

the complex character of this group, and their access to forest dwelling and forest produces.

It was a habit of the early twentieth century scholars to characterise any one living in the forest as a tribe without examining their actual existence pattern. Let us examine some of the representations to get an idea about how did they construe Malampandaarams as a 'tribe'. One of the earliest ethnographic formalisations of Malampantaaram as a tribe can be found in *The Travancore State Manual*, (Nagam Aiya. V, Vol. II, 1906, 1999:417). It states that they are one of the most primitive tribes of Southern Kerala. The factor that enabled the author to confirm their tribal status was the idea of the 'purity of language'; he identifies them as a group who spoke 'polluted Tamil' and this persuaded him to categorise them as a tribal community.

Ethnographic categorisation of them as a tribe is repeated by the demographic Census of India, Travancore, also. 'Malapantaram, the most primitive of the primitive tribes of Travancore, lives scattered in the higher reaches of the Pampa and the Achankoil rivers and at Thalappara and Karumpalli in the forests of Shenkota taluk.' (*Census of India, Travancore*, 1931:396).

What is taken for granted in the statement is that they are primitive and tribes. Yet another exemplary statement can be invoked.

The Malampantarams are the least modified survival of the aboriginal population of Travancore. They have no clan system, but there are two groups among them consisting of three or four families having no distinct names. Each group is exogamous. ... thus double cross-cousin marriage is practised. (L.A.Krishna Iyer, 1941, Vol. III :76).

In such representations, Malampandaarams' tribal status is taken for granted without leaving any room for scepticism, they were foisted with the attributes

such as 'most primitive', 'primitive of the primitive', 'aboriginal', 'nomadic' etc. Even now they are non-self-reflectively considered as a tribe (Menon. V, 1991; Saji. M, 2002).

What is common to the representations we have just invoked is that all of them classified them as a homogenous tribal group under the name Malampandaaram. Those who were branded as 'tribes' were the residues of their 'Oriental other'. Such were the limitations of the Orientalist discourse; they operated with the aid of two categories such as 'caste' and 'tribe'. We know that Malampantaarams were not considered as a polluting group because unlike Nayaadi, Pulaya, Paraya or Izhava, they were not placed within the hierarchy of the caste communities.

Now the question is that, can we credulously classify them as a "tribe". When the term 'tribe' is used in the evolutionary sense to indicate the level of progress and growth, it refers to the following:

... groupings which consist of more than one local community and which are united by common cultural characteristics and some form of political leadership or political organization at a supralocal level. Where such supralocal leadership is more accentuated and there is a development of greater occupational specialization in crafts, military, and religious activities together with a redistributive economy we may speak of the emergence of chiefdom. (Dictionary of Anthropology, Macmillan, P.281)

There is no evidence to argue that Malampantaarams have any of the features specified in the definition and therefore one can argue that classifying them as a 'tribe' is inappropriate. Moreover, it has been well documented that they do not have any system of unilineal descent grouping or 'circles of connubium'. The pattern of marital links does not have moiety systems and rule of local group exogamy. (Morris. B, 1982:167). Given the definition of the 'tribe' and the practices related to kinship and affinal relations, it will be difficult to

legitimately classify them as a tribal group. As they are endogamous group and practice cross-cousin marriage, is it possible to classify them as a caste group.

When we examine their repertoire of kinship terminology and the practices of cross-cousin marriage and various rites that they follow, we find similarities with the caste communities of South India. (Morris. B, 1982: 51). But then, Malampantaarams cannot be classified as a caste group because they do not share in common with the rituals, ceremonies, festivals, worships, deities, gods etc. of caste communities. They do not have the *muppu* system of socio-political organisation that was common among the caste and family groupings. Socially, politically and territorially the *muppu* was a position where authority was relatively concentrated in the medieval Chiefdoms.¹⁶ There are forest tribes such as Kanikkar, Muthuvan, Urali, Mala Arayan, Paliyan etc who have their *muppan*s. Among Malampantaarams no such *muppu vaazcha* (rule) or *muppan* exist. Therefore, they cannot be justifiably classified either as a caste or as a tribe. If this is the case, where can we situate them within the social scientific classificatory scheme?

Leaving the two-tier system of classification (caste-tribe), one can employ four-tier classificatory scheme. The linear but four-tier classification of Progress is the following: Band, Tribe, Chiefdom and State.

Classification of them by employing the terms 'Chiefdom' and State' does not arise as an alternative for obvious reasons; the only alternative left with us is the term 'band'¹⁷. Anthropologists have already explored the possibility and validity of categorising them as a band; they acceptably argued that it is misleading because it amounts to projecting on them characteristics that they do not have (Morris. B, 1982:168). Moreover the numerical strength of a group living together does not reach anywhere near even the lower limit of a band.

Two other tags attached to them are 'pack' and 'local groups' (Iyer, 1937-1939), which are borrowed from the derogatory classification found in Orientalism, this characterisation was also found out to be problematic as this foist upon them stable bounding conditions and stationary internal coherence. The term 'local group' is inappropriate because the membership in their dwelling sites is determined by propinquity, ties of attachment and personal bonds, and one's residence either follow patrilocality or matrilocality¹⁸. Therefore, the phrase 'local group' gives the impression that they are localised in space-time continuity but they are not at all localised as we have seen earlier. Therefore, it is inappropriate to categorise them in this manner. In the case of 'pack', apart from its derogatory implication, it is not justifiable for their groupings are variable over time. Their dwelling sites and groupings are transient and membership in an encampment during their nomadic movements is flexible.

There were attempts to use local terms such as *Kuttam* (collective) (Mukherjee. B, 1954). This is also problematic because this term is too ambivalent; it signifies several mutually nullifying referents (Morris. B, 1982:168). As in the case of 'pack', it can signify grouping or collection of inanimate entities, animals and humans.

Another categorisation depicts them as 'forest traders' (Morris. B, 1982). This categorisation does not involve the conceptual problems we have so far highlighted. Yet, given the present academic context, I have apprehension in retaining it in this text for several reasons. I shall elaborate them in the following manner; a statement that portrays their relation with the market can be invoked.

One particular group of Pandarams lives near a certain tea estate and has an arrangement whereby one of the workmen on the estate will bring certain things like *salt, matches, and rice* to a specified place in the jungle. At this place he finds some forest product, *honey, wax,*

fowl, ivory, or fish, which he takes away with him, leaving his parcel of salt. Practically never does the workman see the jungle men, but the barter goes on regularly twice a month. (Hatch, E. G, 1933:112, emphasis added)

This represents an extreme situation that has taken in the past; a situation identical to it may not be prevalent today, nevertheless, similar situation still prevails among those Malampantaarams who are not yet become the objects of development discourse.

It is true that they still collect several non-timber forest products for the market and this in turn enables them to procure few chosen products from the market. It is also true that they have a long history of supplying them to the traders/markets. Their activities constituted a nod in the world system of economic transactions much prior to the advent of capitalism. Yet, the term 'trader' is inappropriate; the main reason for it is that the rationality, expectations, inter-subjectivity and intentions of the traders/buyers of the forest produces cannot be projected over the Malampantaaram who give whatever they could gather without homogenising the incomparable world views.

Malampantaarams seldom 'sell'; rather they 'give' what they have and 'receive' what are extended to them by the traders/sellers. They do not react or relate to the market forces through gift, barter or feudal or capitalist exchanges. The 'rational calculations' involved in buying and selling is still alien to the focus group of this paper. What they receive is independent of what they give. For instance, to them a 'loan' is not something to be repaid; it is something like any other article they receive from the market. They follow the logic of 'consumption' in the case of money also. That is, they do not distinguish money from rice or any other articles that they receive; once they receive it they consume (devour) them. The giving and taking cannot be phrased as 'silent barter' because there is no individual seller and buyer.

The things 'given' and 'taken' by them are never put to economic/rational valuation, unlike their trading partners, because the notions like 'equivalence', 'mutual reciprocity', 'exchange', 'utility', 'use and exchange values', 'loss', 'gain', 'scarcity', 'abundance' etc do not seem to have influenced their relation with the traders.¹⁹ What takes place is *unconditional interchange* from the point of view of the relation between a Malampantaram and his procurer/buyer.²⁰ The market valuations based on the comparison between what is 'gained' and what is 'lost' cannot be identified in their relations/behaviour with the traders.²¹ This is a peculiarity of the unconditional interchange.

Taking into account of these factors along with the observation made in the previous section that only few among the members of a dwelling site engage in moving from there to the forest fringes, it seems that it is problematic to retain the category 'trader'. At this juncture, the conceptual question that arises is, what other category can be employed to accomplish the objective of this paper. Given the empirical and conceptual issues and the ambiguity of the overinterpreted term 'trader'²², it appears that search for an alternative would not be futile.

Commonly accepted observation about Malampandaaram is that they are nomads of the forest and always insist to keep a chosen distance from the buyers of their forest produces. At most they prefer to keep in touch with their existing buyers, however exploitative they are, and not at all with any one else. They are also not in search for new possibilities or alternatives to enhance what they receive. They do not reveal any reference to sensitise themselves to the market conditions or the behaviour of its agents.

In Malayalam language nomads who move from region to region are called *nadoodi* (gypsy), this word refers to those who move from a *nadu* (chiefdom) to another one. Taking the clue from this word we can call Malampantaarams as *kadoodi* (*kaadu* means forest). In Malayalam language,

as *nadu* stands in opposition to *kaadu*, nomads are distinguishable into *kaddodi* and *nadoodi*. Given these observations, it is better to employ the term *kaadootikal* or 'forest nomads' to categorise them for descriptive and analytical purpose. This conclusion reaffirms the performativeness of the departure from classifying them as a tribe and preferring an alternative phrase in this paper, namely, forest nomad. Despite the advantages of this category to perceive differences among the Malampantaarams, problems inherent in any category are present in this also.

Discussion: Development and the forest nomads

There have been efforts to rapidly sedentise nomadic tribes employing coercive as well as persuasive techniques and strategies. The developmental activities initiated under the colonial conditions in India followed the strategy of selective sedentization by settling them in colonies at the fringes of the forest or among the mainstream sedentarized communities. Under the same condition, Indian subjects were also made to uproot from their home land and they were in turn exported to mines, plantations, farms and factories in alien places. For the social scientists, anthropologists and developmentalists in particular, the theme of sedentization of nomads by the state and the mainstream society is not new. Yet, the conditions under which the sedentization process take place and its outcomes differ from time to time and from location to location; the specificities of strategies involved in the process as well as the responses to them differ significantly. Overlooking such differences and the specificities amounts to academic haste.

Parts of the previous sections included some of the characteristic features of Malampantaarams, specificities of their nomadic movement within the forest and between it and the mainland, and highlighted how use of certain categories has led to dim recognition of their specific features and heterogeneity among them. In this section we will differentiate Malampantarams in terms of the degree and nature of influences of

development on their mobility and underscore their local specificities in their relation to land/forest and its produces.

How do the forest-nomadic Malampantaarams react to the changes that are taking place at their surroundings? Do all of them respond similarly? No. They respond, but their reactions can be differentiated. Before answering these questions, it is important to discern some of the major changes that are taking place at their surroundings.

Kerala is well known for its development experience and the phrase "Kerala Model" has gained wide circulation in the development discourse. The State is projected as an impressive case of development because it has achieved high standards of social development and high level of consumption without producing much (Amin, 1991, Franke and Chasin, 1992, Dreze Jean and Sen, 1997). It is also a place well known for the social reform movements that uplifted subaltern/marginalized communities. People of the State are famous for their evolved political consciousness. It is also a place where majority of the population is already converted as the objects and agents of developmental projects (Raju. S, 2003). But what we find is that there are those who purposively disengage themselves from becoming agents and objects of developmental projects. The best case is that of the nomadic Malampantaarams.

This interstice between the development projects and life of the nomads prevails despite the execution of special developmental projects such as Ecodevelopment and People's Planning which were executed by the state employing the strategy of inclusion rather than exclusion under the surveillance of the World Banks. The 'People's Planning' and 'local level development' are the phrases that gained material repeatability in the developmentalist discourses since the last decade of the previous century. These projects are also celebrated for their sensitivity to local specificities by several authorities. The forest nomads always escaped the tentacles of this

discourse of developmentalism²³; either their environmental niche helped them to be aloof from becoming the objects of it or their rationality made them to be aloof from listening distance of it.²⁴ Although these forest nomads constitute only a fragment of the population of the State, their forest nomadism refers to a tendency that purposively disengages with developmentalism that is normalised in Kerala.

Among the Malampantaarams in Kerala the forest nomads constitute only one eighth of their total population. The rest of the Malampantaarams can be distinguished into two; the colonised and semi-nomads. To gain a comparative picture of the relation and non-relations between forest nomadism and development, short notes on their histories of developments are required.

The colonised were the most severely deprived section of Malampantaarams due to the interventions of the state into the forest through different management strategies and the operations of the market. They were brought out from the forest and made to settle in colonies at the south of Ranni and at Achancoil areas where deforestation, afforestation, clear felling and forest plantations have been taking place at a rampant scale for more than a century.²⁵ These activities not only altered their habitat but also opened to them new locations, agents, structures and situations such that the mainlanders had closer and recurring access to contact and alter them. As they are colonised among the mainlanders, occasions for exploiting them for gaining forest produce multiplied. Malampantaarams were treated as weak forest traders by the hostile and harassing mainland traders and government officials (Menon. V, 2000:353-56 and Morris. B, 1982:182). The Forest Department (Government of Travancore, 1911) and Harijan Welfare Ministry have been governing them. Over time, they got crushed by the tentacles of forest department, mainstream traders and in-migrants etc and some of them turned to most disregarded wage earning jobs while others resorted to begging and partial nomadism (Morris. B, 1982; Menon. V, 1991).