

# *Trends in Linguistics*

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## *Counsel from the Ancients*

*A Study of Badaga Proverbs,  
Prayers, Omens and Curses*

*Paul Hockings*

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# Counsel from the Ancients

A Study of Badaga Proverbs,  
Prayers, Omens and Curses

*by*

Paul Hockings

with an outline of  
the Badaga language

*by*

Christiane Pilot-Raichoor



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## Abbreviations & Symbols

ABL	ablative	GEN	genitive
ACC	accusative	gm.	gram
adj.	adjectival	ha.	hectare
Adj.P.	adjectival participle	HF	husband's father
Adv.P.	adverbial participle	HM	husband's mother
App.	Appendix	HORT	hortative
Ar.	Arabic	HYP	hypothetical
Bk.	Book	idem.	the same, as cited before
BW	brother's wife	i.e.	id est, that is
C	consonant	IMPER	imperative
CAUS	causative	inc.	inclusive
c.c.	cubic centimetre	ins.	inches
cf.	confer, compare with, cross-reference with another item	INTERR	interrogative
Ch.	Chapter	intrans.	intransitive
cm.	centimetres	Kan.	Kannada, Canarese
cu.	cubic	km.	kilometres
DAT	dative	Lat.	Latin
DBIA	Emeneau & Burrow 1962 (cf. Bibliography)	lit.	literally
DEDR	Burrow & Emeneau 1984	LOC	locative
DH	daughter's husband	M	masculine
DOUBT	dubitative particle	m.	morpheme
eB	elder brother	Mal.	Malayalam
eBW	elder brother's wife	Matt.	St. Matthew's Gospel
E.g.	exempli gratia, for example	MB	mother's brother
EMPH	emphatic, emphasis	Mod.	modifier
Eng.	English	Mt.	Mount
et al.	et aliis, and by others	N	neuter
etc.	et cetera, & other things	N.B.	nota bene, note well
ex.	exclusive	n.d.	no date of publication
eZ	elder sister	NEG	negative
F	feminine	Neg.P.	negative participle
Fig.	Figure	no.	number
fig.	figuratively	nom.	nominal, substantive
Fr.	French	NOM	nominative
frontis.	frontispiece	Ob.	object
FZ	father's sister	OBLIG	obligative
		OPT	optative
		orig.	originally published
		ODD	Onions 1955 (cf. Biblio-

	graphy)	trans.	translation, translated
p.	page	trans. vb.	transitive verb
Pers.	Persian	V	vowel
pers.	person	vb.	verb
pl.	plural	V.D.	venereal disease
Port.	Portuguese	vs.	versus, as against
PP	past participle	WB	wife's brother
pp.	pages	WM	wife's mother
Pr.	present	yB	younger brother
Prov.	Book of Proverbs	yZ	younger sister
Pr.P	present participle	ZH	sister's husband
pt.	part	911a	number of a cliché in this corpus
q.v.	quod vide, which see	>	becomes
RHCHP	Revolutionary Health committee of Hunan Province	<	is derived from
S	subject	:	long vowel phoneme
sb.	substantive, nominal	«»	ethnographic and lin- guistic notes
sec.	section	*	hypothetical recons- truction
sg.	singular	*	space between words or morphemes
Skt.	Sanskrit	/	allomorph, variant form of a word
spp.	various species		
SW	son's wife		
Ta.	Tamil		
	/ /		phonemic transcription

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## Part 1

### The Badagas and their Oral Literature

#### *Synopsis*

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#### 1.1 The Badagas

The word *Baḍaga* has four distinct meanings in South Indian ethnography: (1) a general term ("northerner") in Kannada for Telugu-speaking invaders of Southern India during the Middle Ages, who harassed St. Francis Xavier and his Christian converts. They have no connection with (2) Baḍaga, or more correctly Baḍugu, a Dravidian language spoken only by the Baḍagas of the Nilgiri Hills. It is now a distinct language, but was derived from 16th Century Kannada (or Canarese). Today it contains many words of English and Tamil origin, as well as many from Sanskrit. Although the language

has an extensive oral literature of plays and ballads, as well as the hundreds of proverbs, prayers etc. that are included in the present corpus, it was never a written language. (3) Its speakers, the Badagas, once inaccurately called Burghers, are the largest indigenous community in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamilnadu State (formerly Madras) in Southern India. They number at least 125,000 today. Their name ("northerner") was given because they migrated from the plains of Mysore District, just to the north of the Nilgiri Hills, in the decades following the Muslim invasion that destroyed the great Hindu empire of Vijayanagar in 1565 A.D. (4) Badaga is also a common name for the Gaudas, who are by far the largest phratry in this community.

### *1.1.1 Subsistence*

As a community of refugees the early Badagas (i.e. 3°-4° above) had to cut their farmsteads out of the Nilgiri forests. They continued some slash-and-burn cultivation there until the eighteen-seventies. In general they use fields around the villages, practise mixed farming of millets, barley, wheat and a variety of European vegetables, two of which--the potato and cabbage--have now assumed major commercial importance. Badaga farmers have no irrigation, but rely on the rainfall of two regular monsoon seasons. During this century they have gradually shifted from subsistence farming of traditional grains to cash-crop farming of potatoes and cabbages. After several seasons of disease, the potatoes were recently superceded by numerous small plantations of tea (which was first introduced here by the British in 1835).

Badagas also have herds of buffalo and cows for dairy purposes, less numerous than in the past, and never kept for meat even though most people are not vegetarians. Poultry are commonly kept, and ponies occasionally, but not sheep, goats, donkeys or elephants.

### *1.1.2 Economic Exchange*

This community is well-known in anthropological literature for its complex symbiosis with the Toda, Kota and Kurumba tribes of the Nilgiris. We may note that some Badaga villages also maintain exchange relations with the Irulas, Uralis, Panyas and Chettis of the surrounding slopes (Hockings 1980a: 99-133).

The closest ties are with the seven nearby villages of the Kotas. Until 1930 every Badaga family had a Kota associate who provided a band of musicians whenever there was a wedding or funeral in

hat family; and who regularly furnished the Badagas with pottery, carpentry, thatching, and most leather and metal items. In return or being Jack-of-all-trades to the Badagas (who had no specialized craftsmen in their own community), the Kotas were supplied with cloth and a portion of the annual harvest by their Badaga associates.

The Todas, a vegetarian people, were the only group in the Hills whom the Badagas were willing to accept as near-equals. The two communities used to exchange buffaloes and attend each others' ceremonies. Some Todas still supply their associates with baskets and other jungle-grown produce, as well as clarified butter (ghee). In return the Badagas give a portion of their harvest. Since 1930 the relationship has become attenuated, as with the Kotas, largely because the Badaga population has increased out of all proportion to the Todas and Kotas; but also because it is distinctly more modernized than they.

The Kurumbas are a tribe of jungle gatherers, gardeners and sorcerers on the Nilgiri slopes. Each Badaga village has a "watchman", a Kurumba employed to protect them from the sorcery of other Kurumbas. He also takes part in some Badaga ceremonies as an auxiliary priest, and supplies his Badaga friends with baskets, jats, honey and other jungle products. The Badaga headman levies for him a fixed quantity of grain from each household in the village.

Irulas and Uralis are thought to be sorcerers like the Kurumbas, but less effective ones, and are treated similarly. Some Chettis are itinerant traders who sell knick-knacks on a fixed circuit of Badaga villages once a month. They also have minor ceremonial connections with the Badagas. Panyas are agrestic serfs on the land of certain Badagas and Chettis who inhabit the Wainad Plateau directly west of the Nilgiris proper.

### 1.1.3 Villages

The settlements, usually of no more than several hundred people, consist of parallel rows of stone or brick houses with tiled roofs. They lie along the slope of a hill on its leeward side, for protection from the westerly monsoon (Fig. 1). The fields spread out all around. Up to a half-dozen temples and shrines for different Hindu gods are to be found in each village. Modern villages have piped water to communal taps, but not long ago the water supply was a nearby stream or at best a channel running into the village from a stream.

One other universal feature is a village green, important as a council place, playground, danceground, funeral place, and general grazing area for the calves.

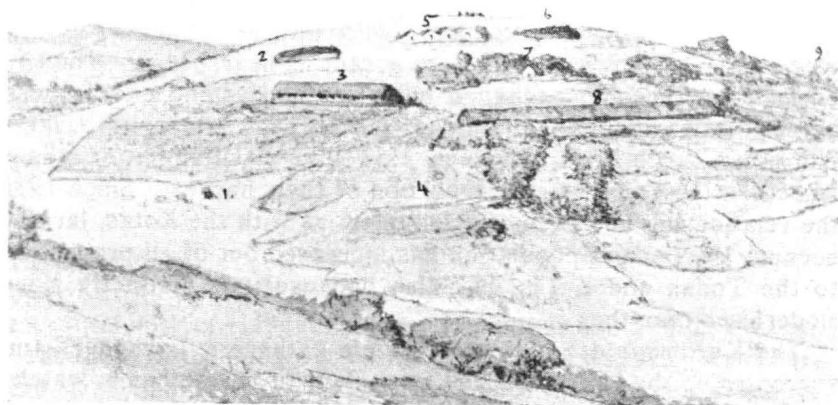


Fig.1 *Badaga Village of Me:l Ke:ri (Merkari)*, 10 km. south of Ootacamund, as drawn in 1875 by Jagor (1914: Pl. 2). His key: 3 and 8 two rows of houses; 2 and 6 buffalo-stalls; 5 cow-stalls with reed roofing; (cf. our Fig. 24); 7 dairy; 4 fields; 1 watchman's hut; 9 stone plinth, 60 cm. high and 150 cm. wide, with a eucalyptus as "sacred tree"

#### 1.1.4 Political Organization

Traditionally Badagas lived in what anthropologists call a chiefdom, and they are still under a paramount chief. This is a hereditary position always held by the headman of Tu:ne:ri village. Below him are four regional headmen, each in charge of all Badaga and Kota villages within one quarter (*na:du*) of the Nilgiri Plateau. At the most local level a village has its own headman, and several neighbouring villages (any number up to 33) constitute a commune. That commune takes its name from its leading village; its headman is also the commune headman.

The Badaga council system still has some influence, although its juridical authority has been greatly undermined by modern law-courts and the Indian legal system. Each headman has his own council, made up in the case of communes by the constituent village headmen; the regional council is made up of the commune headmen; and the paramount chief's council, rarely called together, consists of all the headmen from all levels.

The legal procedure requires that a dispute or crime be considered first by the hamlet council--the headman's judgement being final--but that a decision can be appealed up the hierarchy of councils. Major land disputes and cases of murder would formerly be brought to the paramount chief after consideration by councils at a lower level. In early times the headmen could dictate severe punishments, including ostracism and hanging. Today the headmen are mainly involved in small disputes and in ceremonial duties.

### *1.1.5 Social Organization*

The community is divided into a number of phratries. It is not correct to call these units subcastes, for they are not altogether endogamous and they have no forms of occupational specialization. They are however like subcastes in forming a hierarchy, with the conservative Lingayat group, the Wodeyas, at the top and the headmen's official servants, the Toreyas, at the bottom. Between these two extremes there are one phratry of vegetarians and three others of meat-eaters. The Christian Badagas, started by the first Protestant conversion in 1858, now constitute a separate meat-eating phratry ranked below the Toreyas but respected for its progressive habits.

Each phratry is made up of several exogamous clans: two each in the case of Toreyas, Bedas and Kumbharas, three in the case of Wodeyas, and rather more in the other cases.

### *1.1.6 Marriage Rules*

Every Badaga village belongs to one particular clan or another and hence is exogamous: at marriage a bride has to leave her natal village and move to her husband's. Beyond this the Badagas have what are, for Hindus, some unusual regulations. Most remarkable perhaps is that hypogamy is as acceptable as hypergamy: marriages may occur between couples coming from certain clans of differential status, yet in these cases it does not matter whether the groom is from the higher or the lower clan.

Polygyny is acceptable, though not nearly as common as monogamy. In an extreme case a man had five wives. Divorce and remarriage are easy for men, even for women, and are acceptable practices. Widows can remarry without adverse comment in this society.

Although a dowry has become a requirement during the past few years, it is not a traditional part of the Badaga marriage arrangements. Instead a bridewealth of up to 200 Rupees was, and still is, paid by the groom's family. This sum does not purchase the girl but is payment for the ornaments she brings with her to the wedding, and hence has increased over the years with the price of gold.

The favoured marriage partner is a cross-cousin, and preferably a father's sister's daughter, or else a mother's brother's daughter. But other more distant relatives are acceptable, provided that they belong to the appropriate clan. Generation level is recognized as a distinguishing feature of men alone, and women may change their generation levels as they perhaps marry successive husbands belonging to different generations. It is even theoretically possible for a man to marry a woman and her daughter and granddaughter simultaneously, provided he does not thereby marry his own offspring. All three wives would thus attain the generation-level of their co-husband. Gerontogamy--old men taking young wives--is not at all uncommon (Hockings 1982).

### 1.1.7 Religion

Except for perhaps 2,500 Christians (Protestants and Roman Catholics in similar proportions), all Badagas are Hindus of the Shaivite persuasion. A sizeable minority are however of the Lingayat sect, which is almost confined to Karnataka State (formerly Mysore). This was a medieval sect which took Śiva as the only deity for them, and which still worships Him through a phallic symbol, the *linga* (Fig. 18). Among Badagas the sect is represented in the entire membership of several clans, namely Adikiri, Kaṇakka, Kongaru, and the three which make up the Wodeya phratry.

The Hindu Badagas, including these Lingayat clans, worship quite a number of gods, all of which are sometimes explained as "aspects" of Śiva. These include Mahalinga and Ma:riamma (the smallpox goddess), together with many deities unknown outside the Badaga community, among them the ancestral Hiriodea and his consort Hette. Each village celebrates about a dozen festivals during the year. The most important are Doḍḍa Habba ("Great Festival") which begins the agricultural year in November, and De:va Habba ("God Festival") which celebrates the harvest in July. Ma:ri Habba is intended to keep smallpox away for the year, and is celebrated in a few villages by a fire-walking ceremony in which the devotees walk unscathed across glowing charcoal with no protection for their feet.

As in all societies, certain transitions in life are marked by ceremonial. For Badagas these events are the naming, the first tonsure, the first milking of a cow (boys only), the wedding and the funeral. On rare occasions each Badaga commune used to hold a huge memorial ceremony (*manemale*) in honour of a whole generation of the dead, once the last member of it had passed away. This was last performed in 1936.

### 1.1.8 Social Change

For many years now the Badagas have been adapting to their own use certain alien customs and techniques. Nowhere is this more so than in agriculture, where crops of European origin are now grown on machine-made terraces with the help of chemical fertilizers, lorry transport, improved seed, and even crop insurance; and in the tea plantations, which must maintain standards necessary to ensure that the leaf can find its way into world markets.

Such progressive attitudes mark the Badagas as an unusually successful farming community. Population figures from the official censuses bear out this success: in 1812 there were reportedly only 2,207 Badagas; by 1901 there were 34,178; today there are at least 125,000. By developing intensive cash-crop cultivation they have managed to accommodate this greatly increased labour force and improve their standard of living. There is now a sizeable middle class living in the four main British-built towns on the Plateau, and the community can boast several thousand college graduates. Badaga doctors, lawyers, teachers and government officials are very plentiful, and there are also a few professors, agronomists and politicians. A remarkable fact is that fathers have so often been willing to invest the profits from cultivation or labour contracting in college education for their sons. Badagas, although still largely a rural population, today have as high a rate of literacy (in Tamil and English) as does Madras City. A few households can boast imported videotape players.



## 1.2 Their Literature

### 1.2.1 Bibliography

The published literature in the Badaga language is miniscule in extent and largely the work of the Basel Evangelical missionaries, mainly Germans, who were the first to show interest in this community. What follows is the *complete bibliography* of those publications, arranged roughly in chronological order. Those items marked with an asterisk (\*) have been incorporated into the present volume.

Bühler, Johann Michael

- \* 1849 Ueber das Volk und die Sprache der Badaga im Dekkanischen Indien, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 3: 108-118.
- \* 1851 Badaga Gebet über einen Todten, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 5: 385-390.
- \* 1853 100 Badaga Sprüchwörter, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 7: 381-389.

Luke, (Saint)

- 1852 *The Gospel of Saint Luke* [in Badaga; the first book to be printed in this language; George James Casamajor, Eberhardt Gottlieb Carl Mörike, and K. Konga, trans.] Mangalore: Basel Mission Press; 233 pp.
- 1890 *Anga kartāg' ibba Yēsu Kristana o! ēya suddiya pastuka, Lūkā baredaddu.* (Second edition of Luke 1852; trans. revised by Christian Wilhelm Lütze et al.) Mangalore: Basel Mission Press; 128 pp.

Metz, Johann Friedrich

- 1873 *Specimens of S. Indian Dialects being Translations of the Parable of the Sower, etc. St. Matth. XIII., 1-34.) Collected by A.C. Burnell. No. 6. In the Dialect of Canarese Spoken by the Badagas of the Nilagiri Hills.* (Arthur Coke Burnell, ed.) Mangalore: Basel Mission Press; 10 pp.

Natesa Sastri, Sangendi Mahalinga

- \* 1892 The Badagas of the Nilagiri District, *Madras Christian College Magazine* 9: 753-64, 830-43 [includes prayers].

Kanaka, Jacob

- 1886 *A Song about the Daughter of Zion or the Pilgrimage of Christiana Founded on Pilgrim's Progress, II. Part Composed by J. Kanaka Catchist, B.M.S. Kotargiri.* [Christian songs in Badaga] Ootacamund: Church Missionary Society; 30 pp. (Second edition, 1894)