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Placing Indigeneity

Betta Kurumba Narratives of Territory and Clan Structure

The Betta Kurumbas are one of more than sixteen indigenous groups of the Nilgiri-Wayanad hills of southern India, a region that, since the nineteenth century, has experienced wide-ranging cultural and political changes, including extensive immigration by people from other parts of India. This article describes the Betta Kurumbas' view of their homeland, based on the information contained in native-language narratives in which they describe their social organization into clans and their spiritual beliefs. The narratives provide a glimpse into the Betta Kurumba perspective on the changes that have overrun the region, changes that have rendered them—along with other Nilgiri-Wayanad groups—politically and socially marginalized in their own homeland.

KEYWORDS: indigenous groups—Nilgiris—Wayanad—Kurumbas

see also, in the same 2014 issue: Bird-David on Katunayaka, Demmer on Jenu Kurumba, Heidemann on Badaga, Wolf on Kota, and both Hockings and Wolf & Heidemann on indigeneity

THE APPLICABILITY of the term “indigenous” to ethnic groups in India that were previously called *ādivāsī* or “tribal” has been discussed in several publications in recent years (for example, KARLSSON and SUBBA’s 2006 anthology), and it is clear from these discussions that all three terms are highly problematic because there is no clear-cut and consistent set of criteria that serves to distinguish those groups who claim to be indigenous from those that are not so designated. However, several of these authors also point out that these terms are out there, in use, and are not about to go away. Moreover, the terms are in use not because they are the most appropriate descriptors of these groups, but because they serve the purpose of marking off certain sections of Indian society. For various social and historical reasons these sections were distinguished from the “cultural mainstream,” however spurious the criteria used to make the distinction. Of the three terms, “indigenous” in particular is embraced by activists because it has international resonance and because, as KARLSSON and SUBBA point out, a “wide range of rights and safeguards are attached to this internationally recognized status, above all the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination” (2006, 8). They go on to quote Niezen’s observation that “the importance of self-determination is that it represents control of land, resources, and livelihood ... an opportunity to redress systemic injustice in state judicial systems ... [and] new opportunities to express culture and language without the expectation that these will be systematically maligned, suppressed, and extinguished by state-sponsored programs” (Niezen 2003, 188, cited in KARLSSON and SUBBA 2006, 8). The term “indigenous” is therefore used by groups to identify themselves as people who once had control over land, resources, and livelihood in a particular region and who possessed a sufficiently distinct culture and language, but who in recent times have been deprived of that control and that opportunity for cultural expression by groups designated as non-indigenous.

As BÉTELLE (2006) points out, the growing tendency in India by people who use these terms is to treat all the Scheduled Tribes as indigenous people, although some of these tribes may have settled in their current homeland after the non-tribals in the area. This, of course, raises doubts about the validity of the term in the Indian context; however, if, as XAXA (1999, 3592) suggests, a distinction is made between “settlement in the context of country (India being the reference point

here) as a whole and settlement within its parts or regions,” it is possible to identify certain regions within India where the boundary between the indigenous and the non-indigenous is fairly clear. This is the case with areas within the country that have been relatively isolated from their immediate surroundings, typically because of geographical barriers, and in which a set of ethnic groups have had control over land resources and the opportunity to develop languages and cultures independently of neighboring ethnic groups. These regions have experienced a wave of migration from new settlers during the last two centuries—typically as a result of British colonialism—and have been marginalized by these new settlers. In this case, it seems to me that a fairly clear distinction can be made between the older groups (who may even have migrated there in the first place) and the recent settlers.

This article focuses on an indigenous group in a region such as this—the Betta Kurumbas of the Nilgiri-Wayanad hills in southern India. This region contains more than sixteen groups (Todas, Badagas, Kotas, various Kurumba groups, various Irula groups, Paniyas, Cettiars, and possibly several more)¹ who lived for a long time in relative isolation from the surrounding lowlands of the Deccan Plateau and the coastal plains of peninsular India. These groups did have some contact with the people of the lowlands, as pointed out by ZAGARELL (1994), who discussed evidence of brief army incursions and taxation at the hands of neighboring rulers, as well as contact for trade. However, the influence of lowland cultures on that of the Nilgiri groups was very limited, and the people in the Nilgiris remained autonomous enough to develop individual languages and separate ethnic group identities. This isolation ended in the nineteenth century, after the British established towns as well as tea, coffee, rubber, and teak plantations in the region, setting off a steady stream of immigration into the Nilgiris by people from other parts of India. The prior inhabitants have become marginalized, some of them dispossessed of lands to which they once had free access, and subordinate to the language and culture of the newcomers (for example, see HOCKINGS 1989; 1997; and 2012 for descriptions of the social history of the Nilgiris and anthropological descriptions of some of its inhabitants). They therefore have good reason to claim special status as indigenous groups, while those who immigrated from the nineteenth century onwards can, in contrast, be identified as “recent settlers.” At present, the recent settlers consist of a few surviving British and a mixed set of people from northern and southern India. Some have lived in the region for several generations and identify themselves as “belonging” to the Nilgiri-Wayanad region, and some have settled there very recently.

My goal in this article is not to debate the applicability of the term “indigenous” to the Betta Kurumbas, but to look at how their long habitation in the region may have resulted in traits in their culture that can be said to characterize them as an indigenous group. As the vast literature on indigenous groups amply demonstrates, claims to indigenous status generally rest upon three factors: intimate connections to soil and territory arising from long inhabitancy in the region, a distinct culture also developed as a result of the length of inhabitancy, and a sense that later settlers, by virtue of their dominance, have infringed on these territorial connections and freedom to practice their culture. I shall, therefore, explore these themes

as they present themselves in a set of descriptive narratives that I gathered from the Betta Kurumbas during my linguistic fieldwork with them. The narratives describe aspects of their social organization and spiritual belief system, both of which reveal close connections to the land and their physical environment. This sense of being anchored in the land and the connection between spiritual beliefs and land is, of course, prevalent in cultures across the world and is discussed in the vast literature about the indigenous people of various parts of the world and in descriptions of rural communities (for example, LAN's 1985 work on the Shona of Zimbabwe, or DANIEL's 1984 discussion of Kallapur village in Tamil Nadu). These themes have also been explored in the large body of work by numerous scholars working on different indigenous groups of the Nilgiris (for example, in the publications cited in the course of this article).

The narratives discussed here consist of fairly free-ranging responses to my questions about issues I wanted to know about and were not made with any explicit goal of asserting a special position for the Betta Kurumbas as an indigenous group. However, they are a window into the view that Betta Kurumbas have of themselves, the other communities in the region, and the land they have long inhabited. The description of Betta Kurumba cultural traditions in this article is restricted in scope to those Betta Kurumbas who live in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, since this is the section where I carried out my linguistic research. The speakers in these narratives were Maadën, Krishna, and Bummën, the last of whom I will refer to as Ajjën ("grandfather") because of his seniority. All three narrators are male. Additional information was supplied by my female linguistic consultants, Bommi and her daughter-in-law, Baḍsi.² The speakers came from different generations: Ajjën, who was head of his clan, was approximately sixty years old at the time his narratives were recorded; regrettably, he died in 2010. Maadën, Krishna, and Bommi are over fifty years old, and Krishna is head of his clan. Baḍsi is over twenty, and as one would expect, knew little of the tales of the past that are narrated by my other, older consultants. All of them live in Betta Kurumba hamlets situated in Theppakadu, a tourist reception point in Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. Since I myself belong to the group of recent settlers (in the sense specified above) in the Nilgiris, these narratives are to some extent a dialogue between the indigenous people and the recent settlers. My family has been in the Nilgiris for three generations, and my childhood home was in Gudalur, a town fourteen kilometers from Theppakadu. My family is, therefore, well-known to the Betta Kurumbas in this locality.

THE BETTA KURUMBA HOMELAND

The Betta Kurumbas conceive of their homeland as the area encompassing the whole of Wayanad district in Kerala and portions of those districts that adjoin Wayanad district, namely Mallapuram district in Kerala, Coorg and Mysore districts in Karnataka, and Nilgiri district in Tamil Nadu. The rest of the Western Ghats is not considered a part of their land. The Betta Kurumbas ascribe the

establishment of their homeland to three brothers, Neerdajjën, Saambaļajjën, and Paṭṭaļkaadn,³ who settled in the region and formed three phratries (*ëyli*) called *ëëltari*, *muurtari*, and *ëydëyli/ëydeli* respectively. The son of Neerdajjën founded a fourth phratry called *muurëyli/muureli*, and the descendants of all four subsequently founded various patrilineal clans (*muupë*) within each phratry. Two more phratries, *baaļëyli/baaļeli* and *terëvëyli/terëveli*, were formed by including two people from other local communities, a *koomaggi* (“Kota man”) and a person from a low-caste community that my consultants could not recall.⁴ The founders assigned territories (*tëttë*) to the different clans. Maadën, the narrator of the first passage below, describes the eldest brother’s formation of his phratry as a journey through the land, founding a set of clans (*saagodkiiri*, and so on) that were joined together to form the phratry *ëëltarëyli*, also called *ëëltarmuupë*. (In all examples, the notation “...” indicates that one or more phrases or sentences of the original narrative have been omitted due to space constraints; square brackets indicate words I have added to improve how the sentence sounds in English, and parentheses indicate my explanatory comments; for the Betta Kurumba texts that correspond to the translations in the examples in this article, refer to the Appendix that appears after the References section).

(1) Then there—they call it *karigod-tëttë* and *munmel-tëttë*, eh?—forming clans there, he joined it to *saagodkiiri*. From *saagodkiiri*, he went to *mëridkiiri*. From *mëridkiiri* ... to *yaanparkiiri*. Descending from *yaanparkiiri*, he left and went. Where did he go? Going to *mëridkiiri*, like that [to] *yaanparkiiri*, then below that itself, *ermatkiiri*, then *yaanalkiiri*, then like that forming clans in front, where did he go? He went to *ëḍmelkiiri*. Having gone to *ëḍmelkiiri*, he turned upwards. Having gone to *ëḍmelkiiri*, he turned upwards. Turning upward, up to where did he come? *komjerkiiri*, *sinkiidkiiri*, he came like this. Having come, where did he go? Once more, he reached *saagodkiiri*. Having reached *saagodkiiri*, in that manner *peelajënmuupë* [was formed].... Like that, ending now with *ëttoodnmuupë*, he organized them into *ëëltarmuupë*.

The Betta Kurumba homeland is, therefore, organized into numerous clan territories, each of which belongs to a specific clan (*muupë*). The boundaries of these *tëttë* are typically marked by rivers or streams. Some are well known and large rivers, but other boundary markers may consist of small streams that are hardly known to recent settlers, but which are significant to the Betta Kurumbas. In each *tëttë*, there are one or more hamlets (*mëtiri*), in which a group of families build houses (previously made of bamboo and grass) surrounding a central community hall (*ambali*). The Betta Kurumbas are free to move from one *mëtiri* to another, and the hamlets, although they consist primarily of kinsfolk, are not restricted exclusively for the use of one family. Although the *mëtiri* are in fixed locations now, the Betta Kurumbas moved their *mëtiri* frequently during the British era because their work for the British consisted of clearing forest land to establish teak plantations, and at the same time they cultivated ragi (a millet) for themselves in the space between the teak saplings. In the second passage below, Ajjën expressed

nostalgia for that time and disappointment that their freedom to change the location of their *mētiri* is now curtailed:

(2) If you ask what [we did] in those days, now, now this is a *kaadē* (a cultivated area). In this *kaadē*, we would make a house this year. Then the next year, if a [teak] plantation is formed there, pulling down this house, we would make a house in that *kaadē*. It was like that in those days.... Now it is not so. Since we have nothing, [we are] in one place only.... Where do we have [a place] now? Where do we have land now?

It is possible that in the lifestyle they had before the British recruited them for forest work, any shift in location of their *mētiri* was done within the confines of their *tētṭē*. However, the Betta Kurumbas are not currently restricted to living in their clan territories—people move to other areas in search of work or because much of their homeland is now under the control of private landowners and the government. No matter where they live, their ethnic identification with their *tētṭē* plays a crucial role in their religious rituals and their conception of their spiritual world (described further below). Furthermore, the primacy of the clan over its traditional territory is still maintained in the form of the annual planting ritual: Betta Kurumbas are not allowed to plant crops unless the headman of the clan on whose clan territory they reside conducts a ritual in which he plants five pumpkin seeds and checks to see if the seeds have sprouted. If the seeds sprout, the others may commence planting. If they do not sprout, it indicates a malaise in the community and a ritual must be conducted to ask the ancestral spirits and deities for the cause of the problem.

A *tētṭē* also has one or more sacred places in each of which resides a specific deity. Some of these sacred places are in remote areas in forests, near mountain peaks, or within streams, and often consist of a rock or a *gungallē* (a “grinding stone”), in the form of which a deity has manifested itself (the verb used to describe this is *oḍmuri/oḍmuyri*, to “emerge from the earth”). Thus, to the Betta Kurumbas, while most of the rocks in the region are just ordinary ones, some of them could turn out to be the emergence of a deity from the earth. When it happened in their ancestors’ time, such an event would take them by surprise, as it does in the following third narrative, in which a grinding stone carried by travelers unexpectedly speaks with the voice of the female deity, Mariamma. The place name Kargudy in this example refers to a locality within the Mudumalai Sanctuary, where there is a temple dedicated to Mariamma:

(3) It got the name Kargudy. It’s a *gungallē*, a stone for grinding chillies. For that, we ... like this, those people who sleep here and there (that is, wanderers) used to go grinding chilly. They wouldn’t leave the *gungallē* anywhere. Sleeping now in this town, tying it in a bundle, they would take it with them. Going and sleeping in another village, they would take it and grind *kaarē* (masala). Doing that, they brought it from Huntur up to here without leaving it anywhere. Having come to Kargudy, they ground some *kaarē*.... In the morning, having eaten their meal, they set off. This *gungallē* was left behind.... Having left the *gungallē*,

they went part of the way. Having gone, checking in that bundle, checking in this bundle, it wasn't there—when holding the bundles and checking. [Saying] “Oh! The *gungallë* is left behind. Let us walk [back]. Let us bring it,” some of the people came back there. When they came and looked, the *gungallë* was there. Kargudy Mariamma spoke [from it]: “Don't touch me from now on. Go! Come back once a year.” That is why Kargudy—because [the stone] was used for grinding chilly, she is called Kargudy Mariamma.

Other sacred places are situated within the limits of some town. These are frequented by other communities as well, and have temples of varying size depending on how important the temple is to the townspeople. For example, Gudalur, a town with a sizable population on the western side of the Nilgiris, close to Wayanad district in Kerala, has a big temple whose management has been taken over by the Tamil Nadu government, while smaller temples occur in smaller villages like Masinagudy, Theppakadu, and Bokkapur (see below for more on this). Not all the temples situated on their homeland are viewed by the Betta Kurumbas as places in which they can worship. “Their” temples are ones in which specifically their deities are located. They distance themselves from any other temple that may be situated in the region, presenting the avoidance as an injunction from their own deity, who will get jealous if pooja is offered to the deities of other communities:

(4) Our deity won't allow it. She will get angry. “Having forgotten me, you are doing pooja for that one? You are offering coconut and burning incense!” she will say. “You don't do it for me! [Then] why are you doing it for that one? From now on ... remain with that one,” she will say ... then difficulties will arise.

None of the temples that the Betta Kurumbas hold sacred have been built by the Betta Kurumbas themselves, nor are they allowed by their own customs to conduct any ritual in them—they can only ask the temple priest to perform a pooja on their behalf. The temple priests come from various communities, depending on the location of the temple and its history. Kasavas and Cheṭṭiars serve in the temples in Nilgiris district (but a Tamilian in the case of the temple in Gudalur) and Muḷḷu Kurumbas for many of the temples in Wayanad district. The Betta Kurumbas, however, assert their primacy in the area by claiming that the deity of at least some of these temples was first discovered by them, as in the following statement by Ajjën about the temple in Bokkapur, at which the priest is a Kasava:

(5) For Bokkapur Mariamma, in those days, the ones who discovered her were us, Kurumbas. Whom? Bokkapur Mariamma—the ones who discovered her in those days were us. It was not the Kasavas. Not the Kasavas. She is a deity who appeared in our, my ancestor's time. In our [clan] land, my ancestors were the ones who were worshipping that deity. Causing that deity to be worshipped—it is a stone, a *gungallë*.

THE LAND AND BETTA KURUMBA SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

The Betta Kurumba vision of their homeland as divided into clan territories extends into their conception of the spiritual world. When a person dies, the body is buried as soon as possible after death, but after a certain waiting period of preferably nine days, but possibly more, a ceremony called a *binji* (further described below) is held, in which the ancestral spirits and deities are summoned and asked to escort the dead person's spirit to the relevant *tētṭē*, where the spirit must remain henceforth. The living may travel around, but the spirits of the dead are confined to their *tētṭē*, as explained in passage 6, below, where Krishna, who does not live in his own clan territory, Benne, says that upon his death, his spirit will have to return to Benne:⁵

(6) If I die here, if they do the *binji* here, when they do the *binji*—my *ēyli* is at Benne—I have to go there. [My living relatives] have to give me into the hands of the ancestral spirits who live there. I have to remain there. Having gone there, it is forbidden for me to come and be here. They will send me there in this *binji*, when I die.... Then, there is no place for me here. No seat in this clan. Having gone there, I have to remain. Only [my] children can be here.

Once the dead person's spirit is safely sent off to his territory, the spirit will interact with the living only when summoned through a chant during a *binji* organized by his kin. But if the spirit has not been successfully sent to the clan territory, it will wander around in despair, troubling the people in the place where the person died. Thus a *tētṭē* in the Betta Kurumba cosmos is peopled not only with the living, but also with the spirits of every ancestor going back to the first founders. Harmony among the living requires that the spirits too maintain their clan structure, remain in their designated *tētṭē*, and from the spirit world, extend their protection to the living. The ancestral spirits form an extended family, by which family relationships in life are kept intact even after death and continue to have an impact on the living. Ancient relationships between the ancestral spirits are believed to affect their descendants in the here and now. For example, Krishna narrated a legend to me about a man from the *yaanpar* clan who murdered his wife from the *erkoṭ* clan at a river in Benne. He described the murder as affecting the place where it was done (the water, water plants, fish, and crabs turned bitter) and as the cause of problems even today between the two clans—the problems have to be sorted out through dialogue with the spirits during a *binji*.

The *binji* is a night-long ritual in which men designated as *binjkaḷṇḍē* (spirit-summoner, shaman) sing a chant to summon the spirits of the ancestors as well as the Betta Kurumba deities. The *binjkaḷṇḍē* is assisted by the cries of other men calling upon the spirits to come, and by songs sung by the women. The spirit, after some persuasion, comes from his or her *tētṭē*, possesses one of the men present, and speaks through that person. The *binji* is very much like the spirit possession rituals conducted by the Kaṭṭunayakas/Jenu Kurumbas (hereon referred to as Kaṭṭunayakas), and which are described by BIRD-DAVID (1990; 1996; 2012) and

DEMMEER (1997; 2001; 2012). In these rituals, the living engage in a dialogue with the ancestors and deities during which they make requests, argue, joke, criticize, and in general maintain communication with their extended family of supernatural beings. The authors point out, however, that the Kattunayakas are not organized into a clan structure and, according to Bird-David (personal communication 2011), the spirits are thus called upon in unison and in no particular order—they come because of a mutual “sharing” relationship that they have with the living. The Betta Kurumbas, on the other hand, are organized into clans with clan territories, and this social organization influences the structure of the *binji* and the nature of their interaction with the supernatural. All the ancestors of the *binji* sponsor (the person who asks for the *binji* to be held) are called in order, starting with the founders of the six *ëyli*, graduating to the founder of each *muupë* within the *ëyli*. Next, the *naadë* (the forebears) within the clan of the *binji* sponsor are called, followed by family members who have died more recently, and finally, in the case of a passage-rite for a dead person, this person’s spirit. The deities are called last, after dawn, when there is some light. Significantly, the deities and ancestral spirits self-identify themselves in a *binji* by stating their phratry and clan-territory:

(7) [The spirit] will now say, perhaps *ëydëyli*, or perhaps *muurtari*, or perhaps *muurëyli*. He will say, “I have come from this place, the spirits of this place.” If he is from *ëëltari*, he will say that. He will say “I have come from *ëëltari*, from this place.”

Binjis are held several times a year and for various reasons. In addition to the dead person’s passage-rite referred to above, a *binji* can be held to ask for an explanation and cure of an illness or other hardships, for a general purification before a temple festival, for the annual planting ritual, and other reasons for which the living may wish to seek the assistance of the ancestral spirits and deities. The *binji* is, thus, the primary religious ritual for the Betta Kurumbas and is more integral to their religious practices than worshipping a deity in a temple.⁶ Visits to the temple are optional and typically done once a year for a temple festival, but *binjis* are considered essential because a person cannot live in health without the protection of the ancestral spirits and, therefore, must remain in communication with them. The *binji* enables direct communication with all the ancestors and deities, in contrast to temple worship, where communication can take place only with one deity and only through the medium of the temple priest, who is never Betta Kurumba.

The *binji* is an important mechanism through which the community maintains its sense of distinctness, remains united, and remains anchored to the homeland. For the Betta Kurumbas, it serves to underscore and reinforce the boundary between their community and other communities because the *binji* is a very private ceremony. It is rare for a non-Betta Kurumba to be allowed to witness the ceremony and still rarer to be allowed to sit either in the *ambali* with the men or at the edge of the *ambali* with the women. It is conducted only within the *mëtiri*. The *binjkalndë*’s chant is never uttered outside the context of the *binji* because the chant is seen as a hymn of power whose utterance in itself has the illocutionary

force of compelling the performance of the act, and the spirits would be angered if summoned for no good reason. Further, Betta Kurumba traditions are adhered to more faithfully in the *binji* than in other aspects of their life: the materials used in the ritual are, to the extent possible, of local provenance (for example, incense cannot be bought from a store, but must come from the sap of certain native trees). Those who sit in the *ambali* must wear Betta Kurumba attire. Thus, men wear a white cloth around the lower half of the body (like the *veshti* of other southern Indian communities) and are bare chested, with a second cloth slung over one shoulder. Women wear a cloth wrapped around the body from chest to knee, and a second cloth wrapped as a shawl around the shoulders.⁷ Some aspects of modernity cannot be avoided (for example, the *ambali* nowadays often has a metal roof, rather than the traditional grass one), but although these are tolerated, they are considered polluting. Krishna reports that some of their deities come very reluctantly when summoned because of all the changes that have “polluted” their hamlets and, when they arrive, water must be kept ready for them to immediately cleanse themselves of the pollution.

The *binji* unites the community because it transcends geographic distance, allowing for ancestral spirits and deities to be summoned from any clan territory, no matter how far. In contrast, only a single deity—the one to whom the temple is dedicated—can be contacted in a temple. It therefore gives the Betta Kurumbas a sense of connection to their clan territory and the extended family of spirits and deities in that territory, even if they live away from it. Further, it draws together members of different phratries because the minimum requirement for a *binji* to be held is that either a *mëssën* or a *maamën* of the *binji* sponsor is present. A *mëssën* is the kinship term for a brother-in-law, a male cross-cousin, or a female parallel cousin’s husband. A *maamën* is the father of the persons listed as *mëssën*.⁸ Since the Betta Kurumbas are divided into exogamous phratries, relatives designated with this kinship term are necessarily from a different phratry than that of the *binji*-sponsor. This ensures that the ancestral spirits and deities of at least two phratries, and consequently two sets of *tëttë*, are invoked in the *binji*.

While the *binji* transcends geographic distance, connecting Betta Kurumbas in a supernatural sense to faraway clan territories, it also anchors them in their homeland because, as Krishna and Maadën explain in the following passage, a *binji* can be conducted only within the homeland. If a Betta Kurumba is living outside the homeland (which is rare) and dies there, he may be buried where he died—the burial place is not important—but a *binji* must be held within Betta Kurumba territory to summon the dead person’s spirit from wherever he is and assist him in going to his own clan territory. While the *binji* does not stop individual Betta Kurumbas from living away from the homeland, it requires that some members of the community remain in the homeland. It is crucial that these members be from different phratries; therefore, the community, not just a few individuals, must maintain a presence in the homeland, as demonstrated here:

(8) Krishna: Now say my relative dies in Chennai. My relative dies in Chennai. The pit will be dug there.... Putting him in the pit there, what will they do? We

will get the *binji* done here. Conducting the *binji* here, my deity has to come, no? [The spirit] has to go to him and be given to him.

Maadën: Wherever [he] dies, if his clan people are here ... only the body goes there, the soul comes (here).

(Author): But can't you do the *binji* in Chennai?

Krishna: It can't be done.... There are no Kurumbas [there]. Only in our land.

THE BETTA KURUMBAS AMONG OTHER COMMUNITIES

BIRD-DAVID (1997) argues that the Nilgiri Mountains is best viewed in terms of two cultural zones: one consisting of the Upper Nilgiri Plateau (average elevation 1980m) and the south-southeastern slopes, and the other consisting of the Nilgiri-Wayanad Plateau (average elevation 914 meters) and the north-to-northwestern Nilgiri slopes. The former, the Upper-Nilgiri zone, is inhabited by the Todas, Badagas, Kotas, Alu, and Palu Kurumbas, and some Irula groups. The latter is inhabited mainly by the Betta Kurumbas, Kattunayakas, Mullu Kurumbas, Paniyas, Chettiar, and Kasavas (an Irula sub-group). The groups of the Nilgiri-Wayanad zone do not appear to have much to do with the Upper Nilgiri zone, except for occasional visits to Ootacamund (Ooty), the district headquarters. The Betta Kurumbas, in any case, do not have traditional dwelling places in that zone. However, the Badagas, Kotas, and Todas do have some areas that they traditionally occupied within the Nilgiri-Wayanad zone: HOCKINGS (2012, 113) lists twenty-one hamlets and village clusters within Wayanad in which Badagas continue to live. The Kotas have a small hamlet called Kalaac near Upper Gudalur (EMENEAU 1944; WOLF 2005). According to WALKER (1986, 30), the Piir clan among the Todas used to have a hamlet called Kafiθy, close to the Kota hamlet of Kalaac at the time that Rivers studied this community (RIVERS 1906, 636–37); however, this hamlet is now abandoned.

Quite naturally, the Betta Kurumba language has developed individual native names for local communities with whom they have long had some interaction or which figure in some role in their own cultural traditions. They reserve the terms *kurbiti* (“Kurumba woman”) and *kurbën* (“Kurumba man”) only for their own community, while they have the following names for other indigenous Nilgiri groups (given in the format “woman/man”): *mugiti / mugën* (Kattunayaka),⁹ *pidalti / pidalñ* (Mullu Kurumba), *toolti / tooñ* (Paniya), *bađsi / bađñ* (Chettiar), *erti / ërën* (Kasava), *melbađsi / melbađñ* (Badaga), *këəsi / koomaggi* (Kota), and *taaditi / taadñ* (Toda). They do not have separate native names for indigenous Nilgiri groups with whom they did not have a history of contact. Thus, they refer to the Alu Kurumbas, who live in the Upper Nilgiri zone, as *aalgurbën / aalgurbiti*, a form of the same name used by other communities. They apparently do not have a specific term for Irulas, who were called by different consultants *muursal ërëndë* or *iirmugën*.¹⁰

For ethnic groups that are not indigenous to the Nilgiris, the Betta Kurumbas do have distinct native names for three categories of people: Kannada speakers are called *koṅḡiti/koṅḡēn*, Malayali Hindus *tiyyiti/tiyyēn*, and non-tribal temple priests are called *aarēti/aarēn* (such as the one in the Gudalur temple, who is appointed by the Tamil Nadu government and, therefore, is normally Tamilian). For some other groups whom they have heard of or encountered, they use the terms used by other communities, for example, *moopali* (“Malayali muslim”), and *tamiḷaaḷē* (“Tamilian”). All Indians who come from outside the Nilgiri-Wayanad region are clubbed together under the single term *kan(i)jani*, a term that includes the non-indigenous groups just mentioned. This term is interesting because according to HEIDEMANN (1997), labor recruiters in the Nilgiris were called *kanigani* or *mais-try*, and labor recruiters were typically people from outside regions. The Betta Kurumbas have apparently borrowed this word for a professional group of men who consisted of outsiders and generalized it to refer to any outsider; they use the term *meetri* for “work supervisor.” The British were called *bēḷḷkaarti/bēḷḷkaadn*, (literally “white man/white woman”); however, this pair of words is nowadays used for people of white European descent as well as any person, including Indians, who are Westernized in appearance, regardless of skin color.

The long cultural association between Nilgiri groups has naturally resulted in a network of relationships of some sort between them. There is plenty of discussion in the anthropological literature on the Nilgiris about a tradition of mutual obligations that existed between the Todas, Badagas, Kotas, and Kurumbas in the Upper Nilgiri zone, according to which each group bartered goods with one another and had specific roles to play in religious rituals. As BIRD-DAVID (1997) points out, the Nilgiri-Wayanad zone did not have such a fixed system of traditional mutual obligations; instead, intertribal interaction in this zone revolves around worship at temples, which are shared by different tribes. The Todas do not frequent any of the temples in the Nilgiri-Wayanad zone, and the Kotas frequent only the temple at Upper Gudalur. But the Badagas and several Nilgiri-Wayanad tribes have a temple-sharing tradition in which the role of the Betta Kurumbas is to provide music by playing the *kaḷalē* (“flute”) and *davēlē* (“drum”) at festivals celebrated at those temples that they recognize as places of worship for their community.¹¹ The religious ceremony itself (pooja and spirit possession) is conducted by the temple priest, who belongs to other tribes—Kasava priests in temples closer to the Karnataka border, and Chettiar or Mulla Kurumba priests in temples close to or within Kerala. Interestingly, such participation of different tribes in religious ceremonies, as well as non-tribals in tribal ceremonies, is a pattern seen throughout the Nilgiri area. JEBADHAS and NOBLE (1989) give a detailed account of Irula priests officiating at the shrine of the sacred Rangaswami Betta peak (within the Upper Nilgiris zone) in religious ceremonies that are attended by a large number of Hindu pilgrims from the plains. (See also BIRD-DAVID 1989; HOCKINGS 1980, 1989; KAPP and HOCKINGS 1989; MANDELBAUM 1989; WALKER 1986, 1989; and WOLF 2005 for references to such intercommunity participation in ceremonies.)

In line with the common practice in India of developing pollution-purity complexes with neighboring groups (MANDELBAUM 1989, 5), the Betta Kurumbas see themselves as part of a hierarchy consisting of some of the indigenous Nilgiri groups: they consider the groups listed above from which their temple priests derive as higher in rank to them, and they accept hypergamous marriages with these groups. However, they consider the Kattunayakas and the Paṇiyas lower in rank and do not accept food from these groups, allow them to enter Betta Kurumba hamlets, or tolerate marriage with them, although they are prepared to give them food, enter their hamlets, and talk to them outside Betta Kurumba hamlets. They also do not attend temples where the priest is Kattunayaka. People from all other Nilgiri groups as well as the recent settlers lie outside this hierarchy—they are not part of the pollution-purity ranking that governs food habits and entry into hamlets, but intermarriage with them is also not allowed. Those who violate these marriage taboos are excommunicated—they are no longer considered part of the community, no *binji* can be conducted for them and, on their death, their spirits cannot be sent to the clan territory. These taboos are in place despite the fact that according to their legends, their early ancestors were drawn from some of the groups with whom marriage is forbidden: their legendary eldest ancestor, Neerdajjēn, married a Kattunayaka woman. Further, the *baalēyli* and *terēvēyli* phratries were founded, respectively, by a Kota man and a person who appears to have belonged to some unknown low caste.

An interesting component of inter-tribal interaction in this area is that it has resulted in traditional patterns of multilingualism in certain domains of Betta Kurumba religious practice. The fact that the priest at their temples is always from another community places a requirement on Betta Kurumbas to learn something of the languages of the other groups. As in many other Indian communities, during the festival, the temple priest is believed to go into a trance during which he is possessed by the deity of the temple, who speaks to the people through the priest. The temple priest speaks in his own language during the trance; therefore, at least a few Betta Kurumbas should know enough of the priest's language to understand the deity's message. According to the Betta Kurumbas, the Chettiar and Mulla Kurumba priests speak in Malayalam, and the Kasava priests speak in Kannada.¹² Their temple in Gudalur, which has been taken over by the government, has a Tamil-speaking priest.

The deities themselves are believed to be speakers of other languages—they are divided into a Kannada- (*baḍēvaaji*) speaking group and a Malayalam- (*melami*) speaking group. Thus, when the deities are summoned during a *binji*, the *binjkaḷṇḍē* is expected to speak the deity's language, while the other participants can respond in the same language or Betta Kurumba. The Malayalam-speaking deities are considered the greater ones (*dappuudē*, “older, bigger, greater”), and they all “emerged from the earth” within the Nilgiri-Wayanad region. Their temples are within Kerala. The Kannada-speaking ones are considered lesser deities (*kiriidē*, “younger, smaller, lesser”) and some of them are believed to have moved into this region from parts of Karnataka that lie outside the Betta Kurumba homeland (Mysore, Mangala, and so

on). The temples of these deities are fairly close to the Karnataka border, in places like Masinagudy, Bokkapur, Theppakadu, and Kargudy.¹³ The “native-born” deities are portrayed as more powerful than the “immigrant” deities. For example, Daṇṇēn Meeravē (Dandan Mariamma), a native-born female deity, is believed to have come to the rescue of the female deity, Masanaamēn (Masaniamma), who fled Mysore in fear of an angry male deity, Saamunḍi Iisvērēn (Chamundi Ishwara),¹⁴ as narrated in the ninth passage below. Daṇṇēn Meeravē then allowed Masanaamēn to install herself in Moyar.

(9) In those days, the Mysore Raja keeping her, Masanaamēn, there, keeping her in Mysore, [he] would do pooja for her ... Saamunḍi Iisvērēn and this one—conflict arose between Masanaamēn and him. Conflict arising between Saamunḍi Iisvērēn and Masanaamēn, Saamunḍi Iisvērēn set out to kill Masanaamēn—in those days. Setting off to kill Masanaamēn, Masanaamēn had to flee. Having said, “Oh-o, I am going to be caught here,” she came running from there ... Saamunḍi came from there with an army, to kill Masanaamēn. As he came, while Daṇṇēn Meeravē was sitting and watching, Masanaamēn was running toward her. Upon running toward her, having said “Sha! She is running, this one!” [Daṇṇēn Meeravē] went and sat on the road, turning into an old woman. Wrapping herself in an old blanket, she sat.... Upon the army coming, [Saamunḍi Iisvērēn said], “Who is sitting on the road? Get off the road!”

“I am sitting here!”

“Are you getting off the road or not?”

“I will not get off the road.”

“This old woman is going to die for no reason now!”

“I will not leave the road. Whatever you do, I will not leave.”

Upon Saamunḍi preparing to cut Daṇṇēn Meeravē [with his sword], her act of waving the old blanket dispersed all that army.... The army, Saamunḍi’s army, had to turn back. Having made them turn back, having made Saamunḍi Iisvērēn retreat to Mysore, she asked—whom?—she asked Masanaamēn. Saying, “What? Will you live with me?” saying, “No, I will live in the town,” having said, “If that is so, all right,” she sent Masanaamēn to the town [of Masinagudy].

Among the recent settlers in the region, the British figure most prominently in Betta Kurumba descriptions of their community’s recent history. This is not surprising because it was the British who were dominant among the first new settlers they interacted with and who recruited them to clear part of the forests in the region and create teak plantations (which are now part of the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary). The Betta Kurumbas would set up camp in a section of the forest, clear it, and plant teak. They would guard the area until the teak plants grew into saplings and then shift camp and move to the next section to be cleared and planted. They look back on this work with pride, assert emphatically that it was they who established these plantations, and, in my experience, become very annoyed if it is suggested to them that the British were colonists who got them to spoil their natural forest environment.

Although the British occupation of their homeland led to a progressive loss of freedom to practice their culture and of control over land resources, under the British, the Betta Kurumbas were apparently able to continue with much of their earlier lifestyle as shifting cultivators. Clearing the forest for teak plantations enabled them to plant their staple crop, *tëyndi* (ragi millet), in the space between the teak plants, and they could guard their crops and the teak saplings from animal depredation using their traditional protective weapon, a sling called *kavankaynni*. They were also allowed to continue foraging in the forest for food, to fish in the river using traditional methods (such as nets or poisonous leaves to immobilize the fish), and to gather the material used for their various traditional technologies. In addition, they were trained as mahouts, an occupation that allowed them to move fairly freely in the forest while taking care of their elephants.

Under the Indian government, they are no longer allowed to practice shifting cultivation, their access to traditional forest resources is severely restricted, and they have been compelled to discontinue several of their traditional practices. Some of the Betta Kurumbas are employed as forest guards and as mahouts, but because the forest department's herd of semi-domesticated elephants is quite small, only a small section of their population gets employment that allows them to continue moving freely in the forest in this manner. The rest have to work as manual laborers in private plantations. It is no wonder, then, that Ajjën, in the following passage, expresses nostalgia for the British era, seeing it as a time when the Betta Kurumbas mattered.

(10) In that time, in the time of our ancestors, we used to make *kaadë* of ragi. Making the *kaadë* like this, [the grain] ripening ... making estates in the white man's time, the ones who did the work for the white man was us, Kurumbas only. Not anyone else—not the Tamilians, not the Jenu Kurumbas, not the Pañiyas. Eh? We Betta Kurumbas only, being [there] in the time of the white man, in that forest, planting trees, growing the trees for them, [it was] our ancestors. Making estates, making estates in the time of the British, planting seedlings, planting trees, handing our work to the British, in that time. And not anyone else—not the *kanijani*, not the Tamilians, not the Malayali Muslims, not the Pañiyas, not the Jenu Kurumbas, the Betta Kurumbas only in that time.... No one else.... In those days, the Kurumbas' name stood first. Nowadays, the Kurumbas have no name. Nowadays, the Kurumbas have no name. In those days, the Kurumbas' name, in the time of the British, it was the Kurumbas' name that mattered.

CONCLUSION

The preceding sections have shown the way in which the Betta Kurumbas view and maintain their connection to the physical environment in which they have developed as an ethnic group. Their ties to the land are an intrinsic part of their self-identification as a community, for instance, in their conviction that their community must always maintain a presence in their traditional homeland if their religious rituals are to be carried out and if their souls are to achieve peace after

death. These ties are also an intrinsic part of their identity as individuals, since every Betta Kurumba belongs to a particular clan and hence the clan's territory. This association remains even if he or she lives elsewhere and has never actually visited the clan territory. The association persists after death because the spirit of the dead person must be led by his deity to the clan territory and must remain there, never to leave again. Further, the clan territory provides the people with an extended family of ancestral spirits, who can be called upon to assist and protect them in life.

This bond with the land that the Betta Kurumba (and other tribes of the Nilgiris) have is, naturally, much deeper than any that the recent settlers could have, even if families of post nineteenth-century migrants, who have been in this region for generations, might also feel a sense of belonging to the region and an emotional bond to it. It must be remembered that Indian families who migrated into this region in the past century are very likely to have retained a cultural link to the region that they came from. Indians generally maintain such ties to the place of their forebears, the ubiquitous "native place," in addition to the place in which they reside, if the two are different—ties that motivate them to return to the native place and the community of people in that place for significant life events (marriages, burial/cremation, and so on). Hindus who share with Betta Kurumbas a belief in household deities whose temples are in the native place alone must return there if they wish to ask for favours from the deity. Thus, the recent settlers have a dual identity, one that is connected to the Nilgiri-Wayanad region as their place of residence and possibly birth, and one connected to the region they came from and to which they typically continue to return. In contrast, for the Betta Kurumbas, the place of residence and the place they "come from" are both within the Nilgiri-Wayanad region.

Further, these cultural ties with the land would make the Betta Kurumba vision of the geography of the Nilgiri-Wynaad area distinct from that of people outside their community and, in particular, recent settlers. While recent settlers see the Nilgiri-Wayanad landscape in terms of the towns, temples, plantations, wildlife sanctuaries, rivers, and hills that are marked and named in conventional maps of the region, the Betta Kurumbas, in addition to sharing this perspective of the newer settlers, also have a mental map of the Nilgiri-Wayanad region as divided into territories, each culturally associated with a particular clan. Thus, a Betta Kurumba moving through his homeland might well see himself as making a journey like the one described for Neerdajjēn earlier. In this mental map, places and villages would be distinguished as "ours" and "not ours." Certain areas would have special significance for various cultural reasons and be marked by distinct Betta Kurumba names, although insignificant to recent settlers, who have no names for these areas. The significance may be based on the usage of natural resources; for example, while walking in Mudumalai Sanctuary with Krishna to record native plant names, he pointed to a meadow that was known to them as *kaḷalpullkaddi*, literally "field of flute grass," because it had the right reeds for making their flutes (*kaḷalē*). He named another part of the forest *jaalgaadē* because it is the only place where the

tree *jaalmeri* (scientific name: *Shorea roxburghii*) grows—the resin of this tree is burnt as incense in their rituals. Or a place may be significant because of a tale about an ancestor, such as the river in Benne, referred to earlier, where an ancestor from the *yaanpar*-clan murdered his wife from the *erkoṭ* clan. There would be sacred places on this mental map that are sacred only for the Betta Kurumbas. For example, at a spot within Mudumalai Sanctuary there is a rocky surface which, to the Betta Kurumbas, contains an imprint of the knees of their deity, Daṇṇēn Meeravē, where she knelt as she held out a blanket to block the advance of Saamunḍi Iisvērēn's army from Mysore (as described in example 9 above). Although there is a little shrine to Daṇṇēn Meeravē at the roadside at which visitors from anywhere are free to worship, the actual location of her sacred place is further inside the forest, and only the Betta Kurumbas and local indigenous groups know of its location and its mythic history.

The Betta Kurumbas have, in their memory, always shared these lands with other communities and they do not claim exclusive rights to the land. Rights of entry and access are enforced only within their hamlets—tribal groups that rank below them are barred entry into the village, while others are allowed, but must respect Betta Kurumba practices within the hamlet, such as removing footwear if the hamlet contains the dwelling place of a deity. Because the Betta Kurumbas do not claim exclusive rights to the land, the fact that outsiders to the Nilgiri-Wayanad region have recently settled in the area is not, by itself, inimical to the Betta Kurumba sense of land use rights and belonging to the region. The problem for them lies in the “title deed culture” of the recent settlers, who claim exclusive control of the lands they have purchased. The government's control over reserved forests and wildlife sanctuaries is similarly a problem—both prevent Betta Kurumbas from having free access to their own traditional clan territories, their sacred places, and the areas that supply their traditional resources.

NOTES

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1. MISRA (1989, 305) lists at least ten other tribes in the Wayanad section; however, detailed reports on these tribes are not available and it is not clear which of these are truly distinct ethnic groups.

2. Betta Kurumba naming practices involve an interesting issue in cross-cultural interaction. Since Betta Kurumba names consist of a small lexical set of male and female names (less than ten each), many different people—even within the same family—have the same name. Their school teachers find this a problem because a class may consist of many more than one, say, Bummēn, Maadēn, or Baḍsi. So the teachers give Betta Kurumba children a “Tamil” name when they join school; some of them continue to use this name after leaving school. Thus, the native names of my consultants, Krishna and Bommi, are Kirbummēn and Kirbuuji, respectively. In my interaction with my consultants, I relied on verbal or nonverbal cues to decide which name to use, and retain those names in this article. The Betta Kurumba

adaptation to the demands of interacting with recent settlers is similar to that of other Nilgiri tribes; for example, WOLF (1997) mentions that the Kotas now give their children two names, a tribal one and a Tamil one.

3. The consonant phonemes in Betta Kurumba are: /p t t̪ k b d d̪ g m n ɳ s j r v l l̪ y/; the vowel phonemes are front /i i e ee/, central /ë ë ä aa/, and back /u uu o oo/. The transcription used in this article is phonemic, except in the case of /r/, which has two allophones: alveolar stop [d̪] and alveolar tap [r]. I show both these allophones as is, because the former is fairly unusual in Dravidian languages in the particular context in which it occurs.

4. My earlier publication, COELHO 2012, erroneously stated that the founder of *baalēyli* was a Toda—the error was due to my consultant’s mistranslation of *koomaggi* as “Toda,” rather than “Kota.”

5. HOCKINGS (1989) points out that elaborate memorial ceremonies are a feature of the Nilgiris region. Although not exactly a memorial ceremony, the sending-off of the spirit is an important ritual among Betta Kurumbas.

6. In addition to the *binji*, the women have a ceremony called *ajjoodgē* (loosely translated as “the grandmother-practice”), in which the ones who get possessed and the spirits/deities who possess are all female. The ceremony is conducted within one of the houses, and men are barred entry while it is in progress. The *binji* differs from the *ajjoodgē* in that it is attended by both women and men but is male-dominated in that only men can utter the spirit-summoning chant. Further, the women have to sit at one edge of the *ambali* “meeting-hall” with their backs turned to the ceremonial fire and the rituals, while the men sit within the *ambali*. The deities and spirits (both male and female) normally possess the men during a *binji*, but occasionally a female one possesses one of the women, at which point the women go off into a nearby house and conduct their dialogue separately there.

7. Other Nilgiri groups have a similar requirement of traditional attire at religious ceremonies, as I noticed, for example, in a Toda ceremony I attended. This practice has, of course, been reported also in other parts of the world. For example, the *mbondoro* spirit mediums of the Shonas in Zimbabwe have a much stricter version. The *mbonodoros* are spirits of dead clan chiefs, and their mediums dress exclusively in traditional clothes so as to present the illusion that “they are not simply the mediums of the chiefs of the past but that they actually are those very chiefs returned physically to earth” (LAN 1985, 68).

8. These terms reflect the typical Dravidian kinship system and permissibility of cross-cousin marriage.

9. The Betta Kurumbas’ identification of distinct groups with labels for each group, including the term *muggēn* for the Kattunayakas, is interesting in the light of Bird-David’s discussion (this volume, 139–153) of the Kattunayakas more diffuse self-identification with their own local group (rather than a larger ethnic community) consisting of the people they live with, and whom they refer to as *nama sonta*. She points out that the labels Nayaka, Kattunayaka, and Jenu Kurumba have been ascribed to them by outsiders, contrary to their own traditional self-identification only with the local group of *nama sonta*. However, the fact that they use only the term *nama sonta* for themselves is not unusual—several groups across the world refer to themselves as just “our people” and use a distinct ethnonym only when this is necessitated through interaction with some other community. For example, the Chechen and Ingush (of the Caucasian Mountains) together call themselves *vai naakh*, “our people” (NICHOLS 2000). Similarly, the label “Inuit” that this ethnic group in Canada uses for itself has the literal meaning “people” in their language. In fact, it is likely that the Betta Kurumbas themselves had no distinct label for themselves prior to the arrival of the “recent settlers” (or *kanijani*), and that they probably adopted the label *kurbēn* because it was applied to them by outsiders, who apparently applied the label indiscriminately to most of the forest-dwelling groups of the Nilgiri-Wayanad region. Interestingly, the Betta Kurumbas restrict the label to

their own group, while for other indigenous groups, they use labels that they probably had earlier on.

10. ZVELEBIL (1981) says that there are three distinct tribes in the Nilgiris (the Nilagiri Irulas, Kasabas, and Ūrālis in his transcription) who speak dialects of the same language. The Betta Kurumbas interact with the Kasavas, but not those Irulas who stay further away, on the east and south of the Nilgiri Mountains.

11. WOLF (2005, 27) says that the “Kotas, Irulas, and most Kurumba groups share a great deal musically and employ cognate sets of musical instruments.”

12. Although the Betta Kurumbas describe the Kasava priest’s language as “Kannada,” it is more likely that they use their own dialect of Irula, a distinct language described in ZVELEBIL 1981. It may be that the Chettiars and Mullu Kurumbas also have distinct languages, but further research is necessary to verify this.

13. My consultants told me that their Gudalur temple has a Kannada-speaking deity; however, Wolf (in an email to me dated 6 August 2013) says that the Kotas claim that the temple was once theirs and that, in their tradition, the deity spoke Malayalam.

14. The deity at the Chamundi temple in Mysore is female and is called Shri Chamundeshwari. However, Ajjēn uses the male designation *iisvērēn*.

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APPENDIX

Given below are excerpts from my Betta Kurumba recordings for which English translations were given in this article. Each text ends in a tag “(≈ ex. ...)” which indicates the number of the example in the main body of this article to which this Betta Kurumba text corresponds. The words or phrases enclosed in square brackets are “speech errors” consisting of fragments of words or other incidental vocalizations.

1. *pin aliya baatu—karigođtēttē munmeltēttē, ēē?—all iitu pin tēyđnu, saagođkiirka yerjēnađa. saagođkiidł iitu, mēriđkiirka pēeso. mēriđkiidł iitu baatu ... yaanparkiirka. yaanparkiidł iit uljēnu, pina poop ētn kaađu. etlkoopa? mēriđkiiri pēyi, adaŋgi yaanparkiiri, pin alli tana kuniiri ermaťkiiri, pina yaanałkiiri, pin aňtana muniir tēyđn etlkoopa? ēđmelkiirka poopa. ēđmelkiirka pēyđu, pina muniir tirguva ēđmelkiirka pēyđu, pina muniir tirguva. muniir tirgēn, etł guň bupa? komjerkiiri, [peelaj] (clears his throat), siňkiidłkiiri, idaňg bupa. baať etłka poopa? pina saagođkiirka [saar] sēērēva. saagođkiirka sēērjēnu, adaňgi peelajēnmuupē ... adaňgi pina baatu ina ettoođnmuupka muuťisan kaňđē, ēēłtarmuup adē kannk maadso. (≈ ex. 1)*
2. *a kaaltēl yaand anan, inna, inn idē van kaadē. ii kaaťł ii yērji kiir kiviya. pina adtē yērji aťťal van planteesēn aasani, ii kiiriya pirsēn ētn pēyđu ann kiir kiviyo, aa kaaťł. adaňg aa kaaltēl paťa ... ina adaňg ila. yaňgērka injēd ilkēndē bēyri, van jaagēł tana ... yaňgērka etli ina? ii etli yaňgērka jaag uudē? (≈ ex. 2)*
3. *kaargēđi ampun pyaar bannđ. adē gungal adē, makkay yarpē gungalē. adēn ad naňgē idaňgē—aťali ergēn ēťili ergēn poopmannđē makkay yartēn pēyoťťēđē. aa gungaliya buťadoťťlo. in ii iidł ergēnu, aana vandē poťntēł kayđnu, ēťtn poopiyo. invand iidł pēyť argēn, aan ētn kaarē yarpīyo. adaňg mayđn, idē unťuur idēnu ill guňn ēťtn bandēgē, budł ildī. kyaargyarēna baatu, kaar yarto ... ergidēna, timmēna tindaťu parpuťto. ii gungaliya ēťn kado ... gungaliy all ēťn kaađu, ēđbatťka poono. pēyđu aťa poťntēł noođn ēťi poťntēł noođn, ila—puđsēn noođn. “oo gungaliya ēťn kaan ipē. nađi pooga. ēťn baadłlooga” allka vand ēđđmuur aal bando. baať noođn gungaalē all ida. “niňg inn inn tođł bēēđi. piigēy. yērjk van pēťťē niň ēťaro” ampunu, kaargēđi maari pēđa. aana taanu kaargēđi—adē kaar yartēna bēyri kaargēđi maar ampunu pyaarē ... (≈ ex. 3)*
4. *yaň mutēr budł ila. ēđmb ēēłgēva. “niyē yani mardeyat adēna puuj oodťoodđē? tyaaňgay koťťoodđ uudēbatt kaccoođđ!” amba. “yanka, yanka kijoođłimi! adēn een kijoođđē? ni innakaasani ... aan ipēł idag” amba ... ann tondar aapa. (≈ ex. 4)*
5. *bokkpur meeraaka, aa kaaltēł baatu, adēna urpati maadsēđē yaň kurbēndē. daadna? bokkpur meeraviya baatu—aa kaaltēł urpati maadsēg yaňgē. adē vērēn ila. vērēn ila. yaňgē, yaň ajjēn kaaltēł bannu ipē mutēr adē. yaňgē jammtēł, yaň ajjēndē taanu aa mutēriya nađpisēn ipēgē. aa mutēriya nađpisēnu—adē kallē, gungallē. (≈ ex. 5)*
6. *nav ill sētēesan, ill binj kałdan kaňđē, binj kałdani—yaň ēyli bēňňē—nav alka pēyđapēla.*

all ipē mutērkē yani oppadsēdapēla. all nav iddapēla. all pēy, ilka baadl iidl koḷa. ii binjēl yani allika kayrtaayo, sētēnēēsani ... ann illi yanka jaag ila. siū ila ii muupēl. alli pēy, na iddapēla. makkē taan ill ipēgē. (≈ ex. 6)

7. *ad inn ina “van ēydeylinḡo, vandē muurtariḡo, vandē muurēylinḡo ad pēēva. “nav iinḡu jaagēl idēn bannaḡḡē, [iinḡu] ilku mutēr,” amba. ann, ina ēēḡtar bannan ad pēēva. “ēēḡtarimi na bannaḡḡē, iinḡu jaagēl idēn” amba. muurēyl bannani, muurēyl pēēva.* (≈ ex. 7)

8. Krishna: *in yan kuḡmbē medraas sētoop andagēy. medraas yan kuḡmbē sētoopa. all kuyl uḡiyo ... all kuyl uḡn, een maadiyo? ill yanḡē binj pēēvsiya. ill binj kaḡḡaḡu, yan teevi bann ipēla? aan ipka pēyḡapēla, koḡḡēdapēla ...*

Maadan: *eḡl sēḡēsan siri, adēn jannē mann ill idani ... baadi taan all pēēsani, adēn aavi bupmu.*

Author: But can't you do the *binji* in Madras?

Krishna: *kiilay aagēl ila ... kurbēn ila. yanḡ uu jaagēl taanu.* (≈ ex. 8)

9. *aa kaaltēl mēysurē raajēn baat idēna masēnaamēn al buḡḡḡu, mēysuur buḡḡḡu, puuj koḡḡḡu buḡḡḡu ida ... saamunḡi iisvuḡn, iḡ ubēna, masēnaamēna, pagḡ banda. saamunḡi iisvuḡn masēnaamēna pagḡ bannēna, saamunḡi iisvuḡn masēnaamēna kengaalay parpuḡḡa—aa kaaltēl. masēnaamēna kengaalay parpuḡḡēna, masēnaamēna oodḡ aaso. “obo, nav inn il kuḡḡēl aapma” andat, all idēn ēyrannd adē, masēnaamēn ... saamunḡi all idēnu, paḡḡaalē, paḡḡaal buḡḡḡu banda, masēnaamēna kengaalayē. bupēn, danḡḡēn meeravē kuḡḡḡu nēyripēn, mēēsanaamēn ēyranḡidida. ēyranḡididēna “sa! ēyranḡoodam idē” andat, maargēl pēy kuursiso, van mutk aynu. kambiljēliya pottēnu, kuursiso ... paḡḡaal bannēna, anna “daar idē baḡḡḡ kuunadḡḡē? baḡḡē buḡḡaalēy.”*

“nav ill kuunadḡḡēmu.”

“baḡḡ buḡḡaavēd ila?”

“na baḡḡ buḡḡ ilani.”

“ii mutki in pētīn sētēnoopa.”

“na buḡḡa ili baḡḡi. yaan maadsan, buḡḡ ili.”

saamunḡi idēna danḡḡēn meeraviya tayḡḡayē parpuḡḡēna, tan kambiljēlood biijisēd anatēr danḡḡiya nikada ... danḡḡē, saamunḡi danḡḡē pimiḡa mayrḡḡēēsō. pina mayrkaatḡu, saamunḡi iisvuḡna mēysuurēna mayrkaatḡu, pina kēēḡa—daadna?—masēnaamēna kēēḡa, “ēēḡḡē, yan birkēl ipēḡḡē?” aanēn, “ila, navē tavēnḡḡl ipiy” aanēna, “pin aanḡ aasan siir” andat, masēnaamēn iirka puduḡḡa. (≈ ex. 9)

10. *aa kaaltēl baatḡu, ajjēḡḡē kaaltēl baatḡu, raay kaadē kaad kijjoḡḡo. kaad kijjēnu ii maadēri, aḡē bēḡḡēnu ... bēḡḡkaadn kaaltēl tooti kijjēnu, bēḡḡkaadnna pēyḡi oppisēn koḡḡēḡē yanḡē kurbēn tana. bēēr daar ila—tamēḡaal ila, teenkurmēn ila, paḡḡin ila. ēē? yanḡē kurbēḡḡē tana, bēḡḡkaadn kaaltēl idēnu, aa paarēḡḡiparmentēl, meriya natḡḡḡu, mer balisēn koḡḡēḡē ajjēḡḡē. estēēḡiyē kijjēnu, bēḡḡkaadn kaaltēl estēēḡiya kijjēnu, tayy natḡḡḡu, mer natḡḡḡu, bēḡḡkaadnna pēyḡi oppisēnu, aa kaaltēl. pina bēēr daar ila—kanijan ila, tamēḡaal ila, maapaal ila, tooḡḡn ila, muggēn ila, kurbēn tana a kaaltēl ... bēēr daar ila. inna ootēya, aa kaaltēl ootēya, kurbēn pyaarē minniḡa pēēsō. ii kaaltēl kurbēn pyaar ila. ii kaaltēl kurbēn pyaar ila. aa kaaltēl, kurbēn pyaarē, bēḡḡkaadn kaaltēl, kurbēn idēnu pyaar tana paḡḡḡḡē. (≈ ex. 10)*