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## **PLACE OF FOOD GATHERING AND HUNTING PEOPLES IN INDIAN SOCIETY AND THEIR TRANSFORMATION**

“The roots of all great thinking and whole living lie deep in life itself and not in the dry light of mere reasoning. All creative work in Sciences and Philosophy, in art and life, is inspired by intuitive experience”.

— **Radhakrishnan, 1929**

Stimulated by the latest paper of Gardner (2013), read along with his earlier paper (1982) and also on account of the other outstanding works on Food Gathering and Hunting Societies (FGH)<sup>1</sup> there will be a shift in the emphasis of my paper from what I had intended to do earlier. Rereading afresh works of Sinha (1981), Morris (1982), Gardner (1985; 2000), Bird-David (1999 and a series of her other seminal articles), Demmer (2002), Naveh (2007), and several others, and in the background of my own work among the Jenu Kuruba beginning in 1967, I am convinced that the people who have been classified as Scheduled Tribes, including FGH, have to be seen in the framework of larger Indian society and its ethos. Therefore, in the first part of my paper, I propose to discuss the place of FGH in Indian society. In the second part of the paper, I will bring in the transformation scene on the Mysore district side of the trijunction, mostly focusing on the Jenu Kuruba. In the last part of the paper, I will discuss what is that which is so very special about people like Jenu Kuruba.

### **Indian society & its ethos**

I feel that the importance of Indian society and its ethos with reference to FGH needs to be emphasized with more vigor. Though what I am trying to do will not be seriously contested now, the tendency among the anthropologists has been to consider FGH as a category by itself and compare them with other FGH across continents. This approach may be all right for developing cross-cultural patterns of FGH but what would be its worth if we ignore the soil in which they have been embedded for a very long time and have grown in and out of each other. Sinha, while writing on tribes and Indian civilization, had

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written 'the situation in India will convince us that even the nature of isolation is determined by adaptive adjustment to the presence of encroaching civilization' (1981: 4). He drew our attention to Kroeber's famous Huxley Memorial Lecture 'The Ancient Oikumene, as an historic cultural aggregate' (1952) in which Kroeber had clearly stated, 'Finally the primitives in the area, or adjoining it, derive their cultures mainly from the civilization characteristics of the Oikumene as a whole through reductive selection . . . Basically, however, these retarded or primitive cultures in or adjacent to the Oikumene are fully intelligible only in terms of "Oecumenical" civilization. They usually add to what they share some lesser measure of their own proper peculiarities and originations, and they have often developed distinctive style of their own. But in the main these backward cultures depend and derive from greater ones whose nexus we have been considering' (Kroeber 1952: 391). This position was more stoutly stated by Moreman, ' . . . A Southeast Asian Society which it may fight, serve, mimic or even become . . . but which it can never ignore . . . In Southeast Asia, the categories "tribal" and "civilized" each implies and defines the other. . . ' (1968: 164). Roy Burman made a series of significant speculative observations on tribe-civilization relationships as dependent historic structures (1969, 1970). Beteille in his introduction of N.K. Bose's book, *The Structure of the Hindu Society*, had observed, 'No one who studies even the tiniest segment of the Indian society can afford to forget that India is a country of more than 500 million people with recorded history of nearly three thousand years. This is the broad context within which anthropological fieldwork in India must be placed' (1975: 2). This he had written to emphasize, along with Bose, Dumont and Pocock, the necessity of bringing together the approaches of ethnography and Indology to understand the Indian society. Reviewing different approaches which have been adopted while discussing FGH as isolated or integrated, Bird-David proposes 'internal relationships (between Naikens) and external relationship (between Naikens and others) are both integral to hunter-gatherer social life' (1988: 17).

Reviewing inter-tribal relations in India, I came to the conclusion that the tribes cannot be considered as isolated populations. Whenever efforts to search for inter-community relations were explored it showed a regional pattern of structured relations. These patterns show various points of articulation with larger Indian society, particularly the caste system (1977: 116-7).

In the long history of India, the country experienced waves after waves of religious and spiritual movements of local, regional and supra regional significance. Many of these movements such as those of Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti as well as Gandhi's in modern times were universal in their approach trying to spread the message of peace, non-violence, and coexistence with people and nature. Besides, there has been a strong tradition of ascetics of various creeds and thoughts crisscrossing the country in order to learn from the people

and also to propagate their beliefs and messages. It is difficult to imagine how certain pockets could have remained untouched by such movements or have not contributed to them. In fact one can go one step further and suggest that the contribution of FGH to those thoughts have not even been explored except some notable exceptions such as that of Sinha who considered that tribal cultures in peninsular India represented the core dimension of Indian civilization which is marked by increasingly complex levels of socio-cultural integration (1958).

### **Methodological issues and Western perspective**

In spite of these observations, while reflecting on my own fieldwork among the Jenu Kuruba in 1967, I realize now that I considered them as isolates, as if they had been planted across the river Kabini, deep inside the forest of Karapur of Mysore district. I was not concerned with their history, or how they reached there, or what was going on around them. I was following the standard ethnographic approach that is, to select a community and study it intensively. This methodology though scientifically valid is problematic when applied in a country like India for the reason specified above. Despite the understanding of that history and myself having grown up in the Indian civilization and carrying a certain load of cultural baggage and values, I set them all aside and did exactly as my fellow anthropologists have been doing. Reflecting on the mismatch of my cognition and approach, I stumbled upon the writings of Balagangadharan. He writes, 'in last three hundred years, the theoretical and textual study of Indian culture has been undertaken mostly by Europe. What is more, it will also be a challenge because, as I will argue, the study of India has largely occurred within the cultural framework of Europe' (2012: 1). If I narrow down this observation to anthropology, it has been dominantly western and when combined with colonialism the decoction becomes very strong.<sup>2</sup>

Initially Anthropology as a discipline was unknown, and the study of the people called as tribe was unheard of in India. The term 'tribe' was introduced by the Europeans during the colonial rule (Roy Burman 1994:22-95) and thereby in course of time it created a wedge between tribes and non-tribes which not only stayed but has become stronger in the context of identity politics. There is no equivalent term for tribe in any of the Indian languages<sup>3</sup>. The present knowledge about the tribes in India began to appear in the notes prepared by stray European travelers, missionaries, colonial administrators, and planters. And later, official surveys were conducted by the colonial administrators. The use of this term was useful for colonial governance and also for keeping a close watch on real and potential fissures in the society. Such writings stimulated the curiosity of intellectuals in the west who were looking for evidences to support their linear Victorian evolutionary theories but who were also making break through in almost all fields, and were also

laying down the foundations of new modern institutions, concepts and practices. India provided a convenient and easy entry point to the scholars from the west. At this stage colonial rule was getting entrenched in the country and it provided all security, comfort and encouragement to the scholars to carry on their researchers provided they did not become inconvenient in running of the Raj<sup>4</sup>. The European scholars in the field were provided with all the facilities and support by the colonial administration; many times, the administrators themselves became scholars and pretended they were doing fieldwork in the lofty tradition of participant observation (Misra 2013; 90-91). Irrespective of official support, being a white westerner assured full support and cooperation of the people studied for obvious reasons. In the earlier writings, the tribes in general and FGH in particular were painted as uncivilized, savages, barbarians, jungle races, etc. (Breeks 1873; Buchanan and Dubois quoted by Bird-David 1987: 174-5). Such categorization though did not altogether vanish, the people became 'simple', 'primitive' (until recently some groups of scheduled tribes were referred to as Primitive Tribes in official parlance) and more emphasis was placed on ethnographies of specific communities to discover how those societies were organized and also what deficiencies they had in their social systems or what failed to evolve in their society and culture. Since there are FGH in other parts of the world, it was considered appropriate to compare them and underline commonalities among them and try to correlate these with their specific mode of production or lack of it overlooking the larger socio-political framework of which they had been a part. Although the underlying theory, sometimes openly articulated but more often disguised, has been that the present day FGH represent the earlier stages of social and cultural evolution and that they are genetically different from other populations. These assumptions are held in spite of the fact that there are now many strong evidences against them. For example, Fox had observed, 'rather than being independent, primitive fossils, Indian hunters and gatherers represent occupationally specialized productive units similar to caste groups such as carpenters, shepherds or leather-workers. Their economic regimen is geared to trade and exchange with the more complex agricultural and caste communities within whose orbit they live. Hunting and gathering . . . is a highly specialized and selective orientation to the natural situation, where forest goods are collected and valued primarily for external barter or trade and where necessary subsistence or ceremonial items . . . Far from depending wholly on the forest for their own direct subsistence the Indian-hunters and gathers are highly specialized exploiters of a marginal terrain from which they supply the larger society with desirable but otherwise unobtainable forest items . . . (1969: 141). He has called them 'professional primitives'. His observation can be easily supported by citing the example of the importance given to elephants in Indian society since ancient times<sup>5</sup>. Several decades ago Fried pointed out that to classify the forest dwellers as primordial communities did not stand to scrutiny (1975). The journal *Human Ecology* devoted the entire

issue (1991:19, 2) to discussion of the hypothesis that hunter-gatherers could never have lived in tropical rain forest without the direct or indirect access to cultivated foods. Though the debate was inconclusive, Bailey and Headland (1991:261) and others in that issue of the journal broadly agreed that it would be more appropriate to conceptualize a continuum from pure foraging to purposeful forest clearing and crop cultivation. Guha, after a detailed discussion on ethnicity and environment in India, concluded 'forests of varying but always significant extent long co-existed along side, and among, the cleared lands of peasant settlement, and forest people existed as specialist in the optimal use of this niche. They exploited its plants and animals both for consumption and for trade and thereby modified its size and composition' (1999: 199).

### **FGH in history and mythologies**

FGH people like any other humans are thinking beings. They are keen observers of nature around them; they learn and adapt<sup>6</sup>. Through observation and experimentations they develop knowledge of their environment, develop appropriate skills and technology to explore it<sup>7</sup> and develop understanding of the phenomena of nature. As far as their material aspect and social organization are concerned they have been adequately discussed, but what have not been paid enough attention are how they derive their knowledge, form their concepts, and project their imaginations, and whether there are any principals around which their practices, concepts and ideas get built up (now these issues are coming under focus, see Naveh in this volume). However we should be aware that, while we are looking for logical correlations, all societies suffer with profound inconsistencies (see Ramanujan 1989). As far as FGH in India are concerned, there is enough evidence to indicate that they are embedded in the social, cultural, philosophical and linguistic environment of the region in which they exist, besides being a part of the regional economic and political organization. They cannot be adequately understood without referring to them particularly in terms of the politics of domination.

Let me elaborate this point. India has a long history and there have been many centers of excellence, specialization and seats of power at all-India, regional and local levels. These centers and their hinterlands were tied together in various complex networks. Whether the networks were strong and clearly identified or weak and vague, they made possible a flow of ideas and values back and forth. Both folk and literary knowledge indicate that people have some broad, though perhaps vague, ideas about geography, mountains and hills, rivers and oceans, forests and deserts, and they have localized versions of the Hindu mythologies<sup>8</sup> and histories (Thapar 2013). Mahabharata and other ancient texts make many references to forests and to the people inhabiting them. In Mahabharata there are references to the exiled Pandavas seeking cooperation of forest dwellers for their subsistence. And sometimes they had

confrontation with them (see Karve 1974). In Hindu mythology the abodes of Gods and Goddesses are often located on the top of the hills, or in rivers and oceans. Animals have been depicted as incarnations of gods and also as their 'vahanas' (vehicles). Such animals are considered sacred and addressed as persons. Hanuman, one of the most powerful gods in the Hindu pantheon is represented as a monkey. He along with an army of monkeys helped Ram to locate his wife and win a big battle against Ravan, the king of Lanka. Besides this, vocabularies of ancient tradition of classical dance in India are full of *mudras* (poses) and movements depicting animals. These suggest that the choreographers had a close association with the life in forest.

The long political history of India entailed drawing and redrawing of political boundaries, which of course necessitated movements of troops through forests, deserts, hills and rivers. Such movements must have led to interactions with local populations for direction, guidance, support, obtaining food, water and other supplies, including establishing political domination in frontier zones (see Rajan 1984 for specific illustration of power dynamics in border regions inhabited by the Soliga). Such political domination, irrespective of the period it lasted or its strength, did not greatly disturb the structure of the traditional Indian society and its internal interrelationships. Let me discuss it briefly to demonstrate its relevance in understanding FGH.

### **Autonomy with-in**

The traditional Indian society is highly structured in terms of Varna and jati. Varna is a broad hierarchical model; each of the four Varnas has numerous and varied jatis in any given region. A jati of one region may not be known or understood outside its region. The jati system is a highly decentralized organization, which in fact is greatly responsible for its longevity. Writing about jati, Ramanujan says, 'Each jati or class defines a context, a structure of relevance, a rule of permissible combinations, a frame of reference, a meta –communication of what is and can be done' (1989:53). In traditional India, mode of production was mostly localized and catered to a region. A village community in India, the backbone of traditions, was composed of a number of jatis. Each jati had its own hereditary occupation, culture and dialect. Each jati had its autonomy of a sort and regulated its internal affairs, yet there was a great deal of social and economic interdependence between jatis while maintaining their hierarchical relationships. Each jati had its hereditary occupations and specialized activities. The goods and services were distributed through *jajmani* relationships, weekly markets, periodical fairs, pilgrimage and, what was not available through these established sources was supplied by peripatatics and the dwellers of the forest. Gardner in his latest paper writes 'Hindus are notable for having a society in which both revered texts and actual practices emphasize mutually dependent relations among occupational specialists . . . Although horticultural tribes do understandably

face agricultural competitors for their land, foragers have a unique and highly valued occupation within the region. Apart from occasional forays into the forest by individuals such as Ayurvedic doctors, they have been the prime collectors of medicinal plants, wild honey, and a variety of other precious forest products. No one seeks to compete with them. Just as Hindu landowners and occupational specialists can supply one another with goods and services century after century without there being significant cultural convergences among them to take part in long term exchanges with specialists from ancient civilization without great erosion over time of their earlier way of life . . . For centuries, perhaps millennia, they have been valuable to the larger systems for precisely what they traditionally did in the forested hills' (2013:510-1). Earlier he had suggested the foragers may as well be called as "caste of the forest" (1978: 295). What Gardner is underlying is an extremely important point, but it is partial and hints at the subtler part and not tell the whole story.

While a great deal has been written about the cooperation with-in the Indian *jajmani* system and the autonomy enjoyed by individual jatis, what has not been adequately discussed is the aspect of coercion built into it and politics of domination, and how the ideology of hierarchy, supported by the concept of purity and pollution, had a strangle hold in maintaining the system which was extremely unjust, cruel and suffocating for the jatis lower in the order (see Rajalakshmi Misra's paper on maintenance of hierarchy based on purity and pollution among the tribes in a region in southern India 1972: 135-48). Looked from this angle the jatis, even when most suppressed, had no choice except to endure, and in the process internalized their inferior position and thus managed to suffer the system. For example, years of subjugation of the Paniya by the local landlords made them feel that they were 'no good', 'lazy', etc., and were incapable to manage their own farms, though the truth was that the landowners thrived on their hard labour (Misra and Misra 1988: 52-70). Hockings has documented systematic massacre and suppression of the Kurumbas in the Nilgiris (Hockings 2013: 232-4). The suppressed classes had one option and that was to migrate to a new location<sup>9</sup> and in the case of FGH when they were harassed too much, it was to withdraw deep inside the forest for at least a limited period of time.

In pre-industrialized India, forests were huge store-houses of resources, some of which, like fire-wood, timber, bamboo, medicinal plants, herbs, spices, root vegetables, fruits and a variety of other minor forest produce, were in great demand by the larger society and some of which were used in cottage industry. A great part of traditional Indian medical practice was dependent on medicinal plants extracted from forest. Animals were in great demand for their flesh, skin, fur, bones etc. Of these animals elephants, as discussed earlier, were of special importance. Also, those who sought to display their exalted sense of courage, vigor and power always considered hunting of wild animals



an important sport. A diverse group of people were engaged in pursuit of the game; they laid the plan and were strategically posted to shout, drum and chase the harassed animal. Of course their role in the operation was least recognized. And who else could these people be?

Thus, it was in the interest of the larger society that forest dwelling populations remain in the forest. Their knowledge about the forest and its resources, skill in climbing trees and extracting forest goods, and ability to hunt, guide in the forest, and capture and train wild elephants were fully utilized. Forests were also used as a natural frontier and the forest dwellers as allies. In this connection citing ancient literary and other sources Thapar writes 'in these later portions too the forest chiefs are seen as potential allies or enemies or as instruments to be used politically to create trouble in the neighbouring kingdoms' (2011:153). For the larger society, the forest and the people who lived there were held in awe, and their austerity, simplicity and romance were admired. But they themselves would not like to inhabit the forest with all the associated hazards. That was meant for truth seekers or students who went to Gurukulas for learning. On their own the forest dwelling populations subsisted on collection of tubers, fruits and honey, trapping small animals and birds, fishing and indulging in occasional hunting, a part of which they consumed; the rest was bartered for other goods they needed such as grains, clothes, spices, vessels and iron tools. Some also cultivated small plots or clearings inside the forest.

This is a general picture, but what is needed in order to understand the dynamics of the situation FGH have been in, is to systematically trace out both the specific relationships between them and surrounding peasants, and the penetration of state power and its economic interests through history. For example, Rajan in a brilliant paper (1984:194-204) has shown how the heavily forested and hill area lying between Mysore and Coimbtore in Tamilnadu, home to Soliga and other FGH communities, from 1799 onwards after the British colonial forces defeated Tipu Sultan, changed its character and impacted the Soliga. In the past, the hills in the area had strategic importance to warlords; whosoever controlled the hills, had control of the surrounding plains. The forest was left to itself. FGH considered it to be a common property. The resources were in plenty and the tools for their extraction were elementary. Therefore there was low probability of somebody among them monopolizing the economy. The strategic importance of the hills was lost once the British firmly established themselves in the then Madras presidency. Whatever threat to their expansion there was removed. They restored erstwhile Mysore kingdom and thereby removed the burden of administering a big state. The Mysore state soon afterwards renovated the temple located on the top of the B.R. Hills and revived the performances of rituals there. A large chunk of land and forest were assigned to it for its maintenance. The Soliga Yajman (headmen) was given pride of place in temple rituals. But, at the same time, the temple



authorities directly intervened in the affairs of the Soliga. The Yajman was authorized to resolve the disputes among the Soliga and each time a dispute was resolved they had to pay a fee to the temple. Thereby the temple authorities established a certain right over the affairs of the Soliga. This way the Soliga Yajman became a strong collaborator of temple organization. After 1800, Rajan tells us that the economic value of forest resources began to be explored. A large area of the forest was released for coffee plantations in which the Soliga were employed as laborers during lean periods. Since their labor was not sufficient, laborers from the plains were brought in, changing the demography of the region. Just before the World War I, the Forest Department brought out a study that highlighted the potential of the forest resources for the benefit of firms and persons. It encouraged private capital to make use of the forest resources. As regards labor required for launching economic enterprises in the forest, the study pointed out, 'In Mysore jungle tribes known as Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba furnish efficient labor for extraction purposes, while contractors can be had in plenty for conveying logs to sale depots' (Commercial Guide to the Forest Economic Products of Mysore, Government Press Bangalore, 1917: 24-5, quoted by Rajan).

Before a forest department came into existence in the erstwhile princely state of Mysore there were no restrictions for entry into the forest or for extracting forest resources. They were commons. Until 1869 no rules were framed for management of the forest. Afterwards the farmers were allowed to cut firewood on the payment of a fee of a rupee one per cartload of wood, with the restriction that no teak or sandalwood tree would be cut. The traders were allowed to cut trees by paying a stamp fee of 8 *annas* (half a rupee) per tree. For all these jobs, forest dwelling populations were engaged (Working plan, Forest Department Karnataka Government document).

For the Forest Department, forest dwellers provided a variety of services like trekking, cutting timber and clearing forest on daily wages or no wages. After commercial forestry began the forest department allowed the forest dwelling population to clear a patch of forest and cultivate it. By the time they sowed the seeds, the Forest Department planted saplings of commercial trees. In other words they allowed the forest dwellers to loosen the soil, weed it and insure that the saplings were protected from wild animals. In about three years time, when the saplings had grown, the Soliga were forced to move to another patch. This way the Forest Department appropriated the labor of the Soliga and also restrained their natural advancement (*Ibid*: 202).

Until the contract system for collection of minor forest produce was not abolished (it was abolished in 1970s and in place of it Large Scale Multi Purpose Societies were formed, popularly called as LAMP), the contractors employed the forest dwelling populations for collecting those items. The contractors paid them very little and irregularly but they always collected much more minor forest produce than was allowed under the license given to

them by the forest department. This was a sort of open secret. The contractors treated the forest dwellers very harshly. They abused them and never hesitated to beat them up. They were often ridiculed for their 'uncivilized' and 'promiscuous' ways of life.

The Jenu Kuruba in particular were recognized as expert in catching elephants and training them. When elephant catching called Khedda operation was a state sponsored activity<sup>10</sup>, the Jenu Kuruba were engaged as beaters and chasers and later they were engaged in training elephants caught during the operations.

### **Forest and hills**

Forests and hills in India are treated with awe, admiration and reverence. There are many forest pockets all over the country that are considered to be sacred (Misra & Rangad 2008:19-53; Gadgil & Vartak 1976). Popular pilgrimage centers are often located deep inside the forests or on the top of the hills. There is a famous temple at the top of the hill called Sabrimala<sup>11</sup> in Kerala that attracts very large number of pilgrims from all over South India. In Mysore district of Karnataka, a temple located at Biligiri Rangan hills, inside the forest is also very popular. In this temple the Soliga of that area have a role in the ritual performance of the temple (Morab 1977). Gardner (1982) has observed that Paliyar play a role as guides and as providers of water to the thirsty pilgrims visiting temples located in the forest. Gardner was a witness to when one Paliyar was asked by the temple priest to participate in the rites in the sanctum sanctorum of a forest Vaisnava temple. He also saw Paliyar serving as priests in two Shiva temples atop the Saduragiri Hills. Gardner points out that being considered at the level of ascetics they transcend the caste barriers. This observation in particular and a series of articles of Bird-David (1999; 2004) and Naveh (2007) on relational epistemology take the discourse on FGH at a different level. A Paliyar and a Soliga being allowed to participate in Hindu temple rituals are not isolated incidents. It has been reported from different places in Southern India, as well as in the other parts of India. Bose had brought this to our attention in his study of Juangs of Odisha. He had written, "Even though Brahmin settlements had been established by royal grants at the pilgrim centers here, at Simhanath and other places the right of worship is even now vested in the hand of non-Aryan forest tribes" (Bose 1975:31). The holiest mountain for the Irula, a tribe in Tamilnadu, is Rangaswami peak; it has a Hindu deity and an Irula pujari (Hrdickova 2012: 444).

### **How larger society reaches FGH**

In an earlier paper (2012), I identified that at least there were three patterns as to how the larger society reached out to the FGH. One was provided by the Soliga, who extracted forest resources for the larger society and were

also given a certain role in the temple ritual. A second pattern was illustrated by the Kurumba of the Nilgiris. They, too, extracted resources for the neighboring populations, but were considered sorcerers and therefore potentially dangerous (see Verghese 1966: 98-106). They were also given the responsibility to guard the villages of Badaga peasants. Hockings writes, 'Each Badaga commune (or village cluster) used to have "watchman", a Kurumba employed to protect those particular Badagas from the sorcery of other Kurumbas. He also took part in some Badaga ceremonies as an assistant priest, and supplied his Badaga friends with baskets, nets, honey and other jungle products. The Badaga headman would levy for him a fixed quantity of grain from each household in the commune' (1999:32). But often they were severely punished and even killed for some alleged sorcery. The third pattern is seen among the Cholanaiken. The forests they inhabit continue to remain relatively undisturbed. The significant difference now is that they do not gather for self-consumption but mostly to earn "wages" to buy food and other products from the stores strategically located in the region. In a way they are enforced. There is no more scope for them to withdraw and other people also cannot encroach in their territory on account of forest regulations.

### **How FGH deal with larger society**

The strategies adopted by FGH in dealing with the larger society have been very well discussed by Norstrom in identifying three ways of adaptation namely withdrawal, alliance and negotiation (2003: 109-208). Paliyans in Gardner's view adapt by bicultural oscillation, interacting with Tamils on one frontier and on the other with the forest that provides them subsistence. The transformation scene in the trijunction of three states namely Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala makes it clear that the option for oscillations has almost dried out. FGH are caught up in a vice-like grip of the modern development but they are devising strategies to deal with them (see Norstrom in this volume).

### **Transformation at trijunction**

The trijunction is mountainous and has been formidable forest area, rich in bio-diversity that has been recognized as part of Nilgiri Bio-sphere. It has been home of numerous forest dwelling populations. The junction is at the frontier of three major cultural regions of India represented by Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam speaking people, each having its own long history and distinct traditions. Unfortunately we do not have a systematic picture of what the situation was in this area prior to the establishment of colonial rule, but much began to happen soon after it. The British discovered that climate at the hill tops of the Nilgiris was salubrious reminding them of home-like conditions. They found it an ideal place for retreat for fatigued officers trying to establish colonial rule in the dusty, hot and humid planes of southern India. They began to develop it<sup>12</sup>. That development phase is immensely important

from the point of view of understanding the forest dwellers who have generally been overlooked by the otherwise very competent and detailed anthropological studies of the region. As that is a subject by itself, I will skip that phase and will focus on what has been happening in this area after India gained independence. I will quickly list its major contours.

### **Area opened up**

The process of laying down roads and railway connections which had started during the colonial rule continued but gained huge momentum after independence resulting in a massive opening up of the region from all sides. Traffic flow has enormously increased with all its associated hazards. The network of roads runs through thick forest region of Nilgiri, Wynaad and Mysore districts. The consequences of such development have been profound but have not been properly assessed. Anyway, the Forest Department felt that the situation was reaching an alarming stage from the viewpoint of protecting forest and wild life; they have banned plying of any vehicle at night between Mysore-Nilgiri and Mysore-Wayanad sectors. As far as FGH are concerned, only very few of their settlements remain in the protected forest area. Those who are sticking it out there find it extremely difficult as very serious contradictions have developed between their view of the world and those who inhabit the external environment.

### **Demographic**

Demographic changes in the region have been massive. For example, the population of the Nilgiri district in 1801, which was 112882, and became 735394 in 2011 census. Hockings writes that, when Sullivan settled in the hills, the only other residents were, according to the 1821 census, 222 Todas, 317 Kotas and 3778 Badagas. In 2003-2004, according to the census conducted by Tribal Research Centre, Udthagamandalm, the population of Scheduled Tribes was 3.71 per cent of the total population in the Nilgiris (Misra 2007: 162). On the Nilgiri side of Wayanad, refugees from Sri Lanka were rehabilitated and a significant movement of the population from Kerala changed the demography, economics, politics and culture of the region. It also encouraged a lot of traders from Kerala to settle down in the region. The land use pattern there has undergone a significant change. FGH certainly have been overwhelmed by these changes but they too are becoming part of the expanding economy of the region (see Naveh 2007). In Wayanad, Pulpally once had a number of settlements of different tribes and Sultan Battery were a small town, but both are thriving urban centers now with marketing arcades and glittering shops. According to the census of 2011 the population of Sultan battery is 297863 and, on the other side, the population of Gudalur town is 49535. The decadal growth rates of the three districts, namely Mysore, Wayanad and Nilgiris at the Trijunction between 2001 and 2013 have been

23.29, 11.30 and 15.65 per cent respectively.

On the Karnataka side the changes have been more sudden. A dam was built across river Kabini. Construction began in 1959-60 and it was completed in 1974. Owing to the dam, the back waters of the river Kabini submerged 234 sq. miles which resulted in the displacement of all the people living on the banks of the river. Of the entire land that went into submersion 8760 acres were dry land and the rest were forest. All Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba settlements in Begur forest range along with other villages were resettled in colonies specially built for them. In other words the entire ecology of the area underwent a huge change. The story of resettlement of the displaced people is a long drawn one and the changes caused much hardship and anguish to the people in general and the tribes in particular. In the case of the Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba, they lost the forest that not only provided subsistence but also the very essence of their life. They now dwell in houses constructed for them by the government which reflect the ideas of the builders. House construction for the Nayaka in Wynaad became a 'silent clash point between Nayaka and non-Nayaka ways of living' (see Lavi and Bird-David in this volume). Some of the FGH in the region have been given title to the land but most of them have not taken up farming in any significant way. For this, there are practical as well as deeper philosophical reasons. Most of them have given their land on lease to neighboring farmers and they themselves go for wage-earning jobs in coffee plantations. Food gathering and hunting as a subsistence activity has become negligible. A number of welfare schemes, such as subsidized ration shops, old age pensions, and support for pregnant women, as well as rural employment schemes, provide much relief to FGH and also keep them away from the forest. In any case there is stricter vigilance of the forest by the Forest Department. Poachers and smugglers of timber and sandalwood are a constant threat to FGH because they seek their enforced assistance in illegal activities. Since the FGH are a resident population of the region, often they are the ones who are questioned by the investigating officers of the forest department. This is a constant worry for them, and therefore many of them find it safer to work in the plantation away from their habitats. Also, the planters entice them in a variety of ways, some of which are certainly unethical.

### **Urbanization**

As most of the forest in the trijunction comes under one protection category or another, particularly after the recognition of the Nilgiri Bio-sphere reserve and formation of Tiger Reserve Forest area etc., there have been more vigilance, patrolling and efforts to protect the area. However these have not stopped urban expansion to the edges of the forest and sometimes there is even clear encroachment in the forest areas. A satellite view shows that urban development is engulfing the forest from all sides. In 1967, a trading village

called Sargur, was about 12 Km from the Jenu Kuruba settlement (Heggandevankote taluk, Mysore district) where I was camping to do my fieldwork among the Jenu Kuruba. Sargur was the place from where we used to get our food supplies. At that time I could not fully realize the significance of the location of a trading village on the edge of the forest. According to the 1961 Census, its population then was 4599. It has grown into a thriving town with a population of 9931 in the 2001 Census and 11425 in 2011. It is now a focal point in the region providing a variety of functions. Most importantly, from our point of view, FGH people frequently visit it. In 1960s it was mostly known for its weekly market. Reflecting on its location and the demand of forest resources in pre-industrialized India, I realize that a full history and profile of such villages need to be prepared in order to understand the role they played in the regional economy and also in the lives of the FGH people.

### **Resort Industry and Tourism**

If one drives from Mysore towards the Nilgiris or Wynaad, one cannot escape huge advertisement for forest resorts. In spite of all restrictions this industry is flourishing and attracts tourists from far off places. The forest ranges of Bandipur and Madumallai attract a large number of tourists round the year. FGH regularly come in contact with these visitors. Some of the Jenu Kuruba, Betta Kuruba and members of other tribes have found employment in these establishments. On the website of one resort, the advertisement states that the guests will have an indigenous ambience, will be served with indigenous cuisines by indigenous people!

### **Transport and Communication**

There have been revolutionary changes in communication. In 1967, when I was conducting fieldwork in the Begur forest area, there was only one bus going from Mysore to Manantavadi and the same bus would return in the evening. It used to take at least 4 hours to reach Karapur from Mysore, which was roughly 48 miles away. Now there are government and private buses, besides numerous small passenger vehicles locally called 'tempos'. There are modern sprawling bus shelters at Ooty (Udhagamandalam, the modern name), Gudalur, Sultan Battery, and Heggandevankote, indicating that the transport industry has really expanded. These centers connect bus-services to the hinterland. The number of privately owned cars, motorcycles and mopeds has enormously increased and also telecommunication. The rural folks including FGH make frequent use of mobile phones. Even in the so-called interior areas, dish antennas dot the scene.

### **Development Activities and NGOs**

Soon after India became independent, it decided to pursue planned development. Tribal development became an important component of the

planning process. Enormous amount of literature exist on tribal development. It has been periodically reviewed and analyzed by experts, committees and commissions. The planning approach, with its focuses and its strategies, has undergone changes from one plan to another. Allocations of funds for development too have enormously increased. On the eve of the Fifth Five Year Plan formation, it was realized that certain groups that were small, pre-literate and pre-agriculture were not getting enough attention under general tribal development plans. Therefore it was decided to identify them separately for their development. Such groups were called primitive tribes, but since it was felt that the term was not appropriate, they are now referred to as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. They include all those people whom we call as FGH. It is not possible to discuss here the impact of development planning on FGH; in brief it can be stated that there is not a single group in the country that has not been exposed to development programmes.

Apart from government efforts, there are a large number of NGOs also working among the FGH for their development and also for bringing awareness among them. There are more than dozen NGOs working among the tribes in Heggadadevankote region of Mysore district. Norstrom has a whole chapter on NGOs in his book. He identified more than 21 of them working among the Paliyans (2003: 127-51).

### **Then**

Development activities in 1967 around the Begur forest region of Mysore district were only minimally felt by FGH people. Most of the people were still engaged in collection of honey, tubers, fruits and trapping and fishing for their own consumption and trade. They used to collect minor forest produce for the contractors. The forest department used to allow some Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba to cultivate some plots of vacant land inside the forest. To facilitate their agriculture activity Block Development Officers used to provide them with bullocks, implements, seeds etc., but generally the Jenu Kuruba were indifferent towards cultivating fields. They preferred to work in the forest. Often, when pressured by Development Officers, contractors, or Forest Department Officials, they disappeared inside the forest, or changed their settlement. Occasionally they also worked in the neighboring plantation on daily wages. The most obvious symbols of development activity in that region were the Ashram schools for FGH children. Ashram schools were elementary residential schools. The idea was that the children would live in the hostel and study in the school up to fifth standard. However, none of the children were staying in the school; rather, some of them would assemble in the school in the morning. The number of children would increase at noontime, when meals were served. The attendance of the teacher was irregular as well. There was very little teaching done there. A hostel superintendent looked after the school and two persons who were in charge of cooking food for



children. Providing two meals a day to the children was the major activity of the school.

### **Now**

In the same area, in addition to an Ashram school, scores of development and welfare schemes are run by the state government. A NGO is running a residential school exclusively for tribal children. In 2012 they had 412 students of which half of them were girls from classes 1 to 10. In 2010-11 a majority of the children who appeared for class 10 examinations passed. This NGO has been working in the area since 1984. It is also working in the sector of health, education, community development and training. It runs two hospitals in the area. In other words the total scenario has changed considerably from 1967 to now. Now, on account of the work done by the NGOs, political activists and exposure to frequent elections for different bodies the FGH too are politically charged. A number of women are representatives in various political bodies and they are articulate. They also put forth their demands for fulfillment of their rights to extract minor forest products from the forest under Community Forest Rights and also demand that they be allowed to cultivate land under the Forest Rights Act. There are frequent disputes between the Forest Department officials and the people over the interpretations of various provisions of laws which have been enacted to protect the rights of the indigenous forest dwellers. Recently a Jenu Kuruba contested State Legislative Assembly election held in May 2013. Though he did not win the election he polled a considerable number of votes, which indicates some kind of solidarity developing among them. A Soliga 'the first tribal community to win a Zila Parishad election in Chamrajanagar district' (The Hindu, 25-4-2014) will now be Vice- President of Zila Parishad. This is a huge change.

### **Conclusions**

In this section, I will summarize what I have stated so far and then try to assess the impact of the external environment in general on FGH and in particular on the Jenu Kuruba. Finally, I will make an attempt to underline as to why people like Jenu Kuruba are different and special for the entire humanity.

FGH in India are of great antiquity and there is plenty of evidence that they have been interacting with the larger Indian society in a variety of ways for a long time. Unfortunately, their interactions with the larger society have not been systematically worked out in historical sequence. A cursory look at the ancient scriptures, texts, temple architecture, dance and music forms and mythological stories indicates a close affinity of the people in general and those who inhabited the forests. In the pre-colonial and also in the colonial period the larger society drew on a wide variety of forest resources on a

continuous basis, which of course must have required the services of gatherers, some organization for exchange, and rules for trade. It must have also required some system of communication and processes of interaction among different sets of people. This aspect is of some significance in the context of ever changing political boundaries in India. In other words, whichever government came into power it did not disturb the local arrangement and relationships with FGH and peasantry in general. It is worth quoting in detail what Trautman writes on this and the related issue of elephants in ancient India. He writes 'The private ownership of elephants and horses, which the Alexander historian's record for the Indian north-west is in sharp contrast to Megasthenes' description of the Mauryan war machine. It will suffice to recall the chief details of that well-known description. In the first place there was completely disarmed peasantry. The Mauryan state was at the farthest imaginable extreme from the idea of the "nation in arms", and did not resort to the levies of citizen-soldiers, long traditional in the Greek world. The Indian peasantry, the second and most populous of Megasthenes' seven castes, was completely unarmed and exempt from military service of any kind; farmers could often be seen ploughing in perfect security from the clash of armies close at hand. From the imperial point of view the only function of the peasantry was to sow and reap, and to render tribute in abundance. In the second place, and as the concomitant of demilitarized agrarian population, there was fully profession fighting force' (1982: 257).

After the establishment of the British rule in India there was massive intervention in the life of the forest dwellers. The forest and its resources were vested into the crown. The state acquired the right to administer those areas and framed new laws, forest policies and rules depending upon the interest of the colonial power (see Guha 1983: 1882-94 and 1940-6). They raised revenue from forest products, harvested timber and other resources in a big way. Big chunks of forest land were released for plantation activity. The British had acquired authority as well as power. These were sudden changes. How did the FGH cope with them? Not much has been written about that, although this is the phase in which a number of monographs on tribes were written. In order to understand the position of FGH in India, it is best to consider them as part of the jati organization. The dominant theme of the jati system is non-interference in the cultural and social domain of other jatis. Each maintains its internal organization, identity and tradition. Jatis are tied to each other in hierarchical network of economic, social and cultural relations. From outside, the system looks rigid and static, but it is not exactly so in practice. There have been numerous structural and organizational changes in the jati system. Many new jatis have come up owing to internal friction and urge to move up in the scale. The process still continues in spite of modernization and significant changes in the economic and political domains. Jatis' identities have become stronger, which is also equally applicable to FGH groups.

## Impact

Sheer population pressure is enormous in modern India. According to figures which have been just released by the Census of India, 2011, the population of India is 12, 105, 698, 73. There is no escape for anyone from this pressure. It can be externally seen and internally felt by each and everyone. On one hand, the areas inhabited by FGH in the southern locations have been opened up from all directions and, on the other, the Forest Department has the onerous responsibility to protect the forest. There is manifold increase of all kinds of activities private and public in the forest region. In the past the scenario was that a populated area would start thinning out as one went towards the forest regions. Now it is different story, whether one is at Gudalur, Sultan Battery, or Heggadadevankote. These are now densely populated areas with a variety of modern activities located just at the edges of the forest. Though there is increased surveillance in the forest and a heightened sense of urgency that forest needs to be protected, the task is becoming increasingly difficult. Wild life is threatened. There are daily occurrences of wild animals straying into human habitations. Forest resources are depleting at an alarming rate. The forest laws have been revisited and the rights of the forest dwellers have been revised<sup>13</sup>. On the one hand there has been increased recognition of the forest dwellers in the forest and it has been realized that, in order to protect the forest, the cooperation of all the stakeholders must be sought. On the other hand there is a strong lobby of those people who have vested interest in the forest resources and the land surrounding it. On the yet broader scale, there is a genuine realization that basic needs of the vast majority of the people must be met. In order to reach out to them and raise their standard of living, massive projects of development have been launched: raising dams for irrigation and electricity, industrialization, extraction of minerals resources, etc. These have had a serious impact on the population that, until recently, lived in the so called 'hinterland'. Now there is no such hinterland<sup>14</sup>.

While there is an all round cry for conservation of resources, the problem is that modern development is based on promoting more consumption. How can conservation and ever accelerating consumption be held together? It is a huge paradox for which there are no answers except to hide behind slogans such as 'sustainable development', which is logically impossible in a world that has deliberately and consciously promoted a fiercely competitive market. However, such slogans do create illusions and are successful in falsely justifying new development projects (See Misra 2008; 2010). In this regard, it is worth quoting Jahnvi Barua, 'Man is driven by ambition and impatience like never before. Impatient, greedy and always in a hurry, afraid of falling behind the next man, the next town, the next country. His needs are enormous and their demand to be met instantly. This truly is the age of fast food, faster lives of instant gratification and impatience', (*Deccan Herald*, June 2013).

This brief discussion straight away leads us to realize the value of FGH to modern societies around the world, though they have been generally portrayed as backward and primitive. The larger Indian society in spite of its ethos has ridiculed them and their customs. But that has not stopped them using their skills, knowledge about forest and ability to stay-put in the forest. Indian society has exploited them severely, made them feel inferior, and blocked their natural development. They have also been evicted from their habitats to promote commercial interest in forest resources, encourage commercial agriculture in forest regions, and pursue mega development projects. Their labor, of course, has always been obtained whenever and wherever it is needed. Their habitats too have been fully exposed by laying rails and road links everywhere. Location of sacred spots deep inside the forest and on top of the hills could be looked at from the spiritual quest of the Hindu mind, but the subtle effort to expand economic and political activities were also the underlying reasons. Rajan (1984) has shown the political and economic dimensions of such activity in the forest region of the Mysore district and in incorporating the Soliga into that orbit. There is need for more such analysis.

The over all picture of FGH at the trijunction is that they are in total disarray. Except for a few groups here and there, their lives have been interfered with in a big way. A few among them have been 'successful' in climbing up the ladder in a modern sense, as they may have secured jobs in modern establishments<sup>15</sup>; the rest somehow manage, supported by a variety of welfare schemes, by earning wages and by foraging in the forest. Almost all children of FGH go to modern schools. Drop out rates of the children from the schools used to be very high but that has been arrested to a great extent for all FGH groups except the Jenu Kuruba, on account of support provided by welfare schemes and sustained effort of some NGOs. At least on Mysore side, after the Kabini dam, no FGH settlements are in the forest other than a few in Nagarhole reserved forest. Those who continue to live in those settlements do so because of very strong emotional attachment to the forest but also because of new act that recognizes the rights of forest dwellers. It has a provision that the forest dweller may be assigned land for cultivation. It is not that the Jenu Kuruba care much for land or have shown interest in cultivation. It is others who goad them to acquire land, and create a kind of hope that, if FGH claims are met, they too will climb up the ladder. In this respect there is hardly a distinction between rural and urban aspirations.

The majority of the Jenu Kuruba shift between their habitats and plantations to earn wages. Their own land, if any, they give on lease to others. If these observations can be summarized, it boils down to this, of all the forest dwelling communities, the Jenu Kuruba continue to be different. This is in spite of the fact that sustained development activities have been going on among them for decades. Their response to such development programmes has been very different (Misra & Misra 1982). Some sincere and committed

social workers have confirmed these observations. What makes them so very different? The Jenu Kuruba come very close to Kurumba, Cholanaiken, Paliyan and Naikens in this respect.

Their worldview cannot be understood from a material angle or by pointing out that they are primitive or they have some deficiency in their social organization, or their environment is ever giving, or they are immediate return people, or they have not developed storage capacities. These certainly provide partial explanations but to my understanding there is something deeper and philosophical about their thoughts—if we are prepared to concede that they are thinking human beings. They respect autonomy. They share. In conditions of scarcity they also share, even with outsiders, if they find they are in need, rather than storing for themselves. They strongly believe in **social storage** rather than individual hoarding. They find strength in resilience. They consider themselves as the part of the nature they live in. That they establish personal bonds with nature and its phenomena has been very well highlighted by Naveh (2007 and in this volume). They have immense capacity to tolerate pain and sorrow and they believe in living simply, which could be ideal for any human society concerned for right living. I can do no better than cite a few cases.

While I was working among the Jenu Kuruba in 1974, a dam on river Kabini was under construction. The backwaters of the river were going to submerge several Jenu Kuruba hamlets. They were not prepared to leave their hamlets and settle in the colonies that were being built for them. I was asked by the authorities if I could persuade some of them to accept what government was offering to them. I approached a senior Jenu Kuruba and suggested to him that he along with others should go and settle down in the new colonies that have been made for them, as in those colonies they will have all the essential facilities. With moist eyes, he looked towards me and then to the trees near his hut said that he had grown along with those trees and now he could not leave them and go elsewhere. He said, after he was dead and gone, we could do whatever we wanted to.

Doctor Balasubramaniam is a medical practitioner, a sincere and devoted social worker. He has been working among the forest dwellers for more than three decades. He tells me that Masti, a Jenu Kuruba *Yajman* came to him one day late in the evening and asked him to take cold water bath and wear a clean *panchey* (lower garment). Later in the middle of night he was escorted to the forest where some Jenu Kuruba had assembled. There they had a conversation with spirits and told him that their *devaru* (deity) has asked them to make him (Balasubraminam) a Jenu Kuruba. All the Jenu Kuruba who had assembled there except for Masti who was in trance, prostrated before him. Dr. Balasubraminam does not know how to explain this event but he says that made a huge impression on him. He strongly holds the opinion that the Jenu Kuruba are much different from other FGH in the

region. He has many anecdotes to illustrate his observations. He told me that he helped a Jenu Kuruba to grow some fruit plants. After the plants began to yield, that Jenu Kuruba would pluck only what he and his family needed. On being asked by the doctor why he did not pluck more. He simply said that he took whatever he required, the rest was for others and nature to take care of.

Doctor Balasubramaniam's wife is a gynecologist; both of them, along with others, run a hospital at Sargur in Heggadadevankote taluk. His wife told me that threshold of tolerating pain by the Jenu Kuruba women is extraordinary high even compared with other forest dwellers who come to their hospital. According to this couple, the Jenu Kuruba never complain that they are hungry or have been starving or are in some kind of distress, but when they are in a group, like others they also put forth their demands.

I have been told repeatedly by the people who have been closely associated with Jenu Kuruba that they have an innate attraction for forest in spite of the fact that this attraction puts them under enormous difficulties and pressure. I think a key to understanding this attraction, as well as Jenu Kuruba being a moral community, is provided by Demmer (2001:475-90; 2004: 107-16; and in this volume). It is in a death ritual their worldview gets expressed. The Jenu Kuruba believe that the spirit of the dead has to join the underworld of the ancestors. The roving spirit could be dangerous and therefore has to be engaged in a dialogue and let him/her express all anger, dissatisfaction, anguish, and pain experienced, as well as happy occasions by him/her in lifetime. The death ritual is an occasion for representation which through dialogue between the dead and living. The representation is 'accounted for and mutually evaluated, i.e. rejected, criticized or justified' (2001: 486). The principle aim is to commit to the moral values of the community and restore its order and solidarity. With this insight, it is possible to understand what they did to Dr. Balsubraminam. It was just their attempt to reinforce their universe, which has been under severe threat.

The challenges of exploding external environment leave little room for today's Jenu Kuruba to engage in moral negotiation among the living, the roving spirit of the dead and the moral authority of the ancestors. Their world is collapsing. Alcoholism among Jenu Kuruba is rampant and there are several cases of reported suicides among them and also homicide, which was totally unknown among them before.

This is extremely sad, for the qualities of the people likes Jenu Kuruba should have been a moral guide for modern harassed and directionless humanity with its very bleak and uncertain future. The root cause of all this is the unsustainable lifestyle of modern human beings. I can do no better than quote Gardner writing about Paliyans 'It startled me. Paliyans treat fellow human so considerately that my year and half with them was unforgettable. They were quieter, more peaceful, more respectful, more egalitarian, and more

individualistic than any people, I had ever met or read about . . . Portraying Paliyans this way make them sound like those hypothetical, ideal people, social philosophers and political theorists love to write about' (2006: 30, emphasis mine).

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the Jenu Kuruba who have not only provided me information, insight, understanding but also a perspective of life, 'stop making sense... it is the process not the knowledge. So just entertain transcendence and you will be better of it...Generally, in a way, people are the better for it for being less reasonable' (Yann Martel). My thanks are due to Peter Gardner, Jayanta Sarkar, Peri Alwar, R.Balasubramaniam, M.Balasubramanya, J.Shankar Rao, Poshini Naik and K. N.Chandrakant.

#### NOTES

1. I prefer to use Food Gathering and Hunting Societies in short FGH, as most of their food in India comes through food gathering: hunting at present contributes very little to their food. In mainland India there is hardly any group that could be classified as classical hunter. In any case in good part of India hunting is prohibited.
2. Lest I be misunderstood, let me state that in last five decades of my professional carrier and also in private experience I feel that the western and the Indian perspectives significantly differ on several matters. In writing this I am quite aware that both these terms will be hard to define. However, this can be said without hesitation that the load of history that a common Indian carries is amazing.
3. I have been trying hard to find a generic term for the tribes in ancient Indian literature and mythology; I have discovered none.
4. Verrier Elwin came to India as a missionary. During the course of his stay he came under the spell of Gandhi. He wanted to work among the downtrodden and weaker sections of Indian society. He says that he came to India as an act of reparation, 'that from my family somebody should go to give instead of to get, to serve with the poorest people instead of ruling them, to become one with the country that we had helped to dominate and subdue' (Elwin 1964:36). Soon the then colonial government got a sense of Elwin's intentions; his passport was impounded and was not allowed to come back to India. It was returned back to him only when many influential people intervened on his behalf in Britain and he gave an undertaking that he will work exclusively in tribal areas and will not participate in any political activity. This incident clearly indicates the assumption that the researches were not supposed to have any political views and also that tribes were separate from other Indian population.
5. It is not possible to go into the details of this matter here. It may be briefly indicated that in India elephants were used as part of the war machinery in ancient and medieval periods of Indian history (Trautman 1982: 254-81). They have been insignias of royalty. Elephants are considered sacred animal. They are widely used in temple rituals and at present are maintained by all-important Hindu temples. They have been widely used in temple architecture. If we ask a simple question from where the elephants came, the obvious answer is forest which means that the forest dwelling populations must have been part of the chain in their capture, training and maintenance. This issue becomes extremely significant when we learn that catching elephant from wild was considered more economical than raising them in captivity. It takes about 15 years before an elephant is sufficiently domesticated and made useful. Catching and training elephants are dangerous activities. The forest dwellers not only cohabit along



with wild life but have developed special knowledge and skills in catching elephants and handling them. Since in the past there was so much continuous demand for the elephants the link between the elephant catchers and their customers must have been stable.

6. Jayanta Sarkar, who has been in Andaman Islands for a number of years and has worked among the Jarawa, tells me that the Jarawa are very keen observers and quickly learn. He further adds that in spite of the fact that they have a very limited contact with mainstream people, many of them speak Hindi while none from outside except for some who work as a part of the Jarawa mission speak the language of the Jarawa. See Sarkar (1990).
7. For the Jarawa iron pieces are prized possession they steal/rob by raiding neighboring settlements of other populations or rip off iron pieces from abandoned ships. These pieces then are converted into arrowheads and knives, which are very important weapons for them. Since they do not have any other tools to assist in their work they spend hours together in just rubbing the iron pieces on stones to give them the desired shape.
8. Deep inside Karapur forest (Mysore District), which was basically a territory of the Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba, people from the neighboring village used to celebrate Benki Maramma ritual, which, apart from other things, involved walking on a bed of fire. Though the Jenu Kuruba and Betta Kuruba did not walk on fire they did all the preparation for it. That required making a bed of fire, bringing fire wood, igniting it and also fanning it so that ash did not get formed on the burning wood. Those who had taken vow (*harikey*) to perform this ritual would first take a dip in a pond nearby which was called Ganga *snan* (bathing in the sacred river Ganga) and then walked on the fire.
 

Regarding the concept of India as a region, an ancient Indian text states, "The country that lies north of the ocean, and south of the snowy mountains, is called Bharata, for there dwell the descendants of Bharata. It is nine thousand leagues in extent, and is the land of works, in consequences of which men go to heaven, or obtain emancipation". Vishnu Purana, Chapter 3, quoted by K.S.Singh in *People of India: An Introduction*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India. 1992:17.
9. See K.S.Singh 1992 "There are few communities which do not consider themselves migrants" (p. 103) in *People of India*. Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India.
10. It is not known when Khedda operations were started but it appears to be an age-old practice for elephants were used in warfare in India from ancient times. Forest regions of Mysore must have been one of the main suppliers of the elephants. In Begur forest range of Mysore district there was a guesthouse at Karapur. In this guesthouse, several old photographs were displayed, including a number of photographs of Khedda operations which were often conducted in honor of visiting dignitaries from England.
11. See P.R.G. Mathur "Sacred complex of the Sabrimala Ayyappa temple" unpublished report, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi (2012). He has shown that the temple is of ancient origin. It is located in Saha mountain range of the Western Ghats. Although the temple is managed by Brahmins, the popular perception is that the deity there is a hunting deity.
12. The Nilgiris is one of the most studied regions of the country (Misra 2007:151-71).
13. Government of India passed an act called 'The Scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers Act 2006'. The passage of the bill faced a lot of opposition from the forest conservationist but finally the bill was passed and an amended rule has been adopted in 2012. This act allows the forest dwelling communities to live inside the

reserved forest with the right to extract resources for their bonafide needs. Community rights of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (FGH) have been recognized. Many of them have also been given land to cultivate; implementation of the provisions of this act is highly problematic. Forest department would like to reduce human activities inside the forest. Welfare and development agents, governmental and non-governmental want to reach out to them with their welfare schemes. How to resolve these contradictions is a big issue.

14. On account of this exposure and a variety of other factors there are areas of serious conflict between the people, state, and vested interests. Many of the forest areas in the country are now hot spots.
15. In my recent visit to Sultan Battery (October, 2013), a Tribal Cultural Festival was inaugurated by a member of Legislative Assembly of Kerala. He is a Kurchia, a member of scheduled tribe. I met several other members of scheduled tribes of the region who are holding jobs in banks, railways and state government. I met a Paniya, whose people were once the most suppressed scheduled tribe in the region, holding a respectable position in the local representative civic body.

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