and jumangi-type relationships, were regarded as prototypical, representative of the original type or model of South Indians, which could give insights in to earlier societies, as anthropologists at that time were searching for autochthonous, unknown races (Rooksby, 1971; Walker, 1989; Zagerell, 1997). Indeed, the choice of Todas of early studies in the first place was to engage evolutionary theory (Stocking, 1988). One example is the suggestion in the literature that Badagu is a variant of Old Kannada retained from migrant ancestors from the Mysore region, albeit mixed with recent innovation and assimilation of linguistic characteristics of other Nilgiri languages (Agesthialingom, 1972; Emeneau, 1938, 1939, 1967). This perspective is derived partly from the nature of conventional ethnography which focused on single sites understood as containers of particular sets of social relations, bounded islands of cultural distinctiveness. Yet the convention and its assumptions have undergone shifts in anthropological thinking which need to be examined further in relation to Badagas and Nilgiri.

Applying geographical isolation to the peoples in the Nilgiri creates a number of other difficulties. In an increasingly connected and globalized world, it is difficult to think of communities as geographically bounded. Although it might seem truer today than ever before, the Indian population in times past was also mobile and connected. Globalization is not necessarily a new phenomenon but a historical process which has occurred since ancient times (Scholte, 2000). The authorities in the early colonial period often portrayed the population as fixed and immobile, and much of the literature on the Nilgiri makes the false assumption of sedentary patterns among Badagas and indigenous peoples as the norm, and population movement as an exclusively ‘modern’ phenomenon, even though historical research shows that most of the Indian rural population was highly mobile at that time, as population movement was the rule rather than exception (de Haan, 1999, 2002; Habib, 1963; Washbrook, 1993). These portrayals of Badagas are essentially artefacts created by writers through being identified as “other” to something else, to serve their own needs. A fundamental problem with these

representations is the implication of mutually exclusive groups, the division of the Nilgiri population into discontinuous groups, thereby supporting, albeit tacitly, a compartmentalised view of human diversity. Identities which portray the Nilgiri and its peoples as isolated and unique and potentially biologically constituted are open to the accusation of assuming or exaggerating homogeneity within each group, and focusing on contrast rather than similarity between groups, a neglect of mixed or multiple identities. The artificial division of people and locations as discrete societies based on cultural, historical and geographical grounds highlights differences, some of which are not significant or worth emphasising, and downplays similarities and togetherness as one diverse group, and therefore ignores nuanced meanings of identity. It should be noted, however, the sentiments of Western culture and its take on modernity relegate the local peoples to a passive voice with no agency of their own, although the local peoples also recognised the Nilgiri and themselves as distinctive, evidenced for example by their oral traditions of origin myths, territorial divisions, village exogamy, and so forth. Thus the construction of the Nilgiri as a regional space and identity ultimately underpins representations of Badagas. The value systems that upheld these early perspectives continue to influence the ways people think about the Nilgiri, and the ways that social structures operate. Perhaps surprisingly, the Nilgiri as a geographically-isolated cultural enclave is still the prevailing perspective in the literature, and is even repeated in recent writings (e.g. Nielson and Pritchard, 2009; Hockings, 2013). It is this imagined distinctiveness which has piqued so much interest from scholars and others over the years.

Conversely, a minority of writers have emphasised the similarities and linkages of the Nilgiri peoples and wider South Indian context, although they too emphasised the uniqueness and apparent scant cultural diffusion among the Nilgiri peoples. These include, for example, fluency in Dravidian languages, kinship systems, Saivite Hinduism, emphasis on pollution and purity, and gift exchange in previous times (Mandelbaum, 1970, 1989; Rivers, 1906; Walker, 1989; Zagarell 1997). Rivers (1906) commented that the assumed differences between the Nilgiri tribes could be slighter than initially thought when compared to customs and ceremonies elsewhere in India. Mandelbaum (1989) also changed his perspective as he came to know Indian society better. An underlying theme of Walker's recent update of the Todas was consideration of the Nilgiri within the Hindu world of South India (Walker, 1986, 1989). These linkages are not recent, however, as there is evidence that the Nilgiri and bordering areas in

ancient times had extensive and long-term relationships, and were integrated into state society (Zagarell, 1997), and archaeological research shows prehistoric cultures in the Nilgiri did not develop in a vacuum (Zagarell, 1997) despite earlier excavation reports which claim its monuments diverged from the types typifying much of South India during the megalithic period (Breeks, 1873; Hockings, 1976; Leshnik, 1970; Naik, 1966). Other linkages reported in the literature include trading expeditions in Tamil Nadu by Badagas, petty trading of merchandise in the Nilgiri by Chettis (Fenicio, 1603; Francis, 1908; Zagarell, 1997), and immigration throughout the preceding centuries (Richards, 1932). Another point to consider here is the supposed migration of the ancestors of Badagas from the Mysore region to the Nilgiri several hundred years ago, and the subsequent founding of the Badaga community, a key theme in oral tradition and academic literature. If the migration had really happened, Badagas have been displaced from the lower plains by only a few centuries, and therefore might retain some aspects of their residual identity, although it also seems possible they would have lost many connections with the plains; indeed, they lost their allegedly former Mysore caste identity as Vokkaliga (Hockings, 1980a). Unfortunately there is no consideration by previous scholars of the similarities and differences between Badagas and Vokkaliga, and the process of identity change from the former to the latter. In any case, these presumed linkages and similarities dispel the notion of isolation and difference, and instead paint a picture of the Nilgiri and its peoples as a piece of a jigsaw that has been part of Tamil Nadu and South India since ancient times. The degree of similarity and difference between peoples in the Nilgiri and other areas of South India seems to be a contentious issue in the literature, and it is difficult to find a balance between these perspectives as they are both representations by Western authors, and came to coexist in the literature through attempts of observation and epistemological construction to carve a Nilgiri space.

There is a marked reluctance in the Nilgiri literature to account for dynamic aspects of identity. However, there are exceptions. Although not noted in the literature, the establishment of the Badaga community in the Nilgiri by migrants of Vokkaligas from the southern plains of the Mysore region suggests their identities were highly fluid and adaptable, and capable of absorbing outsiders easily, inclusive rather than exclusive. According to oral tradition, on reaching the hills the women wore facial tattoos and dressed in white clothes to resemble Kota women, while the men wore Toda shawls for warmth and as an effort to resemble the hill tribes

(Benbow, 1930; Karl, 1945; Hockings, 1980). As Hockings (1999, p. 29) notes “they represent perhaps the only well-documented case in Southern Asia of a former caste group adopting a tribal social model for emulation, since usually cultural change has been in an opposite direction: Tribes there emulate and sometimes enter caste society”. Another exception to the ethnic essentialism and absolutism portrayed in the literature is speculation of identity change among Badagas in the 19th and 20th centuries set against encounters with migrants and British India’s meddling with sovereignty, social reforms, infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, population surveillance, land taxes, and so forth (James, 2000; Wolpert, 2009). Hockings (1989) believes the changes, concentrated in the towns in the Nilgiri, initially had minimal influence on Badagas as they continued their way of life as usual. However, they gradually came in contact with the new peoples and regime which shaped their orientations towards life and ways of living. Mandelbaum (1989) wrote the British carried certain legitimacy as they were regarded as the Kshatriya Varna, the social division of Hindu society synonymous with the ruling elite. He also reasoned that Badagas readily adopted the ways of Tamils and Kannadas as they ‘took the modernising Hindus when they met as models of change’ (Mandelbaum, 1989, p.15).

It has been suggested Badagas were the first in the Nilgiri to change—for example, to intensive cash-crop cultivation, employment in local businesses, education of children in missionary schools where they learned English language and ideas, and the establishment of authority by British officials which undermined the panchayat headmen—whereas the other tribes maintained their subsistence way of life for several more decades (Mandelbaum, 1941, 1989; Hockings, 1999). Reasons hypothesised for their readiness to change include cultural similarities with other South Indians, as removal from ‘lowland society’ by only a few centuries meant they had common ground for interaction, especially religion and village culture (Mandelbaum, 1941, 1989), and the remoteness and geographical distance of other people from the changes taking place (Mandelbaum, 1989; Hockings, 1999). However, Mandelbaum (1941) reasoned the Todas had been exposed more to the British overtures as they were one of the famed sights in the Nilgiri, and were also subject to intensive missionary efforts, although it is claimed they reacted to the changes by isolating themselves (Handley, 1911) and British administrators expressed impatience with their refusal to follow official orders and cultivate cash crops (Mandelbaum, 1989). These discussions, although in the style of old anthropological thinking and writing, reveal important insights into identity. Although not explicitly stated in



the literature, the speculation of cultural change shows the identities of the local peoples were subject to change and contestation. It depicts in-between forms of identity whereby Badagas are described as being between two cultures, and resonates to some extent with notions of hybridities, a central term in post-structuralist cultural theory which focuses on the movement and mixing of identities as the product of creolization and fusion. For example, that the migrants identified as a new group upon settling in the Nilgiri—the Badagas—shows the production of something new rather than only the assimilation of other people's cultural traditions. While it is an exception to the static and essentialized notions of identity which dominate the literature on Badagas, it still has epistemological problems. The discourse of change in the literature reifies two forms of bounded undifferentiated cultures coming into contact—'the Badagas' and 'the British'. Also, the analysis of change locates Badagas as colonial subjects who assume an identity ascribed by the colonizer, and therefore regards a hybrid Badaga identity as a product of the colonial experience, a legitimating narrative of cultural domination (Bhabha, 1994). It mirrors old-fashioned views when sociologists believed that minority groups adopt the culture of the majority society (cultural assimilation). Identity change among Badagas is taken to be a one-way imperialistic process of increasing assimilation or integration within mainstream society in which the British were assumed to be the 'normal' majority culture and Badagas the 'exotic' minority. In these analyses, then, minorities are compared against the 'white British' group as the index category, implying that the latter is the majority and the normal and desirable experience, as if identity change functions to celebrate a privileged access to a hegemonic British culture, essentially a racialised research agenda. The representation of the displacement of Badagas and other Indian peoples during colonialism in favour of the culturally dominant group lays claim to epistemological privilege. For example, there is no consideration in the literature of the response of the British, such as their incorporation of cultural products from the Nilgiri peoples, which implies the latter has nothing of importance to contribute to cultural innovation. Also, the underlying processes of identity change among Badagas were not mentioned in the literature, and require delineation.

These speculations in the literature are insightful but only scratch the surface of what it means to be Badaga, and how meanings have changed in relation to temporal and societal change. The above review shows a great range of proxies have been emphasised for various dimensions of identity, and it is not clear if they are measuring the same qualities, which makes

comparisons fraught with difficulty. The identity categories used in previous research are unsatisfactory to capture the complexity of being Badaga and the context in which it is played out, both in theoretical and practical terms. Identity is too complex for the simple classifications of previous studies, and fresh thinking is needed to develop a more meaningful and sensitive conceptualisation of 'the Badagas' (or to refute its existence). Moreover, it is important to note the changes taking place in India and among Badagas are not simply about economic standards, as often assumed in writings, but also represent a cultural and personal process involving people and their lived experiences and constructions of change envisaged within their local settings and resources. In other words, identity and its change are not objective or universal but actively constructed and produced by people, grounded on their judgements of social reality. Therefore, the ethnography fills a void in the literature by examining the human experience of being Badaga in contemporary India to gain an appreciation of the ways people define and think about themselves, and the ways they make sense of their lives and changing circumstances, to determine what being Badaga really stands for. This attention to human self-expression as Badaga broadens the scope of the literature to permit a more complete understanding of identity which takes in to account personal experiences in relation to contemporary and historical change.

### **Quality of life**

Another aim of the ethnography is to explore the quality of life of Badagas, which is taken to refer to the general circumstances of the people and community, and also solutions to the challenges they face. It is an important endeavour because the literature reviewed in the previous chapter is dated and spotty and portrays both positive and negative depictions of life quality which need to be further elucidated. Social scientists have made invaluable contributions to understanding quality of life and its context; indeed almost all social science deals with quality of life in some way, and it is the desired outcome of social policies and programmes (Ferriss, 2004; Sirgy et al. 2006; Mathews and Izquierdo, 2010; Selin and Davey, 2012). Precursors of quality of life research can be identified in the early sociological literature, largely concerned with views on morality and society and social progress rather than the empirical research that it is today (Veenhoven, 2000). Notable contributions include the works of Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Georg Simmel (1858–1918; Plé,

2000; Zingerle, 2000; Vowinckel, 2000; Rehberg, 2000). The classical literature concerns interpretations of the social problems of their time which differed markedly among theorists (Veenhoven, 2000). Quality of life has also been a topic of interest in philosophy, which shows it is as old as civilization, although these contributions have been speculative (Depew, 1980; Smith, 1980; Sirgy et al. 2006). Philosophers in Asia have written extensively about the topic (Dalai Lama and Cutler, 1999).

Although people's living conditions have been a concern of social scientists since the beginnings of the field, 'quality of life' per se as a term or concept was not considered until recently. In one of the first analyses of quality of life in a sociology journal, Gerson (1976) interpreted it as an elaboration of Mead's (1934) ideas of self and society as aspects of the same social process, which he likens to individual and community quality of life respectively. The former, according to Gerson, stresses individual freedom, dominance of the individual over society, and their achievements despite imposed constraints. The 'natural law' and 'natural rights' philosophy that certain rights or values are inherent by virtue of human nature, upon which American political theory was initially based, is the preeminent example of the individualist approach to quality of life, and is grounded on the work of classical theorists such as John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, William Blackstone, and Adam Smith. The latter, community quality of life, is a transcendental approach to quality of life, and concerns the extent to which the individual carries out their place in the larger social order for the interests of community and society at-large, the primacy of the social over the individual. Gerson stresses the inadequacy of the dichotomy between 'individual' and 'society', and proposes a new approach, as attention must be focused on the interaction of self and society, based on ideas which stem from the classical work of Marx in 1844 and 1846 (Marx, 1964; Marx and Engels, 1970), the Pragmatists (Dewey, 1920, 1922, 1929; Mead, 1934) and symbolic interactionists (Glaser and Strauss, 1968; Hughes, 1971; Rose, 1962; Stone and Farberman, 1970). Gerson (1976) exemplified his theoretical framework with particular reference to health-related quality of life, although he pointed out it can be applied to any setting.

Despite Gerson's (1976) attempts to ignite interest in quality of life among sociologists, his ideas were not taken further. A decade later, Schuessler and Fisher's (1985) extensive review of the status of quality of life research found the concept seldom entered the literature, and Sociological Abstracts first used it as a category of sociological research in 1979. However,

several components of quality of life figured prominently in the literature, for example concern with the good life under other rubrics such as 'happiness' have long been a sociological interest. Quality of life research at that time had limited utility to guide the formation of social policy, and Schuessler and Fisher provided suggestions for further research. Two decades later, Ferriss (2004) re-examined the presence of quality of life research in sociology, and concluded it was still largely missing from the literature, and that there is no sociological theory specifically about quality of life, although articles frequently address its components.

Although it is reported that quality of life as a concept is not commonly taken up in sociology, and that few sociologists have recognised its value, these conclusions might be an artefact of the ways people socially construct meanings of academic disciplines and fields within arbitrary and narrow boundaries and terminologies, as quality of life research is interdisciplinary, and sociological contributions are not always distinguishable from literature in other disciplines. The assumption that purely sociological contributions are difficult to isolate (Ferriss, 2004; Schuessler and Fisher, 1985) depends on the meaning of sociology as an academic discipline which differs among people and cultures. Research now conducted under the banner of quality of life research was actually being done by earlier generations of sociologists but under other labels. For example, quality of life figures prominently in social psychology, which can be regarded as a topic of sociology. Therefore, it is premature to assume that sociology and cognate disciplines such as anthropology have overlooked quality of life. A great deal has been written on the circumstances of the world's peoples since the establishment of anthropology as an academic field in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Anthropological studies are now conducted everywhere, and from the late twentieth century onwards there has been increasing interest in the so-called 'high civilizations', including 'modern' and 'Western', and contemporary issues such as globalisation, indigenous rights, poverty, and virtual communities, and anthropologists and sociologists have moved away from neoclassical economics and structural determinism to focus instead on people's experiences and social constructions of reality, including quality of life (Elder-Vass, 2012; Mathews and Izquierdo, 2010; Veenhoven, 2007). Indeed, anthropology's position as the broad and interdisciplinary study of people—covering an enormous variety of topics at the crossroads of humanities, sciences, and social science—has helped to understand the multiple ways quality of life is experienced and expressed. Also, anthropology's four-field approach, alongside

specializations such as applied anthropology in non-academic settings (advocacy groups, businesses, development agencies, human services, governments, non-governmental organizations, and tribal associations), has potential to understand and solve some of the world's most pressing problems.

Quality of life research gained momentum in the last century with reports by governments and other organizations containing data and analyses of social change and trends. In the 1930s, sociologists were instrumental in advancing reports and quantitative measures of living standards, and some early examples include Chapin (1933), Sewell (1940), McKain and Walter (1939), Cottam (1941), and Cottam and Mangus (1942), as reviewed by Ferriss (2004) and Sirgy et al. (2006). Important conceptual contributions include Ogburn (1933) and Odum (1936), precursors of the social indicators movement. Efforts to collect and organise such data became more systematic around the 1960s with funding and support by governments and prominent sociologists; important landmarks mentioned in the literature include the U.S. President's Commission on National Goals (The American Assembly, 1960), Bauer's work (1966) on the effects of national space programmes on society, and support by the Russell Sage Foundation (Bauer, 1966; Bell, 1969; Ferriss, 2004; Markides, 2000; Moore and Sheldon, 1965; Panel on Social Indicators, 1969; Sirgy et al. 2006). The work led to developments in analytical and data gathering approaches (Sirgy et al. 2006).

Developments in scale construction and measures of life satisfaction played a large role in this direction of quality of life research (Campbell, Converse, and Rogers, 1976; Ferriss, 2004; Liu, 1976; Schuessler and Fisher, 1985). As an academic research focus, it became collectively known as the social indicators movement which concerns measuring social indicators in survey questions which evaluate individual, family, community, regional, and national circumstances in a range of areas—crime, environment, health, housing, and so on. Social indicators are measures of people's perceptions of their living circumstances in their cultural or geographic unit, and can be used to evaluate how well the lives of people are going in a society, proxies for quality of life and social welfare; a wide range of variables have been measured and studied (Diener and Suh, 2007). The research area gradually became institutionalized with landmarks such as the launch of the journal *Social Indicators Research* in the 1970s, the founding of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies in the 1990s (Ferriss, 2004; Land, 1983; Sirgy et al. 2006; Veenhoven, 2007), and the publication of books such as *Social Indicators of Well-*

*being: Americans Perceptions of Life Quality* by Andrews and Withey (1976) and *The Quality of American Life: Perceptions, Evaluations and Satisfaction* by Campbell, Converse and Rogers (1976). The growth of the social indicators movement was fuelled in part by dissatisfaction with economic indicators that were prioritised at the expense of social objectives but not sufficient to understand the entirety of a person's life conditions. The post-war economic boom was followed by disenchantment with economic growth which raised questions about the meaning and advancement of quality of life. Increased recognition of the need to understand people's judgments of their circumstances rather than only those of academics, economists, policymakers, and others, and mounting evidence of discrepancies between objective and subjective life quality, were also important drivers (Cummins, 1995; 1996; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener and Seligman, 2004; Diener and Suh, 2007; Sirgy et al. 2006; Land, 1996). In social science, quality of life research largely arose out of the social indicators movement.

Quality of life issues have also been considered in other academic areas such as the Sociology of Health and Illness and Medical Anthropology. Improvements in public health such as changes in causes and patterns of major illnesses have shifted focus away from infections and disease to the growing impact of chronic illness, and have put social dimensions of health and the everyday experience of illness at centre-stage (Bury, 2001; Popay and Williams, 1996). Since the end of the last century, the influence of the biomedical model and medical dominance (Friedson, 1970) has waned, and biomedical practice has become more sensitive to lay viewpoints. The need to understand people's constructions of health and meaning-making in their everyday lives is now well-established in sociology and also biomedical research and practice, evidenced for example by the rise of patient-centred medicine (Stewart, 2001), shared decision-making (Elwyn et al. 2016), patient-friendly communication (Prior, 2003), incorporation of public views in research (Entwistle et al. 1998; Oliver, 1995), and sociological investigations of contemporary health problems and inequalities (Popay and Williams 1996). There are also sociological perspectives on social quality (Fairweather, 2001; Sirgy et al. 2006), work life (Gallie, 1966), housing, and family (Schuessler and Fisher 1985; Ferriss 2004). Other research traditions apparent in the quality of life literature include the growing area of Positive Psychology, an extension of psychology's traditional emphasis on negative states and mental illness to include positive human functioning, and Happiness Economics which combines

economics and other fields such as psychology and sociology (Diener and Seligman, 2004; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Kahneman et al. 1999; Liu, 1976; Selin and Davey, 2012; Sirgy et al. 2006).

The above summary shows quality of life research is fairly new, interdisciplinary, and consists of numerous overlapping traditions. There are diverse views about the meaning of ‘quality of life’ in academic and popular writings. The term has become a catch-all which is elusive and difficult to pin down—a clear, precise, and agreed definition appears to be absent from the literature. There are substantial differences in the conceptual approaches, methodologies, and data collection in quality of life research, an eclectic pursuit. Quality of life is a broad multidimensional concept, and researchers have proposed different definitions and approaches to categorising research (Sirgy et al. 2006). One way of subdividing the concept, which is adopted in this ethnography, concerns objective quality of life, referring to tangible criteria measured independently by experts, especially standard of living and income, and subjective quality of life which is a more personal evaluation by the people under study of how life is going and the circumstances in which they live, subjective appraisals including their beliefs, emotions, feelings, opinions, perceptions, and life experiences and histories, grounded on interaction between the external conditions of life and internal perceptions of those conditions (Cummins, 1995, 1996; Sirgy et al. 2006). The latter can also be regarded as subjective well-being, an umbrella term concerned with a person’s subjective experience and various types of evaluations of their lives. Thus the Badaga is the expert here and not the scholar. Its popularity is based on the claim that it must be assessed in any adequate measurement of wellbeing, as people react differently to the same circumstances based on their personal attributes and experiences, and reflects societal trends concerning the value of the individual (Diener and Suh, 1997; Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith, 1999).

Much of the research relies on data collected with survey questions about people’s happiness or satisfaction with their lives overall, or with particular domains of their lives such as “how satisfied are you with your life in general?” or “how satisfied are you with x, y, and z”. These approaches paint a colourful picture of life quality around the world and its determinants and mediators (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002; Vittersø, Røysamb, and Diener 2002). One interesting finding of surveys such as the Gallup World Poll and World Values Survey (WVS), is that people in India score just above average on a wide range of social indicators, and urban

residents report higher scores than rural residents; these values, although not as high as in many other countries, are positioned in the positive range which indicates the Indian population is generally satisfied with life (Biswas-Diener, Tay, and Diener, 2012). Research shows general populations in most countries are on average above the neutral point on self-reported life satisfaction (Diener and Diener, 1996), and when data from various countries are ranked from lowest to highest, India is in the middle to lower portion as people in more industrialized countries report higher scores, and some Indian respondents report challenges such as inadequate food, unemployment, and shelter (Biswas-Diener, Tay, and Diener 2012; Inglehart and Klingemann 2000). These studies show countries differ in subjective wellbeing which to a large extent is explained by the wealth of nations (Diener, Diener, and Diener, 1995), although scores also differ when income is controlled in statistical models as other explanations are also important.

These kinds of surveys reveal valuable insights, and currently dominate quality of life research, but also have limitations. Although anthropologists do of course engage in cross-cultural and quantitative methodology, and acknowledge cultures are not equally good at enabling people to be content with life, the trend of quality of life research to appraise cultures and societies based on statistical analyses of survey scores raises critical questions about its appropriateness. Also, a great deal of quality of life research is based on cross-cultural studies of similarities (etic) and differences (emic) across cultures and groups, such as comparison of mean survey scores. However, anthropologists tend to approach culture as a social construction grounded on cultural relativism. The good life, subjective and culture-bound, does not mean the same for all people, and it has even been suggested its conceptualisation in the literature might be an artefact invented by social scientists (Mathews and Izquierdo, 2010). Another limitation is the assumption India is a single cultural entity, a premise that Indian respondents have shared experiences and common histories separate to other nations, which overlooks the cultural heterogeneity of the country and the similarities and cultural influences which extend beyond its national borders in the globalising world. Also, quality of life research largely focuses on Western countries and cultures, particularly Europe and North America, and far less information is available elsewhere (Selin and Davey, 2012). There is only a nascent literature on the quality of life of smaller communities in India (Biswas-Diener, Tay and Diener 2012; Selin and Davey, 2012) which justifies the present study of Badagas.



Fortunately, a great deal has been written on the objective quality of life of Badagas, valuable information about their life conditions. These originate in the first reports by Fenicio and East India Company officers who initiated social research in the Nilgiri by collecting information on agriculture, customs, population, religion, and trade. Census data have been compiled since 1812, although Badagas have not been enumerated separately in The Census of India since 1981, and no recent census or quality of life survey has been conducted. District Gazetteers, compiled first in Madras in 1853 and then other districts in the late 19th Century, contain comprehensive catalogues of data used by Collectors and Officials. The chapters on the Nilgiri describe its administration, agriculture, communication, education, forests, land revenue, local government, occupation, people, political history, public health, and trade. Some states such as Tamil Nadu continue to publish versions of these gazetteers, although the quality of information varies widely, even within the same state, and its accuracy is a subject of dispute. Efforts to collect and organise data continued with the anthropological research reviewed in the previous chapter. An excellent example is Hockings's (1990) demographic analysis of social change over three decades concerned with the development of Badaga society and household life, a combination of anthropology, history, demography, and linguistics. He conducted a longitudinal study consisting of censuses and surveys about the changing structure and attributes of the Badaga population such as death rates, fertility, household structure, kinship, marriage, media usage, schooling, and various other aspects of contemporary life. Hockings reported improvements in life quality including a move away from subsistence farming to commercial farming, increased access to school education, and the emergence of an urbanised middle class, and he presented a general model of the modernization of Badaga economy and society. There is also literature on specific areas of quality of life such as health-related quality of life. For example, Hockings (1980b) wrote extensively about aspects of life interconnected with health including lay understandings of health and illness, diet, traditional therapies, tobacco and other drugs, sexual activity, childcare, mental health, and death.

However, the majority of writings are evaluations by anthropologists (objective quality of life), and have not captured people's own perceptions and evaluations of their life conditions. There have been no reports of the views of Badagas (subjective quality of life), perhaps due to previous trends in social science such as structural determinism. Even after many years of research experience, the most reputable source on Badagas stated "the goals of daily action are

not often stated, and have to be inferred from what people are seen to do and heard to say in conversation. It is difficult to be sure that the pursuit of happiness, so widely valued in our modern world, is perceived as a worthwhile goal by the Badagas” (Hockings, 1989, p. 209). Unfortunately, this gap in knowledge was not explored further. While there are many advantages of studying objective aspects of quality of life, there are also disadvantages (Diener and Suh, 2007). These also apply to previous research on Badagas. Perhaps the main limitation stems from the fact that objective indicators may not accurately reflect people’s interpretations and experiences which are far more complex than assumed (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Diener and Suh, 2007). The basic premise is that to understand the quality of life, it is important to directly measure people’s evaluations and perspectives of their circumstances (Diener, 1984; Myers and Diener, 1995). Therefore, the thrust of the ethnography is to examine Badagas’ subjective quality of life—their own perspectives of life and experiences that are important to them, attention to subjective processes and meanings—to permit a more complete understanding, an approach hitherto neglected in the literature. Previous research on Badagas is still useful as studies of objective and subjective quality of life are complementary, and therefore the present study provides important additional information to make more definitive conclusions about their quality of life.

As a number of reviews have already discussed the conceptualization and measurement of quality of life in social science, I sidestep these issues by approaching it in the ethnography as an umbrella concept to represent in general terms the wellbeing of Badagas and their community, the circumstances in which they live, and their understanding of those circumstances—being well physically, psychologically, and materially. This definition serves as a starting point in the ethnography on which Badagas can build with their own interpretations as I have tried to be sensitive to local constructions. However, although some anthropologists seem reluctant to write about the people they study in ways that could be construed as evaluations of cultures, as the values and meanings of any culture should be seen in their own context (Mathews and Izquierdo, 2010).

There are other limitations of the literature. In my view, previous work is somewhat biased, concerned with imperial history and Western culture to speak for Badagas, though it is important to put this criticism into context by pointing out studies of the Nilgiri began when anthropology was emerging as an academic discipline and derived many of its key notions from

colonialism. The recent literature is less prone to the gross ethnocentrism of its nineteenth century forbearers, but still on occasions comes across as a nostalgic return to the colonial past, an idyllic sojourn of the U.K. An example of imposing a British identity on Badagas is the usage of concepts such as ‘development’, ‘modern’ and ‘success’ to portray the colonial period and its influence on their quality of life in positive terms. Mandelbaum, for example, believed Badagas ‘flourished’, ‘took advantage of’ (1982, p.1460), and ‘benefited from’ (Mandelbaum, 1989, p. 15) the changes taking place, and Hockings (1999) even concluded Badagas in the 1990s represented a ‘successful’ South Indian community because they had changed markedly over several centuries from several hundred refugees to a ‘powerful’ and ‘wealthy’ community in South India, which he attributed to their ‘progressive attitudes’ to accepting British customs and techniques such as agriculture (1999, p. 18). British civil servants have been labelled as ‘revolutionary’ and their actions as a ‘cultural revolution’ (Hockings, 1989, p. 334). Hockings (1997, p. 3) wrote “The Nilgiris...had been an isolated backwater vis-à-vis the militaristic neighbouring states in the plains until in 1820 the British founded Ootacamund and began to settle in the hills”. These expressions, reminiscent of the cultural, economic and political aspirations of the West, position the changed way of life in the Nilgiri after the arrival of the British as superior to the past, as authors tend to speak as if colonialism and its large-scale cultural diffusion is what past and present is all about. This bias has influenced the constitution of recent writings about Badaga culture and society. Examples include the ways they have been characterised with labels like ‘paramount chief’ which refers to the head of the panchayat, the British colonial designation for the highest-level political leader in a regional or local polity administered with a chief-based system, and the recent account of traditional dispute resolution (e.g. Hockings 1980a, p. 171) which bears remarkable similarity with the modern legal system even though authors claim Badagas avoided the legal system and continued to operate their own customary system until the end of the century.

I also take issue with the meanings of designations such as ‘tradition’, ‘modern’ and ‘success’ which seem to be constructions of academics and not Badagas. Who is to say what the standards for Badaga culture and success might be? Previous scholars espoused the conventional thinking of their day when modernisation emphasised an evolutionary trajectory of progress from the so-called ‘traditional’ (underdeveloped) societies, a short-hand way of referring to the experience of agrarian societies before the impact of the recent West, to ‘modern’ (industrial) societies, a

way of referring to societies after the impact of the West in economic, political, social and technological terms. Discourses on modernity in India were initially concerned with application of European theories and models, and the literature on the Nilgiri fits the consensus. However, recent Indian and Western literature has explored and interrogated the various meanings of modernity, a complex and multifaceted concept that does not lend to such easy definitions, especially in newly modernising societies in Asia with different responses to the ‘modern’ entangled in cultural and social differences. Indeed, modernity is now a highly contested topic, and recent theorists have challenged classical models with India-specific orientations, giving rise to alternative claims and a rethink of classical discourse, although these developments are not reflected in the literature about the Nilgiri.

Misra (1999) reminds us that quality of life is not only about academic musing but concerns real people. ‘The British took away the land of the ancient inhabitants and imposed taxes on them making the local inhabitants realize where the power was. For themselves they created conditions of luxury and pleasure in home-like conditions. The normal engagements of the Europeans in the Nilgiri were picnicking, dancing, partying, hunting, animal racing, dating, etc... The non-white inhabitants of the Nilgiri worked hard under the most oppressive conditions to run the colonial-plantation structure. The Whites over the years had become accustomed to luxury as they were carried on rickshaws from the plains of Coimbatore region to the heights of the Nilgiri pulled up by local inhabitants, most of them the Badagas’ (Misra, 1999). Misra also argued these conditions were attractive to European ethnographers, and enabled them to conduct their studies in comfort. While I am not aware of a history of harsh mistreatment of the Nilgiri peoples in British India (which could be the case or an artefact of the literature), it is fair to conclude their way of life and social and natural environment were completely and irreversibly changed forever without their consent, replaced with a capitalist one characterized by money, domination, and social inequality. Moreover, the policies of the British Raj were exploitative, as the region was ruled with considerable power by relatively small numbers of British. It is unfortunate much of the native forest was cleared for plantations and other activities, confined nowadays to small protected areas including three national parks—Mudumalai National Park in the north, Mukurthi National Park in the southwest, and the Silent Valley National Park in the south. Also, the opening of the Western Ghats by the British for plantations involved land grabs and relocations, and plantations in colonial India are well known for cruel working conditions

and hardships which were integral to nationalist struggles (Macfarlane and Macfarlane, 2003; Moxham, 2003; Neilson and Pritchard, 2009). By the time India gained Independence from British rule in 1947, and became a republic with a new constitution in 1950, it was a deeply impoverished country, and even today it is to some extent under the economic and political domination of its former imperial powers, a situation coined 'neocolonialism'. These negative aspects of Western colonialism and modernisation in the Nilgiri and India have been glossed over in earlier writings on Badagas to portray some kind of path to utopia.

Even if the conclusions of a successful Badaga community and its underlying causes are to be taken at face value, they still seem difficult to accept in light of hardships people have experienced since the 1990s. As noted in the previous chapter, the livelihoods of the Badaga tea producers have been affected by issues in the tea industry. They suffered hardship and poverty. So do Badagas really represent a successful South Indian community, as portrayed in the literature? Although the switch to cash-crop cultivation improved living standards, and some Badagas enjoy a high standard of living, especially the middle class, there is a marked rural-to-urban socio-economic divide in India, and rural residents such as Badagas are perhaps among the poorest in society, a situation explored further in the following chapters.

The intention here is not to debate the wrongdoings of British colonialism or to undermine previous work as the situation is undoubtedly more complex than can be appreciated here. Indeed, every anthropologist is influenced by their own cultural relativistic assumptions as well as the academic trends when they write, which is also evident in the ethnography. It should be cautioned that although this monograph is critical of previous research, it can be a mistake to engage in arguments involving the superiority of one's favorite theoretical or methodological approach over others. They are regarded here as complementary as neither the previous nor present research is exhaustive, and in fact each captures different aspects of identity and quality of life. It is also important not to overlook the positive aspects of colonialism in the Nilgiri such as the introduction of agricultural methods, hospitals, schools, and other services, an improvement in quality of life.

### **Concluding summary**

To set the scene of the empirical research of the thesis, which empirically and theoretically elucidates the meaning of being Badaga in India today, this chapter reviewed the diverse ways

identity and quality of life have been deployed in social science generally and Nilgiri studies specifically. Unfortunately, as shown above, the majority of writings on Badagas align with classical essentialist conceptualisations of fixity and rigidity of cultural and social criteria and their principal structural forces, simple researcher-assigned representations that have come to be perceived as scientifically-recognised and academically-constituted. ‘The Badagas’ as a category has been framed in terms of homogeneity as a bounded group, difference to other groups, and isolation in a unique region, a failure to offer terms with which to understand the complexity and diversity of Badagas and their unison with other Indians. While there has been speculation in the literature of cultural and identity change, which resonates to some extent with recent notions of hybridities, it mirrors old-fashioned views of bounded undifferentiated cultures coming into contact, namely a minority group adopting the culture of the majority, as if change among Badagas is a product of the colonial experience. Similarly, regarding their quality of life, the majority of writings are concerned with imperial history and Western culture to speak for Badagas, which positions the changed way of life in the Nilgiri after the arrival of the British as superior to the past. Previous research on quality of life only focuses on evaluations of economics and living standards (objective quality of life) with no consideration of the views of the people (subjective quality of life), in line with previous functionalist and structuralist trends in social science.

It is perhaps surprising these ideas of cultural identity and geographical isolatedness and remoteness are still prevailing perspectives in the literature. The representation of Badagas, although a rigorous and meticulous attempt at documenting their rich culture and history, is unsatisfactory in both theoretical and practical terms when it comes to understanding identity and life quality. Anthropological thinking about culture and identity has undergone shifts which need to be examined further in the context of the Nilgiri to develop more meaningful and sensitive conceptualisations that are not taken for granted as objective or universal but actively constructed and produced by the people under study, grounded on their judgements of social reality. Badagas can no longer be characterised as a bounded and distinct rural community in the Nilgiri of about 160,000 people with certain proxy measures such as cultural and historical traits framed in terms of similarity or otherness. Rather, Badaga identities are much more diverse, complex, and nuanced than previously suggested.

The following chapters aim to provide fresh thinking and greater flexibility in conceptualising Badaga identities and quality of life, a break away from the essentialist and isolatedness approaches of the previous literature to explore the concepts in their multiplicity. The methodology of the monograph, outlined in the next chapter, provides a contemporary social constructionist approach to iron out many of the epistemological problems discussed above. Specifically, chapter three begins with an overview of a multi-site approach (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995) designed to overcome the limitations of previous studies which regard Badagas and the Nilgiri as local and bounded in an isolated region contextualised by macro-constructions of a larger social order. Multi-siteness also removes geographical barriers to understand Badagas as dynamic and mobile, to capture new forms of identities in flux in multiple situations that transcend bounded spaces, with focus on rural-to-urban migration.

Chapter three then continues with an outline of the theoretical orientation of the monograph, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1937, 1969; Mead, 1934), a major perspective in social science which underlies a great deal of sociological interest in identity. Symbolic interactionism is useful for examining the shared subjective experiences, meanings, and lived experiences of Badagas, avoids a deterministic understanding of society described in previous writings, and enables the researcher to ‘get inside’ the minds of people to see the world as they perceive it on the basis of their own particular meanings (Blumer, 1962). This departs from the tradition of studying Badagas from the top down, the notion of a Badaga society with a macro-level institutions and social structures, by shifting the focus to micro-level processes to conceive the individual as agentic, autonomous, and integral in creating their social world. Similarly, to understand quality of life, the methodology described in the next chapter aims to measure people’s evaluations and perspectives of their lives and circumstances (Diener, 1984; Myers and Diener, 1995), as the literature’s previous focus on objective indicators such as economy and standard of living may not accurately reflect their interpretations and experiences which might be far more complex than assumed (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Diener and Suh, 2007). Therefore, the thesis examines Badagas’ subjective quality of life—their own perspectives of life and circumstances, and attention to subjective processes and meanings—an approach hitherto neglected in the literature.

The final sections of chapter three overviews the conceptualisation and operationalization of identity in the present research, as well as the methods of data collection and analysis, and

ethical considerations. Attention to the human self-expression as Badaga broadens the scope of the literature to permit a more complete understanding which takes in to account personal and lived experiences in relation to contemporary and historical change as well as recent work on cosmopolitan, hybrid, and multicultural identities and their intersectionality in which ideas of rigid group boundaries have given way to fluidity. Such an approach means that the changes taking place in India and among Badagas are considered a cultural and personal process involving people and their understandings envisaged within their local settings and resources, and are not simply about social and economic standards as often assumed in writings.



### 3. Methodology

This chapter reviews the concepts and theories which underlie the methodology of the thesis. To explore the social identities and life quality of Badagas, the thesis draws on two connected locations in a multi-site approach (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995), the first online in an Internet forum, and the second in the real world with rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore. The analytical and methodological frames chosen during fieldwork and ethnographic writing hinged on multisite ethnography, thematic analysis of forum discussions and interviews, and reflexivity from a symbolic interactionist perspective as the theoretical underpinning. The approach provides fresh thinking in conceptualising and operationalising the meaning of ‘Badaga’, a break away from the limitations of the literature. Every stage of the methodology is explained and justified below with clear reasons for the choice.

#### **Locations: Multi-siteness**

Multi-site ethnography was employed as both the methodological framework and final product of research, namely this monograph. Multi-site field work has recently gained wider recognition in response to a growing interest in fully understanding contemporary issues such as advances in media technology, movements of people, and relationships between the local and global (Coleman and von Hellermann, 2013; Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995). It is markedly different to previous studies of Badagas and the Nilgiri which involved conventional anthropology in the sense they regarded peoples and cultures as local and bounded in an isolated region, contextualised by macro-constructions of a larger social order, namely the British Raj and its capitalist political economy, discussed in the previous chapter. As argued throughout the monograph, Badagas cannot be understood through sole focus on their distinctiveness and community in the Nilgiri, the assumption that culture is an enclosed and self-constrained construct. Also, as they are moving around India and the world, and are multiply situated, the single-site barriers of previous research need to be removed to understand the dynamic, mobile population and associated phenomena such as identity and life quality that transcend bounded spaces. As the ‘natural habitat’ of Badagas now includes the city and the Internet, which have become important in their lives for the creation and reproduction of identities and ways of

living, the ethnography considers these multiple spaces—geographically, socially, and virtually. A multi-site approach was adopted in the research, then, to lift Badagas out of their traditional anchoring in a particular locality. Multi-site ethnography is also suitable for the interdisciplinary nature of the research which does not have a clearly bounded disciplinary home and transverses foci such as anthropology, identity studies, Internet studies, migration studies, sociology, and quality of life. Since the approach of the thesis diverges from the assumptions and practices of the classic model of single-site ethnography, and involves numerous methodological challenges, there is a reflection of its meaning as an ethnography in the final chapter which also counters potential critiques of readers (Finlay and Gough, 2003; Hannerz, 2003).

The research focuses on Badagas in urban areas—the online and offline inhabitants of Indian cities—and not the people in the Nilgiri, although they do make appearances. The primary field sites, an Internet forum and Bangalore, were chosen based on the research questions and opportunities for comparison, as discussed below. Yet while the thesis sometimes draws arbitrary lines between the online and offline worlds, it is important to bear in mind this divide does not actually exist as people live concurrently in these multiple, overlapping spaces. Also, in addition to the primary field sites, parts of the study took place elsewhere, for example pilot work in the Nilgiri and an interview in Hong Kong, as the research also attended to the ways Badagas positioned themselves relative to far-flung and global factors, as discussed throughout the monograph. The first study explored the portrayal of identities and quality of life in a virtual forum community of Internet users. The forum was the field site in which the researcher spent an extended period of time getting close to the community and its members' forum posts. It is a specialized form of ethnography to analyse technology-mediated communications—cyberanthropology, digital ethnography, virtual ethnography, or webnography, to quote the various neologisms in the literature (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hine, 2000; Kozinets, 2010). Specifically, the study examined an Internet forum dedicated to Badagas, an online website with discussions in the form of posted messages, to explore their usage of new media, the nature of the new type of community, and online understandings of identity and quality of life, a lens through which to examine their lives in contemporary India. Selection of the forum as the study site was considered carefully (Waldstein, 2003), and involved a comprehensive computerised search of potential sites using web search engines and popular

Internet services (Facebook, MySpace, Orkut, YouTube) and key words and terms related to the research questions.

A number of relevant sites were examined by carefully reading messages and postings, and in some cases preliminary coding samples of discourse to narrow the choice. The site selected for the study appeared to be most suitable and informative, as preliminary analysis of forum posts suggested a sense of community and identity among forum members, and it was easily and publically accessible at all times, and satisfied ethical considerations. The site is a kind of community space primed to facilitate communication and connectedness between people, a tool for storytelling and narratives. Unlike other social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn, which are particularly focused on facilitating personal self-presentation, the forum's interface caters towards the need for individual and collective expression, and therefore was ideal for examining discourse about identity. The forum was also a source of information about the goings-on of Badagas, their past and current circumstances, including new material hitherto undocumented in the literature, and thus an analysis of the information is pertinent to understanding their quality of life. The forum consists of discussion boards onto which registered members post messages in English at any time subject to moderation, which anyone with an Internet connection and web browser can access. Participants can interact with one another by clicking on and reading threads, textual conversations that are organized chronologically on the forum's webpages, and forum members can add their own voices to the conversation if they choose. The study therefore was essentially archival research of an existing public record of forum discussion and interaction. The archival data are particularly valuable as they refer to personal writings from multiple viewpoints, subjective opinions of Badagas. As the forum posts date back a decade, another advantage is the opportunity to examine long-term perspectives as well as change. The sample of forum members is particularly noteworthy in terms of its size and representativeness of cities. The Internet study began in 2009, and continued to 2014. Due to the ethical and practical issues applicable to Internet methodology discussed below, namely to ensure anonymity of the forum members, the name and address of the website forum nor data extracts such as quotes will not be published alongside the write-up.

The second study was conducted in Bangalore (Bengaluru) with rural-to-urban migrants to gain an appreciation of their experiences in the city and to paint a comprehensive picture of what it means to be Badaga in urban areas in terms of both identity and quality of life.

Bangalore was the location of the study for several reasons (Davey, 2012b). As the capital city of Karnataka State with a population of about 8.42 million, and a major economic centre in India playing a leading role in the country's information technology sector, it is a major destination for Badagas and hundreds of thousands of other migrant Indians; over two-thirds of the city's population are migrants. Therefore, it is a fitting location to study the experiences of migrants. That Bangalore is an ethnically diverse city with a fusion of cultures and cosmopolitan lifestyles provides fertile ground for exploring identity and quality of life and their change. During pilot research, I met migrants living and working in Bangalore, and they shared rich experiences about their migration and urban living in which identity and quality of life were salient threads, who confirmed Bangalore was a popular location for Badagas because of economic opportunities and its relatively close distance. The participants of the study lived in a range of areas in the city, and they chose the location of their interviews (coffee shops, homes, and public places). The study began during a two-month residence in 2010, and continued with follow-up interviews in 2012 and 2013. In the study, migration is taken to mean the (more-or-less) permanent movement of individuals or groups across geographical boundaries, examined from a social science perspective.

### **Theoretical Framework: Symbolic interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), grounded on social constructionist epistemology, is the theoretical orientation of the thesis, as its tenets are useful for examining the shared subjective experiences, meanings, and lived experiences of Badagas in contemporary India. Moreover, by aligning the methodology with symbolic interactionism, it is possible to acknowledge the interaction between the researcher and researched which influences the construction of the findings. In this section is an overview of symbolic interactionism and its alignment with the approach of the research; further detail about its key proponents is presented in the previous chapter. Departing from the tradition of studying Badagas from the top down, the imposition of macro-level institutions and social structures on people, symbolic interactionism was applied in the present research to shift the focus to micro-level processes to emphasise social process, subjective experience, agency, and indeterminateness of action, and to regard individuals as autonomous and integral in creating their social world, in contrast to the deterministic stance in previous literature that social institutions define and impact people

(Blumer, 1962). In other words, unlike the structural functionalist view of Badaga society, symbolic interactionism values the capacity of each individual to act independently with distinct interpretations and experiences, and to respond reflexively to anticipate and coordinate with others. Meanings such as 'Badaga' are not inherent but constantly perceived, negotiated, and reinterpreted among people in an interactive process of shared conscious action (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1992; Mead, 1934). From this perspective, being Badaga is the product of an intersubjective process among people as they interact, and therefore is constantly in flux.

Symbolic interactionism has several basic tenets which form the foundation of the ethnography: (1) individuals interpret and create social reality with symbols (for example, appearance, body language, expression, and language) and through social interaction, and strive and act towards objects either individually or collectively on the basis of the meanings they represent for them, (2) meanings and interpretations of symbols arise from social interaction with others and society, for example based on expectations, norms, and rules, a shared understanding of meaning, (3) meanings are continuously created and modified through taking into account the situations individuals confront and interaction with others as an interpretive process, or on the basis of anticipation or imagination, and (4) interaction occurs within specific social and cultural contexts in which physical objects, people, and situations are interpreted, which, notwithstanding freedom of choice, is in some way shaped by cultural and social norms (Blumer, 1969). In this way, symbolic interactionism locates meaning constructed by individuals within social experience, and emphasises the shared meanings and social realities which people construct and negotiate through social interaction and contexts, demonstrating the importance of people's perspectives and meaning-making in everyday lives. These tenets make symbolic interactionism a suitable theoretical framework for understanding Badagas on a micro-level.

Symbolic interactionism is a popular approach in social science. A contemporary understanding is characterised by a wide diversity of topics and methodological applications (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003; Sandstrom and Fine, 2003). In particular, there have been major contributions to understanding the self and identity. In symbolic interactionism, self is a very important object which individuals make of themselves, and identity refers to the meanings and labels that one attributes to self and the expectations of behaviour tied to those meanings and labels (Mead, 1934). Symbolic interactionism contends that self rests on human association,

for example the ways individuals interact with others and have been evaluated and treated socially. As noted in the previous chapter, Mead (1934) emphasised the socially constructed nature of self. Mind and self are regarded as social phenomena which come into being and existence through the identification and communication of symbols, as people make sense of their world from their unique perspectives and work together as collectives to solve problems. Therefore, people's self-conceptions emerge from social interaction (Denzin, 1992). Self and society are continuously being created and recreated during ongoing social interaction as common meanings and interpretations are developed and manipulated by those engaged in social behavior (Serpe and Stryker, 2011). The process of becoming aware of one's self through reflection and appraisal is a core assumption in symbolic interactionism. Society, viewed through the lens of symbolic interaction, is an outgrowth of communication and social interaction based on meanings; reciprocally, society is also basic to the development of self, as social interaction shapes society which then plays back on social interaction and self, each constitutive of the other.

The monograph also aligns with the perspectives proposed by Stryker (2000) which place importance on society in understanding self and social interaction. Commonly known as 'structural symbolic interactionism', Stryker's approach attempts to bridge the gap between micro- and macro- processes, partly to counter critiques of symbolic interactionism's neglect of societal issues. According to Stryker, individuals identify themselves and others in the context of social structure, and these identifications become internalized parts of self which build up as identities over time from the person to the situation and larger social structure, highlighting the reciprocity of the individual, self, and society. It also takes as its foundation the notion of social structures as durable and reproducible patterns of interactions and relationships, and society as composed of complex mosaics of large-scale structures such as communities, groups, and institution, and their interactions and role relationships, cross-cut by demarcations such as class, age, gender, ethnicity, and religion (Stryker, 2008; Serpe and Stryker, 2011). This perspective will assist to tease out the meaning of Badaga identities related to broader rural and urban contexts, and to undertake a nuanced analysis of modernity, globalisation, and identities in flux.

Symbolic interactionism also helps to understand specific ways groups are defined by difference such as culture and ethnicity, namely the micro-level interactions between members of these groups and others in social context, rather than only structural issues of difference.

From a symbolic interactionist viewpoint, the intersection of differences such as culture and ethnicity are important sources of identity. Symbolic interactionism examines how people learn to become members of their cultural and other groups as they learn through socialization (the internalization of social norms) different aspects of their identities. It occurs primarily through the communication of symbolic meanings among members of their collectives which transmits the experience of the group to its members and underpins the acquisition of culture and understandings of difference (Anderson, 2000; Lal, 1995; Mead, 1938). Self, then, is a reference to others by means of socialization when the individual is brought into line with accepted symbolized social roles and rules to "assume the attitudes of those in the group who are involved with him in his social activities" (Mead, 1938, p. 192). The collective understanding and exchange of symbols and meanings through social interaction represent the group's culture, and can be perpetuated by socializing the next generation into these meanings and beliefs. Furthermore, Stryker's structural symbolic interactionism views socialisation as the process through which people learn normative expectations for actions as they relate to role relationships, building up from the person to the situation within the larger social structure as a reciprocity of the individual and society (Reynolds and Herman-Kinney, 2003; Serpe and Stryker, 2011; Stryker, 2008). Symbolic interactionism also accounts for cultural and identity change as new meanings of objects are created, even over and against their prevailing meanings, which can lead to change (Mead, 1934). That symbolic interactionism emphasises social process rather than social structure suggests that any analysis of culture and identity should consider context, historical and social settings, to understand the environment in which collective experience and action takes place (Blumer, 1969; Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman, 1989).

In addition to culture and identity, other substantive areas of inquiry based on symbolic interactionism include collective behavior and social movements (Britt and Heise, 2000; Lofland, 1996; McPhail, 1991; Morris and Mueller, 1992), cultural studies and postmodernism (Denzin, 1983; Gergen, 1991; Lemert, 1997; Sandstrom and Fine, 2003; Maines, 1996), emotions (Rosengren, 1961), deviance (Becker, 1953), dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959), family (Stryker, 1959), gender and feminism (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Deegan and Hill, 1987; Thorne, 1993; Schilt, 2006), semiotics (Manning, 2003), social problems (Best, 2003), neo-Marxism (Schwalbe, 1986), online environments (Robinson, 2007), political ideology (Brooks,

1969), role-taking (Stryker, 1957), and social interaction (Glaser and Strauss, 1964), to name a few. Symbolic interactionism's emphasis on the production and expression of culture and identity, as well as wider values and ideologies of society, is particularly useful for understanding groups such as Badagas, and the theory's supposed inseparability of the individual and social context makes it a powerful framework to guide the present analysis of people as they transverse social contexts through migration and Internet usage.

### **Operationalising identity**

The previous chapter reviewed academic discussions and meanings of identity, and revealed the diverse, contradictory, and unsatisfactory representations of identities of Badagas and the Nilgiri. Therefore, it is instructive to clarify the present approach to investigating Badagas as people defined by difference (Aspinall, 1997; Bhopal, Phillimore, and Kohli, 1992; Stanfield and Dennis, 1993). In the most generic form, previous studies describe Badagas as a form of social or group identity, drawing on notions of shared aspects such as ancestry, cultural commonality, beliefs, geographic origin, and so forth, conceived as clearly bounded, fixed and stable characteristics which position them as different to others, and the peoples in the Nilgiri as also belonging to discrete groups. As discussed previously, there are many shortcomings of constructing these fixed categories and groups, including overemphasis of homogeneity within groups, focus on differences rather than similarities between groups, production of racialised categories, and failure to use concepts and terms with which people identify, essentially a reification of Badaga society as a constraining entity (Aspinall, 2001; Bradbury, 2003; Ellison, 2005; Gunaratnam, 2003). This leads to the issue of how to conceptualise and operationalise identity in the present thesis. As a start, it should be noted the research is underpinned by the theoretical perspectives summarized above, symbolic interactionism, to remedy the weaknesses identified in the literature, namely top-down approaches which define the Nilgiri peoples with over-socialized macro-level stereotypes originating in the culture of the British colonial era such as historical political economies of colonialism, the capitalist world system, and market regimes, perpetuated by anthropologists during European expansion and colonization as the study of native peoples in colonies who were merely regarded as primitive. In this monograph, while macrotheoretical concepts are acknowledged, and dualism between individualist and structuralist approaches avoided, the meanings of identity are not assumed to be inherent in



Badagas or other objects but the product of intersubjective processes among those who regard themselves as defined by similarity and difference. Consequently, Badaga identities and society are not regarded as concrete, structured, patterned, or stable, as assumed to be the case in the positivist stance of the literature on the Nilgiri, but as dynamic and constantly in flux, which gives rise to the possibility of multiple Badaga identities. The focus of the present monograph, then, is an exploration of identities as they are experienced, the perspectives of Badagas themselves rather than the theoretical and social orientation of British colonists and anthropologists, based on symbolic interactionism's intersubjective and interactive conception of identity as a social process of shared conscious reflection negotiated by people constantly engaged in action (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1992; Mead, 1934; Meltzer and Petras, 1970; Shibutani, 1988).

In other words, the ethnography tries to avoid presenting categories as natural or taken-for-granted, explores similarities as well as differences, and considers underlying dimensions of identity and their relevance. Unlike classical conceptualisations in the literature, which tend to take the essentialist approach that emphasizes the rigidity of social categories, the present research is grounded on social constructionism which emphasises identity as dynamic and fluid, something that is constantly evolving and changing. Its focus on subjectivity helps to tease out the shared meanings among Badagas which they create and maintain through repeated interpretation and interaction which make up their society. Therefore, the main focus of the present research will be on diversity and how Badagas understand themselves through engagement in social interaction, how interactional dynamics shape their sense of who they are, and how identity is formed by cultural, economic, and social factors. Attention to the human self-expression as Badaga broadens the scope of the literature to permit a more complete understanding which takes in to account personal and lived experiences and contemporary and historical change. In this sense, the 'Badaga identity' reified in the literature is reinterpreted as an artefact concealing multifaceted and fluid identities in a continual state of flux.

Despite the above championing, it is necessary to tighten up the definition of identity in terms of its usage in this monograph, and to clarify the object of study. As the anchor of the research is an endeavor to understand how people who regard themselves as Badaga identify themselves and understand their lives, the thesis takes the position that while being Badaga is not fixed and immutable, it also cannot be simply dismissed as ideological fiction, as it has real-life meaning

which people experience and understand in the world around them. Thus, a middle-path approach to the conceptualisation of identity will be adopted which takes as a starting point the premise that while it is important to guard against reifying the notion of 'Badagas', they represent a separate reality in the minds of people who self-identify as Badaga based on subtleties of their culture, community, style of living, and so forth.

A contradiction in this starting point in understanding identity is that it is ascribed to the participants rather than elected by them, and seems to support the idea that there are boundaries which reify and separate Badagas and other social groups (Aspinall, 1997; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Smith, 2002). There are several important justifications for the approach. As the aim of the monograph is to conduct a thorough investigation of the validity of the current Badaga classification in the literature, the continuing use of the concept 'Badagas', as a starting point, seems sensible. Adopting the generally accepted category in the literature will facilitate comparability and consistency, especially when undertaking secondary analysis of previous studies. Also, pilot work undertaken in the Nilgiri prior to the ethnography showed the use of the Badaga category. Therefore, it constitutes appropriate terminology from the viewpoint of participants, as their everyday talk about 'Badagas' is real and important to them, and so the thesis lays claim to sensitivity to the way people describe themselves based on enquiries that ensured its acceptability and meaning. Indeed, usage of the Badaga label also draws on previous studies of self-identity which showed people were very much aware of their distinctiveness as Badaga by having their own language, culture, and oral tradition about their ancestors' migration from Mysore to the Nilgiri, separate to other local peoples (Hockings, 1968, 1993, 1988). Thus it is not a matter of intellectual sloppiness but reflects the tension between the essentialist and constructivist approaches in producing fixed identity categories that are inherently complex and variable. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue, the prevailing constructivist stance on identity stipulates they are ambiguous, constructed, fluid, and multiple, which leaves no rationale for conceptualizing identities at all; if identity is fluid, how can we understand it as a hard, crystallised concept? As the aim of the thesis is to generate data on the important dimensions of the meanings of identity and life quality among a group of people from the Nilgiri, at least some kind of foundation of self at the individual and group level is needed as a starting point. 'Badaga' seems to have greater utility than alternative categorisations such as Indian, South Indian, South Asian, and so forth which may struggle to accommodate people

who identify as a small minority group among other Indians. While it might seem sensible to throw away the label 'Badaga' and other imposed categories as a starting point, doing so might have meant the participants gave complex and diverse understandings of identity that could not be brought together for the aims of the study, as experienced in studies about ethnicity in censuses (Malesevic, 2004; McAuley et al. 1996; Rankin and Bhopal 1999). Therefore, the necessity of tightening up definitions of Indian peoples as social groups cannot be avoided. It is also important to point out the monograph seeks to discover underlying meanings and processes rather than simply infer their existence, and the 'Badaga' label is not applied prescriptively or as clearly bounded, fixed or stable but inductively to offer a rich and diverse sense of the people's perspectives and lived experiences. Steps were taken to avoid imposing a researcher-assigned identity and essentialist explanatory power; otherwise the research might have done more harm than good, especially if the imposed character was at odds with self-identity. Thus the term 'Badaga' was applied loosely as an ice-breaker, as the participants in the research were asked to categorise and self-assign aspects of their own sense of identities to mitigate these categorisation difficulties, for example by permitting fluid and hybrid identities to be expressed (Aspinall, 1997; Bradbury, 2003; Smith, 2002). The stance that the individual is the arbiter of their identities gains credence from the almost universally accepted notion that ways of understanding groups defined by difference are intrinsically socially constructed and subjective (Aspinall, 1997; Bradbury, 2003; Smith, 2002).

However, there still seems to be an inherent contradiction in the above reasoning, as the inevitability with which the label 'Badaga' is used seems complicit with fixity and the very notion of cultural essentialism that the study tries to resolve. Paradoxically, the ethnography, as an investigation of Badagas, reifies their identity by drawing a boundary around their existence, a symbolic declaration of distinction to others, while also claiming to critique their simple portrayal in the literature. Therefore, it is important to recognise this double-edgedness. The middle path approach of the ethnography attempts to weigh up these issues by acknowledging the problematic nature of the common notion of Badagas as a group, while concurrently accepting identity as an analytical category as a prelude to make sense of a loosely connected group of people in India. It should be accepted for what it is: An initial simplified and generalised stereotype based on the commonalities reported in the first chapter such as ancestry, culture, migration, language, place of origin, religion, and so forth (Modood, Berthoud, and

Nazroo, 2002) which paves the way to delve further in to the complexity of Badaganess in all its possibilities. The approach attempts to conceptualise identity in a fashion that is meaningful for the research, reflects people's lived experiences, and avoids the dangers of reifying difference, flexible enough to remain relevant to Badagas and scrutiny in the thesis. So it would seem that we cannot do without referring to 'Badaga' in a way that assumes its coherence as a distinct group, even though doing so perpetuates its presumed ontological stability challenged in the research.

Despite this tension, the following chapters report an investigation of lay understandings of identity among Badagas, the beliefs, common sense understandings, and personal experiences of the lay, 'ordinary' people untrained in academic studies of identity, and their basis in the various micro- and macro-level factors which constitute the fabric of daily life and society. Lay understandings can be contrasted with theoretical and professional perspectives of academics and professionals reviewed previously, although it is now recognized there is a diversity of lay and professional knowledge with complex relationships, for example lay understandings tend to be imbued with professional rationalisations. The thesis can also be regarded as a desire to establish good practice in conceptualising the peoples in the Nilgiri by avoiding the self-serving and oppressive ideologies of its forebears, a call for greater precision in defining identity.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The data collection and analysis correspond to the theoretical requirements of symbolic interactionism to throw light on the subjective views and experiences of Badagas and their social groups to uncover a range of meanings. In the Internet study, the forum posts were archival data consisting of computer-mediated communication since the forum's conception. The dataset comprised more than 1500 Internet forum posts written in English, approximately 2000 A4 pages when saved as text-readable files (single-spaced, 12-point font), and was amenable to empirical thematic analysis. Other types of communication in the forum (audio, audiovisual, graphical, textual) were also considered when relevant to the research questions, for example hyperlinked material and images, audio information (iTunes), visual information (Flickr), and audiovisual information (YouTube), and websites mentioned by forum members were accessed by the researcher to contextualize the forum discussions. Spam and unsolicited messaging in the forum were excluded from the analysis as they were considered to be different

to members' posts and interactions, although the amount was low and did not interfere with online conversations. Communication in the forum was mostly text-based but included nonverbal cues such as paralanguage, capitalization, font colours, and emoticons (graphic depictions of facial expression using punctuation marks, letters and pictures) to alert other users to the mood and tone of their posts, and the most common were smiley :- ) and sad faces :-( which conveyed social emotion and meaning. Some interesting trends were apparent in the use of emoticons. In general, they were used more in positive than negative contexts to express positive emotions, and in conversations than single posts. I took an observational and unobtrusive approach to the online study as I was not involved in creating or prompting forum discussion; therefore, I did not reply to members, post messages, or contribute to forum activities. My decision to be a non-participant was considered carefully, and seemed appropriate as the data were mostly archival interactions, although it should be noted some researchers advocate a participative role (Kozinets, 2010). The methodology was also informed by previous studies of online interactions in other forums (Jones, 2002; Kendall, 1998; Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996).

In the second study, in Bangalore, a sample of 24 Badagas was selected by convenience and purposive sampling initiated through contacts made in earlier trips to the Nilgiri when I talked to villagers about their migrant relatives. Ethnographic interviewing was employed to gather detailed data from the participants in the social worlds under study (Briggs, 2007; Skinner, 2012). Ethnographic interviewing is set apart from other interviewing styles commonly used in research for several reasons. The interviewing was aligned with the anthropological tradition since it was conducted over time with particular focus on the meanings Badagas placed on their life circumstances and experiences. The interviews were preceded with extensive preparatory work including trips and pilot work in Bangalore and the Nilgiri when I lived with and talked to migrants and villagers, and established connections with potential interviewees and their families. The interviews were conducted on-site during a lengthy residence in the city, and continued with follow up meetings and theoretical sampling through respectful, long-term relationships. The participants helped to determine the important information to share, as questions and topics, although based on a literature review and pilot work, were flexible and open-ended, and participants had freedom to discuss topics not anticipated by the researcher. The interviewing method also took into account the the interviewer/interviewee relationship and

the co-production of knowledge during the research process, discussed further in the final chapter. Therefore, the interviewing heard from Badagas directly to understand the complexity, nuances, and particularities of being Badaga.

The sample consisted of men only, as they represented the vast majority of rural-to-urban Badaga migrants encountered; it was difficult to recruit females although I tried to do so. Each participant satisfied the following inclusion criteria: (i) identified himself as Badaga; (ii) born in the Nilgiri, and brought up in an agricultural background; (iii) within the age-range 18–65 years (working adult); (iv) able to converse verbally in English; and (v) gave informed verbal consent to participate in the study. Also, to minimize confounding, the research concerned Badagas from the upper portion of the Nilgiri to the east, the Nilgiri Plateau, as some scholars (e.g. Bird-David, 1997) believe they differ to people in other areas. The average age of the sample was 35 years, and half of the participants were in the age-range 18-30 years as they were easier to recruit (the majority of migrants seem to be young men). Two-thirds of the sample had completed secondary school, and one-third tertiary education. The interviewees were employed in a range of professional occupations in the city such as business, civil service, education, engineering, and finance. Sample size was determined by data saturation as sampling of participants ceased when dimensions and gaps in each theme of the data analysis had been explicated (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Purposive and theoretical sampling were employed to probe topics apparent in the initial analysis, facilitated by concurrent data collection and analysis (data were transcribed and analysed promptly to guide subsequent data collection; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The thrust of theoretical sampling was follow-up interviews with participants via telephone and Skype, and recruitment of two new participants towards the end of the study. Although the research focused on migrants born in the Nilgiri (first-generation migrants), a conversation I had with a second-generation migrant (the daughter of an interviewee in Bangalore) revealed interesting perspectives of identity and quality of life which I decided to follow up by meeting two second-generation migrants in Bangalore and Hong Kong. They had grown up and lived in several cities since adulthood, for example Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad. The interviews were conducted to refine and saturate a theme ('Becoming City Badaga', page 152) in the emerging thematic analysis rather than as a separate in-depth study of second-generation migrants.

As the prime concern of symbolic interactionism is to analyse meanings of everyday life, the data collection took place in participants' preferred settings rather than alternative settings such as a university, and we met for several hours according to their preferences. To establish empathy and rapport, the interviews commenced with an introduction and warm-up chat followed by guiding questions based on the theoretical direction of the study: What is your background and current situation? How do you identify yourself, and how do others identify you? What sorts of things come to mind when you think of being Badaga? How do you see yourself as Badaga with the knowledge that some people in the city are similar or different? What personal and social factors influence you being Badaga? How is your life and quality of life in the city? What aspects of city life do you like and dislike? Are you happy in Bangalore? The concept of boundaries was also used as an analytical tool to understand the changeability of identity (in this study, 'boundary' refers to distinctions constructed by the participants to separate and categorize themselves and others based on feelings of similarity, difference, and group membership). We discussed their understandings of any boundaries in their social lives such as characteristics, conditions in which they existed, permeability, and processes such as boundary crossing and boundary-work. Standardised questions were kept to a minimum and broached loosely to explore the men's own viewpoints without overly directing predetermined routes, a balance between maintaining an open mind to discovery and using prior knowledge of the literature to ensure concepts of theoretical significance were identified. These questions, and follow-up questions in response to initial replies, explored how the migrants understood and thought about themselves, their sense of identities in rural and urban areas in relation to social others (e.g. Badagas and non-Badagas), quality of life, and the processes which shaped these meanings. In doing so, the monograph attempts to paint a comprehensive picture of what it means to be Badaga in contemporary India among migrants who departed their villages and community in the Nilgiri to live and work in the city.

In line with the symbolic interactionist orientation of the study, 'meaning' was the core of the data analysis, not only the specific meanings interpreted by the participants but also how they actually function as a core element in identity and quality of life. In both studies of the multi-site ethnography, the data were analysed by coding and thematic analysis, a widely-used qualitative approach. The dataset of each study was analysed separately, and produced themes which characterize the forum posts and interviews. First I immersed myself in the forum

commentary as well as my fieldnotes from Bangalore to appreciate their breadth and depth and to highlight issues of potential interest with preliminary jottings. It was followed with an in-depth coding process whereby the data were read and searched numerous times to identify and sort similarities and reoccurrences in the participants' discussions (codes), repeated patterns of meaning which captured something important to the overall research questions as descriptive or explanatory ideas. Collections of codes were divided and grouped into core topics (categories), and those sharing similar characteristics were linked and integrated (themes) to consolidate meaning and develop explanation (codes → categories → themes). The coding process was recursive which involved moving back and forth throughout these steps with concurrent data collection and analysis, and codes and categories become more refined and conceptual, and also reflexive as I carefully considered my decisions. All coding was done manually using the paper-and-pen technique, coding by hand without assistance of a software program; although the datasets were large, it enabled a virtuous closeness. The themes, when compared and consolidated with each other, furnish a rich picture of Badagas' experiences which are discussed in the thesis with analyst narrative and illustrative data extracts interconnected to the literature, as the analyses go beyond simple description and exploration. The datasets taken together represent a description of collective interpretation and action that takes into account individuals and their social and historical settings in which they exist (Tonkin, McDonald, and Chapman, 1989).

### **Ethical considerations**

The research underwent ethical review and risk assessment in accordance with the University of Kent's research governance procedures, and was approved by the School of Anthropology and Conservation. Also, parts of the research were discussed beforehand with members of the Badaga community, an eminent specialist on Badagas (Emeritus Professor Paul Hockings), and Indian social scientists. I consulted various ethics and best practice guidelines for anthropological and Internet research produced by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the U.K. and the Commonwealth, Association of Internet Researchers, American Anthropological Association, American Psychological Association, and British Psychological Society (Birnbaum, 2004; British Psychological Society, 2009, 2010; Brownlow and O'Dell, 2002; Cassell and Jacobs, 1987; Hewson, Yule, Laurent, & Vogel, 2003). Reporting guidelines



(COREQ) were also considered where appropriate to ensure that the studies are reported in the best possible way. In Bangalore, the participants gave verbal informed consent for participation in the study after its purpose and expectations of participation (anticipated uses, benefits, and consequences of the research, confidentiality, right to withdraw from the study, and voluntary participation) were clearly explained. Regarding confidentiality, field notes were locked in cabinets in the researcher's office during data collection and analysis, personally-identifiable information was anonymised, and electronic data were password-protected. There was no use of incentives such as payment to encourage participation, although all interviewees were provided refreshments (tea, coffee, snacks).

In the Internet study, additional ethical and practical issues applicable to Internet methodology were considered very carefully. I first judged whether forum posts were private or public by considering distinctions between public and private communications, and I concluded the forum was publicly-available information as it was easily and openly accessible by anyone. Forum posts were a permanent record for any website visitor to access freely, and there was no indication of privacy in the forum, which suggests its members would have expected their posts to be accessible and observable by others. Indeed, the forum posts had been read many times before the study began, as indicated by a visitor counter on each post. I also considered: The difficulty or perhaps impossibility of contacting all of the forum members; my absence of interaction with forum members; and whether my own collection, reporting, and publication of the results would be intrusive or have other and privacy implications for the forum and its members. After considering all of these issues, it was apparent the study of the forum was an unobtrusive analysis of a public space, essentially archival research of an existing public record of texts, and therefore did not constitute human subjects research for which informed consent is required. Although the aims of the study meant identification of forum members was unnecessary, steps were still taken to ensure anonymity. Personally-identifiable information such as real names or online pseudonyms was not recorded, the address of the website forum was not published alongside the write-up, and forum posts, traceable through public search engines, have not been quoted verbatim. In summary, I carefully considered from an ethical standpoint my involvement with Badagas, and the outcomes of the research. In addition, I was reflexive of my own interpretation of the data by realising my findings represent a co-production between the researcher and the research process, discussed in the final chapter.

### **Concluding summary**

The chapter reviewed the methodology of the thesis including its guiding approaches and theoretical framework. It answers three main questions: How were the data obtained? How were they interpreted? And, what reasons justify the methodology? The first section overviewed the multi-site framework of the monograph, and its departure from previous research of Badagas and the Nilgiri which were conventional single-site studies, to explore contemporary issues such as migration and new media usage embedded within a complex and globalising India (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995). The intention is to avoid culture-bound misapprehensions associated with the ethnographic style and theoretical assumptions (such as functionalism) of earlier single-site ethnographies. The next section considered the monograph's theoretical orientation, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), grounded on social constructionist epistemology, which was employed to examine the shared subjective experiences, meanings, and lived experiences of Badagas in contemporary India with emphasis on agency, social process, subjective experience, and indeterminateness of action, a deliberate move away from previous macro-level and functionalist trends in the literature. The remaining sections of the chapter described the conceptualisation of identity in the thesis is empirical research, data collection involving forum posts and face-to-face interviews, analysed with coding and thematic analysis, and ethical considerations. The chapter also discussed the problems anticipated in the design of the research, and the ways they were minimized, for example tensions between the essentialist and constructivist approaches. The thesis's methodology, then, is an interpretative group of complementary methods—multisite ethnography, symbolic interactionism, thematic analysis, reflexivity—focused on analytically disclosing the subjective knowledge and meaning-making of Badagas to understand the phenomena under study in a comprehensive and holistic way, in contrast to the previous literature's focus on positivism which essentially reified Badaga society as a fixed, structured, and patterned entity. The approach provides greater flexibility in conceptualising identity and quality of life as dynamic and constantly in flux, to account for contradictions and social change. While macrotheoretical concepts are acknowledged, meanings of these objects are not assumed to be inherent and fixed but the product of intersubjective processes among those who regard themselves as defined by similarity and difference. The focus of the research, then, is an exploration of being Badaga as it is experienced from the

perspectives of Badagas themselves. Overall, it presents a credible methodology which bolsters the value and interpretation of the findings.

Grounded on this methodology, chapters four and five explore the identity and life quality of Badagas in two connected locations in a multi-site approach (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995), the first online with Internet forum users, and the second in the real world with rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore. Migration to urban areas and overseas, and the dramatic rise of technologies such as new media, nestled in the broader transformation of society as India develops and globalises, have shaped multifaceted changes in culture and society. To understand the changes, the following chapters explore people's experiences of living in contemporary India, especially migration and new media, as they navigate the persistence of their cultural heritage in a society in flux, and the extent to which they increasingly permeate and influence understandings of self. Specifically, the next chapter examines identity and quality of life of Badagas in the context of new media usage. It explores the portrayal of Badagas and their lives in a virtual forum community, an online website with discussions in the form of posted messages, the nature of the new type of community, and online portrayals and understandings of identity and quality of life, a lens through which to examine their lives in contemporary India. It begins with a discussion of the paucity of media and visual studies of the Nilgiri and its peoples, the need for further research, and the role of media as a prime information source and facilitator of cultural change. As the forum was primarily a source of information about the goings-on of Badagas, including their past and current circumstances which contain new material hitherto undocumented in the literature, it is primarily a thematic analysis of their quality of life, although there is also an analysis of Badagas identities as a prelude to a more thorough analysis in chapter five.

## 4. Badagas going digital

Many people today would find it hard to imagine themselves without an Internet connection, an inseparable part of daily life. Technology-mediated communication is being incorporated into ever more aspects of life, and the distinction between online and offline worlds is now less clear as they merge and transform each other. Since the beginning of the ethnography in 2008 there has been an appreciable rise of new media usage among Badagas, especially young professionals and students. I have interacted with them through electronic mail (e-mail), social networking services, and mobile apps. They use the Internet for the same purposes as other people—such as access to information, business, communication, entertainment (e.g. watching films, playing games), social networking, and shopping—and there are numerous personal webpages and blogs created by Badagas, insightful information and musings about life supplemented with photos, music, and videos. Changing language use also shows the grip digital spaces now have on life, such as the need for acronyms such as OMG (oh my god), LMAO (laugh my ass off), and LOL (laughing out loud or lots of love), which people incorporate into everyday communication. These examples are located in broader contemporary social change concerning the rise of digital and communications technologies (Barney, 2004; Castells, 2000).

As new media increasingly frame the lived realities of Badagas, and their contemporary social lives increasingly include online interactions, this chapter considers an Internet website where they reside and interact. Specifically, it explores the representation of Badagas and their lives in a virtual forum community, an online website with discussions and interaction in the form of posted messages, and explores the nature of the new type of community, especially online understandings and portrayals of being Badaga, a lens through which to examine their lives in contemporary India. It begins with a discussion of the paucity of media and visual studies of the Nilgiri and its peoples and the need for further research, as well as the role of media as a prime information source and facilitator of cultural change. It is followed by an analysis of the content in a virtual forum community created specifically for Badagas. As the first study of new media usage among Badagas, it reveals important findings.

There is a paucity of media and visual studies of the Nilgiri and its peoples. Some visual documentary exists, especially photography. The photographer Albert Thomas Watson Penn

(1849-1926) travelled to the Nilgiri at the age of 16, and later set up business in Ootacamund where he lived for thirty-years until his death. His work was commissioned for the first editions of Edgar Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of South India* (1909), Frederick Price's *Ootacamund: A History* (1908), and other works. The numerous photographs constitute a significant visual record of the social history of the Nilgiri, as documented in an excellent biography researched and written by his great grandson, Christopher Penn (Penn, 2008). Photography of Badagas has also been published in academic works, for example Hockings's (2001) detailed analysis of funeral practices can be regarded as a photo essay.

The impact of the development of media on cultural and social change in India is well documented (Singhal and Rogers, 2006), although not among Badagas. Hockings studied media consumption in the Badaga community, described in his book chapter *Education, Mass Media and the Future* (Hockings, 1999). In 1963, Badagas in four villages were asked questions about their news-gathering habits, and they replied the main sources of news were friends and relatives, newspapers, and officials. Radio broadcasting was not a main news source in the 1960s as it was at an early stage. However, it would have been a prime information source for Badagas in the 1970s onwards, and therefore a key facilitator of cultural change. All India Radio, officially known as Akashvani, the main public radio broadcaster, aired news only twice daily in the 1960s. In the late 1960s onwards, transmitter stations and broadcasting services expanded across the country, and personal ownership of radios increased substantially when relatively cheap sets became available. Consistent with the socialist policies of the Nehruvian era, All India Radio produced education serials dealing with topics such as community development, education, environmental protection, family planning, literacy, and marriage (Singhal and Rogers, 2006). Badagas' low socio-economic status at that time meant they were a likely priority audience for the rural development messages carried by All India Radio (in 1963, for example, 29% of men and 65% of women were illiterate; Hockings; 1999). Radio and other media would have also introduced different lifestyles and orientations towards life including aspirations of upward mobility. However, radio programmes specifically for the Nilgiri and its peoples became available in 1994 when the Ooty Radio Station, a local radio station of All India Radio, was established to provide local news alongside national programmes (Jayaprakash, 2000). In 2013 it began broadcasting a daily news bulletin in Badagu titled 'Seemai Suddhi' (local news) with newscasters from the Badaga community, and announced plans to gradually

include other local languages (Business Standard, 2013; The Hindu, 2013). Prior to the 1990s, then, Badagas only had access to national and regional radio programmes. Television was not available in the Nilgiri at the time of Hockings's study, although his survey respondents reported watching films once or twice a month, especially films which he described as mythological and semi-historical melodramas ('traditional' dramas with dancing and singing), and modern social dramas ('modern' comedies, romances, and tragedies).

Television was introduced to New Delhi in 1959, and its popularity grew slowly until the 1980s when the launch of Indian satellites and large-scale television transmitters improved broadcasting capabilities (Kivlin et al. 1968; Singhal and Rogers, 2006). Badagas probably encountered television in the 1970s and 1980s following the expansion of broadcasting and ownership, especially when cable and satellite television channels with engaging programmes and linguistic plurality became available. However, its uptake in the Badaga community was slow. For example, Hockings (1999) notes that in 1990 Kiy Odeyaratti village had one television set per 159 people; Oranayi had one per 104; Hullada had one per 57; while Keti Torekeri had one per 49. There was also differential access to other types of communication such as telephones, post offices, telegraph offices, and roads. Television would have sparked further social change among Badagas. Television broadcasting in the early decades was characterised by education and development programmes until the early 1990s when it was commercialized, spurred by economic reforms, privatisation of state-controlled media, removal of government regulations, and access to global markets. Doordarshan, the public television broadcaster, and previously the sole provider of television services in India, was joined in the market by a host of foreign and private broadcasters such as STAR-TV, Zee-TV, and MTV. Financed by commercial advertising, they propagated Western values such as capitalism and consumerism through adverts and the lifestyles of actors and actresses. My observations in the Nilgiri suggest almost every Badaga household now has a colour television, partly due to political reasons. Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), a state political party in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, won parliamentary elections in 2004 and state assembly elections in 2006, and formed the Government of Tamil Nadu as a coalition with Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK). The leader of the DMK, acting in his role as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, fulfilled his election manifesto promise of a free colour television for every household, and the state government spent about Rs. 1.62 crore (16.2 million) on television sets. Although the scheme was

subsequently suspended by the Election Commission of India, which ruled such gifts inappropriate influences on votes in favour of the party in power, many Badagas had already received their free televisions.

Until the 1980s the media were primarily print and analog broadcasting such as newspapers, radio, and television. In recent times there has been an emergence and rise of digital and new media which many observers consider to be fundamentally changing the ways people live and communicate; a voluminous literature has debated the positive and negative implications (Best and Kellner, 2001; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002; Hiltz and Turoff, 2003; Singhal and Rogers, 2006). Demand in India for computers, Internet services, and mobile technology has increased substantially in recent years with technological advances and rising incomes (Singhal and Rogers, 2006). As of the writing of this monograph in 2015, there were over 243,000,000 million Internet users in India accounting for 19% of the population, although minority groups such as Badagas are less likely to use the Internet compared to the majority population. Despite these changes, no other media or visual studies of Badagas have been conducted since Hockings's research in the 1960s, and his study was only exploratory and preliminary. Hockings intended to replicate his study in the 1990s with the same population and survey questions to discover changes in media usage over one generation but his funding proposal to the National Science Foundation was rejected, and 'we are thus left to guess at how much attitudes may have changed since 1963' (Hockings, 1999, p. 232). The paucity of research is a marked contrast to social science generally as Cyberculture or Internet studies have blossomed since the 1990s when the Internet began to make its presence felt, and there now exists a huge body of research on technology-mediated communication including classic studies about online identities and virtual communities (Dibbell, 1998; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1995), cyberculture-related anthologies (Jones, 2002; Smith and Kollock, 1999), and critical cyberculture studies (Ho, Kluver, and Yang, 2003; Miller and Slater, 2000; Shahani, 2008; Silver and Massanari, 2006). Therefore, research about Badagas' usage of new media generally and the Internet specifically is long overdue.

The increasing popularity of these technologies among Badagas, and claims in the literature that they are fundamentally changing daily life, raises interesting questions about how and why people are using them and their implications, which is the overarching direction of the research. The study is an analysis of an Internet forum dedicated to Badagas, and explores its usage and

portrayals of identity and quality of life. The not-for-profit discussion forum was created by Badagas, and geared to their specific experiences, a uniquely Badaga space where sharing experiences and perspectives was the major attraction to users. The forum was popular for communication and expression, and for making connections and community building, an important a source of information about the goings-on of Badagas—their past and current circumstances—which permeated almost every post including new material hitherto undocumented in the literature. For this reason, the study is primarily a thematic analysis of Badagas' perspectives regarding their lives and quality of life. It also provides a rich source of debate about identity in contemporary India, as the forum participants interacted in a space specifically created to attract and support discussion about being Badaga. Therefore, the forum provides specialist cultural knowledge pertaining to individual and collective experiences of a large-scale social category (Badagas), and yet also concerns the construction of diverse identities among people who identified as a member of the category who could come together and interact regardless of what form the affiliation took, and could experiment anonymously with the ways they presented themselves without the same kinds of fears that might exist offline.

The changing media landscape and its implications form the necessary backdrop for asking critical questions about being Badaga online: How do Badagas use new media such as the Internet? How are representations of being Badaga created and shaped through online platforms such as the forum? How do these features enable and constrain the sculpting of a collective persona? And, what are the consequences of new media in terms of social change? The study analyses how identity is played out at the level of the Internet forum, deconstructs strategies of identity work, and theorises their implications, particularly the relevance of claims in the literature that new technologies could radically change daily life and society (Best and Kellner, 2001; Hiltz and Turoff, 2003; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002; Singhal and Rogers, 2006). As noted above, television and radio were probably instrumental in change among Badagas for much of the twentieth century, but the significance of new media is difficult to evaluate without empirical research; therefore, the study examines positive and negative implications of new media for Badagas, a starting point for an extrapolation to the future when it will be more popular and could sharpen their ability to resolve quality of life challenges.

The methodology of the study and its theoretical underpinning (symbolic interactionism) are detailed in chapter three. The forum discussions spanned a wide array of topics relevant to



Badagas which have been grouped in the following main themes: The Badaga community past and present, Pride of being Badaga, Tea growing and poverty, Social inequality in the Nilgiri, and Social activism. They are discussed below.

### **The Badaga community past and present**

There was discussion in the forum about the characteristics and history of the Badaga community in the Nilgiri. Forum users estimated its population size to be between 250,000 and 350,000, about 20% of the Nilgiri population, and the number of hatties to be between 300 and 500, based on census data, logical reasoning in forum discussions, and their common knowledge. For example, a forum member asked others to post names of all known Badaga hatties and they replied with lists of hatties and debates about their completeness with arguments for and against the addition and deletion of names. Forum users expressed feelings of resentment and injustice about the unavailability of precise population and demographic data which meant the status of community—such as its economy, people, public services, and social issues—was unknown. They also criticised the underrepresentation of Badagas in government and tourism literature and websites exemplified with the following: The Tamil Nadu Government's website ([www.nilgiris.tn.gov.in](http://www.nilgiris.tn.gov.in)) included information about people in the Nilgiri but not Badagas, and the Census of India grouped them with other Indians that speak Kannada in the 'Kannada, Badaga and Kodagu' sub-group of the Dravidian family. Forum members accused the Government and others of weakening the distinctiveness of the Badaga group by neglecting them in official records and media which blurs the boundaries between them and others, interpreted in the forum as a threat to their authenticity and existence. While they acknowledged a social unity of Badagas and Indians based on common beliefs and practises, they also regarded themselves to be distinct based on their community, customs, history, and language, and they reasserted the perceived distinctiveness by writing about it in the forum and calling for recognition of Badagas as a separate group in websites and official records. These discussions show the forum members under the auspices of their group came to see a threat posed by the 'other' as jeopardising its distinctiveness and survival.

It was suggested Badagas could collect at least basic demographic information about the community through initiatives such as: Voluntary censuses of residents; a 'Directory of Badagas' to record and organise contact details of everyone (names, addresses, contact

information); and genealogical trees of residents and their ancestors, descendants, and family relationships, which could be constructed by asking elders to recall family relationships. They also discussed the potential of the Internet to gather information about the community. For example one forum member created a page on Wikipedia and then used Wikimapia, an online map and satellite imaging resource of locations around the world, to introduce his village; other forum members subsequently used Wikimapia and posted links in the forum to their villages. They also posted links to other types of information about Badagas hosted on other websites such as photo albums and family details. Another idea was to research the genetic genealogy of Badagas using DNA testing. Several forum members reported they had taken DNA tests to gain knowledge of their ancestry, and they shared the test results in the forum to shed light on the origin of Badagas. The tests taken by the forum members were Y chromosome or Y-STR tests for paternal ancestry which analysed DNA sequences for genealogy purposes. The tests had become affordable and available in India, typically marketed to consumers in print and television advertisements. They involved taking a buccal swab of the cheek to collect a DNA sample which was mailed to a laboratory for analysis and interpretation in a written report, direct-to-consumer genetic testing for genealogy purposes. However, the forum members struggled to understand the meaning of the test results as they were lay-people with no training in genetics. For example, one person's test results showed a high frequency of the R1a1 Haplogroup and microsatellite Y-STR variation which he argued could be a genetic marker of Badagas. Others thought the test results implied relatedness to Coorgs (Kodavas), a community from Kodagu in South India, as they also have the same Y chromosome Haplogroup, or an origin in Europe as a significant number of Europeans also have that genetic marker. Counterarguments to these propositions included the existence of the R1a1 Haplogroup in populations across large areas of Asia and Europe which shows it is not specific to Badagas; to evaluate the claim, I consulted scholarly studies of R1a1a which suggest it most likely originated in South Asia, and is present with high frequency in a number of demographic groups, and is widespread in Tribal Southern Indians (Kivisild et al. 2003). In response to speculation in the forum of a European origin of Badagas, it was pointed out that all ancestors of the Indian population would have migrated from Europe, known among biologists and evolutionary anthropologists as the African origin of modern humans (Out of Africa hypothesis) which asserts modern humans originated in Africa and then migrated outside the African

continent to the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and the Americas; it was also noted the European migration theory might have been invented by missionaries in colonial times as a strategy to promote religious conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. Forum members realised the speculative nature of their discussions which did not make any useful contribution to knowledge. They also noted no other information was available about the genetics of Badagas, and so they advocated for more research. These discussions in the forum about genetics and evolutionary origin also portray an effort among forum users to construct a strong group identity based on biological hereditary, and the lack of genetic-testing as an identity-based problem. In other words, the forum users perceived Badagas to be a large related family united by genetics and shared descent.

Forum users expressed their appreciation for academic research which has been done on Badagas and advanced knowledge. They thanked several scholars, and called for some kind of honour or recognition to be bestowed on them by the Badaga community. In particular, they singled out Paul Hockings for devoting his academic career and lifetime to Badagas. His books *Counsel from the Ancients: A study of Badaga proverbs, prayers and curses* (Hockings, 1988), and *Kindreds of the Earth* (Hockings, 1990), were regarded by forum members as bibles for Badagas. However, they complained the academic books were expensive and, therefore, inaccessible to many people; some forum members were restricted to free previews on Google Books, an Internet service that stores extracts of texts in its digital database. They noted books had been authored by Badagas, such as *Paamé* by B. Balasubramaniam published by Elkon Animations (Balasubramaniam, 2009). The forum was also used to promote and invite papers for a new academic journal about tribal studies founded and edited by a Badaga, *The Dawn Journal* ([www.dawnjournal.com](http://www.dawnjournal.com)).

The history of the Badaga community was also discussed. A forum post retold a legend about its supposed origins during the reign of Tipu Sultan, the Muslim ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore. The legend was summarised as follows: A family of seven brothers and a sister lived in a village called Badagahalli in the Talaimalai Hills near Mysore. Tipu Sultan, riding on horseback in the vicinity, was mesmerised by the young woman's beauty, and desired to marry her. Consequently, the family, staunch Hindus, fled their home during the night, and migrated to the Nilgiri where they established the Badaga community. The young woman's disguise of covered and tattooed forearms and forehead, which made her unrecognisable as she fled,

subsequently became the distinctive dress and tattoos of Badaga women. The legend represents a popular belief among Badagas about the establishment of the community in the Nilgiri by ancient migrants from the Mysore region in 1500 AD to 1600 AD following the break-up of the Kingdom of Vijayanagara, discussed in chapter one. Forum members debated the plausibility of the migration. A key reason they put forward in support was cultural similarities of Badagas and the ancestral caste in Mysore at the time of the Vijayanagara Empire. While they could not unequivocally confirm the ancestral caste, such as its name, religion, and lifestyle, they speculated on possible peoples and locations. These included the Kodavas based on perceived cultural similarities with Badagas, especially the name of the Gram panchayat ('Badaga') in Kodagu district in Karnataka; Lingayats in Karnataka, as they follow the Lingayat tradition as well as other similar practices; Badaganadu Balliga community in Karnataka which they presumed had originated in north Karnataka and later resettled around Bangalore and Mysore; Mallavalli in Mandya District situated between Mysore and Bangalore, based on similar house designs; Bhoj village in Rajasthan, based on a forum member's family stories; and, Punjab in West Bengal, as Badagu words such as jogi and nandhi are also used in the Punjabi language. An alternative argument put forward in the forum was Badagas are indigenous to the Nilgiri. Reasons against the migration included the absence of a written Badagu script which could rule out a relocation from a place such as Mysore with scripted languages; improbability of a small migrant population being able to establish and flourish in the Nilgiri; and the high incidence of Sickle Cell Trait among Badagas and other Nilgiri tribes, regarded as an evolutionary adaptation among native peoples.

There was also discussion about Badaga associations, small groups of friends and volunteers in the Nilgiri and other locations which represent the interests of Badagas and promote cultural and social welfare activities. The majority of associations are open to all Badagas but a minority are private and closed to public membership, and some places had more than one association. The oldest association is the Young Badaga Association which was formed in 1961 under the Society's Act 1860, and was granted half an acre of land in Ooty by the Government to conduct activities for the community. Other Badaga associations in the Nilgiri, as listed in the forum, included: Aruvankadu Badaga Association, Badaga Iignar Peravai (Ooty), Badagar Peravai (Kotagiri), Coonoor Badaga Association, Ooty Town Badaga Association, and Naakku Betta Nala Sangam (Ooty). Associations in other parts of India included: Badaga Association

Thudiyalur (Coimbatore), Badaga Gowda Welfare Association (Bangalore), Badaga Welfare Association (Chennai), Bombay Badaga Association, Covai Badagar Sangam (Coimbatore), Hyderabad Badaga Association, Karnataka Badaga Association (Bangalore), Trichy Badaga Association, and Tiruppur Badaga Association. The Dubai Badaga Association was the only overseas association mentioned. The Federation of Badagas Associations, according to forum posts, represented all Badaga associations, although it is not clear if the claim was true. Forum members wrote it was difficult to obtain the details of local associations, and not all Badagas in a city or locality were aware of their existence. The majority of posts about the associations were requests for details, and replies with the names, locations, and telephone numbers of the organisers, although representatives of Badaga associations also used the forum to advertise their details and events. Forum members also discussed their experiences of attending events organized by Badaga associations. They enjoyed the opportunities to meet others, share experiences, and partake in cultural activities, especially dance and meals; however, they criticized the infrequency of meetings, low attendance by young people, and limited action by the Badaga associations to improve the quality of life of Badagas, as they tended to be small groups of volunteers with few resources. However, several Badaga associations were praised for their social welfare activities, for instance an association in Coimbatore which operated an ambulance service to transport residents from the Nilgiri to hospitals in the city. There were also reports of in-fighting between Badaga associations, labelled in the forum as ‘political factions’, such as one group in the Nilgiri which forbid another to use its premises. Suggestions to improve Badaga associations included the compilation of a list of associations; collaboration and merger of associations in the same town or city to pool efforts and resources and reduce conflicts; establishment of a physical presence with buildings, offices, and leadership structures to strengthen them and showcase Badagas to others, as existing associations were regarded as weak and transitory with low visibility; and a more proactive approach to the provision of education, health, and social welfare services rather than only social activities.

The forum—a kind of Badaga association or community—was also praised for creating opportunities for Badagas separated geographically and socially to meet and socialise, a place where they could drop in, have a chat, seek or give advice, debate issues, and interact with others, although there were varying levels of personal involvement ranging from fleeting to enduring. The forum connected Badagas outside the Nilgiri to pursue common interests and

purposes, namely information-sharing and social ties, which they perceived as personally meaningful. Sociality in the forum centred on posts and responses, many of which developed as chains of social interaction, the glue that held the forum community together in its electronic space. They appeared to be a committed group of people in close association with each other, and some interactions over time rendered a strong sense of familiarity which led to the subjective sense that they belonged to the online group, although the identities and social collaboration that bound the forum members also involved the Nilgiri, and thus included both a new place in the Internet and the original Badaga community. Forum members embellished the forum as a platform on which they could express their thoughts, and freely debate topics with an open mind, and some discussions were characterised by strong sentiments and a polarisation of viewpoints on issues that divided them around their different meanings of being Badaga. As shown throughout this analysis, these debates among forum members show the ways they constructed us-them distinctions which underpinned their beliefs about being different to other Indians.

The diverse and clashing views illustrate the ways forum members constructed images of Badagas, and aligned themselves with understandings of identities which they then defended, contested, and negotiated by engaging in discussion, typically debate about traditional and modern—the extent to which being Badaga was regarded as a set of inescapable destinies versus having to change in response to living in contemporary times—was a defining feature of the online debates which shows substantial disagreement about what constitutes being Badaga. It was possible because the forum could not be dominated by any particular point of view, as there was no restriction or control of people’s voices, unlike in the next chapter which reveals Badaga rural-to-urban migrants carefully balanced conformity to different competing Badaga identities. Therefore, while the forum users certainly incorporated their offline and online behaviours, it seems the online self was also an expression that was not possible offline. These claims and counterclaims show that Badaga identities develop from the constant ebb and flow of interactions between people, and that those interactions are frequently sites of contestation. Individuals laying claim to particular identities find that others challenge those claims, and it is in this context of claims and counter-claims in which new Badaga identities emerge. These discussions also show the viewpoints in the offline world were reproduced in the online environment, and are therefore far from being removed from everyday reality. Therefore, the

forum as a connector of dispersed users, and as a group largely excluded from the mainstream in India, was more than just a new media outlet.

### **Pride of being Badaga**

A sense of pride and worthiness of being Badaga was portrayed in the forum dialogues. Badagas were described as dignified, diligent, ethical, generous, hardworking, heroic, honest, hospitable, humble, and intelligent. Forum members revered traditional lifestyle and customs, a simple way of living within means; family and community connectedness; courtesy and hospitality towards strangers and visitors in the Nilgiri; and ‘village Buddhism’ which has unique features such as the worship of minor deities regarded as heroes of the community. They were also proud of being born in the Nilgiri.

They wrote about the achievements of Badagas. The development of the community in the Nilgiri—from a small group of migrants to a sizeable population with geographical spread in India and overseas—was regarded as a major accomplishment. The founders of the community were praised for their bravery, heroism, hard-work, innovation, and communication skills, as evidenced by their folklore which was described in the forum as creative, inspirational, and intricately-detailed. They also admired their folk medicine which cured ill-health, and village architecture and design with benefits such as houses facing east and west to ensure sufficient natural light, location next to water sources, terraced to economise on building materials, and drainage systems to prevent flooding. They also admired aspects of folklore which they thought have since been supported by scientific evidence, for example the phrase ‘Sandirana Sarpa Maadi Dhadu Papa’ in the funeral prayer ‘Karu Haruchodhu’ was translated in the forum to ‘sleep after seeing the moon being swallowed by smoke is a sin’ and interpreted as ‘observing the sun during a solar eclipse could harm the eyes’.

Forum members also shared news of recent achievements by Badagas, as well as their own achievements. Individuals thought to be of good standing were named in the forum including academics, agriculturalists, doctors, elders, entrepreneurs, entertainers, government officials, journalists, ministers, politicians, and scientists—mostly professionals and experts with specialized knowledge, and people dedicated to serving the community. They also listed the names of people believed to be the first Badagas to have achieved specific awards and job positions, such as author, army officer, athlete, doctor, graduate (undergraduate, postgraduate,

Ph.D., D.Sc.), golf champion, journalist, judge, politician, novelist, school head teacher, Silicon Valley (USA) entrepreneur, and university dean. However, doubts were raised about the authenticity of the lists as some names were based on speculation and not official documentation, and some posts questioned whether the titles were worthy of recognition. It was also argued the handful of success stories did not generalise to Badagas as a whole. The overly positive characterisations in the forum were challenged, for example claims of honesty and hospitality were counterbalanced with examples of cheating, hostility, and misbehaviour such as alcoholism, real estate fraud, and a murder case.

There was discussion of artists, entertainers, and people working behind the scenes in the entertainment industry: actors, singers, musicians, cameramen, directors, producers, and song writers. Musicians and singers have earned a living by performing Badaga music and songs, and producing digital media and (formerly) non-digital media such as cassette tapes and records. Forum members discussed the performers and their music, wrote congratulatory messages, and posted web links to audio recordings and video clips for others to access online; and producers of music and films posted information about their work. Badaga music listed in the forum included *Haa Akka*, *Hosa Kunnare*, *Nenjuga Nimadhi*, *Raaga Maale*, and *Nethiya Barey*. There was also news and reviews of Badaga films about Badaga culture and language films with Badaga actors and actresses; non-Badaga films with Badaga actors and directors; theatrical performances and movies in production in the Nilgiri, including details and locations of filming; and opportunities for forum members to meet in Ooty to watch newly-released movies. According to forum discussions, the first commercial Badaga film was *Kala Thappitha Payilu* released in the 1980s in the ATC Theatre in Ooty, and was shortly followed by the film *Kennanju*. The first colour movie was *Hosa Mungaru* produced by MKV Films; forum members debated the meaning of the title and agreed on ‘new spring’ because the word *Mungaru* means light showers and gentle breeze in the month preceding the southwest monsoon, rain in the spring season between the summer and rainy seasons. Entertainers in previous times such as reputed singers of ballads prior to the advent of digital and non-digital media were also mentioned in the forum. However, concern was expressed about Badagas working in the entertainment industry. Singers and producers had encountered difficulties releasing music and films commercially, and amateur singers had incurred monetary losses because of high production costs, limited sales, and profits lost due to pirated copies. Other



barriers to entertainment careers included a lack of support from elders and parents for young people's singing and acting ambitions, and few music or performing arts schools in the Nilgiri; forum members praised Badaga entertainers for their determination to overcome these challenges. Another complaint was the misrepresentation of Badagu and Badaga dance and dress in films. For example, the Tamil movie *Azhage Irrukai Bayamai Irrukkithu* was criticised for its inaccurate portrayal of Badaga culture by non-Badaga actors from Manihatty. It was argued in the forum that only authentic Badaga culture should be shown in movies and in public to protect its authenticity, although others pointed out they should be proud Badagas have been showcased in the media despite the misrepresentation. These discussions of how Badagas are represented publically reveal alternative beliefs among forum members about how the group should be portrayed to others. Forum members regarded the performing arts to be an ideal way of imparting knowledge about culture to both the next generation of Badagas and non-Badagas, and called for more Badaga film and music to serve this purpose.

A strong sense of a reified Badaga identity was also revealed in discussions of specific customs and folklore such as Badagu, blessings, ceremonies, clothing, food, games, jewellery, recipes, rituals, music, prayers, temples, and so forth. Forum members described and explained various cultural traditions. Examples include Hethai Habba, a festival for worshipping a goddess; Blessing of Elders (*Doddavakka Harichili*), a ritual whereby a young person seeks the blessings of elderly people; wedding and funeral practices; Badaga Day, which has been celebrated annually on May 15<sup>th</sup> since the 1990s; and traditional dishes and their ingredients, recipes, and preparation, for example Avarai, Bathaku, Erigi, Gaasui, Ganjikke, Keerai, and Samai. There were also requests for guidance on the formalities of specific customs and traditions. Forum members wrote personal accounts of their participation in festivals including recent and past events and reminiscence of childhood memories; they posted links to photos and videos of festivals as well as news about future events in the Nilgiri.

Discussion about Badagu focused on its uniqueness and declining popularity. It was regarded as a distinct language with definitive sounds and words and no script; forum members compared it to Tamil to demonstrate its exclusivity. Thus, language served as a marker of their group identity. They proposed the adaption of English, Kannada or Tamil scripts to reproduce Badagu phonetics, and each was weighed-up in forum posts to identify the most appropriate. The Kannada script was ruled out because it was unfamiliar to most people, and not taught in

schools in the Nilgiri. Limitations of the Tamil script include difficulties differentiating 'K' and 'G' or 'T' and 'D' when Badagu is written in Tamil, and the absence of 'Ha' in classical Tamil. The English script was regarded as most suitable because it is understood by the younger generation, schools in the Nilgiri are either English- or Tamil-medium, and is already in use as a script for Badagu and other Asian languages. Examples of English scripts for Badagu were cited in the forum, notably Paul Hocking's work, and the UCLA Phonetics Lab Archive ([www.archive.phonetics.ucla.edu](http://www.archive.phonetics.ucla.edu)). However, forum members also pointed out the drawbacks of an English script, for example some Badagu phrases written in English are difficult to differentiate.

They were concerned about the apparent declining popularity of Badagu. Many people now communicate and conduct matters in English and Tamil. The utility of Badagu was said to be very limited outside the Nilgiri. Some people in rural and urban areas apparently spoke English and Tamil rather than Badagu as they thought doing so displayed to others they had 'modern' lifestyles; one forum member even claimed some Badagas pretended they did not understand Badagu which they perceived to be backward. Young people desire to be fluent in English which is required to secure professional jobs in India and abroad, and thus they tend to focus on improving English rather than Badagu skills, and were encouraged to do so by their parents. Badagas with excellent English proficiency living in cities and overseas were said to be role models and reference groups to which young people aspired. These concerns were evident in forum discussion about typical Badagu names for boys and girls, and the rising popularity of non-Badagu names. In times past, children were named after their ancestors (usually a deceased grandparent) to remember the dead and differentiate Badagas and other people, and also after villages and seemai to identify place of residence and restrict marriage between villagers (endogamy). Traditional male names listed in the forum included: Ari, Ajja, B(h)oja, Bellie, Bela(Mada), Bella, B(h)eema, Bidia, Bulla, Chenna, Dhali, Dimba, Dona, Gedda, Gujja, Hala, Hiriya, Hutcha, Jevana, Jogi, Kada, Kakkamalla, Kariabetta, Kalla, Kangi, Kari, Kulla, Linga, Loga, Madha, Madhi, Madiya, Masi, Moracha, Nandi, Nanja, Nanji, Pada, Peela, Pokka, Raju, Ranga, Sevana, Sele, Shaja, Thatha, Thippa. Female names listed in the forum included: Beeki, Bulli, Chenne, Chinna, Doni, D(h)ali, Gange, Gangamma, Gauri, Giriji, Hali, Hallamma, Honni, Hui, Jevani, Kade, Kangi, Koli, Kuniki, Lingi, Madi, Mariki, Masi, Masthi, Pomai, Michi, Nanji, Nimmi, Panne, Paru, Pooji, Rukki, Seethi, Sevani, and Sing(a)ri. Traditional

names of villages were often linked to nature, such as Bikka Mora Hatti (Olive Tree Village), Hubbathale (Chinese Pagoda Tree Village), and Osa Hatti (New Village). In recent times, English and Tamil baby names have become more common. Forum members expressed concern about the declining popularity of traditional baby naming practices, and argued for their preservation.

However, some forum members had limited knowledge of Badagu. There were many requests in the forum for explanations and translations of Badagu names, phrases, proverbs, and songs to which others responded with answers and commentary on the cultural and historical aspects of the language. For example, a forum member recalled his experience at a funeral ceremony in the Nilgiri when nobody in a crowd of nearly one thousand knew Karu Harusodhu, a prayer repeated several times before burial or cremation for the soul to be free of all sins. Replies to his post confirmed other forum members also did not know the prayer and many other sayings, and they expressed feelings of embarrassment and guilt. The disengagement with Badagu was perceived negatively as a failure to connect with their culture and values, and as a threat to the survival of the language—they feared it could become extinct. Yet Badagu was regarded as crucial to being Badaga, as some expressions and feelings can only be expressed through their mother tongue, a sense of uniqueness which could not be experienced when conversing in other languages. They suggested Badagas continue to use and teach Badagu to ensure its popularity and survival, for example adults living in cities and overseas could make an effort to speak and teach it to their children, and retirees could convey their knowledge to young people. These positions construct the story of a Badaga identity as the victim of globalization and modernity. However, other forum members wrote in support of language and cultural change which they regarded as unavoidable and necessary for adaptation to modern times. They argued Badagas should embrace rather than oppose the language shift, for example by improving their competence in the English language. To counterargue criticism in the forum about children growing up in cities with a limited understanding of Badagu, they reasoned migrants often have to adapt to new locations, just as their forefathers had done when they migrated to the Nilgiri and underwent subsequent cultural adaptation and innovation. They felt proud to belong to a community which embraced change to survive and succeed. It was also pointed out Badagu is not static but constantly changing; its vocabulary is now a mix of Badagu, English and Tamil as numerous words have infiltrated daily conversation. The

flexibility of Badagu was evident in discussion about proverbs: Forum members listed proverbs in the forum along with Paul Hockings's translations in his book *Counsel from the Ancients*, and they debated his interpretations, discussed alternative meanings, and concluded more than one version of a proverb was possible, modified and interpreted differently by different people and villages.

Identity was also brought to the fore in discussions about the legal and political status of Badagas. The Government does not designate Badagas as Scheduled Tribe, a special title conferred by the Constitution of India to afford economic assistance to tribal communities such as reserved places in educational institutions, government jobs, and parliament and state assemblies. As some Badagas want to be a Scheduled Tribe, forum members weighed up the benefits and costs. The benefits hinged on: Government support which could help ease the low quality of life in the Badaga community, especially for people in need of financial support to change their lives: reserved places in the civil service and higher education; and resources such as funding for rural healthcare services and small- and medium-scale enterprises. They also believed reclassification as Scheduled Tribe would strengthen the identity of Badagas as a community separate to non-tribals in the Nilgiri as the current practice by the Government and others is to club them together. The perspective was salient in a forum thread about a news story published in *The Hindu* (Radhakrishnan, 2007) which reported the inclusion of the Nilgiri in a list of parliamentary constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution of India (the Delimitation Commission allocates seats in parliament for Scheduled Castes and Tribes based on their proportion in each State). According to the article, the news had evoked a mixed reaction in the Nilgiri, as Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Kotas, Kurumbas, Paniyas, and Todas) had welcomed the move whereas Badagas argued they had been denied representation in parliament. In the article, the Government was accused of politically isolating and marginalising the Badaga community, and misunderstanding the demographics of the region as Badagas had less weight in politics despite being the numerically-dominant community. The article also reported local Badaga leaders considered the decision to be an injustice, and representatives of Badaga associations had sent letters to the President, Prime Minister, and Chief Minister urging a reconsideration. The news was situated in changes since the late 1980s whereby an increasing number of candidates in MP and MLA elections have been recruited from other communities whereas in the past the candidates were

exclusively Badaga. Forum discussion of the news story largely concurred with these views, and blamed politicians for insufficient support for Badagas. A forum member posted a letter template he had sent to the President of India to urge the Government to reconsider their decision, and requested others to also send it. Identity as Badaga, then, unites attachment to the Nilgiri and the belief in the right to political control over that territory.

However, there were also arguments against reclassification as Scheduled Tribe. The suggestion that Badagas as a whole deserved assistance was regarded as absurd—an unfairness of affirmative action. As the numerically-largest and wealthiest group in the Nilgiri, on the whole they were not regarded as the neediest of assistance, and many people resident outside rural villages were financially comfortable. Also, as a Backward Class, Badagas are already eligible for assistance with economic, educational and social resources but only a small number of people have benefited, and thus their entitlement to further assistance was questioned in the forum. For example, in reply to a forum member's complaint that Badagas in Bangalore were not on a list of Backward Classes entitled to higher education admission quotas, it was counterargued that most students eligible to attend colleges and universities tend to be from elite schools and wealthy families and, therefore, less deserving of financial assistance, and that admission to university should be merit-based—reservations tied to a student's academic and other achievements and not caste criteria. However, others pointed out many people had financial issues and needed assistance from the Government. 'Scheduled Tribe' was regarded as a demeaning tag, indicative of a socially-backward community, as it is common practise in India to look down on it as one of the most disadvantaged groups, a reflection of a stigma of government support as well as the Indian caste system in which peoples are socially-stratified and ranked as higher or lower, a practice which dates to the historical official designation in British India which labelled some tribes as 'criminals' under the Criminal Tribes Act 1871. Despite anti-discrimination laws and proactive policies, stigmatisation and discrimination continue in employment. Therefore, forum members warned reclassification as Scheduled Tribe would tarnish their reputation and image, and hinder rather than facilitate opportunities. It was also pointed out reclassification as Scheduled Tribe did not guarantee additional support for Badagas as the Government's pledges had not always been realised. They also reasoned the Government would not reclassify them as Scheduled Tribe because they had already been campaigning for decades, and lacked the support of politicians in the regional and national

governments. Some forum members complained the fight had diverted attention and effort from real issues, and they urged people to instead address the community's problems rather than fight to rely on government handouts, a change in attitude rather than status. It was also claimed the majority of Badagas were disinterested in the matter. A forum member created an online poll for others to vote for whether or not Badagas should be Scheduled Tribe, and 53% (26 respondents) voted in favour, 42% disagreed, and 3% were undecided. Although the poll result might be an unreliable representation of the larger population and public opinion, it shows an ambivalent attitude and highlights the potential of online polling as a useful tool of analysis. These arguments also show government-sponsored classifications have gained credibility among some Badagas, and so play an important role in constructing, as well as enforcing and challenging ethnic identities.

### **Tea growing and poverty**

Tea production, the mainstay of the local economy, was another theme in the forum posts, although other crops such as cereals and vegetables grown by Badagas were also mentioned with reference to low yields and bad weather conditions. Discussion centred on the demise of the tea industry in the Nilgiri since the 1990s, and its negative implications for quality of life. The incomes and living standards of farmers had declined. For example, a forum post cited a newspaper article published in 2005 which reported the average price of tea was the lowest since the 1990s, and another post quoted an unpublished study by students in SRM University which found 32% of Badaga households reported a monthly income of less than Rs. 2000, and 16% earned over Rs. 10,000. To escape hardship, Badagas had migrated to nearby towns and cities, labelled by forum members as the 'second wave of migration' in recognition of both its magnitude (one estimate put the number of migrants at 8000 families) and the widely-held belief that the Badaga community in the Nilgiri was founded by migrants from the Mysore region. Forum members discussed the rural-to-urban migration and its consequences for the community. They were concerned about the sale of houses, land, and tea estates by Badagas which violated tradition because they were considered to be inherited and intertwined with family history, passed down generations by inheritance customs. It was claimed some out-migrants had sold their land at absurdly low prices because they did not understand land value or were desperate for money. Demographic change in relation to the outmigration was another

concern; it was severe in some villages, and their populations had dwindled—empty houses and a conspicuous absence of people marked the landscape. Also, some people had sold their property and land to non-Badagas who then settled in the community and brought a different way of life, a stark contrast to several decades ago when only Badagas resided in villages; another concern was that Badagas outside the Nilgiri were also unlikely to uphold the Badaga way of life. Forum members were also worried these changes might destroy the community, and they questioned whether Badagas would continue to exist, a pessimistic outlook for the future. To justify these concerns, they cited examples of children living outside the Nilgiri (second-generation migrants) with limited knowledge of Badaga culture, and unable to speak more than a few words of Badagu. Some argued for the conditional sale of land and tea gardens whereby buyers and sellers give assurances of future ownership by Badagas, and employment of Badaga labourers, although others counterargued doing so was illegal and also unfair as Badagas had bought land and property in other communities outside the Nilgiri. Another suggestion was the provision of cultural and learning activities—such as Badagu lessons, trips to the Nilgiri, and get-togethers in the city—to impart Badaga culture to children and young people.

However, the arguments in the forum tended to be against rural-urban migration, and were one-sided and protectionist, even though the majority of forum members were city residents. The construction of themselves vis-à-vis the ‘other’ also has a racist tone, and the emphasis on the Nilgiri gives the impression of a ‘sedentary’ bias in terms of their understandings of being Badaga. Yet whereas much of the literature makes the false assumption that sedentary patterns among Badagas and other local peoples in the Nilgiri are the norm, the migration which has occurred in recently times should be seen as just one of many examples, and that it is frequently a two-way process in which people have entered and exited the Nilgiri over a much longer period than is frequently assumed, and is likely to be the norm rather than the rupture of normal patterns of society. The drawbacks of the migration were not weighed-up with its potential benefits, the most important in this case being a reduction of the proportion of disadvantaged and unemployed people in the Nilgiri, money pumped into the Nilgiri economy via remittances, which presumably improve quality of life, and improved links between the Nilgiri and outside areas.

An alternative and more positive interpretation of life in the Nilgiri was also portrayed in the forum, albeit in a minority of posts. In some respects, quality of life in the community had

improved over time. Most homes were deemed to be comfortable, and each hatty took care of its residents, an informal safety net of social security. Also, some people have professional jobs and high salaries. Badagas were placed above the bottom rung of India's poor, as conditions in their villages were said to be better than many other places in rural India and overseas. For example, one forum member compared the Badaga community to places he had travelled in India, South Asia, and the Far East, and claimed Badagas enjoyed better standards of living. Life in the Nilgiri was weighed up with challenging conditions and stress in cities such as competition in society, environmental issues (overcrowding, pollution), and materialism. However, they were also reminded that most villages in the Nilgiri had residents who struggled to make ends meet, and some homes had no basic amenities such as toilets and portable water and were in need of improvement.

Concerns were expressed about the quality of tea produced in the Nilgiri which had hampered its reputation, popularity, and market value. Forum members mentioned reports in media which described the tea as substandard, for example coarse and low-grade leaves. According to news reports pasted in forum posts (e.g. The Hindu, 2008, 2010), recent tea inspection and testing by the Tea Board of India, a government organization which regulates the Indian tea industry, uncovered fraudulent practices in some tea factories in the Nilgiri such as the mixing of reconditioned tea and waste leaves during processing, and tea grown in the Nilgiri had not always met the standards of the *Prevention of Food Alteration Act*. The Tea Board and other organisations had taken action such as: Reminding tea brokers and factories of the rules and specifications of tea production; suspension of manufacturing licences, and closure of several factories; and seizure and destruction of thousands of kilograms of sub-standard tea which did not meet mandatory requirements. However, forum members claimed these were exceptions and not representative of Nilgiri tea as a whole.

The prevailing opinion among forum members was a neglect of tea growers. They criticised politicians for lack of concern about Badagas, and the Tea Board for its failure to remedy the crisis in the tea industry. Government assistance for farmers was said to be limited in availability and scope, and also bureaucratic with stringent conditions which excluded many farmers from eligibility. Although previous assistance was appreciated, the forum members complained solutions had still not been found for tea growers. They insisted the Government should initiate measures such as agricultural initiatives, bank loans, infrastructure improvement,



and tourism promotion to jump-start the local economy. As well as failure to solve problems in the agricultural sector, politicians were criticised for other issues such as corruption, favouritism towards the interests of the upper and middle classes, and unfulfilled election promises. Politicians were described as dishonest, incompetent, and inexperienced. Forum users were also annoyed about political campaigns in the Nilgiri to influence the decision-making of voters, for example popular but relatively unimportant election promises, for example donating free colour televisions to households which a forum member likened to giving a small piece of chocolate to stop a child crying. When a forum member posted news about a Badaga politician's promise to increase tea prices, another scorned the news as a publicity stunt to attract votes.

They discussed strategies to coax politicians to take action. One suggestion was to conduct regular evaluations of the politicians, for example scoring their performance against attributes and objectives similar to the United Progressive Alliance's (UPA) *Report to the People*, a report card published every year by the Government which lists its accountability for governance. Forum members also proposed tactical voting strategies whereby the Badaga electorate could scrutinise candidates for government positions based on their commitment to the community, and elect only Badagas as only a small number had been Members of the Parliament (MP) to serve the Indian Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) to represent the electoral district in the Legislature of the State of the Government. Forum posts discussed the details of Badaga politicians including their names, backgrounds, projects, and achievements and failures while in office. Considering the size of the community—35% of the electorate in the Nilgiri according to a forum post—Badagas were regarded as a political force which could influence election outcomes. Others reasoned that venting blame and frustration at convenient targets such as politicians was not a substitute for accepting and dealing with the realities of life. These discussions of identity politics, political mobilization around identity as Badaga as opposed to ideology or class reveal that being Badaga was seen as a potential tool and strategy of mobilisation in India's electoral democracy, a form of collective action to change state politics relating to social justice, inequities and the redistribution of resources; when Badagas cast a vote, they vote their caste.

Forum members suspected unethical business practices in the tea industry. Farmers were said to be vulnerable in the agricultural system as they had limited understanding of its workings, and were exploited with inadequate and fair compensation for their work. To justify their

suspicions of exploitation, forum members summarised the business chain of tea production in the Nilgiri, channels through which tea moved from growers through markets and buyers to consumers. At the beginning of the chain were the Badaga farmers that grew and harvested tea crops, mostly smallholders although a few owned bigger tea estates. They sold their tea leaves to agents or collectors which then sold them to tea factories (tea manufacturers). Tea factories then processed the tea leaves into 'made tea' (ready-to-drink tea) which was then sold to tea buyers through intermediaries such as auction centres and brokers in places such as Coimbatore and Coonoor. Tea buyers represented national and international tea companies which had blending, packaging, and trading facilities and sold the final product to retailers and consumers. The existence of about 150 tea factories and eight brokerage firms in the Nilgiri was estimated in the forum. According to forum members, the livelihoods of the tea growers were at the mercy of auction centres and brokers which controlled the price of tea after tasting and grading and considering market trends; permitted buyers and suppliers to purchase and sell tea; and controlled money flow as they authorised payments to sellers (farmers) after deduction of commission and charges. In contrast, the farmers played a more passive role as they did not directly sell tea or negotiate prices. Forum members made allegations about an illegal cartel of price-fixing among brokers which manipulated tea prices and buyer and broker availability, resulting in low incomes of small growers. They also claimed some tea factories in the Nilgiri were debtors to brokers, and owed as much as several lakhs of Rupees because they had borrowed money with high interest rates such as 36% per annum. An example posted in the forum was a factory that had borrowed 15 lakhs of Rupees but later owed 60 lakhs with accrued interest; apparently, 100 factories had closed as a result of their inability to repay loans. It was also claimed the factories in debt to brokers were less able to negotiate higher tea prices or seek alternative brokers and buyers, which forum members described as 'bonded labour'. They also accused the Tea Board of ignoring the situation.

### **Social inequality in the Nilgiri**

Another theme which characterised forum discussions was social inequality: Disparate access to education, healthcare, income, and goods and services; unequal treatment of women; and debate about the need for equal opportunities.

Forum members noted the marked divide in economic prosperity and living standards between rural and urban areas whereby the Nilgiri and Badagas had lower socio-economic circumstances. Many farmers were living in poverty with low incomes, debts, unemployment, poor infrastructure such as roads, and limited opportunities. One complaint was education and schooling. The majority schools in the Nilgiri are government-owned (free attendance), and concerns were expressed about the quality of their teaching and resources. Whereas students from affluent families benefited from private education renowned for higher exam pass rates and university acceptance, children from less well-off families attended government schools and more likely to have a below-average level of education. Forum members complained that few Badaga students in government schools continued to university, and high-achieving students tended to come from private schools and wealthy families. Another criticism of education provision in the Nilgiri was the presence of unaccredited and unreputable institutions, labelled in the forum as ‘diploma mills’, and a lack of awareness among students at these institutions. Despite these complaints, forum members also acknowledged progress over the years in the education of Badagas, regarded as a contributor to their economic and social rise, essential for improving people's lives. Previous generations of Badagas did not have the opportunity to attend school whereas education has become compulsory and free for all children up to age fourteen. They were proud of Badagas who had graduated from colleges and universities, and they cited examples of graduates. However, a minority of forum users were not convinced about the merits of the education system which they blamed for the Badaga community's problems. An alternative viewpoint they put forward was entrepreneurship by school leavers was more important for growth and innovation in the community and its economy. They argued education did not prepare youth for the real world, and had distracted ambitious and talented people from the pursuit of agricultural and business development; unemployment of graduates was cited also as support for their views.

There were also complaints about limited access to healthcare in the Nilgiri. Although general medicine was readily available through primary and community health centres, advanced medical services such as specialists and diagnostic facilities were limited. Residents in the Nilgiri had to travel to the city for some aspects of secondary care. However, there were barriers to accessing health services in urban areas such as medical expenses which meant some people had sold assets or incurred debt, and limited transportation options for the three-hour

journey from the Nilgiri to a city hospital. Specialist healthcare was unavailable in the Nilgiri because it was sparsely populated, and staff were reluctant to work in rural areas (even Badaga doctors trained in modern medicine tended to work outside the Nilgiri). Positive comments about healthcare in the Nilgiri emphasised important contributions from a range of non-government organisations, such as charitable trusts and voluntary organizations, which arranged for doctors and medical staff to visit villages, and the natural environment which forum members believed maintained good health, especially the clean air and drinking water.

Forum members also commented on inequalities within and between villages. There were income and wealth differences, and wide gaps between rich and poor, which ranged from people in poverty with limited amenities (e.g. no piped water and household toilets) to wealthy owners of luxury consumer products; in-between these extremes people lived in a range of circumstances. The variation in household incomes reflects the diversity of employment in the community as some people were agriculturalists whereas others were employed in non-agricultural professions. It was claimed some Badagas looked down on the less fortunate, for example residents in towns and cities had a derogatory attitude towards rural folk, and professionals in Information Technology in Bangalore regarded themselves as superior to their counterparts working in less prestigious companies and occupations, the basis of status identities.

Another topic discussed in the forum was gender equity. On the one hand, respect for women was regarded as a tenet of Badaga culture, supported in forum posts with examples of folklore such as ballads, festivals, and legends. The festival Hethai Habba portrays the goddess Hethai as the ideal Badaga woman and guardian of health and agriculture, and the proverb Hennogiri mannogiri (the curse of a daughter or sister will turn the soil barren) describes the supremacy of women and their close relationship with the land. They also discussed recent changes to some Badaga traditions which have presumably improved the lives of women, such as the abolition of a dowry, as in times past the bride's family was expected to give jewellery and money to the in-law's household; minimal stigma of divorcees and widows, unlike elsewhere in India; and Hengava Nadathodu, a tradition of emotional and moral support to daughters and sisters. However, some traditions continue to hinder gender equity, for example entry restrictions for women at the Hethai temples at Beragani and Pedhuva hatties during Hethai Habba, based on a social taboo of menstruation which is perceived to be ritually unclean, limited participation in

the religious festival. Badaga society, like India generally, was said to be characterised by male dominance and the subordination of women. Badaga women continue to experience unequal treatment in many aspects of life, and face pressure to conform to socialised gender roles. For example, women are expected to be primary caregivers in families, and relinquish educational and career goals to marry at a young age and raise children as housewives; it was estimated in the forum that 90% of Badaga women made career concessions to accommodate marriage and family needs. Consequently, women are underrepresented in higher education and the workforce, especially in professional and senior employment. Badaga women wrote in the forum that they could only be successful in the male-dominated society if they were determined, independent, and willing to make sacrifices; one sacrifice was marriage, as it was easier for single women to pursue career and education ambitions because married women were consumed by family responsibilities. It was difficult for women to concurrently pursue an education or career and marriage because the bride was expected to be age 19 to 23, and older women were deemed by some people to be unsuitable for marriage. An example was given in the forum of a man and his family that liked everything about a potential bride except her age as she was older than 24 with a college degree and employment experience. Women felt pressured in to marriage in their early twenties, and sacrificed career and educational dreams; an example cited in the forum was a young woman who had discontinued her PhD studies because her neighbours questioned her single status. One solution chosen by some young women was to pursue short-duration education programmes which could be completed more quickly.

The male-dominated society was condemned as archaic and a violation of women's rights, not in line with contemporary ideas of equality and human rights. Forum members called for a more egalitarian and inclusive society with the removal of existing inequalities, and provision of more opportunities for women. They also warned gender inequity could tarnish the reputation of the Badaga community as an indicator of its backwardness. However, it was counterclaimed the standing of women in the community had improved in recent times, and examples of successful women were mentioned in various careers and professional fields such as educators, government officials, journalists, scholars, scientists, and social workers; for example, an article was posted about the first woman graduate from the Badaga community, a distinguished politician and social worker (Wyatt, 2006). The role of women in Badaga society was said to be changing as they took on positions traditionally reserved for men, and in some cases had

become the primary or sole breadwinner in households affected by the crisis in the tea industry which had reduced men's incomes and jobs. It was also noted a nascent women's movement was challenging the status quo of male dominance, as many hatties now have *Magalir Kuzhu*, an organisation which advocates women's rights and welfare. Others pointed out the examples of successful women were exceptions rather than representative of the majority of Badaga women.

A minority of forum posts written by men defended the gender inequality in Badaga society. They argued it is normative and widespread in India, and not specific to Badagas, and that perfect equality did not exist in any society in the world. They also claimed that women in the Badaga community are better off than women in many other rural places. Some posts even blamed women for their disadvantaged status, putting it down to their attitude and lack of determination. For example, in reply to a complaint about a young woman unable to continue her university studies because of her husband's disapproval, a forum member counterargued the woman should have chosen a different husband! Some men in the forum described career women who sacrificed marriage and family, a key structure of Badaga society, as abnormal, freaks, and misfits, applied in a negative sense to assert the notion of a woman going it alone and defining her existence individually rather than in terms of the family violates social norms. Therefore, these dialogues in the forum show Badaga women and men are challenging sexism, and have made progress, but there is still a long way to go to attain gender parity. Forum members realised change would be difficult to achieve, and discussed the most appropriate ways to bring it about, for example by obtaining endorsement from prominent Badagas and Badaga associations.

There were also clashing views about wedding practices: Arranged marriage versus intercaste marriage and love marriage. Badagas, like India generally, had an arranged marriage system whereby the bride and groom had little or no say in the matter as the choice of partner and other arrangements were decided by their parents and older family members. However, love marriage, a term used to describe the free choice of partner by bride and groom based on mutual affection, with or without the consent of their parents, was said to be increasing in popularity, especially among urban residents. Also, although same-caste marriage was an important criterion of an arranged marriage, an increasing number of Badagas had married partners of different castes. A lively debate ensued in the forum about an advert in the Classifieds section of *The Hindu*

written by a Badaga woman seeking a marriage partner of any caste. A forum member copied and pasted the advert into the forum, and asked others to air their views on intercaste marriage and its implications, a deliberate attempt to incite debate. Forum members in favour of adherence to traditional beliefs and practices argued intercaste marriage was unacceptable and shameful. Their case for upholding same-caste marriage centred on a perceived duty to do so—respect for Badaga culture which was regarded as a cornerstone of being Badaga—linked to concerns about cultural change taking place, a view that traditions should be upheld to prevent their demise. Other reasons they put forward included the possibility young people might choose unsuitable partners because of inexperience and emotional immaturity, which they argued justified arranged marriages by parents and elders, and stigma in society towards intercaste marriage, for example one forum member wrote villagers in his hatti refused to attend the wedding celebrations of an intercaste marriage. The strong support for same-caste marriage, in combination with other portrayals in the forum of being united by blood ties and genetics, show that for many people being Badaga is understood as ascribed rather than chosen, and that it is almost impossible to join the Badaga group.

However, others in the forum were more accepting of intercaste marriage and love marriage. They argued marriage customs are flexible and evolve over time, which they exemplified with the recent abolition of previous practices such as child marriage, exogamy, and polygamy; intercaste marriage and love marriage were regarded as recent examples of change. They criticised people who followed customs uncritically without thinking about their suitability in present-day India, a delusion of an ideal world which had never really existed. Supporters of arranged marriages were branded as hypocrites because they did not uphold many other customs but supported marriage customs. They suggested that people focus instead on more pressing issues to help Badagas. The forum discussion of the newspaper matrimonial advert was also criticised as interference with people's private affairs such as marriage, although others defended the importance of the debate among forum members to understand different viewpoints. They also noted the Hindu Marriage Act 1958 does not prohibit intercaste marriage. One forum member in an intercaste marriage wrote she appreciated the opportunity to learn about her husband's community and culture and vice versa. Another perspective was that intercaste marriage increases the genetic diversity in the Badaga population which helps to reduce the prevalence of inherited disorders such as Sickle Cell Trait and birth defects among

children of first-cousin marriages. Customary marriage rules for cross-cousin marriage and reciprocal bride-exchange between hamlets were regarded as confusing and complicated, as young people and their families were unsure about eligibility according to kinship rules, which had encouraged them to seek non-Badaga partners. The customs were also considered time-consuming and restrictive, and single people preferred to communicate directly with potential partners rather than through intermediaries. Also, nowadays people had additional expectations of potential partners which took priority over customary marriage rules, for example social and financial status; it was claimed urban residents with good jobs found partners more easily than rural folk. The customs were also interpreted in terms of gender inequity by forcing women to follow unjust rules imposed by male oppressors. In arranged marriages, for example, the choice of groom served the preferences and interests of the groom and family, an increased likelihood of a mismatch of bride and groom with negative consequences for their wellbeing. A case was made in the forum to reform arranged marriage to improve women's rights. Other forum members sought a middle ground in the debate and hesitated to choose between the two sides: They reasoned intercaste marriage and love marriage were acceptable in certain circumstances, such as for divorcees and overseas residents who encountered difficulties finding Badaga partners, although both sides in the debate could have done more to establish some middle ground.

### **Social activism**

As well as trending topics, Badagas also worked together in the forum to improve quality of life in the Nilgiri. They brainstormed ideas, and took action to implement them.

The forum was used for charity fundraising on behalf of a social service organisation. A request was posted for monetary donations to fund medical treatment for a young man with a health condition, a poor farmer. The forum was used to introduce the man's predicament and health status; arrange a meeting with his family; discuss treatment options such as choice of hospital; appeal for forum users and Badaga associations to transfer money to a specific bank account number; plan and coordinate the receipt of donations; and provide updates of the fundraising. Forum members raised funds among themselves and acquaintances, and posted messages with details of their donations, alongside offline fundraising by the social service organisation. The donors were Badagas in cities such as Bangalore, Coimbatore, and Chennai,



and overseas (Dubai Badaga Association). At the conclusion of the fundraising, more than 100,000 Rupees was raised although the proportion of the amount donated by forum members was unclear. The fundraisers conveyed their appreciation on behalf of the young man and Badaga community, and the donors and other forum members expressed gratitude and pride of their collaboration.

The forum also facilitated the arrangement of ‘eye camps’ (free eye tests and operations) in the Nilgiri by outreach services of charities and hospitals. For example, an event was held in Jagathala village by the NandiSeva Trust in association with the Shankara Eye Foundation in Kovai and Rotary Club of Ketti Valley. The forum was used to arrange and advertise the event, and provide an update on its outcome. Posts in the forum reported 82 people had received eye tests, and four had surgery. Other charity and social welfare events were arranged in the forum: A cancer awareness and screening programme; fundraising for elderly people with chronic kidney disease; charity work by Badaga associations; and efforts by forum members such as news about donation items and offers of financial sponsorship for people in need.

Other ideas to improve the quality of life of Badagas were also considered by forum members: Educational resources such as scholarships and monetary prizes for high-performing students; careers advice for young people; agricultural development initiatives such as diversification and agricultural co-operatives to reduce costs through economies of scale such as combined purchase, storage, and distribution of farm inputs; financial and technical support for farmers to upgrade inefficient and outdated agricultural methods (forum members gave examples of unprofitable farms sold by Badagas which subsequently became successful under new management); proposed education and degree courses about agriculture and vocational skills training related to trades such as carpentry and manufacturing; economic and infrastructure improvement in villages such as job creation and installation of running water and toilets; lobbying of politicians to take action to improve the situation in the community; arrangements for Badagas with expertise and skills—e.g. architects, builders, lawyers, financial advisors and retired government employees—to share their knowledge with others; construction of Badaga-specific institutions and facilities such as a Badaga hotel, hospital, medical camp, school, and public health initiatives; and a proposal to create a team of overseas Badagas or a charitable trust to lead community development.

A face-to-face meeting of forum members was organised to discuss these ideas. The date and location of the meeting was agreed in the forum, and it was attended in Ooty on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2006 by five people for 3 hours in duration. An outcome of the meeting was discussion about the next steps needed to create a charitable trust for Badagas including tax exemption and legal registration, creation of a business plan and mission and vision statements, bank account application, appointment of a management team, and agreement about its long-term goals such as the creation of an educational institution, health centre, and organic farm. A forum member prepared the deeds for the trust, and posted them online.

However, these goals were not accomplished. At the end of 2006 onwards, forum discussion lost momentum. Subsequent posts questioned the inaction as several years had passed since the forum thread and the face-to-face meeting had taken place. Reasons given for the failure to follow through on the ideas included disinterest, concerns about the safekeeping of monetary donations and funds, residence outside the Nilgiri, limited manpower to do the groundwork, lack of consensus on projects, and uncertainty about the legality of creating and operating a charitable trust, especially legal liability. An example of a hypothetical legal problem was postulated whereby medical assistance was given by the proposed trust to a Badaga who subsequently died which might put the trust and its volunteers legally and financially liable. Also, forum members questioned whether the creation of a new trust was necessary as others already existed and efforts by forum members would be more appropriate and effective.

The forum was also used as a platform for activism to bring about social and economic change, the first documented case of Internet activism by Badagas. Forum members raised awareness in their posts of what they perceived to be unethical money lending by the tea auction centres to tea factories. They claimed that high interest rates on loans had indebted tea factories to specific brokers and reduced their ability to negotiate higher tea prices or seek alternative buyers. Brokers and buyers were also accused of forming illegal price-fixing cartels to lower market prices of tea. Forum users requested information from the Tea Board about money lending from brokers to factories in the Nilgiri in accordance with The Right to Information Act 2005, which obligates public authorities in India to retain and publish records, and permits citizens to request the information. In accordance with the Act, an applicant could expect to receive a reply to their enquiry within thirty days, and was required to pay fees to file requests (Rs. 10), receive information (Rs. 2 per page), and inspect information at record offices (Rs. 5

per hour). Forum members requested information from the Tea Board about: Rules and records of money lending; action taken by the Tea Board against its officials who did not take action against the tea brokers and illegal money lending; financial records of all tea brokers in the Nilgiri; and other agricultural issues such as the Tea Quality Upgradation and Product Diversification Scheme based on forum members' suspicions of corruption and financial irregularities. They also lodged First Information Reports about the suspected money lending, written documents prepared by the police when they first receive information about a crime, to set in motion the criminal justice process which begins with a police investigation, based on the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Charging Exorbitant Interest Act (2003) which prohibits and punishes lenders with unreasonable interest rates on loans.

The activists posted details of their activities and instructions and templates to assist others to lodge similar applications to the Tea Board and police to join the activism. Details they posted in the forum included reference numbers of their applications, names of tea brokers presumed to be involved in unethical money lending, and names and addresses of police stations where they had lodged First Information Reports; subsequent forum posts gave updates on the progress of these efforts. Replies they received from the Tea Board, copied and pasted in the forum, confirmed money-lending by tea brokers to factories and estates was prohibited in accordance with the provisions of the Norms for licensing of Brokers in Public Tea Auctions. The forum members interpreted this admission to be a successful outcome of their work which they reasoned paved the way for the next steps of their activism which could include obtaining documentary evidence of money-lending, requesting the cancellation of brokers' licences, and court action. They also believed their activism had put pressure on the Tea Board and others to investigate and remedy the issues they had raised. However, replies from the Tea Board also stated it was unaware of money-lending in the Nilgiri tea industry, and had not received any complaints from factories about brokers charging exorbitant interest rates. The activists later wrote in the forum they had heard anecdotal reports since the online activism began about increasing tea prices and cautiousness by brokers when dealings with factories, as they no longer gave advance payments, which they regarded as evidence of the success of their activism, although these claims were neither evaluated nor substantiated.

In summary, then, the activism was essentially a movement in the forum to advocate farmers' rights and improve their standard of living based on perceptions of an unjust system in which

they were mistreated. I categorise the activism in the forum as follows: 1) awareness raising, when the activists publicised their cause, exchanged information to justify their claims and activities, and tried to persuade other forum members to take action; 2) analysis and discussion, including debate and weighing-up of the issues as well as contradictory and opposing viewpoints; 3) coordination and mobilisation, as some of the activism was group-based with alliances of collaboration and support among forum members, and; 4) action and lobbying, such as First Information Reports and applications for information under the Right to Information 2005. Identity was clearly a resource strategically deployed in the activism, as being Badaga come to the fore when they diagnosed and addressed issues, recognised their group's suffering, and accused those thought to be responsible for the problems, boundaries between them as a group and others. However, the scope of the activism was limited.

Only a minority of forum members participated while the majority only read or commented on posts and did not engage beyond discussion. A search of the Internet reveals the online activism took place only in the forum, in other words only among Badagas in that particular online space, as there was no cross posting—the act of posting messages to other outlets—which would have increased awareness of the activism and its cause to a much larger audience. The activism was a small group effort on which a minority of forum members pinned hopes, and not a social movement that achieved any real change. Also, the activism had a short life-cycle that began when the activists wrote the first posts to frame the problems they critiqued and proposed Internet activism as a desirable solution, an initiating event which sparked a chain reaction of posts and replies in the forum as well as offline activities which gained momentum as others joined the activities. But interest and action gradually declined and waned. It implies that although identity as Badaga unites people, it was not a particularly effective tool for mobilising the general population. Even so, the activists had big ambitions. They suggested collective action by mobilizing Badagas in villages and cities, as they thought a mass movement was needed to turn the tables around for the community; several forum members volunteered to visit hatties to raise awareness of the issues and encourage people to protest. They also suggested collaboration with Badaga associations and charities and trusts experienced with logistics such as the Annai Trust, Blue Hills Education and Development Association, GAVA trust, and Sadhuragiri Trust; some of these are organised by Badagas, for example the Annai

Trust, a non-profit social service organisation which focuses on education, healthcare, and the empowerment of women.

However, forum members complained the activism was burdensome and time-consuming. Their motivation was dampened by slow and non-replies to their enquiries which they situated in the inefficiency and slowness of the Indian judicial system. They also experienced hostility from public authorities, for example a forum member described a reply he received from a local government office that required a large photocopying fee (Rs. 238,800) and additional costs to provide the information requested in his application under the Right to Information Act 2005! Some activists did not understand the replies they received because they had limited legal knowledge and skills. For example, in a discussion of the Norms for Licensing of Brokers in Public Tea Auctions and other rules, which according to forum posts forbid brokers from lending money but permitted advance payment with interest they discussed the legal definitions of advance payment, borrowing, and lending but did not reach a consensus. An activist submitted an application to the Tea Board to request clarification of the issue, and the reply confirmed a brokerage firm was not entitled to lend money to a tea factory but could pay an advance against future supply if requested by a factory, and any interest accrued on the advance should be governed by local laws. Several forum members reported they had met factory owners to raise awareness and persuade them to file complaints with the Tea Board and police, but they were reluctant to do so as they depended on brokers for business. According to forum posts, several factory owners had filed First Information Reports but they were interpreted by others as cunning attempts to default on their advance payments, and thus the police were reluctant to accept them. The brokers, as powerful stakeholders in the tea industry, were accused in the forum of delaying the investigations of these applications.

Although forum members mostly posted supportive messages concerning the activism, some questioned the allegations of predatory lending by brokers which were not verified with evidence. They reasoned money lending was a common business practice, and tea prices were determined by an array of other factors such as quality of tea, mismanagement of tea factories, and inefficient farming methods, which the activism did not target. The activism also did not target other quality of life issues in the Nilgiri. The activists replies with the Badaga proverb ‘Uttithama thindhalaey ota bendhara nannama thindhalaey nan yenthara’ which means ‘they want nothing to do with our community but they will work to improve matters elsewhere’.

However, the criticism of the activism did not outstrip it, and there was no counter mobilisation in opposition to the activism.

The forum was also used to report news about activism taking place by Badagas in the real-world Nilgiri and nearby areas. For example, news and links to newspaper articles about a demonstration by hundreds of Badagas protesting the construction of a church in B. Manihatty Village which they claimed would have threatened the unity of the village, denigrate their culture, and create social problems (The Hindu, 2012; Radhakrishnan, 2012). The demonstration took place at the Collectorate, the office of the District Collector (District Magistrate) responsible for the implementation of government programmes in the Nilgiri, and representatives of the villagers and other members of the Badaga community held talks with the District Revenue Officer and the Deputy Superintendent of Police. Forum members condemned the arrest of eighteen protestors at the village following a row with the villagers who proposed the establishment of the church, demanded the unconditional release of the arrestees, and sought assurance that churches and religious propaganda would not be permitted in the Badaga community. They supported the activists, concurred with their viewpoint that the construction of the church would have negatively affected Badaga culture and community, and referred to the proposers of the church as ‘traitors’ and ‘parasites’.

### **Concluding summary**

This chapter explored a virtual Badaga community and its online portrayals of identity and quality of life, a lens through which to examine the lives of Badagas in contemporary India. As the first study of new media usage among Badagas, it showed they now have an online presence, and revealed other important findings. A new type of Badaga social collective, a virtual community connected by online social interaction and notions of culture, is documented for the first time. Regarding identity, a strong sense of being Badaga was revealed in forum dialogues, as the study analysed how members of the Internet forum articulated and expressed different understandings of their caste. The forum members regarded themselves as Badagas to be a distinct group as an identity category with a shared sense of community, customs, ethnicity, history, and language, collective identifications that separated ‘us’ from ‘them’. They reasserted their perceptions of distinctiveness and an identity divide by writing about them in the forum with a sense of pride and worthiness, calling for recognition of Badagas as a separate group in

websites and official records, and accusing the Government and others of neglecting and blurring the boundaries between them and others which was interpreted as a threat to their authenticity and existence. The forum members also perceived Badagas to be distinct from other groups on the basis of blood ties and genetics, which show that for many people being Badaga is understood as ascribed rather than chosen, although their reasoning was not linked to ideas of genetically transmitted physical or mental differences. Social interaction in the forum was essentially identity-promoting in the sense forum users focused on commonalities rather than differences, fostered allegiances among Badagas, and legitimised and showcased them to the world via the website which was accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. Identity was also brought to the fore in discussions about the legal and political status of Badagas, and in collective action to change state politics relating to inequities and redistribution of resources, the notion that being Badaga was a potential tool and strategy of mobilisation in India's electoral democracy. Identity was also deployed strategically in activism concerning low tea prices and life quality among farmers when forum members diagnosed and addressed the issues, accused those they perceived to be responsible, constructed identities of Badagas as victims of marginalization which solidified the 'other' against which they became relevant and meaningful, and then worked together to bring about change. Taken together, the forum members constructed boundaries to mark their territory—who is part of the group and who is not—which reveal perceived meanings of being a member of the group.

While these findings seem to support, at least from the perspective of the forum members, the reification of an overarching Badaga identity as something tangible, a distinct and specific social group with its own culture and markers in essentialised terms, a look beneath the surface of these simple constructions in the forum revealed their abstractness and diversity, as many forms of Badaga identities were portrayed in the forum which highlight the heterogeneity of the population. This was particularly evident in lively debates and discussions about different images of their caste, sometimes characterised by a polarization of strong sentiments on issues which they contested, defended, and negotiated, a deconstruction of the meaning of being Badaga which shows some consensus as well as substantial disagreement. This antagonism largely revolved around the issue of authenticity—who is a 'real' Badaga and who is not. While authenticity itself was not an objective category, definitions of an authentic Badaga largely hinged on notions of upholding long-standing traditions and core values among those who

wanted to set narrow parameters on its meaning, in contrast to other forum participants who did not consider adherence to tradition as a requirement for being Badaga as they advocated change and new ways of living. Also, it involved claiming and challenging assumptions of being Badaga from within a set of prevailing discourses already circulating about stereotypical customs and traditions as well as discussion of alternative perspectives depending on the biographies and the conditions under which people had come to affiliate with the forum. These interactions in the forum enabled people to construct meaningful identities and cultural boundaries which involved maintaining allegiances but also creating and defending new ways of being Badaga grounded on the original community in the Nilgiri, the new virtual community, and the changing situation in India. In other words, the forum, as a meeting space for people who have very different experiences and perspectives about being Badaga, was a medium that facilitated conversations which challenged and defended the reification of rigid boundaries between those who support traditional beliefs and values and those who refused to identify themselves in such terms. However, none of the forum members, regardless of their viewpoints, rejected the Badaga label; indeed, most embraced it and expressed pride doing so. Collectively, these findings revealed a diversity of Badaga identities and processes through which they were established and played out in the forum, and show the cultural boundaries are actually porous with little or no restrictions placed on the types of images of being Badaga that can be portrayed.

Forum discussions spanned a wide array of topics concerning Badagas, a valuable source of information about their lives. Unfortunately, the depiction of a negative quality of life in the Nilgiri was a salient theme which centred on the demise and low profitability of agriculture. The livelihoods of farmers were characterised as low incomes and living standards, debts, unemployment, limited opportunities, and out-migration to nearby cities. There was emphasis in the forum on the tea growers' vulnerable position in the tea industry in which the overwhelming proportion of economic returns flowed to other stakeholders, namely middlemen and large tea corporations. Other aspects of low life quality in the Nilgiri included education, healthcare, infrastructure, and socioeconomic inequalities. The unfortunate reality was an appreciable number of people struggling for satisfactory living resources. However, the forum was utilised as a tool to improve quality of life. It empowered Badagas to form alliances and work together across geographical boundaries to raise awareness of issues, propose and discuss solutions, and



coordinate and take action. It is also important to note e-philanthropy took place in the forum. These findings reveal a novel form of social action by Badagas not documented previously in the literature which for some changed the nature of their advocacy and protesting, and had potential to shape Badaga culture and society in the coming years, issues which are discussed further in the final chapter. There was also interaction between identity and quality of life, for example the reification of a group Badaga identity was effective at mobilising people to work together to challenge perceptions that the ‘other’ posed a threat to their group’s quality of life and survival. Whereas the literature emphasises objective aspects of life quality, especially economy and standard of living, this chapter considers subjective quality of life, Badagas’ own perspectives of their circumstances. This analysis, then, departs from the deterministic trend in the literature which imposes macro-level institutions and social structures on people.

The discovery of the virtual Badaga community and notions of diverse identities among forum members is a starting point to dispel the classic representation in the literature of a homogenous, spatially-bound, and static caste of more than 160,000 people in the Nilgiri. The existence of the virtual community contradicts previous assumptions and conceptualisations of the people and their culture as local and bounded in an isolated region, as they are now multiply situated and moving around India and electronic spaces, an interlinking of Badaga identities and communities which show they can no longer be understood by sole focus on the Nilgiri. It is important to note the online community was markedly different to the real-world community in the Nilgiri, an alternative way of understanding Badaga sociality which turns previous literature on their apparent culture and society on its head. The virtual community was not geographically circumscribed but a differentiated form of social space glued together by new media-mediated social interaction and no longer bounded by time and space; most of the forum members resided outside the Nilgiri without physical propinquity. Online and offline life overlapped in multiple spaces with meaningful social connections such as forum members meeting offline, and while the forum complemented face-to-face interactions it did not replace them. The study’s focus on people’s actual experiences and perspectives enables the reader to ‘get inside’ the minds of Badagas to see the world as they perceive it on the basis of their own particular meanings which revealed diversity and disagreement about the cultural markers and boundaries of being Badaga. Overall, the study supports a symbolic interactionist conception which shows Badaga identities and life quality are thoroughly in flux, and contested and negotiated across multiple spaces, as

the evolving local and global realities of the twenty-first century elicit fundamental changes in their meanings and expressions, not only new forms of sociality but alternative notions of self-understanding.

However, the findings are also limited as an exploratory study. The researcher had no control over the key issues addressed in the forum posts, as the study was a secondary data analysis of archival data, and there is an absence of data extracts for issues to do with anonymity of participants. Therefore, the thesis requires the consideration of additional data. To explore these issues further, the next chapter builds on and complements the online study by reporting another study, conducted in the real world with rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore. It begins with a discussion of migration in India, especially among Badagas, and then outlines the study's aims. It is followed by an analysis of interviews conducted in Bangalore with rural-to-urban Badaga migrants grounded on symbolic interactionism and social constructionist epistemology (Blumer, 1937; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) which offers rich data to help tease out the extent to which Badagas respond to the upheaval of leaving the Nilgiri and living in the city, processes of identity change, contextual determinants of new identifications, and criteria by which Badagas construct distinctions between themselves and others. There is also a need to explore further the quality of life of Badagas in the city, and its intersection with identity, as the forum data only touched on the issue briefly. The second study, then, gains an appreciation of the experiences of Badagas in the city to paint a comprehensive picture of what it means to be a member of their caste in urban areas, and the processes which shape these meanings, a more in-depth approach to understanding their identities and quality of life. The combination of the two empirical studies in a multi-site ethnography enables a critical conceptualisation of these concepts in the final chapter informed by its theoretical underpinnings.

## **5. Migrant stories: Becoming ‘City Badaga’**

Sensationalist images and stories of people abandoning their homelands, travelling across countries, and living in refugee camps appear regularly in newspaper headlines and on television and electronic screens, an unrelenting stream of reporting which has put migration in the public consciousness. India, the world's second most populous country, has one of the most diverse and interesting migration histories, and there is now a vast diaspora spread across every continent. In non-Western countries, rural-to-urban migration is a defining feature of the twenty-first-century which has consistently drawn attention in the literature (Bhagat and Mohanty, 2009). One-third of the Indian population are now migrants, and about half of them are rural-to-urban migrants—around 100 million people. Rural-to-urban migration has resulted in the growth of cities such as Bangalore, Kolkata, Mumbai, and New Delhi, part of a national and global phenomenon as half of the world's population live in urban areas. As demographic change continues, India is likely to have a majority of urban residents in the future (Montgomery, 2008; United Nations, 2015).

Badagas are also on the move. A prominent topic in the previous chapter was the increasing number of people taking migration journeys to seek a better life in towns and cities, fuelled by disparities in life quality between rural and urban areas—a wave of the urbanisation sweeping across India. The literature only briefly mentions rural-to-urban migration and the growth of non-agricultural employment among Badagas (Hockings, 1999, 2013). Thus far, little has been said about the migrants such as who they are and how they live, and there are no studies of Badagas outside the Nilgiri such as in urban areas. Yet migration is not simply about headlines, numbers, and social economics, but concerns people's personal experiences and interpretations of change. Migration needs to be seen as a personal and social process as well as a demographic and economic process. As little is known about Badagas moving to and living in urban areas, and the ways they are finding their place in urban society, research is needed to explore their rural-to-urban migration experiences. Therefore, this chapter contributes to understanding the migration of rural Badagas to urban areas, and gains an appreciation of the ways they make sense of their changing circumstances in relation to being Badaga. It begins with a brief review of the literature about migration and the Nilgiri. The next section is an analysis of empirical

evidence using primary data from rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore to understand more about their experiences. The final section concludes.

Migration is a prominent theme in writings on Badagas. As discussed in the previous chapters, their oral tradition describes successive waves of migration in the sixteenth or seventeenth century by the Vokkaligas, presumably the ancestors of Badagas, from the southern plains of the Mysore region, and the subsequent founding of the Badaga community in the Nilgiri (Benbow, 1930; Emeneau, 1946; Francis, 1908; Grigg, 1880; Harkness, 1832; Hockings 1980a, 1999; Nambiar and Bharathi, 1965; Rhiem, 1900; Sastri, 1892; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). Several authors published detailed analyses of these folk stories (Benbow, 1930; Emeneau, 1946; Francis, 1908; Grigg, 1880; Hockings 1980a; Nambiar and Bharathi, 1965; Thurston and Rangachari, 1909). As some stories portray people fleeing from Muslim soldiers, it has been suggested the ancestors of Badagas might have migrated to the Nilgiri to escape war and persecution, for example following the Muslim invasion of Malik Kafur (Belli Gowder, 1938-41) or The Battle of Talikota on the 26 January 1565 and the subsequent destruction of the Vijayanagar Empire (Belli Gowder, 1923-1941; Burton, 1987; Emeneau, 1946; Hockings 1980a, 1999; Sastri, 2002). For this reason, Badagas have been styled in the literature as ‘refugees’ (Hockings, 1980b). It is thought the early arrivals established several homesteads in the Nilgiri. Fenicio’s recording of 500 Badagas in three villages in 1603 may be indicative of a recently-established settlement (Fenicio, 1603; Hockings, 1980a), which then increased in number to 2207 people and 350 villages according to the first British census in 1812 (Hockings, 1980a). However, the migration hypothesis remains hypothetical as there is insufficient evidence. There has been too much reliance on folklore and the rough observations of Fenicio and early British census officials, and academic analyses of oral tradition are rudimentary. Also, the migration has been regarded as a one-way movement, as there is no information about the exchanges and links between origin and destination which presumably would have continued for a much longer period than assumed in the literature. Importantly, there is no information about identity construction, for example the change from Vokkaliga to Badaga. Therefore, whether Badagas are indigenous or nonindigenous to the Nilgiri remains an unanswered question. Despite the uncertainty, the supposed migration has been taken for granted by scholars and Badagas without any real critical thinking about its validity, although the analysis of forum discussions in the previous chapter shows some people disagree with the

migration hypothesis and posit an alternative proposition of Badagas as aboriginal. It highlights the need to explore the variety and nuances in people's views rather than follow academic perspectives of migration ascribed in the literature.

There has also been discussion of labour migration to the Nilgiri from neighbouring districts in Tamil Nadu and provinces such as Coimbatore, Malabar, and Mysore when the expanding economy in British India created employment opportunities (Heidemann, 1997). The migrants took up all kinds of jobs alongside Badagas and other local peoples. Examples reported in the literature include labourers in coffee and tea plantations since the 1830s and 1840s; infrastructure construction such as buildings, roads, and telecommunications; domestic and other workers; and petty trading of merchandise and the opening of stalls in bazaars (Heidemann, 1997; Hockings, 1999; Richards, 1932; Zagarell, 1997). A notable study is Heidemann's (1997) analysis of migrant labourers in the Nilgiri including the demographic, economic, and social changes following their arrival. They became a significant proportion of the population, and the backbone of the economy. The influence of the migrants on Badagas has been speculated in the literature, for example the introduction of new ideas and relationships are thought to have replaced the former gift and commodity exchanges (Heidemann 1997; Mandelbaum, 1955, 1989; Shortt and Ouchterlony, 1868). The impact of colonialism on migration and social change in the Nilgiri, a reoccurring theme in the literature, has been overemphasised by previous writers. There has been a tendency to divide the history of the Nilgiri into three periods (early, colonial, and post-Independence; Hockings, 1999; Mandelbaum, 1982, 1989) which puts British India as centre stage, based on biased assumptions by writers that colonialism was a time of development and success, superior to the past, even though the economy of India was stagnant under the British Raj, and did not undergo industrialisation in the nineteenth century in the way that Britain did. The economic impact of British imperialism on India remains a contentious issue among historians, and is probably not as bright as the picture painted in the writings about the Nilgiri.

The literature on Badagas and the Nilgiri also aligns with a sedentary bias in anthropological thinking of static, ageless village communities and social structures apparently broken up during the nineteenth century, an old colonial notion of an immobile rural Indian population, in contrast to more recent views of a highly mobile Indian society rendered stationary by colonists (Breman, 1990; Haan, 2002; Lucassen and Lucassen, 1997; Washbrook, 1993). The authorities

in the early colonial period often portrayed the population as fixed and immobile, and argued for enhanced mobility. Thus much of the literature on the Nilgiri makes the false assumption of sedentary patterns among Badagas and indigenous peoples as the norm, and portrays population movement as an exclusively ‘modern’ phenomenon, although some evidence shows the Nilgiri and bordering areas had extensive and long-term relationships throughout history including migration (Richards, 1932), and were integrated into state society (Zagarell, 1997). Much historical research in other locations shows that most of the Indian rural population was highly mobile at that time, as population movement was the rule rather than exception (Habib, 1963; de Haan, 1999; 2002; Washbrook, 1993). It seems likely that people in the Nilgiri and surrounding areas were engaged in labour migration and trading activities for centuries by bringing and taking farm and manufactured products to and from neighbouring areas, a much longer period than is assumed. Thus it is necessary to move away from the sedentary bias of the literature to understand migration as a central aspect of Badagas’ lives. Also, rather than isolating migration events in the Nilgiri as something out of the ordinary, an alternative perspective in this chapter emphasises their normality and interlinkage.

Another migration topic in the literature is the relocation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, also known as Ceylon Tamils or Jaffna Tamils, Tamil people of Sri Lankan origin whose ancestors were recruited in the 19th century from the Madras Presidency to work on plantations in British Ceylon. Recent ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has resulted in migration to India since the 1980s, although there has also been recent repatriation of refugees from India to Sri Lanka (Dasgupta, 2003). A large proportion of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees resettled in the Nilgiris District, and has since become one of the largest groups of migrants, estimated by Heidemann (1997) to have numbered over 100,000 in 1984. Despite the general trend of essentialising ethnic identity in the Nilgiri literature, Heidemann (1997) describes the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu as a heterogeneous and complex group with regards to caste and place of origin. The Tamil Nadu Government placed the refugees in the Nilgiri on the assumption they would find employment in the tea industry, as they previously lived on plantations in Sri Lanka (Hockings 1999). Another reason is an ethnic and linguistic connection between Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils (Valatheeswaran and Rajan, 2011). It is claimed ‘these generally unskilled people have made themselves deeply unpopular with local inhabitants by their encroachment on Badaga and other farmland, squatting in Badaga villages, aggressive politicizing, and evident liaisons with

and protection by Tamil government officials in the district' (Heidemann, 1997; Hockings, 1999, p. 266). Hockings (1999) questions whether Badagas can maintain a strong ethnic identity in light of the economic and political pressures of the increasing populations of migrant communities, as they have not been the numerically dominant group in the Nilgiri during the 20th century.

The repatriation also created complicated issues for the refugees regarding identity and quality of life. These include coming to terms with displacement from Sri Lanka, and its consequences; citizenship, as the children of the refugees born in India are registered as citizens of Sri Lanka and not India as the Government has refused to give refugee status, permanent resident status, or citizenship because it expects them to repatriate (and, in some cases, birth, marriages, and deaths have not officially recorded in refugee camps); and living in refugee camps (Dasgupta, 2003). Many of the younger generation born in India identify as Sri Lankan Tamils but consider themselves culturally and linguistically Indian as they follow Indian culture and habits, regard life in India as routine and normal, and have integrated into local society (George, Kliwer, Rajan, 2015; George, Vaillancourt, and Rajan, 2016; Giammatteo, 2010; Valatheeswaran and Rajan, 2011). Some refugees have expressed a desire to remain in India whereas others intend to return to Sri Lanka. Many factors contribute to the ambivalent attitudes including the complexity of the repatriation process, connections and family relationships in Sri Lanka, duration of stay in India, educational and livelihood opportunities, perceived safety in Sri Lanka, social relationships within the Tamil and Sinhalese communities, and economic, political, and social support from Sri Lanka (George, Kliwer, Rajan, 2015; George, Vaillancourt, and Rajan, 2016; Giammatteo, 2010; Valatheeswaran and Rajan, 2011). The younger generation born in India are more likely to express a preference to remain as they feel socially connected even though they regard Sri Lanka as their motherland (George, Kliwer, Rajan, 2015; George, Vaillancourt, and Rajan, 2016; Giammatteo, 2010; Valatheeswaran and Rajan, 2011). These studies highlight the need to explore understandings of identity among migrants in India (Canagarajah, 2008; Dasgupta, 2003).

The analysis in the previous chapter of online discussions by Badagas reveals they are currently undergoing their 'second wave of migration' as they relocate to nearby towns and cities to escape declining incomes and living standards. As there is likely no single reason which can explain the motives behind their rural-to-urban migration, other changes not

mentioned in the forum might also be important such as a labour surplus caused by agricultural intensification, livelihood diversification, and rising population density in India. The forum members were concerned about the consequences of the migration such as abandonment and neglect of customs and traditions, especially by Badagas living and growing up outside the Nilgiri; demographic change in villages; increasing numbers of non-Badagas settling in the community with different ways of living; and the sale of houses, land, and tea estates which violates inheritance customs. These changes were regarded as a challenge to established lifestyles, and forum members worried they might lead to the demise of Badagas, a pessimistic outlook for the future. The forum members were largely against the rural-to-urban migration with one-sided and protectionist arguments. While the existence of problems for rural and urban areas as a result of migration cannot be denied, it should not be viewed as a problem per se. It is important to accept that it is probably inevitable, has benefits as well as drawbacks, and that the meanings of both the migration and being Badaga are too complex for such monolithic classification. Therefore, further research is necessary to accommodate some of the complexities glossed over in the forum debates and literature.

The study reported here attempts, with sensitivity, to fill the gap by offering a comprehensive account of the current situation and life experiences of Badagas in the city. It gives voice to the myriad experiences of rural-to-urban Badaga migrants in the city to unpack the complexity of their journeys from the Nilgiri to Bangalore as they attempt to uphold some sense of autonomy and heritage as Badaga while also becoming functional members of an urban culture and social setting while in search of a better future. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions: What was the background and situation of the migrants? How did they self-identify and understand themselves as Badagas? How was their life and quality of life in the city? What happens when people leave the Nilgiri, the social context in which they identify as Badaga, and move to a new place with a complete change of environment where the former supports of their identity and life quality no longer exist? What opportunities and challenges do they face when they migrate? Answering these questions through examining the lived experiences of migration should paint a comprehensive picture of what it means to be Badaga in urban areas, an entry point to reach a deeper understanding of their identities and life quality. The findings also have broader implications. Rural-to-urban migrants experience the changes associated with India's development and urbanisation over relatively short time periods which enables changes in life



to be examined, insights into the associated changes that will occur gradually in the Badaga community in the Nilgiri in the coming years. As migration has implications for quality of life in origin and destination locations, the study will help to identify any issues and assistance needed, and how positive impacts of migration and urbanization can be maximised while negative impacts minimised. For those involved in planning for the future of the Nilgiri and cities such as Bangalore, understanding the situation of rural-to-urban migrants is crucial for successful social policy. The study, then, is also an attempt to understand the complex relationship between migration and quality of life, an important endeavour considering that India holds a large number of urban dwellers and will continue to do so.

The research focuses on migrants born in the Nilgiri, although several interviews were also conducted with second-generation migrants to refine and saturate a theme in the data analysis ('Becoming City Badaga', page 152). The methodology of the study and its theoretical underpinning (symbolic interactionism) are detailed in chapter three. The discussions with Badagas in Bangalore spanned a wide array of themes which have been categorised as: (a) Departing the Nilgiri: Social mobility, (b) The Promised Land: Living in Bangalore, (c) Being Badaga, and (d) Becoming City Badaga. Collectively, these themes and their descriptions comprise an understanding of the migrants' shared experiences and interpretations as Badagas living in the city, particularly in relation to identity and quality of life. Below is an account of each theme which represents a broad consensus among the participants unless described otherwise, with examples of quotes from the interviews.

### **Departing the Nilgiri: Social mobility**

All of the migrants had grown up in the Nilgiri, and relocated to Bangalore as adults. Some had previously lived in other cities, for example Chennai, Hyderabad, and Mumbai. Length of residence in Bangalore varied among the sample, one-year to more than thirty.

We discussed the reasons why they had left their ancestral villages in the Nilgiri. Agriculture as a profession did not sustain a decent standard of living. It was not an option for the men because of low incomes, unpredictable costs, drought, and pests. Tea cultivation and the running of tea estates were described in the interviews as 'a struggle', 'doomed', 'unguaranteed income', and 'not worth it'. A migrant described his family's circumstances:

“My family’s tea plot in Ooty is not running well. Ten years ago, we earned 25 Rupees per kg; now it’s only 2! How can we survive on that? Barely enough money to make ends meet. It’s dreadful for me to continue in those footsteps. I love Ooty, but I can’t stay...there is no job, no money. I keep telling my parents they should leave too”. (Male, 36).

The above extract describes the financial difficulties experienced by the interviewee’s family, the prime reason for his migration to the city. Similar to the other interviewees, he interpreted his relocation to Bangalore as inevitable, so although we talked about the motives of migration, he conceded that ultimately there was no alternative but to leave.

The interviewees complained about limited employment opportunities in the Nilgiri which they attributed to its economic backwardness and sluggish agricultural sector. Although the local villages and towns were not devoid of business activities, they tended to be small-scale family enterprises employing family members and non-locals willing to work for low wages, and few were owned by Badagas. They also complained about limited government and private sector initiatives supporting business development, economic growth, and job generation, as they thought the Nilgiri and Badaga community had been side-lined in the country’s development plans. However, they also blamed the Badaga community for missed opportunities over the years. A contrast was made between Badagas and Tibetans in the Nilgiri, a small community which arrived in Ooty in the 1970s. As traders of Tibetan handicrafts they established the Tibetan Market (near the Botanical Gardens), which is profitable and reputed. They complimented the Tibetan people’s ability to establish a thriving community and business from scratch by taking on the challenges they faced. Said the oldest Badaga in the sample (age 61):

“We [Badaga] are poor compared to what we were and what we could have become. The outsiders came and settled and have more money than us. We have not grown in the same way. They are doing well in Ooty, but look at us—we scratch our heads, and slave away on farcical farming. They bought up all the land right under our noses! If we had shown more initiative, things would be much different”. (Male, 61)

He attributed the dire situation of Badagas to their reliance on agriculture and disregard of entrepreneurship. Whereas other people in the Nilgiri were admired for getting on in life, establishing businesses, and acquiring resources for living, Badagas were portrayed as naïve and unable to change. The quote above referred to non-Badagas generally.

The interviewees described their migration as social mobility, a desire to improve their situation by moving forward in life to new and exciting possibilities. Many jobs in the Nilgiri were menial and unskilled. The city offered a wide array of professional careers and employment, especially for graduates—a key reason for their migration. They had not encountered major difficulties finding work in Bangalore, and enjoyed higher incomes. The majority of the sample had sought career and personal development prospects in the city's booming business and financial sectors, and several were employed in leading Indian and international companies. A migrant summarised his career progression in Bangalore:

“I got a job as a Customer Service Rep in a call centre. Six months later, I was in a training workshop to be a supervisor. After probation, I got promoted to be my team's manager. Now, I am a middle manager. I am not stopping here!”. (Male, 26).

The above quote describes a Badaga man's career progression in Bangalore, and his ambitions for the future. Such opportunities—promotion from an entry-level to middle-management position, and access to a management training programme—were said to be almost non-existent in the Nilgiri.

The interviewees willingly disclosed their monthly earnings which ranged 20,000 Rupees (recent college graduate) to 100,000 (senior manager); in comparison, farmers in the Nilgiri typically earned less than 5000 at the time of the initial interviews in 2010, relatively poor in economic terms. Farmers made hardly enough profit to live, and some lost money as their tea plantations were financially unviable. The quality of life of the farmers was a cause of concern for everyone. A migrant described his feelings about problems in his ancestral village:

“It makes me sad when I think about the greatness we fell from and the hole we are now languishing in. Things are getting worse by the day; it is depressing”. (Male, 49).

The situation at the time of the interviews was compared to the past. The 1980s and 1990s were labelled by the interviewees as the ‘The Good Old Days’ when agriculture was profitable, and Badagas enjoyed a comparatively high standard of living in terms of income level, availability of employment, and ease by which they were able to satisfy their needs and wants. Said another migrant:

“My father graduated from a top university when few of us went to university. He declined a job offer from the city government to return to his father’s tea estate. Believe it or not, profits then were much higher than working in Bangalore! Back in his time he made so much money—as much as 10,000 [Rupees] a week—he didn’t know what to do with it all!”. (Male, 22).

The above comment by an interviewee contrasted his situation to the past when tea cultivation was profitable. The quote also reveals temporal changes in rural-to-urban migration. While the he had migrated to Bangalore for economic prosperity, his father had returned to the Nilgiri from the city for the same reason several decades previously. It also shows rural-to-urban migration is not a recent phenomenon among Badagas.

They could not explain the details and causes of the agricultural issues. They said incomes had been hampered by low market prices of tea, high production costs, and inefficient small- and medium-size farms, but were unable to elaborate these explanations. They blamed farmers, including their own families, for failure to critically examine and improve agricultural procedures, lack of planning for the future, and unresponsiveness to changing economic and societal circumstances; many people simply continued their old ways of doing and took no notice of the bigger picture. The following reflection by an interviewee sums up this viewpoint:

“A long time ago we used to boast we were the greatest. We were certainly the wealthiest. And, my generation was the first to become teachers, doctors and alike. But those good times were filled with naivety, an idea they were forever. We never imagined it would have become this bad. Frankly, it’s shocking...embarrassing even”. (Male, 55).

However, not everyone wants to leave the Nilgiri. Some Badagas prefer to stay to continue the *status quo*, as agriculture has always been their livelihood and way of life, and it is difficult to find alternatives; another reason is respect for ancestral land and tradition. We also discussed positive aspects of life in the Nilgiri. They reasoned Badagas were still relatively well-off compared to many other rural communities, especially in states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Uttar Pradesh. They said small-holders in other tea-growing communities in India survived only with hand-outs from central and state governments, and the poverty and child labour in the northern states of Assam and Bengal did not exist in the Nilgiri. Though many Badagas struggle to make ends meet, the vast majority are able to satisfy at least their basic needs with sufficient resources for living—food, water, basic necessities, education, healthcare, and housing. Families were able to grow their own vegetables for consumption, and, at the time of the interviews, rice was available throughout Tamil Nadu at low prices because of government subsidies (about one Rupee per kilogram), and electricity and water charges were low. Also, Badagas, unlike many Indians, tend to be home- and land-owners as they inherit ancestral land and property, although not everyone has. A wide range of inexpensive goods were available in nearby shops, markets, and towns. But expensive goods were out of reach for many people, and prices had risen in recent years. Quality of life in the Nilgiri was also captioned as beautiful natural scenery: abundant nature, fresh air, magnificent landscapes, and multiple sides of weather. Therefore, while the interviewees complained of challenging living conditions in the Nilgiri, they also reasoned Badagas fared better than many other Indians. As one participant put it:

“Well, here’s my list: We have roofs over our heads, rice on our tables, and clothes on our backs. We have colour TVs with a 100 channels! No Badaga begs or sleeps on the streets!”. (Male, 31).

They also valued the strong sense of community in the Nilgiri, a feeling that everyone matters, and, by being a member of the Badaga community, they were contributing to something worthwhile. Everyone in surrounding homes and areas considered themselves a big family which they cared about and felt engaged and connected with. Being part of a close and caring community was conducive to enjoying life, and enabled them to cope when things became

difficult. These meaningful social relationships were also salient in their lives in the city, yet they also valued the freedom, independence and individualism of living there.

Some of the men had moved to Bangalore for further and higher education opportunities, and stayed in the city after graduation. In their view, the availability and quality of its colleges were superior to the Nilgiri and surrounding areas. Bangalore is reputed throughout India for its educational institutions; some have global acclaim. Coimbatore, a city 228 kilometres from the Nilgiri, with more than 150 colleges and universities, is another popular choice for students. Even so, the majority of Badagas study in local or nearby colleges in the Nilgiri for the following reasons: Low tuition and living expenses were unaffordable in Bangalore; public perceptions of local colleges as satisfactory; concerns about the unfamiliar urban environment and ways of living; and even ignorance and disregard for education by some families. Those interviewees who had studied in Bangalore said they had supportive parents including some that had borrowed money to fund their child's studies.

### **The Promised Land: Living in Bangalore**

Our discussions painted a picture of contentment with life in Bangalore. Positive talk of the city emphasised employment and career opportunities, convenient-living with availability of amenities and products, and leisure activities. The migrants were financially-independent, and material goods had become important to them. Disposable incomes and spending power, along with availability and diversity of consumer products, had led to the adoption of a consumer culture among the men. A different notion of living characterised by new types and sites of consumption, and everyday displays of modern goods and wealth, a materialist orientation disconnected from their previous hold on frugality. Consumption in the city had also led to novel forms of leisure, as Bangalore's department stores, shops, and shopping malls were attractive not only because of the goods on sale but also the clean, spacious, and air-conditioned sites for social experiences. Said one participant:

“Bangalore leads the way in glamour and glitz! Forum Mall on Hosur Road has become vital in my life. I go with friends several times a week; we grab a coffee or McDonalds, stroll round, chat. It's good ‘brain medicine’ to deal with the stress of my job. There are no malls in Ooty”. (Male, 25).

His consumption sites had shifted from visits to small stores in the Nilgiri to trips to shopping malls, coffee shops, and fast food restaurants, a prominent feature of his social life in the city. However, these sites meant more to him than consumption and materialism; they were new social spaces and forms of leisure. He also regarded the shopping mall to be important for his emotional health, thereby connecting consumption to wellbeing.

Although their consumption habits had changed, they made it clear that Badagas, including themselves, were not adherents of materialism and wealth. They said a hallmark of being Badaga was a simple way of life and disinterest in materialism. Badagas in the Nilgiri were described as a content and happy community because they embraced simple lifestyles, and were satisfied with what they had. Conditions in rural villages, although a world away from the city, were said to be sufficient to uphold satisfaction with life. Even materialism in an abstract sense—the existence of the material world external to the person—did not come into the psyche of being Badaga, as they said happiness is not something one has but something who one is, a perspective of looking spiritually inward and outward through contemplation and inner reflection rather than in material goods which were regarded as illusionary and relatively unimportant. The perspective was entwined with Hindu beliefs, especially Karma.

However, a contradiction was apparent in this explanation. They had adopted a consumer culture in Bangalore yet upheld Badagas and themselves as detractors of materialism. When asked for clarification, they interpreted their consumption as different to others in Bangalore, a distinctive type of ‘Badaga consumerism’ incorporating aspects of Badaga and Bangalorean consumption. Its distinctiveness was underscored by strong views about the ownership of goods as necessities of living rather than symbols of wealth, social position, and status. The interviewees disapproved of ‘conspicuous consumption’, and did not regard themselves as being at the forefront of fashions and brand names as status symbols. Indeed, all of the Badagas I met in Bangalore were dressed casually and plainly, and they appeared typical or average in their appearance with jeans, pullovers, sneakers, and sandals devoid of brand names and high-end consumer goods, although they all adopted Western styles. Therefore, although they experienced a shift from subsistence to multi-dimensional consumption and consumer desires and behaviours, there was a lack of conspicuous consumption, explained by the interviewees as a marriage of city and Badaga values. Even so, they did not accept the downplaying of

materialism without qualm, as it was pointed out their migration had been an attempt to better themselves in a material sense.

There was, however, a downside to life in Bangalore. Cost of living constrained, to some extent, their choices and experiences of the city, especially expensive property rents. Only three of the migrants owned an apartment or house; the others rented accommodation, typically a single-bedroom in a shared house at a cost of Rs. 5000 to 10000 monthly. As exemplified in the complaint below, while their incomes were sufficient to financially support daily-living, as everyday necessities were affordable, high-end goods and activities were too expensive. Even so, all of the interviewees acknowledged their standard of living in the city was higher than in the Nilgiri, and about half of the sample saved money to remit money to their families, typically several thousand Rupees monthly. Moreover, although they complained of affordability, they did not consider themselves in poverty, and none lived in squatter settlements, shantytowns or slums even though these types of housing exist in Bangalore.

“Things can be cheap, things can be costly. The price tag on imported items will blow your mind. Prices have gone up a lot. My salary is not low but I have to think twice when buying...I don't spend much when I am with my friends, I just window shop. It's possible to live here cheaply, though...I have just enough to get by”. (Male, 19).

Shops and services (auto-drivers, bus conductors, landlords, and street vendors) sometimes charged them higher prices than Bangaloreans, prejudice directed at migrants based on the stereotype that they were professional workers earning comparatively high salaries. However, discrimination and inequality were not perceived to be major problems in Bangalore, as they rarely encountered unequal treatment, and considered themselves to be socially-accepted by others. They held favourable, positive attitudes towards Bangaloreans, and praised their acceptance of difference. One interviewee even claimed Bangalore's position as a cultural melting pot was an exemplar for other countries such as the U.K. to learn how to achieve social harmony within their multicultural communities. However, they had received complaints from elderly locals about the city's dramatic change from its former status as a peaceful and quiet locale, criticism targeted at migrants generally and not Badagas specifically. Another interviewee said Badaga migrants in other places, for example Kavundampalayam in



Coimbatore, had created tensions with local residents, but I decided not to investigate the point further as it was beyond the scope of my study.

Working in the city was challenging with long commutes and working-hours, emphasis on performance such as meeting targets and deadlines, and relationship issues with colleagues such as rivalry and clashes of personality. The migrants talked about work-related pressure, burnout, insomnia, and the impossibility of a work-life balance. About one-third of the sample said their job was exhausting as they spent all of their time either working or resting from work, and had limited time and energy for other activities.

At the time of the initial interviewees in 2010, Bangalore's economy had been affected by a global financial crisis triggered by valuation and liquidity problems in the U.S. banking system and housing market in 2008. A recession hit Bangalore in 2009 with subsequent financial and job losses, especially in the information technology industry following a decline in demand for exports and services. Two of the men had lost their jobs, and several others experienced reductions in salaries, working hours, and perks. The interviewees feared job security, and several had cancelled or postponed financial plans such as a mortgage application and setting up a business. One man described his unemployment during that time:

“I was an engineer for G.E. It was a good job, but we were laid off at short notice in early 2009. I couldn't find another job for three-months. I tried my best, but few were recruiting. I was in a difficult position. I didn't return to the Nilgiri...I was too ashamed to tell my parents. Thank god my savings covered my rent. Now I work for Rolls Royce; it's okay, but not as good as before”. (Male, 28).

Another topic was an intention to reside in the Nilgiri in the future, as the migration to Bangalore was not considered to be permanent; living in the city was regarded as a home away from home, transient and secondary. Some of the men were optimistic about being able to return in the near future; others envisioned a lengthier wait. The desire to live in the Nilgiri was based on several reasons: A sense of belongingness to the place they regarded as their motherland; to be with family, friends and Badagas; and to enjoy its natural environment and scenic beauty, conducive to a fulfilling and satisfying life. But they were unable to support themselves in the Nilgiri because of limited incomes and employment. However, three of the

men, residents in Bangalore for more than a decade, made their preference to stay in the city very clear. They felt settled in Bangalore, and thought the Badaga community had changed markedly since they had left. They were concerned about the limited availability of goods and services in the Nilgiri as their lifestyles and needs had shifted. They said they might not be able to readjust to a place different to when they had left and different to their lives in Bangalore. Even so, they still visited regularly, had not sold their inherited ancestral land and property, and paid village tax (an honorary, informal tax). These continuing ties were important in their lives; they did not reject the salience of the Nilgiri in their lives but they also felt a strong sense of belonging in Bangalore. One of them said:

"I think of myself a Bangalorean now, granting a large part of me will always remain there [the Nilgiri]. Jeez...I've been here donkey's years, a family and house here now, my birth place is less on my mind. But I am still a Badaga, and I keep up-to-date with my village's comings and goings". (Male, 57).

Other challenges in Bangalore were regarded as typical frustrations of daily life: inadequate services, poor roads, electricity outages and power-cuts, water-shortages, construction work and noise, pollution, traffic jams when commuting to work, and lack of greenery. Economic and population growth had put considerable pressure on urban infrastructure and resources which had not kept up with the city's development. These issues impinged on quality of life, as shown in the complaint below, but were regarded as minor inconveniences:

"The power blacks out a few times a day. We've been without power for an hour today. It's a short time, but we can't do many things. I sometimes work from home, and can't do my work; my wife cannot prepare dinner. We can't even go out because the shops are left high and dry!". (Male, 42).

### **Being Badaga**

Being Badaga was the essence of who they were, the fundamental basis of being human. It was central to their sense of self: how they understood themselves and others, their interaction with the social world, and ultimately how they made their way through life. It was also expressed in

relation to others, a notion of “us-ness” with other Badagas. In this way, being Badaga was described as both an inner feeling—the foundation of thinking and state of mind—and an outward feeling of engaging with the world at large, which imbued their lives with meaning and the capacity to enjoy and embrace life, as illustrated in the quotes below:

I love being a Badaga, it’s really who I am...my mind, my thoughts, my essence, my life. But I want to state categorically that I am also proud [to be a Badaga] because I was born there [in the Nilgiri], it’s my motherland, a special place where we are the same and love each other. (Male, 31).

This is a real issue. I am a Badaga, and will always be a Badaga by heart. It’s my true character, deep in the depths of my soul. It comes from God, my ancestors, my people. Us Badagas are a big family...and we are all on the same page, so-to-speak. (Male, 37).

Distinct lines ran between ‘Badaga’ and ‘non-Badaga’. Perhaps not surprising, being a native of the Nilgiri, and ‘belonging’ to the Badaga community, were important as they saw themselves as part of a collective. Thus, being Badaga was ascribed at birth, in virtue of being born in the Nilgiri, as the interviewees expressed a strong emotional accord with their ancestral villages and community, regarded as their ‘motherland’. Though they were living in the city, their identification with the Badaga community in the Nilgiri remained strong and central.

Another anchor was family, especially parents and siblings, although their meaning of family extended beyond immediate members to include villagers and ancestors—Badagas past and present. The interviewees explained they were family- and community-orientated, as their feelings, thinking, and behaviour were embedded in the social, valued as a key ingredient of a fulfilling and satisfying life. They regretted separation from family and friends while in Bangalore. The men visited the Nilgiri monthly or bi-monthly, and trips were planned to coincide with family events and days of festivity, and their relatives occasionally visited them in Bangalore for several days to weeks at a time. For many interviewees, the round trip to the Nilgiri (Bangalore-Ooty-Bangalore) was completed in a weekend, departing on Friday evening after work and returning on Monday morning, and was exhausting because of the overnight bus journey on Sunday which meant they went directly to work after arriving on Monday morning

at Bangalore's Kempagowda Bus Station, Majestic. The monthly trip was significant and meaningful, the 'highlight of the month', as the meaning of life hinged on the collective: Family, village and community. They talked about 'collective happiness', a shared and combined sense of wellbeing of Badagas as a group, from individual to family, community and beyond. 'Collective happiness' was defined as the general mood of the community, a collaboration among family and friends in which everyone worked together for the common good. Individual happiness also stemmed from this social footing, as to be happy was grounded in the happiness of others. Similarly, any problem which impinged on an individual was interpreted as a problem of the family and community. However, the collective did not negate the notion of free will, as each Badaga made sense of their own lives in relation to their own situation, although these too were embedded in shared experiences.

As the interviewees made reference to their ancestry, I asked about their knowledge about the history of Badagas. They recalled limited understanding of the topic beyond the history of their immediate families, but were familiar with historical aspects of Badaga folklore. They concurred with the common belief of a migration of their ancestors from Mysore to the Nilgiri several centuries previously. However, they were unable to describe or explain the legend, and seemed to know almost nothing about it. Even so, the migration was taken for granted as factual. I also probed their awareness of the literature on Badagas. Most of the men were aware of the existence of books about Badagas, but only two could name one of the books or authors, and only one had read one. An interesting comment came from the daughter of an interviewee when her father, a participant in the study, asked her to fetch *Kindreds of the Earth* from their bookshelf:

"I was born in the Nilgiris, but never grew up there...I know nothing about my heritage. My husband is not a Badaga. I came across the book last month. I learnt about where I come from. I am very lucky these books are available...they have really moved me".  
(Female, 28).

Although the young lady was not a participant in the study, her comment is intriguing. As a second-generation migrant (she had lived in Bangalore since early childhood), her knowledge of Badagas was very limited. The book was an opportunity to find out more, and gave her

profound meaning and joy from discovering more about her heritage. Based on our discussions, I decided to conduct several interviews with Badagas who had grown up outside the Nilgiri as second-generation migrants, described at the end of this chapter.

Also important were morals, principles and personal values which represent rules of thumb for how they lived their lives. Badagas were singled out by the interviewees for their unique philosophy of life: ‘Doing the right thing’ was said to be their guiding principle, defined as ‘doing one’s duty of being good’, ‘honesty and truthfulness’, ‘meeting social responsibilities’, ‘friendliness and hospitality’, ‘going above and beyond the call of duty’, and ‘accountability to oneself’. The philosophy imbued direction for the choices they made about how to live, desirable ways of living through assessing the moral quality of their actions. However, it was also seen as a struggle between good and bad, purity and pollution, and duty and desire, as ‘doing the right thing’ was not always easy to do or judge, especially in Bangalore where they faced an inordinate number of difficult decisions. But while a principled life in accordance with these personal convictions did not guarantee perfect integrity, it at least guided them to do their best and avoid feelings of guilt and shame. Regarded as a kind of Badaga ‘philosophy of life’, these principles also etched out a roadmap for living the good life, as satisfaction with life was linked with doing good, and living the ‘right way’ was synonymous with being content and at peace with oneself. The interdependence of morals and wellbeing was set against a background of their relationship with God and Hinduism, and the Indian religious concept of Karma, as they believed a life of contentment fitted into place for those who genuinely respected and did good deeds for others. Thus, happiness and health of a Badaga were seen as outcomes of the totality of their actions in the past, present and future, some of which were shaped long before they were born, through cycles of birth and death. Thus, being Badaga—and being health and happy—was thought to be destined and fated. However, it should be noted our discussions of religion and philosophy were general and superficial, as the interviewees and interviewer were not theologians nor philosophers, and did not discuss the topic in detail.

Fluency in Badagu was put forward as another building block of the Badaga. Conversing in the language differentiated Badagas and non-Badagas, and was regarded as being synonymous with coming from the community, although literacy in English and Tamil was also common. Badagu was the principal means of communication in homes and villages, and deemed necessary for full participation in their culture and society. It enabled them to truly express inner

feelings and thoughts, and nurtured common and social understandings, a sense of grounding as Badaga. For these reasons, Badagu was put on a pedestal as an authentic and central aspect of being Badaga. However, the migrants were living in Bangalore where they used English in daily life and the workplace. I asked them to weigh up the utility of Badagu, Tamil, and English in their lives. Badagu was primarily for communication with family and Badagas, and participation in community events such as ceremonies and festivals, whereas English and Tamil were for communication with non-Badagas, and essential for living outside the Nilgiri; all languages were seen as necessary and complementary. Fluency in English was important for cultural competence in Bangalore and beyond, and for this reason they believed all Badagas should acquire a good command of English; poor language skills limited career and life opportunities. English has gained popularity among youth, and Badagu was not taught outside the home environment (unlike Tamil which was taught in schools administered by the Tamil Nadu government). The interviewees had mixed feelings of these changes: On the one hand, Badagu was very important to them, and they cherished opportunities in the city to converse in it. They expressed regret and disappointment of its rarity in the city. However, another viewpoint was acceptance of its declining popularity as an inevitable consequence of living in modern times. Said one interviewee:

“Are we losing our Badaga ways, or are we just finding new ways of living in India? It’s sad, I want things to stay the same, but, you know, coming here [Bangalore], I realised I must accept these changes to survive. Swimming against the tide will deny myself the chance to make something of myself”. (Male, 24).

The above comment was typical of the participants’ weighing-up of the changing popularity of Badagu and English. On the one hand, they argued for the preservation of Badagu and other aspects of their culture and heritage, but their lives in Bangalore had shown them a good command of English was also essential.

The interviewees elaborated on their experiences of being Badaga in Bangalore. Living in the city, and thus rural-to-urban migration, was conveyed as a vehicle of personal change. They still maintained a resolute foothold with the Nilgiri but had also developed a sense of attachment to the city, a new place which had gradually become more personal. Thus they articulated

identification as Badaga as flexible and changing, as concurrent connections with both rural and urban had given rise to a hybrid type of Badaga—a minority subgroup with similarities and distinctions to the Badaga in the Nilgiri and non-Badaga in Bangalore. This new type of Badaga, which some of them labelled ‘City Badaga’, was characterised as a collective of like-minded people with similarities in their backgrounds and changing circumstances based on assimilation of urban culture and lifestyle. Further discussions about the meanings of being a member of the group revealed they considered themselves subtly different to Badagas at large by having a bicultural understanding of the customs, social norms, and world views of both rural and urban, a dual grounding on the Nilgiri and Bangalore. They felt able to navigate and maintain their lives and relationships in both cultural worlds without having to choose between them. Thus, being City Badaga was viewed positively, as an enriched understanding of life and the world.

In Bangalore, they put on their ‘City Badaga’ hat which embraced the urban way of life; however, in the Nilgiri, it was juxtaposed with ‘Nilgiri Badaga’, a way of doing aligned more with the rural community and its norms regarding attitudes, behaviours, and choices. They justified the identity flexibility as a strategy of self-presentation to others through regulating the image they thought they needed to portray in each locality to address the relevant expectations and needs in the Badaga community or Bangalore respectively. Below is an example of identity flexibility by a migrant working as a financial advisor in the city.

“I’m a City Badaga here all of my waking time, seven days a week, morning to night. My job is a financial advisor. I wear this suit, this name tag, and act like I am one! Most people just see me as another city guy; my clients just see me as ‘the financial advisor’. But when I return to the Nilgiris, I put on my Badaga clothes, speak Badagu, and say the things...behave the way...they expect. I return to my old ways, completely different to here!”. (Male, 28).

City Badaga was also objectified in terms of material distinctions, a geographical separation from the Nilgiri, and differential access to income and consumption. There were also cultural distinctions: Urban culture and Westernised lifestyles in the city versus greater emphasis in rural areas on traditional practices. Individualism and individual autonomy—greater personal

freedom to pursue one's own interests, goals and personal choice of lifestyle—were central in Bangalore as they tended to put themselves first and made decisions themselves, in contrast to their former selves in the Nilgiri which were more cooperative and interdependent with others around them as family activities and goals were synonymous with their own.

The interviewees found it easier in our discussions to articulate the meaning of Nilgiri Badaga than City Badaga which suggests the former was more clearly delineated in their minds and the latter was abstract and ambiguous. Although both were separated as either-or terms (either 'City Badaga' or 'Nilgiri Badaga'), their differences were subtle, overlapping and blurred rather than absolute. Cultural continuities between Bangalore and the Nilgiri were emphasised, as they thought Nilgiri and City Badaga were unified by similarities more than divided by differences. These similarities enabled adaption to city life, and also legitimised 'City Badaga' coming to the fore, as reflected in the following comments:

“There is no written rule which tells us what we should do or believe in. Yes, we [City Badaga] have our quirks, our points of view, but I don't think we do things that unusually. You know, most of us Indians are Hindus, not much differences, just a little. Actually, it helped me to settle in”. (Male, 31).

“Any gap or likeness is only in our heads. Anyone can be different depending on what you look at. Only after leaving Kotagiri did I begin to question who I am. You see, a Badaga in my village is nothing special, everyone is the same. But in Bangalore I feel I am different, but also the same. I also feel like it now whenever I visit my home [in the Nilgiri]. I am seeing myself in new ways. (Male, 30).

But the differences, although subtle, were important. Being City Badaga meant the shedding of long-standing practices. In Bangalore they continued morning prayers, speaking Badagu among family (daily telephone conversations with parents), and listening to songs and music. Also, they returned to the Nilgiri as often as possible to participate in family and community events. However, most Badaga practices were not easily conducted outside the family home; they were said to be interlocked with village, society, and the totality of the Nilgiri. For example, homes have shrines or clearly demarcated places of worship, and religious events involve the



participation of the entire family and community. Also, limited leisure time hindered the practice of time-consuming traditions such as preparation of Badaga dishes which required several hours, unsuitable for fast-paced city lifestyles. Discontinuing the Badaga precedent while in Bangalore was described as a sense of loss, accompanied by feelings of anxiety, guilt, and shame. They regretted not being able to participate more often in ceremonies, which they interpreted as failure to live in accordance with Hinduism. However, while they acknowledged the urge to uphold traditions which they considered essential to being Badaga, they also made an effort to embrace the protocol necessary for successful living in the city. They also realised some aspects of the Badaga way of life were archaic and unnecessary in the city, as shown in the quote below. Thus, living Bangalore had enabled them to experiment with new experiences, challenge prior conceptions, and sift through the past to uncover new ways of understanding themselves in the present.

I love living as a Badaga, but I also have to match Bangalore. Let me give you an example. Let's say you got a job here, in this coffee shop. As an employee, your opinions should match those of your company. Your work duties should be in line too, say to meet your targets. If not, you will be fired. It's either kill or be killed. Yes, you can have your own ways, but they have to do what you have to do. It's same as my life here. You need to give-and-take to get on in life (Male, 50).

Some of the interviewees desired to facilitate change among Badagas, to 'bring them in to the 21st century' as one put it. The migrants, culturally grounded in the Nilgiri, and yet armed with experience and understanding of the city, recognised their strengths and potential to improve the community's standing. They wanted to be mediators to forge links between the Badaga community and outside, and apply their experience and skills to tackle issues. Thus, leaving the Nilgiri was not just to better themselves but also Badagas at large, and thus crossing the boundary from Nilgiri Badaga to City Badaga had motivated them to use their new skills and position to improve the Nilgiri side, a kind of cross-border economics. Yet the desire to better the community seemed to be a future vision than a reality, as only two interviewees had taken action to serve the Badaga community, namely helping to organise school trips for children to visit Bangalore, and sponsoring students' college fees.

## **Becoming City Badaga**

I asked questions about the experience of becoming City Badaga, acquisition of the new group membership. Identity change or flexibility was articulated as an ongoing process of personal growth, new ways of thinking and living and making sense of themselves and the world. Becoming City Badaga was just as much about exploring awareness of one's self as it was about acquainting with the propositions of urban culture. It did not take place as a coercive effort to change but through subtle shifting perspectives of life, beginning before they had arrived in Bangalore by bringing into awareness that which was on the horizon, followed by the migration and then exploration of the new environment by testing for comfort and safety. Through participating in city life, dealing with the surprises they encountered, and honing attitudes and life skills during the initial months in Bangalore, they took hold of their new way of being—a realisation that they had to live and think in different ways to survive and succeed—and moved from feeling out of place in the city to feeling comfortable. Gradually, the self, as they saw it, became enriched with a new awareness of changing relations with society, a better understanding of how, and why, they were Badaga. The change was not a replacement of old with new, but a reframing of previous experiences with novel perspectives, a new understanding and philosophy of life. As the city and its peoples gained a more prominent hold, they were able to dig deeply in to their inner selves by questioning how they understood and went about life. As they accepted the realities of who they were becoming, from an understanding they once had as Nilgiri Badaga to a new understanding as city folk, they came to acknowledge and accept themselves as 'City Badaga'. Thus, becoming City Badaga was described as a journey through different perspectives of self-understanding, a self-discovery process that had changed their view of themselves and the world, and out of this came the emergence of a new sense of self fully invested in both past and present. As fully-fledged City Badaga, they felt grounded on their new understanding of life, and proud of gaining something valuable, not only new skills and confidence but an entirely new way of being. Therefore, the boundary in-between Nilgiri Badaga and City Badaga was constructed and surmounted as a process of changing self-definition as Badaga, an interface of reflection and negotiation with oneself in different social contexts, and not necessarily a site of division as the interviewees acted out both identities in either Bangalore or the Nilgiri:

Man, I used to be a sleepwalker...on autopilot. Not good, uh? I shifted to B'lore, I was asking myself why I do things this way or that way. The more I understood, the more I got on with guys here. We are all from different places. What makes me misty-eyed is how my different thoughts came together. The 'me' that has always been me is still here, but I have improved, I feel different, I feel like a new man. (Male, 25).

Come to think of it, it was tricky. It [the migration] triggered me to mull things over. I think the change-over in how I see myself is an up-swing on my life. It's difficult to express, but basically I now live in a conscious mode, I now have control over my life. I feel connected to my inner self—who I am, what I stand for. I have enjoyed the ride so-far. (Male, 30).

However, becoming City Badaga was difficult. Leaving the Nilgiri was a sad time of parting and separation, the ending of a deep and personal relationship with a place crucial to the meaning of life. Also, all of the interviewees experienced challenges adjusting to the city and letting go of the familiar and entrenched ways of being, at least initially. The realisation that becoming City Badaga was irreversible played on their conscience. Once the unfamiliar in Bangalore became familiar, they were in a position of not being able to go back to their former selves but also unsure of the outcome of going forward, as if one foot was on the gas pedal and another on the brakes. They toyed with the moral convictions of whether the change was right and moral, even though they had no choice. However, these concerns turned out to be unfounded as only a few of the men had experienced a major struggle to come to terms with the changes, partly because they maintained a foothold with their residual culture such as regularly visiting the Nilgiri and socializing with Badagas in Bangalore. Though they were initially apprehensive of identity flexibility, it later came across as a healthy reaction to their migration, as they came to see City Badaga not as a threat but as normative for city life, as if to say 'modern living is the thing to do'. Also, negative aspects of the migration were counterbalanced with its opportunities, as their time in Bangalore was cherished as a chance to better themselves and experience new situations which made life enriching and exciting. Moreover, as the changing self was construed as a gradual and natural occurrence of increasing awareness and contact in the city, they distanced themselves from the notion of actively disowning Badaga

culture or behaving wrongly for economic self-interest. They also pointed out the move to Bangalore was for good reasons, and that non-involvement in the new surroundings was not an option. Thus they posited an alternative notion of right and wrong which hinged on whether they were wearing the City Badaga or Nilgiri Badaga hat: In Bangalore, being City Badaga was ‘right’ to fit in to its way of life (put in their own words, they would be social misfits if they were to live as devout Badagas in the city); whereas the opposite was the case in the Nilgiri. In other words, they reported positive and negative connotations of both identities depending on social context, rather than one being right or wrong.

The key to being content with oneself in Bangalore was openness to new experiences and change. It was important to accept and embrace different ways of being and living, even if they did not fully agree with them, and to work around difficulties, which meant making compromises and reaching a common ground between their new lives and the assumptions they challenged. Feelings of ‘us-ness’ with other Badagas in the city were important for coping successfully with challenges which helped to ease the transition from rural to urban. Each migrant had a small circle of close friends in Bangalore and nearby cities who cared about them, and whose company they enjoyed. Being with other Badagas who understood their predicament, afforded a sense of emotional comfort and reassurance. The social support also represented a safe space in which they could be City Badaga and experiment with new activities and behaviours, essentially validating it as a legitimate existence. It also shows how their understanding of identity was intersubjective, perceived and interpreted in shared conscious interaction. Friendships in Bangalore with non-Badagas were regarded as more complex and diverse than in the Nilgiri, and involved a wider range of social groups and contexts, and social acquaintances were mostly people of other castes and regions unlike in the Nilgiri where they were predominantly Badaga- and family-orientated.

Family support was also important. Living in the city was fraught with emotional challenges which intensified when the men became aware of being in a transient state between Nilgiri Badaga and City Badaga; they knew they were continuing down a one-way path—the point of no return. Support and reassurance from family were interpreted as permission to do whatever was needed to make a life for themselves in the city. Whereas most of their family members held positive views of urban lifestyles and modern India, some were described as traditional-minded which they interpreted as forbiddenness to fully partake in urban life. About a fifth of

the interviewees had encountered hostility and negativity from parents or family members concerning some aspect of their new lives in the city, the extent to which they imbibed individualism. They criticised the older generation for a contradiction in their wants: On the one hand, they wanted to see their children succeed, but they also wanted things to remain the same. Conservatism by family and others put them at the centre of a tug-of-war as they found it difficult to satisfy the expectations of both family and the city; identity flexibility was a way to balance these opposites, although it did not solve every issue. The quote below, for example, reveals a mismatch between the expectations and interests of an interviewee and his parents.

"I love my family to pieces. But when I told them I wanted to study fashion design, they persuaded me to do something else. To please my father, I am doing a business diploma. But I really love fashion. Life there is simple and closed...my family is not in the 'real world'...they just don't understand...geez, my family has really screwed me up!". (Male, 18).

The young man had his own hopes and dreams but he was also expected to submit to his family's expectations. He sacrificed his education and career goals to please his parents, which he told me he regretted. Yet disobeying his parents would have also led to guilt and worry. So abandoning his career dreams of being a fashion designer was counterbalanced by personal satisfaction of respecting his parents and performing duty for its own sake, living life in accordance with one's dharma and not only individual interests. It also served to keep the family together in a state of harmony rather than discontent. The finding also shows migration decisions are not exclusively taken by the migrant but also their family.

Though the interviewees embraced life in the city, they had to tread carefully. That they considered themselves different to Badagas in the Nilgiri carried the risk of being over identified with the outside. Some elders were described as conservative, timid, and fierce defenders of the status quo who criticised modernity as a destabiliser of tradition, a kind of border control by symbolic guards monitoring the boundary between Nilgiri Badaga and City Badaga. Some of them were worried they might be excluded from Badagas at large, relegated to the fringe of society through stigmatisation and marginalization, especially if they were to distance themselves further from long-standing Badaga beliefs and practices. Identity flexibility

buffered the threat by showcasing their continuing affiliation with the Nilgiri and its way of life. However, rather than an illusion of harmony, they came to accept irreconcilable differences which involved treading a fine line. But was there really a boundary, and was it being monitored and protected? They referenced only a possible outcome and not an experience, as none of the men had experienced hostility or marginalisation, although cases of moral condemnation and social exclusion were recalled by the interviewees to support their concerns. A notable example was intercaste marriage among friends and family, a major conflict between tradition and modern. Badaga practises, grounded in Hinduism, forbid marriage of different castes, especially higher and lower castes, and intercaste marriage is taken to mean caste and spiritual contamination, out of tune with the workings of Karma. A marriage between Badagas involves an elaborate set of religious customs, including substantive consultation with family and elders, which are severed in intercaste marriage. Badagas believe the pollution impurity of an intercaste marriage causes permanent misfortune for the bride and groom and their families for future generations. The interviewees knew of intercaste marriages among family and friends, and described the emotional toll:

“I have seen it with my own eyes. My brother married a Tamil women he met at work in Chennai. Folks in our village did not agree to it. Why? Because marriage is a union joining us [Badaga] and them [other caste]. When my brother and his wife visit [the Nilgiri], they [villagers] give him them the ‘cold shoulder’. My parents have a tough time dealing with the gossip; when neighbours visit, it’s the first thing they talk about, again and again. Every so often he asks for my opinion. But what can I do?”. (Male, 36).

The above quote exemplifies disapproval of an intercaste marriage which involved the interviewee’s brother and a non-Badaga. His family lost respectability and social standing in his village, and were teased and ridiculed. Collectively, the discussions show the majority in the Badaga community does not accept lightly the claims of difference by minority identities, and is unlikely to do so without a struggle.

Theoretical sampling probed the possible long-term after-effects of being City Badaga. Specifically, I conducted interviews with two second-generation migrants who had grown up in

Coimbatore and had lived in several cities since adulthood, notably Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad. They had also lived overseas during short-term work placements, including the U.K. Similar to the first-generation migrants, they regarded themselves as Badagas and members of the Badaga community in the Nilgiri. However, unlike the rural-to-urban migrants, being Badaga did not seem as central in their lives; it was something they reflected on from time-to-time, but was not at the forefront of their minds. Other identities were more salient such as being Tamilian, an ethnic group who speak Tamil and trace their ancestry to Tamil Nadu; when others enquired about their lives and where they were from, they were likely to reply they were Tamilian and from Coimbatore. When I asked one of them to arbitrarily rank the order of importance of his identities, he put 'Badaga' at the bottom of the list, as being Badaga only came to mind when he talked to his parents and family, met other Badagas, and visited the Nilgiri. Moreover, they did not regard themselves as a different subgroup of Badagas, unlike the rural-to-urban migrants who regarded themselves as City Badaga.

However, they expressed a strong accord with the Nilgiri, their relatives, ancestral village, and villagers whom they considered to be extended family. They visited once every three or four years, and yearly when they were younger. During these visits they were welcomed by the community, and felt as if they were being treated as Badagas, as older villagers remembered them and their families. Although participation in the rural way of life during these visits was not easy for them, they still felt part the village and its people. They had not experienced hostility or negative reactions from others in the Nilgiri, except for complaints about their infrequent visits and non-participation in village events. They also reported changing their actions to satisfy the expectations of others; however, unlike the rural-to-urban migrants, the change was played down as temporary 'acting', similar to portraying a character in a play, and not identity flexibility, as they did not perceive themselves as bicultural; rather, they described a feeling of being a foreigner or outsider in the Nilgiri, even though it was also regarded as their home. They certainly did not express a strong desire to live there, as they could only bear visiting for several days, in contrast to the majority of the first-generation migrants who expressed a strong intention to reside there.

They regarded Badagu as their mother-tongue and first-language which they had learnt from birth as the principal language used at home when they were growing up and communicating with their parents. Badagu played an important role in their lives as the language they knew best

and with which they could truly express inner feelings and thoughts, even though they were trilingual and rarely conversed in the language as adults. One of the interviewees said he often had to translate his thoughts from Badagu to English or Tamil because his way of thinking in Badagu was different to thinking in other languages, even though he used English most of the time. Thus he reasoned that he probably thinks more like a Badaga than a Tamilian, although he could not explain the difference. I asked him to clarify whether thinking in Badagu contradicted his comment that being Badaga did not come into daily thinking. Again, he found it difficult to articulate the meaning of thinking in these two languages, but explained that feelings of being Badaga rose to the fore when he met or spoke to other Badagas. Both of them had fewer Badaga friends than the first-generation migrants, and their close friends were all non-Badagas. One of the men had married a Badaga from Coimbatore, and another was planning to get married to a Badaga in the near future. The reasons for choosing a Badaga partner included respect for their parents, and concerns about criticism from the Badaga community in the Nilgiri of intercaste marriage. The unmarried interviewee had spent considerable time contemplating the possibilities of his marriage, especially finding a suitable partner, which was a challenging task, and at the time of the interview his parents and relatives were searching for potential suitors. As he was concerned about his future wife's adaption to city life, he preferred someone who was fluent in English and had studied or lived outside the Nilgiri for several years.

Being Tamilian influenced how they identified themselves in Indian cities, even when they resided outside Tamil Nadu. All members of their close friendship groups were Tamilian, although in the work place they interacted with Indians from all over the country. A key reason for the distinction between Tamilian versus non-Tamilian was a social divide they had experienced in Tamil Nadu while growing up, underpinned by political factors which date to the anti-Hindi agitations of Tamil Nadu. For the same reasons, they did not learn other languages such as Hindi when growing up in Coimbatore, another reason for their preference to socialise with Tamilians. They each had a small circle of Tamilian friends (about 5 people) who lived together in a shared house and worked in different companies, and they spent a significant amount of time together, supporting each other in the new places. These friends tended to be contacts made in Coimbatore prior to moving to the city, and not colleagues. The characteristics of the social group were described as: Tamilian, close friendship, like-mindedness, and similar experiences and interests.



In contrast, their social groups had diversified when working overseas to include Indians from various locations, and not only Tamilians, new friends they had met after arriving in the country. They socialised and lived with Indians in the same company, especially those also on overseas placements, unlike in India where their close friends and housemates were not colleagues. They had preferred to befriend Tamilians but there were none in their work and living places, and so the composition of friendship groups was less controllable, unlike their situation in India when choice of social acquaintances was more selective. The main in-group when they had worked overseas was essentially a work group with social ties extending beyond work, socialising and living with Indian colleagues. The experience of living and working with non-Tamilians nurtured feelings of indifference and appreciation, and changed their views of people from north India; it also meant they tended to identify themselves to others when overseas as Indian and not TAMILIAN. Prior to going overseas they tended to avoid contact with Indians from other states (and foreigners), whereas upon returning to India they made an effort to befriend them. However, they described distinct differences between Indian- and overseas-born Indians (people overseas with ancestral roots in India but not Indian-born). The difference was mostly cultural, for example they said the actions and behaviours of British Indians they had met reflected the culture of the U.K, and so they were regarded as a separate group to themselves. Even so, they had changed some of their habits when they lived in the U.K., such as eating breakfast cereal rather than an Indian breakfast, and participating in the fitness culture in the U.K. by enrolling at a gym. They also took weekend trips which they did not do in India.

### **Concluding summary**

This chapter has detailed my discussions with rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore about their experiences of leaving their villages in the Nilgiri and living in the city, personal meanings of being Badaga, and the journey of becoming City Badaga. A thread tying the themes together is a deep personal sense of being Badaga, and on this common background rested diversity and flexibility. The study shows the various ways in which Badaga identities and quality of life change under the impact of migration. A key finding was changing notions of what it meant to be a member of their caste as they engaged the city, as being Badaga was malleable to changing context and social and economic concerns, and therefore in a state of flux. It revealed a new identity and collective, City Badaga, characterized by shared experiences of living in the city as

Badagas, a phenomenon unique to their caste and not reported in the literature on migration in other parts of India or elsewhere. The study also uncovered the criteria by which Badagas construct distinctions between themselves and others, and the specific processes and contextual determinants of identity construction and change. The migrants put together new meanings of self through negotiating and reworking their understandings and social practices of being Badaga, leading to personal change and new formulations of identities, the vanguard of living in a cosmopolitan urban setting. The point here is that symbolic interaction among Badagas and others in the city represented unique relationships between self and society which nurtured new understandings of who they were, new images of similarity and difference between themselves and others. Important here was the existence of identity flexibility, a creative adaptation to deal with new challenges and unforeseen contingencies; the migrant Badagas shifted from their home setting to the city, it allowed them to preserve some aspects of their heritage in exchange for new allegiances to the city. Yet while all of the migrants who went to the city underwent some kind of identity change, the all-encompassing Badaganess remained as they maintained a strong sense of being Badaga while concurrently adjusting to and incorporating features of urbanity, and so their understandings of self were both persistent and changeable, and connections between new and old aspects of their identities were complex and mutually constitutive. The study shows the lived experience of being Badaga is strongly influenced by social context, bound up in a give or take over one's place in society, and thus cross-cultural comparison of identity is vital. These findings are discussed further in the next chapter.

Self-understanding of being Badaga imbued the capacity to enjoy life. Also important to quality of life were meaningful social relationships with family and others, and they talked about 'collective happiness' as a shared and combined sense of the wellbeing of Badagas as a whole, the general mood of the community in the Nilgiri. Doing good in life according to morals and desirable ways of living were also deemed important. A negative depiction of life in the Nilgiri continued to be a salient theme, although the migrants painted a picture of contentment with life in Bangalore, particularly with employment, income, convenient-living, and access to education, grounded on notions of social mobility and personal growth, albeit balanced with downsides to city life. There was no evidence of misconceptions surrounding migrants which are sometimes reported in the migration literature such as barriers to healthcare or other essential services, anti-migrant discrimination, stereotyping, social exclusion,

substandard housing, xenophobia, or the abuse of migrants' human rights. There was also no evidence of any interference with their social and economic integration or limits to their opportunities in the city. The migration contributed to livelihoods in the Nilgiri by alleviating unemployment and providing remittances which presumably improved quality of life. The migration was circular as they continued to maintain strong links with the Nilgiri, and described an inter-connectedness of place of origin and destination. Overall, the participants reported the migration experience had changed them. New understandings of self which came out of experimenting with their Badaganess and new ways of making sense of life were viewed positively in terms of personal growth. Thus material gains were only a part of what the migrants obtained from the rural-to-urban migration. These findings challenge the anti-migrant message by pessimists in forum discussions analysed in the previous chapter with positive implications of migration.

In summary, it is clear that Badagas, if such a category really exists, do not conform to the model of a closed and bounded tribal society in the Nilgiri with a reified identity according to customary cultural prescriptions. Such simplification ignores the complex lived realities of people with a Badaga heritage who have diverse experiences shaped by a range of circumstances. The findings reveal complicated, flexible, and pluralistic notions of identities and living circumstances which are thoroughly in flux and negotiated and contested across multiple spaces, characterised by openness and variation. Moreover, symbolic interactionism's focus on people as agentic, autonomous, and integral in creating their social world, and their own perspectives of their circumstances, shows the need to move beyond previous deterministic and functionalist trends in the literature. The next chapter develops further this revisionist narrative in the thesis which transcends the old Euro-American stereotypes and positivist perspectives in the literature, a fantasy which was first constructed by scholars in the 19th century, to reveal identities that are dynamic, fluid, and lived at interrelated multi-sites, much messier than conveyed in the literature. This conclusion, explored further in the next chapter, essentially redefines the classificatory structure of 'Badaga', and rebalances inequalities in its representation in the literature. It also considers the limitations as well as future directions of these findings. In doing, the next chapter attempts to paint a holistic picture of what it means to be Badaga in India today which should remove the old fashioned portrayal of a Badaga identity from the literature once and for all.

## 6. Conclusion

The previous chapters furnish new insights in to Badagas and their way of life. The rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore, and Internet users in the virtual forum, were rich sources of information about Badagas in contemporary India and their encounters with new modes of identity, sociality, and quality of life. At an empirical level, the ethnography unpacks the ways migrants and netizens negotiated their Badaganess while navigating inevitable change taking place in society and the circumstances in which they lived; at a theoretical level, it deconstructs and redefines the concept of ‘Badaga’ constructed in anthropological studies, and rebalances inequalities of representation in the literature. The ethnography is also a timely update as previous in-depth research on this group of people dates to the 1990s. There is no doubt that Badagas are living in truly momentous times. Migration to urban areas and overseas, and the dramatic rise of technologies such as new media, grounded on broader transformation of Indian society have shaped multifaceted changes in culture and people’s daily lives. Being Badaga is thoroughly in flux, and contested and negotiated across multiple spaces, as the evolving local and global realities of the 21st century elicit fundamental changes in its meaning and expression, not only ways of living and social mobility but alternative notions of becoming and self-understanding. These are strong claims which essentially challenge established viewpoints in the literature on Badagas, and contribute to social science generally, and so this chapter begins with a summary of the key findings from which they are derived followed by a consideration of their limitations as well as directions for future research.

In addition, this finale reflects on the approach and context of the ethnography, and also reveals my position regarding the cultures and identities it attempts to capture. I also take the opportunity through reflexivity to critically examine the quality of the research, and its future implications. As the research is essentially about self in relation to others, it is important to consider my self and how it relates to understanding of Badagas—a self-consciousness of my presence in the ethnography. Through reflective thinking I come to understand my conceptualization of Badagas in the previous chapters was partly shaped by my own social worlds and the social orchestration of the ethnography. Reflexivity marks a new approach to research on Badagas and Nilgiri, and remedies some of the criticisms of the literature about the distance in some writings between the researcher and researched.

## **Badaga identities**

A key finding of the ethnography concerns the ways Badagas made sense of identity, changing notions of what it means to be a member of their caste as they engage novel milieu in contemporary India. As Badagas and their community in the Nilgiri de-territorialize and spread out to multiple places in an increasingly networked country and world, they are questioning who they are, how they live, and what kinds of social groups they belong to. In the midst of these changes, new forms of identity and sociality have come into being. Rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore identified themselves as City Badaga, an identity commitment and collective of people with similarities in their backgrounds and experiences such as changed circumstances, assimilation of urban culture and lifestyle, and shedding of some long-standing practices—an alternative to Badagas in the Nilgiri and Bangaloreans in the city. Similarly, the study of Internet forum users also revealed a new type of Badaga social collective, a virtual community connected by social interaction and notions of online culture and identity, as new media reshaped sociality and self-identification as well as pathways for collective mobilisation to improve quality of life. Social practices and identities are changing as online spaces become more important and influence how people build communities no longer bounded by time and space. For example, the forum facilitated the building of a community for Badagas who were geographically separated, and participation online and offline simultaneously. The discovery of these novel Badaga identities and communities, documented for the first time, in which self and sociality had undergone radial shifts, dispels the orthodox standpoint in the anthropological literature of Badagas as a homogenous, spatially-bound and static caste of more than 160,000, and the Nilgiri as an isolated cultural enclave of indigenous peoples (Hockings, 1999; Mandelbaum 1989; Nielson and Pritchard, 2009). Thus I propose an alternative conceptualisation of Badaga identities as dynamic, fluid, and multi-site, much messier than conveyed in the literature.

The significance of these findings is perhaps dampened by the stubbornness in the literature of the prevailing yet simplistic reification of a Badaga identity based on stereotypical criteria such as birthplace, culture, language, locality, and so forth—the common sense and popular understanding of a group of people who hail from a particular region of India, speak a particular language, and behave a particular way. The simple representation and perpetuation of a rigid and stable identity and community (reviewed in the initial chapters) can be traced back to the

colonial and early literature which portrays a strong positivist stance of straightforward understandings of the world, tied up with cultural relativism. It is an artefact of the othering process of British and American writers, and originally evolved in the discourse of East India Company officers who initiated social research in India by collecting information on agriculture, customs, population, religion, trade and so forth, practices later institutionalised in censuses, gazetteers and ethnographic surveys, an identity inscribed as standard that was then taken for granted by everyone, even Badagas themselves. The simple stereotypical description of Badagas in the literature, dating back to the social institutions and mind-set of the British Raj, is a misappropriation of difference produced through being identified as being “other” to something else based on a series of antiquated, fictitious, if often romantic, notions by early colonists and travellers, a constraining entity that ultimately defines individuals as having a fixed identity. I would go even further and interpret the early literature as ethnic cleansing or institutional racism that made such imaginary acceptable and seemingly natural, as the claims to a Badaga identity by Euro-Americans pivot around articulations of power and difference, especially race, gender, class, the very conditions which helped the colonists and early anthropologists to legitimate their roles in the Nilgiri. Racist subcultures are historically close-knit community-based groups that socially construct a subcultural image of themselves vis-à-vis the ‘other’ (Leonardo, 2009; Zickmund 2000).

The present research, then, can be regarded as a response to the mainstream positivist perspectives on the Nilgiri and Badagas that dominate the literature. The monograph deconstructs the illusion of a Badaga identity in the literature which does not and never has existed, and removes it from the agenda of anthropology and social science once and for all. Departing from this tradition, grounded on symbolic interactionism as its theoretical framework, the present study shifts the focus to micro-level processes of Badaga identities which conceive individuals as autonomous and integral to creating their social world, a bottom up perspective which focuses on their subjective viewpoints for making sense of their social groups. In other words, the study unpacks how the subjective meaning of Badagas and their interactions come to define the make-up of self, and is less concerned with the objective structure imposed by foreign writers which dominates the literature. To some extent, the initial findings of the ethnography concur with the homogenisation of Badaganess, as constructions of identity by the migrants in Bangalore and forum members depended to some extent on shared common attributes, enforced

by the ways most people tend to think of human culture and space as distributed in neat and tidy spatially-bound entities. It is based on beliefs among people that they are different from one another based on numerous markers which differentiate in-group and out-group members, complementary us-them boundaries which correspond to and even reinforce group divisions to imply a distinct and specific entity sharing a common history and culture. It is not a new finding as previous studies have also shown the peoples in the Nilgiri also recognised it Nilgiri and themselves as distinctive, evidenced, for example, by their oral traditions of origin myths and village exogamy (Mandelbaum, 1989). The basic assumptions of the illusion have been contradicted by the findings of this ethnography which reveal that being Badaga was nuanced, flexible and pluristic in multiple spaces. For example, regarding language, the literature simply categorises Badagas as people who speak Badagu, whereas the ethnography found some people had limited knowledge of the language, city residents tended to communicate and conduct matters only in English and Tamil, some rural residents apparently spoke English and Tamil rather than Badagu to imply they lived 'modern' lifestyles, and young people focused on fluency in English rather than Badagu to improve employment prospects in India and abroad. Second-generation migrants regarded themselves to be Badaga but rarely conversed in Badagu even though they regarded it as their mother-tongue which played an important role in their lives as the language with which they could truly express inner feelings and thoughts, even though they used English most of the time. The simplistic reification of the Badaga identity in the literature based on stereotypical criteria, which in essence portrays a culturally identical people in terms of similarity with each other and difference with others, is a fantasy which shows a complete absence of grappling with epistemological issues and the complexity of multiple identities.

These findings also provide a different take on Badagas' demands for Scheduled Tribe status. While they might on the surface seem like a call for change, when reinterpreted in terms of the conclusions of the present research, they come across as a desire to cling to the past. In the forum, essentialism was being employed as a strategic tool for identity politics. Although the term 'tribe' in India is complex and contested, in many people's minds it still denotes a distinct social group with cultural and social homogeneity based on archaic stereotypes which originated in the early literature about indigenous hill peoples with distinctive and primitive ways of life, and habitation and territoriality in remote and inaccessible areas, a general

'backwardness' that reveals more about the biases and prejudices of civil servants in British India, and then the ethnographies and reports of anthropologists (Cohn, 1987; Dirks, 2001; Pant, 1987; Pels and Salemink, 1999; Sissons, 2005). A return to the past is evident in extensive quotations from 19th century scholars and writers in recent memorandums written by Badagas to support their call for indigenous status, the uncritical acceptance and internalisation of the tribal identities created and inscribed by British colonists. The political identity and ideological concept of Badagas as Scheduled Tribe reduces the complexity and flexibility of Badaga identities revealed in this ethnography to a reified political and administrative category. As argued throughout the monograph, an essentialist approach to Badaga identities is not sensitive to the multiple shifting contexts in which they live. While there may be good reasons to dwell in the past, such as going over the past to learn from mistakes, and taking knowledge gained in to the future, there is no evidence it is happening in Badagas' demands for Scheduled Tribe status. While the adoption of Western stereotypes of indigeneity might offer material rewards, it is a double edge sword. The migrants interviewed for chapter five were embracing the wider context of South India, integrating into the State, and maximizing their benefits from it, and yet at the same time their counterparts are holding on to a, archaic status that in itself goes in the opposite direction. They come across as not being able to move on from the colonial official processes of creating and imbuing cultural and racial categories. It is perhaps not surprising, as they have become part of state policies and the common-sense worldview of the Indian people, but it is ironic that the demands for recognition as Scheduled Tribe perpetuates cultural distinctiveness come at a juncture when their assumed distinctive way of life is less evident than before, and when cultural criteria and boundaries are evidently porous. Another inherent contradiction lies at the core of the demands for Scheduled Tribe status which emphasises once again how troublesome the concept of identity is, as they promote aspects of an identity inscribed by colonists and scholars to demand changes to other aspects of the same inscribed identity. It is also an irony that anthropologists are busy debunking the colonial essentialisms connected with identity, and yet Badagas (and the scholars who study them) are appropriating the same essentialism in order to reconstruct a colonial identity in the present (Karlsson, 2001; Xaxa, 1999, 2005). Thus the oppressive authenticity that was integral to the British Raj continues to haunt the Badagas and seems likely to continue.



It should also be noted the calls for Scheduled Tribe status have been continuing for decades. Like a vinyl record, the issue is continually going around and around in the same groove, and getting nowhere. Those Badagas fighting for the status might find it useful to understand more about the state's criteria for recognising a community as Scheduled Tribe. It is also important to acknowledge that 'Scheduled Tribe' and 'indigenous' may at first appear relatively unproblematic but are actually highly ambiguous and contestable, and there has been no real debate or consensus over their criteria (Kenrick and Lewis, 2004; Xaxa, 1999). Although not clearly spelt out in the Constitution, in my opinion claims for tribal status measured with criteria such as animist or totemic religions, closeness to Hindu civilization, distinctive culture, economic backwardness, geographical isolation, lack of relationship to the majority community, shyness of contact with the community at large, and 'primitive' traits (Kapila, 2004), means the demands by Badagas are unconvincing. It is not clear if they can demonstrate unique traditional customs. At the least, the architects of Badagas' demands for Scheduled Tribe status should critically examine how and why other groups in India have been successful in persuading the Indian state to reclassify them as such. They should also clarify the grounds on which Badagas more tribal than other groups residing in South India. They seem to base their case of indigeneity on anthropological and colonial administrative discourse, as evidenced by the content of memorandums written by Badagas which have extensive quotations from 19th century anthropologist-administrators (Heidemann, 2014), but fail to recognise these attributes—hierarchy, kinship, purity and pollution, distinctive language, and positionality at the margins of the state control—are artefacts of colonists and scholars, and do not really mean Badagas are more tribal or indigenous than their South Indian neighbours. As discussed in the forum studied in chapter four, the uncritical use of the term 'Scheduled Tribe' by Badagas could have dangerous political implications. Also, if the designation signifies a level of political assertiveness and empowerment, and recognition thereof by the state, the unmet decades-long demand by Badagas suggests they are politically weak and disempowered as they have not succeeded in obtaining the recognition, rights and entitlements associated with it. Finally, as shown in the analysis of the forum, not everyone desires to be a Scheduled Tribe, as Badagas express both claims and counterclaims with regards to its appropriateness. Therefore, their demands for an indigenous identity represent a site of contestation rather than the oneness portrayed in the literature.

While City Badaga and Nilgiri Badaga were described by the interviewees as opposites, based on beliefs about the sort of person one is and should be in Bangalore or the Nilgiri respectively, and urban and rural cultures and lifestyles turned into a site of differentiation, they were actually mutually constitutive. Therefore, it is important not to imply a false dichotomy that only plays out distinctiveness. For example, both identity orientations were acted out by the same person as a negotiation with social context to regulate the type of Badaga they thought they needed to be to fit in and uphold social accord. They professed fairly positive views of both identities and heritage and host cultures rather than regarding one as superior or inferior, as the idea of being Badaga—City Badaga or Nilgiri Badaga—was a positive and powerful sense of belonging and connection. They did not distance themselves from the Nilgiri past to secure the present. The migrants declined to make a binary choice of identifying solely with rural or urban as it could have led to problematic trajectories for their future lives and wellbeing, and instead they constructed flexible identities to maintain identification with both. As identity change rested on the continuity of existing identity elements compatible with new ones honed in the new setting, the migrants managed to maintain a strong sense of being Badaga while concurrently adjusting to and incorporating features of urban life, and so their identities were both persistent and changeable. Put simply, the migrants in Bangalore were trying to uphold being Badaga while responding to the upheaval of leaving the Nilgiri and living in the city; and, similarly, the Internet forum users, as Badagas in urban areas outside the Nilgiri, were maintaining their allegiances while also creating new online ways of being Badaga, grounded on both the original community in the Nilgiri as well as the new virtual community. While Badagas who went to the city and forum underwent identity change, the all-encompassing Badaganess remained. Indeed, the words ‘City Badaga’ symbolise a linkage of the individual, Nilgiri, and Bangalore: The word ‘Badaga’ in this label assumes continuity and commonality, and the qualifier ‘City’ implies difference and tension. Continuity was also shown by the notion that the signifier ‘Badaga’ alone, whatever its meaning, was sufficient to differentiate themselves and others, and also emphasis on similarities rather than differences between Badagas and others—for all their imagined distinctiveness, Badagas follow a familiar Indian pattern.

Although the idea of identity as malleable and not immutable is now widely accepted, the mechanisms through which identity change takes place, especially among minority ethnic

groups, is unclear in the literature. The present research offers an analysis of the specific processes of change, contextual determinants of new identifications, and criteria by which Badagas construct distinctions between themselves and others. The findings show how City Badagas and Internet forum users became members of their new micro-cultures as they negotiated new aspects of their identities which members of their collectives understood as their social world regarding 'who is who'. In the context of symbolic interactionism, the migrants and forum members put together new meanings of objects in their lives through negotiation and reworking of their understandings and social practices, ways of living in the city and online over and against prevailing meanings which cross-cut conventional boundaries—leading to cultural change and new formulations of identity. The identity change process is likely to be similar to the universal story of migrants, but also unique as the subjective meanings documented in the study occurred within their particular cultural and social contexts, and were continuously created and recreated during interactions with Badagas and non-Badagas—thus the findings cannot be generalised across all rural Indian societies. The research emphasised symbolic interaction among Badagas in the city—the distinctive and peculiar meanings and interactions that occurred between them—a unique relationship between self and society which provided its members with the new definitions of who they are and how they should behave, a social pattern which, although not characterised by boundaries or rigidly defined groups, created new images of similarity and difference between Badagas in the city and Nilgiri. These specific contexts, experiences, and interactions make City Badaga distinct to other rural-to-urban migrants, a social construction that occurred within specific experiences common to the Badaga rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore and not migrants of other castes. They were also unique because their specific historical, cultural, and social situation and encounters framed the reshaping of their identifications.

It should be noted that identity change and cultural contestation among Badagas is not a new phenomenon. For example, Mandelbaum (1941, 1989) described factional differences when some wanted to eliminate Kota musicians from funeral rituals because they ranked very low in the caste system, but more conservative Badagas saw the change a threat to their way of life and stubbornly retained their relations with Kotas, labelled by Mandelbaum as 'a fight between the pro-music and anti-music party', one striving to effect the change, the other resisting it, although since the 1930s all Badagas subsequently reformed these customs. Other examples of

cultural contestation include competition for precedence in the hierarchy of ranking among two factions of Badagas, and factional disputes played out in electoral contests (Mandelbaum, 1989). These scenarios in the literature resonate with many of the debates in the forum posts about continuity versus change, and suggest the category 'Badaga' has been the object of intense contestation for some time. However, the present research goes further by documenting the actual processes of identity change, and by reporting the existence of identity flexibility whereby the line between us and them can no longer be drawn, as City Badaga and Nilgiri Badaga are indicative of the porousness of Badaganess. In agreement with symbolic interactionism, the identity flexibility shows the new experiences in the city necessitated creative adaptation to meet the challenges; stated differently, it was a novel solution to living in the city by adapting existing meanings and behaviours to deal with unforeseen contingencies. It is interesting to note that while the identity processes identified in the forum and real life were similar in many respects, only the second study in Bangalore revealed the existence of identity flexibility. It might be because the ability to be anonymous on the forum enabled people to present themselves and express and play out their views without the same kinds of fears that existed in the face-to-face world, as a forum member could simply avoid or ignore any negative reactions that might accompany less anonymous circumstances (Turkle, 1995), whereas in real life they adopted identity flexibility to mitigate negative reactions from others. When Badagas in the city went about their lives and interacted with one another it was important for them to appear authentic and normal in order to fit in, for example by dressing or speaking certain ways, whereas those in the forum, although able express some level of style, could not identify others in such embodied terms. Faced with the diverse beliefs about Badaga identities and the lack of face-to-face concerns about each other, forum users were less concerned about their adherence to an identifiable lifestyle, an alternative conception of identity which associates the ephemeral and anonymous aspects of being online.

In conclusion, it is instructive to summarise what it means to be Badaga in India today, and how it is any different to being another Indian in the Nilgiri, South India, or beyond. When the migrants and forum members discussed the meanings of being Badaga, many said it was important to have been born in the Badaga community in the Nilgiri, and to have ancestry and family, although current (and length of) residence was not important. Speaking Badagu was regarded as vital to being Badaga, even though its popularity was declining, as were folk beliefs

and ideals which imbued direction for how people lived. Also, the meaning of being Badaga was emotive, invoking feelings of pride, worthiness, and admiration of the efforts and achievements of ordinary men and women, yet humbled by the perceived failures of Badagas. A thread tying these strands was a deep personal sense of being Badaga, the basis of their existence. However, on this common background rested diversity as being Badaga was flexible and in a state of flux. Also, as shown throughout the ethnography, there were clashing views about what it actually constitutes, multiple understandings which people defended, contested, and negotiated as they engaged debate about traditional and modern. The people I studied thought of themselves concurrently as Badagas and city residents or forum members, a sense of identity rooted on both original and new social contexts. These debates show Badagas shared a common sense of belonging but with substantial disagreement over its specifics, albeit still embedded in a strong bond with the Badaga community in the Nilgiri, and therefore builds on previous scholarship in the literature by pushing further its guiding concepts. This is because the meanings of being Badaga, constructed during symbolic interaction, are based on the subjective interpretations of each Badaga and their interactions with other Badagas.

However, these conclusions do not generalise to the second-generation migrants that had grown up in Coimbatore, as they did not describe such a strong sense of being Badaga in both rural and urban contexts, and were not typically involved in Badaga-orientated social networks outside the family and Nilgiri. Although they still regarded themselves as Badaga and members of the community in the Nilgiri, other identities were more salient in their lives such as being Tamilian, and they did not regard themselves a different subgroup of Badagas unlike the first-generation migrants who identified as City Badaga. It was probably because the second-generation migrants described less attachment to and experience of their ancestral homeland which exists more as a memory and legacy, and therefore less incorporated into their personal understandings of self. The attachment to history and locality is a powerful yet complex phenomenon with different possible modes for people's sense of self. In summary, it can be seen Badagas do not conform to the model of a closed and bounded tribal society and customary cultural prescriptions, but instead are characterised by variation and contextuality, although their identities were certainly interwoven in a common culture and history which served as its anchor. The findings of the monograph reveal complicated, flexible and pluralistic notions of identities thoroughly in flux and negotiated and contested across multiple spaces, a shift back

and forth between the personal and the social. In other words, the label ‘Badaga’ is fixed in name only, as it seems to be primarily a process of being and becoming, open to negotiation with moment and context, and grounded on human experience in the many and varied ways it is lived—not a fixed entity reduced to simple criteria. This revisionist narrative transcends the old Euro-American ‘Badaga’ stereotype in the literature.

However, an inherent contradiction is apparent in the above conclusions: While the fluidity and multi-siteness of being Badaga can be taken as an implicit point of critique of the literature’s simple and territorial portrayal of the Nilgiri and its peoples, its limits also lie in its own simplicity and boundedness. Badagas, Bangalore, the Internet forum, and so forth can only exist by drawing boundaries around them. Similarly, it is not clear with any certainty where Nilgiri Badaga ends and City Badaga begins, as they represent a vague symbolic declaration of distinction based on a few simple criteria which the migrants thought set them apart from others. Therefore, it is important to recognise the double-edgedness of the above conclusions which perhaps confirm the very notion of cultural essentialism they attempt to resolve, not the best solution to challenging the homogenization stance of the literature (Ang, 2014). The inevitability with which Badagas (and the researcher) use terms such as ‘Badaga’ seems complicit with essentialised fixity, a heuristic device for understanding difference. Any attempt at constructing categories such as ‘Badaga’, however justified, will not circumvent the fundamental tension that exists in reifying identity as a bounded object. So is this a contradiction to claims of fluidity and plurality? While acknowledging the drawbacks of fixed categorization and then superseding it with more of the same may seem like a contradiction, it is an irreconcilable issue. The researcher and Badagas also fall prey to the same cultural and ethnic essentialism of simplified mental images to make sense of the bewildering complexity of the human and social diversity in the world, even though doing so is biased, stereotypical, and troublesome. On the one hand, being able to have a feeling of an autonomous existence of one’s self, and to make common sense understandings of life, means being at ease with the constraints imposed by human cognition—as human and not superman, we cannot easily go about life trying to measure up all of the similarities, differences, and hybridities between peoples, although some appreciation is obviously achievable. It seems identity is perhaps just too complex for the simplicity needed for human cognition, as ‘Badaga’ may be a theoretical concept that doesn’t really exist. People still need to be able to identify concrete locales within

their social world where the object they are interested in can actually be observed; otherwise it would be a case of anything goes. But does it then follow that we must accept the common and simple notion of Badagas? The findings of the ethnography show it is inaccurate on account of the substantial heterogeneity it conceals but also a useful starting point to make sense of similarity and difference between people and others in India. It should be accepted for what it is: An initial simplified and generalized stereotype which is essential, localized, and fixed, but also inherently complex and variable, which paves the way to delve further in to the complexity of Badaganess in all its possibilities. So it would seem that, at least in this monograph, we cannot do without referring to ‘Badaga’ in a way that assumes its coherence as a distinct group, even though doing so perpetuates its presumed ontological stability that has been challenged. This complicated position manifested in the previous chapters as a careful balancing act.

### **Quality of life**

Another endeavour of the ethnography is to explore the quality of life of Badagas, and solutions to the challenges they face. The research in Bangalore and the Internet forum revealed a rich array of information, a timely update as previous in-depth research was completed in the 1990s. Whereas the literature emphasises objective aspects of life quality, notably economy and standard of living, the present research considered subjective quality of life which took in to account Badagas’ own perspectives of their circumstances and lived experiences. It is because the conditions of Badagas, whether or not they face difficult times, and what improvements are needed, if any, depend in part on what they actually think rather than only the views of academics which were stated in previous research.

The findings shed light on the meanings of the good life from a Badaga perspective, as they are not the same for all people and contexts. There was no single key to the good life, but several important ingredients were thought to support a happy and satisfied Badaga. At the core was self-understanding of being Badaga—the essence of who they were—which imbued the capacity to enjoy and make their way through life. The good life was also embedded in meaningful social relationships with others, especially family, which extended beyond immediate family members to include villagers and ancestors, as everyone in surrounding areas in the Nilgiri knew and cared about each other. Thus, being an affiliate of the Badaga community was a key ingredient of a fulfilling and satisfying life. Indeed, they talked about

‘collective happiness’, a shared and combined sense of the wellbeing of Badagas as a whole, the general mood of the community, and collaboration among family and friends working together for the common good. Individual wellbeing was said to stem from this social footing, as to be happy was grounded in the happiness of others; similarly, an individual’s problem was also interpreted as a problem of the family and community. Badagas in the Nilgiri were also regarded as a content community because they embraced simple lifestyles, and satisfied with what they had. Happiness was interpreted as something that one is rather than something one has, a view of looking spiritually inward and outward through contemplation and inner reflection, rather than in material surroundings regarded as illusionary and transient. Another major cord of the good life was a relationship with God and Hinduism. Doing good in life according to morals and desirable ways of living, set on the Indian religious concept of Karma, as Badagas believe a life of contentment and peace fits into place for those who genuinely respect others and do good deeds. From this perspective, the good life was seen as an outcome of the totality of their actions, some of which were shaped long before they were born through cycles of birth and death. It is also important to note interpretations of quality of life involved relative standards evaluations (Albert, 1977; Diener et al. 2002; Diener and Lucas, 2000; Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2002; Festinger, 1954; Michalos, 1985). A temporal comparison in the interviews and forum posts of current and dated living conditions such as the 1990s when availability of employment and high returns from tea cultivation provided a comparatively higher income and standard of living, and a social comparison of the present-day Badaga community with rural peoples in Indian states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, perceived to be worse off with economic backwardness. However, these comparisons by the migrants and forum members seem simple considering the wide range of relative standards past and present, and further research is needed.

Unfortunately, a salient theme in both studies of the ethnography was a depiction of a negative quality of life in the Nilgiri which centred on the demise and low profitability of agriculture. Tea farmers hardly made enough money to survive, and some tea gardens were financially unviable. Their livelihoods were characterised as low incomes and living standards, debts, unemployment, limited opportunities, and out-migration to nearby cities. There was emphasis in the forum on the tea growers’ vulnerable position in the value chain of the tea industry in which the overwhelming proportion of economic returns flowed to other



stakeholders, namely middlemen and large tea corporations, an identity construction of Badagas as victims of marginalization due to institutional and structural processes. Other aspects of low life quality in the Nilgiri revealed in the research included education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The participants also noted socioeconomic inequalities—a marked divide between the Nilgiri and urban areas, and between and within villages. The unfortunate reality was an appreciable number of people struggling for satisfactory living resources. It should be noted, however, inter-village inequality is not a new finding. Hockings reported variation between four villages in terms of what he regarded as ‘modernisation’ (1999). The villages in his study differed according to accessibility of schooling, proximity to a town, number of telephone lines, television viewing behaviour, and population data such as child-woman ratio and mean household size. Villages ranked according to these criteria from most traditional to most modern suggest the modernisation of each village was inversely proportional to extent of traditionalism, albeit a preliminary, impressionistic, and problematic interpretation of modernisation by Hockings. Even so, an important implication is that quality of life at the village level matters, a direction for future research. Regarding quality of life in Bangalore, the migrants I interviewed painted a picture of contentment, particularly with employment, income, convenient-living, and access to education, grounded on notions of social mobility and personal growth, albeit balanced with a downside to city life such as cost of living, challenging work conditions, job insecurity, and separation from family and friends. The wellbeing of the migrants did not appear to be compromised by any major issue; no tension with Bangaloreans was apparent; and there was no indication ‘City Badaga’ was devalued by its members or others which presumably would have threatened wellbeing.

The research also explored the intersection of quality of life, identity, and migration. Migration and city life were at times emotionally challenging, especially when the men relocated and adjusted to the new environment and changing perspectives of self, and felt torn between the Nilgiri and Bangalore. However, only a minority experienced a major struggle, and the reports of negativity are perhaps not surprising considering their lives and sense of identity changed, as it is well documented the loss of the familiar may lead to stress and ill-health. Judging from their relatively healthy adjustment to the city, it could be argued identity flexibility served the migrants well as a novel avenue to express autonomy in the city while maintaining connectedness to family and native culture in the Nilgiri, in other words to buffer

potential disruption and hostility, although doing so was a careful balancing act and not risk-free. Furthermore, rural-to-urban migration, and subsequent identity change, was viewed positively as a vehicle of personal transformation, a changed view of self and others which came out of experimenting with their Badaganess and new ways of thinking and making sense of life. Also, the shared identity affiliation with the city (City Badaga) nurtured friendship and support among the migrants as they were involved with each other as a social group, a common space they occupied as Badagas outside the Nilgiri (as was sociality in the Internet forum which connected Badagas otherwise separated geographically and socially)—a powerful emotional resonance among those who felt detached from mainstream Badaga society, and gave them a unity with others where they know they were not alone. It seems crucial for people marginalized outside their community, as the migrants and forum members experienced difficulties connecting with Badagas. Thus City Badaga and the forum were connectors of dispersed Badagas, and platforms for a group largely excluded from the mainstream which energised its members, facilitated social gatherings, and encouraged political action, more than just a new identity or media outlet. It was also seen in their identity-promoting activities such as friendship networks and meetings in which they fostered allegiances among themselves and with the community in the Nilgiri. Membership of City Badaga also reassured the migrants to experiment with the new ways of being and living in the city, and validated their legitimacy.

Another key finding was that identity served as the basis of cooperation and collective power to improve quality of life. The migrants in Bangalore desired to improve the rural community's standing, taken a step further by the forum members who worked together to bring about change. Importantly, a new pathway to change was identified, as the forum was utilised for discussion of social and political issues, as well as e-activism and e-philanthropy, examples of how people can improve their lives with technology, not documented previously in the academic literature on Badagas and the Nilgiri. It is important because Badagas face many challenges which existing circumstances in their current form have been unable to address. How they deal with these over the coming decade will significantly impact their life quality and future. These findings concur with previous research in a number of academic disciplines which position identity as central to social capital and health and well-being, although the dynamics are complex and not elaborated here (Jetten, Haslam & Haslam, 2012). Also, while these are new findings, previous writers have already postulated that the capacity of Badagas to

understand themselves as belonging to a cohesive and well-defined group is crucial for coping with changing circumstances in India (Hockings, 1968, 1993), confirmed in the ethnography with empirical evidence. Finally, that the migrants reported enriching experiences of identification with the city supports some portrayals in the literature of identity change as a necessary cultural innovation to live together in difference in a globalised world (Ang, 2001; Geertz, 1988). The migrants in Bangalore were generally positive about identity flexibility which they thought was beneficial, although opinion was more divided in the forum with support and refutation. Some people also realised other advantages of identity change, such as getting themselves re-categorised as a Scheduled Tribe, and for tactical voting strategies, as the Badaga comprise a large proportion of the electorate, indicative of the deployment of identity for political advantage.

It is instructive to consider claims in the literature that new technologies could improve quality of life in India, a country currently busy constructing the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of its population (Best and Kellner, 2001; Hiltz and Turoff, 2003; Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002; Singhal and Rogers, 2006). Digital and new media have fundamentally changed the ways people live, and a voluminous literature discusses the positive and negative implications. Regarding Badagas, previous studies documented radio and television consumption and social change in the community which have been reanalyzed in chapter four (Hockings, 1999; Singhal and Rogers, 1999). The ethnography adds to the literature with the first look at the potential of new media to shape Badaga culture and society in the coming years. Taking the findings as a record of an early Internet experiment among Badagas, it can be regarded as a starting point to ponder their future engagement online and its implications. It is clear new media confront Badagas with new opportunities and challenges. They could even be at the dawn of a new era with breakthroughs in technology that fundamentally change the ways they live. But can the case study of new media usage be scaled up to address the Badaga community's poverty and social deprivation? Although it remains an open question, it is important to reflect on possible scenarios. As exemplified in chapter four, the Internet as a technology of communication afforded Badagas with access to knowledge and debates about quality of life issues that matter the most. I believe it can be scaled-up to empower them to discover and disseminate information to improve their lives, for example to operate agricultural systems more efficiently, and secure alternative ways of living, as the findings revealed limited

knowledge among Badagas of the tea industry, as well as an inadequate response to changing economic and societal circumstances. For example, agriculturalists can use the Internet to access timely and location-specific information about market prices, alternatives to brokers, farming techniques such as location and timing of cropping patterns, innovation and best practice, and weather updates—a step towards precision agriculture, a site-specific farming concept which relies on timely information via new technologies to optimise business. Mobile telephony is being increasingly utilised by farmers in India to obtain real-time news and advice regarding agricultural commodities, markets, and weather updates. Examples include Reuters Market Light (RML) initiated by the Indian branch of Thompson-Reuters which provides highly customized information in SMS phone messages sent directly to farmers' mobile phones; Nokia Life, a SMS-based subscription information service; national services such as IFFCO Kisan Sanchar Limited, a partnership between Bharti Airtel and the Indian Farmers Fertilisers Co-operative Limited (IFFCO); and small-scale local projects. A number of studies have examined the impact of these types of services on agricultural outcomes and rural livelihoods, although not yet applied to Badagas.

It is also important to consider the advocacy aspirations of the migrants and Internet forum users. Activism by Badagas is not a new finding as they have been organising protests since the 1990s ranging from petitions and small-scale gatherings to large crowds with a thousand supporters. The first public protest was in 1992, followed by a rally in New Delhi in 1993 (The Hindu, 2007). The findings of my research reveal a novel form of activism by Badagas not documented previously in the literature. The Internet forum changed the nature of their advocacy and thus the ways they can bring about change. Importantly, it empowered Badagas to form alliances and work together across geographical boundaries to raise awareness of issues, propose and discuss solutions, and coordinate and take action to improve quality of life. The potential of e-activism to bring about change among Badagas is perhaps evident in recent social and political movements in which the Internet, especially social networking sites, facilitated the mobilisation of large numbers of people easily and quickly, for example the Arab Spring in 2010 and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 when demonstrations and civil resistance preceded a popular uprising. While I am not, of course, suggesting these events will or should generalise to Badagas, they highlight the potential of new media to bring about collective action and changing social practices as digital spaces become embedded in their culture. The Internet is

changing the ways Badagas connect and socially interact. Although focus on whether the activists attained material benefits or resources is important, the study shows identification as Badaga was a key concept which underpinned their collective action (Melucci, 1985, 1989, 1996). And, as identity is ultimately a social process manifested through symbols, the Internet forum as a communication resource was important as it enabled people to communicate across geographical boundaries in ways that challenge the power of the status quo. It is clear that the Internet is changing the ability of Badagas to engage in political organizing, also known as ‘electronic advocacy’. Such rhetoric about Badaga activism also puts a different spin on their quality of life as their desire for change evokes a sense of opportunity, and overcomes the victimology of Badagas by empowering them. However, it also evokes a sense of concern, as the finding that identification as Badaga can motivate people to mobilise people politically to support action against perceived threats also increases the likelihood of conflict and social division.

It is important to note e-philanthropy took place in the forum which linked Badaga donors and recipients across national and international borders, and enabled small-scale donors to contribute funds to charitable projects easily without going through financial intermediaries such as banks, a kind of person-to-person microfinance. The Badaga-to-Badaga philanthropy in the forum could be harnessed further for charitable purposes to support those in poverty—as the interviews and forum discussions implied some people in the Nilgiri had insufficient funds to mitigate daily living, and borrowed money or sold land—and as a catalyst for economic and social development, for example business and health education and intervention (Smith, 2002). The Internet forum could be redesigned with microfinance and microcredit functions to develop credit models, verify borrower identity, and process payments between borrowers and lenders. E-business could even be developed for the entire value chain of the tea industry. Even so, it should be noted the suggestions above are underlined by technological determinism. When new media become more accessible and prevalent, it is up to Badagas to determine if and how they will be utilised, and what type of change, if any, will take place, as they will be the ones bringing it about and not caught in a wave of change. Though a causal relationship between media and development can exist, it is complex and different in different contexts, and shaped by an array of factors including its social construction; in any case, there are varying ideas in development studies concerning what constitutes desirable change for a particular society. Thus,

it is important to keep an open mind with a technocultural view of social change whereby culture and technology intertwine in complex ways.

The accuracy of the claims in the forum of price-fixing and unethical money lending was not verified with evidence, and difficult to evaluate without further investigation. Although the literature cites similar concerns and anecdotal evidence, stakeholders in the Nilgiri tea industry dismissed the allegations and counter-claimed they were monitored by committees and the Government (Neilson and Pritchard 2009). Bhowmik (1997), for example, reported exploitation of bought-leaf factories and leaf agents such as incorrect prices and weighing of supplied leaves. Factory owners collaborated to decide tea prices and avoid competition with each other, and growers had no bargaining power; the leaf agents were regarded as primarily responsible for the low prices growers received as they procured the leaves and sold them to factories with commission. Bhowmik (1997) also found some tea growers preferred to supply tea leaves to factories which provided interest-free loans for agricultural development or personal reasons, and in return the factories expected a regular supply of leaves from the farmer until the loan was repaid in full. Although some tea growers had formed cooperatives to ensure fair prices, corruption and favouritism by their management has been reported such as rejection of tea leaves and applications for subsidised fertilisers. Bhowmik (1997) also noted studies undertaken by the Tea Board had shown bought-leaf factories exploited small tea growers. Therefore, further research and action is needed to help improve the quality of life of Badaga farmers.

When considering the activists claims, it should be noted the tea industry was more complex than its depiction in the forum, and they were not experts of the tea industry or the law. The simplicity of the business chain they described in the forum is evident when compared to academic analyses such as Neilson and Pritchard's (2009) account of a complex system of more than 60,000 smallholders, 40 large tea growers, agents, brokers, factories (bought-leaf, cooperative, estate), public auction centres in Coonoor, Coimbatore, and Kochi, as well as blenders, distributors, exporters, retailers, and wholesalers. The authors also situated the system in a complex interplay of institutions and governance in local to global cultural, economic, and political spheres. Forum members misunderstood some aspects of the business chain, for example a post alleged farmers were exploited by price manipulation as retailers' tea prices were much higher than the prices paid to Badaga farmers, which overlooked the process of adding value to products during business chains which is eventually passed on to the end

consumer (a series of business processes such as manufacturing, packaging, branding, and retailing which all cost money). Also, the negativity of the farmer versus agent narratives in the forum overlooked positive aspects as well as the fact some Badaga growers with smallholdings also act as agents. For example, agents provide small growers with access to national and international markets, and tea buyers with access to a wider variety of sellers rather than separate tea gardens, and auctions and brokers can help peg prices to market conditions. Therefore, the activism might have been based on false premises. I am not satisfied that prima facie was established in the forum members' allegations, and more investigation is needed. The activists exaggerated the level of justification and support for their cause, and some the activism was misdirected, for example emails sent to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to raise awareness of the issues affecting Badagas even though it is the Indian government's national security and intelligence agency which investigates serious crimes. It should also be noted that crop prices and agents are not new issues for Badagas; for example, the prices of grain they sold were fixed in British India, and fluctuated yearly, and were affected by the grain surplus in the nearby 'lowland markets' (Hockings, 1980a; Sarada Raju, 1941). In the period between the two world wars, many Badagas with small land-holdings experienced difficult times and debts; some sold land to non-Badagas to pay off outstanding debts (Thurston, 1909; Ranga, 1934; Pilla, 1937; Hockings, 1980a). Therefore, the issues debated in the forum should be considered in a historical and relative context. Yet while it would be easy to mock the misunderstandings and instances of trivial banter in the forum, taken together the research demonstrates how contributors can engage in political action to improve quality of life.

The proposition that new media could bring about material and social advancement of Badagas can also be challenged in other respects. The Nilgiri, like India as a nation, is far from becoming a digital and information society, and online knowledge creation and distribution is not yet a dominant cultural and economic activity for the majority of the population. Badagas are currently on the wrong side of the Digital Divide, separated from the educated and urban elite which represent the majority of Internet users, a reflection of disparities in economic and social resources. New media are constrained in the Nilgiri by barriers such as inadequate telecommunication systems, high cost of technology, limited media ownership, and restrictive government policies. Support is required for technology to become a quality-of-life toolkit for Badagas, and the first step is to increase its availability and then identify mechanisms and

pathways to embrace a technology-oriented future. Computers, 3G/4G technology mobile telephones, PDAs, and other devices are still relatively uncommon in the rural community, and their utility has not been firmly established in people's minds. Even so, they have increased in popularity since the ethnography began in 2006. The online community investigated in chapter four does at least characterize the beginnings of an information society, and thus Badagas have definitely begun their journey on this path. Although rural and lower income peoples generally have less access to computers and technology, the digital divide is shrinking as their cost continues to decrease and public access increases (Wilson, Wallin, and Reiser 2003). That Badagas recognise that change is beneficial or necessary to improve their situation should enhance the adoption of new practices. Also, the analysis of the forum seems to support the notion that people who communicate online tend to be more involved in the local community (Stern and Dillman, 2006).

#### **Another side to the story: Reflexivity, limitations and future directions**

The research involved continuous reflection. Reflexivity took two main directions. First, there was a consideration of the design and theoretical concerns of the multi-site ethnography, a quality control check. Second, the identities and lives of the participants and researcher, and their interaction, were proactively explored, a reflexive positioning of self and otherness to uncover assumptions and bias, inform understandings of the findings, and make the research process itself a focus of inquiry. Thus reflexivity facilitated understanding both the phenomena under study and the research process by helping to situate oneself in the findings as well as be cognizant of personal history and its influence (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Etherington, 2004; Woolgar, 1988).

An important aspect of reflexive thinking was consideration of the extent to which the researcher and researched co-produced the objects under study as social constructions. The meanings of objects such as Badagas, identities, quality of life, and so forth, are not inherent but collective and individual interpretations by people and their interaction. From a symbolic interactionist vantage point, then, the thesis can be conceived as a product shaped by the social worlds of the participants and researcher. Thus I engaged in introspection to reflect on personal experiences relevant to the social construction of knowledge. One challenge identified early in the research was self-consciousness of cultural distance between the identities and social groups



of the participants and the researcher. The researcher was a white British anthropologist, the type which has been harshly criticised in the previous chapters for their misrepresentations in the literature, and also scorned by Indians for power distance in the past which enabled studies of the Nilgiri by foreigners at the expense of what colonialism did to its population and environment (Misra, 1999). As this cultural difference could influence the ways identities and life quality were framed in the findings, I felt the need to somehow transcend my own subjectivity in a way that would release myself from my cultural baggage and the stigma in the literature of white researcher privilege.

Data collection was preceded with extensive preparatory work including literature reviewing, and trips and pilot work in Bangalore and the Nilgiri when I lived with Badagas to learn more about their lives, potential areas of enquiry, and appropriate approaches. It concurs with arguments in the literature that an insider is not necessarily a member of a community but someone who possesses intimate knowledge of it (Burgess, 1984; Merton, 1972; Simmel, 1950). Sensitivity and respect were key ingredients in meeting and listening to Badagas, analysing their words and worldviews, and nurturing empathy and understanding to represent them as accurately as possible. The meaning of 'Badaga' was broached loosely and not defined by the researcher, as participants were given freedom to convey their identities as they chose, and the interview questions were open-ended, flexible, and highly dependent on their own preferences. The minimal constraint by formal procedures was intended to encourage authentic and true voices, and enable Badagas to be involved in the development of the research.

Reflexivity also involved being aware of my thoughts and actions in relationships with Badagas, a means for becoming a better researcher. One example worth mentioning is an initial interview in Bangalore which revealed a participant's assumptions of authority and power that led to improvements in data collection. Following the interview, the participant asked if he could take a photo with me and his family, as he thought I was someone of eminence and good standing. It resonated with my earlier trips to the Nilgiri which revealed another scholar, Paul Hockings, had earned a celebrity and superstar status among Badagas. While it could be optimistically argued that the request for a family photo demonstrated my success in building rapport and trust with the participant, it was also problematic. Even though I do not enjoy the same celebrity fame as Hockings, the participant's comments implied he perceived the researcher as someone of importance, revealing hidden assumptions that could potentially

undermine the interviewer-interviewee relationship and thus the topics. For example, my position and status as perceived by others might have encouraged some people to talk to me, and some to avoid me, and might have shaped the type of information they gave, biases in data collection. Also, my response at that time—to agree to the photograph without challenging his perceived distance between us—might have implied that I concurred with his assumptions. Although I acknowledge from the outset an inherent difference between the researcher, a British Caucasian who grew up in the U.K., and the researched, Badagas who grew up in South India, there is no reason not to regard each other as equals. Thus these concerns led to a rethink of data collection approaches, a reflexive commitment to power redistribution. Strategies were adopted to ensure the portrayal of a more equal sharing of power which included considering the similarities and differences between the researcher and researched, scheduling interviews at times and place chosen by the participants, putting them at ease during warm-up discussions, assuming a relatively flexible and unstructured approach to questioning to give them control over its direction, and an open stance such as sharing information and answering questions. I noticed during my time in Bangalore that the close, informal, and personal nature of the meetings meant that the perceived distance between us were not obvious. Important here is my preference for the phrase ‘participants’ who contributed ‘meanings’, rather than alternative labels in the literature such as ‘subjects’. I realise that I still may never be able to attain a complete acceptance as equal among Badagas, and the reflexive steps taken could not lead to the perfect research interview which in reality does not exist. But acknowledging and working through these challenges enriched the data collection, and made assumptions and biases manageable.

The key arguments and findings of the thesis emerged during a gradual deepening of insight as the researcher came to identify his assumptions and preconceptions, an attempt to ensure the participants were not interpreted with the same ‘othering’ identified in previous reports. When the ethnography began, based on extensive reading of the literature as well as acknowledging the standpoint of the researcher’s academic and personal biography (initial training in quantitative psychology), the reified Badaga identity in previous writings was taken for granted. This influenced my expectations of what I thought I might find even before I had started collecting data, which only began to change following insights gained during the interviews. The alternative arguments put forward in the thesis about Badaga identities came about through

an analysis of the emergent findings as they unfolded in reflexive practices. These included discussions with Badagas about their identities, challenging my understandings of self, and recognizing that being Badaga is open and not fixed. Adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the thesis focuses on intersubjectivity, individual and collection interpretations and the ways they are bounded by personal background, time, and place. To enable a closer scrutinisation of my own subjectivity, I interrogated my understandings of self to a high degree of self-awareness. This is a key tenet of symbolic interactionism whereby the researcher considers their own categories which capture meanings, and takes the standpoint of the actors under study, a proxy to get inside the Badagas to see the world as they perceive it. I began by interviewing myself using the same questions given to the participants in Bangalore to shed light on how the emerging Badaga identities in the findings were situated in the ways I also perceived collections of people. Interestingly, some of the themes in the interviewees' discourses in chapter five were similar to my reflexive interview, for example ancestry, family, fluidity, language, and locality, an indication of the cognitive processes by which knowledge was created in the research. Taking the time to think through these mechanisms informing my judgements helped to show how the identities of Badagas and the researcher were not separate but intimately interconnected. The exercise was also an opportunity to reflect on the interview experience from a position analogous to the participants.

The findings also show my initial concerns about cultural and ethnic distance with the participants might have been overstated. As identities are inherently complex and fluid, the researcher can never be absolutely inside or outside those of the participants regardless of whether he is a Badaga or not. Caste or ethnicity are not the only relevant social signifiers of difference, as people have multiple and cross-cutting identifications, for example age, education background, employment status, sexuality, and other dimensions, not one continuum but a multiple series of parallel ones. A concordance with one or several of these criteria might be counterbalanced by discordance with others. For example, being a migrant, and an active participant on the Internet, as well as having other similarities with some of the participants, meant I was well placed to do the research. The consideration of similarities and differences between the researcher and participants, elements of being inside on some dimensions and outside on others, was of considerable value in understanding knowledge production. Being an outsider in some respects also made it possible to stand back to see more clearly the full scope

of the findings to enable some objectivity towards producing better, less distorted research accounts (Burgess, 1984; Lewis, 1973; Merton, 1972; Simmel, 1950).

Another point to consider is the appropriateness of Western academic theories and methods. The thesis began with a critique of the representation of Badagas in the literature, and then advocated for a fresh symbolic interactionist approach to gain an insider's perspective of being Badaga. It might be interpreted as a compilation of intellectual failures by previous anthropologists. But, before being accused of spreading doom and gloom, it should be emphasised that interpreting identities requires multiple theoretical lenses, and the thesis is designed to complement and build on previous research rather than rubbish it. Furthermore, its theoretical underpinning, although employed to overcome limitations of previous work, is not without criticism. A major critique of symbolic interactionism is its highly ambiguous, impressionistic, and subjective stance, an 'anything goes' approach to being Badaga which can be interpreted differently by different people, an ignorance perhaps of the extent to which humans inhabit a world not all of their own making (Goffman, 1974). As symbolic interactionism focuses on individual agency and informality, it may be less attuned to understanding larger groups such as the Badaga community in the Nilgiri and its macro-level structures such as class, economy, and historical circumstances. Yet these are important topics which need to be explored in further research. Similarly, if meanings of identity are subjective, constantly reinterpreted among individuals, and tied to time and context (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934), they may be reinterpreted differently by the participants as they continue to adapt to the city and new media. Therefore, continuing the research, perhaps longitudinally through repeated interviews, can explore these changes across the life span. Also, as only one sample was interviewed in Bangalore, the findings do not represent all Badagas in urban areas. The meanings of migration could vary among individuals with different backgrounds and characteristics. Alternative samples of interviewees (for instance, without a college education, working in low-paying jobs such as in factories, hotels, restaurants, and shops, and resident in smaller cities and towns) might reveal different findings, probably a multiplicity of urban Badaga identities. The present study focused primarily on Gauda Badagas, the numerically dominant section of the population, and almost all of the participants were Saivite Hindus, and therefore further research can explore the diversity among Badagas and its connections to experiences of migration. It is also important to note migrants tend to represent a select group of

people that leave their native place to pursue opportunities in a new society, and therefore might be more motivated than the general population to embrace change, so it is not certain the findings will generalise to non-migrants. Similarly, the focus on only one Internet forum also narrows the scope of the ethnography, and future research could investigate other forums as well as social media such as blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), e-mail and instant messaging (e.g. Skype), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and Virtual Learning Environments (e.g. Blackboard). For example, studies of Facebook, an interface particularly focused on facilitating personal self-presentation, and LinkedIn, which caters for professional self-promotion, may show alternative deployments of self. Despite these limitations, however, the monograph has made a significant contribution to understanding the nature and development of Badaga identities, and the above consideration of its weaknesses brings a spirit of openness and accountability to this endeavour (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Etherington, 2004; Woolgar, 1988).

Doing the research gave rise to methodological anxieties which I had to grapple with, particularly its nonconformity to the assumptions and expectations of conventional ethnography. Is the research approach I labelled 'multi-site ethnography' really ethnography? To consider this question, it is first instructive to clarify the stereotype of conventional anthropological research. Ethnography refers to both an empirical research strategy for gathering data on human societies, and the final product of research, namely a monograph or book. Summarised succinctly, ethnography is the first-hand observation of a particular culture, community, or society, and is more holistic than other research methods as it includes an extensive period of fieldwork (Davey, 2012a). To understand the totality of social life, anthropologists prepare for their research meticulously for several years, and then immerse themselves in the group they are studying by living with the people, learning and conversing in their common language, and participating in their social and cultural events (Davey, 2012a). Participant observation (observation of daily behaviour) is a hallmark of ethnographic research alongside other data collection methods such as document analysis, genealogy, in-depth interviewing, questionnaires, etc. This research strategy developed around several classic ethnographies such as *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) by Bronisław Malinowski based on fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands; *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) by Alfred R.

Radcliffe-Brown based on fieldwork in the Andaman Islands; *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) by Margaret Mead; *Naven* (1936) by Gregory Bateson; and *The Nuer* (1940) by E. E. Evans-Pritchard. Much anthropological research still operates within this widely accepted model, regarded by many as essential for being a ‘real’ anthropologist. Defining ethnography in the above terms perhaps makes the thesis difficult to accept as ethnography. But it is important to note from the outset that multi-site ethnography is not the same as the conventional research model; it is a new mode of ethnographic research that breaks convention, and, in many respects, challenges the status quo (Marcus, 1995, 2005; Hannerz, 2003). There is no descriptive or theoretical prescription of multi-site ethnography, and even conventional ethnography now has different meanings, especially in ‘modern’ settings and other disciplines such as media studies—both are eclectic methodologies. The design, structure, and form of my ethnographic research remains individual and personal, derived from the research itself rather than only academic literature and theories, as its contours emerged during research across multiple sites on topics that turned out to be relevant in the lives of Badagas. The methodology was not a pre-determined recipe but an evolving process which required methods that escaped the boundaries of the local. An underlying thrust of the thesis is criticism of the down-to-earth character of the early anthropological literature by white men visiting strange, isolated places, which glossed over epistemological issues with straightforward notions of reality. A key driver of the strong bias in the literature was conventional fieldwork which has long been assumed to be an initiation rite for identity as an anthropologist. This expectation, which is rooted in assumptions of the anthropologist as a kind of colonial administrator, has to some extent driven the misrepresentation of Badagas in the literature as a small-scale, exotic and primitive society in a microcosm glued together by norms, kinship regulations, and so on (Fortes, 1945; Glucksmann, 2015). Nowadays, no place in the world, thanks to globalisation and technological advances, is far-flung or isolated. As shown in the thesis, all places are connected in multifarious ways, so there is no need in an era of extended spatial mobility to separate Badagas as a group apart. Conventional ethnography seems less appropriate for understanding the identities and quality of life of Badagas in their increasingly global and mobile world. It is this change in circumstance and connectivity, the focus of the present research, which means that ethnographic practice in the Nilgiri must change.

Another possible criticism is whether the monograph produces the same quality of data as conventional ethnography, especially whether it sacrifices depth for breadth. While it is true the type of data generated is different to single-site research, it is not necessarily in terms of quality (Horst, 2009). For example, although the time spent in Bangalore was relatively brief, around two months, it was preceded with extensive preparatory work including trips and pilot work in Bangalore and the Nilgiri, and continued with follow up meetings and theoretical sampling. More time in the Nilgiri would have been of value, but, for practical reasons, I focused on the aims of the study rather than an all-inclusive investigation which might have meant the multi-site studies were rushed. Moreover, the online discussions analysed in chapter four date back more than a decade, a dataset which comprised more than 2000 A4 pages when saved as text-readable files (single-spaced 12-point font). The rich set of data seems equivalent to the corpus expected of classic Malinowskian fieldwork, and is much more substantive than other qualitative methodologies which often involve shorter data collection and analysis. I did not work on the project full-time as I was engaged in teaching and other activities, but many other anthropologists today are also engaged in professional obligations which hinder the opportunity to disappear for several years to conduct conventional ethnography. Another limitation might be the absence of data extracts in the analysis of the Internet forum (for issues to do with anonymity of participants, as discussed in chapter four), but there was not a lack of data nor analysis, and its inclusion as part of a larger project rather than a standalone study shows the depth of data was similar to that of an extended stay in one location. The lack of data extracts in chapter four reflects the realities of multi-site ethnography such as variation in the depth of focus from site to site due to the nature of the sites. The present research, in common with other multi-site ethnographies, retains anthropology's quest for intimate knowledge yet focuses on specific topics and multiple sites rather than a holistic and bounded approach that is typically seen in conventional anthropology. It was grounded on the need to reform the deeply engrained mind-set and culture of research methodology previously used for investigating the Nilgiri peoples. I do not claim to have a grasp of the entire lives of Badagas, as the aims of the research were to explore specific aspects of their lives. In any case, it is perhaps inappropriate to think of space- and time-frames as criteria of research quality as the sites and topics studied were markedly different to the community in the Nilgiri, for example the Internet forum was actually a reconceptualization of time and space as well as what counts as a research site, an alternative

way of structuring Badaga society and research (Hallet and Barber, 2014). The thesis's inclusion of an online space can be regarded as its strength because studies of the Nilgiri have overlooked the importance of new media, hitherto missed opportunities which help to more fully understand the local peoples (Hallet and Barber, 2014). The combination of online and offline data resulted in a more complete and nuanced understanding, new forms of identity and life quality of Badagas in contemporary times, and shows the online space matters and should be taken seriously. For these reasons, the project involved rigorous ethnographic work that reflects today's complex global context in which Badagas find themselves (Hannerz 2003).

The research design included data collection from forum discussions and ethnographic interviews rather than participant observation. The use of interviews in anthropology is by no means uncritical. It should be noted multi-site ethnography tends to be more dependent on interviews, largely because of the time factor (Hannerz, 2003), so the approach of the present research is not unusual. Also, there is a developing home for ethnographies that engage strongly with interviewing as a research method (Skinner, 2012; Smith, Staples and Rapport, 2015). Yet there are several other features which distinguish it from simple one site interviews with men in cities, and a one site analysis of online discussions in a forum. As a multi-site ethnography, it is designed around a juxtaposition of locations, and with an explicit posited logic of connection. The main connection between the two sites concerns city residence, as all of the Badagas studied in Bangalore and the forum were resident outside the Nilgiri, and their experiences of identity and life quality were framed in the context of this experience in contemporary India. Therefore, it is not a mere collection of sites but an interconnection, and the findings regarding identity and quality of life in both studies were woven together in the monograph. Also, it was not possible to get as close to the migrants in Bangalore as in conventional ethnography, which is as much to do with its setting of 'modernity' as Badagas are dispersed in the city, and do not live in a community. The researcher visited the Internet forum regularly over several years, and spent an extended period of time getting close enough to the community to sufficiently understand its workings. Even so, the aim of the research was not to get to know the participants intimately but to investigate specific aspects of their lives and their embeddedness in a wider set of circumstances. These challenges are not specific to the present research but a reflection of how a multi-site study differs from the single site study of a mid-20th century anthropologist.



The migrants and forum members were concerned about limited information on Badagas and their community in the Nilgiri. It is difficult to judge, without further studies, the current status of the rural community. An obvious starting point is a push for enumeration in the Census of India and other surveys, supplemented with in-depth sociological research. Enumeration of Badagas as a separate group in the national census would be invaluable as it currently records population, name, age, sex, marital status, religion, education attendance and level, literacy status, occupation, migration, and number of children, as well as house-listing information such as house size and condition, occupants, ownership status, main drinking water source, latrine facilities, and media ownership (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). Alternative measures of quality of life could also be employed similar to the Afrobarometer in Africa, Eurobarometer in the European Union, Latinobarometer in Chile, and international surveys conducted globally such as The Happy Planet Index, Human Development Index, International Social Survey, International Wellbeing Index, World Happiness Report, and World Values Survey (Rato and Davey, 2012). That one of the most evident findings of the monograph is that Badagas are becoming far more mobile and able to relocate in search of better employment prospects and a higher standard of living, there needs to be shifting focus on gathering information in multiple locations. Yet while the changes documented in the thesis seem to be underpinned by ‘modernity’ and ‘globalisation’, it is important to note that they are not objective or universal concepts but actively produced by people, constructed and perceived as social reality, grounded on people’s judgements about which social practices are important in the present. Thus attention to these meanings in further research will permit a more complete understanding of Badagas in relation to economic and social change. In other words, the changes taking place among Badagas and in Indian society are not simply a reflection of economic and social standards but also a cultural process involving people’s lived experiences and constructions of change, envisaged within their local settings and available cultural and symbolic resources, which is a fertile ground for future research. Since the meanings and uses of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are complex and multifaceted, and do not lend to easy definitions, especially when applied to different cultures and the newly modernising societies in Asia with different responses to the ‘modern’ entangled in local social and regional differences (Eisenstadt 2000, Escobar 1988), a fruitful line of further enquiry could be to explore and interrogate their meanings among Badagas.

## **Parting thoughts**

Interwoven into the thesis are the threads of continuity and change. As the first in-depth investigation of the human and social experience of being Badaga, it examines the intricacies of identity and quality of life as people questioned and experimented with their place in contemporary India. It is also an extension of previous speculations in the literature about the transition of Badagas from an ascribed status to a mixed community of rural farmers and urban residents, as previous research had not empirically investigated Badagas outside the rural Nilgiri.

Badagas expressed concerns about the future such as the declining popularity of their customs, and increasing outmigration to urban areas, which varied from romantic eulogizing to ethnocentric denigration, and some even feared their community in the Nilgiri was sliding to extinction. Discourses of decline and hardship are perhaps not surprising in the context of recent issues affecting the tea industry and national and global economies, a predominantly neoliberal economic standpoint. Based on the key findings of the thesis, the prevailing view in the literature of Badagas as victims of the accelerating encroachment of globalisation and modernity which is destroying their cultural identity should be considered with a good deal of scepticism. Pessimists should reflect on the key findings of the thesis which show that being Badaga is not reified or fixed but a work in progress, dynamic and negotiated in response to current cultural and social context. ‘Badaga’ is actually a process of being and becoming, grounded on human experience in the many ways it is lived, rather than a fixed entity reduced to simple criteria. The words ‘Becoming City Badaga’ in the title of chapter five, for example, capture the dynamic nature of Badaga identities.

The changes taking place in India and globally are a significant force in creating and proliferating Badaga identities—for example, City Badaga and Nilgiri Badaga—a different situation to the portrayal of a collective ‘Badaga identity’ in previous writings. The thesis calls into question the very idea of ‘the Badagas’ as a unified cultural identity because it contradicts such a wide, complex, and contextual range of experiences that render it of limited use. The thesis has debunked the myth in the literature that once upon a time there existed an undisturbed and fragile autonomous, distinct, and local Badaga community with well-defined traits and connections between geographical place and cultural experience with surviving remnants that needed documenting and preserving.

That the thesis constitutes an antithesis to conventional thinking is a big epistemological step forward for Nilgiriology. The new types of ethnographic research employed, multi-site and virtual ethnography, are essential for understanding the intricacies of people's lives in a country and world more mobile and connected than ever before and which cannot be captured by traditional single-site ethnographic approaches (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995). While advances in technology and media research are obviously not new to anthropologists and sociologists (Jones, 1998; Cavanagh, 2001), Nilgiriologists have been slow to realize their potential. Yet it is clear that Badagas can no longer be understood without consideration of such contemporary forces, a rethink of ways to study culture and society in the Nilgiri. Ethnographers must incorporate the Internet and other technologies into their research. The present examination of the Internet is particularly important as it confirms Badagas, and presumably other Nilgiri peoples, have formed online communities and identities, and that new media impact their lives. I argue the forum studied here has immense value to anthropologists because it is one of the few (and perhaps first) social networking sites created and utilised by an Indian tribal community. Another strength of the ethnography's research strategy was application of social identity to analyse connections between individuals and the social, as people tend to define their sense of self in terms of social group memberships with shared emotional and value significance (Tajfel, 1972, 1974, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), an approach neglected in studies of Nilgiri peoples.

Globalisation and modernity have led to conditions in which Indian society has now become far more complex and dynamic. As shown in the thesis, they have impacted notions of identity and quality of life, and necessitate a re-think of how people live together. The online Badaga community was markedly different to the real-world community in the Nilgiri, an alternative sociality which turns previous literature on Badaga culture and society on its head. The virtual community was not geographically circumscribed but a differentiated form of social space glued together by new media-mediated social interaction, as most of the forum members resided outside the Nilgiri without physical propinquity, situationally different to the real-world community. Time was also different because forum discussion and interaction took place over days, weeks, months, and even years, much slower than in the real world, and asynchronous and time-lagged. Successions of forum posts were highly temporal, demarcated as chronological narratives connected through a timeline in the order in which they occurred, a chronology of posts and social interactions ordered in linear sequences from past to the present (they were also

located temporally to specific times and dates in the real world by time-stamped headers, and some posts by their content such as references to events occurring in the real-world). Furthermore, the online community's economy appears to be a type of gift economy whereby information exchange in forum posts took place with expectations of reciprocity (replies from others) and new social connections. This type of economy contrasts markedly to the agricultural and manual labour system of the rural Badaga community, although the literature documents the existence of a gift economy prior to the 1930s based on interdependent social exchange of products and services. These unique features of the online Badaga community support the conclusions of variation and fluidity of Badaga sociality, and offer intriguing opportunities for future research.

The final line of thought I would like to take up briefly is the ethnography's broader implication as an important case study of people's experiences of living in contemporary India. The research shows identity and quality of life practices of Badagas represent a fascinating site for examining how broader social trends in India and further afield are negotiated at the local level by ethnic minorities, particularly how change in contemporary India is experienced. Badagas are at the crossroads of change as long-standing traditions are being replaced with new ways of doing. It was exemplified in the interviews and forum with shifting identities and quality of life. At a societal level it reflects India's so-called economic development and integration into the global economy which has led to a capitalist society and the rising popularity of cultural and material products of the West. One of the underlying tenets of multisite ethnography is to combine local practices with the national and global world system, as the findings are dependent on context. The present research's tracing of Badagas across different spatial and cultural contexts reflects the broader forces shaping their lives, and the kinds of global connections they are making between locales, larger social structures, and further afield. While the analysis relates specifically to Badagas, it also constructs a window through which to explore other people, and the extent to which change increasingly permeates and influences understandings of self, a more intimate and complete understanding of the impact of India's social and economic transformation. In the ethnography, Badagas played an active role in unpacking representations around which they organised identities and quality of life, a more personal evaluation of life than previous research which echoed the views of academics and their objective and stereotypical categories of description. Taking this a step

further, the issue of what it means to be Badaga in India is ultimately about being Indian—the new City Badaga identity as a localised ‘Indianness’—and how it is constantly in flux, a pertinent concern at the forefront of debate about the future, not only in India but the world at large. It focuses attention on the fact that in a changing India, people are adopting flexible identities in an attempt to survive and thrive. That City Badaga can be construed as part of a new Indianness shaped at the local level, the ethnography serves as a template for understanding other minority people in India.

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