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The Nilgiri Tribal Systems: A View From Below

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Prologue

In 1980, the Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu were chosen to be India's first biosphere reserve under the *Man and the Environment* program launched by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in an attempt to conserve for study examples of characteristic eco-systems from each of the world's natural regions. Scholastic interest from a broad spectrum of disciplines has turned, therefore, to the Nilgiris, and it has become apparent that although the Nilgiris have been studied extensively, anthropological attention has been uneven and parts of the region have been grossly understudied. The present paper intends to provide a foundation for filling this gap in the Nilgiri scholarship.

Introduction

The tribal populations of the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India have attracted massive ethnographic attention for over 150 years. In the *Bibliography for the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India*, Hockings (1978) listed 576 references to them, and additional work has since been published (see Hockings, ed., 1989). However, although the regional ethnography is extraordinarily voluminous for an area confined to 984 square miles, the overwhelming majority of studies concern the Nilgiri Plateau at the top of this mountainous region, and its tribal communi-

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ties, the Toda, Badaga and Kota. Surprisingly few studies concern the Nilgiri-Wynaad plateau, which lies a dozen kilometers down from the Nilgiri Plateau, on the western slopes, and its tribal groups which include the Mullu Kurumba, the Betta Kurumba, the Nayaka, the Paniya, and the Chetti. Anthropological studies conducted in the latter area, in fact, consist of Furer-Haimendorf's brief investigation during the summer of 1948, of all the aforementioned five groups (1952); Misra's study of the Mullu Kurumba in Erumad for the *Anthropological Survey of India* (1971, 1972, 1989); and my own study of the Nayaka near Pandalur (Bird 1983a,b; Bird-David 1987a,b; 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992a, 1992b).[1]

Since Keys (1812), observers and scholars have been particularly concerned with the system of relationships between the tribal communities of the Nilgiri plateau. Several scholars have argued over the question of whether it should be regarded as an early tribal variant of the Indian caste-system, and if so, what can be learnt from it (see Mandelbaum 1941; Fox 1963; Gould 1967; Hockings 1980; and Walker 1986). At the same time, except for Misra's short article (1972), in which she describes inter-tribal relationships in her study-village, Erumad, there has as yet been no attempt to look at the nature and the form of inter-tribal relationships in the Nilgiri-Wynaad, and how they compare with the more famous ones of the Nilgiri Plateau.

The objective of the present paper is to fill up the lacuna in the regional ethnography in a twofold way. The paper will examine the Nilgiri-Wynaad inter-tribal world, and it will compare it with the well-known system of the Nilgiri plateau. The comparison is between two regional social worlds within each of which tribesmen interact, or think they interact, with one another more frequently than they do with tribesmen in the other regional social world. It is, therefore, concerned as much with social representations as with inter-tribal interaction and, indeed, tribesmen in some cases have easier access to tribesmen whom they consider to be part of the other regional social world than to those they include in theirs. We are concerned, furthermore, with what twentieth-century local people and their observers regard as the 'traditional' inter-tribal world, which

[1] The major spell of fieldwork was conducted during 1978–79 and was financed by grants from the Smuts Memorial Fund, the Anthony Wilkin Studentship, and the H. M. Chadwick studentship. The return visit was financed by the Horowitz Institute for Research of Developing Countries, and the Jerusalem Foundation for Anthropological Studies.

encompasses the consequences of regional historical processes up until the nineteenth century, but ignores the considerable impact of British colonization.[2] The Badaga in this view are regarded as one of the Nilgiri tribes, although, as Hockings (1980) shows, they are descended from farming refugees who fled from Karnataka when the Vijayanagar Empire collapsed, and arrived at the Nilgiris during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Similarly, the Chetti of the Nilgiri-Wynaad are viewed as an autochthonous land-owning people, while it seems they are composed of a variety of Kanarese and Malayalam speaking peoples who probably gradually emigrated from surrounding areas throughout preceding centuries and encroached on land in the Nilgiri-Wynaad.[3] I shall use the past tense in the comparison, adopting the tense people usually employ when speaking about the 'traditional' way of things. However, part of what I describe has bearing on the present in that parts of the 'traditional' system still exist, or in that since it is constructed by people as 'traditional', it has bearing on their present thoughts and actions.

I shall first compare the Nilgiri plateau (including the steep slopes and glens of the southwestern, southern, southeastern, and eastern slopes) and the Nilgiri-Wynaad plateau (including its western and northwestern slopes), focusing on the inter-tribal world of, on the one hand, the Toda, Badaga, Kota and Kurumba,[4] and, on the other, of the Mullu Kurumba, the Betta Kurumba, the Nayaka, the Paniya, and the Chetti.[5] I shall show that there are significant differences between the two systems. I shall then consider the little known isolated communities of the Toda, Badaga and Kota who live in the Nilgiri-Wynaad, and I shall show that the relationships between these communities differ from those between their main respective groups, and instead bear the marks of the inter-tribal arrangements in the Nilgiri-Wynaad. For convenience, I shall call the two areas Region N and Region W, and the two inter-tribal worlds System N and System W, respectively.

[2] On aspects of recent changes, see Hockings 1980, Walker 1986.

[3] See Richards 1932: 170.

[4] The Irula are not mentioned much in the literature, but their position is accepted to be similar to that of the Kurumba. See Hockings 1980.

[5] Except for the Nilgiri plateau, the tribal population of the Nilgiris, especially of the Nilgiri-Wynaad, has been described confusingly under many names. We probably still do not know all its ethnic constituents, but see Zvelebil 1981 and Bird-David 1987a.

Spatial Articulation

The first striking point of contrast between Region N and Region W is that the tribal peoples in Region N had, on the whole, distinct territorial niches, while in Region W they were interspersed, forming multi-ethnic clusters. Thus, in Region N, the Toda lived on Wenlock downs on the western side of the Nilgiri plateau, at elevations ranging from 2,000 to 2,400 meters.[6] Badaga mainly inhabited the eastern half of the Nilgiri plateau, at elevations ranging between 2,200 and 1,200 meters.[7] The small Kota population was interspersed amongst the Badaga, but there were no mixed villages of Badaga and Kota, or of Kota and Toda, nor Toda and Badaga.[8] Finally, Kurumba lived mainly on the steep slopes and glens of the southwestern, southern, southeastern, and eastern ranges of the Nilgiris, at elevations ranging from 1,600 to 600 meters,[9] and their settlements, furthermore, appear to have been separated from the other tribes by an uninhabited zone of land between 1,300 and 1,400 meters above sea level.[10]

In contrast with Region N, in Region W tribesmen lived interspersed one amongst another. The Mullu Kurumba were concentrated in one area—the western Cherambod area[11]—but the Paniya, the Nayaka, the Betta Kurumba and the Chetti lived scattered throughout the Nilgiri-Wynaad—including the Cherambod area. Nayaka, for instance, were found in the northernmost flattened Mudumalai sanctuary, in the southernmost Ouchterlony Valley, at the eastern border around Gudalur, and on the western side in Cherambod.[12] Furer-Haimendorf reports that they 'did not possess a compact territory of their own, but share their habitat with several other tribes. It is said that even in the old times the Jen Kurumba [Nayaka] lived in the same *jama* [the territory of a local group] as Bette Kurumba' (1952:25).[13]

The scattered communities in Region W formed multi-ethnic locali-

[6] See Walker 1986: 44.
[7] See Hockings 1980: 66.
[8] Walker 1986: 23.
[9] Kapp 1978: 169. Hockings (1989:11) positions the Kurumba at 1500 to 450 meters above sea level.
[10] Hockings 1989: 11.
[11] See Misra 1971: 2.
[12] Bird-David, fieldnotes.
[13] Paniya and Chetti were scattered equally widely. See figures 2 and 4 in Richards 1932.

ties. For example, around Erumad village there lived Mullu Kurumba, Betta Kurumba, Nayaka, Paniya and Chetti.[14] In Thepakadu, at the eastern end of the Nilgiri-Wynaad, lived Betta Kurumba, Nayaka and Paniya.

Furthermore, the territorial division in Region N was anchored in folk history. A Kota folk story, for example, recounted that upon their arrival on the Nilgiri plateau, the first Badaga refugees met a council of the three resident tribes—Toda, Kota and Kurumba—and pleaded for some land.[15] Badaga place-names, moreover, include names which bear reference to Toda and Kurumba place-names. The names probably bear witness to the displacement of Toda and Kurumba by the Badaga who immigrated into the area during the seventeenth century and, it seems, pushed Toda upwards and Kurumba downwards.[16]

In Region W, in contrast, folk tradition concerning the location of tribal groups alluded to an absence of territorial divisions. Nayaka in the Pandalur area, for instance, related that at the beginning of time Nayaka pairs lived scattered throughout the Nilgiri-Wynaad area, and the scattered local groups of the present were descended from them.[17] The Chetti in Erumad said they had migrated several centuries before from the Madurai district in Madras state in search of lands and—they appear to make no reference to other occupants—had settled where land had been found throughout the Wynaad.[18]

Socio-economic Articulation

The second obvious point of contrast between Region N and Region W is that inter-tribal economic relationships were respectively dominated by what anthropologists commonly distinguish as 'gift' and 'commodity' relationships.[19] Thus, in Region N, families of the separate tribal communities were linked to one another by hereditary links which passed down from father to son, and formed the basis for traditional relationships of exchange between tribal communities. The Toda families provided their exchange partners with dairy food, the Badaga families with grain, the Kota families with utensils and

[14] See Misra 1972: 3.
[15] Emeneau 1946, 157; cf. Ouchterlony 1848, 8.
[16] See Hockings 1980, ch. 2, especially p. 65.
[17] Bird-David, fieldnotes.
[18] Misra 1972: 136.
[19] See Appadurai 1986 for a recent discussion of this distinction.

craftware, and the Kurumba with forest produce.[20] According to the literature, the tribal communities in Region N did not provide one another with labor, nor did they engage in market transactions. Walker observes that: 'economic exchange had ritual and social dimensions and took place not randomly in a market place but according to established relationships, mostly between families' (1986:25).

The tribesmen in Region N also performed ritual and ceremonial duties for one another in exchange for ritual services and traditional exchange resources. The following example concerns the interchange between the Kurumba and the Badaga, and has been widely recorded in the literature.[21] Each Badaga community had its own Kurumba 'watchman' with a life-long and hereditary position. The Kurumba 'watchman' guarded the Badaga village from supernatural danger and, in addition, played a necessary role in Badaga ritual, acting as an accessory to the Badaga priest. During the Badaga sowing festival, the Kurumba watchman, for example, cut the first furrows with a plough or a ploughshare, and then sowed the first seed.

Furthermore, it seems that in Region N social interaction across the ethnic divide was mainly occasioned by, and channeled through institutionalized traditional links. As Emeneau maintained:

> communication between the symbiotic communities making up the local Nilgiri caste system is rigidly restricted to a very few channels. Members of one community have certain well-defined rights and duties vis-a-vis members of the others. Beyond these contacts, communication hardly exists (1941:167).

The tribal communities each had their own temples and celebrated their own festivals.[22]

The literature which deals with Region W—anthropological and other—tells us little about the interrelationships between the local tribal communities. I would argue, however, that this is only because Region W lacked the kind of formal and rich ritual system of Region N, which fascinated observers. It seems that tribesmen in Region W engaged in mercantile exchange of commodities with one another. Nayaka, for instance, supplied a wide range of forest produce to meet changing demands. For example, they exchanged honey, firewood, bamboo and various spices, for rice, tobacco, metal knives, and

[20] For recent discussions, see Walker 1986, chs 1, 3 and Hockings 1980, chs 4–5.

[21] See Hockings 1980: 125; Grigg 1880: 211; Ward 1821, lxxvi; Francis 1908: 154; Noble 1976: 118–20.

[22] Walker 1986: 23.

clothes. Furthermore, tribesmen in Region W provided one another with labor in exchange for payment either in kind or in money. Paniya were engaged as agricultural serfs by land-owning peoples in the area, while other tribesmen occasionally worked for one another. In Erumad, for example, Mullu Kurumba worked in the fields of the Chetti, and Nayaka worked in the fields of both the Chetti and the Mullu Kurumba.[23] Nayaka, moreover, were also employed as watchmen by other tribesmen, which brings to mind Kurumbas' employment of watchmen by Badaga in Region N (see above). However, the difference between the two cases is striking, and it clearly illustrates the contrast I make between the two systems. While the Kurumba were employed as 'watchmen' to ward off supernatural danger, the Nayaka were employed to ward off predators and trespassers. While the employment of Kurumba was hereditary and for life, the employment of Nayaka was on a contractual payment basis, for a season and sometimes for a single day.

In contrast with tribesmen in Region N, tribesmen in Region W had common local temples and held common local celebrations. Chetti, Mullu Kurumba, Nayaka, Betta Kurumba and Paniya, for example, participated in the celebration of the Vishu festival in the *ambalam* (temple) of Erumad. A hierarchical order between these groups was expressed in seating arrangements as well as in dancing and ceremonial arrangements. Nevertheless, all the tribesmen attended and participated in the festival. They all walked in procession around the temple premises—Chetti first and after them the Mullu Kurumba, the Betta Kurumba, the Nayaka and the Paniya. In turn, they all danced around a ceremonial fire which was passed from one tribal group to the other.[24] Multi-tribal festivals were also celebrated in the early nineteenth century. One such festival, for example, is described in the *Military Reminiscences* of Colonel James Welsh (1812).[25]

The Organizational Environment

The third feature which clearly distinguishes Region N from Region W was a uniform clan organization in the former and diverse social organizations in the latter. Thus, the tribal groups in Region N, with

[23] Misra 1972: 32.
[24] *Ibid.*, 145–6.
[25] Cited in Raghavan 1929.

their clear territorial and socio-economic boundaries, all had a similar intra-tribal social organization. They were divided into subgroups which were wholly or partly endogamous and were, in turn, divided into several exogamous units. Toda had two endogamous divisions; Badaga had nine relatively endogamous divisions; Kota comprised 21 exogamous patriclans; and Kurumba were divided into two endogamous groups.[26]

The tribal groups also had similar intra-tribal political structures. For example, the forest-dweller Kurumba, who are contrasted below with the Nayaka of Region W, had an elaborate structure of offices, hereditary in the patriline. In each settlement there was a village headman (*maniagara*), and a second head (*talevary*). They had two assistants (the *bandari* and the *kurudale*). Over and above the village structure, Kurumba had several pan-tribal offices: the priest (*mannugura*), the priest's helper (the *kanikuruma*), the diviner (*Kanigara*), the exorcist (*devvagara*), and the sorcerer (*odigara* or *odia*).[27]

Region W was markedly different. As Furer-Haimendorf writes:

> the social systems of the Wynaad tribes are diverse . . . and the social anthropologist is in the unusual position of finding within easy walking distance communities presenting several varieties and combinations of patrilineal, matrilineal and bilateral systems of descent and inheritance (1952:36).

The Betta Kurumba had patrilineal exogamous clans known as *maga*.[28] The Mullu Kurumba had exogamous matrilineal clans called *kula*, and, cutting across them, patrilocal and patrilineal kin-groups known as *kutumba*.[29]

The Nayaka, about whom we are in a position to elaborate, were divided into territorially-based local groups: those who lived in a particular area (*sime*) constituted a group (*sonta*, meaning relatives). The *sime* was highly fluid in composition. According to a bilateral pattern, individuals could associate themselves with the *sime* of either of their parents, and with the *sime* of their spouses. The Nayaka had an egalitarian political organization similar to the organization found in other hunting and gathering societies,[30] and considerably different from that of the food-gatherer Kurumba in Region N (see above).

[26] See Walker 1986: 21, citing Hockings 1965: 44–69; 1980: 71–97; Vergese 1969: 143; Mandelbaum 1938: 574; Mathur 1977: 56–7; Namibiar and Baharathi 1965: 9; and Zvelebil 1979a: 74. See also Kapp and Hockings 1989.

[27] Kapp and Hockings 1989: 4, 8.

[28] Furer-Haimendorf 1952: 26.

[29] *Ibid.*, 28.

[30] See Woodburn 1980.

With two exceptions, the Nayaka had no official positions, and even the two exceptions were not political. The first was the *modale* (meaning the first to have come to the area). His main responsibility was simply to organize a festival in honor of the ancestors—a festival held every few years. The second was the shaman. The position was an achieved one and it was open to young and old, females and males. It carried no special rights and obligations outside the context of the shamanistic performance.

Social Representations

The fourth point of contrast between Regions N and W concerns the pan-regional social representation of constituent tribal communities. Communities in Region N were cast into distinct economic roles, although, as it now appears, they did not pursue exclusively the activities ascribed to them. Toda were known as pastoralists although they occasionally gathered food in the forest and took up cultivation.[31] The Kota were known as artisans and musicians although, in addition to being smiths, leatherworkers and potters, they also maintained some cultivated lands and herds.[32] The Badaga were known as agriculturalists but kept some buffalo.[33] Finally, the Kurumba were known as food-gatherers, but they also pursued shifting cultivation,[34] and even their 'ceremonial work' for the Badaga deviated from their stereotypic occupation in involving, as mentioned above, ploughing and sowing. The main consequence of this stereotypic representation, it seems, was to provide a basis for links of complementary specialization between the tribal communities, elaborated in the form of traditional exchange relationships.

While the tribal communities in Region N characterized themselves by accentuating differences, in Region W the differences were subdued. In terms of the Durkheimian classic distinction—applied to the integration of communities within regional systems—it can be said that while System N was characterized by organic solidarity, System W was distinguished by mechanical solidarity. In marked contrast with Region N, the communities in Region W were described more

[31] See Walker 1986: 21.

[32] *Ibid.* Furer-Haimendorf (1950:126), in fact, describes them as 'substantial cultivators' who 'were probably the first agricultural population in the highlands'.

[33] Walker 1986: 21.

[34] Kapp and Hockings 1989.

uniformly as cultivators and food gatherers, although there were significant differences in the extent to which they pursued the one or other activity. Mullu Kurumba, described as cultivators and hunters, were in fact settled plough cultivators who practised communal hunting only as part of their marriage celebration.[35] On the other hand, Nayaka, who were often described as food-gatherers and shifting-cultivators, planted vegetables and fruit only erratically, and then usually neglected them. On the basis of conversations with local informants, Furer-Haimendorf informs us, it was hard to establish the nature and extent of economic differences between the tribal communities.[36]

The Nayaka in Region W and the Kurumba in Region N were both described as sorcerers. However, the descriptions were differently constructed and, although the difference was subtle, it had morbid consequences. The Kurumba were viewed by their neighbors as occupying, in Turner's terms, a liminal position. They were described as being both humans and animals; within and outside the Nilgiri society; associated with danger and with sacredness. The Badaga, for instance, although they employed Kurumba as assistants to their priests (see above), believed that Kurumba were able to change into insects of any sort and into mammals, that they killed and ate people and were capable of inflicting mortal epidemics.[37] Even in the 1960s, Badaga informants described incidents of Kurumbas turning into tigers which, they said, they saw with their own eyes; women were afraid of mice, lizards and insects (because they might have been Kurumbas), and everyone was afraid of walking alone in the forest.[38]

In contrast with Region N, in Region W it was held that Nayaka *behaved* like animals—as opposed to turning *into* animals. Even in the 1970s, their neighbors related that Nayaka 'do not value shelters and, like animals, frequently sleep in the jungle', and that 'they show little concern for each other, each eating, like animals, food where they find it' (Bird-David, fieldnotes). Tribesmen did not fear the Nayaka. On the contrary, in what related to the forest world they made use of their knowledge and their expertise. Walking in the forest, for instance, they used Nayaka foot-paths and crossed through their hamlets. They also approached Nayaka for natural medicines and for mediation with

[35] Misra 1972.
[36] See Furer-Haimendorf 1952: 25.
[37] See Hockings 1980: 123, drawing on Harkness 1832: 84–5; Metz 1864: 116–17; Thurston 1909, vol. I, 86, and 1912: 232–3.
[38] Hockings, fieldnotes.

the supernatural realm, since they regarded Nayaka shamans as being very powerful.

The inordinate fear in which tribesmen in Region N held the Kurumba, resulted in massacres of suspected Kurumba sorcerers. When a mishap struck Badaga and Toda, they attributed it to Kurumba sorcery. A Badaga party, often accompanied by one or two Toda, then took revenge on Kurumba families. Massacres, for example, were recorded officially in 1824, 1835, 1836, 1875, 1882, 1891, and 1900.[39] In 1835 no less than forty-eight Kurumbas were murdered;[40] in 1875, six households of Kurumbas were massacred with axes;[41] and in 1882 one Kurumba family was impaled and burnt alive.[42] A police report from 1890 describes the murder of an entire Kurumba family.[43]

Silence is loud with regard to Nayaka in Region W. In official sources concerned with the Nilgiri region as a whole, there is, to my knowledge, no mention of any inter-tribal violence in the Nilgiri-Wynaad during the same period in which so many cases were recorded in Region N. Other sources make no mention of inter-tribal tension. We can make a case out of silence and suggest that inter-tribal tension, so prominent in Region N, was not found in Region W.

Finally—and symptomatic of the two systems—tribesmen in Region N spoke a great deal about 'The Food-Gatherer and Sorcerer Kurumba', but knew little about the day-to-day life of the Kurumba people,[44] while in Region W they knew a great deal about the daily practices of 'those food-gathering Nayaka who live in so-and-so place', but they were reluctant to form any generalization about *The* Nayaka. In Region N, they regarded the local food-gathering people as The Other, and in Region W as others.

Regional Exceptions

Small communities of the Toda, Badaga and Kota also lived in Region W away from their main groups in Region N. The extensive literature on the Nilgiris contains only a few and scattered references to these isolated communities. However, once the references are col-

[39] Hockings 1980: 200, citing Breeks 1875: 65; Grigg 1880: 299, 411; Stokes 1882, *passim*; Francis 1908: 155; Thurston 1909, vol. I: 86; Tignous 1911: 155.
[40] Thurston 1912, vol. IV: 171.
[41] See Hockings 1980: 200.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Thurston 1909, vol. IV: 171.
[44] Cf. Bird-David 1987.

lated and viewed as a whole, they show considerable differences between the two regions—evidence of, in all likelihood, the influence of the regional social milieu. They suggest that Badaga, Toda and Kota who lived in Region W, probably adjusted themselves to their regional social world and accordingly deviated from customs and conventions of their main groups of affiliation.

One of the three divisions of the Toda's Piedr clan lived in Kavidi in the Wynaad. From W. H. R. Rivers' seminal monograph of the Toda (1906)—a monograph in which this Cambridge-based founder of British Social Anthropology demonstrated the uses of the genealogical method—we can deduce that Kavidi differed from all other Toda villages in a number of ways.

Firstly, Toda normally saluted villages with a special gesture (*kaimvihkti*). Some villages were saluted by members of all the clans, and others only by members of their own clan. Only Kavidi, Rivers observed, 'had no sanctity whatever and was not saluted when seen from a distance' (1906:703), not even by 'members of the clan to which it belonged' (1906:420).

Secondly, it was generally believed that Toda dead went westward to Amnodr in the other world, crossing on their journey, a river called Puvurkin, on the banks of which lived 'people who belonged to all tribes' (1906:399). All Todas who were selfish, jealous and grudging during their life-time, or who had committed any offence against the sanctity of the dairies, fell into the river, and were kept by the tribal people of Puvurkin, except for the Toda of Kavidi. They, wrote Rivers, 'run no danger from this source, however bad they may have been' (1906:400).

Thirdly, Toda did not normally enter a Kota settlement for fear of being polluted. Rivers recorded only a single exception: Toda could, and did, enter the Kota village of Kalgas, near Gudalur, and even slept in that village.[45] The Kota village was close to Kavidi and, presumably it was the Toda of Kavidi who usually visited it. This deviant custom, furthermore, was credited to the cultural hero, Kwoten, who was the first Toda to visit the Kota village in Wynaad.[46]

Fourthly, customarily, when a man of either of the two other divisions of the Peidr clan (who lived in Region N) performed a certain ritual, a buffalo was given to the other division. However, if a man from Kavidi performed the ritual, the buffalo was given to either one of the two other divisions.[47]

[45] Rivers 1906: 636, 640.
[46] *Ibid.*, 200. [47] *Ibid.*, 671.

Although Rivers mentioned each of these exceptions on its own, within its relevant thematic context, these deviations combine with one another to form a whole, which clearly invites consideration within a local context—i.e., the location of Kavidi outside Region N and within Region W. All these exceptions, I suggest, are evidence of a diluted presence of features which are characteristic of System N and are in apparent conformity with features that are characteristic of System W. The first item on the list, we can say, alludes to relative profanity; the second reflects on friendly and immediate relationships with undistinguished 'other tribes' who live in the same locality; the third further attests to inter-tribal friendly visits; while the fourth is an echo of a lax form of exchange ties.

A similar picture emerges from examining the Badaga Gauda of the Wynaad, who were distributed there in thirteen communities.[48] They seem to have had no relationships with the Toda in the Wynaad. They did not fear Kurumba sorcery in a mythical way as did the Badaga in Region N, and did not accept the 'watchmen' institution, so prominent in the communal life of Badaga in Region N.[49] Moreover, it seems that they did not believe that the Nayaka—their own local forest-dwelling, food-gathering people—were fearful sorcerers, and employed them, as well as other tribesmen, to work in their fields. Nayaka near Pandular, for instance, related that during the early twentieth century they used to work in Gauda fields,[50] and Paniya, Betta Kurumba and even the Kota, probably did so as well.[51] Finally, the Gauda Badaga in Region W were not as strictly endogamous as they were elsewhere, and they did intermarry occasionally with the local agricultural Chetti.[52] Thus, these local variations of the Badaga tradition are in accordance with what is shown by the aforementioned local variations of the Toda tradition.

Conclusions

In drawing on diverse literary sources, as I have done in this analysis, there always looms a question concerning the credibility and completeness of data. Is our picture of the Nilgiri-Wynaad incomplete? Is it only for lack of data that there seems to be no institutionalized elaborate inter-tribal system in the Nilgiri-Wynaad, as was the case in

[48] Hockings 1980: 31, 130.
[49] *Ibid.*, 130.
[50] Bird-David 1983a: 36.
[51] Hockings 1980: 130.
[52] *Ibid.*, 32.

the nearby Nilgiri plateau? Or, on the other hand, is it that the projection of the complex inter-tribal system in the Nilgiri plateau was exaggerated precisely because so many accounts concerned themselves with it. In each account references in previous studies were taken as evidence. The evidence provided the basis for further generalizations, and the generalizations, in turn, were taken as evidence in subsequent accounts. Thus, cumulatively—as Winnie the Pooh in search of the Heffalump—commentators further enriched the 'evidence' for, and the articulation of, the traditional inter-tribal system in Region N.

It is hard to know for certain. It is likely, in fact, that there is a grain of truth in both possibilities. However, the differences between the regional systems are remarkably consistent and, in the light of the comparison, each regional system seems in itself to be highly intra-consistent. On the one hand, in the Nilgiri-Wynaad (in comparison with the Nilgiri plateau), we have an inter-tribal system wherein constituent ethnic groups are largely mingled. On the whole, they do not accentuate too much the economic differences between them, and they hold common local festivals. Moreover, by and large, in day-to-day life, tribesmen are linked to one another by informal ties. On the other hand, in the Nilgiri plateau (by comparison with the Nilgiri-Wynaad) we have a regional system wherein constituent ethnic communities maintain clear ethnic boundaries: they each have their own festivals and emphasize their distinct economic occupations. In addition, they socially regulate inter-tribal interaction through institutionalized economic, political and ritual means.

I would further note that while it is true that we have only sparse sources on the Nilgiri-Wynaad, it is highly likely that a major contributory factor for that is, precisely, that there was no elaborate inter-tribal system there, as found in the Nilgiri plateau. The pluralistic and fluid nature of inter-tribal relationships in the former area did not attract observers' attention—customarily inclined towards ritual-rich ceremonialism and formal structures—as did the structured and formal inter-tribal relationships in the latter area.

Thus, notwithstanding the aforementioned reservations, I suggest that there is a strong case for the existence of *two* kinds of inter-tribal worlds in the Nilgiris. They constitute two *types* of system which respectively dominated the ways in which local peoples and their observers constructed the 'traditional' inter-tribal worlds in the Nilgiri-Wynaad and the Nilgiri plateau. Whether these traditional worlds reflected accurately the actual, historical inter-tribal worlds in

the two geographic areas, is another question and one which deserves close scrutiny.[53]

The extensive literature on the Nilgiris, prior to the present paper, has not been concerned with, let alone examined, the inter-tribal world of the Nilgiri-Wynaad. It is hoped that this paper will encourage basic ethnographic research in the area, neglected for far too long in favor of the Nilgiri Plateau. It is hoped, furthermore, that in offering a systematic outline of the differences between it and the Nilgiri plateau, the paper will provide an analytical matrix for the study of the fluid and pluralistic inter-tribal world in the Nilgiri-Wynaad, as well as an impetus for broader regional examination which engulfs the Nilgiri-Wynaad. When continuing research further explores the *two* Nilgiri inter-tribal worlds, the well-established Nilgiri scholarship will have to reconsider old questions,[54] and raise new ones.

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[53] With respect to the Nilgiri plateau, see Bird-David 1987a on the Kurumba.

[54] For example, in speculating on the origin of the Toda, Rivers (1906: ch. 30) attached considerable importance to the fact that Toda did not show any reverence for the Toda settlement of Kavidi. He thought that it went against the hypothesis that they had arrived at the Nilgiris from Malabar.

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