

SPRINGER BRIEFS IN WELL-BEING AND
QUALITY OF LIFE RESEARCH

Gareth Davey

Quality of Life
and Well-Being in
an Indian Ethnic
Community
The Case of
Badagas



Springer

**SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality
of Life Research**

SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality-of-Life Research are concise summaries of cutting-edge research and practical applications across the field of well-being and quality of life research. These compact refereed monographs are under the editorial supervision of an international Advisory Board*. Volumes are 50 to 125 pages (approximately 20,000–70,000 words), with a clear focus. The series covers a range of content from professional to academic such as: snapshots of hot and/or emerging topics, in-depth case studies, and timely reports of state-of-the art analytical techniques. The scope of the series spans the entire field of Well-Being Research and Quality-of-Life Studies, with a view to significantly advance research. The character of the series is international and interdisciplinary and will include research areas such as: health, cross-cultural studies, gender, children, education, work and organizational issues, relationships, job satisfaction, religion, spirituality, ageing from the perspectives of sociology, psychology, philosophy, public health and economics in relation to Well-being and Quality-of-Life research. Volumes in the series may analyze past, present and/or future trends, as well as their determinants and consequences. Both solicited and unsolicited manuscripts are considered for publication in this series. SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality-of-Life Research will be of interest to a wide range of individuals with interest in quality of life studies, including sociologists, psychologists, economists, philosophers, health researchers, as well as practitioners across the social sciences. Briefs will be published as part of Springer's eBook collection, with millions of users worldwide. In addition, Briefs will be available for individual print and electronic purchase. Briefs are characterized by fast, global electronic dissemination, standard publishing contracts, easy-to-use manuscript preparation and formatting guidelines, and expedited production schedules. We aim for publication 8–12 weeks after acceptance.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/10150>

Gareth Davey

Quality of Life and Well-Being in an Indian Ethnic Community

The Case of Badagas

 Springer

Gareth Davey
School of Anthropology and Conservation
The University of Kent
Canterbury, Kent
UK

ISSN 2211-7644 ISSN 2211-7652 (electronic)
SpringerBriefs in Well-Being and Quality of Life Research
ISBN 978-3-319-90661-4 ISBN 978-3-319-90662-1 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90662-1>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018939310

© The Author(s) 2018

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Contents

Introduction	1
Once upon a Time: The Beginnings	2
Migration and Identity	5
Localisation in the Nilgiri Hills	7
Badagas as One Big Family	9
Language, Religion, and Folk Medicine	11
Traditional Economy	12
Badagas as Colonial Subjects	14
Desire for Change	18
Concluding Summary and Chapter Outlines	20
References	23
Methodology	27
Fieldsites: Multi-sited Ethnography	28
Social Identity and Symbolic Interactionism	30
Quality of Life	34
Data	37
Concluding Summary	41
References	42
Badagas Going Digital	45
Past and Present	49
Pride of Being Badaga	52
Poverty and Social Inequality in the Nilgiri Hills	56
Fundraising and Social Activism	61
Concluding Summary	66
References	69
Migrants' Voices	71
Departing the Nilgiri Hills	76
The Promised Land: Living in Bangalore	79

Being Badaga	82
Becoming City Badaga	87
Concluding Summary	92
References	93
Conclusion	95
Being Badaga in India Today	96
Intersections of Quality of Life, Identity, and Migration	102
From Othering to Self-Othering	105
Parting Thoughts	107
References	109

Introduction



Abstract This chapter introduces Badagas, an ethnic minority in India, and their general portrayal by scholars. Drawing on literature since the colonial era, it reviews different representations, collectively a social construction of a distinct cultural and ethnic identity category for a specific population and way of life—a popular imagination of a hill tribe in a remote region bound by strong ties to ancient myths and rituals, kinship, and land. Colonists, missionaries, and early intellectuals gave the false appearance of coherence to people in othering and social boundary-making processes, a mindset grounded in European colonial expansion and early anthropology. Later writers uncritically adopted and reinscribed a reified identity through detailed investigations of its defining criteria, and in this way misleading stereotypes have been stamped in the literature over many years. Another aim of the chapter is to pinpoint what is already known about Badagas, as well as gaps in knowledge, to make a case for the empirical research reported in this book which is a multi-sited ethnography of life quality and identities among Badagas in two connected locations, the first online among Internet forum users, and the second in the real world with rural-to-urban migrants in Bangalore.

Keywords Badagas · Identity · Nilgiri Hills · Quality of life

The Nilgiri Hills rise majestically on the plains of South India as a picturesque landscape cloaked by greenish-blue mist and blossoming purple flowers. They are well known to social scientists as the location of over a dozen indigenous communities, which have long been an object of academic attention. Badagas are the numerically largest ethnic minority group. This book is about their experiences as they navigate a society in flux, and the extent to which modernity permeates life. It is a timely update of previous in-depth research on Badagas, and an important case study of the impact of the country's economic and social development on its people. Badagas, like everyone in India, have been experiencing profound changes as new ways of living have become widespread. For example, an increasing number of people are migrating to cities in search of employment, and using technologies such as new media, which are influencing how they live, grounded on broader shifts in Indian society.

The primary concern of my research is an investigation of the life quality and identities of Badagas with reference to rural-to-urban migration and new media. At an empirical level, this monograph unpacks how they understand and embrace life to the full in the twenty-first century. However, it also challenges ways they have been understood and portrayed in the literature. At a theoretical level, then, it charts the historical formation of the identity category, deconstructs epistemological claims about its meaning for a specific population, and rebalances inequalities of representation. Thus the book is a critical appraisal of previous writings combined with fresh thinking about quality of life and the ambiguities and paradoxies of contemporary identities at work.

To set the scene, this chapter introduces Badagas in the Nilgiri Hills and their general portrayal by scholars, to tease out some of the themes and styles which characterise writings. The following sections draw on literature since the colonial era to show how the category ‘Badaga’ is primarily a reified social-political construct advocated by colonists, missionaries, and early intellectuals who gave the false appearance of coherence to people and their identities and quality of life. I also hope to weave an argument more complicated than claiming that it is merely an invention of the British, by analysing its construction by social actors and historical and political processes in India. The following sections also critically discuss the numerous criteria typically used to characterise Badagas, based on assumptions by previous writers that they share a common history and culture, and show the literature does not fully do justice to the diversity of ways people interpret being Badaga; similarly, as the research is also about their quality of life, the chapter delineates its documentation, and reveals it has similarly been shaped by complex historical, political, and social forces. Finally, another aim is to pinpoint what is already known about Badagas, as well as gaps in knowledge, to make a case for the empirical research reported in Chapters “[Badagas Going Digital](#)” and “[Migrants’ Voices](#)”.

Once upon a Time: The Beginnings

The earliest recorded descriptions of the Nilgiri Hills date to the second century BCE in *Srimad Valmiki Ramayana*, an ancient Sanskrit epic poem which narrates the journey of the Hindu Sage Valmiki, and to 1572 and *Os Lusitadas*, an epic poem of Portuguese voyages during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Luís Vaz de Camões (Hockings 2008). Archeological studies in the Nilgiri Hills have produced prehistoric material such as rock art and stone structures, but it is not known if they are connected to the indigenous people (Breeks 1873; Congreve 1847; Zagarell 1997).

The earliest written account of the local population was in 1603 by the Italian Jesuit priest Jacome Ferreira from the Syrian Church of Malabar. He is styled in the literature as the first European to set foot in the Nilgiri Hills while searching for villages of ancient Christians of the St. Thomas Christian community, although his church had previously dispatched others to the hills to collect information about the local people (Whitehouse 1873). Ferreira documented his journey and observa-

tions of people in the hills such as their lifestyles, population sizes, and settlements (Rivers 1906; Whitehouse 1873), the first known account of a topic which does not appear in the literature again until the nineteenth century when adventurers, civil servants, and missionaries in British India published censuses, district gazetteers, reports, and travel writings (Brecks 1873; Francis 1908; Grigg 1880; Thurston and Rangachari 1909). These early representations of Badagas were penned in a style characteristic of colonists and missionaries prior to the development of social science in the twentieth century. Exploration of the New World by Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries meant that strange and exciting cultures began to be reported back in Europe, which fueled a curiosity among intellectuals and the upper classes. Colonialism and missionary activities brought Europeans—who regarded themselves as ‘civilized’, ‘modern’, and ‘advanced’—into contact with people whose appearances, beliefs, customs, and ways of life were regarded as exotic and primitive, based on the premise that indigenous cultures were facing extinction. In this context, people in the Nilgiri Hills were described as separate and peculiar with distinct and striking physical appearances, notions of backward primitive tribes associated with the jungle.

Thus, the category emerged as a social construct out of othering and social boundary-making processes based on ideas and material relations in European colonial expansion and imperialism, a social construction which in part legitimised colonial rule in India as it portrayed the Indian population as in need of being governed. The Indian population was subdivided into different ‘castes’, ‘classes’, ‘races’, and ‘tribes’, an emphasis of marked difference to British writers and each other. As there is disagreement and inconsistency in the literature concerning the categorisation of Badagas as a caste, tribe or other group, and the Nilgiri Hills as a caste or tribal society (Hockings 1968, 1993; Mahias 1997), these terms are used loosely in this monograph only to highlight styles and trends in previous writings (and with no implied meanings such as perceived cultural or economic backwardness). Even so, the opinion that Badagas constitute a caste is central to identity and quality of life. Hockings (1968, 1988, 1993) speculated that Badagas 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 former Mysore region. He also reported that they identified themselves as Backward Class (an official classification conferred by the Indian government), and therefore as ‘culturally superior to, or not as primitive as’ the socially disadvantaged Scheduled Tribes (Kotas, Todas, and Kurumbas) in the Nilgiri Hills. Other distinctions Hockings thought they were aware of included same-caste marriage based on endogamy, the practice of marrying within a specific group; ritual purity and impurity, which forbid intimate relations and marriage with other ethnic groups; dress and tilaka; birth and residence in recognised hamlets (assemblages of villages, each with several hundred inhabitants); and the ability of two people of the same phratry (subcaste) to trace a tentative kinship connection. However, it has also been argued that Badagas did not fit the typical caste model prevalent in South India as their ancestors were migrants and separated from caste society (Hockings 1980a, 1982). While Badagas have been categorised as a caste by some writers, it is a highly contested category as a product of two hundred years

of British domination which made it the central symbol of Indian society (Dirks 2001), and the nuances of the label from Badagas themselves have not been studied. It may no longer convey the sense of community that it once did, but ‘caste’ is still a primary form of local identification for many people in India, and remains a signifier of India’s diverse forms of identities, a core feature of social organization even in serious critique of the concept.

Serious academic research began in the twentieth century onwards. W. H. R. Rivers in 1906 wrote about the kinship and social organization of Todas, now a classic for its novel approach to ethnography which later became standard practice in British social anthropology (Hockings 2008; Rivers 1906). Murray Emeneau and David Mandelbaum conducted seminal works on Kota and Toda languages (Emeneau 1944–46, 1989; Mandelbaum 1941). Like many Indian ethnic groups documented in social science, Badagas also have a classic ethnographer and then followers who take up particular issues. This role was filled by Paul Hockings who conducted doctoral studies on Badagas at the University of California, Berkeley in the 1960s. He devoted a large part of his distinguished career to 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 Hills. However, much of his work including recent books (Hockings 1999, 2013) is based on fieldwork conducted up to the 1990s. Other scholars have published short reports, but Badagas remain neglected in academic literature. Even so, an army of scholars have since marched over the Nilgiri Hills from almost every possible research angle, and a recent innovation has been an interdisciplinary interest—architecture, climate, human geography, and zoology, to name a few foci.

Unfortunately, a great deal of writings are based on old-fashioned notions of small-scale and isolated societies with exotic and traditional lifestyles, and reflect the succession of ideological positions in early social science including evolutionism, diffusionism, and functionalism. Later writers uncritically adopted and reinscribed the reification of coherent identity categories with detailed investigations of stereotypical criteria which they thought differentiated them. These include, for example, community, customs and rituals, economy, folk medicine, history, kinship, language, and religion, markers of similarity and difference which all correspond to and complement one another in a common cultural space. On this basis, authors have tended to separate Badagas in simple and crude 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 1980a, p. 2). In this way, a simplified category (‘Badagas’ or ‘Badaga community’) has been stamped in the literature in the last century, a false appearance of coherence to a body of stereotypical yardsticks that are actually complex and diverse. The next sections of this chapter overview some of these criteria to highlight the ways a distinct identity and quality of life have been portrayed and the limitations. The analysis is also relevant to critically reading writings on other ethnic minorities in the Nilgiris and India.

Migration and Identity

The history of Badagas has been separated from other people in the Nilgiri Hills, although no archeological or historical records have been discovered in support. Writers have stated Badagas did not exist until the arrival and consolidation of various migrant groups in the hills, events which are regarded as their beginnings (Hockings 1980a). Claims they were migrants are based on folk beliefs among Badagas of successive waves of migration in the sixteenth or seventeenth century by people of Vokkaliga castes from the southern plains of the former Mysore region; they were supposedly granted permission to settle in the Nilgiri Hills by Kotas, Kurumbas, and Todas (Benbow 1930; Emeneau 1944–1946; Francis 1908; Grigg 1880; Harkness 1832; Hockings 1980a, 1999; Thurston and Rangachari 1909). A well-cited Kota folk story recounts their meeting with the first migrants who pleaded for land upon arrival in the hills (Belli Gowder 1923–1941; Emeneau 1944–1946; Hockings 1980a). Epic ballads and legends retell stories of the origin and settlement of the migrant community including individuals and families thought to have founded specific villages. Several authors have published analyses of these stories (Benbow 1930; Francis 1908; Thurston and Rangachari 1909; Emeneau 1944–1946; Grigg 1880; Hockings 1980a). Notably, Hockings (1980a, 1988) examined in detail folk stories about intermittent migrations by ancestors of Badagas to shed light on places of origin, sequences of arrival, and formation of kinship and exogamy in newly-established villages, as some legends mention the beginnings of particular family lineages and villages. Other indigenous groups in the Nilgiri Hills have been described as having different origin myths about their creation locally by gods (Emeneau 1944–1946).

Some authors have attempted to date and explain the establishment of the Badaga community, although there have been accounts of several waves of migrations for different reasons (Belli Gowder 1938–1941; Emeneau 1944–1946; Harkness 1832; Hockings 1980a; Ward 1821). As some legends describe people fleeing Muslim soldiers, it has been reasoned the ancestors of Badagas departed their homeland due to political turmoil and oppression, for example during the invasion of Malik Kafur (Belli Gowder 1938–41) or The Battle of Talikota and subsequent destruction of the Vijayanagara Empire (Belli Gowder 1923–1941; Emeneau 1944–1946; Hockings 1980a, 1999). Some historians believe Muslim horsemen extorted money and goods from people after the fall of Vijayanagara, alongside robberies and plundering operations by gangs of warlords, events which concur with those retold in Badaga folklore. Kota folklore also claims Badagas fled to the Nilgiri Hills ‘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 1944–1946, p. 257; Hockings 1999, p. 28). Badaga folklore claims the first village established in the Nilgiri Hills was Tuneri; and the first settler became the head of the Badaga community, a hereditary position subsequently passed patrilineally from father to son. Hockings (1999) estimated the date of Tuneri’s origin using family records (dates of birth) of previous headmen. As the incumbent headman at the time of his study was able to name nineteen generations of his family, Hockings counted back