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THE STORY OF ANDI, THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PALIYAN OF THE PALNI HILLS, AND REPRESENTATIONS OF SOUTH ASIAN HUNTER-GATHERERS

Social scientists, especially anthropologists, have, within the sub-discipline of hunter-gatherer studies, long discussed different ways of presenting and representing those peoples in the world classified as contemporary or former hunter-gatherers. Within these discussions there has also been a strong area focus, with specialists of different geographical areas having their own 'internal' discussions to adapt their findings to local and regional contexts. Thus I represent the study of South Asian hunter-gatherers due to my work with the Paliyans of South India.

Over the years, studies of South Asian hunter-gatherers have resulted in detailed ethnographies and important insights, especially in a comparative perspective, from the studies of Peter M. Gardner (1960s) and Brian Morris (1970s) of the Paliyans and Hill Pandaram of southern India, respectively, to the recent studies of Jana Fortier of the Rautas in the north, in the remote areas of Nepal. This can be seen as a continuation of some of the classical studies in anthropology from South Asia focusing on hunter-gatherers, such as the Seligmanns' *The Veddas* (1911), A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* (1922), S. C. Roy's *The Birhors* (1925), C. von Fürer-Haimendorf *The Chenchus* (1943) and U. R. Ehrenfels' *Kadar of Cochin* (1952).

What sticks out in the studies of South Asian hunter-gatherers during the last decades is the many models presented trying to capture core features and specialties of these peoples. For example, we have 'the bicultural oscillation' model advocated by Peter M. Gardner and his referring to 'the individual autonomy syndrome'; 'the giving environment' and 'the relational epistemology' models by Nurit Bird-David; and the 'cultural resilience' model by Jana Fortier. While all of these models capture certain core features among South Asian hunter-gatherers, features that I have more or less recognized in my own fieldwork among the Paliyans for more than twenty years, the models are all oriented towards features of 'traditional traits' and what the collective of social

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scientist within the study of hunter-gatherers would recognize as the most 'hunter-gatherer-like' characteristics.

The purpose of this paper, however, is not to scrutinize these models in detail, or discuss model-making as an ethnographic strategy, but rather to use them as an academic background to widen the discussion and to highlight what is left out due to the specific focus of these models. I will do this by giving the story of Andi, the self-proclaimed leader of the Paliyans of the Pandju valley in the Palni Hills of South India. Andi was born in the Pandju valley in the early 1950s at a time when his parents started to work in cardamom plantations high up along the slopes, inside the forests of the Palni Hills. His parents were the first generation of Paliyans in this area to add wage labour to their hunting and gathering economy. This kind of mixed economy continued up to the 1990s when significant changes took place in the Pandju valley. In 1991, when I first met Andi, he and his fellow Paliyans—about 20 families were in a process of creating a village and becoming farmers of their own, an economy fully developed ten years later, where the element of hunting and gathering in their lives had turned from an important livelihood asset into a minor one.

In the light of the above mentioned models I will present some events and actions in the lives of Andi and his fellow Paliyans during the last 30 years, with the purpose of widening representations of South Asian hunter-gatherers. Before doing this I will give a condensed presentation of the above-mentioned models.

Models of South Asian Hunter-Gatherers

As I said many models have been presented trying to capture core features of South-Asian hunter-gatherers. The underlying motivation for creating these models, as I understand it, is on the one hand to discuss certain key issues within social science in general and the way hunter-gatherers' life, former or contemporary, can inform us about humanity in general, creating an 'Anthropology of Comparison' in the broadest sense. On the other hand, in a more narrow sense, the models focus on characteristics that distinguish the life of these peoples from their neighbours, a way of representing them that gives them the quality of being the significant other in their regions.

In this section I will give a very short review of these models, models based on fieldwork and ethnography since the 1960s up to recent times. The reason why I focus on these models and the hunter-gatherers they represent is that they taken together, in my view, constitute the dominant scientific representation of South Asian hunter-gatherers for the last thirty years. My selection, I have to admit, leaves out some important writings and several South Asian groups of hunter-gatherers, although I believe that if I had included them they would not have changed my main argument. One book

worth mentioning here is Brian Morris' work on the Hill Pandaram in Kerala. However, as there has not been any follow-up writing for 30 years since his book on 'forest traders' (1982), I do not know his view on contemporary changes, and therefore it is also excluded from this article.

Let me start with Gardner's 'individual autonomy syndrome' and 'bi-cultural oscillation' models, as he and I share the same field of study, the Paliyans, a people living on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu, from the Palni Hills, the Sirumalai and the Varushanadu Hills and further south.

Gardner proposes that some hunter-gatherer societies, including the Paliyans, possess an 'individual-autonomy syndrome' based on culture features such as children's self-reliance and independence, individual decision making, extreme egalitarianism, absence of leaders, immediate economic transactions, individual mobility, informal arrangements, etc. (1991, 2000: 84). This strong emphasis on 'individualism', something I have discussed elsewhere, leads us in a direction which excludes any clear understanding of social cohesion among the Paliyans, blurs social loyalty and collective understanding within the Paliyan society (Norström 2003). Let me give one significant example in relation to the purpose of my argument.

Gardner shows convincingly that Paliyan individuals, families and sometimes even a whole sibling group resolve internal conflicts by shifting settlements (voting with their feet). This is, according to Gardner, a clear sign of individualism, and I agree. However, if we follow this fragmentation for a while, we find the other end of this process, the constant integration of the 'fragmented' into other neighbouring local Paliyan groups, an integration that needs some degree of cooperation, the most visible and urgent in this situation is a place to stay (hut or house) and some livelihood assets over time, today most often wage labour in farm land owned by outsiders or Paliyans in the local area (an integration into the local labour market). There is, in other words, a collective frame to this kind of individualism. As a matter of fact, part and parcel of the decision to leave a group in conflicts is the knowledge that they can and will eventually join others; no individuals or nuclear families stay on their own for any considerable time. This idea of cooperation, although moulded and adapted in a 'world of individualism', becomes actually an important asset for the Paliyans for learning interaction with outsiders, where the expectation of collective action on many levels, are demanded. This is not to say that Gardner does not recognize 'integration', only that the collective side of it is downplayed.

In an article in 1985 and later on repeated in his book *Bicultural Versatility* (2000) Gardner describes how Paliyans show a strong bi-cultural versatility as a 'frontier adaptation', resulting in bi-cultural oscillation between a more or less independent life inside the forests living on forest resources

and a life outside the forest based on wage labour for caste people in a caste dominated society. Gardner attributes the oscillation, and Paliyans often retreating back into the forests after being 'outside' for periods, as a way of 'holding back' from assimilation into the main stream society (ibid: 213) due to economical, socio-political and religious reasons. The result, according to Gardner, is that the Paliyans 'have two ways of life' (1985: 414). I have also given an earlier critique of this model (Norström 2003), suffice here to say that I can definitely agree with Gardner that my own findings confirm that this kind of behaviour have been there among *certain* individuals and families during *certain* periods, but during the same period Gardner refers to, but excludes from the model, many other actions and strategies used, for example, Paliyan sedentarism and permanent wage labour for caste people.

Let me now shift to the writings of Nurit Bird-David whose ethnography is based on the Nayaka living in the Nilgiri Hills, the area where three southern states of India, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, intersect. Bird-David has over the years developed two models, which inform most of her writings, based on a careful and elaborate ethnography, trying to capture core features of the Nayaka people. She calls these models 'the giving environment' or 'the cosmic economy of sharing' and 'relational epistemology'.

'The giving environment' was presented in an article (1990, see also 2008) in which she wanted to show that Nayaka and similar hunter-gatherers as Mbuti from central Africa and Batek from the Malacca peninsular 'have a distinct economic system', making them significantly different from other societies in general, and from their neighbours in particular—an economy based on their interaction with their environment, the forest. This leads to a kind of 'animistic epistemology' (2006) or 'relational epistemology' (Bird-David and Naveh 2008), where beings (humans or animals alike) 'are invoked as participants and members of a single community of sharing' (Bird-David 2006: 48), through an 'immediacy' in relations to beings which can 'be directly and personally engaged with' (Bird-David and Naveh 2008: 56). This has the economic implication which could culturally be exemplified by the metaphor 'forest is parent' (or other kin relations), a view that the environment are 'giving' of its resources, a 'cosmic economy of sharing' (Bird-David 1992), rather than taking: 'land is not an object that can be owned but something that people can be closely associated with and related to' (Bird-David 1990: 192). While Bird-David gives hints of changes among her people under study, those changes are excluded from consideration by her, in her study of 'traditional' Nayaka ways of thinking and acting in relation to the forests.

The last model I want to present comes from Nepal in the northern parts of South Asia. In 2009 Jana Fortier's book 'Kings of the forest' was published. She elaborates on a model she calls 'cultural resilience' with reference to Rautas, a group of hunter-gatherers in the western part of Nepal. She shows how they are able to get access to agricultural foods and still remain

forest foragers (2009: 126) through a dualistic pattern of trade and exchange; they are egalitarian within their own community and asymmetrical with farmers (ibid: 141), Further, the Rautas use different strategies of accommodation, such as blessings and rhymes adapted to outside standards (Hindu) as well as forming fictive kinship bonds with villagers, to maintain their egalitarian society (ibid: 139-40). In conclusion she claims that the Rautas, through their strategies towards outsiders, have been able to keep their cultural institutions intact, a sign of strong cultural resilience.

The weakness of this model is that it excludes groups within the wider complex of former and contemporary hunter-gatherers in the region, including Rajis and Banjaris (the ethnic division between these groups and Rautas is not clear in her description), who use a much wider number of strategies towards their neighbours, such as sedentarism, agriculture, etc. (ibid: 24-56).I have been giving a similar critique of some of the claims made by Gardner and Bird-David. In short this critique says that the anthropologist in question exclude from the models behaviours he or she finds in the field that do not correspond to the same proposed models (Norström 2003).

In the case of Fortier's cultural resilience model, another conclusion is that those Rautes, Rajis and Banjaris who have not been able to 'resist' outside influences become 'victims' of outside forces (2009:5). We are left with only two alternatives, either the possibility of keeping the 'traditional' culture and lifestyle or more or less losing it, nothing in between, thereby downplaying their agency and giving them a kind of innate behaviour of 'no change'.

Further, these models can give the impression that there still is a 'forest-world' (Bird-David 2008: 523) and a sharp 'frontier zone' (Gardner 1985: 413) for them out there, but to be frank, that is long gone by now. For all of us this is obvious when we travel in the regions where hunter-gatherers live in South Asia today. I have for decades traveled extensively in my anthropological work all over South Asia. Already in the late 1980s I visited re-settled Jenu Kurubas and Sholigas in south Karnataka and Birhors in Bihar, all of them in close cooperation with NGOs and government undertakings. In the early 1990s, apart from my own work on the Paliyans, I visited re-settled Hill Pandarams below the famous pilgrimage temple of Sabarimalai in Kerala, several groups in the Nilgiri Hills, Kadars on the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Jarawas of the Andaman Islands and re-settled Wanniyala-Aetto (the Dambana Vedda) in Sri Lanka. They all give a clear testimony, already more than 25 years back, to a much more integrated world with the wider society compared to the dichotomized 'worlds' taken as the starting point for the creation of the above-mentioned models; an 'integrated' life-world giving the different hunter-gatherer groups both reason and a necessity to create strategies of many different kinds for their livelihood.

In spite of the credits of the above presented models, they all share certain features which I think is problematic if we look at what sometimes

have been called 'the double hermeneutic' (Sayer 2000: 17-8) in social research in general and in anthropology in particular. On the one hand we can as social scientists use our field material, created into ethnography and models, as a way of elaborating on our understanding of humanity in general, a kind of basic research. On the other hand we are also responsible for the images and representations we give of the people under study by presenting them in the way we do. In other words, we are also answerable to those we study. That becomes even more important concerning former and contemporary hunter-gatherers because the peoples of the world in this category are probably some of the most politically weak when it comes to 'talk back', to represent themselves in a wider audience.

In conclusion and in my view, these models and the representations they give of South Asian hunter-gatherers, are hunter-gatherers, male or female, extremely individualistic, literally walking in and out of distinct environments and cultures, one kind of environment secluded inside the forests, the other a world for them of little comprehension, where they are only able to move around by being very culturally conservative to keep their 'traditions' and 'resilience' or more or less passively accept the total force of an outside world. The models give little or no room for discussing their agency or variation in strategies, either in scope or over time. For about 30 years these are the representations of South Asian hunter-gatherers we get, apart from some of my own writings on the Paliyans (1999, 2001, 2002, and 2003) and Ulrich Demmer's 2008 article. It is in the light of this constructed South Asian hunter-gatherer that we should consider Andi's ways of dealing with the life of the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley in the Palni Hills during the last 30 years.

Becoming Farmers in the Pandju Valley

As I mentioned in the introduction Andi was born in the 1950s at a time when his parents and other Paliyan families in the Pandju valley combined their hunting and gathering economy with work in cardamom plantations on the southwestern slopes of the Palni Hills. His parents were the first generation of this group of Paliyans who did wage labour. However, wage labour has been done occasionally by some Paliyans in this region far back in time. We have a report from 1908 by the Jesuit FrDahmen, the runner of St Mary's Estate, who refers to Paliyans working for them, but according to him they were extremely elusive. The estate manager had to face the fact that they could never predict timings and amount of work these Paliyans would do. They would basically come and go as they liked. This estate is still running and several Paliyans live and work there today. From a historical perspective though, most Paliyans in the Palni Hills stayed away from wage labour at least up to the 1950s and 1960s.

Andi's family, in his young days, worked in several of the small cardamom estates in and around the Pandju valley. At the height of the

cardamom business in India in the early 1980s, there were about ten estates running simultaneously in the area, but in the 1980s Andi's family mainly worked and lived in Chettiar Estate, a cardamom estate in the upper end of the Pandju valley. During their time in this estate there were three things, according to Andi, that to a great extent explains the special character and outlook on life that Andi developed and which became instrumental for his future actions; the possibility of education, land ownership and mistreatment, respectively.

In this part of the Palni Hills, there are a few hill caste villages situated on top of some of the ridges along the southern slopes. Here lives a caste group called the Mannadian, a people migrating from the plains into the Palni Hills several hundred years back. In the Pandju valley we can find two of these villages. In the nearest village to the Chettiar Estate, Andi and his brother Colras were sent to school for a couple of years. Later on, in the 1980s, some young Mannadians had started a health training program for rural people in the hills together with a Christian organization from the nearby hill station of Kodaikanal. In relation to this Andi and Colras were invited to join the project. This continuous interaction with caste people made the two young Paliyan men accustomed to interact rather smoothly with outsiders, something many Paliyans otherwise would have problems with (mainly due to the local caste hierarchy), at least at that time. Further, it created an important network for Andi and his fellow Paliyans in the Pandju valley later on when they decided to create a village of their own.

The second thing that happened in the 1980s was that through saving some money from their wage labour, Andi and Colras, together with two more brothers, were able to buy some plantation land (mainly lime trees) in 1985 outside the cardamom estate they were working in. This provided important extra income for them, but it created a conflict with the estate owner who thought they diverted their work too much outside the estate and finally he decided to kick them out of the estate. Andi refers to this period as a period when they were *adimaihal* (slaves) in the estate, and he thought the estate owner pushed them too hard and tried too much to force labour out of them. Due to this conflict Andi's family decided in the second half of the 1980s to stay on their own outside the estate in the forests in the bottom of the Pandju valley. However, conditions were harsh according to Andi, including periods of difficulties to getting drinking water and food.

This is the background that made Andi take the initiative in the late 1980s to create a village of their own, instead of living as they had done in smaller sibling groups dispersed in the Pandju valley. I have described this transition in detail elsewhere (Norström 2003). Suffice here to say that the organization they met in the nearby hill caste village, together with a caste landowner from the plains who had a plantation of silk cotton and lime in the Pandju valley, made it possible for them to get the local government's approval

to have their own registered village in the Pandju valley in November 1990. This was a struggle in itself, which they had not been able to achieve without outside support for mediating between themselves and the local government.

The other problem for Andi was that it was not obvious that his fellow Paliyans would join this project. Andi did a lot of lobbying, visiting all settlements in the neighbourhood, to convince the others that this is a much better idea than continuing to live in *adimai* (slavery) for the local estate owners or on their own in the forests in their traditional thatched huts or as in some cases even in caves. Finally half of the families in the valley joined the village project. When I turned up at the scene a couple of months after they had shifted to the village site there were 20 families, about 80 individuals, staying in the village.

There were several factors that made this opportunity tempting for the Paliyans. One factor was the locality as such, which is rather special in the Palni Hills. Normally revenue land, where you are allowed by the government to have villages, build houses and have farm land, is on the fringe of the forest and further into bigger cultivated areas dominated by caste people. In this case though, the revenue land is like an island surrounded by reserved forests, thereby not exposing the Paliyans too much to the outside society. At the same time they are able to have close access to the forest resources they are used to. A second thing was the approval of more than 100 acres of land for cultivation by the government. A third thing was the support they got from several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1990s, helping them with the resources needed to establish hill cultivation, where the most common crops, such as silk-cotton, lime, orange, etc., need at least four years before the first crop (return on investment).

Over the next years the Paliyans slowly established the village including cultivation. This, however, was not a linear and smooth ride. For one thing, many of the Paliyans joining did not realize the amount and kind of work needed to become their own farmers. Some left after a while and others joined. Some were very casual with their farming and often left for wage labour in nearby estates. Other individuals and families invested more in the farm work, especially through their own labour, and Andi and his family worked the hardest and openly advocated to the others in the village, over and over again, that it was worth it. Today most of the families have at least two acres of good farmland. In general we can say that from a farming point of view, about 20 years after the start of the village, farming is secured and in healthy condition.

Two effects are important to point out in relation to the transition from an economy based on hunting and gathering combined with wage labour, to an economy based on farming. One is the otherwise egalitarian economy among Paliyans who in the transition to farmers now have a more diversified

economy, and for different reasons, some earn more money from their farmland than others. Secondly, instead of the pattern described by Bird-David, that 'outside' resources are incorporated into the 'traditional economy and moral', what she calls 'wage gathering' (Bird 1983), we can in this case see a real transition into a dual economy, where the old sharing of forest resources through general reciprocity is still there, but have to stand back for the ever more balanced reciprocity from wage and farm income. That this transition has not been socially and mentally easy I witnessed many times in the 1990s, where these two value systems clashed, with heated arguments about the righteous behavior when people shared and borrowed money and food from each other.

Another thing that happened in the early 1990s was that several caste families from the plains suddenly turned up and moved into their village. They also had been allocated some land for cultivation in the vicinity by the government due to their relative poverty. In the same period, in 1994, a comparatively rich caste person started a goat farm in their neighbourhood, and even began to encroach on Paliyan land. Suddenly the Paliyans had to face competition over their land with people much stronger politically compared to themselves. Andi was very frustrated in this situation, and demanded of the Christian NGO they cooperated with to solve this problem, because in the beginning he did not feel that they alone had any means. However, the Christian organization stepped down. The reason for this was that the organization was led by Western expatriates, and, as 'guests' in India, they could not allow themselves to be involved in such confrontational politics. Andi made the following comment to me about this whole situation:

> My fellow Paliyans do not work hard enough on their land. If they had planted 100 trees each year they could have had 400 by now. Even if they work during daytime they could set aside half an hour in the evening to plant a couple of trees. Just because so many of us don't maintain our land it is easy for others to encroach on it. Take Mani, for example. He planted some seedlings in the beginning (three years back) but has not bothered since then. So the undergrowth and the trees have taken over. And even worse, some land has not been maintained at all. Therefore we can't act through the court, as they will notice these things. And the authorities don't extend certificates if we don't show an interest in our land. (Norström 2003: 139).

However, Andi and his brother Colras did not want to be obedient to the suddenly appearing neighbours. Through some contacts they had with people coming and going into the valley from the plains, they were offered, through a deal, some help from people in the plains. They came up the valley and discussed with the workers in the goat farm, and within a couple of weeks violence was very near to break out in the valley. This came to the attention of the farmers' association in the nearby foothills, who tried to intervene. At the same time a tribal organization in the urban parts of these hills joined the Paliyan cause and in the end the District Collector made a move and declared

all the caste people cultivating in this area, and not belonging to the hill castes, must abandon their cultivations and move out. Today there are no threats of this kind against Andi and his fellow villagers.

The Entrepreneurial Hunter-gatherer

Let me now add a couple of more events in relation to Andi and his brother Colras which, although described sketchily, taken together show their attitude towards their new situation in the 1990s and the entrepreneurial skills they developed during this period. In 1995 a new NGO appeared on the scene. This was an environmental organization with an expertise in hill cultivation. In a meeting with representatives of this organization it became clear that they could provide, for free, the Paliyan families with appropriate seedlings for their land. They asked Andi to make a list of seedlings they wished to have. While the people from the NGO had full respect for the environmental knowledge of the Paliyans as a "forest people", they became very surprised when they saw the list Andi provided. Actually they could not have put up a more suitable list for hill cultivation themselves. The chosen species were fully adapted to climate, soil, storage, transportation and market conditions in this area, showing that these Paliyans already at this time had the knowledge needed for succeeding in hill cultivation.

During the 1990s, in spite of the support now and then from NGOs, the conditions were tough for establishing their cultivation, as the income from it, as mentioned above, would take some years. Therefore they were eager to find different avenues for extra incomes. Apart from wage labour, short term millet cultivation, and some hunting and gathering, Colras started to work as a leader of 'labour gangs', a common practice in agriculture among caste people in the plains. In this way Colras took on labour contracts guaranteeing the contractor a certain sized Paliyan labour force. Colras even took on a contract outside Pandju valley at this time, when the cardamom estate owners further to the east needed to clear the so called 'Coolie Ghat Road', the famous path that in the early 20th Century used to bring people up to the hill-station of Kodaikanal before there were any roads into these hills.

Another aspect of South-Asian hunter-gatherers that has been recognized is the way they construct their dwellings. Bird-David (2013) and Levi (2013), show convincingly that the aim of government housing schemes, basically brick-and mortar houses, falls rather flat in the hands of locals with a hunter-gatherer history. The hunter-gatherers in question prefer to modify these houses against the desired aim of social change from the government, so they 'preserve and maintain to a large extent their relational epistemology' (Lavi 2013), i.e. they regenerate their specific cultural values. These reactions I have also witnessed in several Paliyan villages where so-called government colony-houses have been built. However, I have also seen examples where they live in rather similar stone houses as their neighbouring caste people,

especially in mixed villages. In fact the housing scene among the Paliyans of the Palni Hill is very mixed, both when it comes to implementation and expectations. Again, Andi and his brother Colras is a special case.

In 1994 Colras' mud-and stick house was in very bad condition. He lived there with Andi's and his mother. As he had some money saved from wage labour and his land (lime trees) above the village, mentioned earlier, he decided this time to build a stone house – the first in the village. He hired a stone cutter and two carpenters from the nearby plains. In the same period Andi's bigger mud-and-stick house (he lived there with his wife and four sons, and some goats) totally collapsed, sliding one night down the slopes due to heavy rain. In the darkness we heard the sound of the collapsing hut and, by the morning, they had all moved into some of their neighbours' huts. Due to this incident, and as Colras already had started his house project, Andi also decided to construct his own stone house, but now three times as big as Colras'. After a lot of trouble they eventually finished the houses, including wooden doors made by the carpenters and framed windows with iron bars bought from the nearby town down in the plains. Later on they added tin roofs instead of the ordinary grass roofs.

The underlying architectural idea was to copy their hill caste neighbours' houses. They all knew of course that theirs would be of a simpler kind, but definitely a marker of progress compared to their ordinary mud huts. Actually this move by Andi and Colras inspired Kaliyappan, the main medium (*samiadi*, god dancer) in the village, to construct an intermediate version, where he built a three-room mud-and stick hut (probably one of the first of its kind in Paliyan history). This can be seen as a reaction against Andi's sibling group, an emotional reaction which now and then turned up at different occasions. A kind of jealousy (*porama*) was created among the others because they felt that they were put down by the 'businesses' and relative 'richness' (*selvanthar*, rich people) developed within Andi's sibling group. Anyway, the fellow villagers thought that Kaliyappan was a little bit crazy in their eyes with this bizarre hut construction. Why did he need such a big hut when there were only two of them, as Kaliyappan and his wife had no children, was the standing question. However, Andi, with his kind of authority and village unity attitude, trying to develop the village and at the same time keeping all of them together, told everyone that it is not the material of a house that shows the strength of a family, but the number of rooms. Therefore he concluded that he and Kaliyappan were equals.

Let me now consider Andi's sons, and the way he wanted to invest in them and prepare them for the kind of future he had in mind. For certain periods in their village during the 1990s, they had a small school running for the children. Due to several practical and cultural reasons these attempts in the long run failed. Instead, in the late 1990s, he sent two of his sons to a Jesuit boarding school. Their stay in this school did not last long. The liberty

the boys had been brought up with in the Pandju valley did not correspond to the discipline demanded by the Jesuits. The boys soon ran off back to the valley, and Andi had to give up this idea. Later on though he was instrumental in giving the two eldest sons work outside the valley, and a kind of work no other Paliyans in their history had taken up. One became a firewatcher in Kumili, the little town in Kerala, on the other side of the Tamil Nadu/Kerala border, just outside the famous Periyar Tiger Reserve. The other son was hired on a mobile water-drilling unit for bore wells, traveling all over India for more than a year. The firewatcher unfortunately died in the late 1990s. The other son is back in the valley and today has his own family and farm in the village.

A final example of helping his sons occurred when Andi in 2006 sent his youngest son, together with a girl from the village in the same age, to an NGO in the nearby plains. This NGO has been in cooperation with the Paliyans in the Pandju valley for many years and his reason to regularly send this young couple to the NGO was to train them in the everyday matters of organizing an NGO and all the negotiating skills needed, especially with local government administrations, to be successful.

In the middle of the 1990s a confrontation took place between another tribal group in the Palni Hills, the Puliyans (traditionally swidden cultivators) and the government (the Forest Department) concerning land issues, culminating in beatings and arrests of several tribals. During the period several rallies took place to the district headquarter in the plains (Dindigul) and in 1998 even a rally to Chennai (the capital of Tamil Nadu) was conducted. Several Paliyans joined these actions, especially those who lived in the eastern side of the Palni Hills, where most Puliyans live (IWGIA 1998). Even Colras attended some meetings, but after some years it all cooled down and nothing substantial for Andi and Colras, and the Paliyans in general, came out of these organizational acts. However, Andi, in my last meeting with him in October 2012, claimed that today they have a network of Paliyan villages/settlements that they can mobilize if necessary. Logistically this is rather easy today as many Paliyans now have mobile phones. This, at least, indicates that collective action is within their minds.

If the 1990s was a two-front 'war' for Andi, on the one hand to defend his group and their village against encroaching outsiders, and on the other hand to discipline his fellows to become farmers, he opened a third 'front' the years after 2000, with direct negotiations with the authorities. Although things looked rather bright at the end of the 1990s, on the level of formal recognition from the government it was not good enough, according to Andi. While they got land for the village, they only got so-called B-memorandum rights for the land, which means only users right, which circumscribes their ability to keep it in the long run (if the land is not maintained the authorities can claim the land back). Full ownership rights are only possible if you have so-called *patta* land rights. The B-memorandum rights over the years have therefore been

problematic; in the early years of 1990s the land certificates were in the hands of the first NGO, later on some families got it, others not, etc. In June 1996, for example, only ten certificates were issued although they claimed they needed at least 20 more. When I met Andi last year this issue was highest on his agenda, because he saw *patta* land rights the final goal for securing the future and the overall position their village had reached so far.

Another issue was community certificates. One needs a community certificate to prove if one is eligible for certain Government concessions given to people of socially disadvantaged groups. In the early 1990s when my assistant went to the local authorities of the area of the southwestern slopes of the Palni Hills, they did not have any statistics of Paliyans in the revenue village which Pandju valley belongs to. In the eyes of the authorities they simply did not exist in this area. A certain degree of recognition came in 1996, when Tamil Nadu re-introduced the *Panchayati Raj* system, which is a parallel to the ordinary government administration to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level and redistribute certain resources. As members of the board of this *panchayat* are allocated through quotas, if there are Scheduled Tribes living in the area, they have representation in this board. Through their representation (formally it was Andi's wife) in this local *panchayat* board Andi's village was able to get, in the late 1990s, electricity, a threshing floor, corrugated sheeting for their houses and 'street'-lights.

After the introduction of the Forest Right Act in 2006, the Forest Department also issued individual certificates for collecting non-timber forest produce, basically a very positive step for the Paliyans in the Palni Hills, as this move makes them more independent in relation to outside contractors who otherwise have controlled this business for decades. However, for the Paliyans in the Pandju valley, this has not been important because they have never entered this business to any extent.

Still, though, the individual community certificates were not issued until 2009, after a long process. When they finally got an appointment and time for issuing the certificates the Deputy *Thesildar* only came to the entrance of the valley (at the end of the road), thereby forcing the Paliyans to come down from their village higher up the valley. This is a typical act of the authorities as government officials think it is too hard to walk up and stay overnight in the village of Aruvellam (a fair guess is that since the start of the village, government officials have visited the village less than ten times, and never stayed overnight) . This fact also resulted in rather harsh quarrels between the officer (the Deputy *Thesildar*) and Andi, because in the beginning of the meeting the officer said he can only issue certificates for those attending. Andi then claimed that they had both old and sick people in the village who could not attend this day, and they should also get their certificates now, according to his view. The officer further said that he doubted that all of those around him actually were Paliyans. He asked how they could prove it.

It so happened that a couple of Tamil friends and I turned up at this quarrelling scene without knowing about the event. After being introduced, Andi was in 'full swing' with his argumentation with the officer and his assistant and pointed at me, the only *vellaikarrar* (white person) around and said: 'Sir (turning to the officer), you can ask him, he knows everything about us Paliyans, he knows who is related to who, who is married to who, so if you have doubts, ask him'. Even if there was some truth in Andi's claim, it was definitely a kind of overstatement. However, in a polemic like this, it was at least a rather disturbing argument for the officer. Even more disturbing was the fact that two of my accompanying friends were rather influential individuals in the region, which the officer soon realized. Worst was however that one of these friends was a very high-positioned Tamil lawyer appearing both in the High Courts of Tamil Nadu and the Delhi Supreme Courts, who told the officer, although in a very collegial and friendly way, that he expected this proceeding to be done in the 'right' manner. Somewhere at this moment we, the outsiders, decided to step back and make everyone involved able to 'save their faces'. In the end Andi was basically satisfied and the officer could go back to his 'home territory' in Kodaikanal having basically done his duty.

Andi and Contemporary Time

The major reason for me to tell this story about Andi is not to show whether his thoughts and actions are successful or not, although for them it is obviously of great importance, but to show his general attitude towards their life and the surrounding society. The story of Andi, together with his brother Colras, shows individuals whom I prefer to call entrepreneurial in the most common sense. They are innovative in relation to their former experiences, they are willing to take risks when it comes to sticking out their necks in relation to different kinds of outsiders (caste people, landowners, government officials, representatives of NGOs, etc.), challenging the general code of caste conduct in the region, in relation to their own people, especially challenging their traditional values of individual autonomy, and last but not the least, being willing to change their work ethics concerning, among other things, kinds of work as well as timings of work.

This is of course not to say that all Paliyans have acted in the same way as Andi. There is even a great variety of reactions and actions in relation to changes visible within Andi's own sibling group. Andi and Colras, as we have seen, are very progressive and rich in initiatives. Nagarajan, the youngest brother and Rasamal, their sister, basically followed the ideas of Andi and Colras and never took any significant initiatives on their own. Ganesha, the brother closest to Andi in age, was however a different matter. He was more of the secluded kind and never joined the village idea. He stayed away in the forest up at the end of the valley with his two wives and several children throughout the 1990s, usually working in a cardamom estate, and very seldom

showed himself further down the valley and in the nearby plains. These differences within Andis's sibling group are of course normal in any society, showing that 'hunter-gatherers' in this sense are no different than anyone else.

If we take a wider look at the Pandju valley and the neighbouring valleys on the southeastern slopes, the variety of strategies in relation to outside influence is also wide and resembles the different ways the siblings of Andi have acted the last decades. At the time of the creation of the village of Aruvellam, half of the Paliyan families decided to stay on in the more interior areas, however, combining hunting and gathering with wage labour for Mannadian farmers or in the cardamom plantations. However, in the late 1990s, all cardamom estates in this area were closed by the Forest Department. Still though the stone house buildings, including coolie-lines, are still visible, but now covered by an overgrowth of bushes and trees, where nature have closed in on an old era of human activities. In the same period there has been an increased pressure put on the Paliyans from the Forest Department to move out of the reserved forest into the areas of the Mannadian. This has increased these Paliyan families dependency on the farming Mannadians, except in those cases where they have been able to secure some farmland of their own, as for example the Paliyans in the valley to the west of the Pandju valley, in the village of Thinaikadu.

If we take the Palni Hills as a whole many Paliyans of today, as in the last case mentioned above, have at least some land for cultivation. We even have paddy cultivators on the northern slopes and families of Paliyans who cultivate on reserved forestland. We also have landless Paliyans who are confronting the local authorities to allocate land for cultivation to them and as well as Paliyans who collect forest resources for the market (I elaborate on this variation in my book from 2003). All these situations need negotiations and alliance building with the local government in one way or the other, and the outcome of these negotiations over time become crucial for their future situation.

What we can conclude in the case of Andi and his co-villagers is that they have been very successful economically over the last decades. They have since the late 1980s developed a clear dual economy, in which sharing forest resources is based on general reciprocity and the dominant resources, the income from farm labour, is based on balanced reciprocity. This farming have been so successful that they today earn much more money than many landless Dalits (lower castes) of the nearby plains and neither do they depend on handouts in the form of food from the government ration shops ('rice politics' as it is called in South India) or the government's nation-wide 100-days guarantee labour program for the poorer section of the Indian society.

Important to note here is that Andi shows very little interest in their living on forest food as their major livelihood resource, or protecting their

lives/culture in a kind of bi-cultural oscillation or a kind of cultural conservatism. Here we should point out that there are no major practical problems to live on hunting and gathering in the Palni Hills today, the forest is in very good condition, and their traditional staple, wild yam, is abundant and wildlife is thriving. However, for the two decades I have known him he has always played down their life and history as hunter-gatherers and instead eagerly pointed out his wishes and demands for the authorities and other important actors in their neighbourhood.

Here we come to Andi's main concern. For him a life continuing of hunting and gathering, a life based on forest food, would definitely put him, his children and grandchildren, on the lowest rung in the regional status hierarchy, what he sees as making them **vulnerable**. This knowledge is fully embodied in his life experience. So for him, legal rights to land and other demands they put forward towards the government are the key to becoming as close as possible to equals among equals, to enjoy respect, egalitarianism and individual autonomy in accordance with Paliyan basic values. My point is that Andi tries to keep a Paliyan ethos, in Barnard's sense (2002), but not as in many other cases reported, through being culturally conservative, but to be culturally progressive.

To summarize, Andi is not interested in a place in an **old world**, a 'forest world', or hiding now and then behind a 'cultural frontier', or 'cultural resilience', clinging to old habits, where new habits only make them vulnerable. For him **resilience** is about the ability to keep autonomy according to his principles, a way of political learning and political space, in a **new world**.

For me there are at least two reasons for us as anthropologists to engage more directly with these processes. One is of course the interesting fact that in line with Demmer's 2008 article 'Contested Modernities..', concerning similar groups in South India, many Paliyans are very willing to be active in a process of 'political learning', whereby they re-evaluate old values and habits in new ways, to achieve new goals in line with their new aspirations. We can also conclude that these kinds of negotiations seem to dominate their interaction with the wider society of today in the same way as I feel it does for similar groups all over South India, and therefore 'political representation' becomes a key issue.

Secondly, their demands of today are not that different, although put forward in their own way, from the demands from the landless Dalits of the nearby plains or the Naxalites (the so-called Maoists), the last movement, since some years back also active in 'Andi's world', the Palni Hills. However, these more organized and militant groups may have a tendency of putting the Adivasi/tribal situation in South India and their way of political representation in shadow. Here I think an increased interest from us of South Asian hunter-gatherers interaction with the wider society could be an important contribution

to highlight their situation, as has been done by anthropologists in other parts of the world, for example in the Americas and southern Africa.

Conclusions

To be clear, I am not saying that the characteristics of South Asian hunter-gatherers presented in the above mentioned models are wrong, or that they are not well-informed and anthropologically important, especially for purposes of comparison and the understanding of hunter-gatherers as a former lifestyle. I am saying rather that they are narrow in scope and time, even to the extent that they fail to cover the dominant actions of the people in question at the present time. As a result, the insights in the models are not used for understanding the whole range of different strategies taken by present day South Asian hunter-gatherers in their daily interaction with their neighbours. There are a few exceptions, for example Naveh (2007), who shows that the Nayaka have difficulties upholding their 'relational epistemology' in contemporary times. If we do not pay more attention to the wide variety of contemporary strategies used by these peoples we do not only open up ourselves as South Asianists for accusations of 'the denial of coevalness', 'a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse', as Fabian (1983: 31) alerted us to sometime ago. This critique is also related to the critique of romanticizing 'contemporary hunter-gatherers', as one side of the argument went in the now rather old 'Kalahari Debate' (Barnard 1992).

Let me end with what I think are some pertinent questions which could be raised today about South Asian hunter-gatherers. Does my argument mean that there is no hunter-gatherer ethos left, or that what the notion of hunter-gatherer itself is no longer applicable to the South Asian peoples I talk about here? Further, what about these changes and their effect on 'traditional' traits, the last so carefully carved out within the above-mentioned models? And, last but not the least question: How do these specific traits influence their ongoing strategies towards outsiders in their contemporary world? These are some of the questions I am not dealing with here but I think are of great importance for the future study of South Asian 'hunter-gatherers'.

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