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ANARCHISM, INDIVIDUALISM AND SOUTH INDIAN FORAGERS: MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS

Prologue

This paper brings together two long-standing interests of mine, as reflected in two of my books, *Forest Traders* (1982), a study of the socio-economic life of the Malaipantaram, a group of South Indian foragers, and *Kropotkin: the Politics of Community* (2004), which offers a critical account of the political philosophy and social ecology of the Russian revolutionary anarchist Peter Kropotkin. The books have one thing in common. Both have been singularly ignored by academic scholars.

Apart from Peter Gardner (2000), no hunter-gatherer specialists—for example, Lee, Ingold, Barnard and Kelly—ever cites, or even mentions my study of the Malaipantaram. In a paper that emphasizes the heterogeneous subsistence strategies among contemporary (not modern) hunter-gatherers, and aims to mediate between the 'traditionalists' (Lee) and the 'revisionists' (Wilmsen) in the rather acrimonious Kalahari debate, Bird-David argues that contemporary ethnographic inquiry should concern itself with the 'dynamics of contact' between modern hunter-gatherers and capitalism at the *local level* (1992b: 21). This was precisely what my ethnographic study *Forest Traders*, published a decade earlier, had entailed! Anyone who reads this book will recognize that I don't treat the Malaipantaram as social isolates, nor do I deny them social agency—either individually or collectively, and I certainly do not describe the Malaipantaram as an unchanging society (cf., Bird-David 1996: 260, Norström 2003: 49).[1]

Likewise, apart from a review in an obscure anarchist magazine, published by the Anarchist Federation, my book on Kropotkin has never been reviewed in any academic journal. A pioneer ecologist and a renowned geographer—his portrait still adorns the library of the Royal Geographic society—Kropotkin was also an anthropologist, the author of the classic text on *Mutual Aid* (1902).[2] Yet the reviews editor of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* did not consider a book on an obscure Russian anarchist as having any interest to anthropologists. And given the current

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academic fashion with so-called post-anarchism, which invokes the ghosts of such radical individualists as Stirner and Nietzsche, a book on Kropotkin seems of little relevance also to contemporary academic anarchists (e.g., Rouselle and Evren 2011).

The dean of Khoisan studies, Barnard, once wrote a perceptive paper on primitive communism: it was aptly titled "Kropotkin Visits the Bushman" (1993). In like fashion, in this paper, I want to bring together my two books; thereby, linking the Malaipantaram ethnography to Kropotkin's social anarchism, and to address the question: are south Indian foragers anarchists, or, more precisely, can the social life of the Malaipantaram and other south Indian foragers be described as a form of anarchy?

Anarchy and Anarchism

I begin this discussion with a confession. When I completed a draft of my Ph.D thesis on the Malaipantaram in 1974—of which *Forest Traders* was a shortened version—I asked a close friend of mine who had a degree in English literature and is a talented poet, to read the manuscript and to check it for any grammatical or stylistic errors or indiscretions. When she returned the thesis to me she declared, 'I don't believe a word of it'. When I asked why, she responded: 'It is just a description of your own anarchist politics. I think you've made the whole thing up'.[3]

That hunter-gatherers and tribal people more generally, have been described as living in a state of anarchy, has long been a common theme in anthropological writings. In recent years, with the highlighting of the presence of anarchists within the anti-capitalist and occupy movement, together with the publication of Scott's seminal *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009)—subtitled *An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*—there has been an upsurge of interest in the relationship between anarchism and anthropology. Indeed, I long ago suggested that there was a kind of 'elective affinity' between anarchism as a political tradition and anthropology. For scholars like Bougle, Mauss, and Radcliffe-Brown had close associations with anarchism—Radcliffe-Brown in his early years was a devotee of Kropotkin and was known as 'Anarchy Brown'—while anarchists such as Kropotkin, Élie and Élisée Reclus, Bookchin, and Zerzan have all drawn extensively on anthropological writings in developing their own brand of anarchism (Morris 1998). Evans-Pritchard in his classic study, *The Nuer* (1940), famously described their political system as 'ordered anarchy' while Marshall Sahlins equally famously, described the 'domestic mode of production' as a 'species of anarchy'. In true Hobbesian fashion, Sahlins negatively portrayed the social organization of tribal peoples as akin to a 'sack of potatoes' (1972: 95-6, see Overing 1993 for an important critique of his neo-liberalism). But, more importantly, long before the current interest in anarchist anthropology, the Canadian scholar Harold Barclay wrote a perceptive little book, *People Without Government* (1982), which is subtitled

The Anthropology of Anarchism. The book affirms that 'anarchy is possible' and describes not only hunter-gatherers—such as the Inuit, Bushman, Yaka Pygmies, and the Australian Aborigines—as having anarchic societies, but also tribal societies more generally. Finally, we may note that Gardner, in his pioneering study of the Paliyan foragers of south India, entitles one of his key chapters 'Respect, Equality and Peaceful Anarchy'—emphasizing the fierce egalitarianism, the high value placed on individual autonomy, and the non-violent ethos that pervades the social life of these foragers (2000: 83-100).

A distinction needs to be made, of course, between anarchy, which is an ordered society without government (or any enduring structures of domination and exploitation) and anarchism, which refers to an historical movement and political tradition. Emerging in Europe around 1870, in the aftermath of the defeated Paris Commune, mainly among workers in Spain, Italy, France and Switzerland, anarchism as a political movement subsequently spread throughout the world in the early years of the twentieth century—and is still a vibrant political tradition (van der Walt and Schmidt 2009).

In Kropotkin's own understanding of anarchist history, anarchism sought to actualize the rallying sentiments of the French revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity (social solidarity)—and entailed a creative synthesis of radical liberalism, with its emphasis on the liberty of the individual, and socialism (or communism) which implied a repudiation of capitalism, and the development of a society based on voluntary co-operation, mutual aid and community life (Baldwin 1970).[4]

Anarchism may be defined, at least for the purposes of the present essay, in terms of three essential tenets or principles.

First, a strong emphasis is placed on the liberty of the individual. The moving spirit of anarchism entails a fundamental focus on the sovereignty of the individual, and thus a complete rejection, not only of the state power but all forms of hierarchy and oppression that inhibit the autonomy of the individual person. For social anarchists the individual was viewed of course, as a social being, not as a disembodied ego, or as some abstract individual, or still less as some fixed, benign essence. A form of existential *individualism* is then a defining feature of anarchism as a political tradition.

Secondly, there is an emphasis on equality, and the affirmation of the community as a 'society of equals'. For anarchists, this implied a complete repudiation of the capitalist market economy along with its wage system, private property, its competitive ethos, and the ideology of possessive individualism. Anarchism thus upheld *egalitarianism* as both a social premise, and as an ethical principle.

Thirdly, it expressed a vision of society based solely on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation, a community-based form of social organization

that would promote and enhance both the fullest expression of individual liberty, and all forms of social life that were independent of both the state and capitalism. The anarchists thus believed in voluntary co-operation, not in chaos, ephemerality or 'anything goes', and anarchists like Kropotkin viewed both tribal and kin-based societies as exhibiting many of the features of anarchy (Morris 2004: 173-90). *Communism* or what Kropotkin described as free communism, was therefore one of the defining values (or characteristics) of anarchism as a political tradition—or at least a defining feature of the kind of anarchist communism that Kropotkin advocated (Morris 2004: 69-74).

Anarchists like Kropotkin therefore did not view anarchy as something that existed only in the distant past—in the Palaeolithic era, nor as simply a utopian vision of some future society, but rather as a form of social life that had existed throughout human history—albeit, often hidden in contemporary societies, buried and unrecognized beneath the weight of capitalism and the state. As Colin Ward graphically put it, anarchy is like 'a seed beneath the snow' (1973: 11).

I turn now to the ethnography of South Indian foragers, and will address the question as to whether their social life can be described as a form of anarchy in terms of these three defining features of anarchism as a political tradition, namely, individualism, egalitarianism and communism.

Individualism

It has long been recognized that the foragers of south India—such as the Kadar, Paliyan, Malaipantaram and Jenu Kuruba—express what has been described as an individualistic ethic or culture (Gardner 1966: 408, Fox 1969: 145,Misra 1969: 234, Morris 1982: 109-10).

But to understand what this individualism entails, an initial note of clarification seems essential. For there has been a lamentable tendency on the part of many anthropologists to set up, in rather exotic fashion, a radical dichotomy between Western conceptions of the individual—misleadingly identified with Cartesian metaphysics or the 'commodity' metaphor—and that of other cultures. This radical dichotomy suggests that Western culture views the human subject as an egocentric, isolated, non-social, and rigidly bounded individual, whereas in other cultures—specifically Bali, India and Melanesia––people have a socio-centric concept of the subject; they view people as intrinsically social beings, a 'microcosm of relations', who conceive of themselves in terms of their social roles rather than as unique individuals. (Geertz 1975: 360-411, Shweder and Bourne 1984: 158-99, Strathern 1988). There exist in the world, therefore, we are told, 'two types of person' (Carsten 2004: 84-8). This kind of dualistic approach is quite untenable, and has been subject to several telling criticisms (Spiro 1993, Morris 1994: 16-8, Lipuma

1998: 47-56). We need, in fact, to go back to Immanuel Kant, and to commonsense understandings of the world.

Kant famously described anthropology as the study of 'what is a human being', or, in contemporary parlance, 'what it means to be human'. And in his seminal work, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (2007, originally 1798), [5] published in the last decade of his life, Kant suggested the understanding of the human subject in terms of a triadic ontology, portraying the individual as a universal human being (*mensch*), as a unique self (*selbst*) and as a social being, a member of a particular group of people (*volk*). Kant, of course, focused on the individual as a universal, rational subject, while his student and later critic, Herder, stressed that humans were fundamentally cultural beings. Many years later the anthropologist Kluckhohn expressed this triadic ontology in simple everyday terms. Critical of dualistic conceptions of the human subject in terms of the nature (biology) versus culture dichotomy, Kluckhohn suggested, in contrast, that there were three essential ways of understanding the human subject. Every person, he wrote, is in some respects like every other human being—as a species being (humanity); that it is like no other human being in having a unique personality (or self); and, finally, that it has affinities with some other humans, in being social or cultural beings (or persons) (Murray and Kluckhohn 1953).

The notion that humanity is simply a class concept or does not exist - only individual humans, we're told, exist - as expressed by John Gray (2002: 12)[6] and some anthropologists, is quite misleading. As Manuel DeLanda argues, humanity (as well as other species-beings) do indeed exist, but at a different geo-temporal scale to that of the organism (the unique human individual). For a species-being like humanity comes into being, endures as an entity over perhaps thousands or even millions of years, eventually to be transformed, or become extinct, as with the dodo and great auk (Delanda 2006: 48-9).

The Malaipantaram, and other foragers of South India, like people everywhere, clearly affirm this triadic ontology. They recognize that the people they encounter are human beings (*manushyan*) (as distinct from elephants and monitor lizards) and that they have unique personalities, and a sense of their own individuality (which ought not to be equated with individualism as a cultural ethos). They recognize too that other humans, both within their own society, and with regard to outsiders, are social beings with ethnic affiliations and diverse social identities (Rupp 2011: 14-7).

But what is significant about the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers' conception of the human subject is their placing fundamental focus on the individual, on the independent person—as existentialists do. They stress and value an individual's autonomy. In their child-rearing practices and their gathering economy Malaipantaram place a high degree of emphasis on self-reliance and autonomy. Socialization patterns are largely geared to

making a child socially, psychologically and economically independent at a very early age, and respectful of the autonomy of other individuals. Thus in contrast with neighbouring caste communities the Malaipantaram individual may constitute a unit of both production and consumption; to live a solitary existence is not only possible but by no means unusual for older men, and it is not thought of negatively (Morris 1982: 140-7).

A strong adherence to individual autonomy, and thus an 'intense' individualism (as it has been described) has been recognized by all researchers on South Indian foragers.

Although clearly linked to a gathering economy, both for subsistence and trade, such individualism is also expressed in the diversity of their economic strategies, and their individual mobility and flexibility with regard to group membership. Indeed, individualism has been interpreted as a characteristic feature of hunter-gatherer societies generally—or at least those with an immediate-return economic system (Woodburn 1982). Nobody has expressed this individualistic ethos with more cogency than Gardner, who in relation to the Paliyan and several other foragers, views it as intrinsically linked to individual decision-making, social mechanisms that undermine any form of hierarchy, a non-violent ethos—in that inter-personal conflicts are generally resolved through fission and mobility, and a general absence in the formalization of culture (Gardner 1966; 1991: 547-9; 2000: 83-5).

In *Forest Traders* I noted that the ethnographic data on the Paliyans, who were characterized by a 'very extreme individualism' (Gardner 1966: 409), seemed to run counter to Louis Dumont's argument in *Homo Hierarchicus*(1970), wherein he suggested that the presence of the 'individual'––in its modern, normative sense—was not recognized in Indian society. I have written elsewhere on this apparent paradox (Morris 1978; 1991: 262-9). What has to be recognized in the present context is that not only must a distinction be made between individuality (and the agency of the individual that is acknowledged in most societies) and normative or cultural conceptions of the human subject, but there are many distinct and contrasting forms of *individualism* (Lukes 1973). Dumont himself devotes a good deal of discussion to two forms of individualism, besides that of economic individualism. One is that of the ascetic 'renouncer' in Hindu society, the *Sannyasin* whose individual identity is achieved by repudiating all ties that bind a person to the caste system (society) and the world. The other form of individualism is that associated with the concept of '*bildung*' or 'self-cultivation' that was particularly associated with literary intellectuals in Germany at the end of the 18th century, and was later developed by Nietzsche and by his poststructuralist devotees. (Dumont 1986a; 1986b).[7]

The key distinction that has to be made is that between the individualism of the South Indian foragers, and the various kinds of

individualism that are generally associated with the capitalist economy, if not with many aspects of Western culture. These range from that of Cartesian philosophy, with its notion of a disembodied ego radically separate from nature and social life (critiqued by Lévi-Strauss 1977: 41),[8] the abstract or possessive individualism of liberal theory that was long ago lampooned by Marx and Bakunin, the methodological individualism of optimal foraging theory, critiqued by Ingold (1996), and the radical egoism of Ayn Rand which advocates a form of selfishness that has little or no regard for other humans, and is now apparently dominant in right-wing American politics (Weiss 2012: 9-10).

All four kinds of bourgeois individualism were repudiated by Kropotkin and the early social anarchists, as all tended to deny the social nature of the human subject. The mode of individualism that Kropotkin advocated, in contrast, he described as *'personalismus or pro sibicommunisticum'*—the kind of individuality that is inherently social (Kropotkin 1970: 297).

In a more recent text, Susan Brown has followed Kropotkin in making a clear distinction between instrumental or possessive individualism manifested through the market, and the existentialist individualism advocated by the social anarchists––as expressed in the individuals capacity to be autonomous and self-determining (Brown 1993: 32-3; Morris 2004: 183-6). Clearly, the kind of individualism expressed by the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers, has close affinities with the existentialist individualism described by Brown. Indeed she defines social anarchism as combining existential individualism with free communism (1993: 118).

But, of course, making a distinction between the individualism of hunter-gatherers and the rugged individualism of modern capitalism, is not saying anything new or original. Long ago Diamond emphasized that the mode of thought expressed by tribal societies—specifically hunter-gatherers, with respect to the human subject, was one that was concrete, existential and personalistic (Service 1966: 83; Diamond 1974: 146).

Egalitarianism

In *Forest Traders* I emphasized that an egalitarian ideal permeated Malaipantaram society, and that this ethos contrasted markedly from the emphasis on hierarchy in surrounding agricultural communities, particularly in relation to gender, and with regard to the higher castes (1982: 49). In fact, I argued that Malaipantaram society was both egalitarian and individualistic in its essential ethos (1982: 110). Around the same time James Woodburn published his seminal paper on "Egalitarian Societies" (1982), although it is well to recall that, as a concept, 'egalitarianism' is hardly mentioned in what constitutes one of the founding texts of hunter-gatherer studies (Lee and DeVore 1968). But it is generally recognized that egalitarianism is a fundamental characteristic not only of South Indian foragers, but all hunter-

gathering societies with an immediate-return economic system (Gardner 1991; Boehm 1999; Widlok and Tadesse 2005; Solway 2006).

Among the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers egalitarianism is manifested in diverse ways: as an ethos, as a constellation of values and normative expectations, and as a way of handling social relationships (indeed, their cultural values and social actions are inter-linked and dialectically related). Three aspects of their egalitarianism bear mentioning: their emphasis on sharing, their attitude towards authority structures, and their general emphasis on equality, especially gender equality.

As in many other hunter-gathering societies, Malaipantaram always share wild animal meat within the camp or settlement and every person is entitled to a share. While the hunting of mammals such as sambar, chevrotain and various monkeys is practised, most of the meat obtained is through eclectic foraging, and what almost amounts to the 'gathering' of small animals—specifically tortoises, bats, monitor lizards and squirrels (Morris 1982: 71-9). Apart from the sharing of meat, sharing is in fact limited among the Malaipantaram, and economic exchange within the community is best described in terms of reciprocity and mutual aid.

Although in various Malaipantaram settlements there are recognized 'headmen' *(Muppan)*, these are largely a function of administrative control introduced by the state via the Forest Department, in order to facilitate communication. Such headmen have little or no control over the lives or movements of other members of the local group (Morris 1982: 158-9). There is, in fact, amongst the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers, a marked antipathy towards any form of authority, or any form of hierarchy, whether based on wealth, prestige or power. In their everyday life the emphasis is always on being modest, non-aggressive and non-competitive, engaging with others in terms of an ethos that puts a fundamental emphasis on mutual aid, and on respecting the autonomy of others—especially those with whom a person regularly associates. But as many scholars have indicated, the stress on egalitarian relationships does not simply imply a mere lack of hierarchy, but is actively engendered by forms of social power—diffuse sanctions or levelling mechanisms—expressed and enforced by means of criticisms, ridicule, ostracism, desertion, or by the simple, voluntary adherence to customary norms. Such diffuse sanctions among hunter-gatherers have been discussed by Lee (1979: 458) and Barclay (1982: 22). To describe this form of social power and the diffuse sanctions that are entailed as an implicit 'reverse-dominance hierarchy' (Boehm 1999: 86-8) or as a form of 'governance' (Norström 2001: 207) is quite misleading, for the Malaipantaram have a marked aversion to all forms of domination and governance. This does not, of course, imply that they live in the forest in a state of 'anomie.' They are, however, like other South Indian foragers, well attuned to the 'art of not being governed' (Scott 2009).

Given this emphasis on egalitarian relations, it is not surprising that gender relations among Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers, are typically recognized as being based on equality. In *Forest Traders*, by acknowledging the social and economic independence of women I stressed that there was a high degree of equality between the sexes, especially when contrasted with gender relations among caste communities. Within the conjugal family men and women have more or less equal rights, and neither party has authority over the other (1982: 40). But, given the harassment by outsiders that Malaipantaram have generally to face, I never encountered a Malaipantaram woman foraging alone in the forest. Similar gender relations are seen among other South Indian foragers (Ehrenfels1952: 209; Mathur 1977: 178; Bird-David 1987: 154; Gardner 2000: 101-3).

In a widely-acclaimed essay on Sahlins' thesis describing hunter-gatherers as the 'original affluent society' (1972: 1-39), Bird-David (1992a) seems to inflate the notion of sharing—a key element of egalitarianism—into a rather metaphysical principle. Sharing thus becomes a totalizing concept that incorporates almost all aspects of the social and cultural life of the Nayaka. By implication her 'model' applies to all foragers with an immediate-return economic system, although interestingly she makes no mention of other South Indian foragers.

There is nothing amiss with describing South Indian foragers as individualistic or egalitarian, or as having a 'sharing ethos,' but Bird-David's analysis is a typical example of what Morrison describes as typological and essentialist thinking (2002: 3). Although her analysis has a ring of truth, it gives quite a biased portrait of the social and cultural life of South Indian foragers. In following Turnbull's misinterpretation of Mbuti religion as a form of crude pantheism, Bird-David tends to *conflate* natural phenomena—mountains, rivers, rock outcrops, stones, trees or animals (especially elephants), as well as artefacts, with malevolent spirits, ancestral spirits and forest deities that have their 'abode' in the forest, or are identified with certain figurines or icons. But these two aspects of the forager's life-world are distinct. Bhanu writes, for example, of Chola Naickan calling on spirits, represented by an elephant figurine (*aneuruva*), to protect them, not only from illness and misfortune, but from marauding of real elephants (1989: 63-6). Indeed, rather than living in a 'giving environment' (Bird-David 1990) Malaipantaram and other south Indian foragers appeal to the ancestral spirits (*chavu*) or mountain gods (*malaidevi*), not only when there are illnesses and misfortunes, but also when there is a *lack* of food or honey, or hunting has been unsuccessful. Through shamanistic rituals the reasons for the lack of food or misfortunes is explained in terms of people not upholding certain customary norms or moral edicts, particularly not respecting other people's autonomy, or not sharing or offering mutual aid to their close kin. Equally, by focussing on their religious ideology, Bird-David ignores the empirical naturalism that is manifested in

their ecological knowledge of the natural world and in their practical activities. This is equally a part of the foragers' culture. The metaphor 'giving environment' is misleading,[9] for like people in all societies, the relationship of the Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers to the natural world, is one that is complex, diverse, multifaceted and often contradictory, and cannot be reduced to a single metaphor, however engaging and illuminating.

The Malaipantaram, of course, recognize the forest as their home, and have warm feelings towards the forest as the essential source of their livelihood and well being. It is the abode of their ancestral spirits and the forest deities on whom they can always call for support and protection, and the forest is always a place of refuge (Morris 1982: 50). But it is misleading to interpret the forest simply as a 'parent' or as 'giving'.

Likewise, although sharing is a fundamental ethic among the Malaipantaram, one has to recognize that it is not ubiquitous. The Malaipantaram are involved in market relations and, though they always strive to make these relationships friendly, sharing, personal, and involving mutual aid and support (cf., Kenrick 2005: 135), they are essentially hierarchical and exploitative, and the foragers do not control them. As Mathur describes market relationships among the Chola Naickan—who are clearly related to the local group described by Bird-David—what the foragers attempt and prefer is to 'act as a generous kinsman rather than a self-seeking trader', by contrast with the forest contractor who always seeks to control and exploit them (Mathur 1977: 36).

Equally important, one has to recognize that there is very little sharing between families among the Malaipantaram, and it is the family that is the key productive and commensal unit. It always struck me as unusual that after a day spent together in eclectic foraging, both for food and for minor forest produce, co-operating, conversing, and engaging in banter, on returning to the cave in the late afternoon each of the three families would build their own fireplace, establish a distinct commensal unit and that there would be no sharing at all between the different families.

Although a distinction can be made between tribal agriculturalists and South Indian foragers like the Malaipantaram—and even between those Malaipantaram who are settled cultivators and those foragers living exclusively in the interior (on whom I focussed in my research), it is quite misleading to set up a radical opposition between sharing and reciprocity. All human societies engage to some degree in sharing or generalized reciprocity (Price 1975) but the relationship between such sharing and reciprocity is always dialectical. Malaipantaram men who are deeply involved in hunting, especially in the marketing of the Nilgiri Langur, tend to live separately with their family, in order to avoid sharing the meat, while any individual who engages constantly

in demand sharing without any reciprocation is likely to find his or her own kin moving elsewhere. And among Malaipantaram and other South Indian foragers there is a clear distinction made between food gathered from the forest, and goods like rice, condiments, or artefacts that are obtained in the market. The latter tend to involve a more balanced reciprocity (cf., Norström 2003: 221). The key idea expressed by Malaipantaram is one of mutual aid—which includes sharing, reciprocity and an ethic of generosity (Morris 1982: 161).

Communism

The American poet Rexroth once wrote, 'People who hunt and gather cannot be anything but communist' (1975: 1).There has, of course, been a long tradition, going back to Morgan and Engels in the nineteenth century, affirming that hunter-gatherers—those 'roving savages' as Engels described them—and tribal or kin-based societies more generally, live in 'communistic communities' (Marx and Engels 1968: 579). By communism was meant not simply the absence of private (exclusive) property but rather a universal collective right of access to all resources necessary for life and well-being—specifically rights to land and the means of production; what property was 'owned' being of a purely personal nature (Leacock 1983).

In his well-known reflections on 'primitive communism', Lee (1988) noted that the concept was not only ignored by later Marxists—Harman's history of the world (1999), for example, barely recognizes the existence of tribal peoples––but was generally dismissed and belittled by most anthropologists too. Lee tends to identify primitive communism with what he describes as the 'foraging' mode of production. He tends, therefore, to leave out of his account not only hunter-gatherers that are sedentary and non-egalitarian, such as the Ainu (Japan), Calusa (Florida) and the hunter-gatherers of the American northwest coast, but also the Iroquois. For Morgan, however, it was the Iroquois that were the prototypical primitive communists. Democratic and egalitarian, they were the exemplars of the 'liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes' (Morgan 1877: 562).

In several essays Lee outlines what he terms the 'core features' of primitive communism, or the foraging mode of production. These are the following:

- Social life in the society or ethnic community is focussed around a band structure, small groups of 20-30 people, with highly flexible membership and an emphasis on mobility, often with patterns of concentration and dispersal.
- Land is held collectively in common and everyone has free or reciprocal access to resources and there is no ownership in the sense of completely withholding access.

- There is an ethic of egalitarianism, and this implies strong, even if diffuse, sanctions against the accumulation of wealth, all forms of political authority, and any expression of self-aggrandisement.
- Such egalitarianism implies an emphasis on co-operation and mutual aid, and patterns of sharing or generalized reciprocity are strongly emphasized, especially within the band or camp—so that no one goes hungry if food is available.
- And, an emphasis on co-operation and sociality is combined with a high respect for the autonomy of the individual—such that there is a strong emphasis on individual choice with regard to whom a person resides with or associates.

(Leacock and Lee 1982: 7-8; Lee 1988: 254; 2005: 20). Primitive communism, or the foraging mode of production, thus entails a combination of individualism and egalitarianism.

What is evident, of course, is that these core features or attributes of the foraging mode of production––primitive communism––are virtually synonymous with those specified by Woodburn (1982) in terms of immediate-return economic systems; by Gardner (1991) in terms of the individual autonomy syndrome; and by Barnard (2001) in his specifications of the hunter-gatherer 'mode of thought'.

What is equally significant is that the Malaipantaram, as depicted in *Forest Traders*, as well as South Indian foragers more generally, can clearly be described as communists, as exemplars of the foraging mode of production (or thought), even though they may engage in a diversity of economic activities (Fortier 2009: 102).

It has become rather fashionable nowadays to suggest like Ayn Rand, Margaret Thatcher's guru, that societies do not exist and that all we supposedly experience is sociality, social networks or lines, with the human person simply being the nodal point or intersection of various relations. However, nobody seems to doubt the reality of the state and capitalist organizations. It has even been suggested that the concept of society is not applicable to hunter-gatherers, the concept being defined, in rather Hobbesian fashion, as entailing 'structures of domination'. The concept of society, of course, emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, as a relational concept, in contradistinction to the nation-state that was then asserting its hegemony. The distinction between society and the state (entailing structures of political domination or government) was not only articulated by such radical liberals as Tom Paine, but by numerous anarchists from Godwin at the end of the eighteenth century to Kropotkin, Reclus, and the social anarchists in the twentieth century.

Like other primates, all humans live in groups of various kinds, and from the ethnographic record it is quite clear that hunter-gatherers live in

societies. For the Hadza have a clear and distinctive ethnic identity (Woodburn 1988: 39); the Ju/'hoansi of the Kalahari recognize themselves as a society of 'real people' with a distinctive culture and language—as many scholars have described (Kent 2002); the Mbendjele of central Africa regard themselves both as Yaka (or forest people) as well as a distinct society (Lewis 2005: 57); and, finally, with regard to the Paliyans of South India, they are described as being 'both in their own, and in their neighbours' eyes, a separate ethnic group' (Norström 2003: 4) or in everyday language, a society. Dismissing the concept of 'society' as a 'stereotype' is hardly helpful to understanding hunter-gatherers.[10]

A human society, of course, is simply a group of humans who are linked to each other by enduring social ties, who share certain values, beliefs, normative expectations and purposes, and whose members have a sense of belonging to the group. A society, as Kropotkin long ago emphasized, is essentially a moral, not a political, community (cf. Boehm 1999: 12). To even talk about an 'egalitarian ethos', or 'mode of thought' presupposes the existence and identity of a specific hunter-gatherer society.

The Malaipantaram, as do other South Indian foragers, identify themselves as belonging to a specific society or ethnic community, and are recognized as such not only by the Indian state, but by all people with whom they come into contact. But they do not form a cohesive political unit; they are 'fragmented'—as I expressed it in *Forest Traders* (1982: 112)—into diverse, flexible but inter-related social groupings. Basically, with regard to the Malaipantaram, as a society or moral community, there exist three levels of organization, namely the forest settlements, the conjugal family, and what I termed forest camps, the loose groupings of two or three families, who are linked essentially by affinal ties (1982: 30, 157).

Named after particular forest locations, the dispersed settlements are local groups, consisting of between 18 and 36 people. They are situated in specific valleys or forest ranges. At the settlements the Malaipantaram often engage in the cultivation of tapioca or rice, as well as certain fruit-bearing trees, and often engage in casual agricultural labour on nearby estates. People at the settlement are intimately associated with the hill forests above the settlement, and have extensive knowledge of the forest environment and its diverse inhabitants. They also form ritual congregations in relation to the ancestral spirits (*chava*) and mountain deities (*malaidevi*), which have their 'abodes' in the same forested hills. The settlement or local group is rarely a cohesive unit, and is often divided into several 'clusters' or hamlets, each composed of 2-4 families (cf. Misra 1969: 206 and Bird-David 1983 on the Jenu Kuruba and Nayaka respectively). Though widely dispersed over the *ghat* mountains south of Lake Periyar, the settlements are by no means isolated, for all Malaipantaram are linked by a universal system of kinship (Barnard 2001: 94), and thus there are kinship links, particularly affinal ties, between members of the various settlements.

In contrast the conjugal family is a fairly cohesive unit, forming a distinct social and economic grouping. As noted above, the family is the basic productive and commensal unit, even though marriage ties are often transient. Conjugal relations are generally warm and affectionate, essentially reciprocal and complementary.

Between the dispersed settlements or local groups, and the conjugal family there are social aggregates that are difficult to define. But the fact that the Malaipantaram do not have corporate, land-owning kin groups is no reason to suggest that they do not live in groups! I have discussed in *Forest Traders* at some length, the forest groups of the Malaipantaram, and have suggested that, although membership is often flexible and transient—all Malaipantaram being highly mobile and acting as independent persons—such groups are in the nature of a kindred, and people are united in terms of affinal ties. As I put it: 'Affinal links seem to serve as a guiding principle in structuring friendships and camp aggregates' (1982: 157).

People that constitute such camp aggregates are drawn together by 'dyadic bonds of affection' and express enduring relationships of mutual aid, as well as expressing an ethic of sharing and reciprocity. Malaipantaram social structure cannot therefore be interpreted simply as consisting of independent families with floating 'single persons' (mostly adolescents) giving social cohesion to the local group. Although all Malaipantaram act, and are expected to act, as autonomous individuals, it is affinal ties that structure their relationships and their forest camps (cf., Bird-David 1987; Demmer 1997).

Malaipantaram social life, and that of other South Indian foragers, can therefore be described in important respects as communistic. But many scholars (e.g., Riches 2000: 671-72) have suggested that there is an inevitable tension, or contradiction, between egalitarianism (with the emphasis on mutual aid, sharing and sociality) and individualism (with stress on the autonomy of the individual). Indeed liberal scholars like Isaiah Berlin stressed that there was an inherent conflict between the values of equality and liberty. But as anarchists have always emphasized, the two concepts are dialectically related, and necessarily imply each other. As Kropotkin put it: you can hardly be free and independent in a society based on inequality and hierarchy.

Among the Malaipantaram, and it seems hunter-gatherers more generally, an egalitarian ethos seems to co-exist with an equal emphasis on the autonomy of the individual. As I wrote long ago:

> 'A viable ethnographic portrait can be drawn only if we stress the co-operation and the individualism, the warm attachments Malaipantaram hold towards each other and the fragility and ephemeral nature of these ties' (1982: 114).

Conclusion

Given the individualism, egalitarianism and communism that are undoubtedly manifested in the social life of the Malaipantaram and other

South Indian foragers, can we describe such foragers as living in a state of anarchy?

Judging by the ethnographies of Gardner (2000) and me (1982) the answer seems to be in the affirmative. Indeed Fortier certainly suggests that the micro politics of both the Paliyan and the Malaipantaram can be depicted as anarchy (2009: 103). Yet other scholars have baulked at the idea. Boehm, for example, dismisses the whole idea that the 'egalitarian blueprint' of hunter-gathering is a form of anarchy, suggesting that anarchy implies a complete absence of power and control (1999: 87). Apart from Stirnerite individualists, no social anarchist has ever envisaged a society without some form of social power, immanent within the community—power as mutuality and equality, as Barclay expressed it (2009: 7-26).

In my study of the Malaipantaram, written forty years ago, I emphasized how much of their social life and culture—their nomadism, their flexible organization, and their reluctance to take up agriculture and become a settled community—was an attempt to retain their autonomy as a forest people. Thus the Malaipantaram attempted to retain their independence and cultural integrity despite being ridiculed and harassed by the caste communities of the plains, the exactions of the Indian state bent on their development and settlement, and the intrusions of a mercantile economy focused around the trade of minor forest products. The suggestion that in emphasizing the external social factors that impinge on Malaipantaram social life, I thereby deny them social agency (Norström 2003: 48-51) is quite misleading. The whole ethnography is, in fact, about their social agency: how the Malaipantaram derive their basic livelihood, how they organize their kin relations and forest camps, and how through their nomadism and flexible social organization—and many other ploys—they retain a sense of autonomy and independence. And I emphasized too, like many other late scholars of hunter-gatherers, that among the Malaipantaram a strong emphasis on personal autonomy and independence co-existed, as I noted above, with an equal emphasis on mutual aid, sharing and egalitarian relationships. Malaipantaram social life could therefore be described as a form of anarchy.

Anarchists like Kropotkin and Reclus, of course, always recognized and affirmed that the basic principles of anarchism—the liberty of the individual, egalitarianism and a form of social life based on co-operation, sharing and mutual aid—was characteristic of hunter-gatherers and tribal society generally (Kropotkin 1902: 74-101, Morris 2004:173-90). But what they advocated was not a return to hunting and gathering and the pursuit of some form of anarcho-primitivism (Zerzan 1994). Rather, drawing on the knowledge, technics, arts and sciences, that humanity has accumulated over the past five thousand years or so, their aim was to engender an anarchist-communist society, in which productive activities and all social functions would be

organized through voluntary cooperation and mutual aid, the wealth produced being shared equally with *all*.

NOTES

1. In fact, a decade before the revisionist controversy, I was emphasizing, while explicitly acknowledging the earlier seminal work of Fox (1969) and Gardner (1972), that the Malaipantaram had long been incorporated into a wider mercantile capitalist economy. But in dialectical fashion, I also stressed their social agency in maintaining their autonomy and cultural integrity as a foraging community.

2. Essentially this text was a repudiation of the Social Darwinism of Spencer and Thomas Huxley that was prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century.

3. This, of course, raises the interesting question as to what degree anthropologists, in their ethnographic accounts, impose upon the data their own epistemological and political pre-conceptions?

4. This synthesis is well illustrated by Bakunin's familiar adage:

   'That liberty without socialism is privilege and injustice, and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality' (Lehning 1973: 110).

5. By 'pragmatic' what Kant intended was the use of such knowledge to further human enlightenment, to widen the scope of human freedom, especially from religious dogma and political oppression, and thus to advance the 'dignity' of humans.

6. This does not stop Gray from defining humanity as *Homo rapiens*– the destructive primate (2002: 151).

7. Recognizing the many forms of individualism does not entail, of course, that we must follow the facile practice of postmodern anthropologists and put the concept in 'inverted' commas.

8. The tendency of many postmodern anthropologists to equate Western culture with Cartesian metaphysics and mechanistic philosophy is, of course, reductive and facile.

9. Describing the natural environment (forest) as 'giving' is akin to describing Margaret Thatcher as an iron-lady. Although such a metaphor, or 'poetic evocation.' has a certain truth and validity, it is quite misleading in that it completely obscures the complexity of Thatcher's politics. And nobody, of course, thought Thatcher was actually made of iron. Likewise, the metaphor 'giving environment' or 'forest is parent' is restrictive and limiting—and obscures the complexity of the foragers relationship with the forest environment.

10. It is often said that foragers (or tribal people) do not have a concept of 'society' that matches that of the anthropologists. Why on earth should they? Foragers may not have a concept of the 'economy' or 'culture' but this does not imply that they have no economic life or no culture. Terms such as *kudumbam* (family, kin group) like the English terms 'group' or 'society' have a wide range of meanings (or referents). This does not imply they have no society, or that the Malaipantaram is not a society.

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