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Individualism, Collectivism and Flexibility: A Paliyan Ethos for Securing Autonomy

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The purpose of this paper is to give some ethnographic details on the Paliyans, hunter-gatherers of South India, and the possibility of keeping a hunter-gatherer ethos in spite of long-time involvement in a market economy. Several anthropologists have raised this question over the last years. Alan Barnard puts it this way by referring to southern African hunter-gatherers:

> "Foraging remains very much in the ethos of Bushman society, even where groups look after boreholes and livestock, keep their own animals, and grow crops. The Bushmen on the margins of the larger, non-Bushman society are essentially foragers. To them wage-labour and seasonal changes in subsistence pursuits are but large-scale foraging strategies" (1993: 33).

Turning to the Aboriginals of the Northern Territory of Australia, Nicolas Peterson claims that they can still be described as hunter-gatherers despite all the changes. He bases this argument

> "…on the evidence that they are still reproducing sets of values and social relations that structure distribution and consumption, and to a lesser extent production, in distinct ways that are much closer to pre-colonial pattern than they are to the structure and workings of the mainstream economy" (1991: 82).

George Silberbauer asks if there is "a set of socio-cultural practices – a socio-cultural style, if you like – that is distinctively that of people who get (or whose recent ancestors got) their food only by hunting and gathering" (1996: 23), and from his own fieldworks in Australia and southern Africa makes the recommendation "that caution is needed in concluding that people

who are apparently rather remote from their foraging ancestors and their ways are no longer rightly to be seen as qualified hunters and gatherers" (op.cit.).

These views can be seen as a reaction to a certain kind of conclusion drawn by some social scientists from the recognized fact that, on the one hand, contemporary hunter-gatherers in the twentieth century, had lost most of their resources from hunting and gathering and thereby becoming dependent on a market economy outside their own control, and, on the other hand, that economic interaction between hunter-gatherers and neighbouring societies had, contrary to earlier views, in most cases been going on for at least hundreds of years. Some of the most 'high-voiced' representatives of this conclusion formulate the question whether there exist contemporary hunter-gatherers or not in the following way:

> We consider the question itself spurious, arguing that 'Bushman' and 'San' are invented categories and 'Kalahari foragers' an ethnographic reification drawn from one of several subsistence strategies engaged in by all of Botswana's poor. (Wilmsen and Denbow 1990: 489).

In sum these conclusions say that hunting and gathering as a distinct way of life, and the social category 'hunter-gatherer' especially applied by anthropologists, is misleading at its best or spurious at its worst, because the people who are labelled this way have been dependent on local and regional market economies for such a long time that their economy and life in general do not significantly differ from their neighbours.

This debate became known as 'the Kalahari Debate'[1] and its different arguments, developed in the early 1990s, are well known by now. During the same period I did fieldwork among the Paliyans in South India. Based on this fieldwork, that has continued up to today, will join this debate mainly from an ethnographic point of view. My data from the recent development of interaction between the Paliyans and different categories of neighbours, including the local government, will show that if I had followed Wilmsen's and Denbow's recommendation to look upon the Paliyans as part of "a single social formation" (ibid: 492) together with neighbouring people of cultivators and the mass of lower caste daily labourers in their vicinity, it would have been to through out "the baby with the bath water". Let me here quote Peterson at some length as he in my view makes this argument especially clear:

[1] The debate got its name from the geographical focus on southern Africa, and attracted within a few years no less than 600 articles and books concerning the issue and its background (Barnard 1992). Borneo is another area that created a similar but less intensive debate (Brosius 1988; Cole 1947; Hoffman 1986; Kaskija 1988; Sellato 1988).

> The current debate over foragers 'pure' and 'impure' has for the most part been fuelled by neo-marxist views that have tended to see contemporary precapitalist economies as under-developed and created or internally orchestrated by the dominant world economy, giving causal priority to production over exchange. Such views tend to collapse culture into superstructural ideology and consequently underrate its significance and are often in danger of casting members of precapitalist societies in an entirely passive role, thus ignoring the full range of possible consequences of these external impacts. Yet if economic activity is socially constituted, as such materialist perspectives assume, then it is possible that as well as being transformed by these external influences foragers may assimilate some, many or all of the intrusions and linkages with the dominant economy to their own internal social purposes and in so doing reproduce distinctive sets of economic relations (1991: 2)

In the following I will try to meet up to this request of recognizing "the full range of possibilities" in the interaction between a community of 'hunter-gatherers' and outsiders by giving an empirical account of the recent history of the Paliyans, thereby lending support to the propositions made by Barnard, Peterson and Silberbauer, mentioned in the beginning.

The data and the argument presented here are more fully developed in Norström 2003. In this account I will focus on some of the results from my fieldwork, and mainly on the strategies developed during the 1990s by the Paliyans in relation to outsiders in one particular area, the Palni Hills. The combination of strategies found was, among other things, a reaction towards two important structural changes in the region during the 1980s. One such change was that India, who had been the leading world exporter of cardamom, within a few years lost all of its cardamom export to cheaper produced cardamom from Central America. The reduced export possibilities made the cardamom-estate owners to look for other avenues of investments. Many Paliyans who during the 1960s and 1970s had regularly combined hunting and gathering with work as daily labourers in the cardamom estates had to find other subsistence resources as a result of the abandonment of these estates. A second change was that in the same period a new kind of actor turned up in the rural areas of the hills, the so-called non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the Palni Hills these organizations were able to stake out a large space within rural social service, economy and politics. One of the main reasons for the successful establishment of these NGOs was that the administrative and economic centre, and the only urban area of the Palni Hills, was Kodaikanal, an old hill station. The NGOs of the area were a 'natural' extension of the cultural and religious capital, based on an internationally wide network, built up since colonial times in this regional centre. Many of these NGOs included the Paliyans in their agendas as part of their views on rural

development. These alliances, although seldom stable over time, gave a significant impetus for change in settlement pattern among the Paliyans, from settlements inside the forests of a semi-permanent character based on single sibling groups (bands) to the creation of permanent villages at the forest fringes containing several sibling groups.

Alliance building, negotiated on a group level, became from the late 1980s the new kind of interaction with outsiders for the Paliyans. Earlier the main strategies had been what I prefer to call strategies of 'avoidance' or 'negotiation'. Avoiding contact with outsiders seems to have been the general Paliyan strategy up to the 1950s.[2] Since this time most Paliyans have, in one way or the other, done daily labour for land and cattle owners, or the collecting of non-timber forest produce for contractors, all three pursuits arranged through negotiations on an individual level between the outsiders and the Paliyans.

Although these strategies of 'aviodance', 'negotiation' and 'alliance building' describe a certain linear process over time, from a lower intensity to a higher intensity of Paliyan interaction with outsiders, this linearity taken too strictly oversimplify a complex relationship between these strategies and the Paliyans' interaction with outsiders. What we find is rather different kinds of combinations of these strategies, which implies that new forms of interaction with outsiders do not necessarily exclude older forms. In fact, the possibility of changing from one strategy to the other seems to be the key factor for understanding the Paliyans' interaction with outsiders in the 1990s.

Further, the mixing of strategies shows that the Paliyans have their own interest of crossing cultural, social as well as economic boundaries on the one hand, while on the other hand that these crossings come under the scrutiny of central Paliyan values of personhood and self-respect and accordingly with what they consider as confidence and trust in life. These general values may be called, in line with Barnard and others, a Paliyan ethos or mode of thought, based in this case on a life demanding an extremely high degree of individual autonomy, and which seems to be the underlying value regulating the mixing of strategies. This ethos, and the Paliyans' struggle to uphold it, have permeated their lives from a life dominated by hunting and gathering to a life intimately engaged in interaction with the outside society, and is in my view the unifying identity marker, bridging in their minds the way they look upon life and changes in economy and attitudes towards outsiders.

[2] Most elder Paliyans of today claim that it was only in their parents' period, when they were young children that their families went for estate work for the first time. However, we know that at least some Paliyan individuals and families did shorter periods of estate work much earlier (Dahmen 1908).

In the following I will show that this ethos do not only uphold the Paliyans' self-identification, but that the relative success of upholding it in the 1990s make this ethos the key marker for outsiders to continue defining them as the significant 'other' of these hills. I shall start with a brief description of the Paliyans and the area, followed by a more detailed account of the above-mentioned Paliyan strategies in interaction with outsiders. In the next section I shall introduce the Paliyan statement "they call for us", which is the common answer why they interact with specific outsiders and a statement that I think in a neat way epitomize both the structure of Paliyan interaction with outsiders and the way they look upon these relations. In the last section there will be a comparison of my results with two other models suggested to represent the interaction between South Indian hunter-gatherers and outsiders, Peter M. Gardner's model of 'bi-cultural oscillation' and Nuret Bird-David's model of 'encompassment'. These models recognize important aspects of interaction between hunter-gatherers and the wider society, and definitely give good arguments against Wilmsen, Denbow and others' reductionist views. However, both models lack a dynamic and prossessual dimension, due to, as I read them, a too static way of using the culture concept, thereby missing important aspects of cultural dynamism and interaction between groups of relative cultural and economic difference. Further, these models underrate, or ignore, variety within groups, thereby loosing sight of the dynamism of heterogeneity within these groups. In short the models can not incorporate change and thereby actually run the risk of giving fuel to those social scientists that claim that we are inventing the category 'hunter-gatherer'.

The Paliyans of the Palni Hills and their interaction with outsiders

The Paliyans of the Palni Hills, about 4000 individuals dispersed into 40 settlements and villages, live enclaved by different cultivating caste groups on the forested slopes in the interface between the steep valleys of the hills and the increasingly populated foothills. Contrary to what has happened to many hunter-gatherers in other areas of India, the government of Tamil Nadu has never tried to regulate Paliyan interaction with the forests and the wider society in any sense. The Paliyan use of forest resources have been considered negligible since colonial times, and they have been able to enjoy 'autonomy by default' in relation to the different governments over time.

A few historical facts are worth mentioning to understand the Paliyan situation of today. While the British in the nineteenth century introduced commercial forestry all over India, the character of the Palni Hills (the difficult terrain) left large parts of the forests more or less untouched. Exotic tree planting (eucalyptus, wattle, pine, etc.) was mainly done in the

upper plateau (The Upper Palnis), an area only intermittently used by the Paliyans. As a result forest resources, including their staple wild yam (different species of *Dioscorea*), are still available. In the 1990s 38 out of the 40 groups of Paliyans, still used these resources regularly, either directly or indirectly through non-timber forest produce collecting.

Due to environmental conditions the economic development of the Palni Hills differ significantly from one local area to the other. This fact has to a large extent determined the kind of wage labour offered to the Paliyans during the twentieth century. On the northern slopes, where the climate is generally dryer than the southern slopes, estates and plantations are few. Outside labour have mainly been in the form of non-timber forest produce collecting, cattle herding or farm labour (rice, sugar cane) in the foothills. On the southern slopes large estates of cardamom and coffee, together with plantations of silkcotton and lime (earlier banana) dominated the picture.

The foothills, once forested, were up to the 1960s thinly populated due to land degradation and dry conditions. From this time and onwards, the Tamil Nadu Government started to build dams[3] at the major perennial rivers flowing out of the Palni Hills into the Tamil Nadu plains. This has increased wetland cultivation and population in the foothills. During the same period several caste groups of the plains have been able to expand cash crop cultivation, mainly silkcotton and lime, into the lower elevations of the valleys. Both kinds have increased work opportunities, as well as outside interaction, for the Paliyans. Let me now turn to the different strategies in relation to outsiders used by the Paliyans over time.

Avoiding outsiders

A strategy of avoidance among the Paliyans stands for the Paliyan avoidance of interaction with non-Paliyans. This seems to have been the dominating strategy towards outsiders in their recent history. All Paliyans in the Palni Hills claim that they earlier avoided relations with non-Paliyans, and the only thing that differs in their accounts is the time when they started to combine this strategy with a negotiation strategy towards outsiders. Outsiders also confirm this kind of Paliyan avoidance. However, certain cultural similarities with neighbouring people, the most obvious that they speak the same language, points to the fact that they have had close interaction with neighbours earlier in their history. Why this changed and a strategy of avoidance was felt needed is wrapped in obscurity as far as the Paliyans are concerned, although the general Paliyan answer is that they "feared outsiders", often substantiated with claims that outsiders in earlier times would kill them, steal their children or contaminate them

with fatal diseases. Without details we may anyway suspect that a general answer to this situation can be found in the long period of civil unrest in the area and the surrounding plains until the British gained overall control in the early nineteenth century. This is in line with the Paliyan claims just mentioned, as older Paliyans never refer to these stories as something they, or their parents, have experienced themselves. The claims are instead part of narrated history, a history few Paliyans would elaborate on apart from some of these very general statements. When I have asked them about their history and details on events, names of persons, etc., their knowledge seems to reach only two generations back. Beyond that they usually say "How can we know?".

The reasons behind the avoidance towards outsiders during the twentieth century seem to have been more closely linked to the risk of being, in their eyes, humiliated through general mistreatment of different kinds by outsiders rather than running into the very dramatic treatment mentioned above. In positive words Paliyan 'avoidance' stands for the possibility of making a living without interaction and negotiation with other people, a way of life through the survival on the hunting and gathering of forest foods, or as they phrase it: "We survived on monitor lizards, honey and wild yams, only". When asked to compare forest life with wage labour, the Paliyans highlight "that food, firewood and water is there for anyone to take, it's free".

Today one can not find any Paliyans who for extended periods live only on hunting and gathering. However, avoidance towards outsiders is still there but now of a more relative kind. Some Paliyans have a stronger preference for staying away from outsiders compared to other Paliyans. Some local groups, as for example the Paliyans of Mungil Palam, are still following this strategy, as well as those families extracting lemon grass oil for forest contractors among the Paliyans of Kudhirayar Dam. These examples show the effectiveness of this kind of relative avoidance of social relations. In both cases they have interaction with outsiders. However, the places they have chosen to stay at are at such a distance from other settlements and villages, and from paths used by the few caste people who walk up and down the slopes, that they fully control interaction with outsiders. There are also examples of Paliyan groups staying physically very close to outsiders, but in a terrain that make them always able to spot outsiders long before they approach their places. One such settlement is Pattur, situated in a valley on the southern slopes. At this place a group of 5-6 Paliyan families stay on a ridge high up above the main valley, a valley otherwise inhabited by many big plantations and estates. Even if we can see their huts from below, it would take us more than

[3] In spring 2001 the eighth dam, the Sothuparai Dam, was inaugurated.

two hours to walk up the steep and winding path to reach their place. Several individuals and families are also known for minimizing outside relations by using forest food more than the average, as for example one of the families I have been following very close among the Paliyans of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley.

The avoidance strategy is part of a more general strategy of avoidance among the Paliyans, also used to regulate internal conflicts. At least three degrees of this strategy are used in internal relations. The weakest form is the temporary withdrawal to another place for shorter periods, mainly used by individuals and families. Next degree is when some, usually a nuclear family, decides to shift their settlement permanently, further away from other Paliyans, although still within the local area, allowing for at least a minimum of continuing relations with neighbouring Paliyan families. Several families did this in Aruvellam due to internal conflicts, and the same happened when Paliyan villages like Thenaikadu and Karumparai on the southern slopes were created in the 1980s. The highest degree of avoidance is when individuals, families or sometimes whole sibling groups decide to permanently shift to another valley. Karumparai is a good example of this, where only three out of 20 families stayed on in the late 1990s. One of the latest shifts of this nature came in 2000, when a third of the Paliyans in Kudhirayar Dam decided to move out of the village due to internal conflicts.

Negotiation for labour

According to the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, relations to caste people changed when they were offered labour in surrounding plantations and estates. The earliest offer came from the bigger estates established in the late nineteenth century and onwards. The plantation economy was market-oriented, with crops like cardamom and coffee in the Palni Hills, and compared to other kinds of cultivation in the hills labour intensive. One early example on record was St. Michael's Estate, a Jesuit estate that hired Paliyans in the early twentieth century (Dahmen 1908). The 'Hill Tamils' of the Palni Hills, castes like the Mannadiars and Asariars, who had lived in the neighbourhood of the Paliyans for centuries, did not seem to have had the same need of recruiting Paliyan labour. Their cultivation was less market-oriented and the labour need was solved within their own community, or, as in the Lower Palnis, with labour from the Puliyans or other lower castes. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century, or later that some Paliyans started to work for these landowners.

From the 1960s the herding of cattle owned by caste people from the plains and the collecting of non-timber forest produce for contractors became regular work opportunities

for the Paliyans. It had probably taken place sporadically much earlier, but information on this is almost nil for the Palni Hills.

All these work relations were negotiated and regulated between the employer and individual employees and sometimes developed into a kind of patron-client relation. The most negative form from the Paliyan point of view was some cases, which could be considered as bonded labour, where negotiation space for the Paliyans was kept at a minimum. The information I have on such cases is scanty. They are supposed to have taken place in the Lower Palnis in the 1970s and 1980s. The latest known case was from Siruvattukadu Valley, where a group of Paliyans in 1993 moved out of an estate and was able to create a small village of their own in the neighbourhood.

In conclusion we may say that the negotiation space between Paliyans and non-Paliyans developed significantly when new groups of caste people, from the late nineteenth century an onwards, expanded into the hills. Comparing the three main economic activities within this social space (farm labour, non-timber forest produce collecting and cattle herding), farm labour has been and still is the dominant activity, with cattle herding employing only a few Paliyans. The collecting of non-timber forest produce is done by many groups, and in some cases dominates their economy, as, for example, among the Paliyans of Kudhirayar Dam. Due to lack of space I will here concentrate on farm labour and the way the Paliyans fitted into the caste employers' economic strategies.

There are three important reasons why the Paliyans have been and still are attractive as labourers in the eyes of estate and plantation owners. First of all the Paliyans are very well fit to the physical environment of the hills and therefore looked upon as skilful workers for certain tasks in the hilly terrain. Second, the Paliyans have been willing to work for the lowest wages found in the hills, sometimes as low as half the wages of caste labourers. An important reason for this is to be found in the limited role of cash and commodities within the Paliyan economy.

A third reason for their attractiveness as labourers is that they have never had their own labour organizations or been part of any other kind of organization representing farm labourers, something which is otherwise very common among caste labourers. Their ignorance of Tamil Nadu labour regulations and their lack of experience in labour organization or any other kind of collective action, have been good reasons for landowners to consider Paliyans as politically harmless. A common saying among caste landowners is that "The Paliyans are skilful workers, seldom cheat you and easy to handle when it comes to conflicts. Their only drawback is their elusiveness". This 'positive' view was so widespread

that I never came across a Paliyan claiming that there was no wage labour available for them during the cultivation season. During the same period unemployment in the surrounding foothills could be common, and severe during years of drought.

Let me now consider the social space in which the Paliyans fit, from the land-owning employers' point of view. We may divide the landowners into two groups, estate owners and plantation owners. The former has larger acreage of cultivation and a more developed farm infrastructure. The latter have small and middle-sized farms, usually not more than 30-40 acres of land and often less. Both these kinds of employers are absentee landowners in the Palni Hills usually living in the nearby plains and belonging to different caste groups. This is of importance as work relations between landowners and wage labourers in the plains to a great extent are articulated through the local and regional caste system. This guides and shapes the interaction between the Paliyans and the caste landowners in the hills as well (see however, the changing labour relations between castes in today's South India, Cederlöf 1997; Fuller 1996; Kurien 1989; Molund 1988; Srinivas 1992; 1996). I will use two caste groups as examples, the Nadars and Thevars, respectively, although in general this description would account for other caste landowners as well.

The Nadars are common estate owners in the Palni Hills since the early twentieth century. They are found especially on the southern slopes, where they mainly cultivate cardamom and coffee. The Thevars have during the last decades expanded their plantations from the foothills up the hills and especially the cultivation of silkcotton and lime.

The Nadars' original caste name was Shanar. They were regarded as an 'unclean' or ritually polluting caste by other castes, however higher in rank than the former 'untouchable' castes as Pallars or Parayars of the region. The Shanars were concentrated in the southern-most part of Tamil Nadu and their main occupation was as toddy tappers of the palmyra palm (Hardgrave 1969; Templeman 1996). The Nadars we find in the region of the Palni Hills belong to those Shanars who during the nineteenth century migrated northwards. Here many of them became successful traders, businessmen and cultivators, marking their distinction from earlier times by, among other things, dropping the name Shanar in favour of the title Nadar, meaning 'lords of the land' (Caldwell 1849: 50).

It seems that the Nadars very early engaged themselves in agriculture when they moved north. They filled their labour needs within their expansive business with lower caste people, in the same way as other landowners in the area. In that way the Paliyans were seen more or less as another kind of lower caste (however with the competitive advantages mentioned above). This was manifested in several ways, but first of all in the kind of manual

work they were offered, the same kind expected to be done by 'untouchables' in the plains. The way landowners tried to hire Paliyans was similar to the way 'untouchables' were hired. Usually the landowner arranged workers through a head labourer, *kothukkarar* (Ramachandran 1990: 104) or an overseer, *kankani* (op.cit: 114-115; Heidemann 1992). The head labourer or overseer arranged the group of workers and his duty was to see that the workers fulfilled their obligations. For this they were paid extra. This is why the landowners often tried to work through some of the male Paliyans, expecting them to represent a family or a settlement group.

Further, the dwelling sites for the different categories within the estates corresponded to the physical separation of caste groups in the villages of the plains, and especially the division between the former 'untouchables' and the other castes. The *cheri*, the housing site for 'untouchables', was placed outside the village proper, to keep a distance to the most ritually polluted castes, a practice still common in caste villages of the surrounding plains. In this way the coolie-line (labour quarters) corresponds to the *cheri*. If the Paliyans were staying in the estate they would be placed in the coolie-line or in separate huts nearby. The way they were paid also corresponds to the obligation between a landowner and his labourers, where farm servants were paid in cash or kind, but usually at a lower rate than daily-rated, cash-paid tasks. There is also an important ritual aspect in relation to payment for work, where the landowner hands out a set of clothes for the lower castes during festivals. This was also often done towards the Paliyans.

The above also fit the relation between the Paliyans and the Thevar landowners. The common name of the Thevars was earlier Kallar (thiefs). They were classified by the British as a criminal group through the infamous Criminal Tribes Act (D'Souza 1999; Lalita 1995; Shulman 1980). Today they prefer to use the title Thevar, meaning 'the Divine'. The Kallar history of being notorious *dacoits* (highway robbers), feared for their militant manner, is not something they would deny today. This is part of their pride and the claim to be descendants of warriors, underwritten by the legend that they, together with other associated caste sections, were born of Indra, the warrior god (Dumont 1986: 10-15). Today they are mainly farmers, although both theft and protection from theft (the *kaval*[4] system) is still an important part of their identity.

The Thevars in the area of the Palni Hills belong to the Pramalai Kallar, the subsection of the Kallars that was studied by Louis Dumont in the early 1950s (1986). Dumont tells us that the Kallars required service castes and 'untouchables' for manual work

and special services (op.cit: 19). The 'untouchables' were used for two main tasks. "On the one hand they serve as agricultural labourers; on the other hand they are responsible for certain impure tasks, especially in ceremonies" (op.cit: 41). Paliyans filled both these categories of tasks in the estates and plantations. Apart from labour, the Paliyans were used as musicians if there were no other musicians available during ceremonies and festivals. The music instruments are considered impure for higher castes, among other things because of the drum skin as well as the saliva used in the wind instruments (op.cit: 42). Therefore they should be handled by 'untouchables'.

In these ways the Paliyans had a relation to the plantation owner similar to the interdependence between the landowning castes and the 'untouchables' in the plains. The landowners also expected that the Paliyans would adhere to different kinds of debt bondage common between landowners and 'untouchables' in the plains. Many landowners have for sure tried this 'bondedness' towards the Paliyans, as I mentioned above, but with less success compared to the plains. However, weaker forms of bonded labour have been found. For example, several estate owners when they gave credit to workers did not allow repayment unless it was in the form of labour. This was strictly against the grain of *the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976*. The practice still goes on in some valleys involving Paliyans, although the credit amount usually is too low to create permanent debts. The Paliyans have become more aware of the fact that working towards debts is not allowed by the authorities. Taken together, disagreement over debts is rather common today. However, landowners hesitate to bring such conflicts into the open or take them to court. Their situation in relation to the workers is weaker than ever on this point.

The above is, of course, not to say that caste landowners do not recognize and to a certain extent adjust to differences between their labourers depending on which communities (castes or tribes) they belong to. I have indicated this already. Maybe the most conspicuous trait concerning the Paliyans, which was also recognized by Gardner, is the similarity between the Paliyans' simple way of life and the expected life of a Hindu ascetic. This offers the Paliyans a certain degree of ritual purity within the Hindu caste system compared to lower castes (Gardner 1982; 2000: 193-212; see also Dumont 1960). In the Palni Hills during the 1990s, this relation was mainly manifested through the service provided by Paliyan spiritual mediums (*samiadis*, god dancers). Most Paliyan groups have *samiadis* for the healing of persons who have become possessed by evil spirits. Some of these *samiadis* have a local, as well as a regional reputation that attracts caste individuals to their services. In

[4] *kaval*, watchman or guard.

this particular situation the power relation between the Paliyan and the outsider is reversed. The caste patient is fully within the hands of the Paliyan *samiadi* during the healing process (see also Hockings 1989; Noble 1976). However, this relation does not to any significant extent influence the economic relations, or the general power structure, between the Paliyans and outsiders.

The building of alliances

The third kind of strategy that I found among the Paliyans I have preferred to call alliance building. This strategy is an expansion of the negotiation strategy, and where the notion of 'alliance' tries to capture, in contrast to the previous strategy, the basis of equality and group level negotiations between the involved parties. Two factors have been critical for creating the social space necessary for developing this strategy. The first factor has been the change of residential practice among the Paliyans, leading to a unification of several sibling groups into more permanent settlements or villages. This change has not only increased the accessibility of the Paliyans in relation to outsiders. It has forced the government to change their relation to the Paliyans from giving them 'autonomy by default' to the recognition of the Paliyans as a community among other communities. The link has turned from an unregulated relation, mainly based on interaction between individual Paliyans and individual representatives of the local authorities (mainly staff from the Forest Department), to a regulated relation, based on an interaction between Paliyan groups and several local state departments. This change has usually been evaluated as something negative for forest peoples in India, but this has not, so far, necessarily been the case for the Paliyans of the Palni Hills. This is mainly due to the continuous availability of forest resources that always gives the Paliyans a choice of action.

A second factor and one of the key factors for this 'positive' development seems to have been the alliances established between Paliyan groups and local NGOs. These alliances came into being as an effect of the significant increase of NGOs in the Palni Hills from the 1980s and onwards and their attention to the most inaccessible communities of the area. I will here concentrate on the new kind of social space that was created by these NGOs, as they have also been and still are key actors in the creation of new relations between the Paliyans, the government and other actors in their area.

In 1991, during my first stay in the Palni Hills, my assistant and I through a rapid survey found more than twenty NGOs active in the rural areas of the Palni Hills. This survey had no intention to cover all NGOs present, but included most of those we came to know in our dealings with the Paliyans and their neighbours over the next years. The fact that

the number had not decreased ten years later shows that the NGO concept has become a viable label of social action in these hills.

The great diversity of groups in India declaring themselves as NGOs is also reflected in the Palni Hills, although they share several fundamental traits. They are most often a registered society under *the Indian Societies Registration Act* or a public trust registered under the law for the time being in force. This is a common definition of a NGO from the Indian Government point of view. Most of the NGOs in the Palni Hills are running their activities through foreign funding, or at least a substantial part of it. To be able to enjoy such funding they also need to be registered under *the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act* at the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi. Although there is a thin line between NGOs and social movements, the NGOs of the Palni Hills have their main emphasis on lobbying, advocacy, or the provision of different kinds of services. There is also a common division of work within the organizations, between members who formulate the policy, and paid staff who are responsible for the practical part of implementation. Another common feature for several of the NGOs is the fact that they are a registered society on their own, but belong to a wider organization, or are included in a wider network of organizations. A last important aspect when it comes to the relation between a NGO and their target group is that there are few, or no, members in the NGOs coming from the target groups.

The NGOs active during the 1990s will when we look at their main objectives fall under three different fields of action: health and education, economic development and environmental awareness. In spite of these differences it is clear that most of these NGOs try to fill 'gaps' which often have been considered a state responsibility.[5] This becomes clear in the way NGOs motivate and express their actions. Many of the health organizations in the hills specifically target those groups who, in their eyes, lack sufficient government health care. The same goes with the many schools ran by these organizations. Both the tribal/*adivasi* (the original people) and environmental issues have been initiated due to a reaction to the ignorance from the government side. However, in these cases, the government is also often seen as a main actor in creating the negative situation. In the case of the *adivasi*, as the main landlord over the forests in the Palni Hills, and in the case of environmental issues one of the main culprits in the destruction of large forest tracts.

[5] One of the main reasons for the world-wide expansion of NGOs can be found in the neoliberal idea that governments should decrease their direct involvement in welfare services and instead support private and market initiatives (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 2)

From the Paliyan perspective NGOs have become a new actor in their home area, and to such an extent that at the end of the 1990s no Paliyan settlement had been left out of their attention. In some cases we could find several NGOs working in the same valley and settlements. In Siruvattukadu Valley in 1995, for example, there were five NGOs working simultaneously.[6] Looking back on the last fifteen years we can also conclude that new NGOs appear on the scene, while old ones disappear. To this we should add their diverse strategies and objectives. Taken together there is no wonder that the plethora of NGOs suddenly turning up in the lives of the Paliyans creates confusion and tension within the Paliyan communities. On the other hand, the social space that these organizations carve out in the everyday life of the Palni Hills offers a smorgasbord of possible alliances for the Paliyans. These alliances may not be stable over time but at least for the time being are able to create added possibilities within Paliyan strategies for dealing with the contemporary situation of the Palni Hills.

When staff from the NGOs started to approach the Paliyans in the 1980s, the Paliyans considered them as something different, as these newcomers neither wanted to engage them in farm labour, as landowners in the neighbourhood, nor bully them around for their doings, as occasionally was done by staff of the Forest Department. While the general attitude towards them from the organizations not necessarily was something they agreed upon, they did not mind the more or less unconditional resources/gifts the organizations provided. The health organizations' definition of them as 'poor', here meaning the lack of modern health care, formal education and commodities, or the *adivasi* organizations' idea of them as 'downtrodden', here meaning the lack of power and market resources, were not worse than their usual feeling of being looked upon as different, and of lower status, in relation to outsiders they were more used to. However, in these new transactions there were, at least in the beginning of each particular cooperation, a minimum of obligations involved. Over time though certain expectations and demands became involved, making the interaction strenuous, sometimes leading to a breakdown of relations. An important point to make, however, is that even with the experience of cooperation failures, many Paliyan groups do not hesitate to start up such relations again. As far as the transaction of goods and other material resources is concerned it may not be wrong to conclude that many Paliyans, at least in the short run, have looked upon these relations as beneficial.

However, in the building of alliances I think there is another aspect which has a more profound impact on changes of social space, and which becomes explicit if we more

[6] The Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC), Society for the Integration and Development of Tribals (SIDT), Missionaries from Kodaikanal International School, World Vision and Dr. Cherian Group.

carefully investigate the role of the individual staff of NGOs, who most often comes from the area and in that sense are locals as well. Many staff and board members had relations to Paliyans long before they joined NGOs. If they not always related to them in person, they at least recognized the Paliyans as part of their local social map. Whatever the case, these individuals have a culturally conditioned view of their own group's place in the local social structure, as well as the status and role of neighbouring groups. With this in mind, the alliances established between the Paliyans and NGOs to a certain degree challenged these structures. Let me give a few examples.

Narajanan, who was part, from its inception, of a health organization connected to the Van Allan Hospital in Kodaikanal, became the most important representative of that organization in their interaction with the Paliyans and other people in the valleys they operated. As he belongs to the Mannadiar caste, he also belongs to some of the most dominating landowners of the rural areas of these hills. His brothers' and uncles' families all have well-established plantations and belong to important caste networks politically bringing together most of the major villages of the Palni Hills. If there has been any regular interaction at all between the Mannadiars' and the Paliyans, it has almost exclusively been through occasional work relations structured through individual contacts. Although the Mannadiars have certain knowledge of Paliyan life, and definitely a general attitude towards them as 'below' their own caste status, their concern for them has mainly been in terms of whether they are able to fulfil the role as farm hands or not.

However, in the role of a social worker, Narajanan became an advocator for Paliyan 'well-being'. Together with other staff within the organization, he was urging other actors, including his own people, to understand and act in the way he thought was in favour of the Paliyans. This way of acting is a significant break from what otherwise would be expected of a family father of the Mannadiar caste, where his duty in similar questions would be turned towards his own family and close relatives, and at the most towards his own group, rather than outsiders.

Another example is Jaya, the board member of the environmental organization PHCC (The Palni Hills Conservation Council). In his family's history as landowners, they have had the role as employers towards the Paliyans. Jaya have told me on several occasions that as long as the Paliyans did their expected work duties, they did not bother that much about understanding other features of the Paliyans and their life. The interaction was kept at such a social distance that "to get to know each other was not really possible". Within the agenda of PHCC things became different. Apart from the general framework of negotiations

within the cooperation, the Paliyans now found themselves acknowledged for their environmental knowledge. Not only were they asked for the more straightforward tasks of guiding and trekking in the forests, or, as had happened occasionally in the estates, as game hunters. They were also asked about more complex views of the surrounding flora and fauna, knowledge that had a high esteem among environmentalists, as well as among many researchers coming to the area during the last decades through PHCC contacts.

A third example is Joseph from SIDT (The Society for Integration and Development of Tribals), who not only used to tell the Paliyans that the organization was willing to help them, but that whatever they, the Paliyans, thought of their situation, they were not alone. They should look upon themselves not only as Paliyans, but also as part of the *adivasi* people of India.

These three examples show how the attitude towards the Paliyans has become more broadminded over the years among some of their neighbours. More often than before the interests of outsiders coincide with Paliyan interests. This is the social space that entrepreneurial Paliyans, like Andi in the Pandju Valley, Chandran in Kudhirayar Dam or Kaliyappan in Siruvattukadu Valley, now are trying to utilize.

Let me now continue with a discussion on the way the Paliyans combine these three strategies of avoidance, negotiation and alliance building.

The flexibility of strategies

Taking into account the Paliyans' way of economic arrangements, and their changing settlement pattern, it is clear that they have during the last century, and especially the last decades, increased their interaction with outsiders. The strategy of avoidance decreases while negotiation and alliance building with outside people increases. However, the most salient feature of strategy if we look at an individual, a family or a group of Paliyans over some time is their combination of these strategies, rather than the exchange of one for the other. Let me take Andi's family and their life since the 1980s as one example. They live in the village of Aruvellam, located in the Pandju Valley at the southern slopes of the Palni Hills. In the early 1980s they stayed in the Suraj Estate, a cardamom estate, making a living through the negotiated relationship with the owner of the estate. Some years later they came into conflict with the owner. They decided to leave the estate and withdraw to the nearby forest. At this place they mainly survived on wild yam and other forest foods for a couple of years. Out of this situation Andi's family and several others of his sibling group developed the idea and courage to start up alliances with many different partners, especially NGOs, over the years to

come. Through these efforts they were able to create the village of Aruvellam, including land for their own cultivation. In combination with this they also worked as farm labourers through the negotiation with individual estate and plantation owners in the vicinity. Throughout this period however, they also now and then turned to forest foods, including both the hunting of game and the collecting of wild plants.

Another example is Selvam, a brother of Andi, who, in contrast to his brothers, never joined the village of Aruvellam. In the above-mentioned conflict with the estate owner. he preferred to stay on through the deal he had with the owner. Some years later though, in the late 1990s, the time in the estate came to an end anyway for his family. Through the increased pressure from the government, the Forest Department decided to end the lease for this and other cardamom estates in the area. The labourers had to leave, including Selvam's family. One solution for his family would have been to shift down to Aruvellam, where they were welcome and work opportunities plenty. In spite of this possibility the family decided to stay on in the vicinity of the estate. Selvam had, as his brothers, some mature lime trees up at this place. Apart from the income from these fruit trees they could also get some work in smaller caste-owned plantations close to a caste village on the right ridge of the valley, about an hour away. But they also significantly increased their intake of forest foods, instead of moving down the valley. At my visit in January 2001 they still stayed on at the end of the valley.

These cases also show, apart from the mixture of strategies, that the mixing is not of a simple linear nature, from less intensive interaction to more intensive interaction with outsiders, or to put it in other words, from a forest-oriented economy to a market-oriented economy.

It is equally clear that many Paliyans are shifting to a more exposed situation in relation to non-Paliyans and never again return to the same kind of secluded life inside the forest as before. This is especially so among Paliyan families now living in villages mixed with caste families, although even in these cases many would now and then turn to forest resources for limited periods, even if only for a day or two at a time. One such case is the Paliyans living in Boolavadi. Gardner reported that in the 1960s these Paliyans at the northern foothills lived together with several caste families, and had a long-established life as sedentary agricultural labourers (2000: 27ff). Agricultural work was at this time mixed with the exploitation of the nearby forest during off-season. In the 1970s the village had to be relocated due to a dam construction, and the Paliyans were shifted further away from the forest and placed together with several more caste families. In this situation two thirds of the

Paliyan families left the area "in search of quieter living" (op.cit: 29). Those who stayed on anyway kept on visiting the nearby forest slopes and still do today.

Through my own extensive meetings with many groups of Paliyans in the hills in the 1990s and a survey conducted by my assistant from 1996 and onwards, we found that the mixture of strategies was the key character of Paliyan interaction with outsiders. However, there were also many Paliyans who, in contrast to this, had rather stable arrangements with outsiders, as for example the paddy cultivators of Thalanji and the non-timber forest produce collectors of Kudhirayar Dam. This indicates that life could turn out quite different depending on which Paliyans we decided to investigate. If we, for example, followed Laksmi in Thalanji, her family's life had been focused on their paddy field almost all her life, and where her family seldom left the area. However, even if they are farmers they hunt games and collect forest foods now and then and their interaction with outsiders was mainly kept to Forest Department staff, as their fields are within the Indira Gandhi Sanctuary, and caste neighbours are far away. If we had chosen Pichai in the mixed village of Boolavadi, we would have found his family also mainly staying in the village surroundings and with rather stable and intensive interaction with caste people.

In contrast to these examples we can find individuals and families that seem to be on more or less continuous move. Vandi, for example, who is an old man today, told me that during his lifetime he has been moving from one valley to the other on the southern side of the hills, staying a couple of years, sometimes less, in each area. Often he used to work for different landowners within each area, but also interrupting such periods with periods of staying inside the forest only hunting and gathering forest foods. Another example is Ponnan, now in his 60s, at Kudhirayar Dam. He always used to offer himself as a hill guide to me when we met. He was the right man, he claimed, because he had shifted places all his life and therefore knew all parts and Paliyans of the Palni Hills. It was only now in his old days that he preferred to stay at the one place of Kudhirayar Dam.

A last example is Periya Rasu's family who I first met close to the Pandju Valley. He was newly married to Ponukili, and stayed with their first child in her native place, the Paliyan settlement of Kuruvankoli. At this place, in the interior of a small valley, they stayed in a typical Paliyan stick-and-mud hut. However, they had recently moved out of a newly government built stone house in his native place, Korankombu, much further to the east. They neither liked that house nor to stay in that Paliyan village, which is situated very close to several coffee estates in the Lower Palnis. A year later, when I looked for them again,

they had shifted over to the northern slopes close to Kudhirayar Dam. An additional year later, they had shifted place again.

While there are possibilities to fully engage in farm labour and other economic pursuits arranged in interaction with outsiders, or to stay more or less permanently inside the forest on their own, the economic arrangements we can find among individuals and families over time are of such a variation, and has been so for many decades, that it seems that few or no Paliyans would exclude any alternatives. Instead it seems that the whole plethora of alternatives are part of their mental map of dealing with changing circumstances in their everyday life, whether they live very close to outsiders or further away, for the moment. This mental map of possibilities is also used by many of those Paliyans who in reality to a very less extent use forest resources, and in that sense may not shift economic strategies that often. For them the knowledge of alternatives in itself becomes an important asset in the negotiation with landowners even if they usually do not use them. From this asset comes the landowners' experience of the Paliyans as elusive people. With this in mind I will discuss in more detail what is actually guiding and creating this variation. This will be an elaboration on how a group of people, who lives in a kind of borderland between a life of hunting and gathering and a rural market-oriented economy, try to create a synthesis of their lives in spite of apparently incompatible forces.

Individual autonomy and collective sharing, a Paliyan ethos

As my starting point I will take Gardner's representation of the Paliyans as an individualistic culture. However, my way of reasoning will try to balance Gardner's strong focus on individualism with a collective side of Paliyan life, which I see as a prerequisite for understanding how Paliyan individualism works in practice. From here I will move on to the notion of trust, which is a concept that encompasses both individualism and collectivism in a society, and therefore, as I see it, to a greater extent capture the way the Paliyans engage in social relations. At the surface it may look like the Paliyans in their shifting strategies are mainly focused on securing different material resources. However, behind these material quests lie a more fundamental need, the feeling of safety and a certain degree of control over their social environment. To put it simply, what the Paliyans try to achieve in their interaction with outsiders is to widen the social space of trust (certainty) into domains where they hitherto have had less control (uncertainty).

The combination of strategies found among them seems to be adjusted to a general way of assessing and formulating the outcome of interaction taking place, guided by

their ideas and beliefs about the way that interaction between people ought to be. By trying to minimize dependency and maximize autonomy in these relations they expand their own notion of trust, based on a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, formulated and developed within their earlier way of living where they enjoyed an autonomy towards outsiders and a life more or less on their own inside the forests. Let me now start with a closer look at the Paliyans' social organization and what Gardner has called 'the individual autonomy syndrome'(1991).

The social organization of South Indian hunter-gatherers has been characterized as the lowest level of social integration, with a fluid condition (Misra 1969: 201), and a fragmentary nature of group structure (Morris 1982: 182), permeated by an individual autonomy syndrome (Gardner 1966; 1991). Gardner gives the following list of traits representing this kind of social organization:

> ...pressure on children for self-reliance, independence, and individual achievement; individual decision making in matters having to do with family, power, property, ritual, etc.; extreme egalitarianism; techniques for prestige avoidance and social levelling; absence of leaders, what Meillassoux and Woodburn call instantaneous or immediate economic transactions; individual mobility and a corresponding openness and turnover in band membership; resolution of conflict through fission and mobility rather than by violence or appeal to authorities; bilateral social structure; a general tendency toward informal arrangements and individually generated, *ad hoc* structures; and relatively high levels of interpersonal variability in concepts, beliefs, and manner of expression (1991: 548-49).

In general my own data confirms this description. Although I will not go into a detailed discussion on these points here, a few comments are worth mentioning. Gardner draws the above conclusions mainly from what he calls "the forest-oriented" groups of Paliyans and those activities mainly connected to hunting and gathering. My information in the 1990s, where I found an increase of market-oriented economic activities and new kinds of cooperation, both among themselves and in interaction with outsiders, the Paliyan way of individualism was still strongly enforced. This to a certain extent confirms Bird-David's hypothesis that hunter-gatherers under certain circumstances are able to incorporate outside resources without a major break of their own social system (1988: 29-30), something I will come back to later.

However, to understand the working of this kind of individualism we need to put it into a collective framework, which will show that Paliyan individualism and

collectivism/cooperation is not always in contradiction. From the Paliyan sharing of game it becomes clear that the inability that goes beyond the individual capability is not considered a weakness of the same sort as when someone is unable to use what everybody consider as a common Paliyan ability. Also, when evil spirits attacks a person nobody expects this person to be able to deal with this her/him self. These kinds of deviations from individualism I think is very important for understanding the new strategies developed by the Paliyans during the last decades. This deviation is also found in other areas of their lives, areas that by the Paliyans themselves usually are downplayed, or a part of life taken for granted. For example, for anyone who stays a longer period in a Paliyan settlement will be the witness of the conflict-solution method among hunter-gatherers that Richard Lee once so aptly called 'voting with their feet' (see Gardner 1966: 396-397; 2000: 94-100). Any Paliyan have the right to leave a settlement to avoid conflict. However, the opposite, the 'rule' that you never forbid anyone to join your group is not that easy to observe, as it only seems that, more or less unnoticed, some close relatives turn up to stay for a shorter or longer period.

For a better understanding of the relation between Paliyan individualism and collectivism the next part will deal with what I prefer to call the collective framework of individual autonomy.

The collective framework of individual autonomy

Gardner's emphasis on an 'individual autonomy syndrome' leads us in a direction which leaves out any clear understanding of social cohesion among the Paliyans, as this individualism seems to create, apart from self-confidence within the individual, mainly conflicts and fission between people, and in the end the lack of cooperation and group cohesion. This 'lack of' seems to be the result of a 'group model' view that leads us when studying a hunter-gatherer society to what is missing rather than what is there. Following Bird-David's recommendation I will instead turn the focus to the other end of the process of 'disintegration' and 'social deficiency' (1987). She develops the idea that fluidity on the social level could as well act as "an integrative measure linking conjugal families which are each nearly self-contained economically and socially" (ibid: 163). Among the Naiken[7], her group under study, single persons, freed from permanent ties to particular conjugal families, play this integrative role. In the following I will apply this on the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, but also refer to other relevant written sources from south India. However, it is not only in the social domain I find integrative aspects. In the material and symbolic domain each and

everyone have the full right to what the Paliyans' physical and symbolic environment can offer. This may at first glance seems like a disintegrative aspect, as the procurement of these resources to a large extent can be done without involving other people. However, I will argue that it could as well be seen as an integrative aspect, as the individual Paliyan is fully aware of the collective sanction of this right, i.e. this sanction, together with the awareness of possible social fluidity, creates the very foundation of Paliyan life, which makes them keep together to find trust and security in a world where outsiders in no way can offer the same. This becomes the collective framework of their individualism, which I now will turn to.

social fluidity

The Paliyans can be considered as semi-nomadic, where one of the main reasons for shifting settlement is to resolve internal conflicts, both when it comes to individuals, families, or sometimes whole sibling groups (where several sibling groups stay together). Other reasons for shifting settlement (for longer or shorter periods), can be forest resource procurement, wage labour, conflicts with outsiders, environmental hazards like man-animal conflicts (in the Palni Hills especially elephants), landslides and fresh water shortage, promises from outsiders to certain resources, or the opposite, promises that have not been fulfilled, marriages and other ceremonies, friendship, and adventure. Often several of these reasons are interwoven and not always easily discerned.

This mobility becomes in Gardner's eyes behaviour of individualism. However, if we follow this fragmentation for a while we will find the other end of the process, the constant integration of the 'fragmented'. As a matter of fact, no Paliyans will for a too long time stay on their own, and it is only on rare occasions where the first idea when leaving a settlement is to stay that way. To the contrary, part of arguments and decision-making in conflicts is the idea to join others, while at the same time leaving some. Most common is to join close relatives in another part of the valley or in a neighbouring valley. Today though, with much easier communication, people can shift from one part of the hills to another. That is why we today can find individuals and families originating in the southwestern slopes in settlements on the northern slopes. There are also exceptional cases when Paliyans from the nearby Kerala turn up in the Palni Hills (Devi 1990), as when Deivam and his wife stayed and worked in the Pandju Valley in spring 1995, or from the Varunashad and Sirumalai Hills, two neighbouring hill areas where there are Paliyans.

[7] The Naiken people live in the Nilgiri Hills, about two hundred km north of the Palni Hills.

Bird-David reports that the conjugal family among the Naiken has limited relations to other conjugal families, while 'single persons' move around extensively and create the "social circuits which run through and connect the independent autonomous domestic units" (1987: 160). These circuits contain integrative qualities as circulation of information important for decision making, both between local groups and within a local group, expanding the economic unit, and creates new temporary social groups (ibid: 160-162). While among the Naiken this role seems exclusively played by the 'single person', the movement and settlement pattern of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills gives at hand a pattern that includes, apart from single individuals, also families and sibling groups. This difference may partly be due to the special circumstances of the Palni Hills, and that the exploitation and integration of people of the hill areas have expanded in the last decades. However, many reports from the 1950s and onwards about hunter-gatherers as the Hill Pandaram, Kadar, and Jenu Kurumba (Jenu Kuruba), indicate that settlement patterns and movements between local groups are much more diverse than reported by Bird-David (Bhanu 1982: 218, 221-225, 1992: 32, 44, 47-50; Ehrenfels 1952:127-128, 272-273, 280; Fürer-Heimendorf 1960: 45-51; Misra 1969: 202-203).

This pattern of fission and fusion results in a semi-permanent settlement pattern, where local groups remain but the membership within the groups to a certain degree is in a flux. One prerequisite for this is the collective sanction of leaving a settlement. This is part of Paliyan values of individual autonomy. Equally important is the collective sanction of joining other individuals, families and groups. This possibility, which each Paliyan is very much aware of, can partly be explained by Paliyan individualism, where conflicts between Paliyans seldom or never expand outside the immediate circle. This means that conflicts between individuals and families seldom or never create group conflicts, and even more important, whatever social effects created by individual acts and decisions, the individual right to take these actions has preference. In practice this means that Paliyans leaving a settlement because, as they would say, of 'unnecessary words' do not bring this conflict to others. Other Paliyans simply 'understand', they do not bother, as conflicts are only something that concerns the directly involved parties. We may say that 'unnecessary words' and dis-integration, in the end results in 'necessary words' and integration.

rights of resources

While conflicts is one major reason for shifting settlement, there are, as I have mentioned, also other reasons, and especially reasons connected to material resources. If the space for

social fluidity was one prerequisite for Paliyan individualism, the individual right to common resources is the second prerequisite. This cover material, social, as well as symbolic resources, including the specific knowledge and behaviour connected to the spirit world. The Paliyans do not acknowledge any territorial units or individual and group rights to forest resources. The collective agreement of common rights to resources is therefore an important part in the mind of a Paliyan deciding to leave a family or a group. What is of specific interest here is that today this common right has been expanded into the material and social resources emanating from established relations with outsiders. Very soon new arrivals to a settlement will be incorporated within the local group, usually erecting their hut in the vicinity of a sibling group including close relatives, using forest resources in the same manner as the others, and becoming part of labour relations available. For example, when Deivam and his wife came from a Paliyan village in Kerala to join Aruvellam (mentioned above), they stayed in a temporarily abandoned hut belonging to Andi's sibling group. Within a day or two they joined Andi and others in the weeding and carrying work for a Thevar landowner in the vicinity that Andi's sibling group was engaged in at that time.

In this way, through their own work, newcomers maintain their independence towards others in the settlement, but at the same time can enjoy material resources and social relations abandoned in the former settlement, but now once again available. As long as new conflicts do not arise newcomers just 'melt in'. In other words, because the Paliyans allow any other Paliyan to join a settlement, whatever is available in that local area at that time, whether it comes to wage labour or other kinds of cooperation with outsiders, will almost immediately be available for the newcomers. The only exception so far is government-regulated land for cultivation, which is an asset only available for a few Paliyans and individually or family owned and where an expansion of land for this purpose would need new and more long-term negotiations with the government. However, cultivation done by Paliyans inside the forests without government regulation is usually also possible for new members of local groups.

the Paliyan way of creating trust

While Gardner emphasized the individual aspects of Paliyan social relations, I have integrated these aspects into a collective framework. In a sense this collective framework could be seen as a practice opposing individualism, as this sharing of sociality and resources could as well be seen as part of group solidarity and dependency. However, Ingold points out that we need to distinguish between the "dependence on *particular* others from the dependence on others *in*

general "(emphasis in original, 1988: 273). By being able to shift close relations to almost any other Paliyan, the individual Paliyan can uphold his individual autonomy towards any specific Paliyan. We may conclude, in line with Ingold's suggestion, that the collective framework of Paliyan individualism do not put limits to their individual autonomy, but creates the social and physical space for its fullest expression (see also Ingold 1987: 222-242; 1999).

It is important, however, to add that Paliyans on an ideological level always emphasize their 'individualism' and downplays any references to dependency on others, whether of an individual or a general kind. What is found is that when Paliyan life goes on as it should, nothing, or very little, indicates dependency on others. When this is interrupted by significant problems, the solution to the problems is not, as part of their ideology of individualism, other individuals, but rather the general social and physical environment made available through, what they would say their interaction with gods and spirits. Fellow Paliyans and the physical environment are not available through individuals, but God given. In this way of reasoning the individual inability to solve certain problems, and the need of others, including both material resources and social space, can then be incorporated into the Paliyan idea of self, and not contradicting ideas of self-reliance and self-respect.

We may say that the Paliyans' social relations are framed by two intertwined, but distinct parts: an individualism, where the most important aspect is the individual right to follow his/her own mind whatever the consequences for others and a collectivism where all significant resources available for the group are also available for all individuals, no one excluded. These ideas of rights are socialized into each Paliyan individual as experience through everyday life as a Paliyan. One way the Paliyans formulate this is when the say that to know the forest and to be able to survive on its resources, the only thing needed is to be a Paliyan. In this fact they have great confidence, although they, in accordance with local status hierarchies, never would brag about it to outsiders.

This confidence is based on trust, a trust that is developed and maintained by the regular experience that the socialized expectations of means for survival are met in everyday life. To be more precise, if we use the common sociological definition of trust as a state of favourable expectation regarding other people's actions and intentions[8], and expand it into

[8] See Lewis and Weigert (1985) on a summary of sociological conceptualizations of trust drawn from the works of Luhmann, Barber, Parsons and Simmel. A more recent review see Möllering (2001). A discussion on trust in hunter-gatherer societies, see Ingold (1999).

both the physical as well as the spiritual environment[9], we may make the following conclusion:

(1) A Paliyan knows that s/he can expect to be able to follow his/her own mind and to make his/her own decisions, without being regularly compromized by other Paliyans. In spite of this right to turn the back towards others, disagreements and conflicts are mainly kept on an individual level, thereby keeping social relations available to such an extent that a Paliyan always feel confident that new close relations are possible to establish for fulfilling needs of affection, social security and support. Here it is important to add that Paliyans do not make any social distinction between different ways of living within their own group.

(2) A Paliyan knows that collective resources would not be controlled by any other Paliyan group or individual.

(3) A Paliyan knows, through the general access of means for procuring food and other material resources for their subsistence, and the specific knowledge needed for this, transmitted through the Paliyan way of socialization, that the physical environment is capable of providing the means needed for survival.

(4) A Paliyan knows that in personal psychological crisis, and confronted with different kinds of misfortunes and accidents, s/he can, apart from what other Paliyans are willing to give, also count on the help from gods/spirits, because the means, including the social relations, needed for using these forces are available to all.[10]

These four aspects of trust, taken together, form the background and basis for Paliyan behaviour and action, both internal and external.

They call for us

In the foregoing I analytically divided the diverse economic pursuits found among the Paliyans in the 1990s into the three strategies of avoidance, negotiation and alliance building. It is important to point out that I divided these strategies according to their effect on Paliyans' interaction with non-Paliyans.

From a discussion on Paliyan individualism, collectivism and trust I will now move on to show how this way of thinking is integrated in their interaction with outsiders.

[9] Why I do this qualification is because in contrast to trust in the industrialized society, hunter-gatherers have a much less complex relation to the physical and spiritual environment, often based on direct personal relations, more or less without the mediation of other people.

Here I will make use of the Paliyan expression "they call for us", a statement commonly given when answering the question why they interact with specific outsiders. I have chosen this statement as it not only capture the structural relationship between the Paliyans and outsiders, but also in a neat way epitomize how the Paliyans look upon and understand the social dimension of these relations. Further, this way of conceptualizing South Indian hunter-gatherers in general and the Paliyans in particular, and their interaction with the wider society, will be compared with Gardner's 'bi-cultural model' and Bird-David's model of 'encompassment', thereby summarizing Paliyan strategies of the 1990s and formulate a Paliyan ethos that tries to bridge the contradiction that the Paliyans have found themselves in over the last decades: on the one hand the possibility of independence through hunting and gathering, resulting in a lower status at the local arena, and on the other hand a dependency through outside resources, but thereby creating prerequisites for a relatively higher status in the eyes of outsiders, a status in relation to outsiders which is more in conformity with the status they enjoy among themselves.

In many of my conversations with the Paliyans they used the expression "they call for us"[11] to answer the straightforward question why they worked for particular landowners. One particular case that made me aware of this formulation was when Ganesha, a teenager Paliyan boy, one morning in 1994 came up to my hut in the Paliyan settlement of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley. He told me that he was going to work for a period at Chettiar Estate, the cardamom estate up at the end of the valley about two hours walk away. When I asked him why he should go there this particular day, he answered, "They call for me". To be exact, in this particular case it meant that the accountant of the estate had sent a message with Ganesha's uncle Selvam (he stayed regularly in the estate at this time), who some days earlier came through the village on his way back from the plains[12] and asked Ganesha to come for work on this particular day.

From now on I noticed that whether I was in Karumparai at the most western part of the southern slopes of the hills, in Siruvattukadu Valley at the eastern tip, or in Mungil

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[10] In these cases though there may be demands (from gods/spirits) on the individual to change behaviour. This is because the reasons behind misfortune, accidents and certain kinds of illness, are often considered, and diagnozed by the gods/spirits through the *samiadi*, as a result from misbehaviour.

[11] I have chosen, for simplicity, to only use one variety of this expression in the text, "they call for us" (*avargal engalai koopitargal*). In reality there is of course many variations conveying the same kind of message, for example, "they call for me" (*avargal ennai koopitargal*), "he call for me" (*avar ennai koopitargal*), etc.

[12] Selvam (who is the brother of Andi) and his family were, as I have mentioned earlier, the only family within Andi's sibling group that stayed behind in this estate after the creation of Aruvellam. As the owner was an absentee landowner, Selvam usually went down to the owner's home in the plains to collect his salary. During such a visit the owner had asked him to try recruit some more labourers from the village. This was the request Ganesha responded to.

Palam at the northern slopes of the hills, the same kind of answer was repeated. When I looked back in my notes I found this expression again and again, for example when the old Paliyan woman Mariammal explained why she and her family in her young days for the first time went to work in an estate. Fr. Dahmen, in his early account on the Paliyans (1908), also mentioned that they used to ask the Paliyans living in the neighbourhood of his Jesuit Estate to come for work.

One aspect of the expression, and the most obvious, describes the general way of arranging this kind of cooperation between Paliyans and outsiders. The initiative is in the hands of the outsider. It is they who approach the Paliyans and ask them for labour, both when it comes to estates and plantations. Every year, in late spring, when the fruit season started in the Pandju Valley, the absentee landowners used to turn up in Aruvellam. The general enquiry was to what extent the Paliyans were willing to work this season, and the more urgent question was if they were willing, within a week or two, to do the necessary weeding work before harvesting. At this occasion the general work agreement was made, where in the 1990s wages was one of the most critical issues as the Paliyans, due to their increased awareness of their relatively low payment, usually tried to increase their daily wages from one year to the other. In the same way the accountants from the estates usually showed up in the villages and settlements when the cultivating season started. This was especially so when harvesting time started as labour was at its highest demand during that period.

The importance of negotiations for each season should not be underestimated. In the 1990s the estate and plantation owners could not take labour from the Paliyans for granted. In the case of the cardamom estates the establishment of the village of Aruvellam in 1990, when most Paliyans in the valley left these estates, itself symbolized the weakening power of the estate owners in relation to the Paliyans. Plantation owners also had to trust their negotiation skills and did not always succeed. For example, Duria Rasu had for three years been able to count on a substantial Paliyan labour force for his silkcotton harvest in the Pandju Valley. However, when he came up to Aruvellam the fourth year, in 1995, very few Paliyans were willing to work for him. The main reason was that this year, and unfortunately for Duria Rasu, at the same period as the season started, two Paliyan families decided to change their stick-and-mud huts into stone houses, hiring quite a lot of the Paliyans in the village for this work. Duri Rasu was not happy with this unexpected turn, but there was not

much he could do. Instead he had to bring up a 'labour gang' of Chackaliyar[13] from a nearby plainstown.

The same pattern repeated itself in the negotiations for the collecting of non-timber forest produce and cattle grazing. When it comes to the alliances created between the Paliyans and NGOs the pattern of cooperation also in general followed the same pattern as above. Both to start up cooperation and to continue regular meetings the initiative was in the hands of the organizations. Above I have mentioned the organizations VARIHD, PHCC and SIDT. These organizations were not the only NGOs that turned up in the valleys contacting the Paliyans during this period. If we tried to investigate the amount of NGOs that approached Paliyans for cooperation in these hills in the 1990s, we would find that most settlements had been approached by a whole plethora of organizations, and generally the more accessible the Paliyan settlement was the higher amount of contacts. From this we can conclude that the problem for the Paliyans was not to get in contact with such organizations, but to deal with them. This also included the effects on the local Paliyan group from the complex interaction between the organizations themselves when several of them happened to approach the same group of Paliyans at the same time[14].

This complexity of interaction was also increased by the Paliyan interaction with the government. Before the 1980s this interaction was of a very low intensity, but usually of a direct kind and only with staff from the Forest Department. They were the only outsiders apart from the estate and plantation owners and their accountants that approached the Paliyans inside the forests during this period. In this interaction it was always the department staff that took the initiative, as the Paliyans considered this interaction to be of a negative nature. Through the NGOs, and in some cases local landowners and some other concerned outside individuals, this interaction became more developed in the 1980s. Once again the interaction pattern with outsiders was repeated. The Paliyans played a rather passive role, where the government and their representatives through pressure from these mediators, approached the Paliyans for cooperation.

This pattern was also visible when the election for the *Panchayati Raj* system[15] took place, re-introduced in Tamil Nadu in 1996. When one of the important caste families in the area of the Pandju Valley realized, due to the quota system, that the Paliyans of Aruvellam

[13] Chakkaliyar is a former 'untouchable' caste, traditionally leather workers.
[14] The competition between NGOs in the Palni Hills was sometimes so intense that in the early 1990s two groups ran into violent fights in one Paliyan village. After this episode both organizations were asked to leave. Ten years later this Paliyan group is still very negative towards NGOs.

had become an important 'voting bank', the head of the family approached Andi and asked him to join a voting alliance during this election. In this way the Paliyans, and especially Andi's sibling group, became a rather active part of the *Panchayati Raj* system, although they were in the beginning only asked to join by casting their votes in a certain manner.

Let me now shift the focus from the general statement "they call for us", to the first part, "they call", and what it means for the Paliyans that it is the outsider who takes the initiative and the Paliyans who in the initial phase play the passive role. When I asked the Paliyans why it could not be the other way around, that they approached the outsider and asked for cooperation, the most common answer was "How could we?" with no further explanation apart from sometimes a shy smile and a reproachful look saying "what kind of stupid question is that?" It was only with the Paliyans in Aruvellam and a few individual Paliyans in other settlements, those Paliyans I had a somewhat closer relation to, that I could pass beyond this general hesitation to objectify their actions. Generally they would say that they could not know if work or any other kind of cooperation with outsiders were available, "only they know, so they have to tell".

However, at one time a young Paliyan man at Kudhirayar Dam, at the northern slopes of the hills, gave an answer revealing a more active part from the Paliyan side, in spite of the impression the statement gives and their general answer to my inquiries about the meaning of the statement. I had been nagging on him sometime about this issue when we were on our way up the slopes to a shed where a group of Paliyans was extracting lemon grass oil for a forest contractor. I knew the situation was in my favour for deeper probing, as in contrast to a village situation where they easily could turn to something else or someone else when questioned (which they often did), without openly refusing to answer a question, it was only four of us here. Apart from him and me it was my assistant Vincent and my wife. He explained:

> Of course we have a general idea of when work is available, but we would never approach a landowner or a forest contractor for work even if we knew that. To take the initiative in these relations would mean to insult them, as they are more influential people than we are. But it would also give them the upper hand in negotiations and we would run the risk of getting less good conditions. They could much easier control such a situation.

[15] The *Panchati Raj* system was introduced in India from 1959 as a parallel to the ordinary government administration to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level.

What this implies is that their reluctance to openly request labour, to publicly reveal that they are in a need would be a way of showing weakness and goes against the grain of the Paliyan idea of individual autonomy. Instead, to be around, and thereby making you available for being asked, is in line with the way that internal cooperation between Paliyans takes place. Let me explain this in more detail.

For a Paliyan to live with a family, a sibling group or in a bigger settlement, makes him/her exposed to the possibility of being asked to join certain activities initiated by others. Usually someone says "I am planning to…", whether it would be hunting, collecting, go for work or go the plains, etc. "Are you joining"? s/he continues. The word is usually spread every morning[16] when different activities are planned and in the end some may finally leave together. However, this kind of organization is very informal, and sometimes the one who starts it all up changes his/her mind and stay put, others go anyway, and one or two leaves after the first went, catching up somewhere ahead.

When a forest contractor shows up in Kudhirayar Dam or a plantation owner shows up in Aruvellam, they usually try to come in the early morning, as they all know that most days the Paliyans would be away somewhere if they come too late. For sure most Paliyans would know that about this time, if I chose the contractor as an example, will show up, even maybe the exact week or day if the contractor has been able to send an early message to the village. Several of the Paliyans living in the village may stay behind this specific day just because of this reason, and at least listen to the conditions that will be presented. What now takes place between the contractor and the Paliyans is structurally the same as the cooperation taken place between the Paliyans themselves described above. When the contractor enters the village proper, neither will he call the peoples' attention nor would any Paliyan immediately stop his/her activities and approach him. The contractor will start exchanging some polite words with anyone he happens to meet as people usually do in the Indian countryside. However, in a small settlement like this within a minute or so everyone will know what is on its way to take place. The contractor's mere appearance signals, as would be the same with an accountant from an estate or a plantation owner showing up, "I need some workers. Who would like to join?" He will sit down with anyone close by, preferably in the shade at any convenient place somewhere in the centre of the village. Often the contractor is a well-known person to all Paliyans in the village and anyone passing by will change some words with him even if they are not interested in what he has to offer. Sooner or

[16] Hunting can also take place in the night, where the hunting party is organized in the late afternoon/early evening.

later those interested will in a causal manner turn up and over the next hour or so a deal will be settled. In this way "He calls for them" and they (the Paliyans) simply joins if the conditions sounds right and it fits their plans, in the same way as when a Paliyan joins another Paliyan for an activity.

The way the Paliyan statement "They call for us" is phrased indicates the voluntary engagement of cooperation with outsiders from the Paliyan point of view. If they get cash or rice in advance, which is a way for the employer to control the work amount the Paliyan is willing to give in the near future in a given negotiation, the amounts are often very low, usually cleared within a few days, or in some cases if the amount is higher, within a month or so. But even with debts a Paliyan may find reasons to leave for other doings, increasing the employers feeling of Paliyan elusiveness. In the end though the debt will usually be cleared as the Paliyans have their own interest of avoiding conflicts.

It is important to point out that the willingness, or need, to work towards debts differs significantly among the Paliyans. Some are very careful to never work towards debts, or only for small sums. Others though, are quite careless and can easily, due to marriages or other needs of bigger amounts of money, borrow money from landowners taking several months to clear. The interesting point in these last cases is that these Paliyans claim they do not feel more bound to these employers than anyone else, as they say that it is easy to work off these debts. By keeping the accepted deal between the individual Paliyan and the employer more or less short-term, the Paliyans guarantee their individual autonomy in the long run towards these employers. This is also emphasized if conflicts of a more serious kind turn up within the work relation. The Paliyans may then leave the area even if they still have some debts.

This autonomy is also kept in their alliance-building strategies, and especially explicit in the interaction with NGOs. While one or two Paliyans in a village or settlement, like Andi and his brothers in Aruvellam, became 'spokesmen' for their co-villagers in relation to the non-govermental organization, most other Paliyans would not feel obliged to fulfill any long-term demands in this cooperation if other plans turns up in their minds. This lack of group-cohesion, coupled with 'weak leaders' without any authority or other means to force their fellow villagers to act as a group, was one of the main reasons why Paliyan-NGO alliances never became stable over time in the 1990s. From the Paliyan point of view this was not necessarily anything negative as they in this way reduced or minimized their dependency on specific organizations and at the same time were able to uphold their individual autonomy in a sphere of life not fully in their own control. Let me now turn to a comparison of this

Paliyan ethos of individualism, collectivism and flexibility to the other models presented for interaction between South Indian hunter-gatherers and their neighbours.

Bicultural oscillation and the ability of encompassing outside forces

Several representations of the interaction between hunter-gatherers and outsiders in South India have been presented over time, see especially Fox (1969) and Morris (1982). Here I will only focus on Gardner's model of 'bi-cultural oscillation' and Bird-David's model of 'encompassment', both turning up in more recent writings.

Gardner's starting point when developing the model he calls 'bi-cultural oscillation' (1985; 2000; see also 1966) is that through his fieldwork in the 1960s he concludes that "Paliyans have two ways of life" (1985: 414). The first way is their adoption of nomadism and self-sufficiency, i.e. the retreat to the forests and an economy based on hunting and gathering, as "responses to harassment by their cultivating neighbours — verbal abuse, threatened violence, physical blows, rape, and murder" (op.cit.). The second way of life, mainly based on wage labour for agriculturalists in what Gardner calls 'the frontier zone' (op.cit.), "could generally be attributed to economically advantageous contacts" (ibid: 415), where the Paliyans in order to fit in "exhibit rites of passage and kinship behaviour that will be orthoprax in the eyes of their Tamil neighbours" (ibid: 413).

Bird-David elaborates her views most clearly in a discussion of a group of Nayaka (Naiken) who combine hunting and gathering with wage labour in a rubber plantation (Bird 1983). Through work in the plantation the Nayaka change parts of the content of their economy, in the pattern of production (wage labour), consumption (rice), and distribution (money). On the level of social relations, they have however been able to retain their traditional 'pre-existing pattern' (ibid: 81). By introducing the term 'wage-gathering' Bird-David gives emphasis to the 'modern' wage character of gathering, where 'wage' focuses on external relations, while 'gathering' gives importance to the traditional social system of forest food procurement (ibid: 82). An important difference in relation to Gardner is that Bird-David shifts the agency from 'outsiders' to 'insiders', from external forces to internal forces. She shows that, under certain circumstances (where the traditional economic resources are more or less intact), hunter-gatherers can allow changes to take place on one level, while another level remains untransformed.

A problem with Gardner's and Bird-David's suggestions for capturing the relation between South Indian hunter-gatherers and outsiders, is that although they recognize internal diversity, they seem to exclude from their analysis those sections within the peoples in

question whose lives are dominated by economic relations with outsiders. Gardner points out that in one of his major field sites at least a third of the Paliyan men were "almost solely plantation workers (one as a foreman) or contract laborers" (Gardner 2000: 78). In his other major field site the Paliyans were settled in a village working mainly as farmhands since longtime back (ibid: 27-29). He concludes that "a few have the requisite interest and opportunity to rely wholly on work for outsiders, some ignore most of all the external opportunities, and the majority opt for a mix" (ibid: 76). This description would do even today for the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, although with a closer examination we would probably find that due to general social changes the direct reliance on forest resources is smaller today than in the 1960s.

Similarly Bird-David states that "while some of the people have undergone changes, part of the society has maintained to a significant extent the traditional mode of life…" (Bird 1983: 58). Her data rests upon 60 or so individuals, a small portion of the about 1,000 Naiken people in the Wynaad area (part of the Nilgiri Hills), the rest of whom we do not get any information about. Her case seems very limited if we also consider that the Naiken are a sub-group of the Jenu Kurumbas (Jenu Kurubas), who we find both in Tamil Nadu around the Nilgiri Hills and further to the north into the neighbouring state of Karnataka. The latter group has been described by others as heavily depending on wage labour for a long time (ref). Neither Gardner, nor Bird-David, gives any clear account of how these other groups would fit into the suggested models.

Some concluding remarks

In the above models sedentarization and commoditization are downplayed, although the limited data presented indicate that local contexts have varied a long time back, both in space and time, and generated different strategies for dealing with circumstances in a way similar to my findings of the Palni Hills. A pertinent question is in what way the commoditization of the economy of South Indian hunter-gatherers has been internalized and adapted to other forms of exchange within these groups. The appearance of commoditization and cash are often seen as the most important evidence of a significant change among people who have not yet experienced them (Peterson and Matsuyama 1991). Thus, in my case the Paliyans in the Palni Hills make a clear distinction between cash and forest food in internal exchange. Is the concept of 'encompassment' still valid when taking this into account? While Gardner shows that the Paliyans often abandon wage labour due to conflicts with landowners and "return to the forest", in the case of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills it is equally common that internal

conflicts gives the same result. It is also very common (I would guess more so today than earlier) that Paliyan families and individuals when leaving one landowner, whatever the reason, takes up a job for another landowner. Further, how do we analytically treat indications of "bonded labour" among some families? How do these facts fit into the 'bi-cultural model' or a model of 'encompassment'? However, the real challenge to these models comes today when many South Indian hunter-gatherers become established farmers of their own, taking up alliances with NGOs, and develop close relations with the local authorities.

Above I have suggested a distinction of several Paliyan strategies, but in the minds of the Paliyans unified through a Paliyan ethos of individualism, collectivism and flexiblity). This is in line with Kent (1996), where she suggests that by taking into account the variety within groups, instead of downplaying or excluding those variations who do not seem to fit in, we may better represent a population as a whole, and thereby showing how variation in strategies in itself is central to some hunter-gatherers' lifestyle. Further, the implicit distinctions made by Gardner and Bird-David by not including the major varieties of strategies used by a people may not match with the peoples' own social distinctions. As a matter of fact, the models presented by Gardner and Bird-David do not really say anything about how the people themselves perceive their situation. What may be seen from the outside as a variety of social and economic strategies, connected to different local circumstances, are not always recognized by the people themselves as different strategies or life-styles.

When it comes to the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, on the socio-economic level they show a great variety of economic strategies, a variety often also manifested within local groups, which may lead outsiders to consider some as different than others, i.e. often simplified as 'traditional' or 'modern'. On another level though, the Paliyans themselves recognize a unity, which I suggest may be considered as part of a Paliyan ethos. It is of a wider range of inclusion and change over time compared to Gardner's idea of 'bi-cultural oscillation' or Bird-David's assumption of 'encompassment'.

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