

to move; unlike us they move about in the forest but unlike us not in the non-forested areas. Like their preference for small grouping at a dwelling site, they move about in still smaller sub-groups. Not more than six people constitute such groups during their movements in the forest.

Only few among them maintain fleeting relation with the mainlanders but they strongly prefer their habitat in the forest and resist fixing their roof at a place or localisation forever, even if it is within the forest. They do not get localised in the forest due to cultivation, as they have never been cultivators. Moreover, they prefer to be in the given forest habitat rather than altering it; and it is often far away from the forest fringes. Movement from one site to another is their 'resource' and usual way of life. Their dwelling sites are on nearly vertical slopes of hills away from the trails of elephants and other big mammals. Notions of 'property', 'exclusive rights' and 'land ownership' etc are alien to them; they do not influence their inter-personal, inter-dwelling site relationships and their relations to forest. Conversely their mutual relationship has only little connection with their relation to the forest. Even if we employ broad definitions of territoriality¹⁰, territorial behaviour cannot be found among them unlike other hunting and gathering groups in Kerala.¹¹ If others (sedentrists) enter into their dwelling sites or they take away the resources from their resource areas, their nomadism and mobility do not make them to perceive such acts as intrusion or encroachment. If such acts take place regularly, then they just move away to another area. Their mobility and their cosmology are advantageous to them to bypass consequences of such events.

The Nomadic Movements

Few patterns in their nomadic movements can be traced. The term 'forest nomad' in our context does not refer to isolated people or endogamous group. In fact, their habitat has been connected variously to maritime trade since its ancient days, first through Bay of Bengal and then through Arabian Sea. To the procurers of forest produces (*malancharakke* or Malabar Cargo—

as the European shipping companies categorised them and this category is still prevalent), Malampandaarams were crucial agents as the suppliers of forest produces including pepper and to them the procurers were the facilitators to get non-forest produces. Although they have been generally termed as aboriginals and the most primitive of the primitive tribes, they were not isolated from certain marketed commodities and their providers. That is, they and the spatiality of their habitat in general have historical continuity of contact with the mainland history for several centuries and developmental history that have unfolded during the last one century or more influenced their habitat and severely changed its fringes; despite all these changes, how could they maintain their 'distinction' as forest nomads is a question that needs to be addressed first. Answer to this question will reveal their difference from other tribal communities surviving in Kerala who are troubled by their subjectivity conditioned through un-satiated desire to get right to land ownership and wish to settle there because they are made to believe that it is the surest means to gain upward social mobility. I have schematised their nomadic movements into different types and they are elaborated in the following sections.

The broadest way to classify forest nomadism is by distinguishing nomadism inside the forest and the nomadism from it to its fringes. This distinction is important not only because one takes place within the forest and the other enables one to move between forest and its outside. This distinction has also direct reference to the characterisation of this group. That is, while almost every member of a dwelling site engage in nomadic movements within the forest, only very few specialised members of a site engage in the latter movement.

- a) From dwelling sites to its fringes: Once a small group of four to eight of them nomading in the forest collect/chip/pluck/gather the usual quantity of forest produces, which have been taken to the forest fringes or to the market fringes, one or two of them move on to that destination with the

acquired produces. It has to be underlined that all the members of the group who have indulged in the acts of collecting and gathering do not move onto to that direction but only very few among them engage in such a movement.

Although their dwelling sites are impermanent, their destination or the market where they supply forest produces is more or less fixed. So from the changing dwelling sites, depending on seasonal availability of the forest produces, there are only a few members who collect the produces gathered by the people of a dwelling site and few destinations for handing over their forest produces¹² to the traders and to take whatever they receive from the market. Some times they barter with the trader or use cash without counting them.¹³ Although gender based distinctions do not usually influence their mobility in the forest, it can be noticed in this activity of going to the market places. They interchange forest produces with the local vendors and at times with select households¹⁴ settled at the fringes of the forest.

The vendor sets the prices of the brought and sold in the market and they are invariably much lower than the prevailing market price. Barter system is also practised. Whatever be the mode of exchange, valuation is dictated by the rationality or belligerence of the vendor. For the forest produce that they give they receive lower prices and for the articles that they buy from the market they are invariably over charged and over measured. Some vendors give them receipts and balance statement in writing which the Malampantaram cannot read or make any sense out of it. The vendors also induct them into credit trap, so that the Malampantaaram returns to them again and again with forest produces. We have noticed a typical response of the Malampantaarams towards the 'market imperfections'. Although they know that they are not given the right prices, they are relatively indifferent to it and do not express any

grievances about it. Whenever we asked about it, they usually returned only enigmatic smile suggestive of their indifference to it.

They engage in another type of exchange during the pilgrimage season at one of the shrines situated within the PTR. During that time, around fifty days of an year, about three families living close to the shrine sell honey and other minor products directly to the pilgrims. They have been doing it for a very long period and it is a part of the tradition despite the fact that, in terms of 'pollution', no women having menstrual cycles is allowed there. Speciality of this exchange is that the entire family moves to the pilgrimage routes with their children and they return to their dwelling sites only after the pilgrimage season. Here the pilgrims are mobile unlike the vendors and households with whom they otherwise interact. Further, this movement to market takes place within the forest itself.

None of these movements to market, except sale during the pilgrimage season, takes much time. They do not even spent time for negotiation or bargaining with the vendors as they are not yet party to their cultural lexicon; once the giving and receiving are over is over, whichever type it may be, immediately the person returns to his dwelling site. They also carefully avoid engagements with people other than the vendors/buyers with whom they usually contact. The Malampantaaram who comes out to exchange is always in a hurry to return to his habitat as if he wants to leave no trace of him at the market place. Such acts are different from *peripetics*, for such a style of act does not respond by 'reacting' to the actions of their counterparts in the market. If such people are encouraged or forced to live along with those from whom they always departed hurriedly, what will be their fate. The answer is straightforward; they will also suffer just like their colonised and semi-colonised counterparts (they are two groups of Malampantaarams who were sedenterised at two different periods by the government and are at the margins of margins of

the mainstream society. I am referring to them in the subsequent sections as well).

- b) Seasonal circuits: They seasonally undertake nomadic circuits from their dwelling sites lasting few weeks to few months primarily for the collection of marketable articles and for sago of palms which is one of their staple food item. The marketable forest products and palms are available only from widely dispersed locations. Moreover, availability of them are highly season bound. Children invariably accompany their parents during such movements. Children of the age of eight to ten begin to participate with their parents in gathering and collecting forest produces.

Such movements are also in small groups consisting of five to six people. Members of a dwelling site constitute such a grouping or few families of it can do so collectively or a family along with their affines can constitute such a group. Few groups may begin their nomadic circle from their dwelling site together but later they may disperse into different directions. During such movements encampments are erected when they dwell at a location for few days and if natural shelters are not there. The daily movement to gather food articles from the encampments/shelters is usual during such transit camps as well.

The composition of a group on the move depends on the purpose of the movement and the personal affinities among the members of an encampment and relationships between the families of a dwelling site. We came across few Malampantaaram families always moving with their spouses and only very seldom they left their spouses back at the dwelling site. The composition of the group during such movement is irreducible to some or other norm/criteria and the context of the movement, inter-personal affinity, skills and capability required to undertake the task etc influence it. Such groupings are flexibly organised.

While on such movement collection of honey is the sole activity which is done exclusively by men. In no other material practices in the forest we can find any gender-based division of labour that are constituted by them. Although women are also accomplished tree climbers, they do not participate in honey collection. It is also common to find exclusive women groups moving in the forest although adolescent girls and children moving around without an elder person are not observed. Honey and hunts are parts of their food basket as well as marketable surplus. They symbolise their dual existence style.

Such long movement away from their dwelling sites has been observed as a part of their life at least for more than a century. Such movements at large accomplish their needs. It is during such movements, moments of meeting of groups dwelling at different hills/sites happen. Such meetings some times provide chances for future conjugal relations as well. Such movements are parts of their culture and nature.

Juridico-political regulations do not permit any one to do such nomadic activities within PTR, yet they continue to take place with the blissful silence of the PTR administrators because they are 'little known' to them. Knowledge/power nexus, as Foucault formalised it, has not come to force. If any reduction in their ongoing environmental entitlements takes place, which is not unlikely to happen due to the new environmental laws and informed forest management strategies, then there can be more discontinuities than continuities in their life. The consequences of such discontinuities on them would be drastic if not disastrous. That is, the discontinuity may be capable of affecting their world of life and effecting them to become what they are not at present. One of the futures of sedenteristion of the nomads in the mainland is foreseeable because of the known history of the colonised and semi-nomadic Malampantaarams (Morris. B, 1982; Menon. V, 1991; Saji. M, 2001). Sedentarisation of forest nomads has always led them to unbearable position

at the social network's margins of margins. Marginalized communities have been a constant in the unfolding of history of development.

- c) Every day circuits: it takes place from two locations: a) those who are at the dwelling sites move away from their encampments and return after gathering subsistence articles. And, b) there are those who live in transit shelters while they are on the move to the locations far away from their dwelling sites in search of marketable articles or non-perishable food items (seasonal circuits). Some of them also conduct everyday movements for a day or two from the transit shelters. When we categorise such movements, it is not that they are always daily circuits; depending on the availability, it may get extend to few days. But, primarily they are very short duration movements undertaken by an individual or few people depending on the effort required for the collection of subsistence produces. The second type of movement (b) requires some elaboration.

While they are on long distance move or making seasonal circuits, they find shelters in a cave or a quickly erected thatch or any place on the hill slopes where they can manage to lie down in the night. As they generally move as a group consisting of a family or few individuals of a dwelling group for their seasonal circuits, few who are left at the transit shelter or those not directly related to the collection go in search for food items at the nearby places and return to cook the night meal.

Examination of their food basket, which varies with seasons and rate of depletion of resources, reveals that they move across a wide spectrum of tastes.¹⁵ It is obvious that such a variety of items are not available outside their forest ecosystem and even if they are available the financial position of the Malampantaarams would not permit them to procure them. In fact, the colonised and the semi-nomadic Malampantaarams still forage into forest for many of these items. This

reveals their predicament; at one hand they cannot depend on the market for these items which has been their staple and habituated diet and on the other hand they are not able to continue their foraging as they used to do except the forest nomads.

The most unfortunate problem currently faced by the nomadic Malampantaarams is that they know that the Forest Department views hunting as illegal, and yet they have to do it knowingly well that it is a clandestine activity. That is, the alternations in their traditional environmental rights and habits are becoming disadvantageous to their culture and tradition and such alterations take place independent of their action and will. Their increasing dependence on rice, under the patronage of the government and market is one of the processes that influence their every day life activities. The gradual increase in rice dependency reduces their daily movements for food articles and their mobility across tastes, and it can deflect their movements to non-forest lands. Their dependence on the sedentary communities gets intensified and they in turn get more exploited and get pushed to the extremes of the social margins as their integration with the market gets intensified.

- d) So far we have been discussing about their nomadic circles consisting of a movement away from their dwelling sites/transit shelters and back to them. They practice another type of movement which is not circuitous. That is, shift of the dwelling site itself about which we have already mentioned. They abandon a site and starts to dwell at another hill/site. Such movement takes only seldom, but they take place naturally and are normal to them as it takes place several times of one's life span. Due to marriage one may move from a site to another; sometimes men move to the women's site where he had made his conjugal tie and *vice versa*. The direction of movement is extremely context specific such that any reduction of it to kinship or lineage ties would only be an unbearable reductionism.

Another context that makes them shift their dwelling site is availability of forest produce, primarily subsistence articles, within their normal reach. One major component of their diet is sago and only once sago can be taken out of a palm. Palms take few decades to get matured for sago extraction. The velocity of palm depletion is high and they often experience scarcity for it. And it is precisely at such contexts that rice becomes a substitute to them. Further, when they find that the required quantity of roots and tubers cannot be collected with their very short distance movement from their dwelling sites, then also they shift their hill.

Since most of the marketable forest produces are collected during long duration nomadism, paucity of them does not prompt them to shift their dwelling site. We can say that what prompts them to shift a dwelling site is mainly paucity of subsistence articles rather than marketable forest produce. Their habitat choice is inextricably linked to their dietary practice; change in it due to any reason will have unprecedented effects in their life because what we consume to reproduce oneself is inextricably linked to our life in this world.

The event of death of a co-dweller is another context that makes them to shift their dwelling site. At the instance of death, the *ottathoomupera* where the person used to live is chopped down to cover the body and the rest of the members abandon that hill and occupy another one. We have observed that they do not retain memories, direct or orally transmitted, of their ancestors beyond their grand mothers and grand fathers. This group in general do not carry the burdens of the past. They generally do not retain the memories of the bygone and this is the way they do justice to themselves. This could be a reason why they abandon a site and move towards another one to shelve the memories in the remote corners of their selective amnesia. They do this mainly because they do not perceive any thing natural including death as an

aberration or as exceptional as we do; they do not seem to separate their life cycles from the cycles of nature. Thus they move away from the site from where their co-dweller disappeared. Once again, mobility becomes a resource for them in this way as well. This mobility signifies the strong and intimate interpersonal affinity among the co-dwellers.

Private property is something that one cannot abandon because once one is placed in the matrix of the distribution of private lands and imbibes the idea of territoriality and property, mobility involved in the forest nomadism becomes virtually difficult, if not impossible. Private property is essentially a part of non-nomadic culture and once forest nomads are placed in such a culture it amounts to their sedentism as their access to the forest ends. Such a situation will affect their pattern of retention of their memories of ancestors and it will torment their days and nights. Private property is a system that pushed those Malampantaarams who were made colonised and semi-nomadic into the miserable life worlds. Inability to abandon their dwelling site at the instance of death of the co-dweller can take place only if they are in the mainland, but not when they are in the forest as they are now. Once nomads are marginalized by sedeterizing them or settling them in colonies, they can no more relate to their ancestors the way they relate with them by moving away.

Empirical nuances and category slips

At this juncture, a conceptual issue needs to be clarified; it is related to categorisation of Malampantaarams as a 'tribe'. At present they are unproblematically considered as a tribe following the administrative lexicon and forest nomads among them are not distinguished from those who have been sedentised during the previous century. We have to discuss this conceptual issues to by pass the influence of the habitual classification of any one living in the forest as a 'tribe' and also by way of shedding some light on