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Reforming Beliefs

DESERTED VILLAGES AND DESTROYED DREAMS: AN INDICATION OF CULTURE EXTINCTION

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ABSTRACT

What I propose to pen in the following pages is not about the history of my people, but about their contemporary condition of living that I aspire to explore. I come from the badaga community, a distinctive sect of tribes accommodating most regions of the Niligiri district of Tamilnadu. I have no doubt that those who are familiar with the Niligiri district are well aware of the people in it. Especially, nobody would have left their thoughts of Nilgiris without contemplating about the special race of people that the district is blessed with.

It is quite an unfortunate thing that so far a community with such cultural merits has remained unpopular and out of the picture due to lack of script. We have been incapable of expressing ourselves, our culture, customs and rituals in the form of historical records. It is a great disadvantage to live without a language of our own to express. We have indeed lost our finest antiquity and the lifestyle of our forefathers entirely due to lack of education and script. It is at the same time very disappointing to mention the fact that among us not many have attempted to investigate or research our origin. Undeniably, it is true that we have not shown interest into our own community even to the extent it was considered with admiration by scholars from abroad. This paper will attempt to explore the contemporary condition of the badaga people specifically focusing on the impact of dislocation.

Introduction

Displacement has always been a very challenging and unavoidable issue in human history. We have been so far forced to displacements in variety of ways. Turning the leaves of history, we could notice tremendous displacements where men have left their homelands due to battles, due to natural disasters, sometimes because of poverty, for survival, even for education and business. Such unnatural movements have been a gateway for innumerable problems. This has given rise to immigrant literature as well, where authors have expressed their agonies of being away from their homelands, of being uprooted from their family, society and culture, of sufferings they have been facing in the alienated society, of their constant battle with the dual roles they are tied to and many such unpleasant things are well recorded in modern works.

Undeniably, only a handful of gifted people are left with the luxury of living in their native soil. Most of us in one way or the other fall as victims to displacement. Moving from place to place whether we like it or not is an ancient unquestionable strategy and survival need. We may not be able to prevent such migrations because it is something very common in every nation. My purpose here is only to let the readers understand this in an awareness perspective specifically concerning the life of the Badagas. In no way this short piece of writing expresses anything against urbanization.

Badaga *Hattis*

Badagas like many other communities are scattered around the world. Against the traditional belief of unity and brotherhood, modern generations are left with no possibilities to taste the fruits of togetherness. It has become very common among the Badagas to settle outside their geographical boundaries due to variety of reasons. *Hattis*¹ which were once the fountain of Badaga establishments, a reservoir of Badaga tradition and culture, are at present mere leftovers.

Ancestral Badaga heritage has come to an end nearly in all *Hattis*. The continuity in the Badaga tradition has been lost almost to the extent where recovery seems impossible.

Though lifestyle requires change, developments are essential; we ought to try to remain in constant communication with our culture. For the past few years, *hattis* have been losing most of its inhabitants. People are continually abandoning their villages in search of new places in order to fulfill their needs. Day by day, percentage of those who march towards towns and cities have drastically increased and majority of them have left their once valued possessions.

Shifting Roles

Their ancestral routine has been totally stripped off leading to forcibly accept new roles for survival in new places. An unstoppable wave has flooded the Badagas and swept them to areas unfamiliar to them. In one way it is an irreparable cultural disaster but, on the other side it is a way of life. All that is left for us is to understand and accept that change is needed but definitely not at the cost of cultural damage. One could argue over this matter in either way but this is not my intention. Nothing has been lost yet, therefore, there is no need to regret. We are only at the climax, a point that would decide whether we would live or perish, I mean our culture.

Diminishing Harmony

Badagas around the world are in constant communication in the internet everyday expressing their agony of being detached from their people and culture. The harmony that exists in *hattis* cannot be replaced elsewhere in the society. Unfortunately, to most of the younger generation *hattis* have become a place of utter boredom. It is rare enough to see children pestering their parents to take them to *hattis*. In spite of the beautiful serene, landscape and peaceful environment, it is very tragic that *hattis* have nothing entertaining to offer these kids. Despite the improvements, entertainments are still out of reach. It has become so rare to notice children playing in the *tharas*². The *tharas* that were once astonishingly cleansed and decorated by cow dungs are places where children keep loitering around and playing their favourite marble and top games. But now cement bases have replaced the *tharas* bringing down the little harmonies of the past.

Remembering who we are

Children of today hardly remember Badaga customs and practices. Leading their lives in towns and metropolitan cities they do not get the necessary opportunities to be exposed to the rich Badaga culture. They look at their own rituals and ceremonies as an outsider, as if they are observing some alien manners. Shockingly, young Badaga brides brought up entirely in the towns and cities face terrible inconvenience in getting adapted in traditional Badaga homes after marriage. These brides hardly know the Badaga manners and find it to be in some way inappropriate and against their lifestyle. Though they may learn it in the course of time, it may not be possible for us to assure whether they would develop love towards such traditional customs. What I would personally suggest to such youngsters is that they should right from their young age take measures to look into our culture, involve in the practices and move around with suitable elders from whom they can learn much about our Badaga life.

Conclusion

Badagas have understood the importance of education. It is primarily for this reason most people vacate their homelands. Badagas have comprehended the fact that there are no ways their children could flourish in the villages. It is quite impossible to improve our economic and social status sticking to *hattis*. Hence, there is a necessity for every individual of the present generation to depend upon the neighboring towns and cities to grow professionally and safe guard their family. Badagas have understood quite well that agriculture is not a savior anymore. Only education could transform and uplift their life to a better altitude. All we have to remember is this, no matter how far we proceed, how modernized we may be, what matters the most is that how much we stick on to our culture. It is only by spreading awareness our cultural legacy could be spared for our future generation.

NOTES

1. *Hatti* - Badaga term for village
2. *Thara* – Badaga term denoting the area in front of the house

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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