“They call for us”
Strategies for securing autonomy among the Paliyans, hunter-gatherers of the Palni Hills, South India

Christer Norström
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by
Christer Norström

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Abstract
Throughout the world societies based on hunting and gathering have been drawn into the
market economy due to increasing social and economic pressure on their territories. This
anthropological study analyses this process in the 1990s among the Paliyans of South
India. During the first half of the twentieth century most Paliyans avoided contact with
outsiders, preferring a livelihood based on the hunting and gathering of forest resources
inside the steep forested valleys of the Palni Hills. By the end of the century their lives
had significantly changed to a situation involving wage labour on plantations owned by
neighbouring caste people, the collecting of non-timber forest produce for forest
contractors and the herding of other people’s cattle.

In spite of these changes the Paliyans still hunt and gather forest food and through
the building of temporary alliances with non-governmental organisations they try to
uphold a high degree of autonomy towards outsiders, comparable to the individual
autonomy they enjoy within their own group. This autonomy is based on individualism,
gender equality, social and economic flexibility and individual rights to common
resources.

Today many hunter-gatherers around the world have reformulated their history
and identity to link up with the more politically recognised identity as ‘indigenous’. In
India many forest-related groups have adopted this notion. Tribal organisations in the
region of the Palni Hills have regularly invited the Paliyans to join such a general tribal
cause. In spite of this the Paliyans, due to their downplaying of group interaction and
authority, have so far stubbornly ignored these invitations. For the Paliyans, in a life-
world where individual autonomy seems more rational, the virtue of group loyalty has
little value.
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Map 1: South India and the location of the Palni Hills.
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PART I

INTRODUCTION
Chapter One

A Field Study in South India

Modern hunter-gatherers

This book is about the Paliyans, a people in South India classified by the Government of India as a Scheduled Tribe and usually defined by social scientists as hunter-gatherers. The notion of ‘hunter-gatherers’, disregarding the time and place of its use, evokes in most people’s minds a way of life significantly different from the mainstream life of modern society. It is also associated with other notions like ‘primitive’, ‘savage’ and ‘forager’. Participants in the most recent debate about how to represent and define contemporary members of such peoples have, due to the latter’s stigma of ‘otherness’, found themselves in a most peculiar situation. On the one hand, there is an increasing feeling among social scientists that the category of ‘hunter-gatherer’ is problematic. To some it is simply obsolete and misleading, to others it is spurious and its use harmful for our understanding of such peoples. On the other hand, the self-representation of the peoples in question increasingly emphasises their ‘hunter-gathererness’ as part of a re-formulation of their recent history to link up with their currently more politically recognised identity as ‘indigenous’. The idea that the category is obsolete rests on the fact that very few people today have the possibility of basing their subsistence on hunting and gathering. The politicisation of the hunter-gatherer identity rests on the potential of a former life of hunting and gathering as a symbolic asset at the national and international level, whatever their present-day economy is based on.

These two, seemingly contradictory discourses, in which scientists try to get rid of the category of ‘hunter-gatherer’ at the same time as many such groups try to define themselves into it, have been clearly visible in cases such as the Penan people of central Borneo and
the San/Bushman of southern Africa. A similar situation has also emerged during recent years in India. The notion of 'indigenous' and its Indian equivalent adivasi (Sanskrit for the original inhabitants) has been taken up by many communities listed as Scheduled Tribes. The following account of the Paliyans will, however, show a group of people who do not fit either of these discourses. One of its main arguments is that we shall have difficulties in understanding their behaviour today without using the explanatory power developed through the notion of 'hunter-gatherers'. At the same time, the Paliyans, as we shall see, stubbornly resist any kind of contemporary adivasi/indigenous identity imposed on them from outside. On the contrary, their 'hunter-gathererness' is downplayed in interaction with outsiders and their history is of no or little concern to them; both are indispensable parts of the new politicised indigenous identity used in India and elsewhere.

While I still think the notion of 'hunter-gatherers' is useful in the case of the Paliyans, their recent history also resembles that of many other hunter-gatherers in the world, i.e. earlier identified as more or less isolated hunter-gatherers, but now emerging from the forests to an increasing dependence on wage labour and close interaction with outside organisations as well as the local government.

The Paliyans live on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats, the great mountain chain running along the western side of the Indian subcontinent. We find most of them within the southern state of Tamil Nadu, and this study is confined to the northern section of the group living in the Palni Hills. Among the Paliyans in my chosen field the recent changes mentioned above became evident in an early conversation I had with Mariammal, an old Paliyan woman, when I asked her to give me some recollections of her life:

'I was born in Methur, on the other side, over there', the old lady said, pointing beyond the high forest-covered ridge behind us.
'How did your family live at that time?', I continued.
'We lived on wild yams, honey, and monitor lizards. If we met strangers we ran away because we were afraid'.
When did your people start to work for others?
'We started to work on TT Estate, a big cardamom estate in the Sangutumalai area. I was married the same year.'
'Why did you go there to work?'
‘They called for us, so my father and mother took us there.’
‘What kind of work did you do at that place?’
‘We guarded the cardamom plants against monkeys. The owner gave us rice.’
‘Mariammal, when I first came to this valley you and your family used to work on another estate, the Suraj Estate, here in this area. When did you leave Sangutumalai area for this valley?’
‘My eldest son got married. His wife’s family lived close to the Suraj Estate. They used to go to work on that estate. The owner also asked us to come to work for him, so we shifted over to this area.’
‘But now you have left the Suraj Estate and live here in Aruvellam, your own village?’
‘Yes, Sir.’
‘And you have your own land to cultivate?’
‘Yes, Sir.’
‘So you can survive on this cultivation?’
‘No, Sir. We got this village site and the land just now. It will take many years before it yields anything.’
‘So how do you get your food then?’
‘We still dig wild yams, Sir, and still work on the plantations.’

This conversation took place in the autumn of 1991 during one of my first visits to the Paliyans. With a few words about her personal life Mariammal confirms the common story of the changing hunter-gatherer society, how they shift from the hunting and gathering of forest food to a life of wage labour and agriculture, coupled with an increasing interaction with neighbouring people.

The break in this neat linearity that comes at the end when she claims that they still collect wild yams in the surrounding forest is surprising. What she actually says is that at the same time as the Paliyans earn money through wage labour, what we would consider as taking part in a market economy, they also collect forest food, considered by us as part of a hunting-gathering economy. She also mentions that they are trying to establish their own cultivation. In the following I shall show in detail how the Paliyans have been using a whole plethora of economic pursuits for many decades. The articulation of their economy does not recognise any neat division between a hunting-gathering and a market economy, and therefore challenges a simple dichotomisation between the ‘pure’ or ‘traditional’ form of a hunter-gatherer society and a group of people assimilated into the wider market-oriented society.
The fact that people like Mariammal act within or between two economic systems is also reflected at the cultural level in her choice of words. She tells me that her family, when she was a child, lived on wild yams, honey and monitor lizards. In a few words this statement sums up a developed hunting-gathering economy utilising several hundreds of plants and animals. Coupled with the evasive attitude which she claims her people showed towards strangers, it points to a way of life where they earlier lived more or less on their own in the hills and forests. On the other hand, there is no trace of any separate Paliyan language, either in their own stories or practice, or in the available literature. Instead they speak a fully comprehensible Tamil, the same language as their neighbours speak, indicating that they have interacted substantially with neighbouring Tamil-speaking people in their history. The conclusion I would like to draw from this is that the Paliyan society does not differ from neighbouring societies in any absolute sense, although their earlier subsistence hints in that direction. The language spoken and other cultural traits, which will be clear in the following chapters, encourage us to acknowledge that their strategies and degree of interaction with other groups of people have varied over time. In spite of this they are, both in their own and in their neighbours’ eyes, a separate ethnic group.

When Mariammal was a young woman in the 1960s, her family started to work as watchers on a cardamom estate owned by caste people. The way she phrases it, they were ‘called to come to work’. As will be clear later, this expression implies that they were not forced by the owners to do this work. Rather, relationship with the estate owners was upheld through negotiations. As she also points out, the forest resources that they used to exploit were still available.

The Paliyans were guarding the owner’s land against wild animals and were paid in kind (usually rice). Most Paliyans considered such work easy. Watchers on cardamom estates are most important during the autumn when the plants grow big and the fruits ripen. The time coincides with the low season for wild yams, the common Paliyan staple. This made plantation work, when available, even more tempting for them. In areas where estates were not established, some Paliyans turned to cattle herding in the forests during the dry summer months, working for cattle owners from the plains. In other cases, they regularly became collectors of non-timber forest produce for forest
contractors, who in their turn sold the produce to the markets in the surrounding plains.

More or less all Paliyans in the Palni Hills have been engaged in such wage labour for decades. As is indicated by Mariammal's statement, such jobs do not exclude the hunting and gathering of forest resources, even today. In the 1990s a majority of the Paliyan groups used forest resources in one way or another.

Cultivation is not a traditional economic pursuit among the Paliyans. Today, however, several Paliyan families have their own cultivation, as a further addition to their subsistence economy. A good number of families tried out different kinds of cultivation in the forests earlier on. According to them, though, they always had problems in establishing these gardens as they contravened the forest regulations of the Tamil Nadu Government.

A further important fact of socio-economic change is that most Paliyans have shifted their residential pattern from living in small semi-nomadic sibling groups (bands), to more permanent settlements or villages comprising several sibling groups. Many of these villages have been established on the fringe of the forests. The change has brought them into new relations with the local government, as well as with other groups of people outside the forests.

To sum up, the Paliyans are a forest people engaged in a multitude of economic activities, including both wage labour and the extraction of forest resources, and in several cases also cultivation. The presence of different economic activities in the Palni Hills is part and parcel of the increasing commercial exploitation of the forest areas of India. However, the extent to which this exploitation actually provides alternatives for the indigenous forest peoples depends on national and regional politics, including state activities and regulations. This issue runs as an undercurrent throughout this study.

The shift to new economic pursuits among the Paliyans is also an aspect of their changing political strategies. If early in the nineteenth century most Paliyans seem to have used an avoidance strategy towards outsiders, today they follow strategies of both negotiation and alliance-building. However, there is no linear process from low-intensity to high-intensity interaction with outsiders, swapping avoidance for negotiation or alliance-building. The possibility of adapting and mixing strategies from one time and one situation to
another is the key factor that creates Paliyan autonomy vis-à-vis outsiders, allowing them the extent of social space we find today.

Local caste landowners would prefer to call Paliyan autonomy unpredictability, and see it as an essential trait of Paliyan culture. 'You never know, the Paliyans always come and go. That's their habit', as one landowner put it. The deep-rooted opinion held by caste people is that the Paliyans are different and not fully part of Tamil life. This is expressed by the notion of *sambal kundi*, an expression which literally means 'sacred ash on the buttock', meaning a person accepting the sacred ash from a holy person on the buttock'. Such behaviour is looked upon as an offence within Hindu custom, where the proper behaviour would be to let the sacred ash be pasted on the forehead. Local caste people use the phrase *sambal kundi* as a derogatory nickname sometimes for the Paliyans. The first time this expression was mentioned to me was when a young coffee grower named Chandra Shekar recalled that a colleague of his had used it the other day. The colleague had exclaimed 'What kind of behaviour is that, you *sambal kundi*?' when he was admonishing one of his Paliyan workers for not being careful enough in his treatment of his young wife. Pregnant for the fifth time, the expectant mother was not yet twenty years old.

Chandra Shekar, who is the third generation of a coffee-growing family of Nadar caste in the area, told me that his family had hired Paliyans on their estates for many years. To illustrate their autonomous character, he gave me the story behind the notion of *sambal kundi*:

Once upon a time Lord Shiva walked in the forests of South India. Suddenly He came upon a man down on his knees paying careful attention to something on the ground. That the man ignored him puzzled Lord Shiva, who was used to reverence from all people. So He felt it necessary to call for the man's attention. Remaining in his bent position, the man responded without abandoning his concentration: 'I am fully occupied trying to catch the rat in this burrow, but if you don't mind you can throw some holy ash on my buttock,' pointing with his arm towards his posterior.

'This fellow was a Paliyan', Chandra Shekar concluded. For him this anecdote was a good illustration of Paliyan elusiveness.

Paliyan autonomy vis-à-vis caste people is linked to a strong adherence to individual autonomy within the Paliyan's own social
organisation. Recognition of this fact is not something new. Already in 1969, in his well-known paper *Professional Primitives*, Richard Fox pointed out that close interaction between hunter-gatherers and outsiders, especially in the form of barter or trade, is correlated with economic and politically independent individuals and families within groups of hunter-gatherers. Fox’s interpretation was shaped in evolutionary terms, stating that recently ‘enclaved’ hunter-gatherers went from ‘communalism’ to ‘individualism’, due to their changing relations with outsiders.

This evolutionary stance gave the impression that human agency was mainly confined to the outsiders, those people who were considered ‘higher’ up the evolutionary ladder, such as farmers, herders, traders, etc. To follow such a line of thought to the conclusion that the individualism we find today among hunter-gatherers is caused by their relation with outsiders, would only be possible if we could compare the present-day hunter-gatherers with a situation where hunter-gatherers were not enclaved, i.e. a time when hunter-gatherers only had relations with other hunter-gatherers. No one has been able to supply any information, let alone details, on such a situation. All studies of South Indian hunter-gatherers recognise the fact that they have maintained relations with outsiders for hundreds of years. The causal connection is weak, and the proposition boils down to mere speculation.

In spite of this, I shall follow Fox’s lead in a concern with the connection between internal social organisation and external relations. My approach will, however, start from a different angle, developing a well-trodden path established by other researchers on South Indian hunter-gatherers, such as Peter M. Gardner, Brian Morris and Nurit Bird-David. Instead of looking at Paliyan individualism as a mere reflection of changes taking place in the surrounding society, I shall, in line with the latter researchers, claim that Paliyan life-style today is the result as much of internal as of external forces. By recognising the agency of all the groups that are involved in interaction with each other, we avoid falling into the trap of ‘denial of coevalness’, as Johannes Fabian put it (1983). This trap consists of the belief that some people can be seen as less contemporary than others, ‘frozen in time’ so to speak, a belief often held about hunter-gatherers. I shall follow Bird-David’s suggestion that, by using their own thought
models and institutions a hunting-gathering community can under certain conditions, incorporate outside resources and influences, without losing its social coherence. To acknowledge this she suggests that such hunter-gatherers should be classified as ‘modern hunter-gatherers’ (1992b). The combination of a collective autonomy maintained towards others with an internal valuation of individual autonomy, is a central theme for understanding interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders. However, such relations also have to be understood in the context of the larger region of South India, of which the Paliyans are an integrated part through a shared history. This brings me back to the story of *sambal kundi*, and two additional themes that I find important to include in this study.

First, Lord Shiva is one of the pan-Hindu gods, central to what is sometimes called the ‘Great Tradition’ within Hinduism (Redfield and Singer 1954; Marriott 1975). In spite of this, the story shows Him to have little problem in communicating with a Paliyan tribal, a member of a forest group considered to be at the margin of Hindu society. Lord Shiva is depicted as seeing this fellow as a kind of potential disciple. Thereby He includes the Paliyan in His ‘world’, expecting the man to exhibit proper behaviour in His lordly presence. The Paliyan of the story also seems to understand the situation, that Lord Shiva is a holy personage, who has the power of blessing, manifested by giving sacred ash to devotees (the exchange of devotion and blessing). However, the Paliyan man can only accept the blessing if it is given on his own conditions, i.e. that it does not disturb the activity he is engaged in at the moment when Lord Shiva turns up.

Due to the extended interaction between tribes and castes in South India, their lives cannot be considered as ‘different worlds’. Instead we need to analyse the extent to which they share ideas and values. If long-time mutual knowledge of each other among different groups sharing the same physical environment has resulted in a certain degree of cultural overlap, we need to include this fact in our analysis and to find out the extent to which this very overlapping is significant for the interaction.

The second additional theme is equally important. Even though Lord Shiva accepts the forest tribal as a devotee, the ‘misbehaviour’ of the tribal man places him in a lower position within the realm of
Hinduism, legitimating the contempt and constraints he is suffering from people in higher positions whenever they enter into close interaction.\(^1\) In South India, including the region of the Palni Hills, such Hindu ideas are to a large extent reflected in the contemporary perceptions held by Tamil people belonging to higher castes and their behaviour towards tribes and other lower-caste people.

Thus, to conclude, this study about the lives of the Paliyans in the Palni Hills will evolve around three interlinked themes: tribal autonomy, the cultural overlap between separate ethnic groups in a region, and forms of domination from the economic and political centre. The three themes are all constitutive aspects of the interaction between the Paliyans and different categories of other actors in the Palni Hills, especially caste landowners, non-governmental organisations and local authorities. The Paliyans' way of dealing with outsiders, and their ambition to maintain a high degree of autonomy, is manifested through their abundance of different socio-economic strategies. This variation makes a difference in ways of living not only between groups of Paliyans, but also between families and individuals. We shall see how variety as such is one of the key reasons for the Paliyans' ability to maintain their independence. Another conclusion is that, in spite of a wide range of solutions to everyday life situations, the Paliyans seem to be guided and united by certain shared principles of basic beliefs and values, all oriented to securing autonomy vis-à-vis other Paliyan individuals as well as towards outsiders. A unifying Paliyan ethos is emphasised in their everyday practice of making no

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\(^1\) Misbehaviour in a former life is a common explanation for the lower position of certain castes within the Hindu caste system. This kind of explanation was recalled by Viramma, a woman belonging to the Paraiyar (Pariah) caste, a former ‘Untouchable’ caste, today recognised as a Scheduled Caste in Tamil Nadu: ‘In the beginning the divine beings ruled over the universe. Several yugas ago, men took over from them. In those days there were no castes. Well, if you like, there were two: men and women. As soon as humans took possession of the universe, there was the problem of how to share it out. It hadn’t been a problem before – the gods never needed to share it out to rule over it, because they are everywhere at the same time. There were quarrels when men wanted to divide it up. One of them, seeing it was turning ugly, began to hide things, belongings. And just when he was about to hide a drum, the others saw him and shouted, Paraiya maraiyade, “hey you with the drum, don’t hide it”. Since then we’ve been called Paraiyar and we’ve been rejected for being descendants of the thief who stole that drum’ (emphasis in the original, Viramma \textit{et al} 1997: 166; see also Mosse 1999: 71).
social distinctions between families or individuals because of their choice of different economic strategies. A Paliyan is still a Paliyan, and part of Paliyan social organisation, whether his or her economy is dominated by cultivation, herding of cattle, collecting of non-timber forest produce or gathering wild yams or other forest foods.

The next section of this Introduction will discuss my fieldwork, reflected in general terms in my relations with assistants and informants, and with some relevant comments on method. Then I shall move on to give a brief outline of the physical environment of the Palni Hills. The recent changes for the Paliyans can best be summarised as a decrease of physical space accompanied by an increase of social space, constituted by intensified interaction with caste people. The decrease in physical space has mainly been due to the expansion and intensification of market-oriented agriculture and commercial forestry and the increased immigration in its wake. The basic forest resources used by the Paliyans are, however, still available. A discussion of some important prerequisites for these different kinds of land use in the Palni Hills will be presented in this section, dealing with the climate, the topography, and the flora and fauna.

The last section will focus on the history of the area. It will describe the different migration waves into the hills from the surrounding plains and how different ways of land use and economies have been introduced and established in the interplay between the local tribes, including the Paliyans, and the caste immigrants in the context of new political formations in South India. I shall also make some pertinent points concerning the specific history of the Paliyans. Before starting these sections, which end Chapter One, let me give an outline of the rest of this study.

Chapter Two will place my study within a theoretical framework mainly based on discussions within the anthropological sub-field of hunter-gatherer studies. Chapter Three will give a general overview of the contemporary situation among the Paliyan groups and also introduce other major actors in the rural areas of the Palni Hills. By doing this it will be possible to take into account local variations, which are, from the Paliyan point of view, significant in many domains of their lives. The chapter starts with the presentation of two valleys regularly visited by my assistant and me. It will be followed by a more sweeping account of other Paliyan settlements in the hills, most of
them only visited by me occasionally. A summary will also be given, with a focus on Paliyan flexibility in social and economic pursuits.

Chapter Four to Six will describe the process of establishing the Paliyan village of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley, situated on the southern slopes of the hills. This is the area within the Palni Hills where my main fieldwork was carried out. This will be an in-depth study of one group of Paliyans, as a case study of the general trend of resettlement among them during recent decades. Chapter Four has as its focus the building-up phase of the village. Chapter Five continues the description of the interaction between the Paliyans, neighbouring landowners and non-governmental organisations. Chapter Six shifts the focus towards the interaction between the Paliyans and the state. These three chapters will revolve around co-operation and conflict among the Paliyans of this valley and their neighbours over a period of about ten years (from 1991 to 2002). We shall come close to the lives of the members of six Paliyan sibling groups. For simplicity I shall only refer to a few Paliyan names, those that are most important for the way I have chosen to treat this ethnography. For the names of all Paliyan members of the village of Aruvellam, their respective sibling groups and kinship relations, see Appendix I.

Chapter Seven will identify three socio-economic strategies used by the Paliyans in their interaction with outsiders and the way they are entwined in everyday life. In Chapter Eight I will give a generalised view of Paliyan sociality based on collective rights to common resources and a strong adherence to individual autonomy, a Paliyan ethos running as an undercurrent in Paliyan behaviour. Chapter Nine will discuss more specifically Paliyan perceptions of social interaction and their quest for individual autonomy, an autonomy they try to expand into the interaction with outsiders. This chapter will also discuss the implications of new relations with outsiders and the way they, especially the introduction of cultivation, a cash economy and alliance-building, create social pressure among the Paliyans. In Chapter Ten, the last chapter, a widening of the horizon will take place. A brief comparison will be made between the Paliyans and similar groups in India and elsewhere. This will give some indication of why Paliyan strategies to cope with changing circumstances differ significantly from the more common discourse of adivasi/indigenous identity, today one
of the most politicised strategies used by forest peoples around the world.

The Paliyans, the field and my research

When I signed on for my first course of social anthropology at Stockholm University in the early 1980s, my interest in the subject derived from some travelling experiences among hunter-gatherers in Central Borneo. Over the next years I visited several groups in Southeast Asia and South Asia. At the beginning of the 1990s I felt the time was ripe to make up my mind where to do some extended anthropological fieldwork. Through the literature I knew that the Palni Hills of South India was the home of several groups of the hunting-gathering Paliyans. To investigate this further, I visited the town of Kodaikanal, the famous hill station of these hills, in March 1991.

This visit was part of an assignment called ‘A Minor Field Study’, a programme sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for students interested in subjects connected with international aid and development. We were a group of graduate students supposed to investigate deforestation and land use in the Palni Hills as part of a major Sida programme called Water Harvesting in the Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu (Larsson and Norström 1993).

At Kodaikanal I was directed through my Sida contacts to the board of a local environmental organisation, the Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC). They put me in contact with the Van Allen Rural Integrated Health and Development Project (VARIHD). Both these organisations had for several years been working with the Paliyans. Their members and staff became from the outset and throughout my research important informants and co-operating partners. The staff from VARIHD served as guides on my first visits to the Paliyans. Through the PHCC I was put in contact with A. Vincent Jerald, a young Christian Tamil from Kodaikanal, with a college education. He became my assistant during my first stay in the Palni Hills in 1991 and my closest companion in the everyday considerations of fieldwork for the next ten years. I shall come back to him below.
My visits to the Paliyans in 1991 were very short, consisting of only one or two days at a time in different localities in the hills. It was not until the following year, in the autumn of 1992, that Vincent and I stayed for a longer period (one month) with the Paliyans in the village of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley. During this period we created enough rapport with the villagers to get their consent to come back and do extended fieldwork in their valley. In the summer of 1993 we returned. From the outset I had planned to divide my fieldwork into two or three periods of about six months each for family reasons. I mainly fulfilled this idea through my return-visits in 1994 and 1995. However, my study dragged on and I made several more visits in the following years, turning the study into a longitudinal study of more than ten years. My last visit was in June 2002, making it a total of about 24 months in the area.

This is, in short, the background of this study. The rest of this section will be divided into two parts. First, I shall go into some methodological considerations in relation to my research perspective. Second, I will highlight some special features of my fieldwork that to a significant extent have governed my way of creating and establishing knowledge of the field.

When I set out to do fieldwork I was clear about my focus. I wanted to study how the Paliyans related to outsiders, i.e. the interaction between them and the surrounding Tamil caste people. This focus was informed by scientific discussions about the notion of ‘development’ and the way local people cope with an expanding market economy and an increasing urbanisation and globalisation.2 Through the writings of Gardner, mentioned above, I was aware of the Paliyans’ ‘enclavement’ within an otherwise caste-dominated society. I soon discovered that the Paliyans’ interaction with outsiders was mainly created and established within the economic sphere, in the form of either labour contracts and/or patron-client relations. Even when the Paliyans claimed friendship with caste individuals or families,

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2 Two major programmes within the Department of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University have been especially important for the development of my perspectives on anthropology in general and my field in particular. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the programme Development as Ideology and Folkmodel was running under the supervision of Gudrun Dahl and Bengt-Erik Borgström. During the second half of the 1990s the Programme for Comparative Studies on Democracy and Human Rights in Asia, Africa and Latin America was running under the supervision of Eva Poluha and Mona Rosendahl.
or participated in Hindu rituals together with the members of caste
groups, these relations were always established through economic
relations. In this way the economic relations between the Paliyans and
outsiders became my locus of investigation. They constituted the
frame within which other Paliyan claims and expressions of social and
cultural beliefs and values in relations with outsiders evolved. This
frame also included the interaction with non-governmental
organisations and local government officials, the other main categories
of actors in the rural areas of the Palni Hills in the 1990s. Actors in the
latter categories often tried to put other issues at the top of their
agenda, such as health, education or issues concerning lifestyle, but in
the long run the relations always seemed to become dominated by
economic issues.

Another issue closely connected with the Paliyan economy and
their interaction with non-Paliyans was their settlement pattern. When
I arrived in the Palni Hills the Paliyans seemed to be in the midst of a
process of changing their settlement practice, from small semi-
 sedentary settlements to sedentary villages (see Chapter Three). This
process had been so profound that it comes close to what Norman
Long, expanding on Victor Turner's notion of 'social dramas', calls a
'critical event' (2000: 193). In this study I shall show that this change
has affected both internal and external relations, including an increase
of social conflicts and demands for social re-organisation among the
Paliyans. Long's concept is a useful tool for identifying 'the disruption
of an existing set of social relations or breach of norms which
occasions efforts to repair the damage and restore social order or
institute some new, negotiated social arrangements' (ibid.). A critical
event causes people to be 'seriously confronted with the limitations of
the set of existing institutions and practices available for dealing with
the many problems it raised' (ibid: 194).

Changes of this character have a direct bearing on the position of
the researcher and her/his access to people's ideas and views on their
society and everyday life. As the sociologist Robert Merton puts it: 'It
is then that differences in the values, commitments, and the intellectual
orientations of conflicting groups become deepened into basic
cleavages, both social and cultural. As the society becomes polarised,
so do the contending claims of truth' (1972: 9). Such polarisation of
arguments and the discussion and negotiation of re-organisation
among the Paliyans would reflect the varying basic values of the individuals under study and make contested perspectives and ideas more ‘visible’ to outsiders. This was my main reason for selecting the Pandju Valley as the social focus of my study. Just by chance I happened to turn up in this valley a few months after a group of Paliyan families had started to create the village eventually called Aruvellam. This gave me the opportunity to follow closely their sedentarisation process, a process which several Paliyans had already gone through in other areas of the hills, and many other Paliyans would undergo in the coming years.

After some months in the field I realised that there was a significant variation in economic opportunities from one valley to another, making the content of the Paliyans’ subsistence differ to a great extent from one group to another. In order to be able to include this variation in my study I decided to spend some time with other Paliyan groups outside the Pandju Valley. Over the years I worked out a strategy in which I related myself to the Paliyans of the Palni Hills at different levels of intensity. As already mentioned, the Pandju Valley and the village of Aruvellam became my main focus of study. Aruvellam became in a sense my home among the Paliyans, and the place my assistant and I always returned to. The Paliyans living there became an important point of reference in our relations with other Paliyans of the hills. We regularly visited two other valleys, spending at least a couple of weeks at each place each year. Other Paliyan villages and settlements we only visited once or twice, sometimes only for a few hours, but in some cases for up to several days. This included the many visits Vincent made on his own in between my stays in the area, visits which started already in 1992 and continued up to 1999. In this way we covered most of the 40 or so Paliyan villages and settlements in the hills. There were only a few small groups of Paliyans that we never had the opportunity to meet, or from where we only occasionally met one or two individuals (outside their settlements). It was still possible, however, to collect some secondary information from these groups (see Chapter Three and Appendix II).

In my field there were certain local circumstances that more than anything else shaped my interaction with the people under study. At least three such features are worth mentioning. The first has to do with the well-known high degree of physical mobility among hunter-
gatherers. The Paliyans are no exception. Mobility among the Paliyans is mainly connected with economic activities and internal conflicts, and is an important characteristic in their interaction with outsiders. As my focus was on these interactions, mobility became one of the key features of my fieldwork. We seldom stayed in the village of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley for more than a couple of weeks at a time. Even within that time we found reasons to shift places within the valley. If we did not go down to the nearest market town over night, taking with us cash crops from the plantations, we went up to some nearby cardamom estate, joining the Paliyans in their work, or we paid a casual visit to a Paliyan family or a caste farmer in the neighbourhood or went on a hunting trip. Often some Paliyans from the Pandju Valley worked outside the valley. Now and then we visited these places, including visits to neighbouring Paliyan villages and settlements. My assistant and I were always on the move, but most often in company with a couple of Paliyans.

In spite of this mobility we had certain fixed places to which we always returned. Apart from the village of Aruvellam, two other places were of great importance. Through a close caste friend of mine I had access to houses both in Kodaikanal in the hills and in the town of Batlagundu in the nearby plains. These houses served as places for retreat and recollection of information and data, and pondering over adjustments to the ongoing research. At these places Vincent and I also prepared our ‘survival kit’ for the next walk into a valley. Apart from documentation equipment, the most important items were sleeping blankets and food. Usually we were able to stay in temporarily abandoned huts in the Paliyan settlements. We have over the years stayed in at least half of the available huts in Aruvellam, depending on which family was away at the time of our visit. We needed to take food, at least for a day or two, mainly consisting of rice, vegetables and some spices (in Aruvellam an old Paliyan woman usually cooked for us). In most valleys of the Palni Hills, food is not available for sale. We could not expect the Paliyans to have any surplus food. However, if our stay was longer than two days, there was always a way to bring food up from the plains through people moving up and down the valleys or through some extra collecting of forest food.

A second important feature, which had a great influence on the way I conducted my fieldwork, was the focus of my research on social
interfaces. While the houses in the two towns were outside the direct realm of the Paliyans, these places were not outside the field as such. We often spent time there with people who in one way or another interacted with the Paliyans. They were local government officials, landowners and representatives of non-governmental organisations, and other relevant persons. These places were also used as starting points for our visits to people and market towns all around the surrounding plains of the Palni Hills, visits of great importance as my study was concerned with aspects of interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders. To be able to grasp the way outsiders thought and acted in relation to the Paliyans, we needed to ‘follow’ such people, and their related activities, out of the valleys into their core areas in the bigger villages and towns in the plains. In the case of government officials, this took me all the way to Chennai (former Madras), the state capital of Tamil Nadu, and in the case of landowners and non-governmental organisations to Madurai, Dindigul and Bodinayakkanur, main towns of the surrounding plains.

The third feature, but not the least important, was my relationship with Vincent, my assistant. When I met Vincent for the first time in 1991 he was a young bachelor in his early twenties, just coming out of college and unemployment. Ten years later he was married, the father of a child, and working for a tourist company at the Carlton, the biggest hotel in Kodaikanal. He was the third generation of Christians within his family, originally belonging to the Mudaliyar caste. In 1991 I was looking for a temporary assistant, especially to work as a translator. With his fairly good English I took him on, but soon he proved to have wider abilities and became my assistant doing work for me at many levels over the years.

Throughout my fieldwork Vincent accompanied me. We also kept in regular contact through letters and through my re-visits after the PHCC hired him in late Spring 1995. This continued up to 2000. To begin with, I needed him mainly as a translator and teacher in the Tamil language. Over the years, though, he became knowledgable both as regards my anthropological perspectives and intentions and the life of the Paliyans, thereby becoming more of a partner on whom I could try out my speculations and evaluations. Usually we were together participating and observing the people around us, often with both of us taking notes. In the evenings or during slack periods in the day we
compared and discussed our findings. Vincent had a good memory for the words of conversations, as many Indians have, which was very valuable to me. Another special asset he developed was the close relation he was able to create especially with male Paliyans of his own age in Aruvellam (which is not so unusual for caste people if they are willing to show respect towards the Paliyans and stay with them for extended periods, the last however very unusual). Most often he used to sleep in the same hut as some of the bachelors of the village. During their evening sessions and at other times a lot of ‘gossip’ came to his ears. This kind of closeness was often denied me, partly because of my status as a foreigner and partly because of my imperfect Tamil, shortcomings that sometimes made the Paliyans feel uncomfortable in conversations with me. The information he gained in this way was very important, and especially for understanding passing events. Although it was given to Vincent, I often felt that such information was meant for both of us. The Paliyans, and especially in the Pandju Valley, knew very well that Vincent and I were interested in most aspects of their lives and that we discussed them intensively. They also knew that whatever came to his ears would in one way or another reach me. This sometimes became obvious when they expected me to know certain things they had earlier told Vincent but not me.

Only occasionally did we conduct interviews in Aruvellam. Most Paliyans felt uncomfortable answering a lot of questions if it took too long a time. In the other Paliyan settlements we more often turned to informal interviews because in these places we were more restricted by time. The easiest, and for the Paliyans most relaxed, way of conversing with me, was to do it while we were occupied in some other activity. We often had more lengthy discussions when we were, for example, walking up and down the valleys, moving around inside the forests, visiting other Paliyan groups or the nearby plains. Inside the village the most fruitful discussions developed when certain events out of the ordinary diverted attention away from a focused interview. Examples of such events could be aggravated conflicts, visits by outsiders or the spotting of wild animals.

Vincent also spent a great deal of time on his own with the Paliyans during my absence, especially between 1993 and 1995, regularly visiting the three main areas I had chosen, the Pandju Valley, Kudhirayar Dam and Siruvattukadu Valley, respectively. His notes and
taped interviews and our re-visits to these places, added considerable information. He was also in charge, supervised by me, of the Tribal Survey conducted by the PHCC (see Appendix II), during the course of which, accompanied by other PHCC staff, between 1995 and 1999, he paid shorter visits to more than 25 Paliyan villages and settlements in the hills. During this period he was hired full-time by the PHCC, where his assignment was mainly to work with the PHCC project in the Pandju Valley. My visits to the Pandju Valley became irregular after 1995. Through this project Vincent was able to stay in regular contact with the Paliyans in the Valley up to 1998.

While most of our time was spent with the Paliyans, considerable time was also spent with landowners and non-governmental organisations, and sometimes with local authorities. We visited both estates and plantations, including the Jesuit estates, from the foothills up into the hills, where we could participate in everyday work with cardamom, silkcotton and coffee cultivation. Several times we visited the homes and families of some of these landowners. I was able to participate in board meetings and other activities not directly concerned with the Paliyans in several of the non-governmental organisations mentioned, and paid many visits to the homes of members and staff. Local authorities were mainly met in the field, although a few visits to their offices were also made, including visits to government-run research stations for horticulture and regional boards for different crops.

Although I command a certain degree of Tamil\(^3\), I was most often, in relation to the Paliyans, dependent on Vincent for a deeper understanding, as no Paliyans speak English. The situation was significantly different as regards their neighbours. Most landowners, representatives of NGOs, as well as government staff, speak English.

In this book I aim at maximum simplicity and readability. Tamil terms are therefore italicised but presented without diacritic marks. Personal names, place names, and the names of castes are given without italicisation. I follow the conventional way of naming castes. In the singular I use the Tamil version (Paliyan), for the plural I add the English \( s \) (Paliyans).

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\(^3\) I studied Tamil during the autumn of 1991 at the International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai.
The Palni Hills and their environment

The economy of the Palni Hills has always been directly based on the physical environment, with an industrial sector of no significance. This still applies whether we are talking about animal husbandry, agriculture, forestry, or the contemporary tourist business, the last only focused on the hill station of Kodaikanal. In this section I shall give a description of this environment,4 as a necessary background for an understanding of the different economic uses of these forests and hills. As an eastward off-shoot of the Western Ghats, the Palni Hills join the main mountain chain at the Anaimalai Hills and the Elamalai Range (Cardamom Hills), on the border between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They are situated on the western fringe of the Tamil plains and at the upper reaches of two of the main river systems in Tamil Nadu, the Vaigai and Cauvery. The maximum east-west length is about 65 km and the maximum width is about 40 km (mean width 24 km), with a total area of 2,068 km². The Neutral Saddle, a ravine in line with the plain towns of Periyakulam in the south and Palani Town in the north, divides the hills into two geographically distinct zones: the Upper Palnis and the Lower Palnis.

Rolling downs of coarse grasslands and isolated forests in the more sheltered valleys cover the undulating Upper Palni plateau, which varies in altitude from 1,800 to 2,500 m. The Lower Palnis lie at a considerably lower altitude with a number of peaks from 1,000 to 1,500 m, separated by steep wooded valleys. The wooded slopes circumscribe the hills, with a gentler profile on the northern side compared with the short, steep valleys on the southern side.

There are about thirty perennial rivers in the hills, supplying the water-starved surrounding plains. The rivers draining to the south are the watershed for the river Vaigai, and those draining to the north form part of the Cauvery basin.

The climate varies with altitude from the typical tropical climate of the Tamil Nadu plains in the foothills to the quasi-temperate climate of the Upper Palnis. The mean temperature in the coldest months is 23°C in the plains but less than 13°C at the highest

4 Apart from my own observations and if nothing else is stated this section follows Anna University 1985; Matthew 1994; Matthew 1999; Pascal 1988; Viraraghavan 1988.
elevations, a difference in temperature which makes people from the plains shiver just at the thought of living in these hills.

In ascending the hills, the rainfall increases. The average is about 1,600 mm. In the Upper Palnis there is more than 2,000 mm per year, with certain local places reaching more than 5,000 mm. This should be compared with 800 mm in a good year in the surrounding plains. The number of dry months in the hills varies from two to seven.

A special feature of the Palni Hills is that unlike most other areas of the Western Ghats, they basically depend on the northeast and not on the southwest monsoon. The latter is moderated by the Cardamom Hills to the southwest of the Palni Hills. As a result the heaviest rainfall is brought by the northeast monsoon. About half of the annual rainfall thus occurs during October and November.

Although a yearly fluctuation in the regional weather pattern is expected, the conditions in the first half of the 1990s were exceptional. In 1992 the northeast monsoon was extremely heavy, damaging roads and causing severe landslides, especially in the degraded foothill areas. For instance, on the northern side of the hills one group of Paliyans had to abandon their settlement for days, as huge rocks from above crushed several of their huts. In 1995, on the other hand, the northeast monsoon totally failed, with half the average rainfall, resulting in widespread drought in the surrounding plains and as a consequence local conflicts over water.5

Water for household and agricultural purposes is usually abundant in the hill areas, especially in comparison with the surrounding plains. However, irregularity of rainfall over the year can create local water shortages for brief periods. An additional problem arises occasionally during heavy rainfall in the upper regions. Sudden

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5 It is a common idea in Tamil Nadu that drought periods increase conflicts over water as well as crime. Crime, the argument goes, is not caused by a predilection for such behaviour, but by necessity. Not only small farmers with little economic surplus will be brought to the brink of starvation during droughts. Many daily labourers in agriculture lose their income as labour demand decreases due to the dry fields. Political tension also increases. Access to communal water from tanks and dams is part of local and regional power structures. On a regional level this is highlighted by the dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the water resources from their mutual river Cauvery (Guhan 1993). This dispute has been going on for decades, and creates widespread social unrest during drought periods. In Tamil Nadu drought sometimes turns water for agricultural purposes into a commodity. Drought-affected farmers buy water from landowners with good well facilities to save at least parts of their harvest.
outbursts of rain create heavy flooding when the rivers rush down the slopes.6 Rivulets that are otherwise small and calm turn into roaring torrents, sweeping along soil and vegetation from the riverbeds. For people who draw drinking water directly from these rivers, the muddy water remains unfit for drinking for several days, forcing people to draw water from smaller streams further away from their settlements.7

A major influence on the environment in the Palni Hills and the surrounding foothills has been the construction of several dams at the outflow of the larger rivers into the plains. The first of these dams, the Amaravathi Dam on the northern slopes, and the Manjalar Dam on the southern slopes, were built in the 1960s as part of a planned process of expanding wetland cultivation into the dryland closer to the foothills. Other dams followed, and the latest dam, the Sothuparai Dam on the southwestern foothills, was inaugurated in March 2001 (however, the dam was not yet filled in the summer of 2002).

The flora of the forests of the Palni Hills exhibit a considerable variation due to the wide range of the microclimate, the peculiar physiography, topographic features and altitudinal and biotic influences, which have contributed to the presence of almost all important forest types of South India in the Palni Hills. These forests are also the home of the wild relatives of a number of economically important plants like banana (Musa paradisiaca), cinnamon (Cinnamomum zeylanicum), cardamom (Elattaria cardamomum) and pepper (Piper nigrum). However, the proverbial plant kunjji (Strobilanthes kunthiana) is probably the best known plant of these hills, already mentioned in ancient literature. When the native grasslands were intact, this plant covered the slopes, and when in blossom turned the land into shades of mauve to purple. The plant has a peculiar regularity of twelve-year flowering and once functioned as a kind of regional calendar for local people. The last flowering was in 1994 (Matthew 1994).

The vegetation cover of the hills can be divided into the following main categories: dry deciduous scrub, hill savannah forest,

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6 According to local people flooding seems to have increased over the years due to deforestation in the Upper Palnis.

7 I witnessed one such flood in the Pandju Valley on 5 April 1994. We could hear the roaring sound of the flood, coming from above, two minutes before it reached the village. Everyone immediately rushed down to the river with whatever pots they could get their hands on to draw water before the flood arrived. After the flood had passed the water was unfit for drinking for three days.
dry deciduous forest, riparian forest, moist deciduous forest, *shola* forest and grasslands.

Dry deciduous forest is found from an elevation of 600 to 1,200 m, where the top and lower canopy are deciduous and the presence of grasses is common. Hill savannah is a degraded form of this ecological type, caused by recurrent fires on the steep slopes. Lower down the foothills it extends into dry deciduous scrub. This last form represents degradation mainly due to deforestation, overgrazing and firewood collecting.

The hill savannah forest has an open canopy, commonly with lemongrass (*Cymbopogom flexuosus*) undergrowth, an important non-timber forest product for the Paliyans. The dry deciduous forest and the degraded low-lying slopes also contain several wild yam species (*Dioscorea*) used as staple food by the Paliyans. The most important is *valli kilangu*. Commercially important trees found here are tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), the fruit of which is used for culinary purposes, and the galnut tree (*Terminalis chebula*), whose fruits are used in the tanning industry and make up a common non-timber forest product collected by the Paliyans.

The riparian forest stands out as a narrow fringe of large trees along watercourses, streams and riverbanks in the hilly tracts. It consists of widely spaced trees of evergreen and deciduous species, with small trees and shrubs in between and the ground often covered with coarse grass. In this belt we find the wild mango (*Mangifera indica*), an attraction for both humans (who use the unripe fruit for pickles) and elephants.

Moist deciduous forest exists at an altitude of 500 to 1,100 m, often with a closed canopy, growing in depressions, with trees occasionally up to more than 30 metres in height, with a girth of up to 6 metres. At higher altitudes the trees are more stunted and do not attain such giant proportions. In these forests the ground is devoid of grass, apart from some open moist areas where the grass can exceed three meters in height. Here is found a variety of economically valuable trees, like teak (*Tectona grandis*) and rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*). Bamboo of different species (*Bambusa arundinecea; Centra columnas*) grows in the valleys and at the stream edges, and is the main

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8 Apart from the scientific application of the term, *shola* is also the local term for a ‘thick forest’ in these hills, whatever the elevation.
attraction for elephants migrating into the northern slopes of the hills from Kerala during the monsoon. The Forest Department bans bamboo cutting; nonetheless, large quantities of bamboo leave the hills for construction purposes in the plains.

Semi-evergreen low-level *shola* forest is found at summits between 900 and 1,500 m, often in humid isolated valleys and enclosed by deciduous forest. The high-level *shola* are found above 1,800 m. This forest consists of small patches of impenetrable woodland made up of evergreen trees, with a closed canopy, occurring along the furrows of the undulating upper plateau, and often reaching down to the neighbouring depressions. Trees are characteristically less than 15 m high, plentifully branched and nourishing a lot of epiphytes like lichens, mosses, ferns and several creepers. Here we also find a wild yam sometimes used by the Paliyans, *mul valli kilangu*, and available all the year round. The slightly lower-lying *sholas* on the southern side of the hills have been the usual site for cardamom plantations.

At the higher elevations of the Palni Hills we find vast grasslands, mixed with the high-level *sholas*. Together they form the characteristic landscape of the upper plateau. The grassland is the main feeding ground for the Indian bison (*Bos gaurus*). Today huge parts of these areas are covered with exotic tree plantations and the cultivation of potato, garlic and carrot.

The wildlife of the Palni Hills is still plentiful, although several of the bigger mammals have had to face a dramatically shrinking habitat since the late nineteenth century, due to deforestation, agriculture, commercial forestry and immigration. The tiger was hunted out of dislike and in search of trophies. No reliable observations have been reported in the last decade, although rumours of wandering tigers are widespread. The last trustworthy spotting on the southern slopes seems to have been in the 1960s, although occasional tigers may move into the border area between the Palni Hills and the main Western Ghats, where they can still be found inside some of the protected areas (for example, Eravikulam National Park and Anamalai Wildlife Sanctuary). The leopard is more common, and if not always easy to spot, its sound is occasionally heard. Farmers dislike these animals as they often kill cattle, horses and dogs. A common way to get at the leopards is to bait them with poisoned meat.
The largest animal of India, the Asian elephant, is mainly found on the northwestern slopes, migrating into the Palni Hills from the Kerala side during the southwestern monsoon. During the 1990s small herds were seen just outside the town area of Kodaikanal. In 1996 a herd migrated all the way up to the road running down to Palani Town, on the northern side. As the Wildlife Act of 1972 prohibits the killing of elephants, the farmers in the valley had to stand idle while the elephants created havoc in their gardens and plantations. To move around along the streams and forest paths of the northwestern slopes requires a lot of care, as the elephants attack if they feel threatened. Fatal incidents are now and then reported, but according to the Paliyans this could be avoided if people had a better understanding of elephant behaviour.

The Indian bison are found all over the hills. In the 1960s they suffered a near fatal decline due to hunting, habitat loss and rinderpest spread by cattle. Because of protection they now seem to have recovered, and they have today even chased away golfers from the golf course on the outskirts of Kodaikanal. Apart from being lethally dangerous they, together with wild boar and several species of deer and monkey, create severe problems for hill cultivation. The fauna of the area also include endemic species like the Nilgiri Thar (*Hermitragus hylocrius*), the Nilgiri Langur (*Presbytis johni*) and the Giant Grizzled Squirrel (*Ratufa indica*).

The wildlife of the hills is an important food resource for the Paliyans, although they probably hunted more intensively earlier on. The most common game are monitor lizard (*Varanus bengalis*), pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*), porcupine (*Hystrix indica*), several species of monkeys, squirrels, deer and occasional wild boar (*Sus scrofa*). To this we should add that the Paliyans collect honey from three different species of bees, both for their own consumption and the market (Gardner 1993; 2000; Schmidt 1997).

As noted above man-animal conflict is generic in the Palni Hills, and will probably continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Almost all economic activities in the area are directly involved with the physical environment. Hence people’s perceptions of ‘nature’ heavily influence their actions. The dominant perception has been ‘nature for exploitation’. For the first time, though, such a view is today challenged by a ‘nature for conservation’ perspective, especially
'spearheaded' by far-reaching plans to create a Palni Hills Sanctuary covering more than a third of the total area (see Chapter Five). One important source of inspiration for this change is the acknowledgement that the Western Ghat range, including the Palni Hills, is considered one of the 25 'biodiversity hotspots' of the planet (Mittermeier et al 1998; see also Matthew 1999: xlvii-lvii).

The people of the hills: a brief history

The written history of South India is focused on the social, political and economic relations connected with the paddy cultivating areas, the delta and river-bank areas of the main rivers in particular and the plains in general. This correlates with the politically important religious centres and the establishment of states and the conflicts between state-building forces over time. When we leave these areas and enter drylands, foothills and the hills and mountains, the information becomes fragmented, less detailed, and often almost nil for the hills and mountains. The only hill area that does not fit into this general picture is the Nilgiri Hills situated at the corner of the South Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. The history of the Palni Hills is yet to be written. The scanty sources which are available, and on which the following is based, come mainly from British colonial records.

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9 Rice in the husk or in the straw.
10 See Baker 1976; Chopra et al 1979; Irschick 1994; Ludden 1989; Nilakanta Sastri 1991; Stein 1985, just to mention some of the better known.
11 Paul Hockings makes the following remark on the study of the Nilgiri Hills: 'The total of some 3,000 books and articles yields a density of over three publications per square mile – one could almost literally paper the district with them – and shows this to have been perhaps the most intensively studied part of rural Asia east of the Holy Land' (1989b: vi, see also Hockings 1978). The reason behind this interest can be found in the political importance of these hills as a hill station during the colonial period and, in the eyes of the Europeans, the social and environmental peculiarities of the area.
12 The way the colonial records represented events, peoples and the environment are today highly contested. See recent examples concerning tribes and forest areas in South India (Cederlöf 2002; 2003).
Pre-British period

The harsh climate, steep hills and ravines and the difficult access to the forest tracts of the Palni Hills caused the area to fall outside the mainstream economic and political history of South India. Instead, it has acted as a refuge for groups of people deciding to migrate away from different kinds of hardships in the plains. As far back as we know, the area has been exploited for its forest products by people from outside, either through barter, trade, or direct extraction. During certain periods plains people have laid claim to parts of the hills, demanding taxes from the local people.

Today only two groups of the people populating the Palni Hills claim that they are descended from the area; the Paliyan and the Puliyan. Later immigrants confirm their story and so do early British records (Nelson 1989). The Puliyan were once the agriculturists of the hills, cultivating dry grains like \textit{thenai} (\textit{Senaria italica}) and \textit{ragi} (\textit{Echeneis coracana}), different species of millet, for their own subsistence. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the hills were overrun by people from the plains, escaping from violence, famine, and epidemic diseases during the wars between state-building forces in the plains (Nambiar and Krishnamurthy 1966: 8).

The Puliyan were subdued into farm labourers by these people consisting of different caste groups, the most prominent being the Mannadian (Kunnavan), probably descendants of Vellalas from the Coimbatore plains to the north of the Palni Hills. Later on a substantial number of Telugu-speaking Chettiar entered the area. These two caste groups still dominate parts of the rural areas of the hills.

While the Puliyan lost their cultivated land to these caste groups, immigration did not affect the lives of the Paliyans to any great extent. Their means of subsistence, mainly consisting of wild plants and small game, and a living space in the more inaccessible areas of the forests and valleys, were of little interest to the caste groups.

Between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries large \textit{poligar} (warrior chief) estates\textsuperscript{13} were established in the nearby plains of the Palni Hills by the Nayak rulers of Madura (the region around today’s Madurai), influential local families or warriors rewarded for service to different state-builders such as the Nawab of Arcot, the Sultan of

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Poligar} is the English name for \textit{palaiyakkarars}, warrior chiefs.
Bijapur or Hyder Ali (Baker 1976: 2-3). The poligars and their ‘little kingdoms’ laid claim to portions of the adjacent hills and parts of their resources: rights to tax collection, timber, leaf manure, and grazing land (ibid: 15). This also affected the Palni Hills. During the eighteenth century, when the Nayak rulers lost their power, these plains poligars demanded recognition as rulers. We do not know how effective their control over the hill areas was. A stable system seems to have been difficult to maintain with the continuously changing pattern of struggles, unrest, and alliance-building between poligars and indigenous rulers like Hyder Ali, as well as with British forces, in the Tamil area during the second half of the eighteenth century (Nelson 1989 Part III: 265-300).

After the ‘Poligar Wars’ 1799-1800, and the establishment of British rule in 1801, the unrest came to an end (Rudner 1994: 61). The British turned the surviving poligars into zamindars, thereby taking away their governmental functions and military power, but leaving them with rights and duties as estate managers and revenue collectors on a rent basis (Baker 1976: 1-13). Some of the land in the hills was rented out by the British to other plains people, giving them rights to extract revenue from the hill people cultivating in the area (ibid.; Nelson 1989, Part V: 97). The extent to which such taxes had been a heavy burden on the hill cultivators in earlier periods is hard to say, but there is evidence that during the early nineteenth century cultivators occasionally complained to the Collector (the British district authority) about the renters’ exactions. In 1842 the system of renting was formally abandoned (ibid.).

At this time, when the British had established firm political control over the region, they turned their eyes towards the hill areas, including the Palni Hills. They had several reasons for this attention: the wish to expand British administration (including the development of an effective tax system) over the local people, the prospect of exploiting the forest and mineral resources, and the urge to find suitable land for the cultivation of different cash crops and commercial tree species. The epidemic diseases that regularly hit the plains,

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14 Zamindar, landlords

15 Poligar estates who survived the ‘Poligar War’ in the foothills of the Palni Hills were Bodinayakanur in the southwest, Kannivadi in the southeast and Ayyakudi and Rettayambatti in the north (Baker 1976: 4, 7).
especially during the hot summer months, took a heavy toll of the early Western colonisers. Therefore the hills, with their cooler climate, were also regarded as a suitable place for summer camps for administrators and missionaries, as well as for their families. There were also ideas of placing military encampments in the hills for the same reasons.

Colonial rule
When Ward surveyed the Palni Hills in 1821 as the first Englishman to do so, he found a thinly populated area, with large tracts of forests, grasslands, and wildlife. He estimated the population as a mere 4,000 individuals (Paliyans excluded) spread out in a few villages and hamlets (Ward 1821). The hill people were cultivating millets and some paddy for their own consumption, and a few cash crops, mainly garlic and bananas. The locals brought these crops down to the plains to be sold in the nearby markets, or sold them directly to merchants coming up the few paths leading into the hills. The hill people kept some cattle for agricultural use and horses for carrying loads up and down the hills. From the plains they obtained rice (in case of bad harvests), clothes, agricultural and husbandry implements, salt and other articles.

The botanists Wight (1837) and Beddome (1858), and Colonel Hamilton (1864) followed in Ward's footsteps. Beddome presented a detailed survey of the valuable tree species to be found in the hills. He noted that local people burnt down large tracts of forest to make room for banana groves. In the eyes of the British the local use of the forests was devastating, carried out without plans or foresight. The first appointed Conservator of Forests in Madras Presidency, H. Cleghorn, made his view clear in the preface to the first reports on the forest situation and its future in the Presidency:

... throughout the Indian empire large and valuable tracts were exposed to the careless rapacity of the native population, and especially unscrupulous contractors and traders, who cut and cleared them without reference to ultimate results, and who did so, moreover, without being in any way under the regulation of authority (1860: v).

By the creation of an administrative department specifically devoted to the forests, the British planned to take full control of forest

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16 Madras Presidency included today's Tamil Nadu and parts of Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
resources. In 1846 Madras Forest Department was established and in 1882 the Madras Forest Act declaring large forest tracts as Reserved Forests came into force. The immediate concern was to control the unregulated felling of large-sized economically valuable trees, especially teak, sandalwood (*Santalum album*), ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*) and rosewood, which were in great demand within the colonial economy. The main ‘culprits’ were timber merchants and local people practising *kumri* (swidden) cultivation. Later certain rules for wildlife management were instituted, and the hunting of big game in particular was restricted.\(^{17}\) The burning of forests for banana cultivation was already prohibited in 1858. These measures by the British did not generate immediate results at the local level, but marked the beginning of state-controlled commercial forestry, which in its main features is still in effect in India today.

According to government reports most of the timber during the second half of the century was imported from easily accessible areas of Travancore State (Francis 1906: 143).\(^{18}\) Not until the last decade of the nineteenth century did timber felling in the Palni Hills increase substantially. Revenue from the reserved forests in Madurai District increased more than five times between 1893 and 1903, the timber mainly supplying the demand from the expanding railway system (Francis 1906: 29).

In 1840 the first overseas officers and missionaries began to spend their summer vacations in the hills. The chosen place was named Kodaikanal, situated at an altitude of about 2,100 m, at the southern precipitous edge of the Upper Palnis (Francis 1906: 250-52; Mitchell 1972: 91-119). Initially the site was selected for the benefit of officers of the British Indian Government of the southern region of Madras State, as it was located above the malaria zone (1,500 m) and had a dry summer climate. At the turn of the century Kodaikanal became recognised as a municipality and hill station, with a summer population of about 1,900 individuals (Matthew *et al* 1976: 147).

It was with the summer visitors of Kodaikanal that the first exotic tree species were introduced into the area. In 1867 the retired


\(^{18}\) Travancore State included the Kerala State of today, except for the northern part.
Collector of Madurai District Sir V. H. Levinge introduced wattle (*Acacia decurrens, Acacia dealbata, Acacia mearnsii*), in 1906 the Forest Department launched a scheme for the introduction of conifers (for example, *Callitris rhoboidea*, different species of the genera *Pinus*), and already in 1852 some eucalypts (*Eucalyptus globulus*) were planted in Kodaikanal (Matthew 1962: 98-101). Orchards with fruit trees like pears, plums, and apples were also established (ibid: 101-102).

In the middle of the nineteenth century coffee plantations started in the Lower Palnis. Hamilton reports 13 ha under coffee in 1861 (1864: 8). With European capital this had expanded to 2,430 ha by the turn of the century (Imperial Gazetteers of India 1908: 372). Cardamom had been cultivated on a small scale by the local people, but became part of plantations at the end of the century, both in the Lower Palnis as well as along the southwestern slopes.¹⁹

Among the large estates cultivating coffee and cardamom during this period we also find those run by the Jesuit Mission. The first, St Mary’s Estate, was established in the Lower Palnis. It is from one of the Jesuit Fathers, in charge of another estate, St Michael’s,²⁰ that we get the first detailed written account of meetings with the Paliyans of the Palni Hills (Dahmen 1908). Some Paliyan families used to work occasionally in the estate, but it was not easy to persuade them to undertake regular work. Their behaviour astonished the author with his strong Christian morals:

...they avail themselves of the first opportunity to slip back into the jungle and enjoy once more the free and hazardous life of the woods. From those that remain all that has been obtained so far in the way of labour is

¹⁹ This fact should not be taken to mean that the British, by themselves, invented the plantation economy in South India. It is well known that, for example, both coffee and pepper were exported from the area long before the British arrival. Local planters cultivated many of these cash crops and also tried to expand and keep up with new market opportunities. In the case of coffee the Planting Directory of South India reported that in 1886 local people held almost half of the land under coffee cultivation. So, while the British started up large-scale plantations, they had to compete with indigenous entrepreneurs. However, the British had the ambition to take full control and expand these resources according to their own guidelines, as part of the overall British object of controlling and exploiting their colonies (Imperial Gazetteers of India 1908: 372; Kooiman 1992).

²⁰ The Jesuits are still in charge of these estates. St Michael’s Estate was acquired in 1893 (Nobili Pastoral Centre 1983: 337).
to work about two or three days in the week, the other days being
generally spent roaming idly through the forest or lazily reclining in their
huts. The almighty rupee, that powerful incentive to the industrious
Tamilian's activity, is no allurement to them; coercion is no avail either, as
the safe retreat of the woods is near at hand (ibid: 20).

The Palni Hills were, at the turn of the nineteenth century, still difficult
of access. The summer visitors to Kodaikanal had to walk or be carried
in palanquins\textsuperscript{21} up the paths, which necessitated an overnight stop
halfway up. The main route became known as the Coolie Ghat Road,
and the path is still used by the local people. All trade goods had to be
carried by people themselves or on horse/donkey backs. At the
beginning of the twentieth century the Athur Ghat Road was
constructed, facilitating transport between the Lower Palnis and the
southeastern foothills (Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XVI 1908:
400). However, it was not until the construction of the Law's Ghat
Road in 1916, connecting Kodaikanal and the southern plains, that the
real opening up of the area took place (Matthew 1975: 148).

By 1920 the population in the hills had more than doubled since
1850, to more than 20,000 and already during the season of 1903-4 the
area of cash crop cultivation (coffee and cardamom) exceeded dry crop
cultivation, 41\% and 39\%, respectively.

The trends of a growing population, commercialisation of the
forests and increasing land under commercial cultivation, continued up
to Independence in 1947, although they slowed down during the
general economic decline in the 1930s (Baker 1984).

After Independence
In 1947 the big landlord (\textit{gamindar}) estates were dissolved under the
\textit{Estates Abolition Act} and the areas were taken over by the state. Almost
all forest land came under the administration of the Forest
Department.\textsuperscript{22} The new India Government launched big tree-planting
schemes, and large tracts of the Upper Palnis were planted with the
previously introduced species of wattle, eucalyptus, and conifers. Some
teak plantations were established at lower elevations (Matthew 1962).

\textsuperscript{21} A palanquin is a covered box-litter, used by travellers and borne by four or six men
by means of a pole projecting fore and aft.

\textsuperscript{22} One kind of forest that was kept outside state control was 'the sacred groves'
belonging to temples (Gadgil and Vartak 1976; Gadgil and Chandran 1992).
Other forest areas were converted into farmland due to population pressure and an increasing demand for cash crops.

In the 1960s the Forest Department regularised the collection of non-timber forest produce from the forest areas, introducing a lease system, in which collectors sold their produce via contractors to the markets.

With the expanding agriculture and 'the Green Revolution' of the 1960s, knew groups of people in the plains were able to accumulate resources, which they re-invested in the hill areas. Cash crops like lime (*Citrus aurantifolia*) and silkcotton (*Ceiba pentandra*) became popular. In several valleys on the lower elevations of the Palni Hills, especially on the southern side, large tracts were converted into cultivated land under these crops, including the Pandju Valley, the main site of this study.

When banana cultivation was almost wiped out in the hills due to the 'Bunchy Top Virus' in the 1970s, farmers turned to coffee and other cash crops instead. In the late 1970s cardamom cultivation decreased because of competition from Central America. In addition, the Forest Department did not extend the leases, as this kind of cultivation inside the forests was now considered very damaging for forest regeneration.

Let me give some final figures to emphasise the extent of land-use changes in the Palni Hills. When Colonel Hamilton visited the hills in 1861, he estimated the area under cultivation at 2,000 ha (1864: 6). 125 years later, during the season of 1986-87, if we take commercial tree plantations and cash crops together, we end up with a total of 40,000 ha (Matthew 1990: 44). Of these, commercial tree plantations (21,000 ha) and coffee (7,300 ha) dominated the picture. The population had increased to more than 200,000 inhabitants, with an urban population of 27,000 in Kodaikanal (Kodaikanal Taluk Office: Census 1991). Tourism is now the third most important economic sector, with more than 800,000 visitors (mainly natives) to Kodaikanal in 1992 (PHCC 1993e).

23 The main feature of 'the Green Revolution' was the introduction of high-yielding hybrids of crops demanding chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

24 Several hundred ha of silkcotton and lime on the southwestern slopes are not included in these figures.
History and the Paliyans

The early history of the Paliyans is veiled in obscurity. However, two myths about the Paliyans seem to confirm their close interaction with their neighbours. One myth told by the Paliyans and the Puliyans in the eastern part of the Palni Hills is a myth of origin. This tells us that the neighbouring groups in this area, the Mannadian, the Asarian, the Puliyan and the Paliyan are four brothers borne by the same mother. The hierarchical order, with the Mannadians at the top and the Paliyans at the bottom, was established by the will of the Mannadians, and became a replication of the caste order in the surrounding plains. According to my information, this myth is contradicted by the caste groups, but seems to be an adjustment of rather late origin by the Paliyans and the Puliyans. At the western side of the hills, where there are no Puliyans, the Paliyans do not recognise this myth.

The second myth was told to me by elder Mopans, the most forest-oriented caste groups in the nearby plains. In a meeting I had with these Mopan men, they told me that a long time ago the Paliyans were living in proximity to the villages of the foothills. At this time the whole foothill area was covered by forest. The Mopans were grama (Sanskrit for ‘village’) people, but used the forest extensively, while the Paliyans were a forest people. The difference between them was, however, no greater than that they were basically considered to be the same people.

At one time both these groups were accused by the ruler (they could not specify who the ruler was) of having committed some major crimes. The ruler decided that if they confessed their misdeeds and obeyed his verdict, their lives would be spared and they could stay. The Mopans decided to obey, while the Paliyans felt that they were wrongly accused and decided to leave. That is why the Paliyans, according to these Mopans, live on the slopes of the Palni Hills and not in the plains. This is in sharp contrast with their view of the Puliyans, who they claim have always lived in the hills. They even claim that the name Paliyan can be derived from this event. One possible meaning of the word pali is ‘sacrifice by death’. The name Paliyans would then mean ‘those who should be sacrificed to death’. The Paliyans have never confirmed this story and no-one has been able to explain their group name.
I shall end this section by highlighting a couple of other points with relevance to the recent history of the Paliyans. Although we find a dramatic increase of population and cultivation in the Palni Hills, the impact of these changes differs significantly between localities. Commercial tree planting is concentrated in the Upper Palnis, an area seldom used by the Paliyans. Agriculture has expanded outwards from the old settlements, but it is mainly in the Lower Palnis that forest tracts have been turned into cultivated land to such an extent that Paliyan alternative resources have been significantly reduced. Due to the climate, the northwestern parts of the hills lack both commercial tree plantations and cash crop plantations. In this area the Paliyans are the most numerous inhabitants.

With the British system of centralised forestry, a system taken over by the Indian Government after Independence, local people were to a large extent alienated from forest resources. Nevertheless, these measures did not significantly affect the Paliyans, owing to the fact that the forest resources they used were mainly small trees, wild yam, small game, and other plants of little or no interest to the government. The Paliyans were also able to secure some of the increase in non-timber forest produce collection that was administered by the Forest Department. The total lack of ‘tribal development schemes’ in the Palni Hills, otherwise common in other states of India, is another important factor when comparing the Paliyan situation of today with the situation in other tribal areas of India.

However, the increase in population and the expansion and intensification of human activities in almost all corners of the hills, have intensified the interaction between the Paliyans and their neighbours, and have also brought new elements into these relations. It is not easy to answer by a simple yes or no whether these facts have limited or widened Paliyan opportunities for developing their lives in accordance with their own objectives. The dynamic of these relations is complex. The rest of this book will try to shed some light on these issues.
Chapter Two

The Study of Hunter-Gatherers

This chapter will introduce the general theoretical framework within which I want to place this study. It starts with some brief remarks on where the Paliyans fit into the so-called hunter-gatherer studies, a subfield within anthropology that has developed since the 1960s. The next section will move on from the general discussion of the notion of hunter-gatherers to the context of India, and the relation between tribes (a broader category in India including hunter-gatherers) and castes. The chapter will end with a more detailed discussion of hunter-gatherer studies in southern India, and the way to represent such societies.

The American anthropologist Peter M. Gardner was the first to present the Paliyans to a wider scientific audience, bringing them into the scientific category of 'hunter-gatherers' (Lee and DeVore 1968: 4). After his main fieldwork among the Paliyans in 1965, they reappear now and then in international journals and conferences via his articles.

Specialised conferences on hunter-gatherer societies started already in the 1960s25 and have, since the famous Man the Hunter conference in 1966 (Lee and DeVore 1968), been regularly convened under title the International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies.26

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25 In 1965 one conference was organised by David Damas (Damas 1969a; 1969b).
These conferences and the accompanying published volumes of conference papers, have been the most important institution during recent decades for upholding the sub-field of hunter-gatherer studies within anthropology.

However, the people constituting hunter-gatherers have always played a central role in anthropological theory. Early examples are Emile Durkheim’s reliance on texts about Australian Aborigines and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s monograph on the Andaman Islanders. Later on we find Julian Steward’s theories of cultural ecology, partly based on Native American groups such as the Shoshone, and the use made by Claude Lévi-Strauss of Australian Aboriginal ethnography in his search for elementary structures of kinship.

The fascination among social scientists with contemporary hunter-gatherers has been spurred by the idea that they, better than any other living people, could give us clues about the early stages of humanity, which the rest of the world’s population are thought to have passed long ago. Such evolutionary ideas have generated many different images of hunter-gatherers over the last century, including the extreme claim by some scientists that the category itself is just a construction by scientists without any foundation in reality (see below).

Nevertheless, several general models of how contemporary hunter-gatherers are organised have developed with the intention of differentiating hunter-gatherers as a category from other categories of people in the world. Radcliffe-Brown put forward the idea that the Australian Aboriginals were socially organised in patrilineal/patrilocal *bordes* (1930). With new information to hand, Steward developed this notion into a typology of patrilineal, matrilineal, and composite *bands* (1963; see also Service 1962; 1979).

Later research showed that these models were too fixed. The variation of characteristics among contemporary hunter-gatherers was much greater than was initially assumed (Lee and DeVore 1968). Richard Lee and Irving DeVore proposed a new model for understanding this variation, ‘the nomadic style’ (1968: 11-12), consisting of the following five characteristics: egalitarianism, low population density, lack of territoriality, a minimum of food storage, and flux in band composition. This model was based on the ecological relation between the hunter-gatherer society and its environment, and
became known as ‘the generalized foraging model’ (Isaac 1990, see also Kelly 1995: 14-22).

Both evolutionary and ecological models were based on the assumption that contemporary hunter-gatherers could be studied in isolation from surrounding societies, or that, if they were influenced from outside, it would anyway be possible by certain measures to ignore those influences.

These models have been very important for the development of hunter-gatherer studies. They have generated a lot of interesting studies, and still have some proponents. However, they fall somewhat outside the focus of this study. Contemporary hunter-gatherers in general, and in South Asia in particular, are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to study in isolation from the surrounding society. From the fact that these societies are constituted also by their interaction with surrounding peoples, it follows that they do not fit more easily than any other contemporary people as examples for understanding the evolution of human behaviour. In this study I am not concerned with evolution. On the contrary, my study is about a contemporary people, and to emphasise this contemporariness we may call them, following Bird-David, ‘modern hunter-gatherers’ (1992b). To be specific, this book is about a modern group of hunter-gatherers and their interaction with other contemporary peoples, and the way these relations were articulated in the 1990s.

In the following I shall instead elaborate on a perspective called by some researchers ‘the interdependent model’ (Kelly 1995: 24-33). This links contemporary hunter-gatherers with the wider world. Such ideas are inspired by ideas of globalisation, world-system analysis (Wallerstein 1974) and Eric Wolf’s now classic Europe and the Peoples Without History (1982).

**Modern hunter-gatherers and interdependence**

The basic ideas of the interdependent model have come and gone in hunter-gatherer studies over the years, but gained a renewed force in the early 1980s. At that time new information showed that many
contemporary hunter-gatherer societies were actually partly dependent on food-producing activities and on an economy controlled and dominated beyond their own boundaries, and, even ‘worse’, had been so for hundreds of years (Arcand 1981; Barnard 1983; Schrire 1980; 1984; Wilmsen 1983). This information called into question whether the category ‘hunter-gatherer’ was at all appropriate. Could one really define such societies and cultures as significantly different from their food-producing neighbours?

In the 1990s this discussion among anthropologists, archaeologists, and ethnohistorians gained additional energy and intensity. The debate became known under the name the Kalahari Debate because of its geographical focus on the interaction between peoples in southern Africa.

The starting point was three articles in Current Anthropology (Solway and Lee 1990; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990; Lee and Guenther 1991). One extreme saw the concept ‘hunter-gatherer’ as an ‘eminently sensible category of humanity with a firm anchor in empirical reality’ (Lee 1992: 31). The other extreme held the view that the concept only serves ‘to authenticate Euroamerica’s subjective representation of its own past by fitting an iconic “Bushman” into a prefigured category, often called “primitive” and ethnographically labelled “hunter-gatherer” or “forager” today’ (Wilmsen and Denbow 1990: 494).

Wilmsen and others used new information, oral, linguistic, archaeological and historical, to show that people in the Kalahari area (!Kung, San, etc.) have been involved in extended trade networks for many centuries. This included those defined by Lee and others (Lee 1965; 1979; Marshall 1976) as ‘hunter-gatherers’. The San-speaking groups have engaged in pastoralism or worked as labourers for Bantu masters. Some groups had even maintained non-egalitarian social forms for a very long time (Wilmsen and Denbow 1990). These new facts, it was claimed, call for a ‘revision’ of the ‘orthodox’ definition of hunter-gatherers as a generic form of society dominated by hunting


29 This debate attracted within a few years no less than 600 articles and books concerning the issue and its background (Barnard 1992). Borneo is another area, which attracted a similar but less intensive debate (Brosius 1988; Cole 1947; Hoffman 1986; Kaskija 1988; Sellato 1988).
and gathering, with economic and political independence, a high degree of autonomy, and an internally egalitarian social system (Lee and DeVore 1968).

Further, Wilmsen and Denbow stated that, when outside observers found isolated groups engaged in hunting and gathering activities in the Kalahari in the late nineteenth century, those activities were not ‘indigenous but created by the collapse of mercantile capital, which in its genesis and growth had dismembered earlier, well-worn native links of communication’ (Wilmsen and Denbow 1990: 503). When Lee and others found such foragers in the Dobe area of Kalahari in the 1950s and 1960s, the San people were not close to aboriginality but using ‘one of several integrated subsistence strategies engaged in by all the poor — regardless of their ethnic or ethnographic categorisation — of rural Botswana...’ (ibid: 490).

Wilmsen’s and Denbow’s conclusion was that ‘Neither Zhu nor any other San peoples’ identity or cultural values depend on their being foragers’ (ibid: 519) and ‘that each group has defined itself in relations to others, not in terms of some universal hunter-gatherer value system or Heideggerian will to autonomy’ (ibid: 517). Therefore, it was argued, we have to recognise that San and Bantu peoples are ‘embedded in a single social formation’ (ibid: 492; c.f. Wilmsen 1989). They are both parts of Botswana’s rural poor. ‘Bushman’ and ‘San’ are invented categories (Wilmsen and Denbow 1990: 489). Similar views had earlier been put forward by Carmel Schrire (1980). She stated that ‘relations of domination and/or capital reached the Arctic or the Ituri Forest or Sarawak long before ethnographers did and, therefore, tributary or mercantilist or capitalist relations of production have transformed foragers into people like ourselves, as parts of larger systems with hierarchies, commodities, exploitation, and other inequities and all their accompanying social consequences’ (ibid: 18).

Lee seems to be the ‘orthodox’ view personified for the ‘revisionists’. He places the critique from Wilmsen and others within the broader framework of the contemporary anthropological/intellectual discourse of today. According to him, this kind of anthropological revisionism is part of the intellectual culture of late Capitalism. It illustrates two central propositions within contemporary Western thought: first, nothing is real and second, the ‘system’ is all-powerful (1992: 35).
The first proposition points to the question of the authenticity of those people that are represented by the anthropological text (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Clifford 1988). The ethnographic writing, as part of the construction by the observer (Marcus and Fischer 1986), could be 'at best partial, flawed, obscured, and above all relative (emphasis in original)', or as the poststructuralist critic would put it: there is 'no truth, only regimes of truth and power' (Lee 1992: 35). For Lee the poststructuralist's claim that 'the World System' can explain whatever we find in the societies of the world, is the above second proposition. This is a parallel, albeit on a wider scale, to Dumont's view of the Indian society of the 1950s (1957; 1980). He claimed that we cannot adequately understand any part of the Indian society, including all its different kinds of communities, whether tribes or castes, without taking as our starting point the caste system as a whole (see also Sinha 1957).

I agree with Lee that the method of 'universalising' in this way, whether with a present-oriented or retrospective perspective, and granting all agency to the dominant society, runs the risk of being no less romantic and uncritical than the Western researchers' eagerness to find the 'Primitive Other'.

As a comment on Solway and Lee (1990), Barnard distinguishes three important ways to improve the studies of hunter-gatherers. He suggests that we bring in a regional historical approach to larger systems, an ethnographically specific study of cultures with a focus on economic pluralism and dependency, and a recognition that there is both diversity and continuity in cultural-contact situations (1990; see also Shott 1992 and a similar standpoint from an archaeological perspective).

Elaborating on this, Susan Kent sees a weakness in the common focus on the similarities between hunter-gatherers within hunter-gatherer studies. With examples from Africa, she urges us to note the variation in how different contemporary and historical groups of hunter-gatherers have related to others and also the diversity within the groups themselves (1992). Internal diversities, she claims, are of such significance that they should by themselves constitute an interesting problem for anthropologists whatever they think of the category 'hunter-gatherer'. I shall have reason to come back to this issue later in this chapter.
Bird-David tries to go beyond the limitations of both the ‘orthodox’ and the ‘revisionist’ stances. Her approach is not only of interest for me because of her analytical perspective, but also because she takes us from the ethnography of southern Africa to the ethnography of southern India (Bird 1983a). From her own field experiences among the Nayaka (Naiken), a group of hunter-gatherers living in the same mountain range as the Paliyans but north of the Palni Hills, she suggests a more culture-sensitive view (Bird-David 1988; 1990; 1992a; 1992b; 1993).

She argues that while the ‘orthodox’ view rested too much on the three axioms of isolation, a pure hunter-gatherer economy, and timelessness, the ‘revisionist’ view is too ‘integrationistic’. That is, it gives too much weight to trade contacts and features of food production. According to her, both views rest on the assumption of an isolated and self-sufficient hunter-gatherer society. Among the ‘orthodox’ isolation is self-evident. Among the ‘revisionist’, trade etc., constitute recent developments expected to totally change the earlier ‘isolated’ hunter-gatherer social system.

The realisation that hunter-gatherer societies have been involved in economic and cultural interaction with surrounding societies for centuries, and especially so in southern India, ought instead to inspire us to ask how they have been able to maintain such relations, yet remain distinct from their neighbours in terms of ethnicity and economy. What is it within the hunter-gatherer social system that is ‘able to include, and provide a means to deal with, non-hunter-gatherers?’ (Bird-David 1988: 20). These last questions, and the extended acknowledgement of agency among hunter-gatherers, also address the need to give the voices of hunter-gatherers an explicit place in ethnographic texts, especially now when they are more than ever making their voices heard in the political arena, both in national and international contexts.

From this general discussion of the study of hunter-gatherers, let me now shift to the setting of my fieldwork and the subcontinent of India, and how this discussion is reflected in this region.
Tribes and castes in India

Within Indian sociology and anthropology the dominant view of hunter-gatherers has been of an ‘orthodox’ kind, starting with British administrators-turned-ethnographers and further developed by both foreign and native anthropologists. Hunter-gatherers, commonly included in the wider category ‘tribe’ were, in the available written sources dating from the eighteenth century and up to now, commonly looked upon as isolates outside the Hindu system. Through the sanskritisation (adopting Hindu customs) of their leaders (Srinivas 1962) and their own social/political weakness, they gradually became absorbed into Hindu society, following the evolutionary path of the dominant society (see, for example, Desai 1977; Elwin 1977; Fernandes 1982; Fürer-Haimendorf 1982).

A contrasting assumption postulated that the tribes were a subsystem of the Hindu system. Whatever changes there were in their internal structure, they could be explained by their relations to the dominant system. This view was influenced by the functionalist ideas developed by Radcliffe-Brown and early British anthropology and Levi-Strauss’s structuralism (Dumont 1957; Ghurye 1943).

Several recent studies in India try to show that the ethnographic facts about tribal people in India do not always easily fit into such pan-Indian models (Gellner 1991; Leavitt 1992; Steen 1985). They argue that the assumed traditional pan-Indian model, and especially the caste system, was to a large extent formulated through colonialism. They also imply that a too rigid dichotomy between castes and tribes has been used when analysing relationships between dominant and peripheral groups in South Asia.

30 Apart from various ethno-cultural groups such as Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, etc., tribes in India constitute a significant collection of peoples amounting to about 8% of the total population (more than 400 different groups, numbering about 50 million according to the 1991 Census). Although labelled with the single term ‘tribe’ they represent a wide variety and diversity on a multitude of levels, such as population size, economy, religion, language, social organisation, etc. For an introduction to the definition of the category see Béteille 1992. The most common use of the category today is the so-called ‘Scheduled Tribes’, in contrast to ‘Scheduled Castes’, where tribes and castes are listed within each state of India for administrative purposes. A common alternative is the term adivasi (the original inhabitants), today often used by the people themselves and especially in Central India (see also Chapter Ten).
Thinking of India in terms of castes and tribes puts the emphasis on ‘units’, preventing an understanding of the dynamics of the interaction between castes and tribes and how these links are historically constructed. Instead, we need a model which neither subordinates the tribal world to the caste society nor studies the former in isolation, a model which focuses on relationships and processes rather than on states and essences.31

An early attempt to overcome the caste/tribe dichotomy was made by F. G. Bailey (1960) through his introduction of the ‘tribe-caste continuum’. He concluded that if we got rid of the evolutionary framework, the relationship between tribes and castes would come into focus. Bailey suggested certain criteria for identifying populations as belonging to castes or tribes. The most important criterion would be access to land for cultivation. Direct access to land would mean being closer to the ‘tribal’ pole, while rights to land through relational dependency implied being closer to the ‘caste’ pole (1960: 14). Others have introduced criteria like ‘mode of subsistence’ (Nag 1968), or ‘level of technology’ (Sinha 1965). The drawback with such approaches is that, although they focus on relational aspects, they still put ‘units’ on the continuum, thus losing a more sophisticated analysis of the social and cultural features of intergroup interaction. In these studies there is also a tendency to define groups at a single point in time. The importance of history and the point that castes and tribes may be constituted within processes of the wider society are omitted (Steen 1985).

There is also a ‘revisionist’ stance parallel to that found within the general hunter-gatherer studies. Its focus is more on the modern development of the Indian economy and politics and its effects on tribes, taking the caste/tribe dichotomy as a premise. It regards tribes as classes or ethnic groups transformed first into peasants and then into an agricultural working class in a unilinear process (see, for example, Bardhan 1973; Bhowmik 1981).

Critics state that even if tribal life is deeply interlinked with and influenced by the modern state of India, tribes have in many instances been able to maintain their own identity and to a certain degree their own way of life (Singh 1985). This is currently expressed in the multifarious forms of ‘resistance’ pursued by tribes towards economic

31 An early critic of this kind is Fried 1968.
and political ‘development’ in their local areas, from forceful demands for autonomy within an ethnic framework in the north, the centre and the northeast, to the low-profile ‘withdrawal’ in some geographically marginal areas (Kelkar and Nathan 1991; Baviskar 1995; Karlsson 2000; Gooch 1998b; Norström 1999; 2001; 2002).

Devalle, in her study of the Jharkand movement in Bihar, lays emphasis on the importance of ethnohistory. She urges us to recognise the people being studied as social agents acting within their own conceptual framework in order to understand tribal action within contemporary political processes (1992).

The above critics, from different perspectives, all ask for a more culture sensitive view to enable anthropology to capture the current social complexity of India. As my study will focus on strategies related to Paliyan subsistence activities and the values and beliefs that guide them and create meaning in their daily life, I have to ask: What is the relation between Paliyan values and beliefs and the dominant value system in their region? How do they fit into what Chris Fuller (1992) calls popular Hinduism, the enduring structures within Hindu religion and the Indian society? The latter question implies that Indian society is not equivalent to Hindu society, and that it is important to point out that Hindus belong to a religiously plural society. This pluralism is actually at the heart of my study. Is the value system of the Paliyans and its relation to Hinduism a sign of Indian pluralism, as communities of Christians and Muslims are, or are the Paliyans a marginal group encompassed by the Hindu worldview?

Although Indian society has gone through continuing changes over time, we know from plentiful anthropological field experience that there are also structures of longer endurance within Hindu religion and Indian society. This is clearly shown in the multitude of caste and rural studies from Tamil Nadu. Unfortunately for me, all of these studies are from the plains, the core area of Hinduism in southern India. It is hard to estimate the extent to which the situation of the caste groups in the Palni Hills corresponds to the life of the castes of the plains (and especially in retrospect). There are no studies of the caste peoples of these hills so far, apart from two descriptive and

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32 Some of the more important ones are Beals 1974; Beck 1972; Béteille 1965; Daniel 1987; Dirks 1987; Dumont 1986; Good 1983; 1985; Gough 1960; 1989; and Moffat 1979.
limited studies undertaken for the India Census of 1961 (Nambiar 1964; Nambiar and Krishnamurthy 1966).

The geographical distribution of village studies in Tamil Nadu also implies that they do not include any discussion of relations between tribes and castes, apart from the studies by Steen (1985), Beck (1976) and Hockings (1980; 1989a). The two latter demonstrate that one of the Nilgiri tribes (a hill area that is also part of the Western Ghats) originated as a caste in the plains. The study by Steen makes some interesting points on relations between tribes and castes, but does not present any new ethnographical data.

The written sources most valuable for me are instead the studies carried out within southern India guided by the category ‘hunter-gatherer’ rather than ‘tribe’, and the explanations they offer for how southern Indian ‘hunter-gatherers’ relate to the wider society.

Hunter-gatherers and South India

Early writings on hunter-gatherers in India treated them as examples of a prehistoric stage in human social evolution. A representative study of this view from southern India, based on extended fieldwork, was U. R. Ehrenfels’ study of the Kadar (Kadan) of the Western Ghats (1952).33 He argues that ‘Kadan life was still a tangible survival of an early, food-gathering civilisation in India’ (ibid: 4), although he admits that there has been interaction between the Kadars and outside communities for centuries (especially through barter/trade). He claims, however, that the relational aspects he finds, and the Kadars’ ‘dependency’ on outside resources, are of recent origin.

A move away from viewing these communities as survivals of an earlier stage of ‘primitivism’ came with Fox’s introduction of the notion of ‘professional primitives’ (1969).34 With examples from several groups of hunter-gatherers in India, he claims that they ‘can mistakenly be regarded as primitive tribes or “fossils” when in fact they are intimately and irrevocably dependent on advanced civilisation’ (p.158). Their dependence is part of an adjustment on behalf of the hunter-gatherer community, especially in the economic and social

33 See also Fürer-Haimendorf 1943; 1960 and from North India Roy 1978.
34 Gardner made this break with earlier ideas already in his unpublished thesis of 1965.
domains. They have been able to survive as distinct communities, ‘not because of their removal from the Hindu society or their occupation of difficult terrain’, but ‘because of their patterned interaction with the larger society (ibid.). A common consequence of the latter, argued Fox, is the adjustment of social organisation, from group-based to individual/family-based, in order to fit into an economic system based on local and regional trade. By using their experience and knowledge as hunters and gatherers (primitives), such communities adjust their lives to become, more or less, full-time collectors and traders of forest resources for outsiders (professionals).

Fox’s article became very influential for the forthcoming studies of hunter-gatherers in India. The major studies of southern India conducted from the 1960s onwards have mainly focused on the internal social and economic organisation of specific groups, but they have all treated their material within the context of regional transactions along the lines put forward by Fox.

Both Gardner (1965: 76-93) and Brian Morris (1982a: 11-24) stress the historical interaction between hill tribes (including hunter-gatherers) and people from the surrounding plains. To back up the argument they show how early written sources, and especially the vivid and detailed descriptions of nature and people in classic Tamil literature (the Sangam Poetry), give evidence of such relations as far back as fifteen hundred years ago. Relational aspects were also confirmed in the first modern writings from southern India at the end of the eighteenth century. Examples are Abbé Dubois’ work from the period 1792-1823 (1994), and the letters form Jacobus Visscher, who resided in Cochin, Kerala, 1717-1723 (Menon 1924-33). Significant aspects mentioned in these sources are the formalised tributary relationship that was established between some hill tribes and individual states and petty chieftains. The tribes provided forest products as important revenue for the political leadership of some of the surrounding areas.


36 The Tamil classic literature includes the Sangam literary works, dated between the first and fifth centuries AD. See Nilakantan Sastri 1993 and Jesudasan 2000 for an introduction to its cultural and religious content.
However, as recognised by both Gardner and Morris, there is a gap of about a thousand years in the written sources, which makes it problematic to claim that the hunter-gatherers we have as our object of study today are descended from the very same hunter-gatherers mentioned in classic Tamil literature. Not until the reports by the colonial administration in the nineteenth century are groups of people mentioned by the names they carry today. For the purpose of this study this issue is of no great concern. Of greater relevance is the confirmation these sources give of the long-term history of transactions between hill and plains people, even if the information available cannot be used to describe the intensity, character, and change in relations over time in any detail.

These historical relations have to be recognised when one evaluates the writings of Fox, Gardner, and Morris. Fox's main thesis is that the change of social organisation we find among Indian hunter-gatherers, from group-based to individual/family-based, was due to trade with outsiders. In the same way, Morris claims that 'the “fragmentary” nature of Hill Pandaram group structuring can be seen as a mode of organisation most suited for the dual nature of their economy, geared as it is both to subsistence production and to external trade' (1982b: 184). These conclusions drawn by Fox and Morris contain a major problem. They give interaction with outside society such a determining significance for internal social relations that internal agency and room for change are downplayed. This is even more stressed when they get into details. Trade relations have also created highly migratory individuals, a lack of any formal kin pattern in the composition of residential aggregates, and a lack of extensive reciprocity and sharing among families (Fox 1969: 142; Morris 1982b: 184). However, we need to nail down analytically the internal social effects of external relations and not just imply in a functionalist way that the fit between hunter-gatherer social relations and trade organisational demands is also the reason for the former's existence. That would be to make cause and effect only assumed.

Gardner expands further on the interaction between hunter-gatherers and others, using the Paliyans as the example, building a model he calls 'bi-cultural oscillation' (1985; 2000; see also 1966). He concludes that 'Paliyans have two ways of life' (1985: 414), the

adoption of nomadism and self-sufficiency, i.e. the retreat to the forests and an economy based on hunting and gathering, a 'responses to harassment by their cultivating neighbours - verbal abuse, threatened violence, physical blows, rape, and murder' (ibid.). The second way of life, mainly based on wage labour for agriculturalists in what Gardner calls 'the frontier zone', '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).

Although they admit the remaining possibility of 'retreat' or 'return to the forest', and of at least a part-time hunting and gathering mode of life for south Indian hunter-gatherers, Fox, Gardner and Morris come close to the 'revisionist' view referred to above, where the market economy is seen to encompass whatever comes its way. The fact that the retreat is forced by outsiders seems to 'colour every aspect of their culture' (Gardner 1972: 407). The authors fall into the trap of concluding that the mere physical closeness between hunter-gatherers and a developing market economy subsumes the hunter-gatherers (Widlok 1994; Kent 1992).

The deterministic view of outside forces and especially the market economy is challenged by Bird-David through the introduction of the term 'modern hunter-gatherers', as I mentioned earlier. Like Gardner and Morris she recognises that most contemporary hunter-gatherers 'combine, and flexibly shift between hunting and gathering and various other strategies, including the engagement in wage work, trade, occasional cultivation and stock-keeping, and even (in Australia and North America) government work and office work, as well as drawing welfare benefit' (1992b: 22). However, instead of seeing 'the other strategies' as activities weakening the hunter-gatherer mode of life, as Fox, Gardner, and Morris seem to do, she claims that '[t]he hunter-gatherer social system, without being fundamentally changed, has been able to incorporate "other people" as economic as well as social resources, to be used for maintaining the hunter-gatherer way of life' (1988: 29-30).

Bird-David elaborates her views most clearly in a discussion of a group of Nayaka who combine hunting and gathering with wage labour on a rubber plantation (Bird 1983b). Through work on the plantation the Nayaka change parts of the content of their economy, in the
pattern of production (wage labour), consumption (rice), and distribution (money). At 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). In conclusion, and in comparison with Morris and Gardner, 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 'encompass' outside resources; i.e. allow changes to take place at one level, while another level remains untransformed.

A problem, though, with Gardner’s and Bird-David’s suggestions for capturing the relation between South Indian hunter-gatherers and outsiders is that although they to a certain degree recognise 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. Neither Gardner, nor Bird-David, gives any clear account of how these sections would fit into their suggested models. Instead sedentarisation and commoditisation are downplayed.

A pertinent question is in what way the commoditisation of the economy of South Indian hunter-gatherers has been internalised and adapted to other forms of exchange within these groups. The appearance of commoditisation and cash is 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 because of 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 produce 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, for whatever reason, take up a job with 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 on their own, taking up long-term alliances with non-governmental organisations and developing close relations with the local authorities.

My suggestion, which follows Kent (1996, see also 1998), is that we need to take into account the variety within groups, without downplaying or excluding those variations that do not seem to fit in. In this way we shall see that variation in strategies is in itself central to their 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 that people’s 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 recognised by the people themselves as different strategies or lifestyles.

Discussing hunter-gatherers in the Kalahari of southern Africa, George Silberbauer remarks that full-time foragers and Basarwa (Bushmen) residents of ranches and cattle posts maintain close and very active social links, so that to equate ‘a way getting food with a style of culture began to show a few cracks and shakes’ (1996: 22). Instead, he asks whether there is a set of ‘socio-cultural practices – a socio-cultural style’, that is distinct for people who more or less are, or recently have been, dependent on hunting and gathering (ibid: 23). This resembles Barnard’s discussion of ‘a primitive communist mode of production’, in which he suggests a kind of foraging ethos, a foraging ‘mode of thought’ rather than ‘mode of production’. This mode of thought, he suggests, ‘persists after people cease to depend on hunting and gathering as their primary means of subsistence’ (Barnard 1993: 33; see also 2001; 2002). He claims that Bushmen are ‘foragers’ in many ways and to them ‘wage-labour and seasonal changes in subsistence pursuits are but large-scale foraging strategies (ibid.).

This thinking comes very close to the way I shall deal with my data on the Paliyans of the Palni Hills. On the socio-economic level the Paliyans show a great variety of economic strategies, a variety often also manifested within local groups, which may lead outsiders to
consider some as different from others, i.e. often simplified as 'traditional' versus 'modern'. On another level, though, the Paliyans themselves recognise 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 with Gardner’s idea of 'bi-cultural oscillation' or Bird-David’s assumption of 'encompassment'. The following text will focus on the many different ways the Paliyans interact with outsiders, how these relations are intertwined with internal relations, and how, in particular, new resources in the form of cash, land and alliances are incorporated into Paliyans’ views on social relations and basic values. I shall show that the Paliyans in the 1990s, with their increased integration into the wider Tamil society, did not lose their strong commitment to self-reliance and the basic values of social relations. To maintain this, however, they have had to re-think and re-evaluate the wider social setting in the Palni Hills.
PART II

THE PALIYANS OF THE PALNI HILLS: FROM SIBLING GROUPS TO VILLAGES
Map 2: The Palni Hills, the surrounding plains and the main field sites.
Chapter Three

The Paliyans of the Palni Hills: Their Economy and Residential Pattern

In this chapter I shall give a brief overview of the contemporary Paliyan situation and their recent history in the Palni Hills. I shall show that the economy varies to a significant degree from one Paliyan group to the next, correlating with different circumstances and relations with outsiders. It will also be clear that the Paliyans have been involved for many decades in a process of moving ‘out’ of the forests into areas dominated by caste people. The implications of these changes will be touched upon, but developed further in later chapters.

Introduction

In my early visits to the Palni Hills in 1991, I traversed the valleys and slopes extensively (Larsson and Norström 1993). During these walks my guides and I met several Paliyan groups. When we visited the Palangai Valley on the northern side, our objective was a local farmer who had told us that a group of Paliyans had settled down with his support in the vicinity of his plantation. When we reached his farm we met several of these Paliyan families. They said that the simple grass-and-stick huts in front of which we were standing would in the near future be exchanged for better houses. Their hope was to settle down in this place and eventually start their own cultivation.

We met another Paliyan group above the Talajar Falls, one of the most conspicuous landmarks on the southern slopes of the Palni Hills.38 The families of this group were spread out in this otherwise

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38 Another popular name for this waterfall is the Rat Tail Falls. It is visible from the main road up to the hills, the Law’s Ghat Road, with a height of more than 100 m.
more or less uninhabited area. While showing us the surroundings we stopped at a small stream near to several dolmens\textsuperscript{39}. At this place, where the trees were interspersed with patches of grassland, the Paliyans planned to establish a village. They pointed out specific spots where they thought it would be suitable to erect new huts. With the help of a Christian organisation, which had promised to help them, they thought that it would be possible to realise this idea.

The impression I got from these brief meetings, including my visits to the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley mentioned in the Introduction, was that resettlement had become the issue of the day among many Paliyan groups. This implied a change of residential pattern from single sibling groups\textsuperscript{40} living dispersed in semi-permanent settlements to several sibling groups coming together in permanent villages. Over the following years I learned that this kind of resettlement among the Paliyans was a general trend in the Palni Hills (for a map and a list of all Paliyan settlements/villages and some general characteristics, see Appendix II). The process started with some groups several decades back, gained momentum in the 1980s, and is still going on as we enter the new millennium. One important reason for this shifting residential pattern has been the expanding opportunities of wage labour in the area, dominated by cash-crop cultivation. These new opportunities have influenced the content and degree of interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders to such an extent that the question of changing residential pattern has become, as I mentioned in the Introduction, the critical event among the Paliyans during recent decades.

Another significant factor in this resettlement process is its general character. Changes of residential pattern and the introduction of resettlement schemes among hunter-gatherers have been a common theme in hunter-gatherer studies.\textsuperscript{41} These changes are often seen as the outcome of an increasing competition over resources, caused by commercial exploitation and immigration of other people into the areas

\textsuperscript{39} Prehistoric monuments made by stone slabs, often in the Palni Hills with three supporting stones and one capstone (Hosten 1907; Kapp 1985; Rosner 1959).

\textsuperscript{40} A sibling group corresponds to the notion of the ‘band’, commonly used among social scientists for residential aggregates of hunter-gatherers.

of the hunter-gatherers. Governments have for diverse reasons often taken the initiative in starting these resettlement processes. In India such state-run schemes have accordingly been the main factor in resettling hunter-gatherers within the nation. Remarkable as it may seem, no such centralised scheme has yet been introduced in the Palni Hills.

According to my view, the change of settlement pattern among the hunter-gatherers in the Palni Hills should instead be seen as a self-initiated response to changing circumstances. This fact has given room for a high degree of variation in the process. The pace and pattern vary from one valley to the next. In several cases Paliyan families have created villages of their own. In some areas Paliyan groups have become part of caste villages. In other valleys no significant settlement change has yet taken place. A significant feature in these processes is the fact that outside actors have been common as mediating partners, varying from non-governmental organisations (hereafter NGOs) and local caste leaders to benign landowners and occasional local government officers, the last on their own initiative rather than through central directives. In spite of these changes, it is important to note that no Paliyan family has moved out of its home area, as far as I know. Either they still live within the forests, or in the foothills, the latter close enough to allow for continuing access to the forests. Further, whatever the degree of these changes, we may conclude that recent decades have witnessed such radical changes in the interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders that no Paliyans have been left unaffected.

In Chapter Four to Six I shall follow this process of change in detail by focusing on one local area, the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley, situated on the southern slopes of the Palni Hills. In this chapter I provide, as an introduction, a general overview of the Palni Hills.

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42 Such schemes have been introduced among the Birhor in Bihar (Sinha 1972), the Chenchu in Andhra Pradesh (Bhowmick 1992), the Hill Pandaram in Kerala (Morris 1976), the Jenu Kuruba in Karnataka (Misra 1978), the Kadar in the neighbouring Anamalai Hills in Tamil Nadu and the Great Andamanese and the Onge of the Andaman Islands (Chakraborty 1990; Basu 1990).

43 A couple of cases have been reported where youngsters have followed landowners to work for their families in Chennai and Delhi. Another case is that of an adolescent boy who left his family to work for a water-drilling unit in Rajasthan in the late 1990s (he returned after two years).
bringing us to groups of Paliyans living both in the foothills and on the upper plateau, as well as deep inside the forested valleys. I shall show that, although the changes in each local setting included important common features, especially in the character of changing external and internal relations, the contents and timings of these changes differ to a great extent due to local conditions. By recognising these variations my aim is to provide a deeper understanding of Paliyan flexibility and ingenuity in making a living. The chapter will also introduce other important actors in the area, and especially those belonging to the categories of caste landowners, forest contractors, local government representatives and NGOs, thus placing the Palni Hills in a regional context including the surrounding plains.

Let me begin with some remarks on the notion of ‘village’ related to Paliyan ‘settlements’. The Paliyans took the ‘village’ as a social category and settlement form caste villages in the surrounding hills and plains. As I mentioned above there are also cases where sibling groups and families of Paliyans have moved into caste villages, and today live in their own ward (cheri) within these villages. The majority of the Indian population still live in villages. These are usually more or less nucleated settlements, and especially so in the Palni Hills. The steep landscape with limited flat ground encourages the houses and streets to be clamped tightly together like the narrow streets and blocks of a bazaar area in the bigger Tamil Nadu towns (Nambiar 1964; Nambiar and Krishnamurthy 1966). An open space is usually kept in the centre of the village, flanked by a school and a temple. Fields owned and tilled by the members of the village surround the village site. Anthropologists and historians have debated the village as a social category at length, and demonstrated considerable variation within India. Nevertheless, I agree with Chris Fuller that in general Indian ‘villages are normally recognised as significant social units, which are defined and constituted by relationships among villagers themselves, their local deities, and the land on which they live’ (1992: 128). Although an internal division is a fundamental characteristic of the caste system manifested within the village (for example, separate streets or wards for each caste group), a strong identification with the local community, as opposed to other surrounding villages, is an important counterbalance to that division.
In the Palni Hills the caste villages, including the farm land, are quite open places in contrast to the surrounding forests, and linked by roads and regularly used paths to other villages and the markets and towns of the low-lying plains. In contrast, a Paliyan settlement, which usually consists of a sibling group of 10 – 30 individuals\(^44\), does not create such physical openness. For protection the Paliyans usually place their settlement inside the forest and/or on ridges very difficult to reach for others without notice. The huts are simple constructions of grass and sticks (sometimes sealed with mud) placed close together. Occasionally caves are used. Each family (the conjugal pair and their children) has its own hut and household, although there are cases of several families living in the same hut. The area around the huts is usually not cleared in any regular manner. With a semi-sedentary\(^45\) lifestyle and few or no investments in the surrounding landscape, the settlements have a temporary character and can easily be abandoned. With the ongoing resettlement process it is, however, important to recognise that the differences between a Paliyan settlement and a village of a simpler kind are often not clear-cut.

In total there are about 40 Paliyan groups, including more than 4,000 individuals, in the Palni Hills. Among these we find families who for a couple of decades have practised paddy cultivation, such as, for example, the Paliyans in the caste village of Poolur in the Upper Palnis and the Paliyan village of Thalinji on the northwestern slopes. At the other end of a non-forest-forest dependency continuum we have a group of Paliyans living at Mungil Palam in the interior of a valley on the northern side. This group mainly subsists on hunting and gathering, including the staple wild yam. Further, at Kudhirayar Dam lives a group which to a large extent depends on the collecting of non-timber forest produce for the market. The dependence on forest resources varies from one group to another. Some claim no use of forest resources at all today, while others are almost fully dependent on

\(^{44}\) A sibling group consists of several siblings, their spouses, children and parents if alive.

\(^{45}\) I prefer the concept ‘semi-sedentary’ instead of ‘semi-nomadism’ to capture the settlement pattern among the Paliyans. It lays emphasis on the sedentary character of the Paliyan settlement. While the settlement used to be in the same site for more than a year and often for several years, individuals and families move in and out of the settlement much more frequently (cf. Ingold 1999: 403).
hunting and gathering, the differences significantly shaping their interaction with outsiders.

I shall now turn to two Paliyan groups regularly visited by my assistant Vincent and me during the fieldwork period. The first group is the already mentioned Paliyans of the Kudhirayar Dam, situated in the foothills on the northern slopes, an area where the hill slopes are unsuitable for cash-crop cultivation. The second group is the Paliyans in Siruvattukadu Valley, a more or less enclosed valley towards the eastern tip of the Palni Hills and part of the Lower Palnis, an area dominated by coffee estates. These two cases will be followed by some glimpses of Paliyan groups from other areas of the hills.

**The non-timber forest produce collectors of Kudhirayar Dam**

The Paliyans at Kudhirayar Dam live in a small village close to the dam site in the foothills where the Coimbatore Plains meet the northern slopes of the Palni Hills at the outflow of the Kudhirayar River. As close neighbours they have the caste village of Kudhirayar, recently established by the dam workers and their families who stayed behind after the dam was completed in 1990. The dam construction initiated by the Tamil Nadu Government was the last major event creating a shift of settlement for the Paliyans in this area. However, it was not the first time they had moved settlement. Their recent history is a good example of the non-linearity of Paliyan changes from an economy based on hunting and gathering to an economy including wage labour.

The original habitat for most of the Paliyans in Kudhirayar Dam was inside the forests on the mountain slopes around the Kudhirayar River. This perennial river has its sources in the *shola* forest around the old caste hill village of Kukkal, in the Upper Palnis. This area, between the Upper Palnis and the foothills, is still uninhabited, apart from the Paliyans. However, most Paliyans are today attached to Kudhirayar Dam, with their own huts in the village, even if several individuals and families remain for a considerable part of the year up on the slopes inside the forests.

Some Paliyan elders in Kudhirayar Dam recall the period (before the 1960s) when they lived in these forests surviving only through the collecting and hunting of forest resources, without much contact with
the Tamil caste society. These are the words of Kappan, a 55 years old man:46

There is one forest to the west where my ancestors lived. There are a lot of stones along the river at that place. We had wild yam and other things. Otherwise, how could we eat? My group at that time had different kinds of vegetables and fruits in that forest. Sometimes we would feel uneasy eating all these things because some of them may have been poisonous. But my ancestors ate everything. Then many among my people died from fever and headache inside the forest. In that period we never saw any injections or tablets. Because of that we planned to move, and decided to go from that forest to the plains area. We decided to live in the foothills. If this hadn’t happened we might not have come down to the plains.

You know that cave near the river (a place Vincent and I had visited during an earlier trip). That is the place we lived in during that period. There we didn’t live together like we do here. In that period maybe two or three families stayed together and had wild yams. And we didn’t go to the foothills at that time. If we collected honey we didn’t sell it. We gave it to our children. Do you know wild yam? That is the main food for us. We can’t get enough nutrition from rice food, only from the wild yam. Now we are living in the foothills, but we still live as before. We will not visit the cities. We may go to this village (the neighbouring caste village) with ten or twenty sticks (a kind of bamboo) used by cattle owners to control their cattle. We will exchange them for millet. In the forest we suffered in different ways and therefore decided to come to this village area. We had, among other things, elephant problems. We couldn’t live there with our children. In that time we didn’t use beedis (Indian cigarettes). No one had the habit of smoking. Some persons used to chew the betel leaf (together with the areca nut). But the young people didn’t like it. We didn’t have these matchboxes. Our group made fire with the help of vengakali (flint stone) and cotton (wild silkcotton) from the forest, which we set on fire.

They lived like that in the older period. They used to disappear when they met strangers. If you had come in that period they would have ran away, one after the other. It was because of fear that they acted like that. It is only now that we are talking to you. Now we mingle with other village people and have relations with them. Because of that, we now easily speak with others. Every one of us, from 60 years of age to the young ones, has relations with village people.

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46 This is an extract from an interview by Vincent at Kudhirayar Dam on 2 November 1993. Kappan’s family mainly subsisted on lemongrass oil extraction.
While Kappan’s group still lived in the forests, there were other Paliyans, ancestors of other families among the Kudhirayar Paliyans, who during the same period had left the forests and attached themselves to farmers in the foothills. They were doing farm work for a landowner in a place called Anaimettukalam, some kilometres west of Kudhirayar Dam in the foothills. At that time only a handful of farmers cultivated the nearby dry foothill area, which compared with today was very much less inhabited.

In the 1960s some of these Paliyan families did agricultural work for the landowner and yet others began to herd his cattle up in the forests during the summer. The herders remained inside the forests, living around a pattu (small open grass areas within the forests). Now and then some of them came down to get payment (in rice) from the owner. These families, as well as other families still living up in the forests, continued to rely on forest resources, while the families doing farm work only occasionally visited the forests. Periya Poongan, an old samiadi (god dancer, a spirit medium) still talks about this period as the time when they had two kinds of Paliyans: those who knew a lot about the opportunities offered in the plains, and those who knew a lot about the forests.

When the owner of Anaimettukalam died, several families left and started farm work in Kundupuliyamaram, another place in this foothill area, where they did weeding work and harvested paddy. Other Paliyans continued to herd cattle for different owners up in the forests. In the 1970s new work opportunities became available for the Paliyans. A Kavundar caste man introduced them to forest contractors, who asked them to collect non-timber forest produce for the market. Although this had taken place earlier it now became a regulated system (see below).

In 1976, ten years later, the Paliyans living in Kundupuliyamaram ran into conflict with the owner and moved to the nearby forest along the Kudhirayar River. Other families from the upper forest areas joined this settlement over the years. Five years after the first families came to this place, in 1981, the construction of the dam started. When the opening day of the dam arrived in 1990 this section of the Kudhirayar River and the surrounding forest became flooded. The Paliyans were resettled in the place where they are still living today, to the right of the dam wall.
The collection of non-timber forest produce became the most popular source of cash among the Paliyans. If we include firewood collection, 26 families out of a total of 31, obtained their main income, or a substantial part of it, from this source in 1994.47

The collection of non-timber forest produce is regulated by the state through a contractual system administered by the Forest Department. The products are leased out singly or in clumps. Normally those of greater commercial importance are sold singly. The lease period is usually one year and covers the area of one forest range.48 The lessee (contractor) who takes the area on lease, either by himself or through agents, approaches local people to collect and deliver the products. Payment is today normally in cash on a quantity basis.

In Kudhirayar the contractors have been the same for many years. One person has the contract for lemongrass oil and another for most of the other products. They both have their business centre in nearby Palani Town. The products are mostly collected by the Paliyans who are approached at the village site at the right season for each product.

A local forest guard told me in 1994 that there were in total 41 different products leased out in the Kudhirayar area. The most important ones for the Paliyans are lemongrass, gooseberry (*Emblia officinalis*), galnut (*Terminalia chebula*), a palm leaf used for broomsticks (*eechamar, Phoenix silvestri*), and honey. Apart from the above, two other forest products, firewood and one kind of bamboo, are of major importance for the Paliyans in Kudhirayar. These two items are not included in the authorised list of non-timber forest produce collecting in the area. To collect them is therefore regarded as illegal by the authorities. This leads to special considerations when collecting and selling them.

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47 26 families out of 31 gives 84% of the total group involved in non-timber forest produce collection. In 1996 this figure was 76% (Schmidt 1996). An important reason why non-timber forest produce collection became a possible asset to such a degree for the Paliyans in this area, was the fact that they had little or no competition from other people, as the slopes and foothills in the 1960s (the start of the contractual system) were very thinly populated and the only available people with enough skills and knowledge were the Paliyans.

48 A ‘forest range’ is an administrative term dividing the forest for administrative purposes into areas under local Forest Department control. The forest range at Kudhirayar also includes the neighbouring valleys to the west and east.
Before going into details about how cash-oriented gathering is organised, let me give some figures and indicate the seasons for some of these products in the Kudhirayar area.49 There are hundreds of gooseberry trees spread out in many areas of the valley. In a normal year about 1,000 working days are spent picking the gooseberries, producing 25,000 to 30,000 kg, with a good year yielding up to 50,000 kg. The season is between November and January.

Galnuts are available in hundreds of trees especially on the eastern side of the valley. A normal year can produce 10,000 to 20,000 kg, a good year up to 30,000 kg. The season lasts from December to June and offers on average about 800 working days per year. 1,500 litres of lemongrass oil are prepared each year, with a total of about 6,000 working days. The season normally lasts from November to January, but could be extended to February-March if the rains are good, as they were in 1994.

The eechamar trees are found in many places in the valley. Each year about 200 working days are spent by Paliyans collecting their leaves, yielding 100 to 200 bundles (each bundle weighing 20 to 30 kg). Honey collection normally yields about 30 to 40 tins at 25 kg per tin, but in a good year up to 50 tins can be harvested. An estimated 150 working days a year are spent by the Paliyans on this task. However, the number of honeycombs decreased significantly in the hills during the 1990s, probably due to an epidemic bee disease (PHCC 1993b).

Let us now look into the particularities of collecting these forest products, the organisation and co-operation among the Paliyans when collecting and the organisation between the collectors and contractors or other buyers. We need to distinguish between the collecting of lemongrass and other authorised non-timber forest products, and the illegal collecting of firewood and bamboo, because there are significant differences between these activities.

The organisation of collecting is very similar for products like galnut, gooseberry and eechamar. The contractor shows up in the village at the time of the season. As prices are not fixed from one year to another, he makes a deal with the villagers offering to pay a certain amount per quantity and to come back and pay for what they have collected within a certain time. There is no fixed quantity that they have to collect. He will pay each collector according to the amount

49 If nothing else is stated, the figures for Kudhirayar area are taken from PHCC 1993a.
s/he has collected. The contractor signs a paper for each product for each collector, certifying that the Paliyans are collecting legally for him during this period in case the Forest Department staff find reason to check upon them.

How often and how much each individual or family collects is up to them. The contractor has no direct way of determining their decisions, but the price he is ready to pay influences the motivation of the Paliyans to get to work. If they consider it too low they will not work. Now and then the contractor and the individual Paliyan will negotiate or quarrel about what days to work and how much to pay. Normally some consensus is reached.

In collecting these non-timber forest products the Paliyans usually work singly or in small groups. Co-operation is not necessary to complete the task. Each individual man, woman, or youngster, collects according to their capacity and gets paid for his/her own harvest, although young people normally give part of their payment to their parents as they are members of the same household. Who work together is not regulated in any sense and often changes from one day to the next. Their own way of putting it is that 'we do as we like'.

Normally they will leave in the morning after breakfast, returning in the late afternoon, before dark. If the area is far away they stay one or two days in the forest in temporarily erected grass huts. At certain regularly visited sites, these huts are left standing and can be used again with minimal repair. When working in a group, the Paliyans walk together to the collecting area. There they split up and each person selects a tree. If the yield is not enough for everybody they move to the next area, leaving behind what they have collected so far. In the new area the procedure is repeated. When all have collected enough, they pick up the yield of the day and carry it on their heads down to the village at the dam-site. There each individual stores the harvest in his/her family hut until the contractor comes to close the deal.

Paliyan groups do not recognise any territories or individual ownership of trees, plants, etc. The harvest, however, belongs to the person who has collected it. According to the Paliyans in Kudhirayar this is always respected, even if you leave part of your harvest unattended in the forest.

Non-timber forest produce collection is considered an easy but quite heavy job because of the long transportation of the products
down to the plains, usually between one and five hours’ walk. What each individual earns is restricted by how much s/he can carry rather than by how much s/he can collect. This work therefore excludes the very old and the very young.

When the contractor arrives from Palani Town with some helpers, all the Paliyans bring their produce to the open place at the centre of the village. The contractor checks the quality and with his helpers measures each and everyone’s yield and makes the payment. The details are kept in an account book in which each individual’s name and balance are noted down. In this village the Paliyans can accumulate small amounts of debt with the contractor, but usually never to the extent of giving the contractor the ‘upper hand’ over them. When the deal is settled they all put the produce in sacks or bundles and carry them down to the road some hundred of metres away, where they are loaded on to the local bus or a lorry. To end the day’s business, the contractor before leaving often invites the collectors for tea at the tea stall in front of the bus stop.

Lemongrass collecting is a more complex operation. This grass is used for the extraction of lemongrass oil, a medical ointment also available on the world market today. The actual extraction takes place along the slopes and valleys where the grass is growing. The process requires the co-operation of several individuals. The Paliyans do this within their families or sibling groups and ten to thirteen groups are engaged each year. Simple sheet metal stills are provided by the contractor (six units in 1994) and are kept by the families in the village. The extracted oil is stored in plastic cans containing 22 litres. It takes a team about seventeen days to extract that amount. This means that each team has to stay at the extraction site during this period. To reach the sites takes three to five hours’ walk from the dam. Sites are selected for two reasons: the availability of lemongrass and of water.

To describe the process in detail, let us follow Kaliyani and his family when they left one morning in March 1994. They were ten persons in all: Kaliyani and his wife Karuppi and their two children and Karuppi’s parents with four of her younger siblings. Some days earlier, Kaliyani had settled the deal with the contractor. As the group will stay away for more than two weeks they usually take some provisions with them. The contractor will offer them food items and other things they need in advance from the keeper of a grocery shop in a nearby caste
village with whom he has made a deal. Sometimes one or two persons go down to the foothills during the extraction period to get fresh provisions. How much each team takes in advance varies according to their willingness to hunt game and collect wild yam and other edible plants in the area of extraction. The fewer provisions in advance they take along, the more the income will be when they sell the extracted oil. Kaliyani’s group takes some provisions (rice, lentils, sugar, coffee powder, beedis, and kerosene for their kerosene lamp), but they are also planning to collect wild yam and wild vegetables.

The team members, while walking towards the extraction site, carry the different parts of the still together with the provisions. The place they are heading for is on the western side towards a neighbouring valley. After walking up and down three ridges, mainly through tree savannah and patches of grass, they reach the extraction site after three hours. The site chosen runs along a tiny stream at the end of a small shallow valley, where lemongrass is growing on the surrounding slopes.

The first day is used for putting the still together. It is erected on top of an oven built at the place out of stones and clay. Firewood is collected in the vicinity. If the weather is rainy they also need to construct some simple huts of sticks and palm leaves for cover. Next day two young men go out to look for wild yams. Two women are cutting and making bundles of lemongrass from the nearby slopes above the site. Kaliyani, who is in charge of the extraction process, starts making a fire in the oven. Through an opening at the side, the bundles of grass are placed on the bottom of the still and mixed with water to be boiled. The steam rises through a pipe into another metal drum, cooled by the water from the small river. The steam turns into drops of lemongrass oil, dripping down into a bottle. The process goes on 24 hours a day until the plastic can is filled. The days become routine. Lemongrass is constantly provided, the fire is kept going by the already processed grass which is used instead of firewood, as it is to hand. The cooling system is checked. Now and then some people leave to gather food. If there are opportunities they will also combine this work with other non-timber forest produce collection in the vicinity.

In early April, seventeen days later, they close down the camp. The plastic can has been filled during the night. Everything is carried down to the foothills. In the afternoon they arrive back at the village.
Within a few days the contractor comes and settles the deal. Sometimes four or five groups from the village are out at the same time. Each family makes between three and five trips per season depending on the availability of lemongrass. Some families, though, prefer to stay for longer periods and even the whole season, making up the major part of the year, seldom visiting the foothills.

Firewood and bamboo collecting are considered illegal by the authorities. The reason is that such activities are regarded as important causes of forest degradation. Compared with the products on the authorised non-timber forest produce list, the quantity of firewood and bamboo removed from the valley is much larger. This trade involves about 100 individuals (also including caste people). The demand for firewood comes from the bigger caste villages in the nearby plains. Bamboo is a common material used in villages and towns for different kinds of construction.

Because of the heavy demand for firewood all the year round in the area and because firewood collection fits the Paliyans’ lifestyle, they very often turn to it when no other income is available. Usually local hotel/restaurant owners, wholesalers in the nearby villages, and others with a need greater than that of an ordinary family, turn to the Paliyans for firewood. The Paliyans will bring down bundles of firewood from the surrounding slopes. In the darkness of the early evenings the buyers turn up and the deals are settled. Many evenings, if you sit at one of the teashops by the roadside, you can see the firewood buyers rushing past on their bicycles or slowly moving their bullock carts loaded with their purchases coming from the Paliyan village and heading down the road towards the nearest caste villages.

If Forest Department officials are around, the Paliyans will leave their firewood in the nearby scrub forest and business has to wait. If someone gets caught it is normally ‘not the end of the world. A ‘fine’ (bribe) will be imposed on the spot and the firewood confiscated. The income is gone, but business is as usual when the Forest Department representatives leave. However, it is also claimed that during some periods, if the Paliyans also bring firewood for the Forest Department staff, the business is allowed to be more relaxed.

Bamboo for construction constitutes the bulk of bamboo collecting (*periyamungil*, *Bambusa arundinacea*). The Paliyans are not involved in this activity. Instead, they collect a smaller species, *cinna*
mungil (*Dentra columnans*), this bamboo is not hollow. Local farmers use the rods as sticks for controlling their bullocks when ploughing their fields. Because the collecting of all kinds of bamboo is considered illegal, the same precautions have to be taken as for firewood.

To conclude this section, the external demand for different kinds of forest products from Kudhirayar area is so great that over the years it has turned into the major economic asset for the Paliyans. If we compare this valley, where there have never been any estates or plantations on the slopes, with other areas of the Palni Hills where there is plenty of cultivation and where the demand for forest produce has been much lower, we can easily understand why the kind of work Paliyans undertake for outsiders in the respective valleys has turned out differently.

A few men and women in Kudhirayar herd cattle and goats owned by others, taking them for grazing up to the nearest slopes every day. A few other Paliyans work occasionally as agricultural labourers in the nearby foothills. Most families collect wild yam or other plants from time to time, fish and hunt small game, especially those collecting non-timber forest produce. However, the hunting and gathering of today is mixed with and adjusted to the above-mentioned wage labour, something I shall come back to below.

**Siruvattukadu Valley and debt bondage**

If we now move from the northern slopes towards the eastern tip of the Palni Hills, about 30 km as the crow flies, we find the Siruvattukadu Valley. Standing on one of the ridges above the valley (1,500 m), we can see high steep forest-covered slopes on all sides, creating a basin with several square kilometres of rather flat ground (an altitude of 800 m). Large tracts of this valley bottom are today under cultivation. The valley has become well known in recent years among naturalists as one of the last habitats for the endemic and endangered Giant Grizzle Squirrel.

The main entry into the valley is an 8 km-long dirt track, constructed in the late 1970s, connecting the valley to the tarmac road with bus connections down to the nearest plains town, 18 km away. The river in the valley once had water all the year round but for the last twenty years it has almost dried up during the summer, according to
the locals. 1993 was an especially bad year, when it was more or less dry for three months, creating a severe water shortage.

In 1993 a total of about 500 individuals were living in the valley, 110 of them were Paliyans, constituting 29 families. The rest of the population belongs either to the Puliyans (with one village, Chettukadu), or to a number of caste families living in different places. The Paliyans were divided between two villages, Puliangasam (mixed with Puliyans) and Thalaiyuthukadu, plus a few families at other places.

In the nineteenth century the forests in this area were under the control of zamindars from the nearby plains, who sometimes grazed cattle in the surroundings. Apart from some Paliyan families, the first inhabitant in the valley is said to have been a British man, who got to know the place in 1909 during one of his hunting trips. In the succeeding years he established an estate in the valley; it is today called Marumalar Estate and is situated to the west of Puliangasam. This estate may have been the first place where the Paliyans in this valley went for wage labour. The only other regular activity in the valley in the first half of the twentieth century was the transportation of cash crops on donkeys from the caste hill villages above Siruvattukadu Valley down, through the valley, to the nearest plains market.

In 1961, under the Kamaraj (Congress Party) Government of Tamil Nadu, some land was released for landless people. The initiative came from, among others, politically oriented Nadar landowners in the Lower Palnis, who were closely connected to Kamaraj, the Chief Minister, who was from the Nadar caste. 160 acres of land in the thinly populated Siruvattukadu Valley were found suitable for new cultivation. This land was mainly meant for landless people in the Lower Palnis, and especially for the Puliyans, who usually worked as estate labourers and for the Paliyans, hunter-gatherers in the surrounding forests, who had an unregulated relationship with the government. However, the opening up of forestland for cultivation soon attracted people from the agricultural caste communities in the

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50 Earlier considered a Scheduled Tribe but today listed as a Scheduled Caste.
51 If nothing else is stated, the figures and details from Siruvattukadu Valley are taken from PHCC 1993b and 1993c.
52 The grandfather of one of my main Nadar informants, who was one of the landowners taking this initiative, gave me the basic information about this.
vicinity, who encroached on large areas in the valley. In this process the Puliyans were able to keep parts of their allotted land (85 acres). Apart from one family, the Puliyans lost all their land within some years; instead some of them became labourers on the same land.

During one of my visits to the area, Karuppan, one of the Puliyans in the valley made some comments about Paliyan landownership: ‘Earlier we had our own land, Sir. Even though we had that, landowners gave us a lot of trouble. So we gave the land to them and came here (referring to the estate they used to work on)’.

He explained that the caste landowners had talked them into leasing out their land by making advances of food and money during the rainy periods when forest resources are at a minimum (September-November). When the Puliyans had been unable to pay them back, the caste landowners had offered them a kind of sharecropping. The caste family would do the cultivation; the Paliyan family, as the legal landowner, would get a share of the crop without doing any work. First the Puliyans allowed sharecropping for one year, then for a second year, and so on. However, pressure from the landowners increased and after some years the Puliyans regarded the land as lost. Karuppan recalled a discussion they had with one landowner:53

Paliyan (P): What about the lime, landowner (samsari)?
Landowner (L): Hey, hereafter, if you enter the land you will lose your life or you will lose your leg or hand. Where is your land?
P: What about that day when you told me it was my land?
L: Yes, but you got Rs 300.54 Give me that money back. Now, how much interest is it for those Rs 300? You got that nearly ten years back. Calculate that amount with interest. Do you know how to calculate?
P: How to do what, Sir?
L: There you see, just put your signature or thumb print on the document.55 If I get problems because of this land I will cut out your

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53 This is an extract from an interview by Vincent in Siruvattukadu Valley 24 December 1993.
54 Rupees (Rs), the Indian currency.
55 This document refers to the land certificate, B-memorandum (which gives the certificate owner the right to use the land), that the landowner has to sign each year when land tax is paid. In the case of the Puliyans who are illiterate, they make a thumb print on the document. The land was at the time of this dialogue still registered in the name of the Paliyan man. Therefore the owner needed his signature or thumb print.
tongue. That’s all. Live peacefully with the money I gave you. If you say more about this I wont allow you to enter this area.

Karuppan concluded: ‘What can we do if things turn out like this?’

The Puliyans in the valley give a different answer as to why the Paliyans lost their land. A middle-aged Puliyan man gave me this explanation:

My father came here 35 years ago from the garden of Chandra Shekar (a coffee estate) in Perumparai. The Government gave this land only to Puliyans and Paliyans. Some Puliyans but all Paliyans left the land and went to other places. My father and two other Puliyan families were the only ones who were able to keep their land safely. Paliyans went into the forest for wild tubers and honey. They can’t stay permanently in one place. They want to be in different places in the forest. For that reason they lost their land. They have stayed here only the last ten years (referring to the Paliyan group in Puliangasam).

The different reasons why the Paliyans have difficulties in keeping land for cultivation reflect two different perspectives. While the Paliyans refer to reasons beyond their control, outsiders prefer to see the reason as part of Paliyan cultural traits. Both explanations seem to be equally justified.

In the 1970s about half of the Paliyan families were living in the forests on the slopes above the caste-owned estates. Now and then some of them worked as farmhands for the estate owners. The other half, fourteen families, lived more or less permanently within one estate, Mangalam Estate, where they did weeding work, harvesting and plant protection. The major crop was lime. Occasionally they were able to leave the estate to procure food from the forest.

Apart from this, these Paliyans also collected, as they still do, non-timber forest produce for forest contractors. This is organised in the same way as in Kudhirayar, and common items are galnut, gooseberry, soap nut (Sapindus emarginata), bark for medical use and lemongrass. However, in contrast to the Kudhirayar area, the

56 The man referred to here, Chandra Shekar, is the same man who told me the story of Sambal Kundi in the Introduction.
57 34 varieties of non-timber forest produce were under the contract system in Siruvattukadu Valley (PHCC 1993c).
Paliyans here face stiff competition in this pursuit from the Puliyans who consider this income an important supplement to their small farms.

This competition became openly discussed in 1995. The Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC), the environmental organisation active in the Palni Hills, as part of their increased social involvement in this valley, discussed with the Paliyans starting a non-timber forest produce co-operative in their charge. The PHCC board had two reasons for pressing this matter. First, they wanted to regulate this kind of collecting, as they thought it was done in a non-sustainable way under the Forest Department's ordinary contract system. Secondly, they wanted to secure this asset solely for the Paliyans, as the latter were the economically weakest group in the valley, and in the PHCC board’s view, had the traditional rights to the forests. This was strongly rejected by the Puliyans, who, although they were much better off economically than the Paliyans, did not want to see an important asset drift away.

The Puliyans in the valley were very well aware of the PHCC's influence with the authorities, and thought the PHCC would be well able to carry out their plan together with the Forest Department. As non-timber forest produce collectors for the last few decades, the Puliyans therefore claimed their right to these forest resources, and suggested a co-operative including both groups. The Paliyans were hesitant about such an arrangement, as they thought that the Puliyans were politically stronger and would in the long run take control of such an organisation. In 1996 a proposal was put forward suggesting the creation of two co-operatives, with regulated quotas for each group. At the time of my last visit in February 2001 none of this had gone through, and the Forest Department lease system still prevailed. In conclusion, because of strong competition, non-timber forest produce collecting has so far not become as important for the Paliyans in the Siruvattukadu Valley as in the Kudhirayar area.

However, the basic problem for the Paliyans in Siruvattukadu Valley to which they always returned during my visits, was their debt situation vis-à-vis the estate owners, which was especially critical for those living permanently on the Mangalam Estate. For the latter the possibility of using forest resources, i.e. leaving the estate, was strictly regulated by the estate owner. The regulations were executed through a
combination of brute force and accumulated debts often ascribed to
the Paliyans, according to themselves with the help of manipulated
accounts. If anyone disobeyed the order from the management they
would be beaten up. Even other estate owners confirmed that
Mangalam Estate was controlled by firm hands, and was 'still not
modern in management'. Not until 1993 did these Paliyan families
move off the estate.

In the spring of 1993 the Mangalam Estate Paliyans were given
some revenue land to establish a village of their own. After a conflict
over payment on the estate, this was made possible through the help of
the sub-Collector of the district. The land allotted to them is only 500
metres away from the Mangalam Estate, but they are very important
metres. At this place they have built a tight little village of small mud-
and-stick huts. The place is called Thalaiyuthukadu. Today they work
as day-labourers for landowners, combined with non-timber forest
produce collecting and food collecting in the forests. Although they
still go to work on Mangalam Estate, they also work for other
landowners, for a payment equal to that of other Paliyans in the hills
doing similar work. They have also increased their use of forest food.
Through these additional resources the Mangalam Estate owner has
lost most of his power over this Paliyan group.

The group of Paliyan families who lived in the nearby forests in
the southern parts of the valley (fifteen families) decided in the late
1970s, with the help of a Christian organisation (Christian Fellowship
Hospital) and two American missionaries who stayed in the area for
two years, to establish a new village with stone houses and tiled roofs
(Knoll and Knoll 1981). This village, called Puliangasam, became a
mixed village with both Paliyans and Puliyans and some lower-caste
families. Today the Paliyans combine wage labour for the surrounding
landowners with the collecting of non-timber forest produce, wild yam,
and other forest plants. Hunting is at a minimum in this valley because
of Forest Department regulations. They can freely choose between
landowners for wage labour, but they also take on debts during the
rainy season when work opportunities and forest resources are scarce,
thereby getting into a weak position vis-à-vis the landowners. During
some periods they have also been given loans from the government for
goats and cattle, but still have no land of their own for cultivation.
In the early 1990s the local authorities had promised all Paliyans in the valley land for cultivation. The sub-Collector confirmed this when I met him once in July 1993. In February 2001 this offer to the Paliyans had still not materialised. However, they have been given ration cards from the authorities, as part of a public distribution system. With these cards the cardholders can buy a regulated amount of ‘essential commodities’ at a reduced price (for example, rice, sugar and kerosene) in the government shop (fair price shop) in the nearest village outside the valley.

From the paddy cultivators of Poolur to the wild yam collectors of Mungil Palam

Two groups of the Paliyans in the Palni Hills have been described so far. As we have seen, the differences in economic activities between them have been significant. In Kudhirayar Dam non-timber forest produce collecting has become, over the recent decades, the dominant economic resource for the Paliyans. In Siruvattukadu Valley wage labour on the estates has been the most important economic pursuit for the Paliyans since the 1970s. An important factor in the latter case has been an almost permanent debt situation vis-à-vis the landowners, in some cases to such a degree that we can talk about debt bondage, something which seems to have occurred significantly less often, or not at all, in the Kudhirayar area. These two examples indicate the variation of Paliyan life, economic pursuits and relations with outsiders in the Palni Hills. In this section I shall give a few more glimpses into other areas in the hills to show this variation in its fullest extent (see Appendix II for a map and a list of Paliyan groups).

There are only two groups of Paliyans, out of the 40, who claim that today they do not use any forest resources. One group consisted of 25 families (100 individuals) in 1995, living in their own ward, Pulampathi, within the caste hill village of Poolur, situated in the Upper Palnis at an altitude of 2,000 m. They are the only Paliyan group living on the plateau, above the slopes of the Palni Hills. Big caste villages dominate the area. For several decades the Paliyans living here have had their own small farms of one to five acres, growing paddy and vegetables such as garlic, beans and different spices. The cultivation is well established and they have patta land rights (landownership rights),
in contrast to the, for Paliyan farmers, more common B-memorandum right, which only gives the farmer a right to use the land as long as s/he pays the kaišty (land tax). Economically these Paliyans have a higher cash income than the average Paliyan family. It is here that I found the only two Paliyan families with television sets. Their farmland was established two generations back. They say that today they have no reason to use forest resources, although they may conduct marriages with Paliyan groups which are more forest-oriented. Their own farming is combined with wage labour on land belonging either to caste people or fellow Paliyans. They have their own stone houses, but too little housing land is left within their ward of the village to allow for any expansion in the number of houses. As a result the 25 families in 1995 lived in only 20 houses.

The other group who do not use any forest resources today live in Kombaikadu, a Paliyan village on the northern slopes, just at the roadside halfway down the Palani Road, which is the main link between the Palni Hills and the major Palani Town and the Coimbatore Plains to the north of the hills. The valley in this area is cultivated to such an extent that there is basically no forest left. The Paliyans claim that there are no forests near enough for them to use. They are fully dependent on daily labour on the surrounding estates.

At the other end of the scale of forest dependency we find the Paliyans of Mungil Palam, on the northwestern slopes, situated within the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary. This group lives at the end of a valley, just below a steep grass-covered wall, the last heavy climb to reach the Upper Palnis. When I visited this village in February 1995 there were seventeen families. The inhabitants collect forest food more or less every day all the year round, and mainly two kinds of wild yam, *mul valli kilangu* on the lower slopes and *vettale kilangu* higher up. Other important forest foods are tender bamboo shoots, honey, and crabs and fishes from the nearby streams. They claim that they do not hunt much, but I suspect that they were keeping a low profile in this matter as the area comes under the wildlife sanctuary’s strict hunting regulations.58

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58 On another visit to this sanctuary, at the same time as some of the Paliyans were talking with Vincent about the regulations prohibiting them from hunting, another Paliyan fellow came out of the bush with a killed deer on his back.
No contemporary Paliyan group depends fully on hunting and gathering. Today this way of procuring food is always combined with other subsistence activities. I shall come back to this later. Here I shall give only a brief description of their way of using forest food (see also Gardner 1993; 2000). When the Paliyans refer to the time when their subsistence was dominated by hunting and gathering, they often use the oft-quoted phrase: ‘We survived on wild yams, honey and monitor lizards’. In this statement they are emphasising what they consider to be the most important and valued food found in the forests.

The Paliyans collect more than 60 different edible plants. The staple food is different species of wild yam (*Dioscorea*) found in the foothills all the way up to the *sholas* at an altitude of 2,000 m. These tubers grow in the ground, some species at a more shallow level, and others, like *vettele kilangu*, at a depth of up to two metres. Digging sticks, *kampa* (90-125 cm long), were earlier made of different kinds of hardwood. Today iron rods of the same size are more common. In Mungil Palam bamboo sticks are used with a shorter piece of iron rod attached to the end.

The composition and size of collecting parties can vary a lot, from two to ten individuals. Most common are nuclear families, sometimes together with a few others within the sibling group. The group leaves the settlement in the early morning, or makes prearrangements to meet somewhere on the way to the digging site. Most good areas for yam beds are known. To find the exact place to dig, however, needs a sharp eye. The yam plant is identified by its slender vines and leaves, intertwined with the lower storeys of tree branches and bushes and further growing along the ground inside the thorny undergrowth.

When they reach a selected site, the group spreads out individually and starts to search the undergrowth. When someone finds the end of a yam vine extending into the soil, that person removes the surface soil. At this point s/he has to evaluate if it is worth while to keep on digging on the basis of several factors, the most important being how the expected size of the tuber compares with the effort needed to get it up. If it is a small one but worth digging for, one person can dig it out on his own. Bigger types may require the digging of holes more than one metre deep and the removal of large stones, thick tree roots, etc., within a radius of several metres. Then the co-
operation of several people is usual. More than one tuber can grow on each vine. The biggest tubers can be two decimetres thick and three-four decimetres long.

If the party has decided to gather tubers all day, some of the harvest may be roasted over a fire and eaten on the spot. In the afternoon the party will return to the settlement before dark. The harvest will be eaten by the families involved during the next few days. After two or three days the tubers will putrefy and become inedible.

An alternative staple food during parts of the year is wild jackfruit (*Artocarpus pubescens*), which grows out directly from the trunk and main branches of the big jackfruit tree. They are found in abundance in the more forested areas of the slopes, at an altitude of 700 m up to 1,500 m. However, in the area of Mungil Palam there are too few jackfruit trees for the fruit to be used as a staple. Anyone old enough to be able to climb the tree, i.e. from about the age of eight, can cut them down; most commonly men do it, being the most skilful climbers. Apart from the fruit meat, the seeds can be roasted or boiled, and nowadays gravy is made from the seeds and eaten with rice. This fruit will also putrefy within a few days, but the seeds can be kept for a few more days. However, no staple food found in the forest can be kept, with the techniques available, long enough for storing. The Paliyans therefore only collect for immediate use.

Subsidiary plant food includes several leaves, used as greens, more than 30 kinds of fruits and different fungi. During periods of staple-food shortage, the importance of these varieties sometimes increases. Women, both young and old, dominate this kind of collecting.

Compared to plants, hunting and fishing play a minor role in Paliyan subsistence. Several kinds of deer are hunted as well as wild boar. In earlier times Paliyan hunters used wooden spears, traps, and dogs; later on billhooks (*aruvai*), spears with metal points, and some muzzleloaders were added. Nowadays the Paliyans can, in some cases, borrow shotguns from the caste landowners they work for. Even if it is easier to hunt game with modern equipment, the Paliyans get hold of these game only occasionally. Other big game, such as bison, tigers, leopards, bears, elephants and snakes, are normally not hunted, but can occasionally be killed as part of protection.
At the time when no guns were used, hunting parties might consist of several men or several husband-wife couples, who chased and ambushed the prey with the help of dogs. Today it is more common to hunt with guns and the hunting party normally consists of two or three men, but no rule is applied concerning who goes with whom. Sometimes a single man goes out by himself. Women normally do not hunt on their own. When a gun has been borrowed from a landowner, the party, in most cases, will include the Paliyan who is responsible for keeping the landowner’s gun.

The meat is usually divided between all the families living in the settlement, even if a family does not have any member in the hunting party. This way of distribution has always existed, according to the Paliyans. The reason they give is that hunting is an enjoyment, in contrast to food collecting, which is a necessity. If you give something away that you have enjoyed getting you cannot ask for something in return. Collected staple food can also be given to other people in need, but then the giver expects to get the same amount back. The procedure is quite precise, just as when families today borrow rice from each other. The food is measured with the same strictness as when an employer is paying a Paliyan with rice for his/her work.

In total about 30 different kinds of mammals are hunted, including lizard, monkey, hare, rodent, squirrel, mongoose and bats. Most kinds of birds, a couple of amphibians, and some insects are also included in the Paliyan diet. Smaller mammals are hunted with traps, sling shots, spears and billhooks. The bigger lizards are smoked out of their holes and killed on the spot with a billhook, spear, or a stone. When the occasional chance to catch or hunt small game arises while people are moving around in the forest for other purposes, everyone who happens to be on the spot participates, even if the men and boys usually take the lead.

Both men and women, often in large parties consisting of several families, do occasional fishing throughout the year. In a narrow stream where the water runs naturally, or has been deliberately directed to run through one particular channel in the shallow rapids, a piece of cloth stretched over the outlet can catch the fish running down. Fish can also be caught by hand in the rivers, inside holes and under stones. Sometime the Paliyans employ poison to suffocate the fish; they crush the bark from the navapatte tree for this purpose. The common river
crab is also easy to catch with a stick, the end of which has been wrapped in a piece of cloth; the crab grips it when it feels threatened and is then caught.

One of the most relished products from the forest is honey. There are several kinds of honey bees available. The smallest kind, the Little Honey bee (cukki teen, *Apis florea*), builds its single comb on the branches of small trees. Its honey is easy to collect, is sweeter than other kinds and is considered very delicious. One comb yields 30-120 grams of honey. Some Paliyans use a handful of crushed *taraku* grass, which has a pungent smell, to displace the bees. The *pontan* (*Apis cerana*) bees build their combs in hollow trees. The collector uses smoke to stupefy the bees and to protect himself from being stung while extracting the honey. There are also many Paliyans who do not bother about these protective measures, often with swollen faces as a result.

The kind of honey gathering which the Paliyans in the Palni Hills and outsiders most often talk about are the enormous combs from the *katante* (*Apis dorsata*) bee. These combs are built under the upper branches of the biggest trees in the forests and riversides, 15 to 30 metres up in the foliage or beneath high cliff overhangs on the steep valley slopes. These huge, breast-like combs can hold up to 20 kg of honey. To reach them the Paliyans use vine ladders to ascend the cliffs and attach wooden or bamboo ladders to the trunk of the massive trees. When approaching these combs the Paliyans use smoke from lighted leaf twigs to avert stings.

Both men and women are involved in all kinds of honey collecting, even if men collect honey more often than women do. One person can harvest the smaller beehives on his/her own. Big combs require co-operation, although only one person approaches the comb. All members in the party, whatever their role, get an equal share of the harvest. Both honey and wax are eaten.

The seasonal availability of wild yam and jackfruit regulates the composition of the diet. If the supply of staple food fails, the Paliyans either migrate or use subsidiary foods. When food collecting and hunting of small game still dominated subsistence among the Paliyans, it was a complex but well developed and regulated way of making a living. Gardner recognised in the 1960s that several groups were still highly dependent for lengthy periods on these forest resources, and that all general categories of plants and animals were utilised (1993).
His conclusion was that ‘Foraging offers not a truncated or barely remembered way of living, but a rich, ongoing set of practices’ (ibid: 134). The same conclusion can be drawn at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In spite of this, not even the Paliyans of Mungil Palam, the group I found most dependent on forest food in the Palni Hills in the 1990s, are without resources from cultivation, livestock and cash incomes. For parts of the year they cultivate millet and other dry grains for their own consumption. They extract lemongrass oil, but their production system is different from that in Kudhirayar Dam. The Mungil Palam Paliyans cultivate some of the lemongrass, and collectively own the three distilling drums they have in their settlement. All families extract this oil, rotating the use of the drums between them. Up to 1989 they extracted for contractors, but since then they have been selling the oil direct to buyers at the Kerala border. The reason for this arrangement is that the sale of non-timber forest produce through contractors is prohibited in national parks/sanctuaries.59

At the request of hill castes, these Paliyans also collect a bark, talainaru, an ingredient for making a local shampoo. During the dry summer period a couple of families are herding cattle reared by caste villagers. Some individuals may occasionally do weeding work on paddy fields in Manjampatti, a small caste settlement a couple of hours’ walk below Mungil Palam.

The example of Manjampatti again illustrates the problem of discussing hunter-gatherer development in South India in a linear sense, from a life dominated by subsistence based on food procurement to a life based on food production. Although the families in Mungil Palam today have an economy based on the collection of forest food, they informed me on my visit to their settlement that they settled there only in 1980. Before that they tried for several years to cultivate paddy in Manjampatti. Caste families from the hill villages started paddy cultivation in the area in the 1950s; the main local river, the Chinnar, was suitable for diverting water for farm irrigation. Different circumstances gave the Paliyans an opportunity to undertake

59 In the Falangi Valley, on the northern slopes to the east of Kudhirayar, there is a third system of lemongrass oil extraction. In this valley several caste landowners cultivate lemongrass on their own land. Some Paliyan families run the process for a daily wage, similar to wage labour on plantations.
their own paddy cultivation. However, from the late 1970s the fields were regularly attacked by elephants migrating seasonally from the Kerala side during the rainy season and devastating both the settlements and the fields. According to Kannan, one of the male elders in Mungil Palam, they abandoned their farms because of these elephant attacks and shifted to Mungil Palam further into the interior. Whether this is the whole truth or not I do not know, but the fact is that soon afterwards families of the Tevar caste encroached on the area and the cultivated land; they are today the inhabitants of Manjampatti settlement.

Apart from Poolur mentioned above, there are two other Paliyan villages where the majority of families have land for cultivation. First, the village of Thalinji on the northwestern slopes, which is also situated within the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary. This is the biggest Paliyan village in the hills, with more than 100 families, all paddy cultivators. Second, the village of Thinaikadu in the Ahagamalai Valley on the southwestern side. The Paliyan families of this village have, for the past 25 years, been able to secure cash-crop cultivation of silkcotton and lime. In all these cases the establishment of villages has gone hand in hand with the establishment of cultivation.

There are also a few other cases of Paliyan families who draw a secure income from smaller plots of cash crops. All these Paliyan farmers have in common that their cultivable land is on revenue land, thereby regulated in accordance with Indian law. In the case of Poolur they have *patta* land rights. However, they are an exception. The most common status of Paliyan farmland is B-memorandum, which is the case in Thinaikadu. Thalinji is regulated differently as it is situated within a wildlife sanctuary.

There are many other cases of cultivation by the Paliyans, but taking place inside reserved forest. One kind involves the cultivation of different millets (*thenai* and *ragi*), the traditional dry grains of the area. In the Pandju Valley, on the southern side, the old people claim that already in their young days, in the 1950s, they occasionally cultivated these grains in clearings in the forest. The same is reported

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60 Revenue land: land for cultivation, housing, temples, etc.

61 Reserved forest: land reserved exclusively for forest, cultivation and housing prohibited by law. The only exception in the Palni Hills is Paliyan settlements of a semi-permanent character.
from neighbouring valleys. Later on many Paliyans started small-scale cash-crop cultivation on forest land. Both these kinds of cultivation are difficult to establish because cultivation in reserved forest is considered illegal by the state. As almost all forests in the Palni Hills are notified as reserved forest, the Forest Department usually puts a stop to this activity. The only way of keeping such farming going is to bribe the Forest Department staff. Sometimes this is possible, but in the long run this prohibits the Paliyans from investing in and relying too much on this resource.

In conclusion, while many Paliyan families have for decades been involved in cultivation in one way or another, it is equally clear that most Paliyan families still turn to forest resources as part of their subsistence. In addition to these economic pursuits, there are also several families, such as these in Kudhirayar Dam and Mungil Palam, who herd cattle for cattle owners from the plains. The amount of non-timber forest produce collection varies from one group of Paliyans to another. In Kudhirayar the majority of families depend on this resource, while in the Pandju Valley on the southern side, they have never been involved to any significant extent in this activity.

The most common cash incomes among the Paliyans today come from wage labour on caste-owned plantations and estates and, of minor importance, labour for the Forest Department and NGOs. This will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapters.

**Village life, sedentarisation and economic flexibility**

Gardner reports that near the town of Srivilliputtur, in the foothills of the Western Ghats south of the Palni Hills, several groups of Paliyans were settled in the early twentieth century close to a cluster of plantations where they undertook wage labour (2000: 26). Similarly, there were, at the same time, Paliyans in the Palni Hills who lived close to a Jesuit Estate, now and then taking up work on their plantation (Dahmen 1908). In these cases Paliyan individuals and families seem to have been coming and going regularly, although the settlements have been there for much longer. With this in mind none of these settlements fits the definition of 'a village' as discussed above. It was not until the 1960s that the first Paliyan groups in the Palni Hills moved into villages. In these cases they joined already well established
caste villages, including the above-mentioned village of Poolur in the Upper Palnis, and the villages of Boolavadi (PuulaavaTi) (see Gardner 2000: 27-30) and Puliyampatti in the northern foothills.

The first exclusively Paliyan villages seem to be Solaiyur, in the eastern part of the hills, Thinaikadu on the southwestern slopes, and Thalinji on the northern slopes, all established in the 1970s. In the 1980s several more were established, especially along the Law’s Ghat Road, the main link between the hills and the foothills. Coming from the hill station of Kodaikanal down towards Madurai (the major town southeast of the Palni Hills) one finds the Paliyan villages of Vadagaraparai, Moolaiyar and Valaigiri. In 1991 the village of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley was established, and two years later, in 1993, the village of Thalaiyuthukadu in Siruvattukadu Valley. The most recent is the village of Manjalar, where 25 Paliyan families settled in the Spring of 2000. Several of these villages have got stone houses, either through the government or from NGOs.

Today, out of 40 Paliyan groups in the Palni Hills, there are 27 Paliyan villages (including mixed villages), with about 60% of the total Paliyan population (4,000). The other groups still live more scattered, mainly consisting of one sibling group or just a single family or a few individuals in one place. Especially in the Palangi Valley on the northern side and along the southern slopes we find this pattern.

The shift from semi-sedentary settlements to sedentary villages has generally meant a move ‘out’ of the forests down to the foothills, or to farm areas in the hills dominated by caste people. This is also, as mentioned above, a move from reserved forest into revenue land. This fact has important significance at many levels for the interaction between the Paliyans and other people. I shall come back to this in the following chapters. Suffice it here to say that this change paved the way for regularising Paliyan cultivation. Cultivation was insecure in the forests, but less so on revenue land. If the Paliyans, where they were offered land for cultivation, used the land in a way considered proper by the authorities, their cultivation was to a certain degree better protected compared with cultivation in the forests. Nevertheless, only a small minority of the Paliyans have farmland.

A settlement trend among hunter-gatherers towards the establishment of villages also describes a process of social unification. As will be shown in detail in Chapter Four to Six, this process may not
always be as unilinear and straightforward as the settlement shift implies. Let me briefly give a couple of examples. While most Paliyans would express a theoretical willingness to join other Paliyans in bigger settlements and to start cultivation of their own, when it comes to reality many behave differently. Several attempts at establishing villages have failed, due both to the character of the resources available and internal conflicts. In the village of Thinaikadu, 40 families joined together in 1975. They got stone houses and land for cultivation with the help of local caste leaders. While land for cultivation was available for all of them, internal conflicts over the years broke up the unity. When I visited the settlement in 1995, there were only eleven families still living in the village, but even they were divided into two factions. The houses and huts were grouped into two different blocks and they preferred not to speak to each other. The other two-thirds of the families had moved out to their plots in the vicinity.

In Karumparai, to the west of Thinaikadu, there were fifteen families living in 1992; in 2001 there were only three families left. One family lived a kilometre away from the village, but the majority had moved to other valleys. The main reason was that the promise of land for cultivation never materialised. Neither would the landowners in the surrounding areas allow the Paliyans any land, nor did the government show any interest in making land available. The latest split of a Paliyan village was reported from Kudhirayar Dam. Since 1996 the village had come into regular conflict with the police and the Forest Department, due to illicit alcohol distilling and heavy drinking (Schmidt 1998). In 1998 one-third of the Paliyan families, mainly one sibling group, decided that this negative attention from outsiders was too much. They left the village and established a new settlement in an area further to the west (Venkataraman 2000).

Another expectation of settled village life would be a reduction in economic flexibility. A settled life, with an increase of fixed resources, would imply for a hunter-gatherer a reduction of economic alternatives and a stronger attachment to a specific place. However, several cases show the opposite. In the areas where the Paliyans have been able to establish cultivation, they usually add this resource to former resources, rather than exchanging one for the other. A settled life in a village also has a stronger attraction for outside support, for example from NGOs and state agencies adding new kinds of resources. The key factor here
seems to be the continuous access to former resources, whether forest resources or daily labour, the last organised in a way that makes it possible to encompass new resources. When former resources are limited, and especially forest resources, economic flexibility is significantly reduced. This is the case for the two Paliyan groups mentioned earlier, who do not use any forest resources today.

I have also found that village life does not hamper the Paliyans' semi-nomadic character to the extent that might have been expected. In the case of the Kudhirayar Dam Paliyans, at least a third of them live away from the village for prolonged periods of the year (engaged in lemongrass oil extraction), even if they have their own huts in the village and consider themselves to be part of it. In the Paliyan village of Bharati Anna Nagar, high up in a valley on the northern slopes, about 10 families go for lemongrass extraction for several months each year to the neighbouring valley of Palangi. In the village of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley several families leave regularly for daily labour in neighbouring valleys. There are more examples of this kind. As a matter fact, although sedentarisation has increased, there are in most villages families and individuals who migrate for prolonged periods for work in other areas, despite considering themselves as belonging to a particular village or settlement. The continuing flexible economy upholds their semi-nomadic character.

In this chapter I have given a general account of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, with a focus on the changing settlement patterns and economic variations among groups. Although there is a general process of re-settlement, the variation in local processes and economic activities is significant. The next three chapters will shift the focus to one valley in the hills and give a detailed description of the process of establishing the Paliyan village of Aruvellam. It will examine internal relations as well as the process of establishing relations with different categories of outsiders. Each section in these chapters has a specific focus, but they more or less follow a chronological order from the late 1980s up to my last visit in June 2002. In this way it will be easier to see how different events and relations are interdependent and influence the actions of the Paliyans.

Chapter Four will give a brief account of the years leading up to the decision to create a new village and the first years of establishing the place, and successively introduce other actors related to the area.
Chapter Five will focus on co-operation and conflicts emanating from the new situation, conflicts of both an internal and external nature, and the last with a focus on the interaction between the Paliyans, landowners and NGOs. In Chapter Six, I shall look more closely at the increasing interaction between the Paliyans of the valley and the local government. That chapter will also contain some concluding remarks on the outcome of the first decade of the existence of the Paliyan village of Aruvellam.
Chapter Four

The Establishment of the Paliyan Village of Aruvellam

The previous chapter gave a general account of the varying local circumstances and economic pursuits in the Palni Hills. This chapter will be more specific. Together with the next two chapters, it will describe the process of establishing a Paliyan village on the southern slopes of the hills, in the Pandju Valley. It will also point to the importance of internal variation in economic strategies and behaviour within the local group in this process, which also entails increased interaction with outsiders such as neighbouring landowners, NGOs and representatives of the local government.

The Pandju Valley is about 10 km long, stretching along the perennial Vellam River, which joins the major Vaigai River in the foothills. The forested valley slowly descends from the foothills, at an altitude of about 300 m, reaching at the end the great mountain wall leading up to the Upper Palnis at an altitude of more than 2,000 m. There are two caste hill villages on the right and left ridges, respectively. The Paliyans inhabit the valley bottom and other places inside the forest. In total there are about 40 Paliyan families, 200 individuals, in the valley and maybe 300 inhabitants in the two caste villages combined, the last mainly belonging to the Mannadian caste. The economy of the valley is based on plantation cultivation, including a couple of bigger estates, where the major crops are cardamom, silkcotton, coffee, lime and other citrus fruits.

The majority of the Paliyans I met in the Pandju Valley had worked as watchers on the cardamom estates for several decades. In the 1980s the world market for cardamom changed significantly,

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62 I shall use pseudonyms for personal names and place names to protect the integrity of the local people of the Pandju Valley.
affecting local circumstances. The cardamom business declined, new 
ways of thinking influenced the younger generations of Paliyans, and 
the interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders was transformed. 
One idea that made its way into the minds of the Paliyans of the 
Pandju Valley was that they would benefit if they moved together into 
a village instead of living dispersed in smaller groups as they had done 
up to now. At the end of 1990 that idea became a reality.

This chapter will start with a short reconstruction of the years 
leading up to November 1990 when several Paliyan families decided to 
leave their work on the surrounding cardamom estates and start to 
create a village of their own, eventually called Aruvellam. To 
understand this decision and the expectations and ambitions built up 
among the Paliyans, and why the change took place when and as it did, 
we need to look at the circumstances that influenced them during the 
period before the creation of Aruvellam. I shall also present the work 
on the cardamom estates in this chapter, as well as those Paliyan 
families attached to these estates (see Appendix I for a list of the 
sibling groups and their members). When these families began to shift 
to the new village site, many other Paliyans in the neighbouring valleys 
had made a similar shift of settlement several years earlier. Among the 
Paliyans of the Pandju Valley, Andi was the initiator and main driving 
force for the fulfilment of this idea. He therefore deserves special 
attention. A special focus on him will emphasise the influence of 
individual Paliyan actors in this process. If my main field site had been 
in another valley, I could, for example, have chosen Karuppan in 
Senguthumalai Valley, or Andi’s father-in-law Murugesh from the 
Ahagamalai area, both exceptional Paliyans as they are among the few 
Paliyans who have been able to secure some land of their own. These 
individuals become important in hunter-gatherer societies like the 
Paliyans, as these groups of people usually lack any organisation above 
family level. When initiatives are taken concerning social change it is 
individuals like those mentioned above who by their way of acting give 
impetus to the others (see also Kaskija 1998).

After introducing Andi I shall move on to describe the struggle 
of the Pandju Valley Paliyans during the first two years, from late 1990 
to 1992, in the building-up phase of the village. During this time they 
were able to establish co-operation with NGOs, obtain land for 
cultivation, build a school for the children, and establish work relations
with the surrounding landowners, all critical factors for the creation of a new kind of unity among the Paliyan families. Through the presentation of some of the conversations, actions and events that took place among the Paliyans, and between them and other people claiming a stake in the area, I shall show how the economic situation developing in the village created a new framework for interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders.

The Suraj Estate and the cultivation of cardamom

The colonial trade and the cultivation of tea, coffee, spices, and rubber in South India were concentrated in the mountain areas where today we find the three States of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The turning of virgin forests into garden plots and eventually plantations and estates began in the late eighteenth century. Francis Buchanan (1807) gave the earliest account of a ‘plantation’ in South India. He was sent by the British rulers of Madras Presidency to make a land survey of the countryside as a guide for future development. In 1800, he visited several plantations of the East India Company in Malabar (Kerala). Many of these early attempts at plantation cultivation failed, but half a century later many estates were well established.

The earliest estates in the Palni Hills were established during the second half of the nineteenth century. The most suitable crops were coffee and cardamom and the best area was in the east (Lower Palnis) and along the southern slopes. Today one can find estates from the eastern tip of the hills all the way to the west where the Palni Hills join the Western Ghats. On the northern side of the Palni Hills, and especially on the northwestern slopes, there are few or no estates as the slopes are much gentler and the climate too dry for these kinds of crops.

The people of the Pandju Valley told me that in valleys further to the west, estates were already there by the end of the nineteenth century. The first estate to be established in the Pandju Valley neighbourhood was Suraj Estate. The land was opened up in the 1920s.

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63 Cardamom, cinnamon, and pepper are all native to South India and Sri Lanka, and were some of the first products to be traded between East and West.
by a retired major from the British India Army. In 1952 some relatives of the former major took over responsibility for the estate. They left the place idle for many years and sold it in the 1960s. Today a wealthy family of Nadar caste from the nearby plains owns it; in the beginning they had a partner but became the sole owners at the end of the decade. The head of the family, Kaliyanagam, runs the family business together with his four sons. In the Pandju Valley and its surroundings there were at the most eight cardamom estates running simultaneously. Three estates were still operating in the early 1990s: Suraj Estate, Chettiar Estate and Kombai Estate.

The Suraj Estate consists of 143 acres of forest land and is leased from the government through the Forest Department for nineteen years at a time. The cardamom plants (small cardamom) are planted within *sholas* at an elevation around 1,000 to 1,500 m. This altitude has the high level of rainfall necessary for the growth of the plants, and the canopy of lofty evergreen trees gives the necessary shade. These more or less uninhabited and forested areas are also, unfortunately for the growers, the habitat for many animals. Bison, deer, wild boar, birds, and especially monkeys are significant competitors for the cardamom plants and pods, devastating the cultivation if the land is not protected. The wild animals were one of the major problems for the early growers and became even more so when the cultivation expanded in size and became good business (Muthiah 1993). One solution was to find some people who could guard the land. However, to hire plains people, who would for extended periods of the year have to put up with the harsh climate and move swiftly around in the dense and steep terrain, was not easy. Because of this many owners of cardamom estates along the southern slopes of the Palni Hills employed the Paliyans, living nearby.

Kaliyanagam, the owner of Suraj Estate, belongs to the section of the Nadar caste that have established themselves as successful traders (Hardgrave 1969; Templeman 1996). His grandfather and great-grandfather were both rice merchants. His father, apart from dealing with rice, also traded in cloth as a master weaver. Their hometown was Aruppukkottai in Kamaraj District, south of the Palni Hills. When

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64 The allotment of land as part of the pension for ex-service men within the Indian military service is still a common practice.

65 A master weaver provided several weavers with equipment and material. The weavers were paid in kind or cash, and the end product belonged to the master weaver.
Kaliyanagam decided to enter the cardamom business in 1938, he preferred to settle down with his family in Bodinayakkanur, a town in the southwestern foothills of the Palni Hills and a major centre for the cardamom trade in Tamil Nadu.

Kaliyanagam started his career as a commissioner for cardamom, buying and exporting for the international market. He soon realised that an investment in cardamom cultivation was good business. He first bought Suraj Estate through money borrowed from the Indian Cardamom Board. Over the years his business grew and in the early 1990s he owned four cardamom estates, and some silkcotton plantations, a total of 1,000 acres. Today he also owns a silkcotton mill, a cardboard factory, and 40 houses in the town. He told me that the main economic philosophy within his caste group was to invest the first surplus in gold as a life assurance. ‘If we earn more we will invest in land and houses. We feel this is more secure than shares and big industry’. He has twenty heirs, including children and grandchildren. He was very proud of being able, on his way to retirement, to provide them with a good education, 50 acres of land and a house each.

When Kaliyanagam took charge of Suraj Estate there was already a stone house for drying and storing the cardamom. He expanded the cultivation further by clearing more areas of undergrowth. He also added a dwelling house for the family, the cook, the accountant and the foremen, and a coolie-linfor the labourers, a long low stone house with rows of small rooms for the families, a common way of accommodating labourers on the bigger estates throughout India. At the most about 100 persons were living there. The Paliyans in Aruvellam refer to this period as the time when Suraj Estate was like a small town and where they had everything apart from a tailor. As a rule of thumb, Kaliyanagam explained, estate owners would need one worker full-time all the year round for two acres of cardamom cultivation. At this time, in the 1960s and early 1970s, India held the virtual world monopoly of the cardamom trade, supplying 90-95% of the world-market demand (Giriappa 1995: 143-146; Pruthi 1992: 63).

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66 Two of his estates are in Tamil Nadu, leased on reserved forest land, and two other estates are situated in Kerala on private land, with a total of 450 acres.

67 The cardamom business has taken Kaliyanagam to many places in the world, including Western Europe, Singapore and Japan.

68 Coolie, hired labour or burden-carrier in India (Lewis 1991).
The main tasks on a cardamom estate are protecting, tending, harvesting, processing, replanting, and finally transporting. All the work was done by caste people, apart from protection. There are three forms of protection on the estate. First, to protect it from human intrusion, thefts, etc. Second, to protect the plants from animals, such as monkeys who eat the tender leaves coming up during spring and the pods during harvest in the autumn. The pods and plants also attract other bigger animals, such as bison, wild boar and deer, which uproot the plants by moving around in the plantation. The main task for the Paliyans is to chase away the animals by making a noise and firing with shotguns or slingshots (using stones), or firecrackers. The third kind of protection consists of watching out for plant diseases and insect pests. During recent decades pesticides have been used. Normally the plants are sprayed twice a year, just before flowering in February and some weeks before the cardamom fruits start to develop in June.

After completing the harvest, usually in December/January, there is not much work on the plantation apart from replacing the old and diseased plants with young ones. This is the low season, lasting up to April/May when weeding starts. Weeding at this time consists of clearing the undergrowth around the plants to give them ample space to grow.

The cardamom plant is a perennial bush that grows to a height of about three metres and produces pods at intervals from August to January. These must be harvested before they split open. The pods are harvested over a period of two weeks. Then it will take another two to three weeks before enough new pods have ripened. This goes on for five or six times. Between the harvest intervals weeding work proceeds. The pods grow at the base of the plants and need to be within easy reach to be hand-picked effectively, which makes weeding critical at this time of the year.

After the cardamom is picked it is dried for two days in heated air through a careful process inside the drying house. Then the pods are polished, packed in sacks, carried down by workers or loaded on horses and donkeys, and taken to the nearest road in the foothills. From there the sacks are transported by lorry (formerly by bullock cart) to the storehouse in the market town.

Kaliyanagam told me that at the time when he bought the then abandoned estate in the 1960s and started to re-establish it, his workers
informed him that there were Paliyans living in the vicinity. This was Karuppan and his sibling group. They lived some kilometres away from the estate within the forest and were asked by the accountant to come and work as watchers. Kaliyanagam said that during the first decades of his ownership of the Suraj Estate, it was his accountant who looked after the contact with the Paliyans. If the Paliyans saw him or somebody else they did not know, they would not show up.

During this period (in the 1960s) Karuppan’s sister married Murugan from a neighbouring valley. During Murugan’s visits to the area the accountant asked him to join Karuppan’s group for work on Suraj Estate. He was also asked to bring the rest of his family if he liked. Murugan’s father and mother, and the rest of their family then shifted over to this area. They also brought along Ganeshan’s family. Together with Karuppan’s group they now formed three Paliyan sibling groups going to work on Suraj Estate.

When these new Paliyan families joined they preferred to build a settlement of their own in a forest area between their old settlement and the Suraj Estate, from where it was easy to reach the estate for work in the morning and to be back before dark in the evening. This settlement practice also made it possible for the Paliyans to minimise interaction with caste workers living on the estate.

In the early mornings the Paliyans usually met the accountant somewhere inside the plantation. Then the Paliyans, both men and women, spread out in the surroundings of the estate, normally each of them on their own, now and then shifting from one place to another. If animals were around they chased them away or hunted them. The younger brother of Murugan, who was my main informant concerning their life on Suraj Estate, told me that they basically could walk around as they liked, meeting each other now and then, taking a nap on a rock, or just resting. ‘Guarding is easy work’, he often said.

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69 Paliyans are never precise about years when referring back in time. Instead they prefer to talk about ‘periods’ when referring to earlier events or they refer to younger people, the last as follows: ‘That happened when I was his/her age’, pointing to a younger person standing nearby. Accordingly they do not know their own precise age, although today’s youngsters and children have a better check on this.

70 For simplicity I am using the name of the eldest living male to designate a specific Paliyan sibling group, for example ‘Karuppan’s group’. This is common practised among the Paliyans themselves, and particularly in settlements where more than one sibling group live together.
The Paliyans consider work as watchers on forest estates and plantations as a convenient pursuit because it is easily combined with food collecting and hunting, the reason being that this kind of cultivation takes place within the Paliyans' traditional forest grounds. If any small game turned up during their beat they would hunt it and keep it until they returned to the settlement. If there was little or no food in their settlement they would dig wild yam. They never brought food with them for lunch, eating their meals in the settlement only in the morning and evening. However, wild fruits and edible plants, as well as planted fruits given them by the owner, were eaten during the day or taken back to the settlement. There was no effective way for the owner to check the Paliyans' work, as they were very much on their own. However, if the owner discovered that wild animals had destroyed cardamom plants or pods, the Paliyans were usually the blamed.

Apart from work as watchers they were also expected to report anything which was of concern to the estate. This was not an official duty, but something implicitly expected as part of the working agreement. The Paliyans were therefore an important source of local knowledge of all kinds. The owner and his staff would now and then leave the area. The Paliyans, however, would be around continuously and would notice anything of importance going on in the surroundings. Their knowledge of hunting was also a resource for the owner. The owner or the accountant either used the Paliyans' trekking skill or asked them to hunt by lending them a shotgun. The meat was an important and highly valued food asset for the owner and his staff, and was also occasionally shared with the Paliyans.

The owner was prepared to give them work as watchers for most of the year, but during the off-season, between January and April, there was no need to watch over the land. Throughout this period the Paliyans depended solely on wild yams and other forest foods. When the next season started the accountant looked them up and gave notice that the activities at the plantation had started up again.

Payments were in kind, usually in the form of low-grade rice brought up from the plains, and occasionally millet. Each individual was paid per day and each working day was noted in the accountant's account-book. On Suraj Estate it was the normal practice to clear the

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71 Bird-David (1983) gives an interesting comparison of hunting and gathering and certain kinds of plantation work.
account once a month. The rice was carefully measured by the accountant at the main house according to the working days for each individual.\textsuperscript{72} If the owner visited the estate he would supervise the procedure. Once a year, during festival time, the Paliyans were also given some simple clothes, a shirt, a \textit{lungi}, or a pair of short trousers for the males and a \textit{sari} for the females, as payment or ‘bonus’, as Kaliyanagam would put it.\textsuperscript{73}

The working arrangement between the owner and the Paliyans was loosely formulated. Through his accountant the owner made a verbal deal with each family or someone within the local group whom they, the owner and accountant, considered as representing the group, in most cases, either the male of the conjugal family or the eldest male within a sibling group. The agreement implied that the Paliyans agreed to work during the season, but without any specification as to how many working days or how many workers. The deal was that they would hang around the estate from morning to evening. As it is difficult to quantify work as watchers on cardamom estates, and especially to estimate the effectiveness of protection in relation to numbers of watchers, demand for a specific number of Paliyans or working days was not really necessary. The owner was satisfied to have a group of Paliyans coming to work most days.

This somewhat unregulated system gave individuals within the Paliyan group plenty of opportunity to stay away if they so wished, as long as the group sent enough workers to the estate over time. According to the Paliyans this meant that ‘they could come and go as they wanted’. The Paliyans did not want to regularise the work too much and were satisfied to get part of their food from the estate owner. As each individual and family would regulate this according to their own choices, the number of working days varied a lot between them and from one month to the next. This need for a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the estate owner was clearly expressed through the general Paliyan refusal to settle down within the estate. Kaliyanagam could not understand why they preferred to live in those

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\textsuperscript{72} In 1994 a male Paliyan would get 2 kg of rice/day, female/youngster, 1,5 kg/day. 1 kg of rice would be enough for three meals.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Lungi} is the common waistcloth for men and \textit{sari} is the common dress for women.
‘simple huts out there’ or, as in the case of Ganeshan’s family, ‘even live in a cave!’ when they could have lived on the estate.74

The main controlling instrument for the estate owner in his relations with the Paliyans was to make the payment, in this case rice, in advance. When the Paliyans took the advance, they agreed to work according to the amount of rice given. The agreement was made between the accountant and each individual or family, and this gave the owner some idea of how much work he could expect in the near future. Because of the debt the owner could also, to a certain extent, prevent the Paliyans from changing their minds and going to work on other estates or staying away too long for other reasons. In certain areas of the Palni Hills the estate owners seemed to have had an informal agreement among themselves, whereby they tried to regulate the way they hired their workers. If a worker, for some reason, wanted to move over to another estate, but still had a debt to the old estate, the new owner had to clear the worker’s debts before s/he was available. The extent to which this was applied is hard to say, but the Paliyans claim that it was in use during certain periods in some areas of the hills.

This debt system could in some cases be developed into debt bondage, which meant that the workers ended up permanently indebted to the estate owner. In earlier times Tamil society empowered the owner to force people to pay off their debt by work. This kind of bonded labour (pannaiyam) was abolished by law with the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. However, various forms of this system still prevail on certain estates in the Palni Hills. The permanence of debts, which in some cases could go on for several years, forces the worker to continue working for a landowner. In South India debt bondage is closely related to the notion of adimai, slavery. While Paliyans sometimes refer to this concept (see the next section) the Paliyans working on Suraj Estate never claim that they were bonded in any sense approaching adimai.

74 Following Goffman (1961), Oddvar Hollup refers to plantations in Sri Lanka as ‘total institutions’, a settlement and economic institution that encompassed the entire existence of the workforce (1994: xvi-xvii). This description may fit some of the bigger estates in the Palni Hills, but probably more so in the much larger tea estates on the Kerala side. It also refers to caste people (rather than Paliyans and other tribes), who could not make a living on the resources of the surrounding forests.
If debt bondage was one extreme of working relations between Paliyans and landowners, the other extreme was represented by those Paliyans who never allowed themselves to get into debt, either by totally avoiding working for landowners or by never asking for payment in advance. Individual Paliyans certainly have different principles as regards working relations with outsiders. Commonly economic relations varied between these two extremes over time, but in most cases never went so far as bonded labour.

The ordinary situation on Suraj Estate was that Paliyan watchers either got some advance for a period, usually no longer than a month, or lived on wild tubers, etc., until the time of the next payment. The arrangement changed from one month to the next, and also varied from one family or individual to another. If nothing exceptional happened, life went on like this throughout the season. In the next season the owner would expect them to be around again and the Paliyans would expect the accountants to look for them again. Basically this working arrangement between the Paliyans and the owner was in place on Suraj Estate from the 1960s up to the late 1980s.

The arrangement was not, however, anything given. The plantation economy, with its international connections, could not by mere economic force and political power neatly absorb forest people like the Paliyans. That becomes evident when we look below the surface of these working arrangements, into the details of everyday life. The pattern of interaction between the Paliyans and those running the estate consisted of a process full of tensions in which the system, to be upheld, needed a lot of negotiation and bargaining between the parties involved. This issue is part of my main thesis and will be dealt with further in Chapter Seven and Nine. Here I only want to sketch the degree of, and the main reasons, for conflicts on the cardamom estates. In the next chapter, when I present the interaction between the landowners and the Paliyans at the new village site of Aruvellam, I shall come back to the issue in more detail.

As mentioned above, the estate owners, by means of payment in advance and co-operation with other landowners, had a certain degree of control over the Paliyans. If they did not obtain the Paliyans’ full consent, however, the arrangement was in most cases difficult to maintain. That was something Kaliyanagam had to learn at the end of the 1970s when a major conflict developed between him and the
Paliyans on Suraj Estate. One of Kaliyanagam’s foremen was caught stealing cardamom. The owner accused some of the Paliyans of being part of the theft. In making this accusation, the owner and his staff threatened and even beat up some of the Paliyans. The owner said that if they did not confess he would bring them to the police and have them put in jail. The Paliyans, denying the accusations, decided that they did not have to accept such treatment. Murugan’s and Ganeshan’s families left the area, returning to their close relatives in Senguthumalai, their place of origin. Karuppan’s family, however, did not feel involved in the conflict, and continued their relationship with the owner.

Murugan’s and Ganeshan’s families stayed in the Senguthumalai area for more than a year. On the eve of the next harvest season, Kaliyanagam sent one of his accountants to the area to ask the Paliyans to come back. According to Murugan’s younger brother, the accountant came and used ‘soft words’, informing them that the owner had not meant what he had said, that the whole incident was now in the past, and that the owner would be happy to have them back. With these soothing words all families decided to return and resume their working relations with the Suraj Estate.

This was the only major conflict Murugan’s younger brother informed me about. However, during the season minor conflicts regularly occurred. Some of them arose because the foremen blamed individual Paliyans for insufficient guarding when there was a loss of harvest or damaged plants, or for not regulating their debts in time, or for minor thefts of different kinds. The Paliyans would feel mistreated if they were threatened or shouted at too much, if they were beaten up, if there was a disagreement about the amount of debt, if they felt cheated by the accountant, or if they were not provided with the amount of rice promised by the owner.

If individual Paliyans felt that they were too mistreated in these conflicts they preferred to stay away from the estate. The period of time could be from a couple of days to more than a year, and in some cases they never returned. If the owner wanted them back he would send the foreman or accountant to invite them back. Both parties considered these conflicts as conflicts between the owner and the individual Paliyan, or at most, from the Paliyan point of view, a family matter. If one individual Paliyan stayed away because of a conflict, other Paliyans did not feel obliged to do the same.
An additional problem in the interaction between the owner and the Paliyans, was conflict within the local Paliyan group. A common way of solving a conflict between two parties among the Paliyans, either within a family or between families, was for one party to decide to leave the settlement. Sometimes this included leaving the area and whatever working arrangements they had with landowners as well. During these conflicts, the landowner, in his own interest, sometimes tried to mediate. Ganeshan, for example, recollects one occasion when he had a quarrel with his wife and decided to hang around on his own in the forest instead of staying in their cave. ‘I had no intention of going back, but after three days the accountant from the estate came and asked me back. He asked me why I was acting like this. Because of his words I thought that I should stop thinking like I did. So I went back to my wife.’ The reasons for these kinds of conflicts will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter. For the moment it is enough to recognise that conflicts within the local Paliyan group can also disrupt working relations between the Paliyans and the landowners.

To sum up, what we found was an economic arrangement between the Paliyans and the owner of a cardamom estate from which both parties benefited according to their own economic strategies. The owner, by using Paliyans, aimed at maximising the output of his crops to increase his profit. Although he had to expect a certain degree of loss of harvest each year, he could to a significant degree reduce the loss by using the Paliyans as watchers over the land. The Paliyans, for their part, used the payment from the owner primarily as an additional food asset, secondarily as a source of clothes and other goods. This arrangement eases some of the pressure in their ordinary food-collecting economy, a pressure which seems to be at its height at the time of the cardamom harvest when the main staple food of the Paliyans, wild yam, is less abundant or almost nil in some areas of the hills. However, it is also important to recognise that rice, the common remuneration, had become an appreciated food item among the Paliyans.

This working organisation functioned well when the expectations of the parties involved were satisfied. If conflicts arose they were usually temporary. Even when they resulted in a total break in relations, both parties were ready, in most cases, to resume the working relationship. The working arrangements, in which fission and fusion
seemed to be integrated parts, were compatible with the plantation economy, and allowed the Paliyans the possibility of using other subsistence assets that were available in the area, thus giving them a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the landowner.

From the late 1970s, however, major changes took place within the Indian cardamom business. From being in a world monopoly situation in the early 1970s, it now faced increased competition. In the early 1980s India provided 60-65% of the world demand, amounting to around 2,000 tons of cardamom per year (Pruthi 1992: 63). Ten years later Indian cardamom was almost totally ousted by the much cheaper Central American cardamom, and India could only export 171 tons during the 1989-1990 season (ibid: 229). The Indian business recovered some of its export share in the following years, but during the regression in the late 1970s the government had changed its cardamom policy. In 1978 the Central Government in Delhi decided that no more leases would be granted for cardamom cultivation within reserved forest. Cardamom growers within forest land could only continue their cultivation until their leases expired. Instead the government promoted cardamom cultivation on private land.

For Kaliyanagam and his family these changes became a major economic setback, as a significant part of their business was invested in cardamom plantation. In 1985 he lost the last of his international customers. He told me that there was no way they could compete with the low prices and the amounts produced in Central America. The yield in Suraj and Kombai Estates was at best around 20 kg per acre. In Kerala, with a more humid climate as compared with the Tamil Nadu side of the Western Ghats, the yield could be greater. ‘But compared with the 200 kg per acre in Guatemala this is nothing’, Kaliyanagam said with an exhausted look.

With these changes many cardamom estates were abandoned. In the Pandju Valley three estates closed down and those still able to continue until the expiry of their leases, for example the Suraj Estate, decreased their investment. The area under cultivation shrank. By the end of the 1980s the Suraj Estate harvested only around 40 acres out of the original 143 acres.

On Suraj Estate the demand for workers decreased and the overall care and interest of the owner was much less than before. The Paliyans were now also carrying out weeding and harvest work; only
occasional caste workers were brought up from the plains. The Paliyans could still use estate work as a resource, but the owner did not provide rice as regularly as before. As a consequence the Paliyans started to do some cultivation of their own during the last years before they moved to Aruvellam down in the Pandju Valley. Murugan and his siblings had for some years moved close to where Karuppan's group were living. Here they started to grow some banana and lime. The lime trees never produced any crop before they moved to Aruvellam. The bananas, however, gave a small harvest throughout the year, which they were able to sell at the market in the plains. This gave them an extra income, although part of it was needed as bribes for the forest guards from the Forest Department, as the cultivation was on reserved forest land. The Paliyans also occasionally cultivated different kinds of millet for their own consumption.

At the time when these families first heard about the idea of creating a village of their own, the economic situation for the Paliyans on Suraj Estate was in a state of flux. There was no longer the same opportunity of regular wage labour, although they had no problems in surviving. Instead they combined this dwindling resource with the above-mentioned cultivation and an increase in the collection of forest plants and small game hunting. In this situation they were tempted by the new idea of a village. All the three sibling groups of Karuppan, Murugan and Ganeshan decided to join in the establishment of Aruvellam. At that time, in 1990, they were 8 nuclear families, totalling 34 individuals.

**The Chettiar Estate**

A second estate in the Pandju Valley area was Chettiar Estate. While Suraj Estate was outside the Pandju Valley, on the other side of its left ridge, Chettiar Estate was one of four cardamom estates running simultaneously at the upper end of the Pandju Valley up to 1978. It was on these estates that Andi's sibling group used to go for work. His mother came here when she was a young girl. She told me that her parents used to live nearer to the foothills when she was a small child. When her father died her uncle brought their family further up the valley and over the ridge to the Suraj Estate. That was before Kaliyanagam took over the estate. When her uncle died her family
moved back into the Pandju Valley, to the cardamom estates at the upper end. After some years she married Andi’s father and together they used to work intermittently for several of the estate owners. From the late 1960s, however, they worked only on the Chettiar Estate. Her husband later took a second wife, and the extended family lived there up to the 1980s.

The upper end of the Pandju Valley is dominated by an enormous mountain wall, which separates the valleys on the southern side of the Palni Hills from the high undulating plateau usually called the Upper Palnis. Chettiar Estate, much smaller than Suraj Estate, is situated inside a shola literally clinging on to this steep wall, and visible from Aruvellam. Andi’s mother told me that they always used to reside within the estate, in contrast to the Paliyans on the Suraj Estate. There are still two huts with stone walls from that time inside the estate, although they are in a dilapidated condition. The estate owner has a big stone house for drying and storing the cardamom and sleeps there during his visits to the estate. He is a former schoolteacher and belongs to the Chettiar caste and, according to Andi’s younger brother, ‘is an ordinary man with salary and debts and not a rich man like the Suraj Estate owner’. When he retired from his teaching duties in Kodaikanal in 1962, he bought the estate with his savings and some borrowed money. Apart from his small pension, the income from the estate was his only economic asset. In the beginning he cultivated 43 acres, but from 1988 it was reduced to only 18 acres.

According to the members of Andi’s sibling group, life was quite regular here. The owner provided them with rice when they worked as watchers, but they also helped with weeding and harvesting. Compared with the Suraj Estate conflicts between the owner and the Paliyans were less common on the Chettiar Estate. Andi’s group claim that they never got into debt and that they were able to combine this work with the collecting of forest plants and the hunting of small game when needed.

In 1985 Andi and the others started to cultivate some land below the Chettiar Estate. They had been able through some savings to buy part of this land the previous year from a landowner in a nearby caste

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75 An important reason for this was that this landowner hired only a few caste labourers on the estate, and for prolonged periods the Paliyans were mainly on their own at this place.
village. Here they cultivated castor (*Ricinus communis*), banana, lime, a few silkcotton trees, and some coffee, their intention being to increase the income from their own cultivation as a supplement to their wages on the Chettiar Estate. This created a major conflict with the estate owner. Andi said that the estate owner in the beginning had encouraged them to do some cultivation of their own on the nearby land. However, after some time he felt that this interfered too much with their work on the estate, and submitted a complaint to the Forest Department. Some forest guards tried to evict them from the area, but they could not do anything because most of the land was revenue land. ‘We also paid them some bribes to leave us alone’, Andi said.

The owner told them to leave the estate. Apart from their father and one of Andi’s brothers who preferred to stay, they all moved down to the land they had bought earlier. Andi’s group built huts and stayed in this place until they moved to Aruvellam in 1990. During this time they survived on wild yam, other forest plants, hunting and some cultivation. They had been able to save some seeds and seedlings from the estate, and bought some from a nearby caste village. The cultivation of castor and banana gave them a small regular income and the cultivation of millet provided food for their own consumption. Andi recalls that they suffered a lot during this period. At certain times of the year they even had problems finding drinking water nearby. Yet Andi was proud of the fact that they had been able to survive on their own, despite the estate owner’s feeling that their action in moving out, had subjected him to competition (*potti*).

Andi’s father died of dysentery in 1989. The year after Andi and all the others joined the founding of Aruvellam. By this time Andi and two of his siblings had families of their own. The group that joined him to settle in Aruvellam consisted of five nuclear families, each erecting their own hut in the new village. In total, they were 24 individuals.

**The Kombai Estate**

The third estate, the Kombai Estate, is situated within one of the bigger patches of forest to the east of the Pandju Valley. Back in the 1960s several hundreds of acres were under cardamom cultivation here. Most of it was abandoned in the 1970s because of the
government policy of not granting new leases. In spite of this Kaliyanagam, the owner of Suraj Estate, bought the Kombai Estate in 1978. He felt it was worth continuing, as there were still many years to run before the old lease was due to expire.

According to Sethu, a Paliyan born in the vicinity of this estate, life was quite good there and conflicts were rare. During recent years, when he was working on the estate, he had also tried some cultivation of his own in the nearby forest, but the Forest Department had put an end to it. Sethu’s group decided to move over to Aruvellam because the idea of creating a village of their own, with land for cultivation, seemed very tempting.

Sethu’s mother and sister also lived on the Kombai Estate together with the latter’s children. His sister, however, had only been working on the Kombai Estate for a few years. Previously her family preferred to stay in different places in the nearby forest living only on forest resources. Three years before they came to Aruvellam, when they were living in a cave at the junction of the Pandju Valley and the valley of Kombai Estate,6 someone from the estate had asked them to come there to work. In the Spring of 1991, some months after the other Paliyans, they decided to leave the estate and move to Aruvellam. Sethu’s sibling group, with their children, consisted of three families and eleven individuals. In Aruvellam they settled down in three huts.

To sum up, of the 40 Paliyan families living in the Pandju Valley and its vicinity in 1990, 18 families, 78 individuals, all in all six sibling groups, joined together to set up, over the next few years the new village of Aruvellam. Five of the sibling groups, Murugan’s, Ganeshan’s, Karuppan’s, Andi’s and Sethu’s, came, as mentioned above, from different cardamom estates. The sixth sibling group was Chapli’s, consisting of two families, nine individuals, who already lived in the vicinity of the village site.

In this process relations between the Paliyan families of the valley changed in a number of ways. More Paliyans were brought together in one place than ever before in the Pandju Valley. However, it also divided several families and sibling groups, who used to live together

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6 This junction is half-way up the Pandju Valley. The open rock area is a common resting-place and a place for sharing information for all people moving up and down the valley. This includes plantation owners and workers, firewood collectors, Forest Department staff, Paliyans and hill caste villagers, among others.
before this shift. For example, one of Andi’s younger brothers joined in the beginning and built a hut of his own in the village, but moved back to Chettiar Estate with his family when the harvest season started in the autumn of 1991. He never settled in Aruvellam again. A younger brother of Murugan stayed on in Suraj Estate with his family and only paid occasional visits to Aruvellam. From Sethu’s sibling group, Sethu himself stayed behind and worked for the owner of Kombai Estate for several more years. He only occasionally joined his wife in Aruvellam when he took a few days off work. There were also several other Paliyan families who joined the village during the first months, but soon moved over to the Senguthumalai area, the neighbouring valley to the west.

In spite of these twists and turns the process of re-settlement was launched. In November 1990 the first Paliyan families in the Pandju Valley settled along the right side of the river Vellam. During the following months this place was transformed from a more or less untouched stretch of riparian forest into a little village, hereafter commonly called Aruvellam, with about twenty huts connected by small paths.

Andi, the initiator

Andi, who was born in the Pandju Valley, was the initiator and instigator of the idea of this village, whom everyone, both Paliyans and outsiders, would refer to with regards to the village plans. At the time of starting the village he was 38 years old and married to 26-year-old Shanti. They had four young sons. Andi and his younger brother Colras were the only Paliyans in the Pandju Valley who had been in school for a couple of years in a nearby caste hill village, situated on the western ridge of the valley. In their school days they had also come to know some of the caste people better than most of the other Paliyans. Usually the Paliyans would not mix with caste people in the area, although they became acquainted with some of them when they worked on the cardamom estates.

Andi stands out as an exceptional Paliyan in more than one respect. He mingled with outsiders in the Pandju Valley in a very relaxed way, without adopting an underdog attitude, otherwise so common when outsiders confront Paliyans. He had a clear goal for the
future and was the one most prepared to work hard to achieve it. If other Paliyans rested for two days he would only rest for one day. During my stay in the village it was a common sight to see Andi talking to other people and at the same time doing some work, while his partners were just spending the time chatting. While Andi seldom took a day off, Kaliyappan, from another sibling group, was a more typical Paliyan. Kaliyappan used to claim that ‘working more than three days in a row makes your body feel uncomfortable’. Andi also tried to keep strict control over his sons, shouting orders to them from morning to evening. The expression *somberi* (lazybones) easily slipped out of his mouth with regard to his children and fellow Paliyans. His wife Shanti also confirmed his confidence. She is a strongly built lady in comparison with other Paliyan women, taller than her husband, even matching the otherwise taller caste women. She declared with confidence that she could easily carry more weight on her head than her husband, who was considered a strong man by both Paliyans and outsiders.

As Andi was very outspoken, he started without hesitation to explain the village project and the reasons behind it when I arrived in the valley for the first time. When I asked him why they wanted a village of their own, his answer was straightforward. He wanted a better life for his children compared with the life he and his parents had been living so far. He also said that they had been treated like *adimaihal* (slaves) on the estates and explained that ‘in the rainy period, at cardamom harvest time, the foreman forces us to work in the heavy rains. In this new situation we can work as we want’. He also explained that they expected land for cultivation from the government soon, and other outside help to establish the cultivation and to build stone houses. New houses would be a great improvement, according to him, because their ordinary mud-and-stick huts cannot withstand the heavy rains; they need constant repair and cause a lot of suffering and

77 In contrast, hunting was always something they enjoyed and therefore not considered as work (*velai*).

78 The Paliyans often used the word *adimai* when they referred to what they considered as harsh working conditions in the estates. Often though, they were not physically forced to stay, as Andi’s sibling group demonstrated by leaving the estate (but see the case of Siruvattukadu Valley mentioned earlier). However, the word *adimai* became a catchword for describing working conditions all over the hills due to a much exposed bonded labour case involving Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in the Palni Hills in the 1980s.
trouble during the monsoon period. If the Paliyans got stone houses they would also be able to apply for electricity from the government. He also added to the list the school that they planned to start within a couple of months with outside support.

Several suggestions of where and how to establish a village had cropped up among them during the 1980s. One idea, encouraged by the local authorities, was to create a village in a forest area close to some of the cardamom estates. The Paliyans ignored this, because in such an area they would not be allowed to cultivate, as the Forest Department does not allow cultivation in reserved forest. In 1987 the Village Administration Officer (VAO) in the area offered to arrange houses for them in a nearby caste hill village. Andi’s reaction was totally negative: ‘They gave us only houses. What can we do with houses? We also expected land for cultivation. So we told the VAO that we didn’t want to live there. He tried to force us, but we refused’.

During the period immediately before the shift to the village site, Andi received a new suggestion and, together with his younger brother Colras, worked hard to persuade the others that this time they would succeed. The new site suggested to them had the virtue of being within revenue land, where it was possible to have houses as well as land for cultivation. Also, they would not need to share the village with caste people (as we shall see later, things turned out differently). Andi and Colras visited other Paliyan settlements in the area and described their plan and the kind of support from outside that they could count on. When I asked Paliyans in Aruvellam to recall these discussions they said that Andi, when he came to their settlements, promised them ‘land, stone houses, bank loans and a school for the children’.

Andi would repeat the advantages of a village of their own to anyone willing to listen, both to his co-villagers to encourage them to keep on working to achieve the goals and to outsiders (especially those outsiders who he thought could be enrolled as supporters of their cause). In the beginning most of the villagers who joined agreed with the points he made. Over the next few years, though, when things did not work out as expected, different levels of disagreement penetrated this general agreement. It was not always easy for the Paliyan families

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79 Families without houses can apply for stone houses through certain government house schemes.
to foresee the new situation that would confront them in the ongoing struggle to establish themselves in the village.

**The village and the co-operation with VARIHD**

When the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley discussed the idea of a village of their own, they knew that other Paliyans had already begun to settle down in permanent villages. In the Senguthumalai area almost 40 families came together in a village in 1985. Communicating with other Paliyans, the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley also knew of Paliyan villages further away, proving to them that the idea was feasible. However, the practical side of the idea was totally new to them. Like other Paliyans, they had based their earlier settlements on sibling co-residence. They lived in semi-permanent settlements and each sibling group preferred to keep a distance between themselves and others. In practice this meant that they situated their settlements inside forests or high up on ridges, at places difficult for others to reach without notice. When they started to work on estates or for other landowners, some of them lived inside the owners’ land for shorter or longer periods in huts or houses owned by the landowner and usually situated apart from the dwellings of other staff and workers. These different residential practices still persist, i.e. forest settlements, and living in worker’s sheds or coolie-lines.

As already mentioned, Paliyan sedentarisation was not part of any government settlement scheme even if the local government generally became part of the process. Sedentarisation occurred more as a response to the continuous expansion of economic exploitation of the hills (while cardamom cultivation decreased, other kinds of cultivation increased) and a dramatic increase in activities by NGOs in the remote areas, combined with different local circumstances and Paliyan initiatives in each valley. Furthermore, the shrinking of employment opportunities on the cardamom estates weakened Paliyan dependence on the estate owners, encouraging the Paliyans to look for new economic niches.

The creation of Paliyan villages meant a fundamental change in the interaction between the Paliyans and their neighbours. The establishment of a permanent village in most cases needed the consent of the local authorities. Therefore villages had to be situated within revenue land, areas where the Paliyans would be closer to caste villages
and farmland. The government policy prohibits village land grants within reserved forest, i.e. the usual settlement area of the Paliyans. With the shift to revenue land, the government was more or less forced to intervene.

Relations between the local Paliyans themselves also changed dramatically. From living separately in sibling groups comprising at the most five to six families, they now came together in settlements of several sibling groups, sometimes with more than 30 families.

At the time when Andi was eager to fulfil his idea of creating the village he got to know Mohan, a caste man owning some land in the Pandju Valley. Mohan was one of several landowners (all caste people) from the plains, who since the 1960s had cultivated silkcotton and lime in the Pandju Valley. This was the place where Chapli’s sibling group (mentioned earlier) were working as watchers. When Andi and the others in his group visited the Chapli families, who are their close relatives, they used to meet Mohan. He was an ex-service man from the Indian Army, and lived in a nearby town in the plains. On retirement, in 1970, he got five acres of hill land as part of his pension. With the profit he made by cultivating silkcotton and lime, he was able to buy another six acres of land in the area. This was in the early 1980s. With these eleven acres he was able to maintain his family. In his younger days, when he was on leave from the army, he used to visit the Pandju Valley to hunt with friends. At that time there was no cultivation along the river, only forest. Plenty of wild animals roamed the area and Mohan and other farmers even came across tigers now and then. Today Mohan is an old man, but still strong enough to walk up occasionally from the plains to check his land.80

When Mohan learned of Andi’s village plans in the late 1980s, he suggested that the Paliyans should apply for a village site close to his own land. Mohan knew very well the legal status and demarcations of land in the surroundings area. All land in this part of the Pandju Valley, from the river up to the ridges on both sides, was revenue land.81 Large

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80 Mohan died in 1998, and his son, a lorry driver by profession, inherited the plantation.
81 There is revenue land in the foothills before entering the Pandju Valley. From the entrance to the valley and all the way up to Aruvellam it is reserved forest. Then for about a kilometre it is revenue land, shifting to reserved forest again up to the end of the valley, where parts of it becomes revenue land again (this is the place where Andi and his sibling group have some land). It is in this last section that the government
sections of this land were still unoccupied and so far no one had applied for it.

Mohan showed Andi that there was land enough for Andi’s people between the plantations at the lower end of this revenue land and the plantations further up. The village could be situated near the river, on the right bank. Around it, on the slopes on both sides, each family could have their own plot for cultivation. Based on their discussion they drew a map on which they indicated a village site, temple land, a burial ground, and land for cultivation. This became the final suggestion, which Andi put forward to the other Paliyans. In the petition that Mohan helped them to formulate 40 Paliyan families applied for land, i.e. all the Paliyan families living in and near the Pandju Valley.

At this time Andi and the others used occasionally to meet Narajanan, a social worker from Kodaikanal, the only town in the Palni Hills. He was running a NGO called Van Allen Rural Integrated Health and Development Project (hereafter VARIHD). Andi and his brother Colras knew Narajanan from the time when they went to school in the nearby caste village. Colras had been part of a health training programme that Narajanan and VARIHD had conducted some years previously. Andi had explained their ideas about having a village of their own to Narajanan.

When Andi showed Mohan’s suggestion to Narajanan, the latter thought it was a good idea. He told them that VARIHD could arrange housing facilities through their contacts, a school for the children, help them to establish cultivation, mediate with the authorities, etc. From now on Narajanan and VARIHD became the most important partners of the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley.

VARIHD was set up in 1980, its main objective being to establish a health care programme for the remote rural villages in the Palni Hills. The organisation became part of CORSOCK, Coordinating Council for Social Concerns in Kodaikanal, whose main purpose was to ‘coordinate the efforts for serving the poor in Kodaikanal’ (CORSOCK 1976:1). With its hospital, home for elderly and destitute residents, craft shop, etc., it has since 1970 striven ‘to enrich the lives

leased out forest land for cardamom cultivation. Due to the site of the two old caste villages situated on the left and right ridges above Aruvellam, the revenue land claimed was like an island within the otherwise forested valley.
of people in Kodaikanal regardless of race, creed, caste or income’ (ibid.). Some of the doctors working for the organisation were missionaries from the American Baptist Mission, and most of their funding came from the Lutheran Church in America and other Christian organisations in the Netherlands (Tegenfeldt 1980).

VARIHD became CORSOCK’s rural wing. A weakness of the VARIHD committee, according to themselves, was that they were all residents of Kodaikanal, with a majority of Western expatriates whose status was ‘necessarily somewhat tenuous’, as one of the leading American doctors put it. They were therefore eager to enrol local Tamils as fieldworkers in the villages, and Narajanan became VARIHD’s first field assistant. He came from a local caste hill village and belonged to the Mannadian caste, one of the dominant caste groups in the rural Palni Hills. At this time he was a young man who had recently completed his Bachelor of Science in Rural Development Science (the first graduate from his village), and had already started youth clubs among his own people. Through his contacts VARIHD established village health committees in several hill villages. Apart from health education and sanitation, their programme included day care centres (balwadi) for children, and funding for improving farming and animal husbandry.

Through their work in the rural areas VARIHD’s staff came into contact with the Paliyans. At the time when Narajanan met Andi and offered assistance to his group, VARIHD had already begun to cooperate with other Paliyan groups. Andi, Mohan and Narajanan went together to the sub-Collector’s office with the application for the village. There the authorities studied the application and other relevant records, and later approved the grant of the village site in the Pandju Valley, including a temple area and a burial ground, a total of four and a half acres. The Paliyans were also given a promise that land for cultivation would be arranged later.

With all these factors to hand, the support of Mohan and VARIHD and the approval from the local authority, Andi could show the other Paliyans that the idea of a village of their own was close to realisation. This was in late 1990. In November, when most of the cardamom harvest on the estates was over, the Paliyan families from Suraj and Chettiar Estates gathered together their few belongings and
in one day moved down the valley to the place along the river which from now on would be called Aruvellam.

At the bottom of the Pandju Valley there is a path parallel to the right bank of the river Vellam. It is the usual route for people moving up and down the valley. At the chosen village site the Paliyans built their huts on both sides of this path. Although they now formed one single settlement, the former spatial division was still to a great extent reproduced in the way each family located their huts. Karuppan’s and Murugan’s group built their huts below the footpath, close to the river. Ganeshan’s group, who had lived on their own in a cave during the last few years of work on Suraj Estate, now preferred to put their hut just above the path, at the upper end of the site, a short distance away from the others. Andi’s group formed a cluster of huts also above the path, at the lower end of the village site. When Sethu’s group joined some months later, they built their huts in the gap between those of Ganeshan’s and Andi’s groups. Slightly separated, all the clusters of huts were within sight of each other and close enough to make a conversation possible by shouting from one cluster to the other.

The two Paliyan families already living in the vicinity of the village site, Chapli’s sibling group, did not move into the village. They preferred to stay in their huts inside the land belonging to the landowner they worked for, but reckoned themselves, and were so seen by the other Paliyans, as being part of the village. Their huts were some minutes away inside the forest up the slope on the opposite left-hand side, but close enough to make it possible for them to participate now and then in the life of the village.

The point in time for starting work on the village was decided quite deliberately. The heavy rains of the autumn monsoon were over, which makes it easier for outdoor work. The hottest part of the year was still several months ahead – a dry period, which can, when prolonged, turn the soil into a rock-like condition. After the monsoon, however, the soil is still moist enough to make it quite easy to dig.

The first months demanded a lot of hard work. They had to turn the steep forested slope into a site suitable for a village. Most of the big trees were cut down and the ground cleared. They needed to level the soil to create flat ground for the huts, including the removal of bigger roots and stones. When the major work was finished they had built
several terraces, from the lower parts close to the river, and further up the slope above the footpath of the valley.

The field assistants of VARIHD became regular guests in Aruvellam, and the village from now on became recognised by the authorities. This was done through an official inauguration, a common custom in India when new villages are established. It took place at the end of the year with a small ceremony together with the officers responsible for village administration. The Revenue Inspector and the Village Administration Officer were honoured guests and completed the celebration by putting up a metal board with the name of the village at the lower entrance to the village. At the next monsoon the sign fell down during heavy rains never to be put up again. I do not really know why the Paliyans did not bother to re-erect it. One reason could be that the village was officially named after the Collector of the district at the time. Locally no one bothered about this name and today no outsider would know that this name was the original name given to the settlement.\textsuperscript{82} The name Aruvellam, which refers to the river, is mainly used by the Paliyans. Outsiders from the nearby plains who have business in the area usually use the word ‘the colony’ for the place. This is a common way all over India to designate a newly established ward or small village, often built through government housing schemes for lower castes and tribes.

VARIHD’s operations expanded in the late 1980s. At the end of 1991 they were assisting seven Paliyan settlements in different areas of the Palni Hills. The staff consisted at that time of two teams with two field assistants in each, dividing the settlements between them and trying to visit each settlement at least once a fortnight.

In February 1991 I joined Narajanan on one of these expeditions. This was my first visit to Aruvellam. We left Kodaikanal on

\textsuperscript{82} This became evident in 1993 when the Paliyans in the village complained to the police of the district headquarters during a conflict with some landowners in the vicinity. When they signed the complaint they indicated the village name and the name of the main village in the area, which is a common practice in India. The police sent out an investigation team, which had never heard of the official name of Aruvellam. They went instead to the main village of the area as they thought the official name of the Paliyan village must refer to a hamlet close to the main village. To reach the main village, situated on a hilltop above the plains, the police party had to walk for several hours. Discovering their mistake and realising that they would need another day’s walk, into another valley, to reach Aruvellam, they decided to give up and return to headquarter. Due to this incident, the complaint was never investigated.
Narajanan’s motorbike early one morning. After a two hours’ ride downhill we reached the plains. From here to the Pandju Valley is another hour’s bike ride following the main road around the foothills.

We left the motorbike at a small tea stall at the roadside nearest to the valley entrance. Two Paliyan men were waiting for us. They carried some of our luggage, including our food for the overnight stay. After walking through some paddy fields, sugarcane fields, and mango gardens, following the Vellam River, we reached the valley entrance.

At the end of the last mango garden there is a river-crossing where the path up the Pandju Valley starts. Apart from a few firewood collectors at the forest edge, we did not meet anyone. Early spring is the low season for cultivation and few people move up and down the valley. Around noon, after three hours’ walking and two more river crossings, we reached the village. Most of the villagers were at the site, as they were expecting Narajanan’s visit. Although some attention was paid to me, especially when Narajanan introduced me, most of the activities were focused on Narajanan. I was mainly a silent observer, keeping in the background.

The work to be undertaken by the villagers at this time was to create an area for the school. Narajanan discussed the place where the Paliyans should level out the slope. Some villagers were clearing the ground with tools already provided by VARIHD. During the afternoon Narajanan advised and treated those who came forward complaining about different sicknesses. One man had a bad back. Narajanan asked him to lie down on the ground. He gave the man some massage and instructed all the others, now standing in a close circle around him, in how they could easily apply this kind of massage themselves.

In the evening a meeting was held outside the cluster of huts belonging to Andi and his brothers, by the light of a hurricane lamp. Other Paliyans joined in, coming from their huts now in darkness. Narajanan talked about the importance of education, health care, etc. He also asked the villagers to make kitchen gardens around their huts. The vegetables they could grow would give them important nutrition and vitamins, especially needed for the children. Everyone agreed, usually by saying ‘Sari, Sirl’ (Yes, Sir!), with an additional nod of the head as a sign of approval.

If Narajanan had some instructions, needing extra attention, he usually turned to Andi. These instructions included what the villagers
should achieve by the time of his next visit. Narajanan considered Andi to be the village leader and the one responsible for organising the other Paliyans.

Andi brought up the land issue and their expectations of starting their own cultivation. This matter was still pending with the authorities and Narajanan urged them to be patient and wait a little longer until it was settled. Some of the neighbouring landowners were not too happy to see the Paliyans getting their own land and tried to stop the process. Several landowners had good reasons for this. It would increase competition over land in the area, decreasing the possibility for those already established to expand. Narajanan, however, assured the Paliyans that it was not a big problem. It was only a matter of time, as the machinery of the authorities worked slowly.

We slept in the hut of Andi’s younger brother Colras. Next morning, after breakfast, we left for the plains. Apart from such regular overnight visits, VARIHD also now and then invited the villagers to the VARIHD office at Van Allen Hospital in Kodaikanal. They used to gather Paliyans from several settlements and give them childbirth training, health education, medical checks, etc. VARIHD also supported them with occasional food and money in order to provide them with supplies so that they could devote their efforts to the more time-consuming tasks of establishing the village. Monetary reimbursements included compensation when the villagers visited VARIHD in Kodaikanal and payment of house and land tax. In addition to this, VARIHD also sometimes gave the villagers second-hand clothes collected by CORSOCK in Kodaikanal.

In October the same year I made my second visit to the village, again in company with Narajanan, but now also with his new assistant Murugesh. Narajanan also brought along a Paliyan man from Varagaraparai, a Paliyan settlement along the main road between the Kodaikanal and the plains, where VARIHD had been working for several years. The main reason for this was to encourage the Aruvellam Paliyans in their work of establishing the village with the experience of Paliyans who had already been through this process. There was a discussion as to whether the Paliyans from Varagaraparai should come and help the Aruvellam people with the initial phase of clearing the land for cultivation as soon as they got clearance from the government. However, this kind of village-to-village co-operation never materialised.
It did not correspond to customs among the Paliyans and seemed more to reflect the wishes of VARIHD's staff.

The work on the settlement was proceeding, although the villagers were still waiting for the land clearance. A quite large area had been levelled out in the middle of the village site, where the schoolhouse and a little schoolyard were to be situated. Narajanan repeated eagerly that they should create small kitchen gardens, as no one so far had done this.

Basically the village work was proceeded as planned. After the monsoon, at the beginning of 1992, the villagers started to erect the schoolhouse. When it was completed VARIHD provided a teacher. Narajanan informed them that in addition to the school, the teacher would be able to give the adults evening classes, where they could learn to read and write – 'Something very important if you should be able to communicate with the authorities', as Narajanan put it. This matter was, however, left to the following year.

The flexible economy continues

The most important reason given by the Paliyan families for joining the village of Aruvellam was to increase their economic opportunities at a time when work on the cardamom estates was declining, and especially to realise the promise to get land for cultivation. In this section I shall look into these economic aspects, and the way they developed during the first years.

The major economic activity in the Pandju Valley in the 1990s was cash-crop cultivation. This included work on the above-mentioned cardamom estates, as well as on smaller family-owned plantations. The oldest cultivation in the area pertains to the plantations connected with caste villages in the hills, dominated by the Mannadian caste in this area of the southern slopes of the Palni Hills. In the Pandju Valley their land is confined to the forest-covered hilltops and upper parts of the ridges to the east and west. The Paliyan families who joined Aruvellam had very limited contact with these caste people. The latter will therefore only be referred to in a few circumstances. Of more

83 However, some Paliyan families worked and lived close to these villages. They were part of those families whom Andi tried to persuade to join Aruvellam, but who turned him down as they thought the project too insecure. There may also have been other
importance is the cultivation of land at the valley bottom along the river. The first cash-crop cultivation along the river started in the 1960s. In the early 1990s it had expanded into more than 150 acres, owned by nineteen different caste families, all of them having their homes in the nearby plains. Today the size of landholdings ranges from 0.5 to 25 acres per family. The possibility of the Paliyans being granted land by the state in this area in the early 1990s was part of the latest expansion of cultivable land into the otherwise uninhabited (apart from the Paliyans) and forested valley. The main crops are silkcotton, lime and pickle lime, and, of minor importance, orange, guava and jackfruit.

Apart from cultivation, the only other economic activity in the Pandju Valley in the 1990s was some collecting of non-timber forest produce like bamboo, firewood, and occasionally a few other items. However, these activities only involved a few individuals and no Paliyans.

When the Paliyans left the cardamom estates to start constructing the village in November 1990, it was low season in all plantations in the valley. The only economic resources available to them in the neighbourhood were those provided by the forests and especially their traditional staple wild yam, normally procured at this time of the year, after the rainy period. In the area around Aruvellam they could find Sev valli kilangu, Mul valli kilangu down towards the plains, Korakku valli kilangu further up, and Shola valli kilangu in the shola at the highest elevations. Survival was no problem, although the shift of settlement resulted in an increasing dependence on forest resources for the first two years. After about ten months some of the Paliyans in Aruvellam once again started to combine hunting and gathering with wage employment.

The first opportunity to work for others in the neighbourhood of the village came about five months after their arrival in the area, when weeding work started in the late Spring of 1991. However, the plantation owners were only willing to pay Rs 6-7 for a day’s work — about half the wages that had been offered on the estates. So no one took up the offer. At the time of the next cardamom harvest, in reasons behind their reluctance to join. For example, Kannan, Andi’s uncle, was in a long-term conflict with his sister, Andi’s mother, the reason being that his son, who had been married to Andi’s sister Karupayi, died under mysterious circumstances. Kannan blamed, and still does, his sister’s family for that tragic outcome.
August, the accountants from both Suraj and Chettiar Estates turned up and asked their former Paliyan workers to join them again for the harvest, despite the estate owner’s displeasure when they abandoned the estates the previous year. Many of the families of Andi’s and Murugan’s sibling groups decided to respond to this request. This time, though, they would only go for the actual harvest period. This meant not leaving the village for more than ten days at a time, five or six times up to December/January. The other families preferred to stay on in the village subsisting mainly on forest food.

Apart from these resources, VARIHD, as mentioned above, supported them to a certain extent with rice and wheat the first year. When the school was established the schoolchildren got a mid-day meal. Such provisions were, however, not always regular. The quantity was too small to change a family’s general dependence on other food resources.

In 1992, during their second year in the village, two major changes took place in their economy. The first came when the government in the Spring of that year finally granted land for cultivation: three acres per family, with a total of 120 acres for cultivation. In the short run this meant that they could cultivate millet; these crops yield within three months and give two harvests per year. The families who started this were Andi’s and Murugan’s sibling groups, who enjoyed their first harvest in May 1992. Others followed. However, this kind of cultivation only lasted until 1994 when the losses to wild animals proved too great.84

The second change was in their relations with neighbouring plantation owners. In April 1992, before the fruit season started, they were once again approached by several of the neighbouring landowners, who needed workers for weeding and harvesting. This time the wages offered were more competitive: Rs 12 for females and Rs 15 for males. As the main investment of establishing the village had been completed the year before and no more provisions of food were expected from VARIHD, most families decided to join the labour force. The work input varied a lot from one individual or family to the

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84 From the time the sprouts come up until harvest two months later, the land needs to be protected during the night against bison in particular. The problem was that a pair of bison could easily devastate an acre within one night, and the Pandju Valley contained plenty of them.
next. According to Andi it amounted to about ten days per month per individual, including both men and women. This work was even less regulated than their earlier work on the cardamom estates. Usually the labourers were paid according to the number of days they worked, either in rice or in cash.

The most common way of organising this was as follows. Following an agreement the landowner brought up rice as payment. After each workday the workers got their daily amount of rice from the owner or one of his trusted workers (most often a non-Paliyan). If the owner ran out of rice no Paliyans would turn up for work. The Paliyans’ reluctance to work without advance or direct payment was almost a rule. Let me give an example. In May 1994 some Paliyans were doing weeding work when the landowner ran out of rice. As the owner was down in the plains they decided to send the following message to him written on a piece of paper by Vincent, my assistant:

To rPandian. I am K. Kaliyappan writing this letter. Last time we got 20 padi (one padi is about one and a half kg) of rice from Nagaraj. It is finished. These two days we worked on your land. Send some more rice and sugarcane through my group people (eenga aaluga). Only then can we continue to work'. This letter reflects the immediate return system of the Paliyan economy (Woodburn 1980; 1988). They do not accumulate surplus, and especially not food surplus, and simply can not do this kind of work without food.

Anyway, for the landowners the access to Paliyan labour was a good opportunity. The Paliyans worked for a lower wage than was demanded by caste people brought up from the plains, which is otherwise the usual practice among the absentee landowners in these hills. These caste people would be paid twice as much as the Paliyans. The explanation, which the landowners gave the Paliyans for the

85 *Eenga aaluga*, my group people, is the most common expression among the Paliyans when referring to themselves in relation to non-Paliyans. It is also used internally to express the sibling group to which one belongs.

86 For further comparison: in 1995 the wages for weeding work in the Pandju Valley were Rs 20/day for males, Rs 15/day for females for Paliyans; caste workers from the plains got Rs 40 for males and Rs 30 for females. Wages could differ from one area to another in the hills. In the Lower Palnis, where labour demands are higher due to the large number of plantations, wages are higher. On one estate the Paliyans were paid for weeding work Rs 35/day for males and Rs 25/day. In general, Paliyan wages are lower compared to other workers.
difference in payment, was that bringing in people far from home is more expensive. For the Paliyans their wages were no lower than the wages they were used to on the estates, and did not prohibit them from taking up this work.

The Paliyans were mainly used for three kinds of tasks on these plantations: weeding, harvesting and transporting. Chapli’s sibling group continued to watch over land belonging to two nearby landowners above the village. They could also, as members of the village, benefit from some of the subsidies handed out by VARIHD. Working as watchers in this area, mainly protecting silk cotton and lime trees from animals and theft had the virtue of producing a steady income. It yielded a lower payment per day compared with weeding etc., but was considered easy work. Chapli and his sister-in-law were paid Rs 300 each per month. In 1993 Murugan took a similar job with a landowner just below the village, and moved his family down to a hut on that land, while the rest of his sibling group stayed in the village proper. Although the families were more tightly connected to the landowner through this arrangement as compared with the daily labourers, it was mainly the one specifically hired for watching who had the responsibility vis-à-vis the owner, in these cases Chapli, his sister-in-law and Murugan. They had to be always inside the owner’s land. If they wanted occasionally to take time off, they needed the owner’s permission. Most of the other Paliyan families saw this working arrangement, in contrast to the kind of watching they did on the estates, as a way of reducing their flexibility. It restricted one from taking up work for other landowners and from coming and going as one pleased. Andi considered this arrangement as something belonging to the past. He said that the Paliyans who guard other people’s land, like being slaves.

By the end of 1992, two years after the shift to Aruvellam, the economic situation had turned out to be even more flexible than before. Not only did the Aruvellam villagers still have access to forest resources, as well as work on the cardamom estates (even if it was to a more limited extent than earlier). They also had the opportunity to work for several other landowners within the valley. In addition to this,

87 The wage noted for Chapli and his sister-in-law was for 1994. It also included other work on the plantation. Murugan’s wage was Rs 200 per month, but he would get an additional income if he did weeding or some other work besides watching.
land for cultivation was now available. However, the hill cash crops common in this area do not yield a harvest until the fourth or fifth year after planting, and need a lot of attention in the meantime to achieve this goal. As will be seen later, this became an obstacle to securing cultivation. The surplus needed to make labour and cash investments was not always easy for the families to accumulate. Further, although each family had their own plot and tended it within their family, the physically fixed nature of this activity also came into conflict with social relations within the village. I shall discuss this in detail in the next chapter. The only cash crops they could enjoy that would give a faster yield were banana and castor, and occasional cultivation of beans and brinjal (grown a few times by families within Andi’s sibling group).

In 1993 the scene had changed slightly and one could see fully developed banana and castor plants at several places in and around the village. Banana in particular offered a welcome additional income. Although the profit was quite small, the banana plant yields all the year round. The Paliyans also now had several papaya trees for their own consumption, and some of them had planted different kinds of sweet potatoes and a limited number of other vegetables around their huts.

The only sibling group that differed from this general economic description was Andi’s. As mentioned earlier, they had already in 1985 been able to establish land for most of the families within their group in the upper part of the valley. Lime was the main crop, and Andi and Colras in particular were able to benefit from this, as their lime trees were the oldest.\footnote{Andi had 500 lime trees, Colras 700 trees, Kuppan 500 trees, and Kuppi (who lived on Chettiar Estate) 100 trees. Kuppan’s and Kuppi’s trees yielded their first harvest in 1993, while Andi and Colras had harvested since 1988.} They could count on a profit of at least Rs 6,000 each per year from this land,\footnote{This would be more than a yearly income for other male Paliyans in the valley if they do wage labour on plantations for a daily wage of Rs 15-20.} and could thereby rely on a substantial extra yearly income compared with the other families. As we shall see later, this asset gave them much more room for manoeuvre.

Opportunities for securing subsistence as well as for getting a cash income looked bright for the Paliyan families in Aruvellam in 1992. The authorities had granted them land for cultivation and the relationship with VARIHD was proceeding well, with the school established in Spring the same year. The next chapter, however, will
show that relations with outsiders, including both the neighbouring landowners and VARIHD, involved them in greater problems than expected.
Chapter Five

The Coming and Going of NGOs

This chapter will continue the exposé of the first years of the establishment of the Aruvellam village in the Pandju Valley. While the previous chapter was concerned with the first phase of its establishment and the economic consequences for the Paliyan families who joined in, this chapter will focus on external and internal relations, and in particular those conflicts emanating from the new circumstances prevailing in the valley during the first half of the 1990s. I shall present two cases of conflicts between the Paliyans and neighbouring landowners. Apart from the competition over land, these conflicts also significantly affected the co-operation between the Paliyans and the NGOs.

A caste group moves into the village

I have already mentioned that the Paliyans occasionally ran into conflicts with the estate owners when they worked on the cardamom estates. During this period, before they settled in Aruvellam, they also came into conflict with the Forest Department. These conflicts were quite small in magnitude, most often limited to individual Paliyans or single Paliyan families. One important reason was that the competition over resources and power between these landowners and the Paliyans was almost nil; mutual interests were stronger. This fact changed significantly when the Paliyans became landowners themselves. As cultivable land is one of the most valuable assets in India, and ownership is very unequally distributed, competition over land is high. There is everywhere a craving for suitable land, even in such
inaccessible areas as the Pandju Valley, where turning the steep forest slopes into cultivable land is no easy or cheap pursuit.

Already from the beginning of establishing the village there were disputes between the surrounding landowners and the Paliyans. We should recall that several of the neighbouring landowners were negative in their attitude to the establishment of the village at this site. It was mainly due to Murugan, the landowner who helped the Paliyans, that other landowners did not take action against the village idea. One important argument in favour of the Paliyans, which Murugan used, was, of course, that it would benefit the landowners to have cheap labour within such close range.

The most common incidents were accusations of theft from the landowners against the Paliyans, and especially the theft of crops. These conflicts were usually easily sorted out and of a temporary nature. When several Paliyan families in early 1992 started to work for the landowners, the interaction seemed to be working well. However, later that Spring a threat came from another direction. Whereas they were on speaking terms with the bigger landowners for whom they worked, another group of landowners started to build huts of their own within the village proper. This was a group of small landowners who were in a similar situation to that of the Paliyans, trying to start up new cultivation and hoping for a yield in the near future. They had small plots of land in the vicinity of Aruvellam, of about the same size as the plots taken up by the Paliyan families.

In the late 1980s the Tamil Nadu Government had released a total of 300 acres in this area, of which the Paliyans, as a group, had been given about a third. The other plots had been handed out to families from the plains, mainly people from lower castes and especially from the Pallar caste. Several of them eventually abandoned their plots because of the relatively harsh conditions in this area, which is especially difficult for people who have their permanent home in the nearby plains and at the same time cannot afford to hire labour. Others tried to ease these problems by investing time and money in permanent huts for overnight stay. Four Pallar families decided to build such huts in the Spring of 1992, choosing to locate them in a section within the Paliyan village, which they considered a suitable site as it was close to

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90 The Pallar caste is one of the former 'Untouchable' castes, today listed by the Tamil Nadu Government as a Scheduled Caste.
their plots and also close to the river and potable water. This occupation of village land was unexpected for the Paliyans. Suddenly they had to share their village with another group of people. In addition to this, the Pallar families also took up a substantial amount of land for gardens within the village proper; this was done to a greater extent and in a much neater way in comparison with the kitchen gardens made by the Paliyans.

Before this there had not been any conflicts between the Pallars and the Paliyans. The Pallar families worked on their own land and treated others with normal respect. They did not live there all the year round as they had their homes in the plains. They only turned up to do the necessary work in the fields in accordance with seasonal demands, usually not for more than a couple of weeks at a time, and often for even shorter spells of time.\(^9\)\(^1\)

For Andi and the other Paliyan families the new members of the village were not something they openly opposed. Their reaction was more of a confused, perplexed kind. However, Narajanan from VARIHD told them that the village was strictly for Paliyans. He often repeated: 'You have to act as a group, otherwise these people will take over the whole village. That is the way strong caste groups behave'. What Narajanan was referring to is the strong caste loyalty in the region. Conflicts over resources in the area are mainly organised in caste terms, pitting different caste groups against each other. This is also manifested today in the increase in caste-based political parties in Tamil Nadu.

Narajanan's caste group, the Mannadian, is well-known in the area for its strong group loyalty. This organising principle is what he was trying to impose on the Paliyans. He also claimed that if the Paliyans did not force the intruders to leave the village, VARIHD would not be able to support them fully. This view was, among other things, based on the fact, that according to their statutes, VARIHD's funds were for Paliyans or other tribal villages rather than for mixed or caste villages. According to Narajanan, they could not, for example, expect stone houses if the village was not 'a Paliyan village', as the

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\(^9\) Ramesh's family was an exception. In contrast to the other Pallar families, his family did not have enough resources to keep a home in the plains. They therefore lived permanently in Aruvellam.
organisation building stone houses would not help Paliyans living in mixed villages.92

VARIHD’s demand put the Paliyans in a tricky situation. On the one hand, they did not evaluate the problem in such strong terms as VARIHD’s staff did. On the other hand, they lacked the social means for handling a conflict according to the expectations of VARIHD. The Paliyans’ hesitation was in line with their ordinary method of conflict solution. When severe conflicts arose within their own group, the final solution was usually that one party on their own initiative left the group (as mentioned in Chapter Three in relation to the cardamom estates). This way of acting was possible because the Paliyans usually had a minimum of fixed resources.

In this situation Andi and his brother Colras, as spokesmen for the Paliyans, told Narajanan that VARIHD had to take the initiative, either acting on its own or engaging the authorities to take proper action. While the Pallar families in the course of time established themselves in the village, relations between the Paliyans and VARIHD became more and more strained. They blamed each other for not taking responsibility for the situation arising. In the long run this created a major rift in their interaction, and eventually led to the end of their co-operation in 1994.

To understand why this conflict surfaced we need to look at how the interaction between different actors developed in Aruvellam. While VARIHD was able to help the Paliyans with land clearance for cultivation, it was more difficult to engage the Paliyans in VARIHD’s work in health and education. However, it was these issues that were VARIHD’s main agenda.

Although the school for the children was something most Paliyans appreciated, their way of life, and the role of the children within the family, was not easy to co-ordinate with the school schedule. Often children were taken out of school if their parents left the village for visits to the plains, or to work outside the village. The children were also used for different purposes during daytime, an example being the sun drying of the millet harvest, which took place in the schoolyard or outside the family hut. If rain came all the children rushed out of

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92 The organisation Narajanan had in mind was Reaching the Unreached, a NGO one of whose main activities is to build houses for ‘people in need’. They have built houses for, among others, the Paliyans in Varagaraparai and Manjalar Dam.
school to help bring the grains under cover, thereby interrupting the lessons. Other examples were when some children were occasionally needed to take the family goats out for grazing or when they had to follow their parents when the latter were working for landowners in the vicinity. There were also a few families who never allowed their children to join the school at all.

While the schoolteacher, together with VARIHD’s staff, urged the Paliyans to allow their children to attend the school more regularly, the Paliyans often excused their behaviour by referring to other immediate needs that had to be given priority. In spite of this, on my visit in August and September 1992 the school was functioning regularly with 10 to 25 children attending. The schoolteacher, who was Narajanan’s cousin and from the same hill village, lived with her husband and daughter in their own hut adjacent to the school.

The schoolteacher regarded the Paliyan children’s regularity in attending the school as only a matter of time. One event that disappointed her expectations took place in March 1993, when a cyclone destroyed parts of the schoolhouse and the school had to close down. The damage was severe but with hard work it could have been restored within a couple of days. To Narajanan’s and the schoolteacher’s dismay the Paliyans in the village hesitated to undertake the work. Narajanan tried to force them so that the education could resume. The Paliyans claimed that they were preoccupied with other things. Only if VARIHD was prepared to pay them for the work needed would they be able to do it at once. Narajanan thought it was in the villagers’ own interests to invest in the school. It took more than three months before the Paliyans finally repaired it.

Other activities that put strain on the interaction between VARIHD and the Paliyans were the training programmes in health and childcare in Kodaikanal offered by VARIHD. Most Paliyans were reluctant to attend these programmes. They felt the training was too far away and that, with the time for travelling, it would take them several days to attend. VARIHD also wanted to set up evening classes in the village for the grown-ups, an idea which none of the Paliyans supported. They claimed that they needed to rest in the evenings. Many

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93 This was between 50 to 90 % of the children of Aruvellam. They were between three and ten years of age.
of the elderly Paliyans also thought they were too old anyway for such things.

These discussions reflected a general problem in the interaction between the Paliyans and VARIHD. Narajanan thought that the Paliyans' weak attitude against the caste families who had moved into the village partly arose because Andi and Colras were not competent leaders. Their inability to mobilise the Paliyans of Aruvellam as a group made itself visible also in the relations with VARIHD. Frequently many of the Paliyans had not carried out what was expected of them from the last VARIHD meeting. Even worse, many villagers did not turn up at all at these meetings, even though Andi and Colras tried to persuade them. As a matter of fact, the kind of leaders VARIHD, as well as other outsiders, expected to find among the Paliyans did not exist. A reason for this we may find in the Paliyan adherence to individual autonomy and the denigration of most kinds of authority, leaving Andi and Colras with no means of forcing other Paliyans to do something against their will (see also Chapter Eight). These problems escalated when conflicts between the Paliyans themselves increased in the village, something I shall develop further in the next section.

In early 1993 additional conflicts with neighbouring landowners occurred, but this time they were more severe, including physical violence. The most serious event was when three Paliyan boys had taken down lime fruits to the commission agent in the nearest town in the plains. The commission agent, who knew the caste landowners cultivating in the Pandju Valley very well, had reason to think that these bags of limes had been stolen from one of the landowners, and therefore accused the boys of theft. On the way home close to the foothills the boys were captured by some men (suspected of being collaborators with the 'injured' landowner) and beaten up. Next day Colras also took down a bag of limes and was accused of the same kind of theft.

Some days later, three other men connected with the landowners came up to Aruvellam to complain about the situation. This time the Paliyans had more confidence as they were now on their own home ground. They did not accept the accusations thrown into their faces once again, and beat up the visitors and chased them out of the village. The next night several Paliyan huts were set on fire, but no culprits were found. Rumours circulated suggesting that this was an action
either of the Paliyans to create sympathy for themselves or of people connected with the ‘injured’ landowners. The issue was never clarified, but people were afraid that the conflict would escalate. The owner of the Chettiar Estate tried to mediate. However, not until leading members of the local farmers’ association (farmers of the foothills and up the Pandju Valley) appealed to the parties involved, did the conflict come to an end. They called for an informal *panchayat* (village council) bringing together the involved parties. Their argument was that if the conflict escalated further there was no way of keeping the police out, something that they claimed would be harmful to all. This argument pacified the most aggravated and an agreement was finally reached whereby both parties signed a document\(^94\) in which they promised to end the conflict.

For VARIHD, however, and especially for Narajanan, this was too much. Instead of being able to work in health and education, the organisation found itself more and more involved in conflicts over land. A major problem for Narajanan and VARIHD was that they had no mandate from their superiors to get involved in local politics. The board members of CORSOCK clearly stated that their activities should be ‘non-political’ in order to enable them to carry out their main work of health and education in an effective manner. Narajanan told Andi and Colras that the Paliyans had become involved in these conflicts because of their own misbehaviour and because they were not sufficiently careful enough to avoid these kinds of accusations of theft. Even though Narajanan knew that most Paliyans did not steal, he thought in any case that Andi and the other ‘leaders’ of the village should keep stricter control over their members.

Andi and Colras for their part accused VARIHD of not supporting them when they really needed it. With these strained relations other complaints cropped up. The Paliyans thought that the main reason for VARIHD’s staff stopping visiting the village was that they had get their hands on money intended for the development of the village. Andi gave me several examples substantiating his suspicions. One was that Narajanan had been given money to build a well and water tank in Aruvellam, and reported back to the

\(^94\) Such informal but signed documents made it clear that the parties involved had made some ‘mistakes’, including a promise to not make them again. These documents could then be used in court cases if the conflict escalated.
CORSOCK board that this was in place in the village. As this was not the fact, Andi was sure that the money had gone into Narajanan’s and Murugesh’s pockets. Further evidence supporting Andi’s belief was that Dr Camara, the Director of VARIHD appointed by the CORSOCK board to administer the activities, had never visited Aruvellam although he had been in charge for more than a year. To Andi’s mind, this was because Narajanan did not want to show Dr Camara the actual situation in the village. The only time Dr Camara tried to make an inspection, Narajanan, acting as a guide through the valley, persuaded him and his wife to turn back half way up. Narajanan gave the reason that due to rain it would not be possible to cross the river further up. According to Andi that was not a problem on that particular day. Andi believed that, by exaggerating the situation to the doctor and his wife (which was easy as they were not at all accustomed to forest conditions and the strenuous walk up the valley), Narajanan was able to avoid the inspection and thereby save his face.

When I arrived in the Pandju Valley in July the same year, Narajanan and VARIHD had not visited Aruvellam for six months because of the above-mentioned conflicts. The school was still running, although fewer and fewer children attended. Most now followed their parents for the cardamom harvest in the estates (which started in early autumn) or went to work on the nearby plantations. Owing to this the school had to close down from time to time, and the schoolteacher was in low spirit compared with the previous year when the school was in full swing. The schoolhouse was also in a bad state. Parts of the clay on the outer walls had fallen off and not been replaced; the veranda (made of clay) was full of holes made by rainwater dripping down from the grass roof.

The final blow for the school and VARIHD’s co-operation with the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley came in the late autumn of 1993. Rumours were circulating that Colras was having an illicit affair with the teacher. The teacher’s husband found the situation extremely embarrassing, and the family, with Narajanan’s support, decided to leave the village. For Narajanan this incident aggravated the conflict even further. The teacher was his close relative, and illicit relations between caste women and tribal men were strongly stigmatised by Mannadians, Narajanan’s caste group. Most caste groups in Tamil Nadu share their view on this issue. The school closed down definitely
and half a year later, in the spring of 1994, the only visible sign of VARIHD's activities in the village was the dilapidated remnants of the schoolhouse and the teacher family's hut.

The conflict seemed insoluble and Andi thought the main reason for it was the actions of VARIHD's field assistants, including Narajan. However, Andi still hoped that, by confronting the doctors of CORSOCK, who were in charge of VARIHD, they would be able in the near future to settle the conflict and resume their co-operation. He told me several times that he was not bothered about losing the material support they had received from VARIHD, or the different training programmes. 'We can manage ourselves, we have proved that before. What bothers me is the education for our children, so I really hope we can continue to work together with the Kodaikanal doctors', he said emphatically. This hope never materialised because in 1994 the CORSOCK board decided to close down VARIHD and its whole programme, and three years of co-operation came to an end. When I met Narajan in Kodaikanal in April that year, he told me about CORSOCK's decision and that he himself would lose his job at the end of the month. The official reason given by the CORSOCK board was lack of funds and change of policy. Narajan added that there had also been disagreements between the VARIHD staff and the board concerning work strategies. To understand these strategies a few more words on the governance of CORSOCK would shed light on the reasons behind these conflicts.

The health organisation CORSOCK emanated from the Van Allen Hospital in Kodaikanal, a private community hospital established in 1915 by the medical doctor Chester Van Allen, one of the early missionaries of the American Madurai (Protestant) Mission. It started off as a medical centre for the foreigners of Kodaikanal, but by 1980 about 95% of its patients came from the Indian population (Tegenfeldt 1980). While Kodaikanal was quite well provided with medical care at this time, the situation in the outer areas of the hills was very different.95 Doctor Ed Tegenfeldt, a missionary from the American Baptist Mission, joined the hospital in 1978. He made the following point: 'Many (villagers) who do come into town for medical care, tell us

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95 Apart from the Van Allen Hospital, there are since the 1980s also a government hospital and several clinics run by sisters of Catholic congregations available for people in Kodaikanal.
that they have to walk 10, 20 and sometimes 30 miles before finally getting a lorry or bus for the last five to ten miles to the hospital' (ibid: 6). For an organisation whose the main objective is to serve the poor and other people in need (CORSOCK 1976: 1), this was not satisfactory. On the initiative of Tegenfeldt and his colleagues, together with the social worker Narajanan, VARIHD was established to meet these needs.

Although the ambition now was to reach out to the most inaccessible hamlets and settlements in the hills, such outward expansion was not totally new for this Protestant network of missionaries in Kodaikanal. From 1949 the *Skippo Mobile Medical Unit* had provided free medical treatment to more than 20 villages accessible by road around Kodaikanal (Skippo Mobile Medical Unit 1969). This unit ran for more than twenty years. Mrs Dayanu Dhanapal, now in her eighties, and one of Skippo’s office-bearers in the 1960s, recalls that occasionally even some Paliyans used to turn up at the roadside for treatment when their bus passed through.

In the previous chapter I showed how, from the outset, the interaction between VARIHD and the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley included matters concerning the ownership of land and other material resources. From VARIHD’s point of view, however, their engagement in these matters was undertaken mainly for strategic reasons in order to create a positive atmosphere enabling the input of their main programme and asset, health and education. Contrary to VARIHD’s expectations, conflicts over land and other material resources in the Pandju Valley and the village of Aruvellam took the upper hand in the years to come. Instead of being able to work in a peaceful setting on health and education, they found themselves deeply involved in local politics, which brought them into confrontation with other caste groups, influential neighbouring landowners, local political parties, and local government representatives. During these conflicts the Paliyans in Aruvellam put heavy pressure on VARIHD for support, aggravated by different accusations both against the organisation and between individuals within it. One accusation, as mentioned earlier, was that money allocated for the project never reached the village, but was embezzled by the staff. The staff, on the other hand, accused the board of withholding money given by funding agencies. Whatever the truth behind these accusations, all this taken together caused the executive
committee of CORSOCK to finally discontinue the VARIHD project. The social setting did not, in their eyes, permit meaningful work to fulfil their main objectives.

The official reason given by CORSOCK was that they had changed their policy, at least as far as the Paliyans were concerned. However, if we look behind this statement there seems to be more to it. In CORSOCK's Memorandum of Association the first objective is to coordinate efforts 'for the benefit and good of the deserving poor, destitute, disabled, and the ailing section of the public without discrimination as to race, religion, caste and creed' (1976: 1). The CORSOCK people see this as an activity 'above' ordinary politics, in which their work is oriented towards situations where there 'is an urgent and pressing need' (ibid.), without necessarily identifying the social reasons behind these needs. As a matter of fact, to be involved in local politics and legal processes is considered counterproductive and something that can easily hamper their otherwise successful social work. This attitude on the part of CORSOCK should also be seen in the light of the civil status of its board members, something acknowledged by Tegenfeldt already in 1992 in a discussion over VARIHD's funding problems: 'Another weakness in the project is that the VARIHD committee is made up of residents of Kodaikanal, most of whom are expatriates. And the status of expatriates is necessarily somewhat tenuous.'

Expatriates, in this case Western missionaries, and their position as guests in India can easily be jeopardised (and the organisation within which they work) if they become too heavily involved in sensitive political matters. In conclusion, the relationship between VARIHD and the Paliyans, and its development into local politics, became too problematic and seemed to expand into the general work and reputation of CORSOCK. The most viable way out was to abandon the organisation of VARIHD.

The encroaching neighbour

The changing relationship with VARIHD was not the only problem for the Paliyans. In the Spring of 1994 a newly appointed Village Administrative Officer (VAO) of the area, a caste man originating from the nearby plains, allocated land to his father in the vicinity of the
Paliyan settlement. This family became known as the VAO-group, and it started to clear more than 100 acres of land on the other side of the ridge to the right, behind the Paliyan village and bordering on parts of its land. The purpose was to create a big goat farm. In April they brought up 200 goats. Some months later they had expanded their land by encroaching on several of the Paliyans’ plots, and did not seem prepared to slow down the pace of further expansion. Colras had earlier told all the Paliyan villagers to mark off their land clearly, but nothing had been done. He had tried to arrange a meeting between them, but few responded. One day he took four of his fellow Paliyans to the encroaching landowner. In reply to an open request the landowner said that he had told the labourers not to encroach on other people’s land. Later, in August, we passed the area where the labourers of the VAO-group were continuing to clear land. They were now far inside some of the Paliyan plots in spite of the fact that there were seedlings visible in the undergrowth that had been planted earlier by the Paliyans.

Andi and Colras had discussed this problem with some other caste people with whom they had friendly relations. One day one of these caste ‘friends’ (who used to visit the area now and then) came up with a group of other men from the plains. They called for a meeting, a panchayat, and asked the ‘leading’ Paliyans in what way they would like to proceed. As Andi was away, Colras and a couple of other Paliyan men, together with the newcomers, decided to pay a visit to the neighbouring landowner.

All of them went up to the goat farm. The newcomers took the initiative and immediately approached the labourers and asked them if they did not know that they were encroaching on Paliyan land. This created a strong reaction of fear among the labourers. They recognised these caste men as well-known ruffians from the nearby plains who were often hired for situations like this. The newcomers also carried billhooks, the common tool in farm labour, but in a situation like this easily turned into dangerous weapons. The labourers excused themselves by saying that they were indebted to the owner, and were forced to do this job. In spite of that, they stopped working for the day. The Paliyans hoped that this threat would be sufficient to put a stop to the encroachment. The leader of the new ‘friends’ was, however, a little disappointed with the Paliyans and had told them:
'Today some people from your village joined us. Why didn't more people come? Why do they behave like this? We have to join together and face the problem. Otherwise we can't solve problems like this.' This criticism was similar to that raised by Narajanan when he talked about 'acting as a group' in opposing the caste families who had earlier moved into Aruvellam.

The next phase of the conflict dashed Paliyan hopes. The owner of the goat farm informed them that he would not yield to threats. Instead he would take action with the support of the law. He said that only if the Paliyans could present their B-memorandum certificates would he accept their entitlement to the land. He already knew that they had problems with this, as the tax for this land-use right (kaisty) had not been paid promptly by the Paliyans. For the first two years it was paid for them by VARIHD; after that the Paliyans had not bothered to continue paying. The old certificates were still in the hands of people inside VARIHD. During the next few months the Paliyans made many attempts to get their hands on these certificates, but no one within the former VARIHD staff bothered to help them. Andi complained to me about the way the conflict was going:

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

Andi was greatly distressed, and continued:

It is not any easier to co-operate with the caste fellows who help us. They don't do it for free. Either we have to pay for their help, or give them a share of our land or do work for them as payment. Yesterday I had an argument with Rajkumar (their leader). They offered to give us more help, but I couldn't see how we could afford it. Rajkumar said he could pay the others in advance, but then we would have to work on his land. I turned
down his offer. It was enough that I had to pay them Rs 500 and food for the day when they went to the goat farm.

In December 1994 the conflict took a new turn. While I was back in Sweden Vincent sent me some clippings from several Tamil daily newspapers. In Dinamani, the biggest Tamil daily, a small notice stated: ‘On Monday evening adivasis entered the tasildar office to protect their lives’. In the text that followed we could read that during a land dispute between the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley and a local influential landowner (the VAO-group), the Paliyans feared for their lives and sought refuge at the nearest government office in the plains. About 50 Paliyans from Aruvellam had decided to walk down to the nearest town with their grievances and draw attention to the land conflict.

This move turned the conflict into a public matter far beyond the Pandju Valley. Journalists were sent to meet the Paliyans at the tasildar office and some visited the village site. A tribal organisation in the hills, the Society for Integral Development of the Tribals (SIDT), came to the spot to interrogate the Paliyans and others about the situation (see also the next section). Within days hundreds of posters were put up by the organisation in Kodaikanal and its surroundings with the headline ‘Don’t Create a New Chota Nagpur Case’, referring to the killing of more than one hundred tribals in Central India in a similar conflict the same year.

This new and public aspect of the conflict made the authorities promise to look into the case. The Collector decided that the VAO, who had granted the land for the goat farm in the forest area to his father, had given undue favours to his relatives and to an activity that was not in line with government ideas of farming in that area. Although they were allowed to keep the land for cultivation but not goat farming, the Collector transferred the VAO to another area to reduce the tension, and the encroachment came to a halt.

Despite this positive result, several Paliyan families had by this time decided to look for work in other areas. One reason was that they did not want to continue working for some of the landowners in the Pandju Valley as the latter had not supported them in the conflict with

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96Tasildar, an administrative officer below the Collector, stationed in a taluk, an administrative subdivision of a district; the Collector is the chief administrative officer of a district.
the VAO-group. Even Andi and his family and others within his sibling group left the village for work on a big estate in a nearby valley. Both the Paliyans and outsiders considered Andi a kind of leader, but this responsibility became too heavy a burden on his shoulders. He felt he was unable to control the outcomes of the twists and turns of these conflicts. Another thing that disillusioned Andi was that he and the families of his brothers, because of their relative affluence compared with the other Paliyan families in the village, were the ones who were expected to furnish all their allies with food when they visited the village. This ‘affluence’ came from the cash-crop land they had been able to secure in their earlier attempts of cultivation, mentioned above. This ‘obligation’ drained their few family resources. In this situation Andi and his sibling group left for temporary wage labour outside the valley.

In the Spring of 1995, as an aftermath of the VAO conflict, almost half of the Paliyan families diverted their interest away from the village and started to work outside the Pandju Valley. This may seem like a contradiction, as the outcome of the land conflict turned out to be positive from their point of view. The answer to that contradiction will be given in the next section, and has to do with relations between the Paliyan families and sibling groups in the village, and the constraints put on them in the new village situation.

**Paliyan co-operation and competition**

The lives of the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley were significantly different before the creation of the village of Aruvellam. In a discussion about the valley with Pandian, one of the Tevar caste landowners in the area, he told me about his own experiences of the Paliyans. He is from a plains-town about 10 km from the Pandju Valley and is one of the bigger landowners in the vicinity of Aruvellam. He and his three brothers own more than 80 acres of land above the village. From their father they inherited some old mango gardens in the foothills, and with the profit from that land they were able to buy land in the Pandju Valley. This was in 1968 when the whole valley bottom was covered with forest. Pandian was the absentee landowner who most often stayed on his land to work and oversee the tending of it. He was also one of the most popular landowners in the eyes of the
Paliyans, and offered work to them almost all the year round. Ganeshan’s sibling group in particular used to work for him.

Pandian told me that in the 1960s the Paliyans in this valley were very shy, and immediately disappeared if they ran into outsiders. They did not wear any clothes, only a piece of cloth or ‘bark’ to cover their lower abdomen. ‘Step by step they went forward. They started to guard some land. Later on they also did weeding work, but refused to visit the plains. Only about ten years ago, when the colony (the village of Aruvellam) started, they began to live like they do today. Six years back (1988) was the first time I saw them going to town. Now they are more advanced, even talk to us about politics, prices, etc,’ he explained.

The Paliyans confirmed this general picture. While working on the cardamom estates they never had any idea or need to visit the plains, although they would move up and down the valley, sometimes closer to the foothills, sometimes further away within the valley, or cross over the ridges to other valleys. They know all the old paths between the nearby valleys, although most of them are overgrown by now because they are not used. Today it is more common, when visiting other valleys, to walk down to the nearest road in the plains, and take a bus along the foothills to another valley, and then start walking up again. Even the story of bark clothes was confirmed. Andi’s mother (now about 60 years old) showed me a simple basket made from the wild areca palm found in the vicinity. ‘We used to soak this in water, which made it soft, and with that we covered our bodies. We used it in my young days, but not anymore.’

As mentioned earlier, the sibling groups who joined the village in one way re-created the former sibling group-based settlements within the village borders. Each sibling group occupied its own part of the village. In the same way, the families within a sibling group have their pieces of land more or less adjacent to each other. The major change for all of them in the beginning was their relations with VARIHD, and especially with the organisation’s field assistants. Narajanan regarded all the Paliyan families as one group, and took the lead in organising them.

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97 Today we can find several caste villages close to the foothills. 30 years back, though, these areas were mainly uninhabited, apart from some dry cultivation and paths leading from the hills into the plains. These villages have grown up in the wake of the many dam constructions starting from the 1960s around the Palni Hills.

98 The part which is used is the outer cover of the top where the palm leaves start to spread out. Teak leaves were also used as body cover.
to establish the village. VARIHD provided them with food and working equipment during the first year. When the school was established it became the physical manifestation of village co-operation above the sibling group level. VARIHD also continued to try to maintain the community feeling with their regular meetings in the village. In addition to this, the teacher saw it as her right and duty to arbitrate in everyday matters between individuals for the sake of village unity.

Two other significant changes in the villagers’ lives took place as a result of the shift in settlement. The first was the increase in cash available and the closer relationship with markets and commercial goods, including the possibility of borrowing cash and commodities from one another. The second was the new possibility of having fellow Paliyans as employers. Let me start with the first.

While payments in cash rather than in kind had been possible in the cardamom estates during the last few years, in the new situation most villagers increased their cash income, as opposed to rice as payment. Rice was still preferred by some, and especially the older people, who had few demands for commercial goods and seldom or never visited the plains. The others saw an increased freedom in having cash, thereby being able to buy clothes and other items they wanted. Apart from a few agricultural utensils, the most coveted commodities had to do with their appearance. They were now more exposed to outsiders than before and did not want to be looked down on because of their dress and outlook, something they had often experienced earlier.

The importance of this cannot be overestimated. The reaction their physical appearance had evoked in outsiders in the past is almost always reported in early written accounts. Rev. J. E. Tracy wrote in the late nineteenth century from Madura District: 99 ‘I went to their village at the foot of the Periyar hills, and can testify to their being the most abject, hopeless, and unpromising specimens of humanity that I have ever seen’ (Thurston and Rangachari 1909: 462). He continues: ‘A stream of pure water was flowing within a few feet of their huts, and yet they were as foul and filthy in their personal appearance as if they were animals, and very unclean ones’ (ibid.). The Jesuit Fr Dahmen

99 Madura is the old name for Madurai, the major town in the nearby plains southeast of the Palni Hills. The old district limits included the Palni Hills.
made the following comment about the Paliyans who had turned up for occasional work on St Michael’s estate early in the twentieth century:

In the matter of clothing our Paliyans are, of course, now better provided both for decency and protection than their likes in the forests. There, the men content themselves with a bunch of grass or leaves, or a rag about the loins. Women wear a sufficiently broad band of plaited grass or palm-leaves, the ends of which are allowed to dangle about as a kind of ornament fringe, thus giving them a somewhat picturesque air (1908).

Another account will be taken from R. Foulkes, who was introduced to a group of Paliyans in the foothills close to the Pandju Valley by a local landowner in the late 1920s: ‘The men wore a filthy loin cloth only, but the women were fully clothed like the women of the plains, in very dirty saris. They were probably “dolled up” for the occasion, as I have always seen them in the jungles wearing nothing but a loin cloth’ (Yeats 1931).

Caste people nowadays often hold a similar attitude. One of the landowners of a cardamom estate referred to his hired Paliyans as ‘half-animals’, and one of the virtues of the Paliyans was that their children were no hindrance when they were working: ‘In contrast to caste children, these children can just be dropped on the ground and they play in whatever dirt there is’. A last example is a Tevar man who had worked for NGOs co-operating with the Paliyans for several years. He tried to explain the difference between the Paliyans of today and those in bygone days with the following words:

Twenty years back they lived only in the hill area, they were very dirty, like cave men. Now they have a good culture. They meet other caste people and therefore their lifestyle has improved with neat clothes and good food, like rice. Before that they didn’t even cook the food. But I don’t think they want to remember that time. There is still one group out there. They are like cannibals, with just a small piece of cloth round the waist, tangled hair, and they never take a bath.

In Aruvellam the most important expenditure (apart from food) was on clothes, both for the adults and the children. The nicest clothes were usually saved for visits to the plains or to other Paliyan settlements, or used if visitors were expected from outside. If they
brought the harvest down to the commission shop in the plains, they would bring a change of clothes along as well. For these occasions men used to have a pair of trousers and a shirt, or at least a clean and tidy lungi. Women had at least one sari, and some of them owned several. In this way they would not stand out negatively compared with most other people down in the plains. The clothes they had used earlier were usually gifts from the landowners. The result was that if we visited an estate in pre-village times, we would find all the Paliyan men dressed in the same low quality brownish shirt and shorts, and all the women with very simple saris in dull colours. Often the clothes were worn-out as they only had one set at a time. The small children were more or less naked.

In the early days of Aruvellam the villagers also obtained some second-hand clothes, collected by people from Kodaikanal and handed over by VARIHD. Another new feature of personal appearance taken up by the Paliyans, in accordance with caste customs, was the habit of putting oil on the hair. Often the Paliyans used to say 's/he is so poor that s/he can’t even afford to put oil in her/his hair' when referring to the economic status of another Paliyan. Or when a Paliyan woman explained why she preferred to live in an area where she and her family could get a regular income from wage labour: ‘I lost two children due to poverty at the other place. Here we are getting oil for our hair and good clothes for our bodies.’

That the improved appearance together with a new rice diet made a lot of difference to the Paliyans was often pointed out. If they talked with outsiders they would always downplay their use of wild yam and other forest food. Further, if necessary, they would use ‘the beggar in the towns’, dressed in rags and begging at the bus stations, as a contrasting metaphor for telling others about their way of life. An example is the occasion when there was a quarrel between Andi’s wife and a woman of Pallar caste in the village. When the Pallar woman tried to insult Andi’s wife because she was a Paliyan, she shouted back emphatically: ‘We are no beggars! We don’t work with one hand, we work as hard as anyone else.’

The second major change had to do with new ways of internal co-operation. The increase of cash among the Paliyans made it possible for a few of them to hire fellow Paliyans as labourers. In Aruvellam it was mainly Andi and Colras who were able to accumulate that kind of
money. The land they had acquired earlier was giving a substantial yield of lime in particular already at the beginning of village life. With this asset as security, they were also able to borrow money from moneylenders when necessary. The two brothers combined such resources with strong entrepreneurial ambitions.

In general, they undertook the work connected with their land themselves, but now and then they offered the others the opportunity to harvest their limes and carry them down to the commission shop in the plains in return for payment. In the summer of 1993 Colras, for the sum of Rs 12,000 took on the job of clearing the old Coolie Ghat Road for some estate owners who depended on that path for bringing out their crops. Several of the other Paliyan villagers joined him in this work which lasted for several weeks. Another example was when Andi leased some silkcotton land at the start of the silkcotton season in 1994 and hired some of the other Paliyans to help him harvest the trees.

Further, in the Spring of 1994 Colras decided to build a stone house for himself and his mother. This was after the incident when several Paliyan huts had been burnt down (the VAO conflict referred to earlier), including Colras’ hut. He wanted a house like caste houses common in these hills, but could only afford a smaller and simpler model. Anyway, it needed far more investment than their otherwise normal thatched huts. In the same period Andi’s hut fell to pieces during some heavy rains. He did not want to lag behind his younger brother, so he also decided to build a stone-walled house. For the construction work they hired several of the other Paliyans.

When the Paliyans of Aruvellam used to live together in sibling groups, cash and commercial goods were more or less absent. Apart from the food they earned when working on the cardamom estate (which was only distributed within the nuclear family), whatever else they needed they got from the forests. According to them, wild yam

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100 The building of these stone houses was looked upon by some of the other Paliyans as a way of ‘showing off’, threatening the equality between some of the families. An interesting incident then took place when one family of Murugan’s sibling group did not want to feel less important and started to expand their mud-and-stick hut. They could not afford stones, so in a way their ‘house’ was less good compared with Andi’s and Colras’. However, in a public discussion in the village they reached the agreement that it was not the material of the house that counted, but the number of rooms you could afford. In this way all the newly built houses were equal, and equality was restored between the two sibling groups.
and other plants were kept within the family, while meat from the hunting of game was shared with the whole settlement (this practice was still maintained in Aruvellam, now extended beyond the sibling group to cover all the villagers). In a situation like this competition and conflicts over material resources were almost absent. Instead, the most common conflicts arose from competition over partners, something common also in Aruvellam (see below).

The increase of cash and commercial goods, and the possibility of borrowing from and working for each other, expanded the possible arena of conflict. The exchange of these resources between the members of the village beyond the nuclear family was kept strictly within balanced reciprocity. If you borrowed cash or rice food, the same amount had to be paid back. If you worked for someone, the labour had to be paid for according to the agreed terms. However, the time limits for repayment, and the timing, amount and intensity of work compared with wages, etc., gave ample room for disagreements. These kinds of conflicts became very common, at the same time as mobility had to a certain extent decreased, as all of them now possessed physically fixed assets (land, the school, more elaborate huts, etc.). Worst, though, from the point of view of village unity, was that Andi’s sibling group, in the eyes of many of the other sibling groups, seemed to benefit significantly more from the village idea than the rest. Sometimes they even addressed Andi as ‘Tevar Andi’, referring to the caste of landowners most common in the neighbourhood. This cleavage in material resources, and in its wake the difference in status, are important factors when considering the low degree of attention the families devoted to the village idea in the following years, something I shall now turn to.

When the Paliyan families, after the first year of the village’s existence, started to undertake wage labour, most of them went to work for the surrounding landowners. Many of them also returned to the cardamom estates, especially during the autumn harvest. However, from 1994 Suraj Estate and Kombai Estate were abandoned, due to expired leases. Only Chettiar Estate was still able to offer work. The working pattern, although not strictly followed, was that all the families within each sibling group worked for the same landowner.

Slowly, however, this fairly regular labour picture changed and several families turned to work outside the valley. In one family the
husband started a relationship with a woman in Andi’s sibling group, forcing his wife to leave with their three children and her mother. They looked for work in several places, but finally decided to stay on an estate along the Coolie Ghat Road to the east of the Pandju Valley where the woman’s elder brother lived.

In 1994 a young married couple had their first son. It was rumoured that the father might not be the husband, but another married Paliyan man in the village, whose wife had several miscarriages. The man showed more and more open affection for the little boy and his mother. Eventually he was able to turn the mother into his second wife, while the husband was left on his own. The husband felt abandoned although several of the other men in the village told him they could easily find him a new wife. While he stayed on in the village the VAO conflict was going on. At the end of this conflict, during the winter of 1994-95, he and a couple of younger Paliyan boys were accused of stealing some goods from a landowner’s hut. As he was the eldest in the accused group, he became the main accused. Similar blame also came from other Paliyans in the village. In this situation he experienced no trust within his own group and decided that it would be better to leave the village and the Pandju Valley.

Another Paliyan man was abandoned by his wife in 1993 due to his extreme quarrelsomeness, which probably had to do with the fact that he was on the way to becoming blind. He never took a new wife, one of his sons died and another followed a landowner out of the area. He was taken care of by his sister’s family, but died in 1996.

In Murugan’s sibling group several members used to do occasional work outside the valley. While Murugan used to guard the land for one of the landowners near Aruvellam, his wives (two sisters), his eldest son and his wives’ mother now and then worked in Senguthumalai Valley to the west. Usually they only stayed away a week or so, otherwise working in the Pandju Valley. In late 1994 they stayed away for longer and longer periods. Partly this was due to the general decision among the Paliyans to avoid working for those landowners who they felt did not take their side in the VAO conflict. However, during this period Murugan’s wives accused him of having an illicit affair with his younger brother’s wife. For that reason they decided that it was better for them to stay away from Aruvellam. Time went on and in 1996 Murugan lost his job as a watcher in Aruvellam; the owner of
the land had leased it out to someone who brought in his own watchers. By this time Murugan’s quarrel with his wives had cooled off and he decided to join them in Senguthumalai Valley.

In early 1995, after the VAO conflict, the rest of the families within Murugan’s sibling group also turned their attention to the Senguthumalai area for work. They did not want to work for the landowners who had not supported them in the VAO conflict, but their confidence in the village project had also to a large extent diminished. Although they had won the case against the landowner in the VAO conflict, it did not help these particular Paliyan families in the short run, as they had not invested too much time in their plots, and would still have several years to wait before any harvest. Murugan’s younger sister was the most outspoken on this matter. She often referred to their life on the cardamom estate as easier and calmer than the new village life. They were also the family that collected wild yam and other forest food most often, and did less wage labour than the others. They therefore had less time and resources to invest in the land they had been allotted. She also expressed quite clearly that the interaction with VARIHD and other outsiders was Andi’s and Colras’ affair and had nothing to do with her. She was satisfied with regular wage labour. According to her, the promises Andi had given for moving to Aruvellam had not yet proved beneficial to her family. In the Senguthumalai area life was more like before, and they could do easy work for the landowners without too many quarrels. There they only had to deal with a few outsiders and could also easily borrow money in return for labour for occasional needs.

The amount and degree of family conflicts, which caused several individuals to leave Aruvellam for longer or shorter periods, made Andi and some of the other Paliyans worried about the ‘unity’ of the village. During this period they assembled several informal panchayats to solve family conflicts, inspired by the meetings they had been invited to earlier by outsiders. On these occasions no outsiders were involved, apart from Vincent and me. We did our best to stay away from these discussions, although they sometimes asked for our advice. Often these panchayats were able to calm down the conflicts for the time being, but for some they also increased a feeling that Andi’s sibling group were more or less in charge of the village.
In spite of these *panchayats*, by the Spring of 1995, four years after the start, village cohesion had become very weak. Murugan’s and Karuppan’s sibling groups had left the village. Of the three families in Sethu’s sibling group only Sethu and his wife were still in the village. Most of the people in Andi’s sibling group also looked outside the valley for work, although some of their members always stayed in the village, and the others regularly came back and worked hard on their own land. While the two families of Ganeshan’s sibling group still stayed on, Ganeshan’s son and his family, who had earlier lived in the village proper, in 1994 quarrelled with Ganeshan, and the son decided to move with his family to the slope above the village within his own land. They, however, kept in regular contact with the other villagers.

Of the eighteen families who had joined the village during its first years, seven families had left before the Spring of 1995 and no one else had joined. Of the remaining eleven families only six lived in the village proper. Many of them, particularly from Andi’s sibling group, regularly left for work outside the valley. The reasons behind this migration, as has been pointed out above, were a combination of external and internal conflicts, and often of an economic nature. Whatever the reasons, though, the result was that the social life of the village of Aruvellam was more fragmented than ever. The school and the unifying force of an outside organisation were gone, and the interactions above sibling group level were not much more than they had been when they used to live separately. The development of each family’s plot of land differed significantly, ranging from Andi and Colras who had managed to take care of their land quite well (expecting their first harvest in 1996), to some families who had not been able to invest, or shown any interest, in their land. Nor had the villagers been able to attract the attention of the authorities or NGOs to their problems and aspirations since VARIHD left in 1993. In spite of their ‘victory’ in the VAO conflict the legal status of their land was still in jeopardy because the local authorities had not yet regulated the land as was promised during the VAO conflict.

While all these factors seemed to work against the village idea, several circumstances beyond the Paliyans’ own control, and which

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101 Earlier the main reason for several sibling groups coming together was to conduct spirit possession sessions (*sami attams*). Today sibling groups also often join together for marriages, puberty functions, funerals and village festivals.
they at that time could not anticipate, were eventually to support those Paliyans still willing to work for the village. Not only did an established Paliyan village in the Pandju Valley fit into the strategy of two new NGOs turning up in the area. Outside forces at the level of Tamil Nadu State also worked in favour of the villagers of Aruvellam. After more than a decade the Tamil Nadu Government decided to re-introduce the Panchayati Raj system in 1996, a way of allocating certain government resources to locally elected village boards. Together with the re-introduction of this locally administered distribution system the State Government increased its attention to Scheduled Tribes in the Palni Hills, including a visit by the Minister for Human Rights to the area in 1996. This was all very timely for the Paliyans in Aruvellam, as their most valuable property, the first harvest from the cultivation, was soon to come. The eventual income from this became an incentive working more than anything else in favour of the village idea. I shall come back to the increased interaction between the Paliyans and the state in the next and final chapter on the development of the village of Aruvellam. I now end this chapter with the arrival of the new NGOs in the Pandju Valley.

The coming of new NGOs

In the Spring of 1995, when more than half of the Paliyan families of Aruvellam were working regularly outside the Pandju Valley, a NGO, the Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC), started up a co-operation programme with the villagers. The PHHC had over the recent years established themselves, with their base in Kodaikanal, as a very influential environmental organisation in the area.102 This NGO was well known to me because of their funding from and close co-operation with Sweden.103 Through this co-operation I came in contact with them already in 1991 (Larsson and Norström 1993). They put

102 PHCC is the only environmental NGO in the Palni Hills, although several other NGOs have included statements concerning the environment in their funding proposals. It is also worth recognising that many NGOs include ideas about the environment on their agenda, without explicitly profiling themselves as ‘environmental’ organisations.

103 PHCC had been funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) since the early 1990s.
their network and knowledge of the Palni Hills at my disposal, including their contacts with Paliyans, landowners and other NGOs in the area.

The PHCC was established as a NGO in 1985 as a response to the environmental deterioration of the Palni Hills. With slogans like ‘Green belt around the Palnis’ and ‘Protect our forest – plant more trees’, the organisation developed a tree-planting programme and a master plan for the urban area of the hills, including the hill-town of Kodaikanal (PHCC 1993g; PHCCe; PHCC pamphlets). The tree-planting project was soon proclaimed a success and became established in many places in the area, both in the hills and in the surrounding foothills (National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board 1994). Although the PHCC believed in the involvement of local people, especially planters and farmers, local people were mainly excluded from the direct design and implementation of the programme.

This distance from the local people was clearly reflected in the PHCC’s first proposal of a Palni Hills National Park (PHCC 1986). This proposal was formulated according to the principles of nature conservation prevailing at that time, namely that the flora and fauna of the area needed full protection from human activities for the future benefit of people outside the area. No mention was made of local forest dwellers or others dependent on forest resources for their survival.

However, intensified fieldwork by PHCC members and staff resulted in closer interaction with local people. With regard to the Paliyans, two of the PHCC’s nurseries started small programmes in the early 1990s specifically aimed at them, including evening education classes and beekeeping. A major break in the PHCC’s general policy came with the proposal of the Kadavakurichi Interface Forestry Project. A suggestion was made that the Kadavakurichi reserved forest close to the foothills of the Palni Hills should be managed jointly by the local people, the Forest Department and the PHCC (PHCC 1993f). This project, a joint forest management (JFM) project, was one of the first of its kind in Tamil Nadu and included different caste groups from the surrounding villages, but no Paliyans.

Two additional issues within the PHCC are worth mentioning to understand the width and influence of its work. The first is the development of the National Park proposal mentioned above. The
PHCC first approached the State Government with that proposal in 1986, but nothing substantial happened until 1993. Some of the PHCC staff had their own story as to why the government made a sudden change in attitude in that year. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at that time, J. Jayalalitha, paid a visit to Kodaikanal. Early one morning the Forest Department staff took her on a ride in one of their jeeps into the forests outside the town. While driving through the scenic undulating hills, the Chief Minister suddenly pointed towards a grass-covered slope between two patches of sholas where a group of animals were grazing, and asked: ‘What kind of animals are those?’ ‘They are bison, Madam’, replied the senior staff. It was a herd of Indian wild bison. ‘Oh, they are so fascinating and beautiful, we must protect them’, was her spontaneous response. Of course there was more to it than this locally told episode. The fact, though, is that soon afterwards the PHCC was invited to be part of a committee together with the Wildlife Wing of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, to draw up a plan for a sanctuary in the Palni Hills (PHCC 1993d; Tamil Nadu Forest Department 1994). Although the State Government has officially announced the sanctuary, so far nothing of it has yet materialised and it therefore falls outside this study.

The second issue is related to the alarming degradation of Kodaikanal and the surrounding urban area of the hills, especially highlighted in the media through the so-called Pleasant Stay Hotel Case. Since the 1980s tourism in Kodaikanal has increased tremendously and is the third most important economic activity of the Palni Hills today (after agriculture and forestry). A special feature of this tourism is that it is confined to the town itself, and a few hotspots in its vicinity, which has put heavy pressure on the ecology of the town. For this reason the municipality has put restrictions on the building of, among other things, hotels and cottages. The construction of the Pleasant Stay Hotel was one of the more obvious violations of these restrictions, but was cleared by the State Government. In spite of this clearance, many locals still found this a clear violation of town restrictions and other state regulations, and in 1993 the PHCC filed a case against the promoter of

104 The hotel construction, situated on a steep slope in the town, was supposed to have seven floors. However, only two-storey buildings were allowed. The owner then claimed that everything was in order, because the hotel would only have two storeys. The other five were to be considered as basement storeys.
the hotel, as a way of halting the galloping increase of unauthorised housing construction in the urban area.

While initially this case was mainly of a local nature, it soon became a public matter of the state level, and thereby also recognised at the national level (Subramanian 1995; Viswanathan 1995). In court the hotel owner lost the case, and the grey concrete skeleton of the hotel construction still stands in its place in Kodaikanal as a reminder of the conflict.

These examples of PHCC activities show that the organisation has been strong enough to create close relations with the local people, including farmers and local politicians, but has also been accepted as a partner in negotiations concerning environmental issues with the State Government. There are several reasons behind the PHCC’s capacity to work on more than one political level simultaneously. One is the composition of its members. A strategy not uncommon within NGOs in India is the emphasis on lobbying rather than mass mobilisation. Lobbying, with its strategy of influencing important holders of power such as politicians, government officials, etc., needs influential individuals with wide personal networks. The PHCC board has deliberately enlisted several of these over the years, for example, former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers, individuals from influential families within regional caste networks, key figures within Christian organisations, affluent farmers from both the hills and the foothills, environmentalists linked up with urban intellectuals and organisations. The personal networks have also been instrumental in the PHCC’s wide international network, which has been their major funding source.

Another important strategy has been connected with their way of recruiting staff. The staff have often been selected because of their education within relevant areas of knowledge, such as ecology, rural development and social work, but also for their family experience within agriculture and politics in the local arena. As many of these staff are stationed in their home areas, they have a key position in the everyday running of PHCC projects.

The PHCC’s activities were spread out in many areas of the hills and foothills, although up to 1995 they had not yet expanded into the southern slopes, the area where the Pandju Valley is situated. The PHCC’s general knowledge of this area had so far mainly come from
my own discussions with them. As part of the PHCC's expansion, Jaya, one of the board members of the PHCC, paid an informal visit to the Pandju Valley in mid-April 1994.

The day of his arrival was a special day in the village, but for other reasons. The day before, we had carried up, for the first time, a video recorder and TV monitor from the plains. Apart from watching some videotape recordings of village life taken by my wife the year before, the whole village had been watching Tamil movies all night through and far into the next morning. Even at noon most villagers were still in a sleepy state and, to the surrounding landowners' frustration, no one felt like working that day. In this situation Jaya and a leading staff member of the PHCC turned up without notice. They were shown round and were impressed by the relatively healthy state of the forests in the valley. Kuppan, one of Andi's sons, spontaneously took on the role of showing them the village surroundings, and easily supplied details concerning plants and trees not that well known to the 'environmentalists'.

After spending the afternoon in the village we accompanied them down the valley. Close to one of the river crossings, we met Andi and one of his younger brothers on their way up. While Jaya's conversation in the village was very casual, and more of a friendly nature, it now took on a more formal tone. When Andi realised that he had one of the leading members of an organisation from Kodaikanal in front of him, he immediately presented the case of the Paliyans in Aruvellem. He told Jaya about the problems they had had with VARIHD, the conflicts with neighbouring landowners and their insufficient means for establishing their cultivation. He claimed with authority that their case was a righteous one. Jaya gave him a brief outline of the activities of the PHHC and told him that he was sure they would have some mutual interests. At the moment, however, Jaya continued, the PHCC was not ready to enter the area due to lack of resources. The short meeting ended with a promise of keeping in touch.

A year later, in March 1995, the first formal meeting between the PHCC and the Paliyans of Aruvellam took place. The sheer number of PHCC people coming up the valley marked the seriousness on their side. All in all they were six persons, Jaya and another board member, together with four of their most experienced staff. The Paliyans also pinned some hope on this new relationship. Both Andi and Colras
were working on an estate in a neighbouring valley during this period, but had turned up in the village to participate in the meeting. The meeting sessions took place during the day, the first inside Andi’s hut and the second, after lunch, in Colras’ hut. The discussion was mainly confined to Jaya, Andi and Colras, and the PHCC staff and a few other Paliyans listened silently. The general outline of the co-operation was discussed, but revolved around the Paliyans’ problems with cultivation. On the one hand, it was decided that the Paliyans, with the guidance of PHCC staff, should establish a plant nursery in the village. In that way they could develop seedlings according to their own choice, and distribute them equally, thereby helping in particular those families who so far had had few resources and little time to invest in their plots.\footnote{If the PHCC people had some doubts about the degree of Paliyan knowledge of cultivation they were soon relieved of that idea. Andi’s suggestions of the kinds of seedlings they wanted to raise were not only exclusive and expensive, but also ecologically well suited to the area and well adapted to cultivation far from the market. This included pepper, clove and cinnamon, all of which could be stored after harvest until the time was convenient for transportation. The Paliyans also wanted to raise coffee in addition to lime and silkcotton, which they had already planted.}

On the other hand, the question arose as to how to defend the cultivation against outside encroachment. Remember that it was just the aftermath of the VAO conflict, referred to earlier. Although the authorities, following the conflict, had promised to visit Aruvellam and regulate the land issue, so far nothing had happened. Andi also raised the question of re-establishing the school, but Jaya said that the PHCC was not at the moment able to facilitate that. From now on they would visit the Pandju Valley regularly and such issues and other questions could be brought up in due course, Jaya continued.

One month later Muttusami, the newly appointed PHCC staff member in charge of the Pandju Valley, conducted the first working meeting with the villagers. Muttusami belongs to the Tevar caste and is an experienced farmer from a village close to the foothills further to the east. He had worked with the PHCC for almost ten years, and already had some experience of working with Paliyans at Kudhirayar Dam on the northern side. He sent a message some days earlier to the villagers, ‘calling all Paliyan farmers’, as he put it, to attend the meeting. Vincent, my assistant, and I brought him up the valley to the village. At least a third of all families, including Andi and Colras, attended the meeting.
At the meeting Muttusami gave the Paliyans a brief outline of the PHCC’s main objectives and stressed that they were working in close co-operation with farmers in other areas: ‘On the way to Usilampatti, in the plains, we raise and give seedlings to the farmers. Therefore we need to know your needs. So please tell me your names, and what you are doing on your land.’ Muttusami also knew very well from Vincent about the earlier conflicts between the Paliyans, VARIHD and the neighbouring landowners, as well as the migratory nature of the Paliyans in this valley. With the following statement he wanted to make the PHCC’s position clear:

The motive for organising this meeting is that we have planted seedlings in wasteland for ten years. It is very good to have these trees in the foothills. That is why we have nurseries in different places and are encouraging farmers to plant seedlings on their land. Vincent and the foreigner (the anthropologist) used to visit your area. We have a good relationship with them and have found out that you have land but also have had problems with the VAO some months back. Now your land problems are almost solved, but to do that fully, Andi through Mr Jaya in our organisation asked us to come here. But I can’t find all the people. I can only see Andi, Colras and a couple more. If we are to do this work together we have to discuss openly with all, not only a few. We came here to discover the interests of everyone, what all of you have in your minds. So we will come back again, but see to it that all the people attend.

After a general presentation they decided to erect the nursery at a place above the riverbank within the village proper where it would be easy to protect it against animals and theft and it was close to water. One Paliyan made the point that they would have difficulties in raising the seedlings without outside support: ‘Many people will be away for work in other areas, and while some people will always be here in the village they go away to work during the day-time.’ For these reasons Muttusami said that the PHCC would pay the salary for two people from the village to look after the nursery: ‘However, you all have to help in establishing the nursery land, clearing and fencing it, but the seedlings from outside we can arrange. And see that you all cultivate some seeds, which we also can arrange, in kitchen gardens close to your huts’, he added.
The next morning, before Muttusami left, Vincent provided a list of all the families in the village, together with some general information which he had prepared in co-operation with Colras at Muttusami’s request.\textsuperscript{106} A couple of days later I left Aruvellam and my major fieldwork periods in the Pandju Valley were over, although I made several revisits afterwards.

Vincent was officially employed by the PHHC from June 1995 and his main duty was to be part of the PHCC’s extension team together with Muttusami as supervisor for the Pandju Valley (PHCC 1995). When they revisited Aruvellam early the same month nothing had happened with the nursery. It was not until the end of June that the Paliyans decided to start working on it. The land was cleared and a fence put up. One or two Paliyan women were regularly paid by the PHCC to fill the bags and do the watering.\textsuperscript{107} Occasionally a few others were also paid to do nursery work. In early August 5,000 bags were filled. In late October seedlings were distributed to the villagers as the time was ripe for cultivation (the onset of the autumn monsoon); about 170 seedlings of coffee and silkcotton were given to each family, in total 20 families. Most of the families, even those working in other valleys, came back for the distribution. During the following months most of these seedlings were planted, including some limes. However, due to very little rain from the autumn monsoon this year and bison problems, only about a third of these seedlings survived.

During 1996 and 1997 more than 10,000 seedlings were raised each year from the nursery.\textsuperscript{108} To be able to invest in the time for clearing and planting most of the Paliyan families turned to wild yam collecting for their subsistence during the periods of farm work. Although not all families took this opportunity to enhance their cultivation and the unpredictable weather and wildlife took their toll, the PHCC’s support of the nursery became a significant asset for establishing Paliyan cultivation. The nursery became especially important for some of the Paliyan families outside Andi’s sibling group, who lacked the latter group’s resources. This also included some

\textsuperscript{106} No Paliyans in the Pandju Valley can read and write.

\textsuperscript{107} Seeds were planted in small plastic bags filled with soil, one seed in each, a common way of raising seedlings.

\textsuperscript{108} Each family planted between 200 and 400 seedlings per season, dominated by citrus, coffee and silkcotton.
of the families within Murugan’s sibling group, which otherwise was
the sibling group working almost permanently outside the Pandju
Valley during these years. They at least came back for short spells to
see to their plots and huts.

There had been no school in Aruvellam since the autumn of
1993. Most villagers, and especially Andi, were eager to start it up
again. With no school in the village he decided in May 1995 to send his
youngest son to a Jesuit boarding school close to Kodaikanal. Later on
both his sister’s son and his youngest half-brother (all of them about
the same age) joined him.\textsuperscript{109} The PHCC were reluctant to start a
school in the village as they lacked funds, although they had some
experience of running evening schools for Paliyan children in other
valleys. However, in autumn the same year the \textit{Society for Integral
Development of the Tribals} (SIDT), the tribal organisation which joined
with the villagers of Aruvellam in the VAO conflict mentioned earlier,
approached the village with the offer of setting up the school.
Representatives from this organisation had turned up in the valley now
and then since the VAO conflict trying to persuade the Paliyan
villagers to join their organisation. However, the Paliyans had so far
mainly ignored them.

At one time Colras had decided to attend a meeting with SIDT at
their headquarters, after some representatives of the organisation had
visited the Pandju Valley during the aftermath of the VAO conflict.
His comment afterwards was: ‘I couldn’t follow what they were up to.
They talked too much, so I didn’t want to have anything to do with
them.’ Colras’ feeling at this meeting expresses a general problem in
Paliyan negotiations with outsiders, and especially in formal settings
outside their home area. When they have been part of meetings with
local government representatives and/or organisations, the structure of
such discussions, based on the outsiders’ agenda, has a tendency to
ignore the Paliyans, their words and opinions. I shall come back to
SIDT and the reason for their interest in the Paliyans in more detail in
the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that the school issue was an
important way for the SIDT to establish rapport with tribal groups in
the Palni Hills. Through this and other engagements, they tried to

\textsuperscript{109} This school was free of charge. None of the children stayed longer than two years.
In 2001 there were no Paliyans from the Pandju Valley in boarding school.
enlist and unite the tribal peoples of the hills and linking them to the regional and national struggle of the tribes of India.\textsuperscript{110}

If the villagers in Aruvellam rebuilt the school, the SIDT were willing to reimburse them for the work as well as pay the salary for a teacher. Because of some difficulties in finding a suitable teacher, the offer eventually went to Colras. In March 1996 the school was in place again with about ten to fifteen children attending, and with Colras now as the teacher. The PHCC also supported with some school material.

However, the school never became established in the way it had been during the time of VARIHD. Colras, who certainly enjoyed the salary, was not himself fluent in reading and writing, and was not a ‘real teacher’, as Vincent claimed. He soon felt very uncomfortable in this situation, although Vincent tried to back him up during his visits. More to the point, though, Colras found it very difficult to control the children and said in frustration: ‘If I beat them, think of the conflicts I may run into with the others in the village.’ After two months he quit. The number of children attending also changed very much from one week to the next due to migration for work, and the school was often closed for long periods. At the end of 1996 the PHCC felt that if the school was to be able to continue they needed to find an appropriate teacher. In the Spring of 1997 they were able to hire a new teacher, a caste man from the nearby plains, and made a new effort to establish the school. He was supposed to supply primary education as well as evening classes for the grown-ups. These last did not even start as the Paliyans were no less reluctant about adult education than when VARIHD offered the same a few years earlier.

The PHCC considered the nursery to be a success. Nevertheless, they were not able to bring back the absentee Paliyan families to live permanently in the village. While the nursery and the school, when it was running, to a certain extent brought families back to the village, it was only for limited periods. Both Andi’s and Murugan’s sibling groups mainly worked outside the valley during the years between 1995 and 1997. Vincent often visited the other valleys to persuade them to stay more often in the Pandju Valley. He also told them that the PHCC board was expecting them to participate more regularly in the organised meetings conducted by the PHCC if the PHCC programme

\textsuperscript{110} SIDT tried to establish a separate tribal organisation, \textit{Palanimalai Adivasibai Vidhalai Iyakkam} (The Palni Hills Tribal Freedom Movement).
was to be continued. The common answer from the Paliyans was that they would join in later, but at the moment they were indebted to the landowner they worked for, which prohibited them from joining fully in village activities. This was often true. For example, Murugan celebrated the wedding of his eldest son in 1996, spending about Rs 5,000 and inviting many Paliyans from the neighbourhood to the ceremony. He borrowed the money from a landowner in return for labour from himself, his wives and his younger children. However, during this period they created new amounts of debts, although they had promised Vincent earlier that they would soon rejoin the village. What this describes is the common contradiction among the Paliyans between short-term needs and long-term plans, the latter mainly introduced into the lives of the Paliyans during their co-operation with outsiders.

The absence of many families for prolonged periods also diminished the interest among those staying in the village with regard to co-operation with the PHCC. When, for example, Vincent tried to get voluntary labour for maintaining the nursery (apart from watering and tending the plants done by two of the Paliyan women), such as fencing and clearing the land, the able-bodied men often refused if they were not paid. They simply claimed that they could not afford to work without payment. Sethu, for example, told Vincent that he had better ask Andi who is ‘a rich man’ (panakkaran). Thus Vincent and Muttusami came to feel that without Andi around it was very difficult to keep up the co-operation.

Another question complicating the situation came to the surface in 1997. The new schoolteacher hired by the PHCC lived more permanently in the village in comparison with Vincent and Muttusami. He thus had the opportunity to get much closer to the villagers and the on-going everyday life. Through this closeness he soon had reason to suspect that some of the Paliyans living in the village were involved in the local ganja\textsuperscript{111} trade. However, this caste man had a slightly different character from that of Vincent. While Vincent always deliberately tried to keep a low profile in matters he thought were sensitive in relation to the Paliyans (as indeed I did myself), the schoolteacher aired more openly his opinions and soon got into arguments with the villagers concerning the supposed ganja activities.

\textsuperscript{111} Marijuana (\textit{Canabis sativa}).
Early in 1998 the schoolteacher and Colras, who was still a bachelor and could stay more often in the village as compared with Andi, and frequently voluntarily spoke up for the villagers when Andi was absent, came into head-on collision. Colras told the teacher that, whatever truth there was in the ganja discussion, it was not his business to tell the Paliyans what to do. The schoolteacher reported the incident to the PHCC. Vincent tried to cool the conflict by looking up Colras. Their last meeting was in the nearest plains town, where Colras told Vincent that he and the schoolteacher were not longer welcome in the valley. According to Vincent, Colras had the support of the other villagers and because of Colras words he was afraid to return. In March 1998, with the teacher and Vincent gone, the attempt to re-establish the school in Aruvellam came to an end and the PHCC decided to close down the project with the Paliyan villagers.

While the interaction between the Paliyans and the PHCC seemed to follow the same general pattern as the former relations between the villagers and VARIHD, there was one significant difference. When VARIHD decided to close down their programme with Aruvellam it became part of VARIHD’s and their mother organisation’s (CORSOCK) decision to cease all programmes related to the Paliyans of the Palrii Hills. In the case of the PHCC, the conflict only affected the Pandju Valley. The PHCC’s interaction with other Paliyans, and especially in Kudhirayar Dam and Siruvattukadu Valley, continued and was still going on at the time of my last visit in June 2002.

At the time of the break-up with the PHCC, the interaction between the SIDT and the villagers of Aruvellam operated mainly through the school, with no other regular links established. With the closure of the school, the SIDT also lost their link with the villagers, at least for the time being.

During these years several of the villagers, and especially those who had looked after their land properly, could see their first cash-crop harvest coming up. They also came into a more intensive relationship with the local government, partly due to the efforts of the PHCC, referred to above, but also to other circumstances. These questions will be dealt with in the next chapter, leading up to my last visit in 2002. The chapter will also pull together some of the themes arising in the foregoing, as a summary of Chapters Four to Six, covering my
narrative of the lives of the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley and the conclusion of the first decade of the village of Aruvellam.
Chapter Six

State Relations and the Conclusion of the First Ten Years

In the earlier chapters I have shown how NGOs became mediators in the interaction between the Paliyans of Aruvellam and the local government. I have also mentioned that such mediators, whether in the form of NGOs, caste leaders, or occasional local government officials, have been very common in the Palni Hills when the Paliyans have tried to establish villages of their own. This last chapter on the development of the Aruvellam village up to 2002 will shift the focus from NGOs towards the state and the local authorities. It will show how, while the interaction between the Paliyans and NGOs became weak over time, the Paliyans gradually strengthened their relations with the local authorities at different levels. In the concluding remarks of the chapter the original ambitions of the villagers will be compared with the situation at the end of the first decade of the village's existence. This comparison will spell out the different outcomes for the Paliyan families living in the Pandju Valley during this period.

The Forest Department

Before going into details about the interaction between the Paliyans and the state in the 1990s, let me briefly put Paliyan-state interaction in a historical perspective. The history of the interaction between the Paliyans and the state has mainly occurred through the representatives of the Forest Department. When the British set up a Forest Department in South India in the middle of the nineteenth century their immediate concern was to control the felling of economically valuable trees from local timber merchants and the practice of swidden
cultivation taking place in forest regions. Later they also introduced certain bans on hunting.

These regulations did not affect the Paliyans in any direct sense. Their staple food was wild yam, and their hunting was restricted to small game, forest resources of little or no concern to others. The Paliyans’ use of trees for hut construction, food extraction and household implements only needed smaller trees. Their low numbers, semi-nomadic lifestyle, and the habit of living in the more inaccessible areas of the hills, caused them to fall outside state concern, leaving them with a high degree of autonomy. This autonomy was not, however, the result of any agreement between the Paliyans and the government. It was a relationship based on what James Woodburn calls ‘autonomy by default’ (1979: 248), where the administration, for their own convenience, did not bother too much about the Paliyans so long as they did not come into conflict with government objectives.

Although the Forest Department became a new actor in the forests, Paliyans stayed away from contact as far as possible. In the eyes of the Paliyans, the Forest Department was a powerful outsider, uniformed and armed, entering into the forests from the plains and towns, the source of wars and diseases ravaging the surroundings for hundreds of years. The Paliyans’ view was not only based on their own occasional experiences, but was also confirmed by rumours passed on by local caste people they occasionally met, people with more regular interaction with the plains.

When the Paliyans started to do different kinds of wage labour for landowners, their interaction with the state did not immediately change, as this interaction was kept on an individual or family level between the workers and landowners. If individual Paliyans came into conflict with the Forest Department, which was mainly due to the work they did on the plantations, it was most often taken care of by the landowner as part of a patron-client relationship. The Paliyans’ involvement in the contractual system of non-timber forest produce

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112 The Paliyans’ avoidance of strangers may be the reason why they are never mentioned in the early surveys of the Palni Hills in the nineteenth century (see Chapter One).

113 The Paliyans of today seem more inclined to refer to rumours than their own experiences when explaining why they earlier used to run away if they met strangers. For example, ‘we have heard that strangers used to take away our children’, or ‘strangers are supposed to bring dangerous diseases.’
collection administered by the Forest Department since the 1960s brought many Paliyans closer to the local staff of the Forest Department, although everyday relations were conducted between the Paliyans and the private forest contractors.

However, a major shift in Paliyan-state relations was on its way. As I have shown above, through the increase in close interaction between the Paliyans and local caste people, the Paliyans’ economic strategies and ambitions changed. Many Paliyan families tried to start up small cultivation of their own, mainly within the reserved forest, thereby coming into direct conflict with state regulations, as cultivation within reserved forest is considered illegal. To solve this conflict the Paliyans either had to abandon their cultivation or find a way of negotiating with the forest guards. Usually only temporary cultivation was possible, lasting from one season to a couple of years, depending on the attitude and will to enforce the law on the part of the forest guards. However, this increasing interaction between the Paliyans and the forest guards opened up a new negotiating space for the Paliyans. By learning the system of bribes, they were able to negotiate their way especially through so-called ‘minor offences’, i.e. the occasional felling of small trees, small game hunting, etc., but also in some areas ‘the major offence’ of cultivating in reserved forest.  

Bribes as a way of getting access to certain resources or avoiding certain regulations in relation to the state are often referred to in the everyday life of India. I shall not deal with this question specifically in this book as the Paliyans have only to a very small extent had sufficient resources to take part in this kind of transaction. That it is something common to relations with state administration in the area all people would agree. Listen to the following exchange of words between a forest guard and a local leading politician, both living in the foothills area at the entrance to the Pandju Valley. While we were taking a cup of tea at a tea stall together with a forest guard (FG) on duty that day in the area, the local leading politician (LP) showed up and turned to Vincent, who he knows is from Kodaikanal:

LP: Vincent, we (the political party) have a meeting in Kodaikanal next month.

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114 The cutting of teak, ebony, sandalwood and rosewood, the most commercially valuable trees, was also considered a major offence.
FG: Tell me what you are planning at that meeting. I guess you will discuss how to loot people or extract commission from them (the FG intervening before Vincent gets the possibility of responding)

LP: Ask people about us. They admire us, but when they meet you, they disappear.

FG: In this area your people are getting more and more rowdy. Besides that you have become big smugglers.

LP: So you think you are clean. What about the bribes you ask for when someone cuts down a rosewood tree?

FG: No, no. You are the one asking for bribes when you are ‘helping’ people to ‘solve’ their problems.

Although bribes are a rather new phenomenon for most Paliyans, mainly experienced in relations with the staff of the Forest Department, many of the Paliyans today claim that they ‘can easily stand up to the forest guards’ when necessary. However, as with most local people in the hills, there is a high degree of distrust between them and the Forest Department, due to their different experiences and interests.

Staff of the Forest Department usually do not have any special experience of forests before they join the department. What experience they have comes from their training programmes at educational forest institutions situated all over the country, including in-service training and formal forestry education. They are often not locals, they usually have an urban background, and they come from higher castes, the more likely so, the higher their rank. These differences between the Forest Department staff and the Paliyans are also reinforced by the nature of the administrative system of the department. The local office of the department is always outside the forest, in major villages or towns in the plains or in the urban areas of the hills. The guards and rangers only occasionally visit deep inside the forests and seldom stay overnight. The regular transfer of staff prohibits the development of long-term personal relations between them and the local people.

This description also goes for other government departments in their interaction with villagers in the more inaccessible areas of the

115 From this perspective the Forest Department may seem under-staffed. 120,000 staff members are supposed to be responsible for safeguarding 23% or 760,000 km² of the land area of India (Palit 1996).

116 The regular transfer of staff members in state departments is a deliberate method on the part of the state to curtail corruption.
Palni Hills. Together with the power that the government authorities represent and the local caste hierarchies, these patterns of interaction give them a condescending attitude towards the Paliyans. In my conversations with different Forest Department staff, their attitudes were often expressed by statements about the Paliyans like 'backward', 'in need of education', and 'tricky fellows'. In their eyes the Paliyans are such a 'strange people' that it gives them good reason for understanding my interest in studying them. However, the attitude and behaviour of the individual forest staff towards the Paliyans can differ to such an extent that Paliyans often make the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' staff.

The Forest Department also hires the Paliyans as labourers, often on work concerned with social forestry, for example as watchers and seed collectors. To be watchers could also include the monitoring of animal movements. In Kudhirayar Dam one Paliyan man was hired to report on elephant movements, so that the Forest Department would be able to warn people ahead if the elephants came too close to settled areas. Another important factor which goes some way to balance the interaction between the Paliyans and the Forest Department, and which derives from the Forest Department staff's inexperience of the local forest areas, is their need of the Paliyans as guides in order to be able to fulfil some of their duties. This dependence is also due to the fact that there are few other people that the Forest Department can turn to for this service. The need of guides has been especially important for the struggle against some of the major offences in the forest areas, including ganja cultivation, illicit alcohol distilling, poaching, illegal timber felling, and run-away couples. It is important to mention that people from the plains accused of illegal activities by the government now and then turn to these forests and hills as hideouts. 117

Their work as guides for the Forest Department, and sometimes for the local police, however, often put the Paliyans in a problematic

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117 Hiding in forests and hills to get away from government law enforcement can sometimes be an effective method in Tamil Nadu. A good example of this is the notorious Veerapan and his 'gang', the sandalwood smugglers and elephant poachers in the forests on the borders where Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka meet. For decades he has been able to get away, whatever measures the police and military units have turned to. His elusiveness has been reported throughout the media in Tamil Nadu, including both books and films, giving him a mythical status in South India almost equal to that of Phoolan Devi, the former 'Bandit Queen' of Central India.
situation. One reason why they know the sites of, for example, illegal ganja cultivation is that they are in some cases hired by the runners of these activities. The temptation to take this offer is quite great, as the salary is comparatively high, often more than double the ordinary wages on the plantations. In this situation the Paliyans are squeezed between the ganja cultivators (who are usually armed) and the police and Forest Department. Some cases of death threats have been issued to individual Paliyans from ganja cultivators, but no fatal incident has yet been reported. A few Paliyans have also been put into custody at local police stations in the plains. Normally they are released within a couple of days, and the lesson from the authorities seems more to be of the ‘don’t mingle with the criminals’ kind. So far no Paliyans have been accused of running any ganja cultivation on their own behalf.

New government relations

The Forest Department has been the main representative of the local authorities in the interaction with the Paliyans in recent history. The change of residential pattern from dispersed sibling groups living in reserved forest to villagers situated on revenue land, changed this relationship significantly. Not only did it force the local government to regulate the new settlements. The shift, including the acquiring of title to land for cultivation, also exposed the Paliyans in a different way to the state and other outsiders. We may say that the Paliyans, with a village of their own, for the first time in recent history became ‘visible’ as a group, in contrast to earlier interaction with outsiders based on individuals and families. This gives me reason to turn back to the Paliyans of Aruvellam.

The legal status of the land in Aruvellam had not been fully cleared at the time the PHCC showed up in 1995. The B-memorandum certificates they received during the VARIDH period were lost and the taxes on houses and cultivable land had not been paid regularly by the majority of the villagers. A general problem in India is that if the cultivation has not been properly looked after, and if the user only has a В-memorandum, encroachers may be able to lay claim to the land, as was the case in the VAO conflict. Most often the ‘weaker’ party loses the land in the long run. Therefore clear papers are of the utmost importance for defending claims to land. The need to formalise land
rights became one of the main reasons for the PHCC to approach the authorities about the situation in Aruvellam.

With the help of Muttusami and Vincent, the Paliyan villagers drew up several petitions to the relevant authorities, including the request for electricity, stone houses and a bore-well for drinking water, as these issues were high on the Paliyans’ agenda. To be able to ‘pull some strings’, the PHHC, through Jaya, in early 1996, approached the District Collector, the highest local government authority, to discuss ‘the immediate needs’ of the Paliyans, as Jaya put it. To be able to have direct access to the Collector needs a high degree of social status, something the Paliyans lacked. Jaya however, was well known in the district as he belongs to one of the wealthier families of the region (Hardgrave 1969; Templeman 1996). As part of the co-operation between the PHCC and the Tamil Nadu Government concerning the suggested Palni Hills Sanctuary, he had also been appointed as Honorary Wildlife Warden of the district some years back.

Another fact, apart from regulated land deeds, that complicated the interaction between the Paliyans and the local government was the latter’s bureaucratic organisation. First, there is the physical division of administrative units. Aruvellam comes under Kodaikanal Taluk and Dindigul District. The most common and easiest way of travelling out of the Pandju Valley, is down the valley, but then passing into a neighbouring taluk and district. This is also the way to the nearest market and the one always used by the farmers in the valley. The border between these two administrative units comes halfway up the valley. This causes several practical problems. For example, if anyone decides to collect forest produce for the market, s/he may have ‘cleared’ it with the forest guards responsible for the upper areas, but runs the risk of meeting the guards from the other unit further down on the way to the plains. This case as such is not of any major importance for the Paliyans, as they are seldom involved in such transactions.

Of more importance is the system of ration cards, which I mentioned in Chapter Three. Through a government redistribution system, certain basic food items and other goods, for example rice, sugar and kerosene, are available at certain ‘fair price’ shops, at a state-subsidised price. On presentation of the ration card a family can buy a fixed amount per month. Each taluk has its specified shop for this
purpose, and herein lies the problem. The Paliyans in Aruvellam can only buy from the shop in Kodaikanal, and not from the shop in the nearby plains town. The cost of going to Kodaikanal, either in time by walking (a full day just to get there), or by travelling by bus around the hills (90 km), outweighs the possible savings. In fact, ration cards are no option for this group of Paliyans and logically no one has taken the trouble to apply for them.

A third problem is the organisation of the different departments, the levels within the administration, and their respective areas of responsibility. When, for example, the Paliyans during the VAO conflict ran down to the nearest tasildar office with their grievances, they simply turned up at the wrong office. The officer in charge informed them of their mistake and sent them up the hill again, now to Kodaikanal, another 70 km away. To be able to sort this out and approach the right office, the right department at the right level, and, not least, the right person of rank in accordance with the petition or inquiry in question, is no easy task for someone who is not familiar with the system. Let me quote Vincent, from one of his notes about the house patta question, to illustrate some of the turns in one case:

In December we gave (PHCC) the house land patta petition to the VAO and Revenue Inspector. In January, the Kodaikanal Taluk officer checked with the Surveyor about the petitions and sent these papers to Dindigul Collector's office. Deputy Tasildar told me that he is waiting to get the signature from Dindigul Collector's office. Last week, the Surveyor and Revenue Inspector told me that they got an order from Dindigul Collector's office to re-evaluate the village position. For that the Taluk officials may visit Aruvellam regarding the house patta.

Without the concern and interest of government officials, this system can easily stall a case, and at worst simply drop it somewhere 'on the road'. This is, of course, a general problem for people who lack influence and ability to put constant pressure on their case.

After repeated reminders, including a visit when the party had to turn back halfway up the valley because of heavy rains, the assistant of the Village Administrative Officer (VAO) finally came to the village in the middle of June 1996 together with Muttusami and Vincent. While the Paliyans wanted him to issue the B-memorandum certificates to all
families, the Assistant VAO gave out only ten certificates, and explained the reason to Muttusami:

Before PHHC came here I visited the village twice (in 1995) to ask them to pay the *kaišty* (land tax). But people didn’t show up. If one or two are not paying I can manage (he can pay from his own money and collect it afterwards). But no one came. What can I do? Now I have a list of ten persons who I met here on an earlier visit. So I cancelled the other B-memo certificates. If they want they have to come to the Collector’s office and get new B-memo certificates on *Thai* month (January 1997). There is no other way to get the B-memo. I can give the *kaišty* receipt. But it will not be registered in the *cittadal* book (the record book for land kept by the VAO).

This was in any case in the right direction for the villagers, and later on the papers were cleared for all families who attended to their land. In relation to the land issue, the local government in 1998 took another important decision emphasising that they now fully considered the village a Paliyan village. When the Pallar families, who had huts within the village and land in the vicinity, wanted to pay their yearly land tax, the VAO did not extend their B-memorandum certificates. The authorities claimed that the land was reserved for Paliyans only. There is a possibility of the authorities classifying certain areas as ‘Scheduled Areas’ reserved only for Scheduled Tribes. I have not been able to find out whether that was done in this case, although the decision was in line with such a consideration. The immediate effect was that the Pallar families had to abandon their land and move out of the village and the valley.

The re-introduction of the *Panchayati Raj* system in Tamil Nadu in 1996 was another event bringing the Paliyans of Aruvellam closer to the government administration. This system was introduced in India from 1959 as a parallel to the ordinary government administration to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level. The aim was to improve the economic conditions of the rural areas but also to develop the self-reliance and initiative of village communities and the direct participation of the rural people. Through the establishment of elected village *panchayats*, the state government allocates certain resources for

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118 With *patta* land rights within such an area they cannot sell the land within fifteen years, and only to tribals.
local projects that will be administered and implemented by the local people (Das 1993; Mahalingam 1994; Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act 1958, 1990). In Tamil Nadu this system had been closed down for several years but was re-established through new elections in December 1996.

The Village *Panchayats* operate today under a quota system. In the area of the Pandju Valley, the president of the *Panchayat* had to be a woman, and one member had to belong to the Scheduled Tribes and also be a woman (Mahalingam 1994: 13). This gave reasons for election tactics involving the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley, as they were the only Scheduled Tribe in the area. A person from the dominant caste, the Mannadian, who knew Andi well, approached him with a suggestion. If he could see to it that the Paliyans in the area voted for his wife as *Panchayat* president, his group would vote for Andi’s wife Shanti as the Scheduled Tribe member of the *Panchayat*. Through this strategy both groups would be influential in the *Panchayat* and be able to guarantee that resources would also be allocated to Aruvellam, he continued.

This strategy was successful and in early 1997 Shanti, together with Andi, went to the first *Panchayat* meeting in the caste village half a day’s walk away. For the Paliyans in Aruvellam, electricity, stone houses, and the improvement of the path through the village as well as up the valley, were issues brought up at these meetings. Most of the suggestions from the Paliyans came under the government directives on catering for the ‘basic needs’ of villages (ibid: 67-69). The *Panchayat* agreed on implementing several of them in due course. In October 1997 they paved the path through the village and later electricity was installed with four fluorescent tubes as streetlights erected along ‘the street’. A concrete threshing floor was laid in the lower part of the village and corrugated metal sheets were provided as roof cover for several huts.

During these years, from 1995 onwards, some of the villagers were also able to secure additional cash support from outside. In the autumn of 1995 about ten families were able to get a loan of Rs 1000 each under a government-run scheme for *Small Scale Industry Loans*. More families followed suit in 1996. If they repaid half the amount within a certain time they would be able to get an additional loan of a higher amount. Through the SIDT those families which had small children or were expecting babies were linked in late 1995 to a state-
run *Nutritious Food Scheme*, distributing food packages to the village. The VAO at the time also made an arrangement for representatives of a *Widow Welfare Scheme* to visit Aruvellam. Through this scheme five women with small children received Rs 100 per month, running until the child grows up.

As I have mentioned earlier, the interaction between the NGOs and the Paliyans of the village of Aruvellam was of a temporary nature. Nevertheless, the organisations had been very important for the time being as mediators and facilitators in establishing the village. In relations with the state both VARIHD and the PHCC initiated important steps to adapt the village legally to state regulations and thereby give it and its slowly growing assets protection against encroachment from outsiders. While we remember that the local authorities in 1990 joined the villagers in the inauguration of the village and later on gave land for cultivation, I have shown that this in itself was no guarantee that they could keep the land.

The Indian system of land rights and the political system connected with it give ample room for competition and negotiation over time, requiring constant monitoring and active protection if the tenure of land and resources is to be maintained. This is in fact what the Puliyan man, mentioned in Chapter Three, was referring to, when he explained why his group of people were able to keep their land in contrast to the Paliyans in Siruvattukadu Valley during the land distribution of the 1960s. While his group stayed together and defended their land, the Paliyans at that time, even if they also got land through the same distribution, failed to protect it collectively. They often preferred to stay in the forests for long periods, leaving room for others to grab the land. With the help of outsiders and several years of their own experience, the Paliyans of Aruvellam in the late 1990s seemed to have started to learn this lesson.

Let me now end this exposé by giving some impressions from my visit to the village in January 2001. I shall bring together some of the relevant issues concerning the way the Paliyans have tried to manage the new kinds of relations with outsiders in which they found themselves by making the decision to create a village of their own. This summary of the lives of the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley in the 1990s will also show that while the village seemed to be firmly established by now, at the level of sibling groups and individuals the outcome is not
as homogenous as the village establishment may imply. As a matter of fact, the variation in economic pursuits and relations with outsiders that I have shown to exist at group level in Chapter Three was also manifest within the local group of Paliyans in the Pandju Valley. As we shall see, it continued in spite of the success in establishing the village of Aruvellam, the first Paliyan village of the valley.

The conclusion of the first decade of a Paliyan village

The village of Aruvellam, with its cultivable land, is situated a couple of hundred metres along both sides of the river Vellam. All the huts are concentrated on the right-hand side of the river where the slope is gentler. When the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley entered the area in November 1990 it was an untouched stretch of riparian forest, with large trees of evergreen and deciduous species and smaller trees in between, and the ground covered with shrub and coarse grass. To be able to establish cultivation in such an environment, most big trees have to be removed. The country has to be opened up, while the high forest left at the fringes encloses the small fields and the village site. In the cleared area the undergrowth slowly takes over until the farmer decides to clear it again. The cultivated species sprout up little by little and within a couple of years there are lower trees of silkcotton and bush-high lime trees spreading out in the well-tended plots, interspersed with occasional broad-leaved banana plants and sprawling castor plants. Between the huts of the village the few silkcotton trees planted during the first months stick out, together with some papaya trees (*Carica papaya*). Above it all are the high valley ridges, sometimes in the upper parts bared of vegetation and glaring with different shades of grey rocks within all the greens of the patches of grass and trees. The majesty of the forest and the steep ridges, and the more than 2000 m high mountain wall at the end of the valley, create a feeling that the small open village site in the valley bottom is an intrusion, albeit a small one, into high and mighty nature.

In January 2001, more than four years after my previous visit to Aruvellam, this scene had changed dramatically. Coming round the last bend of the path, where we earlier could see the roofs of one or two huts in the near distance, the open space was gone. The silkcotton trees, with their thick straight trunks, reached the level of the surrounding forest. The leaf-cover of their crowns had grown together
into a canopy, putting the village in almost constant shade. Underneath, the roundish, light green lime trees, all tall as a man now, surrounded the village. In one corner four coconut trees, now about eight metres high, were spreading their branches, reminding us of the Pallar family who were the first to cultivate this tree species in the valley, now almost ten years ago. From a distance the small village seemed swallowed up by its surroundings. However, by trudging up the last slope and entering the village centre I was exposed to a more neatly kept place than ever before. Although the village was much smaller and less populated than had been planned, the remaining Paliyan families had situated their now more elaborate huts tighter together than previous. The paved path leading through the village, together with the newly acquired streetlights, created an atmosphere in the evenings similar to any of the small caste villages in the surrounding hills, something Andi and the others were very proud of.

Those families who had stayed on and paid attention to their land, thirteen families in all, had now also enjoyed several years of harvest from their land. Limes were the most important crop, in which Andi’s family had the highest number of trees, about 2,000 on their own land within the village area. Many families had between 300 and 400 lime trees, and those with fewer trees had at least 50. Apart from that, most families could expect an additional income from silkcotton trees and smaller numbers of other species, like pepper and coffee. Although Andi and several of the others now and then still took up work outside the valley, their attention to the village had been strengthened.

While the village now seemed to be able to benefit a great deal from its relations with the local government, what had become of the villagers’ relation with NGOs? At first, it looked as if nothing had happened after the PHCC left the area in 1998. The place where the earlier school had stood was now overgrown, a sign that the school never started up again. According to the villagers, neither the PHCC nor any other NGO had approached them during the last years. However, inside Colras’ hut there was a calendar with a picture of a man dressed only in a loincloth, posing with a bow and arrow, maybe
the most common symbol of tribal political struggle in India. I asked him why he had put it up on the mud wall, and he explained that it had been printed and handed out by the SIDT. He continued by telling me that their village now planned to be much more active in the general struggle to protect their rights through the SIDT. Not that they were much interested in the health and educational programmes that SIDT and the other NGOs usually promoted. He considered these activities difficult to adjust to their lives and of less value in the situation they were in at the moment. However, through the establishment of their village he thought they now had more interest in linking up with other Paliyans and tribals in a similar situation.

Here I found an important development in their attitude towards NGOs. Earlier, and especially in their interaction with VARIHD, the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley had found themselves bound to accept a lot of things offered by the NGOs, while at heart they only wanted practical support, oriented towards their economy. The interaction with NGOs was to a certain extent unequal. The general conditions were laid down by the NGO, and the Paliyans had to accept, at least in words, because of their political weakness and lack of experience of interaction with outsiders. Although this interaction had in any case become beneficial for the Paliyans, what Colras now expressed was something significantly different. Rather he talked about an organisation which they would join on equal terms, together with other groups of people of the same kind. The core programme developed over the years within the SIDT had come to coincide with the core issues of the villagers of Aruvellam, a coincidence lacking in the interaction with VARIHD and the PHCC. To explain this development I need to take some space to describe in more detail the SIDT and its development in recent years.

The SIDT was one out of at least three NGOs in the Palni Hills which had tribal people as their main target group. In the 1990s the SIDT was the most widespread and recognised of these. Run by Christian Catholics, the organisation was linked to the Madurai Multipurpose Social Service Society (MMSSS), a regional Catholic organisation based in Madurai. Its objective was ‘social welfare activities for the poor and

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119 The bow and arrow is often brought along to tribal demonstrations, but not so much to bring ‘weapons’ as to show their distinction as ‘tribes’ in contrast to caste groups.
downtrodden people' (Nobili Pastoral Centre 1983: 38-39). The SIDT's work and support were mainly within the 'coffee belt' of the Lower Palnis, which is where we find the major portion of tribes in the Palni Hills, dominated by the Puliyans, the group apart, from the Paliyans, who claim descent from the Palni Hills. This area includes the Law's Ghat Road (the main southern road up the hill), and the villages and hamlets around the major villages of Pannaikadu, Thandikudi and Pachalur. The Lower Palnis has the largest concentration of cultivation, with high competition over land and some of the largest estates in the hills. The SIDT had also approached other areas over the years, both at the northern and southern sides as part of their ambition to create a tribal organisation for the entire hill area. However, outside the coffee belt, they have had, so far, little success for reasons I shall come back to shortly.

The organisation works on two levels, the local and state level. On the local level, it tries to create rapport with the people of the villages, supporting them in their immediate needs. This includes the running of schools and health care, but especially legal and political support in conflicts over land. It sees the State Government and its local representatives as those mainly responsible for the tribal situation, even if rich estate owners and other powerful people may be the direct exploiters of tribal labour and lives. The SIDT is therefore targeting the government for not defending the rights of tribals. Connected with this is also the fact that many tribals try, as an avenue out of land shortage, to establish cultivation within reserved forest, thereby challenging government legislation.

The SIDT is mobilising for direct action, such as physically defending cultivated land and creating roadblocks, together with campaigns including the posting of bills and the distribution of pamphlets. A pamphlet spread by SIDT members in 1994 had the following headline: 'Because of the neglect of the Regional Division Officers, the Kodaikanal people are suffering.' An excerpt from the text says:

The traditional people have worked hard to turn soil into gold, but are anyway forced to turn over their land to outsiders. Government officials send away poor and ordinary people even if they have used the land for 30 or 40 years. The officers are corrupt and we demand a re-survey of the
land and return of land rights to the rightful owners. All people affected by these problems, join together and demand your rights.

They also submit written petitions to local government departments and stage political rallies. In March 1994 about 500 Puliyans were mobilised for a 75-km-long march from their hamlets in the Palni Hills to the district headquarters of Dindigul in the plains. They demanded to be reincluded in the list of Scheduled Tribes, a position they lost when the Central Government in Delhi in 1976 shifted them to the category of Scheduled Castes. Thereby, according to the Puliyans, they ‘lost several of their privileges and concessions and the education of their children was affected seriously’ (Express News Service 1994).

The state level of the SIDT’s activities was indicated in the VAO conflict in the Pandju Valley 1995. The poster campaign conducted by the SIDT in relation to this case referred to tribal conflicts in the Chota Nagpur area of Central India. During a 40,000-strong procession organised by the Adivasi Gowar Samaj Sanghatana in Nagpur, in the State of Maharashtra, on 23 November 1994, a police labti-charge resulted in a stampede killing more than 100 tribals.

To give the organisation momentum, the SIDT worked hard to link up the situation of the tribal struggle in the Palni Hills to the state and national level. This has mainly been done through co-operation with regional tribal organisations in South India. The most visible umbrella organisation within this movement is the Adivasi Sangamam (Adivasi Joining Hands and Coming Together) created in October 1992. Through the lighting of adiyouthi (awakening of the adivasis) torches, flames of protest were brought from eight regions (through marches by local tribal organisations from Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) to Karinthanandan Nagar in Kerala (Rao 2000). It was no accident that this place was chosen for the revival of the tribal cause. Here a contingent of the British East India Company was beaten in 1802 by a force mainly consisting of tribals led by Talakkal Chandu at the Battle of Panamaram Fort (ibid.)

One of the main activities of the Adivasi Sangamam is to organise big rallies on both the regional and the state level to get political recognition for the tribal cause. The SIDT has joined these activities several times, bringing hundreds of tribals from the Palni Hills. One of

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120 A labti is a hardwood stick used as a truncheon by the Indian police.
the later rallies held at the state level took place in Chennai in 1998. The main reason for the tribals of the Palni Hills to join this specific rally was the ongoing land conflict in the coffee belt, culminating on 4 November 1997. As local people were defending their settlements and cultivation within reserved forest, the Forest Department attacked the area with a force of more than 500 hired men. Houses were set on fire, rifle butts were used to beat up people, and seventeen men were arrested (IWGIA 1998: 282).

The Catholic Christian leadership of the SIDT advocates the use of both negotiation and confrontation in political action, in accordance with an ideology inspired by the ‘theology of liberation’ (Scharper 1998). They see the Gospel of Jesus Christ as ‘a message of freedom and a force of liberation’ (Ratzinger and Bovone 1984: 5). For them liberation

...is first and foremost liberation from the radical slavery of sin. Its end and its goal is the freedom of the children of God, which is the gift of grace. As a logical consequence, it calls for freedom from many different kinds of slavery in the cultural, economic, social and political spheres, all of which derive ultimately from sin, and so often prevent people from living in a manner befitting their dignity (ibid.).

In the MMSSS’ bookshop in Madurai the ideological message of taking the side of the ‘poor section of society’ is presented and discussed through their publications. Among other publications we can find the pamphlet *Theology of Liberation* (Ratzinger and Bovone 1984, referred to above), the booklet about the devoted life of Father Louis Leveil, ‘a friend of the poor’ (De Jesus 1980), and the book *Humans without Rights*, discussing the destiny of Tamils repatriated from Sri Lanka. The foreword of the last book quotes the words of Jesus: ‘The foxes have their holes and the birds of the air their nests. But the son of man has nowhere to lay his head, (Devadoss Rajendran 1989). The message in these publications is often spread through organised meetings between ideologists of the MMSSS and members within the network organisations, as was confirmed by Osvald from Kodaikanal, one of the leaders of the SIDT.

When the SIDT has tried to expand outside the coffee belt, it has stumbled on problems for a number of reasons. The most obvious one is that the tribals of the Palni Hills are concentrated in the coffee belt
(Lower Palnis). The Puliyans, who are confined to this area of the hills, dominate with a population of about 15,000, compared with about 5,000 tribals (mainly Paliyans) in the rest of the hills. The strategies adopted have focused on issues mainly concerning the Puliyans, for example the above-mentioned questions of land for cultivation and government categorisation. The last is of no concern to the Paliyans as they have always been listed as a Scheduled Tribe. Issues related to circumstances in other parts of the hills have not yet been developed within the SIDT’s policy. The appeal to regional and national tribal struggles makes no sense to many Paliyans, and is therefore not a cause they can easily identify with.

Several Paliyan groups and individuals in the coffee belt have now and then joined SIDT activities, although not in any leading positions. In other areas the Paliyans have not shown the same interest. The absence of Puliyans outside the coffee belt has excluded their mobilising effect on other tribal groups. Although the SIDT has occasionally tried to overcome this lack by sending out staff (including some Paliyans) to valleys outside the coffee belt, these visits have not been able to break through the general Paliyan aloofness towards outsiders. The Paliyans also build this aloofness and sometimes open suspicion on negative experiences from earlier visits by individuals and organisations. A not uncommon strategy on the part of ‘representatives’ of organisations which turn up and offer ‘help and resources’, is to collect membership fees for their organisation as a precondition for their support and then never be heard of again. Local people in the hills often referred to such experiences and Vincent and I came across a couple of these attempts. The SIDT has also arranged meetings at its headquarters on the Law’s Ghat Road for Paliyans from the outer areas of the hills, although often with meagre results.

With or without an expansion of their activities outside their core support area, SIDT members have consolidated themselves among the majority of tribals in the Palni Hills. Although most of the board members in the organisation are Christian Catholics from the Kodaikanal area, not belonging to the tribe category, they have been able through their wide Catholic network, to accumulate sufficient resources to develop their organisation. While an important strategy by CORSOCK, as shown above, was to avoid local and regional politics, the SIDT’s main policy, in contrast, is to profile itself in that same
arena. To get themselves involved in local politics and the recognition it generates, becomes the members main asset in attracting tribals to their cause. But as with most outsiders, to be able to create a forum of negotiations and a platform for establishing mutual interests they need to attend to the more immediate needs of the Paliyans – something we have seen as regards both VARIHD and PHCC.

Colras was aware of the heightened activities of the SIDT and the conflicts between the local government and the tribals in the Lower Palnis during recent years – an intensification that has also led to an increased attention to tribals in the Palni Hills on the part of the Tamil Nadu Government, mentioned earlier. With this in mind, it seems that Colras is expressing an emerging ‘ethnic identity’ among the Paliyans of the Pandju Valley based on the local articulation of tribal relations with outsiders, spearheaded and formulated by the SIDT and the more active tribal groups of the Lower Palnis. Colras had earlier, as I have mentioned, been very negative in his attitude towards the SIDT, based on the Paliyans’ ideas of individualism, resulting in a general distrust of people they did not know intimately. However, at this time he spoke in a way that reflected a collective identity rather than an individualistic one, something very weak or mainly absent among the Paliyans up to now. Whether this will become a break with earlier ideas of interaction with outsiders, it may, however, be too early to say.

Before closing this chapter let me offer some general conclusions which I think one can draw from the first ten years of the village of Aruvellam. Let us return to the time when I arrived in the Pandju Valley in 1991 and the way the Paliyans in Aruvellam formulated the idea of establishing a village of their own. Andi at that time clearly had the ambition of bringing together all of the Paliyan families in the valley (about 40 families in 1990) into one big settlement, a village. This was clearly expressed in the first petition they sent (with the help of VARIHD) to the local authorities. They included a village and cultivable land for 40 families, with a list of names, also including those families who did not join the village although they lived in the area. From the outside, this process, started by Andi, can be seen as the beginning of a shift in residential pattern from living in dispersed sibling groups to settling down in a village for the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley. However, such a linear process never took place, at least not when we look at the first ten years.
Only 13 out of the 40 families (less than 30%) could be considered as villagers in 2001. Half of the families of the valley never joined and still live dispersed in sibling groups or smaller units of nuclear families, more or less attached to caste landowners in the area. What happened to the six sibling groups that joined the village? Andi’s group was the most numerous and was even more dominant in 2001. Most of its members lived in the village. However, Andi’s two eldest sons had become old enough to be able to live on their own. They had both inherited Andi’s strong will and fearlessness towards outsiders, clearly shown in their choices of employment. The eldest had joined a mobile drilling unit for borewells, operating in Rajasthan in North India. The other son was a firewatcher for the Forest Department in the neighbouring state of Kerala. Not only are these occupations new for Paliyans, as far as I know, they also leave these Paliyans in a totally new environment, especially so for the one in the drilling unit.

Murugan’s group was still represented by three families, although one sister in this group had moved out. She was married to one of the two brothers of Karuppan’s sibling group. Karuppan’s group preferred to live as farmhands for caste landowners, combining such work with hunting and gathering in a neighbouring valley. This was basically the same kind of life they had lived before they joined the village in the area of Suraj Estate. These families had expressed the most negative attitude towards village life while they were living in the village. They also preferred a closer relationship with the forest through the collection of forest food, and kept interaction with the surrounding caste farmers to a minimum. Karuppan’s own family had broken up. His wife left him in 1993 and three years later he died, spending his last years in the same valley as his brother. One child is still there and another child followed a caste family out of the area.

Sethu’s sibling group, with its two families, was still in the village. Both the husband of his sister and his mother were now dead, and a few others had left the valley several years before. Chapli’s family still stayed, but the second family in this sibling group had left. The last sibling group was Ganeshan’s. This group of two families was also dissolved. Ganeshan himself abandoned his wife despite being more than 60 years old and left the valley in 1998. His son was now alone with his two children, as his wife had died in 1998. Although the son now and then worked for landowners in the vicinity, his main work
was to take care of Andi’s family’s property in the village (their house, goats, etc.) together with his abandoned mother.

From the above it can be concluded that several events beyond the control of the Paliyans in the Pandju Valley significantly affected their lives in the 1990s. However, we can also see that the variation in choices concerning social relations and economic pursuits I described at a general level among the Paliyans of the Palni Hills is also reflected within the local group of Paliyans in the Pandju Valley. Some families preferred to challenge the new situation by creating a village of their own, thereby significantly transforming and increasing interaction with outsiders. A good example of this is Andi’s sibling group, but also to a certain extent other families still living in the village. Yet other families tried this out, some only for a few months, like one of Andi’s brothers; others tried it for several years, but finally decided to leave the area, like Karuppan’s younger brother’s family. This hesitation to join the village project was even stronger among many of those families in the valley that ignored the idea from the start. For example, Andi’s maternal uncle’s sibling group (three families) lived at the end of the valley, high up on the right-hand ridge, now and then working on a small cardamom estate owned by caste people. When I once asked him why he did not join the village he told me that he preferred to live inside the forest. In his eyes the village of Aruvellam was too exposed to outsiders, and in his old age he was not prepared for that kind of interaction.

While the change in residence from dispersed sibling groups to larger villages has become a reality for the Paliyans all over the Palni Hills, the case of the Pandju Valley, as well as many other valleys I referred to in Chapter Three, shows that this process is not a linear transition from one stage to another. Instead, I have tried to show that the process rather increases the variations of outcomes in Paliyans’ lives, manifested through the different arrangements people make. We may say that the ‘untidiness’ and complexity of the lives of the Paliyans in the Palni Hills are the reality and what need to be explained, something I shall turn to in the last chapters of this book.
PART III

THE QUEST FOR AUTONOMY
Chapter Seven

Increasing Competition, Expanding Strategies

In the presentation of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills in the previous chapters, my intention was to show the range of various economic arrangements among them, by comparing local groups, as well as families and individuals within a group. I have also emphasised that the interaction between the Paliyans and non-Paliyans takes place to a significant degree within the economic realm, whether the non-Paliyans are caste landowners, members and staff of the NGOs or representatives of the local authorities. From this I have also drawn the conclusion that the way the Paliyans run their economy to a large extent determines the way they interact with outsiders, something they take into account when they decide what kind of subsistence means they prefer for the time being.

In this chapter I shall draw on this variety of Paliyan economic pursuits, linking them analytically with three kinds of social strategies: ‘avoidance’, ‘negotiation’ and ‘alliance-building’. I use the concept of strategies in its widest sense, from ideas about behaviour resulting in spontaneous action to more or less complex pre-planned actions and any combination within these extremes.

The strategies are differentiated, due to their effect on Paliyan interaction with outsiders. Gardner’s model of bi-cultural oscillation, which I referred to in Chapter Two, would basically fit an oscillation between ‘avoidance’ and ‘negotiation’, and Bird-David’s thesis of ‘encompassment’ would fit the idea that through ‘negotiation’ a hunter-gatherer society could uphold their ‘avoidance’ strategy. I shall, however, take into account the whole range of ways of getting by, in which the above three strategies are often mixed in different
combinations. This mixture, in which one strategy could dominate the other two during periods and then quite easily be switched to another combination over time, breaks the social and cultural ‘boundary’ implicit in the models proposed by Gardner and Bird-David when it comes to hunter-gatherers of South India, something I shall come back to in Chapter Nine.

My kind of reasoning here is influenced by James Ferguson’s use of ‘the full house’ metaphor (borrowed from Stephen Jay Gould) when discussing urbanisation and modernisation in Zambia (1999: 20-21). Ferguson asks for

...an insistence on viewing change not as a sequence defined by ‘typical forms’ for each period but as a less linear (and less plotlike) set of shifts in the occurrence and distribution of a whole range of differences – the ‘full house’ of variation that is obscured by teleological narrations and sequences of typical forms. In a world made up not of Platonic types but messy spreads of variation, changing realities must be conceptualized not as ladders or trees defined by sequences and phases but as dense ‘bushes’ of multitudinous coexisting variations, continually modified in complex and nonlinear ways (ibid: 42).

While Ferguson’s insistence was a reaction against earlier theoretical models for capturing urbanisation in Africa, based on the expectation of a linear transition from a rural to an urban society (a dichotomy and incompatibility between rural and urban life), his methodological suggestion is applicable to the discussion on the relationship between hunter-gatherer societies and their neighbours. It is especially useful in relation to Gardner’s and Bird-David’s models based on the distinction between two different cultural systems/societies in South India. A divide between a subsistence-based hunter-gatherer society and a market-oriented rural society in South India replaces the idea of an urban/rural social divide in Zambia. In the case of Gardner, the Paliyans are oscillating between the two parts of the dichotomy: ‘...that Paliyan differences between frontier and forest are much more than a matter of economics and settlement pattern. When they move from one zone to the other, they are oscillating between two distinct ways of life’ (Gardner 2000: 24). In the case of Bird-David, the Nayaka are able to keep their ‘boundary’ (one part of the dichotomy) against outsiders
by ‘encompassing’ certain resources from the outside (the other part of the dichotomy).

While Gardner and Bird-David select, in my view, too narrow an example of strategies and economic arrangements to confirm their models, I shall instead make use of the ‘full house’ of variation I found among the Paliyans in the Palni Hills in the 1990s. In this way it is possible to bring in the whole range of economic activities, from groups and families basing their subsistence on forest food to Paliyans who have cultivated for several generations, including those Paliyan cultivators who today sell their own crops to the market. With this I shall try to show that the critical point in Paliyan change over time can not be pinned down in a simple dichotomy between forest-oriented and market-oriented activities, but rather in the way in which market-oriented activities come into contradiction with certain basic beliefs and values held by the Paliyans. In this way I would like to think that my analysis of the situation of the Paliyans is an expansion of Bird-David’s idea of ‘encompassment’. My data show, on the one hand, a wider range of resource ‘encompassment’ than she describes, but, on the other hand, this ‘encompassment’ includes a change within Paliyan society which makes it difficult to talk about encompassment without change as her data imply. I shall return to this discussion in Chapter Nine.

I shall now turn to the different strategies I found among the Paliyans of the Palni Hills. Each will be discussed in the light of changing social circumstances, i.e. the development and change of social space in the hills that has given room for new kinds of limitations and opportunities for the Paliyans. The chapter will end with a summary, discussing the way these strategies have been combined during recent decades.

Avoidance

An avoidance strategy among the Paliyans means Paliyan avoidance of interaction with non-Paliyans. This seems to have been the dominant strategy towards outsiders in their recent history. All Paliyans in the Palni Hills claim that earlier they 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 being that they speak the same language, point to the fact that they must have had closer interaction with their neighbours earlier in their history. Why this changed and a strategy of avoidance was felt necessary is wrapped in obscurity as far as the Paliyans are concerned (however, see Chapter One), although the general Paliyan answer is that they ‘were afraid of outsiders’, often substantiated by claims that outsiders earlier would kill them, steal their children or contaminate them with fatal diseases. Without details, we may in any case 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 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 except from some of these very general statements. When I have asked them about their history and details of events, names of people, etc., their knowledge seems to reach only two generations back, i.e. to events they either have experienced themselves or information they have got through individuals they have met. Beyond that they usually say ‘how can we know?’

The reasons behind 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 dramatic treatment mentioned above. In positive terms Paliyan ‘avoidance’ stands for the possibility of making a living without interaction and negotiation with other people, a way of life by means of surviving on the hunting and gathering of forest food. When asked to compare forest life with wage labour, Paliyans highlight the non-negotiated aspect of these resources by saying that ‘food, firewood and water are there for anyone to take, they’re free.’

Today one cannot find any Paliyans who live for extended periods only on hunting and gathering. However, avoidance towards outsiders still persists but now is of a more relative kind. Some Paliyans have a stronger preference than others for keeping away from outsiders. Some local groups, for example the Paliyans of Mungil
Palam, are still following this strategy, as well as those families extracting lemongrass oil among the Paliyans of Kudhirayar Dam. These examples show the effectiveness of this kind of relative avoidance of certain social relations. In both cases they have interaction with outsiders. However, the places they usually live in are at such a distance from other settlements and villages, and from paths used by the few people who walk up and down the slopes, that they more or less completely control interaction with outsiders. There are also examples of groups living very close to others, but in a terrain that makes them always able to spot outsiders long before they approach their dwellings. One such settlement is Pattur, situated in a valley to the west of the Pandju Valley. Here a group of eight Paliyan families live on a ridge high 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 two hours to walk up the steep and winding path to reach them. Several individuals and families are also known for minimising outside interaction by making more use than the average of forest food, such as for example, one of the families 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 temporary withdrawal to another place for shorter periods, mainly used by individuals and families. The next degree is when some people, usually a nuclear family, decide to shift their settlement permanently, further away from other Paliyans, although still within the local area, allowing for at least a minimum continuation of relations with neighbouring Paliyan families. Several families acted like this in Aruvellam because of internal conflicts. I have also mentioned that these actions were common when creating other Paliyan villages, like Thinaikadu and Karumparai. The highest degree of avoidance is when individuals, families or sometimes whole sibling groups decide to shift permanently to another valley. I have talked about one sibling group which left Kudhirayar Dam owing to internal 

121 Velraj’s family within Murugan’s sibling group.
122 One example was Nagesh’s family, within Ganeshan’s sibling group in Aruvellam. They acted like this because of a conflict with Nagesh’s father in 1995, moving back to the village proper only in 1998 when Nagesh’s wife died.
conflicts and the same thing happened in Karumparai. It is more common, though, for occasional individuals and families do this.

Negotiation

According to the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, the interaction with caste people changed when they were offered labour on the surrounding plantations and estates. The earliest offer came from the bigger plantations and estates established from the late nineteenth century onwards. Plantation agriculture was market-oriented, with crops like cardamom and coffee in the Palni Hills, and labour-intensive in comparison with other kinds of cultivation in the hills. One early example on record was the Jesuit estate which hired Paliyans in the early twentieth century, mentioned in Chapter One (Dahmen 1908). The 'Hill Tamils' of the Palni Hills, like the Mannadian, who have lived in the neighbourhood of the Paliyans for centuries, did not seem to have had the same need to recruit Paliyan labour. Their cultivation was less market-oriented and the need for labour was met 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.¹²³

I have also shown how, 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.

These working relations were negotiated and regulated between the employer and individual employees and sometimes developed into a kind of patron-client relationship. The most negative form from the Paliyan point of view was a few cases which could be considered as bonded labour, where negotiation space for the Paliyans was kept to a minimum. The information I have on such cases is scanty. They are supposed to have occurred in the Lower Palnis in the 1970s and 1980s.

¹²³ Some of the Paliyans who did not join the village of Aruvellam in the Pandju Valley worked for Mannadians.
The latest known case was from Siruvattukadu Valley, referred to in Chapter Three.

In conclusion, we may say that the space for negotiation between Paliyans and non-Paliyans developed significantly when new groups of caste people, from the late nineteenth century onwards, expanded into the hills. Comparing the three main economic activities within this social space (farm labour, collecting of forest produce for the market 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 was described in Chapter Three. Here I shall concentrate on farm labour and the way the Paliyans fitted into the caste employers' economic strategies.

There are at least 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 suited 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 little 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 their economy. This is a complex issue, which I shall return to in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that, in general, Paliyan needs for cash were small as they were neither used to greater amounts of commodities, nor fully dependent on cash for their subsistence.

A third reason for their attractiveness as labourers is that they have never had their own labour organisations or been part of any other kind of organisation representing farm labourers, something which is otherwise very common among caste labourers. Their ignorance of Tamil Nadu labour regulations and their lack of experience of labour organisation or any other kind of collective action have been good reasons for landowners to consider Paliyans as politically harmless, especially in comparison with the well-organised caste groups from the plains. A common saying among caste landowners hiring Paliyans is that 'the Paliyans are skilful workers, seldom cheat you and are 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 during the cultivation season. During the
same period unemployment in the surrounding foothills could be common, and especially during droughts (often this situation creates temporary migration among plains people).

Let us now consider the social space into 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 have a 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 found in the Pandju Valley, as well as in most other valleys where agriculture dominates the economy of these hills. These absentee landowners usually live in the plains and belong to different caste groups. This is of importance, as working relations between landowners and wage labourers in the plains are to a great extent articulated through the local and regional caste system, which guides and shapes the interaction between the Paliyans and the caste landowners in the hills (see, however, changing labour relations between castes in today's South India, Cederlöf 1997; Fuller 1996; Kurien 1989; Molund 1988; Srinivas 1992; 1996). I shall use two caste groups as examples, the Nadars and Tevars, although in general this description would account for other caste landowners as well. The Nadars have been 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 Tevars have during the recent 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, they were higher in rank than the former 'Untouchable' castes such as the Chakkiliyars, Pallars or Paraiyars 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 on became engaged in agriculture when they moved north. The grandfather of one of my closest Nadar informants said that at the time of their family’s arrival in the foothills of the Palni Hills, they closed a deal with the Mannadians of the hills not to expand their cultivation higher up the slopes than to an altitude of 1,500 m (see also Templeman 1996: 127). Above that height the land was considered the Mannadians’ territory. In Chapter Four I gave some glimpses of the family history of Kaliyanagam, the owner of the Suraj Estate in the Pandju Valley, who belonged to this caste. Another example is Jaya, whom we also met earlier as one of the board members of the PHCC, and whom I shall return to in the context of Paliyan alliance-building. He told me the following story of the economic success of his family:

My grandfather’s family lived in Periyakulam (a town in the southwestern foothills known for its many mango orchards, situated quite close to the Pandju Valley). His brother owned a small shop in town, but around 1910 my grandfather started to do business with the hill people and the hill station of Kodaikanal. He brought up merchandise with donkeys through the old Coolie Ghat Road, returning with local crops from the hills. Eventually he started some shops in Kodaikanal. When the road came he was the first to start passenger traffic up and down the hills. We still have bus companies in our family. He also invested in agriculture and through my father and my uncles our business expanded into many sectors. From my father I inherited several estates situated both in the foothills and up the hills. You have visited them all. Since my father’s time we have hired Paliyans and other labourers on several of these estates.

A third example is Chandra Shekar, who told me the story of Sambal kundi, mentioned in Chapter One. His family belongs to a branch of very successful Nadar coffee growers (the estates mainly in the Lower Palnis) from Pattiveeranpatti, a Nadar-dominated village in the southern foothills, which became ‘one of the most prosperous villages of its size in Tamil Nadu’ (Templeman 1996: 127).

The Nadars filled their labour needs within their expansive business with lower caste people, in the same way as other landowners in the area. Thus the Paliyans came to be 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 and foremost in the kind of manual work they were offered, the same as was expected to be done by ‘Untouchables’ in the plains. The way landowners tried to hire Paliyans was, and still is, similar to the way ‘Untouchables’ were hired. Usually the landowner hired workers through a head labourer, kothukkarar (Ramachandran 1990: 104) or an overseer, kankani (ibid: 114-115; Heidemann 1992), who drew up a group of workers, a ‘labour gang’, and had a certain obligation 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. Andi, for example, held this position when his sibling group was working on TT Estate, a Nadar-owned estate, during the second half of the 1990s. For this he got Rs 3 extra per day. However, he would also be responsible for the credits taken by ‘his’ workers if they departed without the debt being cleared, a way for the landowner to keep a certain control over Paliyan elusiveness.

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 from the most ritually polluted castes, a practice still common in caste villages of the surrounding plains. In this way the coolie-line corresponds to the cheri. If the Paliyans were living on 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, with farm servants being 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 the payment for the work, with the landowner handing out a set of clothes for the lower castes during festivals. This was often the case with the Paliyans and I mentioned earlier that it took place on the Suraj Estate.

The above also fits the relations between the Paliyans and Tevar landowners. The common name of the Teyvars was formerly Kallar (thieves). They were classified by the British as a criminal group through the infamous Criminal Tribes Act (D’Souza 1999; Lalita 1995; Radhakrishna 1991; Shulman 1980). Today they prefer to call
themselves by the title Tevar, meaning 'the Divine'. The Kallar history of being notorious dacoits (highway robbers), feared for their militant manner, is not something they would deny today. It is part of their pride and of their claim to be the descendants of warriors, underwritten by the legend that they, together with other associated caste sections, were descended from Indra, the warrior god (Dumont 1986: 10-15). Today they are mainly farmers, although both theft and protection from theft (kaval system) are still an important part of their identity. Muttusami, the Tevar man we met earlier as one of the staff of the PHCC, reflected in the following way on this behaviour among his people:

In earlier times almost all of my people were involved in theft and stealing, or worked as bodyguards for rich people. We didn’t own anything, so what else could we do? My family came to this area about 150 years ago. During that time we had a conflict with another Tevar family, in which my great grandfather’s father murdered a man. We left that area close to Madurai and came here and created this village in the foothills. Through body and property guarding we were able to lease land, and later buy that land. Today many of us are rich people. We have a strong caste position in this area but still some watch over land and other property for people. We are good at this. When a fellow some days back was stealing coconuts from my father’s garden, my father found the thief easily because, as he said to me, ‘I was once a thief myself, you know.’

The Tevars 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 (ibid: 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’ (ibid: 41). Paliyans carried out both these categories of tasks on the estates and plantations. Apart from labour, the Paliyans were used as musicians if there were no other musicians available during ceremonies and festivals. Some musical instruments are considered impure for

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124 See Dumont’s discussion on the relation between Kallar and Shanar names and titles (1986: 154)

125 Kaval, watchman or guard.
higher castes, among other things because of the drum skin as well as the saliva used in the wind instruments (ibid: 42). They should therefore be handled by ‘Untouchables’.

In these ways the Paliyans had a relationship with the plantation owner similar to the interdependence between the landowning castes and the ‘Untouchables’ in the plains. The landowners also expected the Paliyans to adhere to different kinds of debt bondage common between landowners and ‘Untouchables’ in the plains, for example the so-called categories of padiyals/pannaiyals\(^\text{126}\) (Ramachandran 1990: 6-13; Sarkar 1985: 110-12)\(^\text{127}\). Many landowners have certainly attempted this ‘bondedness’ in relation to the Paliyans, but, as I have mentioned, with less success as compared with the plains. However, weaker forms of bonded labour have been found. For example, several estate owners who gave credit to their workers did not allow repayment unless it was in the form of labour. This is strictly against the grain of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976. The practice still persists in some valleys involving Paliyans, although the amount of credit is usually too low to create permanent debts. The Paliyans have become more aware of the fact that working in return for debts is not allowed by the authorities. Taken together, disagreement over debts is quite common today. 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 recognise 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 recognised by Gardner, is the similarity between their simple way of life and the life expected of a Hindu ascetic. This offers the Paliyans a certain degree of ritual purity within the Hindu caste system in comparison with lower castes (1982; 2000: 193-212; see also Dumont 1960). This would explain, according to Gardner, why caste people sometimes use Paliyans as spiritual guides or ritual functionaries. In the Palni Hills during the 1990s, this

\(^{126}\) Pannaiyals were farm servants of the former ‘Untouchable’ castes, lineal descendants of the landless labourer of the historical past (Ramachandran 1990: 11; Gough 1981: 50ff).

\(^{127}\) Bonded labour in relation to tribes, see Vyas 1980.
relationship was mainly manifested through the service provided by Paliyan spirit mediums (*samiadis*, god dancers). Most Paliyan groups have *samiadis* for the healing of people who have become possessed by evil spirits (see also next chapter). Some of these *samiadis* have a local, as well as a regional, reputation that attracts caste individuals to use their services. In this particular situation the power relationship between the Paliyan and the outsider is reversed. The caste patient is completely in the hands of the Paliyan *samiadi* during the healing process (see also Kapp and Hockings 1989; Noble 1976). However, this relationship does not to any significant extent influence the economic relations, or the general power position, between the Paliyans and outsiders. It is therefore of minor importance for this study.128

**Alliance-building**

The third kind of social strategy that I found among the Paliyans I have preferred to call alliance-building. This strategy is an expansion of the negotiation strategy, in which, in contrast to the previous strategy, the notion of ‘alliance’ tries to capture the basis of equality and group-level negotiations between the parties involved. 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 uniting 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, as I have already mentioned, forced the government to change its relations with the Paliyans from giving them an ‘autonomy by default’ to their recognition as a community among other communities, i.e. as citizens of the state. The link has changed from an unregulated relationship, mainly based on interaction between individual Paliyans and individual representatives of the local authorities (mainly staff from the Forest Department), to a regulated one, based on interaction between Paliyan groups and several local government departments. As this change has usually been evaluated as something negative for forest

128 However, for at least one *samiadi* at Kudhirayar Dam, who had regular caste patients for many years during the 1990s, the offerings made during the spirit possession sessions have become a substantial part of his subsistence.
peoples in India, I have tried to show that this has not necessarily been the case so far for the Paliyans of the Palni Hills.

Second, one of the key factors in this 'positive' development seems to have been the alliances established between Paliyan groups and local NGOs. These alliances came into being as a result of the significant increase of NGOs, such as VARIHD, PHCC and SIDT, in the Palni Hills from the 1980s onwards and their attention to the most inaccessible settlements in the area. In the previous chapter I have already discussed the role of the state and its changing attitude towards the Paliyans. Here I shall 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.

The term NGO became an international catchword for social action in the 1980s. By the end of the decade we could find several organisations using this label in the Palni Hills. However, voluntary organisations and social action groups have a long history in India. NGOs are, rather, what Joan Mencher calls a 'recent incarnation' of organisations that have existed for hundreds of years (1999: 2081). There is also a link between the environmental groups emerging on the Indian scene from the 1970s onwards and the issues related to the environment in the struggle for autonomy and self-sufficiency by local people in the hill and forest areas during the colonial period.

The number of NGOs in India today, as elsewhere in the world, is so large, and with such an enormous variety of organising structures, strategies and aims, that it is basically impossible to give a concise and useful definition (Dicklitch 1995; Fisher 1997; Mencher 1999, Princen and Finger 1994). However, following Michael Edwards and David Hulme (1996), I shall, for the purposes of this study, make a distinction between NGOs which are intermediary organisations working with funding and different kinds of support for communities and other organisations, and grassroots organisations (GROs), which are membership-based organisations of various kinds. This is also in accordance with the common emic use of the label NGO by organisations in South India. In 1991, during my first sojourn in the area, my assistant and I, through a rapid survey, found more than twenty NGOs active in the rural areas of the Palni Hills (see Appendix 129 See also Carroll 1992.)
This survey had no intention of covering all NGOs in the area, but included most of those we came to know in our dealings with the Paliyans and their neighbours over the next few years. The fact that the number has not decreased as we enter the new millennium shows that the NGO concept has become a viable label for social action in these hills. Some organisations have been short-lived, however, while new ones have also entered the scene.130

In the early 1990s most of these NGOs had their base in the Palni Hills. Today several organisations with their centres in nearby towns of the plains have also entered the area. One reason for this is that the strategies adopted by the NGOs have partly been transformed over the years. During the late 1980s and early 1990s the interaction between NGOs in the Palni Hills was mainly one of distrust and competition. Several reasons lay behind this. The dramatic increase of organisations in remote settlements created competition, in which one organisation often felt that its freedom of action towards local people became circumscribed if other organisations turned up. The international funding agencies also often demanded quite large projects, including many settlements, when approving project applications. In fact, the increase of NGOs, with the accompanying increase of employed staff, seemed at certain times to create a shortage of ‘poor’ and ‘needy’ people available in the Palni Hills to be included in funding proposals.

Although a certain amount of animosity between NGOs can still be found, many members of these organisations have realised that the lack of co-operation is counterproductive. Since 1998 there have been regular measures taken to co-ordinate strategies and resources, although this work is still in its infancy.131 In an invitation from the PHCC to other NGOs, the President of the PHCC wrote: ‘With NGOs being very active in Tamil Nadu, we were pleasantly surprised to find many NGOs and development agencies working among Paliyan

130 A good example of this was when VARIHD discontinued. The two most experienced staff members very soon joined two new NGOs, RIGHTS (Rural Integrated Health Education and Environment Training Society) and ARTCHED (Association for Rural and Tribal Community Health & Ecology Development) respectively.

131 There were co-ordinating efforts earlier. For example, in 1990 people involved in a labour conflict in one village physically attacked NGO officials. This gave rise to a meeting with several NGOs, where they discussed relations between NGOs, the local people, and the government.
tribals in the Palni Hills. I have met several of them, and, based on the discussions with these motivated people, it was decided that it would be good to have a one-day meeting of all the agencies working with the Paliyan tribals' (PHCC 1998). This initiative resulted in the creation of the Palani Hills NGOs’ Co-ordination Committee for Tribal Welfare.\(^{132}\) Another umbrella organisation, United Citizens’ Council of Kodaikanal, was organised in 1998 for those individuals and NGOs concerned with issues related to Kodaikanal and the urban area of the Palni Hills.

The great diversity of NGOs is also reflected in the Palni Hills, although there are several fundamental traits in common. 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’s point of view.\(^{133}\) Most of the NGOs in the Palni Hills are running their activities, or at least a substantial part of them, through foreign funding. 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 put their main emphasis on lobbying, advocacy, or the provision of different kinds of services. There is also a common division of labour within the organisations, between members who formulate 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, though they are a registered society in their own right, they belong to a wider organisation or are included in a wider network of organisations. A last important aspect when it comes to the interaction between a NGO and its target group/beneficiaries, is the fact 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 agenda, fall under three different headings or fields of action:

\(^{132}\) This umbrella organisation included in January 2000 representatives from Anuradha Clinic, VANE (Voluntary Action and New Education), Sacred Heart College, SIDT, ARDA (Anamalaiyanpatti Rural Development Association), AHM Trust (Ambalai Henry Memorial Trust), DMI (Daughters of Mary Immaculate), PHCC, KEDS (Kodaikanal Education Development Society), READ (Rural Education for Action and Development) and People’s Union for Civil Liberties, and several other concerned individuals.

\(^{133}\) This also includes a charitable non-profit-making company registered under the Company’s Act of 1956.
health and education, economic development, and environmental awareness. However, all three themes have become such important concerns within social activism in India today that they all tend to be included in any single NGO’s policy. Nevertheless, as I have shown in the previous chapters, the main interest and ideology of each NGO to a significant extent govern their policies.

In spite of these differences, it is clear that many of these NGOs try to fill ‘gaps’ which have often been considered a state responsibility.\textsuperscript{134} This becomes clear in the way NGOs motivate and express their actions. Many of the health organisations in the hills specifically target those groups which, in their eyes, lack sufficient government health care. The same goes for the many schools run by these organisations. Both tribal and environmental issues have been introduced in reaction to the ignorance from the government side, as well as sometimes being inspired by international influences. In these cases, the government is also often seen as a main actor in creating the negative situation; in the case of the tribals, as the main landlord of the forests in the Palni Hills, and in the case of environmental issues, as one of the main culprits in the destruction of large forest tracts.

From the Paliyan perspective, NGOs have become a new type of actor in their home area, to such an extent that by the end of the 1990s no Paliyan settlement had been excluded from their attention. In some cases we could find several NGOs working in the same valley and the same settlements. In Siruvattukadu Valley in 1995, for example, there were five NGOs working simultaneously.\textsuperscript{135} Looking back over the last fifteen years we can also conclude that new NGOs are appearing on the scene while old ones are disappearing, and that there is also an everchanging flow of diverse strategies and objectives. 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 organisations carve out in the everyday life of the Palni Hills offers a smorgasbord of possible alliances for the Paliyans. These alliances may not, as we have seen, be

\textsuperscript{134} One of the main reasons for the worldwide expansion of NGOs can be found in the neo-liberal idea that governments should decrease their direct involvement in welfare services and instead support private and market initiatives (Edwards and Hulme 1996: 2).

\textsuperscript{135} PHCC, SIDT, Missionaries from Kodaikanal International School, World Vision and Christian Fellowship Hospital.
stable over time, but they are at least for the time being able to create added opportunities for the Paliyans to deal strategically 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 to be something different; these newcomers neither wanted to engage them in farm labour, like the landowners in the neighbourhood, nor push them around for their activities, as was occasionally done by staff of the Forest Department. While the general attitude towards them on the part of the organisations was not necessarily something they agreed to, they did not mind the more or less unconditional resources/gifts the organisations provided. The health organisations’ definition of them as ‘poor’, meaning lack of modern health care, formal education and commodities, or the tribal organisations’ idea of them as ‘downtrodden’, meaning lacking power and market resources, were no worse than the usual images of them as different, and of lower status, held by more familiar outsiders they were accustomed to. However, in these new transactions there were, at least at the beginning of each specific co-operation, a minimum of obligations involved. Over time, as we have seen, certain expectations and demands became involved, putting the interaction under strain, and sometimes leading to a breakdown of relations. An important point to make, however, is that even with the experience of failures in co-operations, many Paliyan groups (the Pandju Valley is a good example) think it is worth starting up such relations over and over 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.136

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 investigate more carefully the role of individual members and staff of NGOs. Many of them had had relations with Paliyans long before they joined the NGOs. If they had not always related to them in person, they at least recognised the Paliyans as part of their local social map. Whatever the case, these individuals have a culturally conditioned view of their own group’s

136 See Crewe and Harrison (2000) for a discussion of contradictory views on failures and successes in regard to development projects.
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 of VARIHD from its inception, became the most important representative of that organisation in its interaction with the Paliyans and other people in the valleys where it operated. As he belongs to the Mannadian caste, he also belongs to some of the most dominant landowners in the rural areas of these hills. His brothers’ and uncles’ families all have well-established plantations and belong to important caste networks bringing together politically most of the major villages of the Palni Hills. If there has been any regular interaction at all between them and the Paliyans, it has almost exclusively been through occasional working relations structured through individual contacts. Although the Mannadians have a 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 a role as farm hands.

However, in the role of a social worker, Narajanan became an advocate for Paliyan ‘well-being’. Together with other staff within VARIHD, he urged other actors, including his own people, to understand and act in the way he thought favourable to the Paliyans. This kind of behaviour is a significant break from what would otherwise be expected of a family father of the Mannadian, where his duty in regard to similar questions would be directed 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 PHCC. In his family’s history as landowners, they have had the role of employers vis-à-vis the Paliyans. Jaya has told me on several occasions that, so long as the Paliyans carried out their expected working tasks, they did not bother that much about understanding other features of the Paliyans and their way of 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 the PHCC things became very different. Apart from the general framework of negotiations within the co-operation, 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 on the estates, as game hunters. They were also asked about more complex issues concerning the surrounding flora and fauna, knowledge that had a high esteem among environmentalists, as well as among many researchers coming to the area during recent years through PHCC contacts.

A third example is Osvald from the SIDT, who used to tell the Paliyans not only that the organisation was willing to help them, but also 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 tribal/ādivasi 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, are now trying to utilise.

Let me end this chapter with a discussion of the way the Paliyans combine the three strategies of avoidance, negotiation and alliance building.

**Expanding strategies: a summary**

Taking into account the Paliyans’ economic arrangements and their changing residential pattern, it is clear that they have, during the last century, and especially the last few decades, increased their interaction with outsiders. The strategy of avoidance is declining while negotiation and alliance-building with outside people are increasing. However, the most salient feature, 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. In the early 1980s they lived on Suraj Estate, making a living through a negotiated relationship with the owner of the estate. Later in that decade they came into conflict with the owner, and decided to leave the estate and withdraw to the nearby forest. Here they survived mainly 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 the courage to start up alliances with, as we have seen, many different partners over the years to come. In combination with this, they also worked as farm labourers through negotiations with individual estate and plantation owners. Throughout this period, however, they also now and then turned to forest foods, including both hunting game and collecting wild plants.

Another example is Kuppi, the brother of Andi, who, in contrast to his other two brothers, only joined the village of Aruvellam for a very short period. He did not leave Suraj Estate during the above-mentioned conflict with the estate owner. Instead, he preferred to stay on through the deal he had with the owner. At the time of Andi’s and the others’ move to Aruvellam, he became so tempted by the idea that he and his family also joined in and built a hut in the village. After six months, though, they decided to go back to the estate. Some years later, in the late 1990s, life on the estate came to an end in any case for his family. As a result of increased pressure from the government, the Forest Department decided to end the lease for this and other cardamom estates. The labourers had to leave, including Kuppi’s family. One solution for his family would have been to move to Aruvellam, where they were welcome and there were plenty of work opportunities. In spite of this, the family decided to stay on in the vicinity of the estate. Like his brothers, Kuppi had some mature lime trees at this place. Apart from the income from these fruit trees, they could also get work on smaller caste-owned plantations close to a caste village on the left 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 last visit in June 2002 they were still staying on at the end of the valley.

A third example is Muniandi and his family in Kudhirayar Dam. When he was a young boy his family used to stay inside the forest living on wild yam and other forest resources. Later on they became paddy cultivators at Thalinji within the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary. Over the years he and his wife found that they did not like this situation. Instead, they took their family to the Kudhirayar area, and when Vincent and I got to know them Muniandi and his family were mainly involved in collecting non-timber forest produce. They
preferred this, even though Muniandi could still claim his paddy field in Thalinji.

Apart from the mixture of strategies, it is equally clear that many Paliyans are shifting to a more exposed situation in relation to non-Paliyans, and will never again return to the same kind of secluded life inside the forests as before. This is especially so among Paliyan families now living in villages mixed with caste families. Yet, even in these cases, many would now and then turn to forest resources for limited periods, 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 in the northern foothills lived together with several caste families, and were long established as sedentary agricultural labourers (2000: 27ff). Agricultural work was at this time combined with the exploitation of the nearby forest during the off-season. In the 1970s the village had to be relocated because of 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’ (ibid: 29). Those who stayed on continued in any case to visit the nearby forest slopes and still do so today.

Through my own meetings with many groups of Paliyans in the hills in the 1990s and my assistant Vincent’s Paliyan survey from 1996 onwards, we found that the mixture of strategies was the key feature of Paliyan interaction with outsiders. However, there were also many Paliyans who, in contrast to this, had quite stable arrangements with outsiders, such as, for example, many of the paddy cultivators in Thalinji and the non-timber forest produce collectors of Kudhirayar Dam. This indicates that life could turn out quite differently, depending on which Paliyans we decided to investigate. If, for example, we follow the twenty-year-old Laksmi in Thalinji, the attention of her family has been focused on their paddy field almost all her life, and they seldom left the area. However, even if they are farmers, their interaction with outsiders was mainly restricted to Forest Department staff, as their fields are within the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, and caste people are far away and excluded from the sanctuary. If we had chosen Pichai in the mixed village of Boolavadi, his family have also mainly stayed in the village surroundings and also in quite stable and intensive interaction with caste people.
In contrast to this there are individuals and families who seem to be more or less continuously on the 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. He often used to work for different landowners within a valley, but he has also interrupted this with periods of living inside the forest only hunting and gathering forest food. Another example is Ponnan, now in his sixties, at Kudhirayar Dam. He always used to offer himself as a hill guide to me. He was the right man, he claimed, because he had shifted around all his life and therefore knew all parts and Paliyans of the Palni Hills. It was only now in his old age that he preferred to live in the one place of Kudhirayar Dam.

A last example is Periya Rasu’s family whom I first met close to the Pandju Valley. Periya Rasu was newly married to Ponukili, and they lived with their first child in her native place, the Paliyan settlement of Kuruvarankoli. Here, in the interior of a small valley, they lived in a typical Paliyan mud-and-stick hut. However, they had recently moved out of a newly built government stone house in his native place, Korankombu, much further to the east. The couple did not like that house nor living 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 moved over to the northern slopes close to Kudhirayar Dam. A further year on, they had moved again.

While there are possibilities of fully engaging in farm labour and other economic pursuits arranged in interaction with outsiders, or of staying more or less permanently inside the forest on one’s own, the economic arrangements we find among individuals and families over time are of such a variety that it seems that few or no Paliyans would exclude any alternatives. Instead, the whole range of alternatives seem to be part of their mental map for 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 use forest resources to a much smaller extent, and in that sense may not change economic strategies all that often. For them the knowledge of alternatives becomes in itself an important asset in the negotiation with landowners, even if they usually do not exploit them. From this asset
comes the landowners' experience of the Paliyans as elusive people. With this in mind I shall now turn to a Paliyan ethos and discuss in more detail what is actually guiding and creating this variation. This will be an elaboration of how a group of people, who live in a kind of border land between a life of hunting and gathering and a rural market-oriented plantation economy, try to create a synthesis of their lives in spite of apparently incompatible forces.
With the above presentation of the Paliyans to hand, this chapter and the next will return to one of the central questions concerning contemporary hunter-gatherers that has occupied anthropologists and other social scientists for some time: does it make any sense to label a contemporary group of people as 'hunter-gatherers'? Does such a notion say anything about a genuine life among particular peoples of today, or is it misleading at best or spurious at worst? The implicit question with regard to this debate concerns the extent to which peoples who we know have based their livelihood on hunting and gathering can still pursue a living that has anything to do with a hunter-gatherer life in a contemporary world permeated by an expansive globalised market economy. The problem is relational by nature and the following analysis of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, focused on their interaction with neighbouring people in the 1990s, will address this question.

In Chapter Two I showed that there were proponents both for and against using the concept 'hunter-gatherer' as a social category among social scientists. In spite of these differences, however, there is a striking agreement among them that all the societies under discussion have significantly increased their dependence on neighbouring people during the twentieth century. In general, we may say that contemporary hunter-gatherers have during this period developed from a status of relative autonomy vis-à-vis outsiders to a marginalised position within modern nation-states. This is not to say that hunter-gatherers in all cases have stopped hunting and gathering, but that a livelihood based
on such techniques and resources has decreased and in several cases come to an end. We can conclude that 'hunter-gatherers' of today depend more on resources produced within a market economy than on resources procured from hunting and gathering.

Why, then, should we insist on using such a concept? In the case of the Paliyans there are at least two interlinked reasons. The first is the most obvious: they still hunt and gather to a certain extent. The second, and the one I consider the more important, is the general logic behind their interaction with outsiders and the way they try to cope with new circumstances. This I have identified among the Paliyans as the mixing of three analytically diverse socio-economic strategies: avoidance, negotiation and alliance-building. The logic I am referring to is based on a distinct way of thinking, what we may call a Paliyan ethos. This ethos, in my view, was constituted within a livelihood based on hunting and gathering, but, as I shall try to show below, used for their orientation, evaluation and accommodation to a life in which they depend more than ever on outside resources. The Paliyans are therefore a pertinent case for demonstrating that we cannot understand and will have difficulties in representing the behaviour among many of the peoples we have labelled as hunter-gatherers if we do not recognise their recent past as hunter-gatherers. This is the perspective that will guide the following discussion.

While the next chapter will demonstrate a Paliyan ethos with direct reference to their interaction with outsiders, this chapter will look at this kind of logic of Paliyan life in general, to establish the relation between internal and external Paliyan behaviour. As my starting point I shall take Gardner's representation of the Paliyans as an individualistic culture. However, my line of reasoning will try to balance Gardner's strong focus on individualism with the collective side of Paliyan life, which I see as a prerequisite for understanding how Paliyan individualism works in practice, something mainly omitted by Gardner.

From here I shall 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 captures the way the Paliyans engage in social relations. On the surface it may look as if the Paliyans with their shifting strategies are mainly focused on securing different material resources. However, behind these material
quests lies a more fundamental need, the feeling of safety and of having a certain degree of control over their social environment. In other words, what the Paliyans are trying to achieve in their interaction with outsiders is to widen the social space of trust (certainty) into domains where hitherto they 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 interaction between people ought to be. By trying to minimise dependence and maximise autonomy in these relations they are trying to expand their own notion of trust, based on a strong emphasis on individual autonomy, formulated and developed within their earlier way of living in which they enjoyed an autonomy vis-à-vis outsiders and a life more or less on their own inside the forests. Let me start with a closer look at the Paliyans' social organisation and at what Gardner has called ‘the individual autonomy syndrome’ among the Paliyans (1991b).

Paliyan individualism

The social organisation of South Indian hunter-gatherers has been characterised as the lowest level of social integration, what Steward called a society with a family level of integration (1963: 101), with a fluid condition (Misra 1969: 201) and a fragmentary nature of group structure (Morris 1982b: 182), permeated by an individual autonomy syndrome (Gardner 1966; 1991b). Gardner gives the following list of traits representing this kind of social organisation:

...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 (1991b: 548-49).
In general my own data confirm this description. What has inspired Gardner to make the above general conclusions on hunter-gatherers comes from what he calls ‘the forest-oriented’ groups of Paliyans and those activities mainly connected with hunting and gathering. My information in the 1990s, when I found an increase of market-oriented economic activities and new kinds of co-operation, both among themselves and in interaction with outsiders, is that the Paliyan way of individualism was still strongly enforced.

Gardner finds several traits among the Paliyans which, taken together, imply, according to him, a society based on an ‘individual autonomy syndrome’, and where his use of metaphors like ‘individual parallel lives’ and ‘dumbness’ sparks our Western imagination of a people whose life strategies stand out as something different indeed. In his 1966 article he discusses this issue by delineating four broad standpoints about the Paliyan society: socialisation, co-operation, competition, and social control. I shall discuss them in turn, and also include facts that may show a difference between the Paliyan situation of the 1960s (the time of Gardner’s fieldwork) and recent decades.

All societies have some way of mediating beliefs, norms, and values. However, among the Paliyans the only obvious one is their care for their children. Gardner summarises Paliyan child rearing as indulgence transformed into a kind of ignorance and scolding at the age of two to three years, starting the process of child independence, successively introducing different working tasks within the family, developing into a basically adult status at the age of about thirteen.

Child independence, as Gardner also recognises, includes the child playing off his parents against other close relatives. Children from around the age of ten could even leave their parents and the settlement for periods, walking on their own for a whole day or so to another close relative (grandfather/grandmother, uncle/aunt) because of conflicts, although this is rather extreme. Common conflicts concern working tasks demanded by the parents, and wage incomes when the child is old enough to accompany the parents in wage labour. The first kind of conflict usually occurs during the mornings when most Paliyans make the final decision on the day’s whereabouts. With the social openness within a Paliyan settlement, these conflicts often turn into open-staged dramas, to the amusement of all the others.
To exemplify this let me repeat one dialogue in May 1994 between Andi and his sons in Aruvellam, where one of them refuses to comply with Andi’s request to take their goats up-river into the riparian forest for grazing. As Andi has four sons of much the same age, and also uses their cousins, two of his sister Karupayi’s sons, for this purpose, a couple of them take the goats out in turn. All of them are sitting outside their huts chatting after the morning meal, when Andi turns to the eldest son Rasa (fourteen years old):

Andi: Rasa, take the goats out to graze.
Rasa: I will do it later.
Andi: No! Go now, it’s a long time since they last were out for grazing. You never do anything fast enough when I ask you.
Rasa: I won’t go.
Andi: So what will happen (when you act like this)? If I get angry you will be beaten. Kuppan (younger son, thirteen years old), be ready to go. You can take the goats near to Raja’s land. There you can guard them.
Rasa: In that area we may run into kadu madu (wild bison).
Andi: No. No. Kaliyappan is cutting trees there. You are safe in that place.
Kuppan: Okay, we will go after a few minutes.
Andi: (starting to lose patience) Think about it. You have had your food. You are also used to having food twice a day. But the goats get it only once.
Kuppan: But they graze for a long time.
Andi: Hi! Do what I say!
Kuppan: Who will come with me?
Andi: Sinna Vellaiyan (another brother, eleven years old). You will go with Kuppan.
Sinna Vellaiyan: I can’t.
Andi: Then how will you get your food?
Sinna Vellaiyan: From the vessel.
Andi: See how you talk. I will ask your mother to beat you. Then you will obey.
Sinna Vellaiyan: I am not afraid of anyone.

Now Andy gets angry and throws a small stone at Sinna Vellaiyan. Sinna Vellaiyan quickly get up and runs some distance away from his father.
Andi: (with another, bigger stone in his hand) With this stone I will break your leg.
Sinna Vellaiyan: You can’t.
Andi: If I come over to you I’ll beat you.
Sinna Vellaiyan: Ha! I will pick out your eyes and give them to the crows.
Now Shanti, Andi’s wife, intervenes and asks Ganesha (a cousin, eight years old) to join Kuppan. They leave with the goats, and Rasa and Sedhu (the youngest son, nine years old) join them. Sinna Vellaiyan refuses and stays behind.

Other similar conflicts are the disputes over money between parents and youngsters who still live in the household. One day Papa in Aruvellam (mother of Suresh, fourteen years old) was screaming to Colras (Andi’s brother) in the settlement: ‘Why did I give birth to this useless boy. If I had given birth to a dog it would have been more useful.’ The reason behind this was the fact that when she was going to collect the wages for the work she and Suresh had done on a nearby silkcotton plantation (Colras was hired by the silkcotton owner to give rice as payment for the Paliyan labourers), she discovered that Suresh had already collected his share and spent it down in the plains.

While childcare and the process of creating strong individuals among the Paliyans have their almost inbuilt contradictions creating conflicts when they grow up, this is not the case with the mediation of material, symbolic and religious knowledge. The main reason for this lies in the Paliyan idea that such knowledge comes as a ‘natural’ part of being and living like a Paliyan.

This somewhat ‘passive’ view of learning is in stark contrast with the way Paliyans consider their possibility of living outside the forests and hills, i.e. in the plains with their big towns and villages. Poonan, an elderly Paliyan in Kudhirayar Dam, put it this way:

Poonan: We are blind people, we need somebody to take our hand (to be able to survive in the plains). In fact, we have no knowledge (arum).
My question: But you have a lot of knowledge about the forests, and how to use them, don’t you?
Poonan: That’s a different matter. That you have because you are a Paliyan. It’s God (sami) given.

Poonan’s last comment implies that socialisation and learning to survive in the forests and hills are more a matter of following those who are older and more experienced. Of necessity the Paliyans, like all other people, need to fulfil a lot of tasks in their lives. In a society where people (and here especially the nuclear family) do almost everything together, and live in extreme social openness, a way of interacting which we usually call ‘face-to-face relations’, the
transformation of knowledge comes by itself. Teaching is not separated from the ordinary purposes of everyday living concerns, and there is no separation between children and adults.

This view of learning and socialisation boils down to a belief that every Paliyan can, by living as a Paliyan, utilise the experience of others and their own interaction with the physical environment, thereby becoming a competent socio-cultural member. At first sight this resembles the Western notion of apprenticeship, a way of transmitting knowledge based on theories of social learning and the metaphor of moulding. This school of thought regards the child as 'being born into a particular setting, a world saturated with cultural particularities and cultural experts, which in unison influence and mould the child into a competent social actor' (emphasis in original, Von Hirsch 1996: 58; Jahoda and Lewis 1989: 21).

Social learning, according to this view, perceives learning as the result of imitation and conditioning, which includes 'that demonstrating to, and surrounding the child with correct and “good” behaviour will eventually and effectively induce such behaviour in the child' (Von Hirsch 1996: 59). This way of learning is explicitly stated in Western society, and the responsibility for its implementation is the burden and anxiety of adults and adult-controlled institutions:

...child culture is seen as a rehearsal for adult life and socialisation consists of the processes through which, by one method or another, children are made to conform, in cases of ‘successful’ socialisation or become deviants in cases of ‘failed socialisation’ (Shildkrout, quoted in James and Prout 1990: 14).137

Among the Paliyans this view, formulated in this way, is absent because of their non-separated social life and anti-authority views, and rather resembles the ‘unfolding model’ which holds the view that ‘the function of caretakers is merely that of providing a suitable environment that is essentially passive for permitting “natural”

137 This quotation is based on what is usually called ‘traditional’ approaches to socialisation theory. New theories have emerged based on ideas of cognition and social interaction (see summaries of Cunningham 1995; Jahoda and Lewis 1989; James and Prout 1990; James, Jenks and Prout 1998), but I think it is no exaggeration to conclude that the message in the above quotation still dominates the practice of socialisation in the West.
development to occur' (Jahoda and Lewis 1989: 20-21). Among the Paliyans the parents’ feeling of responsibility for socialisation diminishes, and mainly becomes part of the relationship between individuals and spirits/gods. In other words, the growing child, like the grown-ups, incorporates knowledge by being part of Paliyan life, and if misconduct or ignorance arises, concerning either values or skills, this is due to individual misbehaviour or neglect, and in the long run is condemned and regulated by aggravating spirits/gods, the only authority acknowledged by the Paliyans (Gardner 1991a). Thus the allocation of responsibility is removed from the relationship between those who know and those who need to know.

With the changing Paliyan residential pattern and the increasing activity of urban organisations in rural areas, Paliyan children have, since the 1980s, been more and more incorporated into the school system of India. Although few Paliyan children get beyond primary school, and many still have no experience of school at all, adult Paliyans consider school learning important. This view is based on the idea that their children need to be prepared for the increased interaction with the wider society. This was the reason why Andi in 1995 put his youngest son Sedhu in a Jesuit boarding school in Kodaikanal. However, so far no adults among the Paliyans have felt it necessary to join in school education for themselves, although, as we have seen, some organisations have tried to offer them adult evening classes.

The second concern of Gardner was the Paliyan avoidance of cooperation. This includes no or very little cooperation beyond the nuclear family, where relations within the family are based on egalitarianism and there is no marked division of labour. The latter, however, is seemingly on its way to change due to increased relations with outsiders, especially in regularised interaction, either through wage labour or with government representatives and outside organisations, where caste people generally, if not exclusively, prefer male ‘representatives’. This gives (some) male Paliyans the possibility of exerting a stronger control over outside resources, with the effect of putting women in an inferior position in relation to men.

Wage labour for outsiders also creates a difference between men and women in possible earnings as caste landowners usually pay less to women (no matter whether they are tribes or caste people) for the
same kind of work. This is based on the idea that women are generally less strong than men (with less work input) and is also in accordance with the lower salary for young people.

One area where Paliyans co-operate beyond the family is in the sharing of meat from the hunting of game and the collecting of honey for their own consumption. One reason for this is the Paliyan idea that meat and honey are considered important for good health and physical fitness, especially for the growing child. A second connected reason is that, while the collecting of wild yam is considered a simple, although sometimes strenuous, task for anyone, success in hunting is difficult to control, and much more part of individual skill. Therefore sharing levels out unevenness in hunting success.

A third reason was mentioned in the Pandju Valley when we were discussing the fact that people were borrowing rice from one household to another, but then expected the same amount of rice in return. Procuring rice was the outcome of wage labour, while hunting was considered an enjoyable event and its result therefore not something you can use for balanced exchange among your own people.

In settlements where more than one sibling group is living this sharing mainly takes place within sibling groups. Wild yam, other wild vegetables and fruits are usually not shared outside the nuclear family. However, we should not take these sharing/non-sharing practices too strictly in the bigger settlements/villages, as occasional sharing and not so carefully balanced borrowing take place outside families and sibling groups, especially when friendships develop. There is also sometimes a certain degree of secrecy within families and sibling groups concerning hunting and honey that prevents public demand for sharing (Wenzel et al 2000).

As mentioned earlier, for about two decades some Paliyans have been able to secure cultivation on their own, and thereby starting to cultivate cash crops. This has created a new kind of co-operation among them, with a land-owning Paliyan hiring some of his fellows for work on his/her land. This relationship, however, is organised and regulated in the same way as that between a land-owning caste family and a Paliyan, where fellow Paliyans work on the land of other Paliyans for cash. One important difference, however, is that in the village of Aruvellam men and women are paid the same amount, obviously challenging gender ideas concerning work input among caste people.
This kind of exchange of labour has also developed in other areas. In both Sangutumalai area and in the village of Aruvellam, some of the better-off Paliyans have used their fellows for stone house construction for payment, or in the few cases I have witnessed when Paliyans have taken silk cotton harvest on lease or path-clearing contracts. An additional new area of co-operation among the Paliyans is found in the communal work and co-operation between them and outside organisations. I have already dealt with these activities in Chapter Four to Six.

The third theme Gardner takes up is the Paliyan way of avoiding competition. He bases this idea on the Paliyans’ strong emphasis on egalitarianism, in which roles are symmetrical rather than complementary and where personal bragging as well as authority is downplayed. In line with this, strong-minded reprimands or demands are considered disrespectful (tarakkorova).

Conflicts arising from feelings of disrespect seem to increase when several sibling groups join together. This was explicitly stated one day in Aruvellam when many Paliyan families had left the Pandju Valley because of conflicts. This particular day the whole village was supposed to have a meeting with staff members from the PHCC concerning their continuing co-operation. After the long walk for several hours from the plains up the valley, the PHCC’s field assistants found to their disappointment that almost half the village members had left the Pandju Valley, even though the assistants had several times explained to the villagers the importance of these meetings. On this occasion, Natchiyammal, one of the elder women, tried to console them by saying: ‘We are not used to living together in the same place, and if we hear unnecessary words we leave. Maybe in five or ten years we can live together in one place.’

Although I agree with Gardner about the Paliyan avoidance of competition (earlier conflicts mainly occurred in competition over partners), there is another side to it that has become very explicit through the changes that have taken place during recent decades in the Palni Hills. These changes have increased the possible areas of competition, thus multiplying reasons for conflict. First of all, bigger settlements and villages with several sibling groups in themselves increase conflict possibilities. The introduction of a cash economy and wage incomes has a tendency to create inequalities between individuals,
and families as well as between sibling groups, depending on differences in the labour force, social competence and strategies. The increased establishment of relations with outsiders as possible channels for different resources is also important in this respect. What is found is that the Paliyan sensitivity towards competition (egalitarianism) sometimes almost plays havoc with their internal relations in the new situation (the development of the village of Thinaikadu in Sangutumalai Valley mentioned in Chapter Three is a good example of this). Because of their different ties to outsiders this ‘inward’ sensitivity also complicates ‘outward’ relations.

The fourth theme mentioned by Gardner is the Paliyan method of social control. While proscription of aggression is considered very important, when tensions or conflicts arise, older people usually intervene, as a kind of conciliators. If this move does not solve the conflicts, separation, as has been mentioned above, is the normal social mechanism to avert conflicts. Another important domain for controlling behaviour, as well as solving serious conflicts, is spirit possession. This includes both sorcery (seyvinai) and relations with certain evil spirits called pey (the spirits of people struck down by premature death still hanging around Paliyan settlements). Both these phenomena are related to social relations, in which seyvinai, considered as a means of retaliation, is a common diagnosis when individuals show symptoms of general weakness and fever connected with social conflicts close in time. Let me give an example from Aruvellam.

In 1992 Sinnatai had been very weak and sluggish for several weeks. Her close family suggested that she was either being attacked by a pey or exposed to seyvinai. As both of these kinds of spirit attacks can be fatal, according to Paliyan views, if appropriate precautionary measures are not applied, the situation was critical. The way to counteract the evil spirits is to engage stronger spirit/gods in defence. This is done through the engagement of Paliyan samiadis (god dancers). In this case they turned to Sinnatai’s brother Kaliyappan, for some years the main samiad in the Pandju Valley. In the course of several spirit possession sessions Kaliyappan engaged his own sami, Toonadian (he who lives at the bottom of the pillar), this pillar being a well-known rock formation in the vicinity usually called ‘the Pillar Rocks’ by outsiders (see also Chapter Ten). Through Toonadian it was diagnosed that it was a matter of seyvinai, a spell cast on her by her former
husband’s family, living in the nearby Sangutumalai Valley, because she refused to go back to him after they had separated because of conflicts some time back. After treatment through these sessions, she recovered. Many Paliyans, who can give examples of people dying from this cause, confirm the danger of seyvinai. That this kind of retaliation is considered possible is a good reason for controlling behaviour, as Gardner points out.

Attacks by pey are also socially related, and on two levels. On one level they can be part of ongoing conflicts, related to suspicious reasons for the death of the individual who is now turned into a spirit. Vulnerability to spirit attacks also increases through misbehaviour, especially related to unmotivated movements by individuals in the dark outside the settlement proper. Why such behaviour takes place was explained by such incidents as eating food supposed to be shared or having illicit relations. Pey is also diagnosed and cured through spirit possession sessions.

Spirit possession sessions were the main reason among the Paliyans in earlier times for meeting in larger groups, usually consisting of several sibling groups within a valley and its neighbourhood. These sessions are not only a dialogue between spirits, gods and the medium. All those taking part are allowed to make their voices heard, and are important for the diagnosis and the final advice from the sami, the only authoritative decision the Paliyans respect. The main reasons for these sessions are connected with social relations, and especially conflicts concerning marriages and partners. However, with increasing reasons for competition, these sessions and their dialogue today also include subtly presented complaints concerning ideas of misbehaviour connected with new kinds of inequalities, although these ‘misbehaviours’ do not directly cause the attacks of seyvinai or pey. An example will illustrate this.

In Aruvellam Andi’s sibling group had developed a better economy in comparison with the other sibling groups, as I described earlier. This occasionally gave rise to comment of a negative kind, i.e. that they had gained this economic position by being shrewd and highly competitive towards other Paliyans in the village. During one of the last sessions for Sinnatai, the evil spirit which had possessed her demanded, among other things, a ‘four-legged animal’ (in this case referring to a goat) as a sacrifice. If this animal was not delivered the
evil spirit would refuse to leave her body. In response, the people from Sinnatai’s sibling group said: ‘We are poor people. How can you demand this of us? We can’t give that, only Andi has enough to give. He can give it.’ In everyday relations this open request from one sibling group to another could easily start an argument. In this setting, however, there was no need for argument as the decision was to be transferred to the sami, who in this case, through his dialogue with the spirit, was able to reduce the demand to a level possible for Sinnatai’s sibling group. On the other hand, those not fully appreciating Andi’s position were able to air it publicly without open argument, reducing for them some of the built-up tensions emanating from a developing inequality within the village.

Another important aspect of social control among the Paliyans not developed by Gardner, is the Paliyan method of decision-making, and the related concepts of representation and accountability. The Paliyans lack political institutions when it comes to regulating internal as well as external relations. Nevertheless, they do have a common practice covering notions of decision-making, representation and accountability. In their internal relations these notions are seldom explicitly stated; they are more or less taken for granted. In relation to others, though, they may be contested, thereby becoming explicitly discussed and ‘visible’. While we may put different meanings on these notions, the Paliyans seem to regard them as closely intertwined, even to the extent that they are not separated at all. This can be seen as part of the Paliyans’ general avoidance of, or lack of interest in, discussing their lives in abstract terms.

To exemplify this, let me turn back to the Pandju Valley and the time of the establishment of the village of Aruvellam, the most decisive decision in recent decades taken by the Paliyans in this area, the details of this we find in Chapter Four. Suffice it to say here that the individuals and families that finally joined the village created a split both within earlier sibling groups as well as within several nuclear families. How was this possible and how did they come to make these decisions?

When Andi and Colras (as we remember, they were the initiators of this idea) wanted to mobilise support for their idea they did not call the other sibling groups to meetings. Such meetings, in which a large group of people discuss a matter in order to arrive at a decision, are not
part of the Paliyan decision-making procedure (apart from the above-mentioned spirit possession sessions). Instead, Andi and Colras, during occasional visits to other settlements in the valley, brought up the issue with those who happened to be around. This emphasises the informal character of these conversations, where the discussion was usually part of many other different matters. Apart from this, some Paliyans may also have heard about the idea from others. Andi brought up his idea and the drawbacks of their contemporary situation, and, according to the other Paliyans, rehearsed the possible benefits. If these benefits were to materialise in the near future most Paliyans in the valley acknowledged that the idea was very tempting. For some the promises were enough to make the decision to join, for others they were not compatible with other concerns.

When people made their decision, it was taken on an individual basis and not through group consensus. It was not authorised by anyone and resembles James Woodburn’s (1979) description of decision-making among the Hadza, hunter-gatherers in Tanzania. Here decisions were more in the form of a series of announcements by individuals or families, with each person taking the decision on his/her own. This way of decision-making takes place among the Paliyans in all collective matters, for example, when several families or individuals decide to go hunting together, collecting forest produce, going for wage labour to the same landowner, joining a marriage in a neighbouring valley, or participating in a spirit possession session.

The strong emphasis on individual decision-making, connected with egalitarianism and the downplaying of authority, gives little or no room for a system of representation. This fact becomes very clear when we look at the status of the ‘leader’ (nattamé), a role usually taken by some of the elder men in most settlements. If a settlement consists of only one sibling group it is usually the oldest male among the siblings, or in a family the husband. However, this role has been created in relation to outsiders, mainly through outside initiative, and can only deal with matters concerning outside relations. These are the reasons why the answer to the question ‘How did you become the leader of this settlement?’ can sometimes be ‘I was chosen by the Forest Department.’

In some places today we can also find ‘leaders’, as in the case of Andi, who on their own initiative try to fill this role because their ideas
and ambitions in relation to outsiders 'push' them in this direction. In both cases, however, the role does not grant them any special authority vis-à-vis the others in the settlement, and they will not have any means to force their opinion on others. The concept 'spokesman' may therefore better capture their actual role. That this role is not an easy one was shown in the interaction between the Paliyans in Aruvellam and outsiders described in Chapter Four and Five. If an individual adopts this role, people expect him to deal with negotiations with outsiders above family level, and in most cases they will refer to this person on such matters. However, nobody would bother if such a 'spokesman' steps down until outsiders again, because of their own interests, try to establish a new one.

This kind of decision-making and lack of representation results in a low degree of accountability towards others. Although Paliyans stick together, and especially within the nuclear family and within sibling groups in the larger settlements, individuals do not feel accountable to anyone else apart from the nuclear family and when it comes to short-term contracts mainly concerning labour and the exchange of certain foods, cash or goods. This is not to say that Paliyans do not influence each other, and agree very often. However, to disagree and not comply with others' opinions is positively sanctioned by the collective, a matter I shall come back to shortly.

The Paliyan method of decision-making, representation and accountability reduce and often disarms tensions and conflicts before they go too far, and as most Paliyan individuals and families are independent in relations with other Paliyans from a political and economic point of view, a low level of tension allows life to continue mainly as usual.

Let me summarise this section so far. The above confirms Gardner's main ideas about Paliyan individualism, and even if new kinds of activities and co-operations are introduced, the Paliyan way of individualism is still strong. This to a certain extent also confirms Bird-David's hypothesis that hunter-gatherers are able under certain circumstances to incorporate outside resources without a major break in their own social system (1988: 29-30). However, the above indicates that individualism and collectivism/co-operation are not always in contradiction. From the sharing of game it becomes clear that the inability that goes beyond individual capability is not considered the
same sort of weakness as when someone is unable to use what everybody consider to be a common Paliyan ability. Also, when evil spirits attack a person, nobody expects this person to be able to deal with this her/himself. These kinds of deviations from individualism I think are very important for understanding the new strategies developed by the Paliyans during recent decades. These deviations are also found in other areas of their lives, areas that the Paliyans themselves usually ignore, downplay, or take for granted as a part of life. For example, anyone who stays for some time in a Paliyan settlement will witness the conflict-solution method among hunter-gatherers that Lee once so aptly called ‘voting with their feet’ (see Gardner 1966: 396-7; 2000: 94-100). Any Paliyan has 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 for an outsider, 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 relationship between Paliyan individualism and collectivism, the next section 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 excludes out any clear understanding of social cohesion among the Paliyans, as this individualism seems to create, apart from self-confidence for the individual, mainly conflicts, fission, and ‘parallelism’ between people, and in the end lack of co-operation and group cohesion. This ‘lack of’ seems to be the result of our ‘group model’ view which focuses on what is missing rather than what is there. Following Bird-David’s recommendation, I shall instead turn the focus to the other side of ‘disintegration’ and ‘social deficiency’ (1987, see also Demmer 1997). She develops the idea that fluidity on the social level could equally well act as an integrative measure, which links conjugal families which are otherwise ‘nearly self-contained economically and socially’ (ibid.). Among the Nayaka, her group under study, this integrative role is played by single persons, freed from permanent ties with particular conjugal families. In the following I shall
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 that I find integrative aspects. In the material and symbolic domain each and everyone has a full right to what the Paliyans’ physical and symbolic environment can offer. At first glance this may seem like a disintegrative aspect, as the procurement of these resources can to a large extent be done without involving other people. However, I shall argue that it could equally well be seen as an integrative aspect, as the individual Paliyan is fully aware of the collective sanction of these rights. In other words, 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 can in no way offer the same. This becomes the collective framework of their individualism, which I now turn to.

Social fluidity
As we have seen from the foregoing chapters, the Paliyans can be considered as semi-nomadic, with one of the main reasons for shifting settlement being to resolve internal conflicts as regards individuals, families, or sometimes whole sibling groups (where several sibling groups live together). Other reasons for shifting settlement (for longer or shorter periods), can be forest resource procurement, wage labour, conflicts with outsiders, environmental hazards such as man-animal conflicts (especially elephants), landslides and fresh water shortage, promises from outsiders of 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 are not always easily discerned.

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

Bird-David reports that the conjugal family among the Nayaka has limited relations with 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 such as circulation of information important for decision-making, both between local groups and within a local group; they also expand the economic unit and create new temporary social groups (ibid: 160-162). While among the Nayaka this role seems to be played exclusively by the ‘single person’, the movement and settlement pattern of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills provides a pattern which 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 the fact that the exploitation and integration of people of the hill areas have expanded in recent decades. However, many reports from the 1950s onwards about the Hill Pandarams, Kadars, and Jenu Kurumbas, indicate that settlement patterns and movements between local groups are much more diverse than was reported by Bird-David (Bhanu 1982: 218, 221-25; 1992: 32, 44, 47-50; Ehrenfels 1952:127-8, 272-3, 280; Führer-Heimendorf 1960: 45-51; Misra 1969: 202-3).

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

Rights to resources
While conflicts are one major reason for shifting settlement, there are, as we have seen, also other reasons, and especially reasons connected with material resources. Another prerequisite is the individual right to common resources. This covers material, social, as well as symbolic resources, including the specific knowledge and behaviour connected with the spirit world.\textsuperscript{138} The Paliyans do not acknowledge any territorial units or individual and group rights to forest resources. The collective ‘agreement’ of common rights to resources therefore plays 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 this common right has

\textsuperscript{138} Apart from some brief comments earlier, I have left out the Paliyans’ relation with the spiritual world, as this part of their lives falls more or less outside the main objective of this book. However, it is worth mentioning that the general principles for access to material resources are also applied to this domain, where the most important aspect is spirit possession. The Paliyans have ritual specialists, the samiadis, who, by means of knowledge and techniques, can use the power from spirits to solve (heal) certain kinds of illness (attacks by evil spirits), emanating from internal conflicts. This role is available to anyone, both males and females, if the interest is there. However, as within Hinduism in general, anyone can be possessed by spirits and, in that state of mind, be useful for healing processes within spirit possession sessions. In contrast to Hinduism, though, these samiadis do not establish themselves as a special institution among the Paliyans, as different kinds of priests and diviners within Hinduism do. A border case is a few Paliyan samiadis who are also engaged by caste people. These samiadis, and especially the one at Kudhirayar Dam, obtain, through these sessions, some cash and other offerings for their own use (in the form of prasad), offerings that they can never expect in internal sessions. These samiadis cannot use their external reputation to enhance their internal position. Other Paliyans simply do not recognise this reputation, or could even mildly ridicule it.
today been expanded into the material and social resources emanating from established relations with outsiders. New arrivals in a settlement will very quickly 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 in addition becoming part of the labour relations available. For example, when Deivam and his wife came from a Paliyan village in Kerala to join Aruvellam, they stayed in a temporarily abandoned hut belonging to Andi’s sibling group. Within a day or two they joined Andi and Colras in the weeding and transporting work for a Tevar 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 vis-à-vis 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 concerns 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 to 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 carried out 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 emphasised the individual aspects of Paliyan social relations, I have in this chapter integrated these aspects within a collective framework. In a sense this collective framework could be seen as a practice opposed to individualism, as this sharing of sociality and resources could equally well be seen as part of group solidarity and dependency. However, Tim Ingold points out that we need to distinguish the ‘dependence on particular others from the dependence on others in general’ (emphasis in original, 1980: 273). By being able to
shift close relations to almost any other Paliyan, the individual Paliyan can uphold his/her individual autonomy vis-à-vis any specific Paliyan. We may conclude, in line with Ingold’s suggestion, that the collective framework of Paliyan individualism does not put limits on their individual autonomy, but creates the social and physical space for its fullest expression (see also Ingold 1987: 222-42; 1999).

It is important, however, to add that Paliyans, on an ideological level, always emphasise their ‘individualism’ and downplay any references to dependence 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 dependence 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 call their interaction with gods and spirits. Fellow Paliyans and the physical environment are not available through individuals, but are God-given. In this way of reasoning the individual inability to solve certain problems, and the need for others, including both material resources and social space, can then be incorporated into the Paliyan idea of self, and does not contradict 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, of which the most important aspect is the individual right to follow his/her own mind whatever the consequences for others, and a collectivism, in which all significant resources available for the group are also available for all individuals, with no-one excluded. These ideas of rights are socialised into each individual Paliyan as experience of everyday life as a Paliyan. One way the Paliyans express this is when they say that, in order to know the forest and to be able to survive on its resources, the only thing needed is to be a Paliyan. They have great confidence in this fact, although, in accordance with local status hierarchies, they would never brag about it to outsiders.

This confidence is based on trust, a trust that is developed and maintained by the regular experience that the socialised 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,¹³⁹ and expand it into both the physical as well as the spiritual environment,¹⁴⁰ we may draw 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 compromised by other Paliyans. In spite of this right to ‘turn one’s back’ on others, disagreements and conflicts are mainly kept to an individual level, thereby keeping social relations available to such an extent that a Paliyan always feels confident that it is possible to establish new close relations to fulfil the needs for affection, social security and support.

(2) A Paliyan knows that no other Paliyan group or individual will control collective resources.

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

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

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

I would claim that among the Paliyans this has not changed during the recent decades in spite of the changing residential pattern and the increase in outside interaction, although I shall qualify this in more detail in the next chapter. However, all Paliyans are very well aware of the fact that outside interaction is based on another kind of

¹³⁹ See Lewis and Weigert (1985) for a summary of sociological conceptualisations of trust drawn from the works of Luhmann, Barber, Parsons and Simmel. For a more recent review, see Möllering (2001). For a discussion on trust in hunter-gatherer societies, see Ingold (1999).

¹⁴⁰ I make this qualification because, in contrast to trust in industrialised society, hunter-gatherers have a much less complex social relationship with the physical and spiritual environment, based on direct personal relations, more or less without the mediation of other people.
trust, which most often contradicts their own kind. Co-operation with outsiders may include, for example, the sudden exclusion of certain resources because of changing strategies among landowners or NGOs and the pressure to obey, whatever the Paliyans' own opinions.

To cope with this they try to expand their own kind of confidence in social relations in interaction with outsiders. I use the term expansion here not only because the Paliyans try to infuse their own view of trust into non-Paliyans, but also because an extremely important consideration for most Paliyans is that this kind of strategy should not undermine any of the above-mentioned aspects of internal trust. The expansion of trust without jeopardising internal trust creates the outer and inner limits of Paliyan strategies towards outsiders, and forms the basis for the combination of the three analytically diverse strategies identified in the previous chapter, and to which I shall now return.
Chapter Nine

‘They Call for Us’: Modern Hunter-Gatherers in the New Millennium

In Chapter Seven I linked analytically the diverse economic pursuits found among the Paliyans in the 1990s with the three relational strategies of avoidance, negotiation and alliance-building, according to their effect on Paliyans’ interaction with non-Paliyans. Further, although one can talk about a growing intensity of Paliyan interaction with outsiders, the nature of these relations is complex. Rather than a radical change, what we find today entails different combinations of strategies, in which new forms of interaction with outsiders do not necessarily exclude older ones.

The mixing of these strategies also shows that the Paliyans have their own interest in outside interaction and market-oriented economic pursuits, but that these activities and social relations are scrutinised in relation to central Paliyan values of personhood and self-respect and to where they put their confidence and trust in life. This I have preferred to call a Paliyan ethos or mode of thought, based on a lifestyle allowing for an extremely high degree of individual autonomy.

From the discussion on Paliyan individualism, collectivism and trust in the previous chapter, I now move on to the issue of how a Paliyan ethos is integrated into their interaction with outsiders. Here I shall make use of the Paliyan expression ‘They call for us’, a statement commonly made when answering the question of why they interact with specific outsiders. Strictly speaking, this expression could be taken as an order. In this case, though, as we shall see, it is understood as an invitation, giving those to whom it is directed the option of ignoring it. I have chosen to make this statement the title of this book as it not
only captures the structural relationship between the Paliyans and outsiders, but also in a neat way epitomises how the Paliyans regard and understand the social dimension of these relations. Further, this way of conceptualising South Indian hunter-gatherers in general and the Paliyans in particular, and their interaction with the wider society, will be compared with other models suggested for South Indian hunter-gatherers.

I shall elaborate on how the Paliyans are trying to bridge the contradiction in which they have found themselves over recent decades. They have the possibility, on the one hand, of independence through hunting and gathering at the cost of a lower status in the local arena, and, on the other hand, the choice of different degrees of dependence on outside resources, creating prerequisites for an improved status in the eyes of outsiders. The latter option would provide respect in relation to outsiders, which is more in conformity with the respect they enjoy among themselves.

They call for us

In many of my conversations with the Paliyans they used the expression ‘They call for us’\(^{141}\) to explain why they worked for particular landowners. One specific incident that made me aware of the regularity of this formulation was when Kali, a Paliyan teenager, one morning in the summer of 1994, came up to my hut in the Paliyan settlement of Aruvellam. He was a kind of dream informant for an anthropologist. I always had problems keeping track of people’s whereabouts, and especially so in the mornings when most decisions for the day were made. According to those decisions, people could suddenly go off in any direction into the surrounding forest. However, young Kali had a kind of liking for us and always used to give me a ‘report’ on his daily activities before leaving. This morning he said he was going to work for a period on Chettiar Estate, the cardamom estate up at the end of the valley, about two hours’ walk away. When I asked him why he had to go there on this particular day, he answered,

\(^{141}\) I have chosen, for simplicity, to use only one variety of this expression in the text, ‘They call for us’ (Avargal engalai koopitargal). In reality there are of course many variations conveying the same kind of message, for example, ‘They call for me’ (Avargal ennai koopitargal) and ‘He calls for me’ (Avar ennai koopitargal).
'They are calling for me.' To be exact, in this case this meant that the accountant of the estate had sent a message via Kali's uncle Kuppi (he was staying regularly on the estate at this time). Some days earlier Kuppi had come through the village on his way back from the plains and asked Kali to come for work.\footnote{Kuppi (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 on this estate after the creation of Aruvellam. As the owner was an absentee landowner, Kuppi 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 to recruit some more labourers from the village. This was the request Kali responded to.}

From now on I noticed that whether I was in Karumparai in the most western part of the southern slopes of the hills, in Siruvattukadu Valley at the eastern tip, or in Mungil Palam on the northern slopes, the same kind of answer in one shape or form 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 on an estate, mentioned in the Introduction. Dahmen, in his early account of the Paliyans (1908), also mentioned that they used to ask the Paliyans living in the neighbourhood of the Jesuit Estate he was running to come for work.

One aspect of the expression, and the most obvious, describes the general way of arranging this kind of co-operation between Paliyans and outsiders. The initiative is in the hands of the outsiders. It is they who approach the Paliyans and ask them for labour, as regards both estates and plantations, not the Paliyans who beg for employment. Every year, in late spring, when the fruit season started in the Pandju Valley, the landowners used to turn up in Aruvellam. The general enquiry concerned the extent to which the Paliyans were willing to work this season, and the more urgent question asked if they were willing, within a week or two, to do the necessary weeding work before the harvest. On these occasions the general working agreement was made, in which in the 1990s wages was one of the most critical issues, as the Paliyans, because of their increased awareness of their relatively low pay, usually tried to increase their daily wages from one year to the next. 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 it was time to harvest, as labour demand was at its highest during that period.

The importance of negotiations for each season should not be underestimated. In the 1990s the estate and plantation owners could not always 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, in itself symbolised the diminishing power of the estate owners in relation to the Paliyans. Plantation owners had to trust their own skills of negotiation 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 at season time the fourth year, in 1995, very few Paliyans were ready to work for him, many were already busily occupied in other activities. Unfortunately for Duria Rasu, Andi and Colras had decided to change their mud-and-stick huts for stone houses, hiring quite a number of the other Paliyans in the village to do the work at this time.143 Duria Rasu was not happy with this unexpected turn of events, but had to comply. He had to look elsewhere for labour, and finally brought up a 'labour gang' of Chakkiliyars144 from a nearby plains town.

The Paliyans were, as a matter of fact, able to increase their wages more than many other neighbouring groups in the 1990s. Let me give one example. If we compare the development of wages between the Pandju Valley and a village in the plains, we get the following figures. The wages for male Paliyans in the Pandju Valley increased from Rs 15 in 1992 to Rs 40 per day in 2002, compared with Rs 35 to Rs 70 per day in the caste village.145 For women the increases are from Rs 12 to Rs 30 in the Pandju Valley and Rs 20 to Rs 30 in the caste village. That this has been a positive trend for the Paliyans is also

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143 To keep relations with Duria Rasu fairly good, Colras organised his sister and six older children from his sibling group to work for him during this period. They fulfilled the simple task of taking out the silkcotton out of the ripe cocoons and putting it in sacks.

144 Chakkiliyar is a former 'Untouchable' caste, traditionally leather workers.

145 These figures come from similar agricultural labour in Vilinayakanpatti, a caste village near the town of Batlagundu close to the foothills south of the Palni Hills.
supported by the fact that their wages have increased more than the price of rice.\textsuperscript{146}

The same negotiating pattern between the Paliyans and the landowners was repeated for the collection of non-timber forest produce and cattle grazing. I have described these procedures in some detail with regard to Kudhirayar Dam in Chapter Three, a pertinent case as the Paliyans of this village had been relying more than any other Paliyan group in the hills on these economic activities for their subsistence in recent decades.

When it comes to the alliances created between the Paliyans and NGOs the pattern of co-operation in general followed the same pattern as above. The initiative both to start up co-operation and to continue regular meetings was in the hands of the organisations. In Chapter Four to Six I described this in connection with the interactions of VARIHD, PHCC and SIDT with the Paliyan villagers of Aruvellam. These organisations were, however, not the only NGOs that contacted the Paliyans during this period. If we had tried to investigate the number of NGOs that approached Paliyans for co-operation in these hills in the 1990s, we would have found that a whole range of organisations had approached most settlements. Generally, the more accessible the Paliyan settlement was, the higher the number of contacts. The problem for the Paliyans was not how to get in contact with such organisations, but how to deal with them. These were tricky matters to handle, which also included the effects on the local Paliyan group because of the complex interaction between the organisations themselves when several of them happened to approach the same group of Paliyans at the same time.\textsuperscript{147}

This complexity of interaction increased even further when the Paliyans came into closer contact with the local government. Before the 1980s this interaction was of a very low intensity. When it did occur it was usually of a direct, individualised, kind and only with staff from the Forest Department. They were the only outsiders who

\textsuperscript{146} Paliyans usually buy the cheaper low-graded rice, the price of which rose from about Rs 4/kg in the early 1990s to Rs 8-9/kg 2002. Paliyan wages have almost trebled compared with roughly twice the cost of rice during this period.

\textsuperscript{147} 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 organisations were asked to leave. Ten years later this Paliyan group is still very negative towards NGOs.
approached the Paliyans inside the forests during this period, apart from estate and plantation owners and their accountants. In this interaction it was always the department staff who took the initiative, as the Paliyans always considered this interaction to be of a negative nature. Through the NGOs, and in some cases through local landowners and a few other relevant outside individuals, this interaction between the Paliyans and the state became more developed in the 1980s. Once again the interaction pattern with outsiders was repeated. The Paliyans played a more or less passive role, when the government and their representatives, under pressure from these mediators, approached the Paliyans for co-operation.

This pattern was also visible when the election for the Panchayati Raj, the government re-distribution system, took place. When one of the important caste families in the local area of the Pandju Valley realised that, due to the quota system, the Paliyans of Aruvellam 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 family, became part of the Panchayati Raj system. However, with only one representative (Andi’s wife) among a whole number of caste members on the board, Andi’s family and other Paliyan villagers became mainly receivers of certain resources rather than part of any decision-making.

Let us now look at the first part of the general statement ‘They call for us’. What does it mean for the Paliyans that it is the outsider who takes the initiative and the Paliyans who play the passive role? When I asked the Paliyans why it could not be the other way round, that is, they approaching the outsider and asking for co-operation, 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 a stupid question is that?’ It was only with those Paliyans with whom I had somewhat closer relations that I could get beyond this general hesitancy to objectify their actions. Usually they would say that they did not know if work or any other kind of co-operation with outsiders was available. ‘Only they know, so they have to tell us.’
However, on one occasion a young Paliyan man at Kudhirayar Dam\textsuperscript{148} gave an answer which revealed a more active attitude on the Paliyan side, in spite of the impression the statement gives and their general answer to my inquiries about its meaning. I had been nagging him for some time about this issue as we were on our way up the slopes to a shed where a group of Paliyans were extracting lemongrass oil. I knew the situation was in my favour for deeper probing. There were only four of us there, in contrast to a village situation where the Paliyan informants could easily turn to something or someone else when questioned (which they often did), without openly refusing to answer. Apart from him and me there was Vincent, my assistant, and my wife. He explained:

> Of course we have an 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 more easily control such a situation.

What this statement makes clear is the Paliyans’ general knowledge of conduct in relation to different categories of outsiders. It also shows their reluctance to openly ask for work, to reveal in public that they are in need. That would be a way of revealing weakness, which goes against the grain of the Paliyan idea of individual autonomy and self-respect. Instead, to be around and thereby make yourself available, is in line with the way internal co-operation between Paliyans takes place. Let me explain this last in more detail.

For a Paliyan to live with a family, a sibling group, or in a bigger settlement, exposes him/her to the possibility of being asked to join in certain activities initiated by others. Usually someone says ‘I am going to…’, whether it be hunting, collecting, going for plantation work, or visiting the plains, etc. ‘Are you joining in?’ could then be asked. Often, though, nothing else is said, but by making the public announcement others are indirectly invited to join. The word is usually spread every morning and within an hour or so some may finally leave together.

\textsuperscript{148} This Paliyan man had guided us several times through different paths up the northern slopes into the plateau of the Upper Palnis. He was also the son of the Kudhirayar Dam samiadi, whom I knew quite well.
This way of organising collective action is very informal, and sometimes the one who starts it all up changes his/her mind and stays put, others leave, and one or two leave after the first have departed, 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 arrive in the early morning, as they all know that a majority of the Paliyans will usually be away somewhere if they come too late. Certainly most Paliyans will know that at about this time, the forest contractor, if I choose him as an example, will show up. They may even know the exact week or day if the contractor has been able to send a previous message to the village. Several of the Paliyans living in the village may stay behind on this specific day just for this reason, and at least listen to the conditions that will be presented.

What takes place between the contractor and the Paliyans is structurally the same as the co-operation among the Paliyans themselves described above. When the contractor enters the village proper, he will neither attract the people's attention nor will 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 village like this within a minute or so everyone will know what is on its way to taking place. The contractor's mere appearance signals, as would that of 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. Most often the contractor is well-known to all the Paliyans in the village and anyone passing by will exchange some words with him, even if they are not interested in what he has to offer. Sooner or later those interested will, in a casual manner, turn up. Over the next hour or so a deal will be struck. In this way 'He calls for them' and they (the Paliyans) simply join if the conditions sound right and fit their plans, in the same way as when one Paliyan joins another Paliyan for an activity.

The way the Paliyan statement 'They call for us' is phrased indicates the voluntary engagement in co-operation with outsiders from the Paliyan point of view. If they get cash or rice in advance, which is a way for the employer to try to control the amount of work
the Paliyan will be 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 reason to leave for other activities, increasing the employer's feeling of Paliyan elusiveness. In the end, though, the debt will usually be cleared as the Paliyans have their own interest in avoiding conflicts.

It is important to point out that the willingness, or need, to create debts differs significantly among the Paliyans. Some are very careful never to work in return for debts, or only for small sums. Others are quite careless and can easily, to meet wedding costs, hospital costs, or other needs for bigger amounts of money, borrow money from landowners which takes several months to clear. Paliyans say they do not feel more bound to these employers than to anyone else, as they claim that it is easy to work off these debts. 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 vis-à-vis these employers. This is also emphasised if conflicts of a more serious kind occur within the working relationship. The Paliyans may then leave the area even if they still have some debts.

This autonomy is also maintained in their alliance-building strategies, and is especially explicit in the interaction with NGOs. While one or two Paliyans in a village or settlement, like Andi and his brothers in Aruvellam, become 'spokesmen' for their co-villagers in the interaction with NGOs, most other Paliyans would not feel obliged to fulfil any long-term demands in this co-operation if they changed 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 negative. In this way they reduced or minimised their dependence on specific organisations and were at the same time able to uphold their individual autonomy in a sphere of their life not fully within their own control. Note here the congruence with the Paliyans' avoidance of being dependent on specific other Paliyans, mentioned previously.

In sum, I see the Paliyan expression 'They call for us' as a way of explaining the structural relationship they are able to create with
outsiders, a relationship that, if successful, upholds their autonomy, both as a group and as individuals, and in accordance with the Paliyan ethos suggested earlier. Through this kind of interaction outside resources are internalised in three significant ways. First, wages and material resources are individually procured, or distributed within the nuclear family. Sometimes these resources are also distributed beyond the family, but then in accordance with balanced reciprocity. Balanced reciprocity seems in these cases to be very important, as this kind of reciprocity upholds individual autonomy. Second, outside contacts, in the form of labour, organisations and government institutions, are collectively available. Third, interaction with outsiders is individually based. Even when it comes to organisations and local governments, the tendency is for group relations to become individualised in the long run.

The outside resources the Paliyans are in this way able to get their hands on could then be seen as absorbed into 'a distinct, but heterogeneous, mode of subsistence', including hunting and gathering, as well as wage labour and regular interaction with outsiders, as suggested by Bird-David (1992: 41). I also agree with Gardner, that because of the common way of interacting between the Paliyans and outsiders, subsistence strategies become the frame of this interaction, which is an underlying assumption in his model of 'bi-cultural oscillation'.

However, to elaborate further on Paliyan interaction with outsiders, and the tensions among the Paliyans that my data suggest, I need to raise a couple of points in connection with Gardner’s and Bird-David’s models. I do not consider that their models are wrong for the time and the cases to which they refer, but that they are incomplete and need to be further developed to be able to incorporate change over time and the internal behavioural differences we can find among modern South Indian hunter-gatherers.

The Paliyan quest for autonomy

In the models suggested by Gardner and Bird-David, sedentarisation and commoditisation are downplayed. The limited data they present indicate in any case that the local context within which South Indian hunter-gatherers operate varied a long time back and generated
different strategies within a group for dealing with circumstances in a way similar to my findings in the Palni Hills.

Gardner points out that at 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 had been settled in a village working mainly as farmhands for a long time (ibid: 27-29) and some had been ‘sedentary agricultural laborers for over a century’ 1978: 307). 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’ (2000: 76). This variation would in general be true even today of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, although with a closer comparison we would probably find that, due to general 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 1983b: 58). Her data rest upon 60 or so individuals, a small portion of the about 1,000 Nayaka people in the Wynaad area (part of the Nilgiri Hills), the rest of whom she does not give any information about. Her case seems very limited indeed, if we also consider that the Nayaka belong to the wider ethnic complex of ‘Kurumba’ including Kattu Nayaka/Jenu Kurumba (Jenu Kuruba), whom we also find in other areas of the Nilgiri Hills and further to the north in the neighbouring State of Karnataka (Bird 1987; Zvelebil 1981). Some members of these latter groups have, at least from the1960s, been dependent on wage labour, a cash economy and close interaction with outsiders to a greater extent, compared to the case presented by Bird-David (see also Bird 1987: 186).

In the Wynaad area the introduction of cash and a significant increase in competition for land came in the 1960s with the immigration into the area of Christians and Muslims from the lower lands of Kerala (Mathur 1982, see also Hockings 1989a; Zvelebil 1981). One example related to these changes is the Kattu Nayaka. Many Kattu Nayaka families used to work for Mullu Kurumbas in their paddy fields at this time, and still do. Usually they were paid in kind, with a share of the harvested rice as payment (velipanni). According to my Mullu Kurumba informants, it was not possible to continue this system after
the arrival of the Christians and Muslims in the late 1960s. When the Christians and Muslims moved in, they introduced cash as payment, and also alcohol and beef, something we did not like.'

When it comes to the Jenu Kuruba (the spelling of the group in Karnataka), I met several families working as daily labourers on farms outside the town of Hunsur, Karnataka, in 1988 (see also Misra 1969). They already at that time were in close co-operation with a local NGO called DEED (Development through Education). Some of them also had small plots for their own cultivation. Since the 1970s we also find many Jenu Kurumbas inside the national parks and sanctuaries, working for the park authorities as daily labourers, often as mahouts (drivers and attendants of working elephants [Lewis 1991: 158]). As one example, we find today a Jenu Kurumba settlement within sight of the tourist base camp in Mudumalai National Park in the Nilgiri Hills.

Bird-David, with her example, concludes ‘that Naikens do not see the intrinsic monetary value of these commodities’ (1983a: 104), or ‘[f]ieldwork observations clearly suggested that in spite of appearances, wage work was for Nayaka just another means of gaining food (and other material requirements)’ (1992: 28) and ‘[d]espite their financial prosperity, there was no obvious change in their attitude to money and possessions’ (ibid: 35). In Gardner’s case, he suggests that the Paliyans have been living in a social space divided into two distinct cultures, one made up of Paliyan forest life and one based on agriculture, and that they are ‘oscillating between two distinct ways of life’ (2000: 24). This generalisation actually contradicts some of his own data, because, as I mentioned above, some Paliyans do not oscillate as they are more or less engaged in wage labour.

Both Gardner and Bird-David show in a convincing way that some hunter-gatherers have been able in recent times to combine their hunter-gatherer life with the occasional use of outside resources. However, their downplaying of variation within the respective groups creates a kind of cultural fence between these groups and their neighbours.

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149 I made a short visit to this area in June 2002.
150 The same situation is found for tribal groups in parks/sanctuaries closer to the Palni Hills. Muduvans and Paliyans work in Periyar Tiger Reserve and Kadans in the Anamalai Wildlife Sanctuary.
Gardner even claims that the Paliyans, because of their way of dealing with knowledge and outsiders’ attitudes towards them, are incapable of incorporating outside knowledge (Gardner 2000: 217). Apart from some minor exceptions, he concludes that ‘[n]ewly acquired knowledge from Tamils is piecemeal at best and there is little to ensure its meaningful retention or transmission’ (ibid: 218). I hope that I have shown in the foregoing chapters that it is not possible to draw such a dramatic conclusion. For me this sounds as if Gardner, by observing what he thinks is an absence of ‘development’ among some Paliyans, is mistaking lack of power with lack of knowledge.

I would claim that the expression ‘They call for us’ is one way for the Paliyans to explain to others a well-developed perception of outsiders and a fine-tuned practice when dealing with the same. It is established through long-term intimate knowledge of the wider society, confirmed by, in a comparative perspective, their ‘success’ so far. Despite their relative isolation and ‘hunter-gathererness’ in recent history, nothing, in fact, shows that they have been sufficiently isolated to be ignorant of the wider social environment. While they have been and still are politically weak and looked upon as culturally inferior in relation to their neighbours, both back in time and contemporarily they have been able, in spite of these limitations, to establish an exceptional degree of autonomy.

By focusing on Paliyan explanations for outside interaction, we are also able to include in our analysis their own social experience of these relations, something more or less omitted from earlier studies of South Indian hunter-gatherers. Thomas Widlok makes the following comment in relation to the ‘Kalahari Debate’ in southern Africa:

It is not only diversity that needs further explanation. There is insufficient linkage between the level of changing conditions of social experience on the one hand, and the level of social experience itself in the context of these changing conditions on the other (emphasis in original, 1994: 184-5).

With a focus on social experience we come closer to the inter-ethnic relationship that is taking place and ‘the attempt to construct, maintain and manipulate social ground as a prerequisite of social interaction’

While strategies of social grounding among the 'Bushmen' and their neighbouring Owambo pastoralists in Widlok's case needed a stress on kinship relations and marriages, in the Paliyan case, as I have shown earlier, they are based on inter-caste/tribe interaction within the Hindu complex of labour co-operation and cultural distance.

A focus on social experience reveals that inter-group interaction is also closely linked with intra-group interaction. By elaborating on the Paliyan expression 'They call for us', my data show that the Paliyans can maintain a certain kind of hunter-gatherer ethos even if they have become more or less dependent on outside resources. However, my data also show that this ethos is under severe pressure from this interaction. The interaction with outsiders forces the Paliyans to rethink and re-evaluate their views and actions, to manipulate and reconstruct differences in order to be able to uphold these relations.

I shall provide brief remarks on this by choosing five areas where I think this process is most clearly visible, some of which I have mentioned in the earlier chapters: the introduction of cash, land ownership, decision-making and internal power relations, gender relations and bonded labour.

One of the more important questions concerns the way in which commoditisation of the economy of South Indian hunter-gatherers has been internalised and adapted to other forms of exchange within these groups. In my case the Paliyans in the Palni Hills make a clear distinction between cash (including resources available through cash) and forest food in internal exchange. Certain food resources and especially hunted meat were shared between all the members within the settlement. Cash and food (especially rice, either earned through labour or bought from the plains), when distributed beyond the nuclear family, were strictly kept within balanced reciprocity. As I mentioned earlier, these new forms of distribution among the Paliyans created an increase of space for conflicts.

There are at least three kinds of land ownership, for two purposes, among the Paliyans in the Palni Hills. For cultivation, a small minority have land regulated by land deeds, many more cultivate on reserved forest land through their own recognition of collective rights, and, thirdly, there is unregulated land within sanctuaries (the paddy cultivators within the Indira Gandhi Sanctuary). A majority of Paliyans also have regulated house and temple land for their villages. These
kinds of ownership create at least three kinds of pressure on the Paliyans. First, land for the villages and regulated land for cultivation create fixed assets which demand less flexibility in Paliyan movements as well as in conflict solutions. They also establish long-term interaction with the authorities. Ownership of land, including the unregulated use of forest land for cultivation, brings the Paliyans, albeit slowly, into the realm of the wider political discourse between tribes and the state in India.

The introduction of cash, commodities and private land ownership puts severe pressure on Paliyan egalitarianism. Cash earnings have a tendency to create differences, at least in the long run, what the Paliyans themselves would call ‘rich people’ (selvanthar) and ‘poor people’ (elaimakkal) among the Paliyans. The increase of cash and commodities, and the conflicts they create (what the Paliyans would say is a matter of jealousy [poramai]), show that what is supposed to be an independent and respected Paliyan way of life, and what a Paliyan is supposed to be able to achieve, are challenged. An interesting observation in this connection is that, while a prerequisite for cash and land has meant an increase in sedentarisation, bigger settlements and the introduction of cash seem to have increased reasons for internal conflicts. As a result, the re-settlement process has in many cases been interrupted. Villages like Thinaikadu and Karumparai are good examples of this. From setting out to create quite big Paliyan villages in the late 1980s, including all Paliyan families in a neighbourhood, in these two cases, the majority of the families are today again dispersed into smaller units, and Karumparai do not even exist as a village anymore. While trying to solve the problem of low status in the eyes of outsiders through sedentarisation, which is a way of expanding equality in social relations, sedentarisation has a tendency to turn into inequality among themselves.

Related to the question of conflicts, I would also like to make another observation concerning ‘oscillation’. While Gardner shows that the Paliyans often abandoned wage labour because of conflicts with landowners and ‘returned to the forest’, in the case of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills in the 1990s it is also very common (I would guess more so today than formerly) that Paliyan families and individuals, when leaving one landowner, take up jobs with another landowner. In this way they try to play off one landowner against another, but no
‘oscillation’ between two kinds of lifestyles takes place among the Paliyans.

Cash and private ownership, and especially the ownership of land, bring the Paliyans closer to outsiders, with pressure on internal diversification as a result, and especially the need for ‘leadership’. Fixed assets also seem to demand new ways of decision-making within the groups. As the demand for protecting these assets limits their movements, conflicts which have a tendency to split groups need new solutions. In Aruvellam several informal panchayats, inspired by their neighbours’ use of these institutions, have been set up for solving conflicts.152 These panchayats (not to confuse with the Panchayati Raj system, mentioned in Chapter Six) are a way of overcoming the negative consequences of individual actions (especially disintegration), formerly left for the individuals involved to sort out for themselves.

Closer interaction with outsiders, for example in the form of alliance-building, also influences internal gender relations. From the outsiders’ point of view, these relations should be in the custody of men, inviting Paliyan men in particular to be partners in these interactions. This may give men among the Paliyans an upper hand when it comes to controlling outside resources entering their community. As regards land ownership, a crucial question is in whose name the regulated land is registered. I have not been able to investigate if this is gender-biased, but my suspicion is that it is in favour of men. However, so far this does not always mean that the woman in a divorce needs to abandon the land the family owns, even if it is registered in the husband’s name. Paliyan values are still incorporated in conflicts. In one case in Aruvellam the husband in one family was chased out of the village by the wife because of what the wife considered his ‘wrongdoings’. The woman was psychologically very strong and no one else interfered. The man is now living in

152 There are several kinds of assemblies for conflict solution in caste villages in the area: Gramathu kootam (village meeting): a call for the whole village if there are bigger problems between caste groups, and where the decisions affect everyone in the village. Jati kootam (caste meeting): a call for a particular caste concerning internal conflicts related to, for example, family problems. Katta panchayat, a meeting organised in a special place with other people, like local politicians, associations, between two villages, etc., often to solve problems concerning land, money and resources. The meeting between the Aruvellam Paliyans, neighbouring farmers and the Farmers Association in the Pandju Valley, mentioned in Chapter Four, was called a katta panchayat.
another Paliyan settlement outside the Pandju Valley, and makes no claim to the land they formerly owned together.

Bonded labour is a special case, where the freedom of the Paliyans has been very much limited. As I have noted already, it seems to have been more common earlier, but not as common as in the plains, and then in only weaker forms, with a few cases still persisting in the Palni Hills in the 1990s. Although this issue would need further investigation, these instances in any case demonstrate the power of outsiders in relation to the Paliyans. If circumstances work against the Paliyans there is a clear limit to Paliyan possibilities of ‘oscillation’ and ‘encompassment’ of outside resources.

The above points correspond to changes in similar circumstances around the world, but in this case with its own particular solutions. Among the Paliyans I have tried to show that circumstances still give the Paliyans different opportunities. While some, like Andi, seem more willing to re-think and re-evaluate new relations, both internally (for example, by suggesting village panchayats) and externally (especially his initiative for alliance-building), others, like most of the members in Murugan’s sibling group, and among, for example, the Mungil Palam Paliyans, are more hesitant. A majority are rather neutral, and they seem to find ways of solving their everyday problems more or less within the circumstances given. At the same time, however, many of them are open to taking on new relations and trying them out, especially if other Paliyans take the initiative.

In this account I have suggested a distinction between several Paliyan socio-economic strategies, but in the minds of the Paliyans unified through a Paliyan ethos of individualism, collectivism and flexibility. This is in line with Kent (1996), who suggests that, by taking account of the variety within groups, instead of downplaying or excluding those variations which do not seem to fit in, we may better represent a population as a whole, thereby showing how variation in strategies is in itself critical to the lifestyle of some hunter-gatherers. Further, the implicit distinctions made by Gardner and Bird-David in not including major varieties of strategies used by a people may not match with the people’s own social distinctions. What may be seen from the outside as a variety of socio-economic strategies are not usually recognised by the Paliyans themselves as different strategies or

153 See especially Guenther 1996, but also other examples in Kent 1996.
lifestyles, and especially not if we take into consideration the fact that over a longer time period most Paliyans have combined several of them together. We find instead a group of people who can allow for a whole variety of socio-economic strategies, in which the possibility of variation over time seems to be the key factor for upholding their ethos. To be a modern Paliyan of today requires a balancing act in which new activities, including increasing interaction with outsiders, demand negotiations and re-evaluations, both in the interaction between the Paliyans themselves and between them and the outsiders.
Chapter Ten

Epilogue: The Paliyans in a Global Perspective

I started this study by claiming that the Paliyans of the Palni Hills look upon themselves neither as an ‘Indigenous People’ (a status used by many similar peoples around the world), nor as a people (with a recent history of hunting and gathering) that can be reduced to just another category within the wider group of ‘poor’ people situated at the margins of modern society. By focusing on the everyday life and interaction between the Paliyans and outsiders in the Palni Hills in the 1990s I wanted to lay the foundation for such a claim. In this last chapter I shall provide a brief summary of the Paliyan situation and enlarge the horizon by relating it to the wider national and global discourses of what is often called ‘fourth worldism.’

To be ‘indigenous’ has become one of the most strongly politicised ethnic identities among peoples considered as ‘subdued’ and ‘marginalised’ within nation-states. Enhanced by the United Nations’ recognition of Indigenous Peoples in the 1990s and the increasing networking between Indigenous Peoples from all over the world, the notion has become global in magnitude. Several hunter-gatherer peoples are now participating in this discourse and the political processes involved.

One example is the San/Bushman groups in Botswana in southern Africa. In Gabarone in 1992 a small group of Bushmen appeared claiming for the first time that they represented an organisation called *The First People of the Kalahari*, the name referring to the common definition of Indigenous Peoples as the ‘original inhabitants’ of an area (ILO 1989). The appearance of an organisation with the ambition to represent all “first people” was an innovation in
Botswana, where a prevalent feature so far has been their lack of visible leadership and organisational visibility’ (Saugestad 2001: 29). Over the next few years delegates of the San/Bushman people took part in international conferences, and became linked up to international umbrella organisations for Indigenous Peoples, as well as to international organisations for Indigenous Peoples like Survival International, Cultural Survival and IWGIA (International Work-Group for Indigenous Affairs), run by non-indigenous people. The San/Bushman have also been able to establish long-term alliances with foreign donors and aid organisations. One well-documented case is the co-operation between the San/Bushman people and NORAD (the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) and their interaction with the Government of Botswana (Saugestad 2001).

Another case in mind is the Penan of northern Borneo. Already in the 1980s they made connections with international organisations. To begin with, the link was mainly with environmental organisations like Friends of the Earth and the Rain Forest Network Group, as the conflict between the forest peoples of the area and the Government of Malaysia was mainly framed in environmental terms due to heavy deforestation in Borneo. Later on, representatives of their people went on tour in the West promoting their cause. In these cases the Penan were presented as the ‘original inhabitants’, in contrast to both some of their neighbouring farmers and coast people usually referred to as ‘Malays’. The focus was especially on one section of the Penan, those local groups considered as most ‘nomadic’ and ‘hunter-gatherer-like’, that part of the people with no or little rice cultivation and less interaction with outsiders (Brosius 1989; 1999). We may add other examples of hunter-gatherers and similar political processes, for example the Ainu of Japan and the Aboriginals of Australia.

In all these cases the history of the peoples, and the hunting and gathering lifestyle it includes, have become important identity markers, eagerly emphasised as arguments both at the national level and in the ongoing global discourse on human and minority rights. Such a situation has so far not developed among the Paliyans. What I have found is rather the opposite. The Paliyans downplay history and anything that can, in the eyes of the outsider, indicate a life of hunting and gathering. A pertinent question is why this difference in strategies between the Paliyan case and the other groups mentioned above exists.
To give a comprehensive answer would of course need another study, but a brief general comparison can provide hints.

Peter Metcalf, with fieldwork experience since the 1970s in northern Borneo, defines the situation in the area with the help of Arjun Appadurai’s discussion on ‘disjuncture and difference’ (1990) in the global era (Metcalf 2001). Although Metcalf is critical of certain aspects of Appadurai’s line of reasoning, he uses Appadurai’s concept of ‘scapes’ as tools for pinning down the situation and cultural processes going on in a particular place at a particular time (Appadurai 1996). Metcalf can ‘date fairly precisely the moment at which “cultural transfers” brought people (in central-northern Borneo) into the world radically different from what they had known before’ (Metcalf 2001: 171). What triggered this new situation was ‘the rapid and virtually unregulated expansion of commercial logging’ (ibid.). While commercial logging had been going on in Borneo at least since the nineteenth century, the 1980s saw this business entering an industrialised phase.

In terms of financescape, while everybody among the forest people knew very well that most of the profit from this business flowed out of the area, the amount of wage labour provided for local people, and the money it generated, were enough to transform life significantly. Farming declined, imported food became common, and in general the subsistence economy became cash-dependent.

Huge machines, trucks, bulldozers, lorries and large iron river-barges, demanding road-systems and new jetties where there had never been any before, dominated the technoscape. Access to roads increased the number of local vehicles, taxi-services started up and electricity came to the longhouses up-river.

The ideoscape, according to Metcalf, did not change to keep pace with the technological and financial change. However, in the years to come slowly new ideas of political awareness grew, and especially among the Penan people.

The ethnoscapes became more sharply categorised. This part of Borneo is well-known for strong ethnic identities and a history of warfare between different groups, as well as trade and mutuality between groups, the last especially within one and the same valley. In tandem with the ongoing changes in the 1980s a new polarity emerged between the so-called Up river People and the majority groups of the
coast, including the Chinese and the Malays. An important factor in this process not mentioned by Metcalf was the ongoing ‘Malayisation’ among the people within Malaysia, a national project trying to create ‘One Nation, One People’. This became especially problematic for the Penan people who not only had to observe that their subsistence resources vanished, but also that their culture as such became a target. One of the instruments used by the Malaysian Government for achieving its nationalisation goals has been the school system. I have myself witnessed in the early 1980s Penan children sent to boarding schools down-river, where they had to learn Malay customs and ‘urban life’, and were prohibited from speaking their mother-tongue.\(^{154}\)

Finally, Metcalf touches only briefly upon mediascape. He mentions the ‘ubiquity of television’, where the Up river people ‘had a direct view into worlds that, only a few years before, they hardly knew existed’ (Metcalf 2001: 173).

Without carrying out the full exercise of Appadurai’s ‘scapes’, we can in any case discern certain significant aspects at the time of the creation of the first San/Bushman indigenous organisation. As in the case of Borneo, Botswana and the Kalahari area have had relations with the wider world for centuries, which have had a direct and formative impact on many aspects of the inhabitants’ lives. From the 1890s San/Bushman areas were turned into freehold or private land farms by the British colonial administration, slowly decreasing the freedom of movement for the San/Bushman people. In the early twentieth century population density was low and the interaction between San/Bushman and other groups was fleeting, but gradually many San/Bushman groups were incorporated into the stratified social structure of their Bantu neighbours (Saugestad 2001).

Since the beginning of the Botswana nation in the 1960s the government has raised the question of settlements within Central Kalahari, the last resort for many San/Bushman. In 1961 the Central Kalahari Game Reserve was set up for both people and wildlife. However, in 1996 the government intensified its attention to the reserve, creating pressure on the San/Bushman to move out of the area.\(^{155}\) The great symbolic and material significance of this last refuge

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\(^{154}\) I made shorter visits to Penan groups along the Baram and Rejang River systems in 1982 and 1984.

\(^{155}\) See also Armstrong and Bennett 2002.
for the San/Bushman people brought the case to international attention by their representatives

...through trips and newspaper headlines, securing expressions of concern from, among others, the US Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, Prince Charles of Great Britain, and a large number of indigenous organisations and NGOs. The issue was presented before the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in Geneva in March 1996 (ibid: 222-3).

In spite of this support many families have moved out of the area. The political process, linking local and national politics with internationally supportive agencies and actors has been firmly established. Through its international networks The First People of the Kalahari, the San/Bushman organisation, is trying to maintain a dialogue with the government to work out a better solution (ibid: 224-5).

Another important aspect (now at the ethnic and cultural level) increasing the marginalisation of the San/Bushman population in Botswana has been the nation-building process starting with Botswana Independence in 1966. Sidsel Saugestad draws the following conclusion:

The early process of nation-building in Botswana created the images of a non-racial, non-ethnic homogeneous state, meaning *in effect*, that modes of expression of the numerically dominant Tswana people drowned out alternative voices. Linking this negation of cultural diversity with the condemnation of racism gave it a moral strength that became a major obstacle for San emancipation (emphasis in original, ibid: 225).

This resulted in the fact that the San/Bushman category was non-existent; in ‘official documents and discourse, the life and land-use of the San go unnoticed and unrecognised’ (ibid: 226). Pressured at both the material and the cultural level, the formation of The First People of the Kalahari, with its global links, has turned into one of the San/Bushman people’s most important strategic moves to make their situation visible in both the national and international arenas.

In these two cases of the San/Bushman and the Penan, the events referred to seem to have triggered the development of a new identity construction. Shifting our attention back to India, we shall see that the notion of ‘indigeneity’ has its own trajectory within this country, which is separate from the main international current. Here the term is
closely linked to the indigenous notion of *adivasi*, meaning the ‘original inhabitants’. Since the turn of the nineteenth century the term *adivasi* has been used quite freely to refer to tribal people. Not only did scholars, administrators, politicians and social workers use it, but people in general also adopted it. It became widely used ‘as a mark of identification and differentiation, that is, to mark out a group of people different in physical features, language, religion, custom, social organisation, etc.’ (Xaxa 1999: 3590). In this way a derogatory identity was attached to the tribal people in India. This sense of the term *adivasi* is still in use in the Palni Hills. If you move around in the area asking caste people the way to the houses of the Paliyans or the Puliyans, using their ethnic labels, a common reaction is: ‘Oh, you’re looking for the *adivasi* colony’, showing the way out of the village proper into the marginal village areas designated for either ‘Untouchables’ or tribal families.

In the 1990s we were able to witness a new content and use of the term, influenced by the internationalisation of rights and privileges connected with the notion of Indigenous Peoples. While being attached formerly to a discussion of assimilation and integration in India, the focus now shifted to a question of rights and empowerment used by the tribal people themselves. As the Indian sociologist Virginius Xaxa establishes:

The identity that was forced upon them from outside precisely to mark out difference from the dominant community has now been internalised by the people themselves. Not only has it become an important mark of social differentiation and identity assertion but also an important tool of articulation for empowerment (ibid: 3589).

Even if the notion of Indigenous Peoples has to a certain extent been accepted in countries like the United States and Canada and international organisations like the United Nations, it has been contested by both the Indian Government and leading Indian social scientists/anthropologists (see for example Béteille 1998; Roy Burman 1996; Xaxa 1999). It is questioned because of the difficulties in finding universally acceptable criteria for defining Indigenous Peoples. In India it is also looked upon as a counterproductive identity for political mobilisation. In spite of this critique, the fact remains that, as Bengt G. Karlsson put it, the concept ‘is already out there’ (2002b: 19; see also
We find it adopted by many tribes today and especially so in Central and North India (see for example, Carrin 2000; Parkin 2000; Prakash 1999; Rao 2000), as well as among regional and national tribal organisations involving many outsiders, such as the case with the SIDT from the Palni Hills.

Before returning back to the Palni Hills, let me briefly describe one case where a tribal group in North India found reason to adopt this new way of profiling their identity as adivasi. This is the case of the Van Gujjars, pastoralists in the Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh.\textsuperscript{156} In their cycle of transhumance the Van Gujjars moved their buffaloes between the subtropical sal forests in the foothills and the temperate spruce, pine and birch forests in the hills. Despite the fact that their way of living was circumscribed by Forest Department regulations, their situation appears to have been tolerable until 1992 when a new forest policy for the area was introduced. When groups of Van Gujjars were on their way back from the hills, forest officials closed all entrances to their core area, from now on to be protected from human intrusion under the name of the Rajaji National Park.

The eviction of the Van Gujjars from their traditional forest areas attracted reactions from local NGOs and other concerned people. The peak of the conflict was timely for the Van Gujjars, as the conflict between cultural diversity and policies protecting biodiversity through national parks and sanctuaries attracted great media attention internationally. 1993 was the UN Year of Indigenous Peoples, a context in which tribal people were seen as the last protectors of nature. Over the next few years the Van Gujjars started co-operating with a local NGO, \textit{Rural Litigation \\& Entitlement Kendra} (RLEK), which was lobbying for the Van Gujjars in the national arena (RLEK 1997). Anthropologists, and especially Pernille Gooch, were instrumental in linking up the case internationally. I participated in one workshop in Sweden in 1997 where she and representatives of the Van Gujjars were presenting their case. This workshop was organised together with the \textit{Swedish Society for Nature Conservation} (SSNC), which for many years supported the Van Gujjars. While this conflict is yet to be resolved, Gooch concludes:

\textsuperscript{156} This information is based on Gooch 1998a; 1998b.
There has been an obvious shift in the way the Van Gujjars are perceived, from being part of that larger Gujjar community, defined as backward and static, to the status of a small and exclusive section of the population, defined as 'tribal', 'indigenous', and custodians of a special and sacred relationship to nature (Gooch 1998a: 265).

With these cases from Borneo, Botswana and North India in mind, let us now return to the Paliyans and the Palni Hills. Like Botswana and Borneo, the Palni Hills has never been isolated from the surrounding areas and influences from far away. The last centuries have witnessed different waves of immigration, the earliest traceable being those of the Mannadian, Asarian and Chettiar, all caste groups originating from the plains. They brought in new techniques of agriculture as well as new ways of social organisation and cultural habits. In the nineteenth century, with British colonisation, cash-crop cultivation intensified. Plantation agriculture and commercial forestry started up on a big scale, based on British and German experiences, and a new administrative system was introduced. The hill station of Kodaikanal was founded, eventually becoming the urban centre of the hills. Alongside this, missionaries from different Christian denominations entered the hills, even if their main focus has always been the densely populated surrounding plains.

Nothing of this seems to have affected the Paliyans in any crucial way. The new caste groups subdued the swidden cultivating Puliyans as, at the time of their immigration, they occupied the best areas for cultivation. The Paliyans were able to stay clear in the more inaccessible forest valleys along the slopes and foothills. Forestry and de-forestation have been confined to the Upper Palnis and parts of the foothills, areas of no, or less, use for the Paliyans. As we have seen, forest regulations usually did not hamper Paliyan life. Only a few Paliyans have converted to Christianity, all of them staying close to St Michael’s Estate (Dahmen 1908; Nobili Pastoral Centre 1983: 337). Their number is still very small and we cannot speak of conversion to Christianity as a way of ‘cultural resistance’ as has been suggested for the Rabhas, a tribal group in the forests of the lower Himalayas in West Bengal (Karlsson 2000; 2002a).

Looking at more recent changes, population increase has been significant in the Palni Hills, but has mainly been confined to the urban
area in and around Kodaikanal, an area never used by the Paliyans, and to parts of the Lower Palnis, where the pressure on the forest is substantial, but where alternatives for the Paliyans are still available. The expansion of cultivation into the valleys from the foothills since the 1960s has to a certain extent decreased forest resources. On the other hand, as I have shown, labour opportunities have increased for the Paliyans. An important fact to recognise in this case is that almost all these plantations are managed by absentee landowners, which makes the social pressure on the Paliyans relatively weak compared with what would have been caused by permanent immigration.

The increased presence of NGOs in the Palni Hills from the 1980s, partly through the modernisation of old Christian mission organisations and their international networks, has introduced new ways of co-operation. These sometimes challenged local politics, and introduced new ways of conceptualising local people and their situation, often inspired by influences from Western society. Within this realm we find definitions of what is supposed to be ‘development’ and ‘poverty’, ‘environmental awareness’, tribal people as ‘noble savages’, etc.

The term *adivasi* in its modernised sense, referred to above, has been advocated by some NGOs in the Palni Hills, and especially by the SIDT, which emphasised the empowering potential of the concept by giving the tribal organisation it is trying to establish the name *Palanimalai Adivasibai Vidhalai Iyakkam* (The Palni Hills Tribal Freedom Movement). While the term has been generally adopted by the Puliyans as a means of changing their status from today’s Scheduled Caste to Scheduled Tribe in the administrative record of communities in Tamil Nadu, the Paliyans are very reluctant to do so. In the few cases when term *adivasi* has been ‘used’ by the Paliyans, as in written petitions to the local administration or in the case of posters related to the VAO conflict, referred to earlier, outsiders imposed the term on them.

Another change in the hills worth mentioning is the increasing tourist industry, today the most important economic activity, apart from agriculture and forestry, with at least one million visitors per year at the end of the millennium. The Anglade Institute of Natural History,
based in Kodaikanal, has undertaken traffic surveys in the area for the last fifteen years. The last survey indicated an almost triple increase of vehicles entering Kodaikanal over the last ten years (Kumar et al 2001).

In spite of this large number of outside visitors, due to the rationale of this particular case of tourism, I would claim that it has had no impact on the Paliyans so far. All tourists have Kodaikanal, and a few hotspots in its vicinity, as their goal. The roads leading up to Kodaikanal pass several Paliyan settlements, but the tourist vehicles never stop. The great majority travel by bus. If the bus carries a guide, s/he does not have the faintest idea about the Paliyans they may spot from the window. Eco-tourism, which we might think would bring tourists out also to Paliyan settlements, has not yet started in any regular sense. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the majority of the tourists, 95%, are native Indians mainly interested in Kodaikanal as a place for relaxation and climate change, well-known to them as spectacular scenarios in South Indian movies. They want to see the forest from the outside, not from the inside. Another reason is that the forest surrounding Kodaikanal is reserved forest and people are simply not allowed inside most of it. Those who are interested in wildlife prefer to go to the nearby parks/sanctuaries in Thekkadi (Periyar Tiger Reserve) and Anamalais, where wild animals are more accessible. An additional reason is that the PHCC has never promoted eco-tourism or tribal tourism for that matter. The board members are very ambivalent on this issue as they consider the environment to be very fragile and have difficulties in seeing how such a bigger kind of tourism ought to be organised in an environmentally sustainable way.

While the physical distance between the Paliyans and tourists is indeed sometimes close, the social and cultural distance is significant. Let me give a last, somewhat peculiar, example of this. The most popular tourist spot outside Kodaikanal proper is the Pillar Rocks, an impressive rock formation over 100 m, in height. The columns are separated from the main hill, and in the lower sections there is a vast network of caves and tunnels. Locals aptly call the chamber in between the two pillars the Devil’s Kitchen. The rocks are situated along one of the roads leading into the Upper Palnis. In a bend opposite the rock formation tea stalls and small shops, as well as a parking area, have been arranged to accommodate the needs of the tourists. The town authorities have also created a small flower park behind the stalls, to
give the spectators the maximum scenic view. What really adds to this view is that the whole place is situated on the edge of the great mountain wall running along the southern slopes of the Palni Hills. On a clear day you can see the southern plains, with some of their towns and villages 2,000 m below, only about 15-20 km away, and immediately below the steep wall we find several valleys covered with evergreen forest, impossible to reach from above due to the steep precipice.

While this rock formation is celebrated by hundreds of thousands of tourists each year, it is also revered by the Paliyans. The area below is one of their home areas, and in the middle of the nearest forest we find the now abandoned Kombai Estate. At one time when a young Paliyan man in the Pandju Valley was visiting this estate, he had a dream in which he met a sami, later identified by him as Toonadian (he who lives in the bottom of the pillar), also mentioned in Chapter Eight. After his father’s death, he took over the role as his group’s samiadì. When he joined the village of Aruvellam he continued as a samiadì, introducing Toonadian, who became the most valued samì in the Pandju Valley during the 1990s. When the Paliyans in spirit possession sessions call for Toonadian, he comes from the Pillar Rocks, the place to which he is sent back after having completed his service to the Aruvellam Paliyans.

In this way Pillar Rocks is celebrated both by tribals and tourists, and they both have in common the fact that spectacular natural formations attract their attention. In this case, though, it comes from opposite directions, one from above and the other from below, and therefore the two categories of people never meet.

As I have also mentioned earlier, there have not so far been any government schemes directed towards the Paliyans as a group. Taking all this together, we may conclude that changes within the different ‘scapes’ suggested by Appadurai, seem to have been significantly different in the Palni Hills compared with the cases of the Penan, San/Bushman and Van Gujjars. No sudden economic or technological changes have taken place in recent times in relation to the Paliyans. The links they have had with internationally networking NGOs, like the PHCC, have never focused specifically on the Paliyan situation as

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158 This is the same man who was my main Paliyan informant about Suraj Estate and who belongs to Murugan’s sibling group.
such, as they did in the case of the Van Gujjars. The NGOs have therefore never been allowed in a regular manner to suggest any reformulation of Paliyan identity. The few Paliyans who watch television are not presented with the Western/Hongkong productions described in the Penan case. What they have been able to see is news and films produced in Tamil Nadu, the latter similar to what most Paliyans have been able to watch occasionally in cinemas down in the plains for at least the last ten years. These images and messages are not that strange to them, as they are moulded within the same Tamil culture communicated in Paliyan everyday life in their interaction with outsiders.

Nationalism in India is also something significantly different from nationalism in Botswana or Malaysia. While the caste system definitely places tribal groups low in the local status hierarchy, the rationale of the system is diversity within unity, in other words integration without assimilation. André Béteille put it this way:

> Accommodation without assimilation has been a core value of Indian civilization until modern times. It has led to the co-existence of a large multiplicity of beliefs and practices as well as of social groups. Adding new components has not meant discarding old ones, and new and old components of the most heterogeneous kinds have existed cheek-by-jowl to a greater extent than in other civilizations. The Indian subcontinent has been and still largely remains a vast mosaic of tribes, clans, castes, sects, and communities, each with its own identity (Béteille 2001: 14623).

This design has worked against the ‘one-nation-one people’ idea that seems to have been dominant, especially in Botswana. The cultural influences, or ‘threats’, coming from the caste-dominated society may thus be seen as of another order compared with the Botswana case. Although there have been many examples of hostility between castes and tribes where cultural habits have been in focus, I would in any case claim that ‘sanskritisation’ and the adoption of Hindu customs among tribes are most often of a ‘voluntary’ nature. In the case of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, they are today using, for example, similar wedding and puberty rituals, albeit less complex, to those of their caste neighbours. Some of them also revere, together with their own gods, local Hindu gods. In spite of this, they would not consider these acts as ‘conversion’ to Hinduism, imposed on them from outside, or that
because of this they should be considered a caste group. What they might claim, at least indirectly through such acts as the use of rice food and 'ordinary' Hindu cloths, is that they are still Paliyans but 'as good as anyone', or in sociological terms 'equals' among 'equals'.

In conclusion, I would say that the changes suggested by anthropologists as being instrumental for a reformulation/reconstruction of ethnic identity in the cases mentioned above, have been, in their general character, absent from the Palni Hills. Looking back at the recent history of these examples, one of the most obvious effects of the changes referred to has been their way of dramatically reducing, and often eliminating, livelihood alternatives for local people. In the Paliyan case I have shown that the opportunities and limits created by changes in the twentieth century, and the new space for negotiation they have opened up for the Paliyans, have not to any significant extent reduced their possibility of using 'old' strategies. With the 'old' avenues still open, it seems that the Paliyans have not so far been tempted, felt the need, or sometimes even been able to imagine, new ways of thinking of themselves. Those that have been suggested now and then in their interaction with outsiders, like the caste unity ideas from VARIHD and the adivasi identity suggested by the SIDT, are all based on strong group loyalties. For the Paliyans, in a life-world where individual autonomy seems more rational, the virtue of pitting one group against another still has little value.
Appendix I
Sibling groups and their members in the village of Aruvellam

This census was taken in Aruvellam in September 1992. It is divided into sibling groups and households (most often husband, wife and children) and includes all Paliyans living permanently in the village from its inception and over the following years. It also includes sex and approximate age. It is important to add that the number of families and individuals given in the text at the start of the village do not exactly match the figures below as there is a time gap of almost two years. Ganeshan was the oldest male in Aruvellam at this time. He was born into a group of siblings from which we can trace one or both of the parents of the adult male generation of all the other sibling groups in Aruvellam today. Andi’s father, Murugan’s mother, Karuppan’s father, Sethu’s father and Chapli’s mother were all Ganeshan’s siblings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Andi’s group</th>
<th>2. Murugan’s group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andi 38 (m)</td>
<td>Murugan 42 (m),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanti 26 (f)</td>
<td>Karuppayi 38 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasa 12 (m)</td>
<td>Papa 28 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karuppan 11 (m)</td>
<td>Suresh 16 (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinna Vellaiyan 9 (m)</td>
<td>Maniyammal 8 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedhu 7 (m)</td>
<td>Chitra 6 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colras 24 (m), brother of Andi</td>
<td>Sathi 3 (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagarajan 22 (m), brother of Andi</td>
<td>Sudha 2 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamatchiyammal 58 (f), mother of Andi</td>
<td>Kaliyappan 27 (m), brother of Murugan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rasammal 36 (f), sister of Andi</td>
<td>Mariyammal 45 (f), second wife of Andi’s father (dead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kali 12 (m)</td>
<td>Sethumané 18 (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malliha 10 (f)</td>
<td>Panchu 12 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganesha 6 (m)</td>
<td>Rannesh 10 (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essar 3 (m)</td>
<td>Karuppayi 8 (f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sathyaraj 5 (m)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kannamal 24 (f)

K. Nagesh 24 (m), brother of Murugan
Seeniyamal 22 (f)
Mariyamal 65 (f), mother of Murugan

3. Karuppan's group
Karuppan 45 (m)
Vannakili 38 (f)
Ravi 10 (m)
Velan 8 (m)
Murugayi 4 months (f)
Meenakshi 55 (f), mother of Karuppan

S. Velraj 30 (m), brother of Karuppan
Sinnatai 27 (f)
Shanthi 9 (f)
Muthumani 7 (f)
Nallamal 4 (f)
Ilangai 1 (m)

4. Ganeshan's group
Ganeshan 65 (m)
Natchiyamal 60 (f)
Mariappan 24 (m)
Papa 18 (f)

K. Nagan 30 (m), son of Ganeshan
Lakshmi 26 (f)
Manikandan 7 (m)

Situthayi 5 (f)
Mahesh 6 months (m)

5. Sethu's group
Sethu 30 (m)
Muthammal 40 (f)
Rasa 12 (m)

K. Balan 22 (m), sister-son of Sethu
Panju 19 (f),
S. Ganeshan 25 (m)
Karuppayi 40 (f), sister of Sethu
Rajeshwari 16 (f)
Mariammal 6 (f)
Rasa 2 (m)
Kalaichelvi 6 months (f)
Kanamal 55 (f), mother of Sethu

6. Chapli's group
Chapli 40 (m)
Muthammal 36 (f)
Ganesan 15 (m)
Muniammal 7 (f)
Gaswaran 4 (m)

P. Muniandi 26 (m), brother-son of Chapli
Karuppayi 24 (f),
Kattu Raaja 2 (m)
Chellamal 55 (f), mother of Karuppayi
Appendix II

Paliyan settlements and villages in the Palni Hills

This appendix will give some general data on the 40 Paliyan groups of the Palni Hills. If nothing else is stated the data comes from a tribal survey conducted by A. Vincent Jerald in co-operation with the Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) 1996 – 1999. Each group number corresponds to the numbers on the map.

My calculations give 998 Paliyan families and with an estimation of 4 individuals on average (family figures from 15 groups) within each family it comes to almost 4,000 Paliyans in the Palni Hills. This is an approximate figure, as the collection of the Census is spread out over several years and we also have to take into account the Paliyan’s semi-nomadic character; some individuals may be missed and some others may be counted twice.

Mixed Village: Caste/tribe population. Economic activities are listed in the order of importance. NTFP: Non-timber forest produce.

Map 3: Paliyan villages and settlements in the Palni Hills.
Village
30 fam.
Food collecting, wage labour, NTFP

2. Thalinji (Oct. 1997)
Village
125 fam.
Cultivation, food collecting, hunting

3. Mungil Palam (March 1995)
Village
17 fam.
Food collecting, hunting, grazing, NTFP

Mixed village
25 fam.
Cultivation, wage labour

5. Kudhirayar Dam (Nov. 1998)
Village
27 fam.
NTFP, food collecting, hunting, grazing

Mixed village
30 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, hunting

Mixed village
51 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, NTFP

Several settlements
49 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, hunting, NTFP

9. Barathi Anna Nagar (March 1997)
Village, settlements
28 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting, hunting

Settlement
7 fam.
Wage labour

Settlements
18 fam.
Wage labour

Village
35 fam.
Wage labour

13. Karuvelampatti (July 1997)
Village, settlements
31 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, Food collecting

14. Sembarankulam (July 1997)
Village, settlements
30 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, Food collecting

Settlement
8 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP

16. Boothamalai (July 1997)
Village, settlements
28 fam.
NTFP, Food collecting, hunting, cultivation

17. Kadaisikadu (July 1997)
Village, settlements
21 fam.
NTFP, food collecting, hunting

18. Thalaiyuthukadu (Sept. 1996)
Village
15 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting, hunting

19. Puliyangasam (Sept. 1996)
Mixed village, settlement
25 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting, hunting

20. Pandrimalai (May 2003)
P. Thamizoli, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (Chennai), personal communication.
Settlements
29 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, hunting

Village
41 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, NTFP, hunting

22. Perumparai area (Dec. 1996)
Settlements
15 fam.
Wage labour

Settlement
18 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting

24. Kaduhudhadi (Dec. 1997)
Village
39 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting

Village
40 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, hunting, food collecting

Village
41 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting, hunting

27. V.S.R. Puram (Nov. 1997)
Mixed village
7 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting, hunting

28. Valaigiri (Jan. 1999)
Village, settlements
27 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting, hunting

29. Pulathur area (July 1997)
Settlements
21 fam.
Wage labour, cultivation, food collecting, hunting

30. Manjalar Dam (Sept. 1996)
Settlement
7 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, hunting

31. Samakadu (Nov. 1999)
Settlements
10 fam.
Wage labour, cultivation

32. Palamalai (Nov. 1999)
Village
40 fam.
Wage labour, cultivation, food collecting, hunting

33. Periyur-Chinnur area (April 1995)
Settlements
24 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, hunting

34. Kollakkara (Sept. 1996)
Village
20 fam.
Wage labour, cultivation, food collecting, hunting

35. Pattur (Aug. 1997)
Settlement
8 fam.
Wage labour, cultivation, food collecting, hunting

Village
28 fam.
Wage labour, cultivation, food collecting, hunting

Settlements
16 fam.
Wage labour, food collecting, hunting

Village, settlements
14 fam.
Wage labour, NTFP, food collecting

39. Solaiyur (July 1996)
Village
35 fam.
Wage labour

40. Bodi Mundal (July 1996)
Mixed village
40 fam.
Wage labour
Appendix III

Non-governmental organisations in the Palni Hills

This list is based on a small survey made by A. Vincent Jerald in October and November 1992. It had no intention of covering all groups active in the rural areas of the Palni Hills at the time, but includes several of those we met during our fieldwork.

1. PASAM TRUST
   Health.

2. KEDS-Kodaikanal Educational & Development Society
   Tribes, women and poor people.
   Welfare, education, legal aid and medicine.

3. CMS-Christian Mission Service
   Children's Home
   Orphans and deserted children.
   Education, food, dress and accommodation.

4. CSI Rehabilitation Centre- Church of India
   Home for polio-handicapped children from villages.
   Accommodation, food and education.

5. MMSSS-Madurai Multi Purpose Social Service Society
   Poor people.
   Organisation, schools and tuition centres, a medical centre, medical camps in the villages, education and health and legal aid.

6. SPACE-Society for People Action for Change and Education
   Rural people.
   Economic development, education and health.

7. Servite Convent, related to MMSSS
   Women with children.
   Food schemes and a medical dispensary.

8. TECRAS
   Rural people.
   Economy and rural development.

9. TRDP-Thandikudi Rural Development Project
   Rural people.
   Economy and rural development.

10. SIDT-Society for Integral Development of the Tribals

11. TOM-Tribal Outreach Mission
    Tribes.
    Health, economy and education.
12. CORSOCK-Coordinating Council for Social Concerns in Kodaikanal

13. VARIHD-Van Allen Rural Integrated Health and Development Project

14. PHCC-Palni Hills Conservation Council

15. Vilpatti Women's Project Woman empowerment.

16. Reaching the Unreached Poor people, tribes. House construction.


19. Christian Fellowship Hospital Poor people, tribes. Health and medicine.


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Throughout the world societies based on hunting and gathering have been drawn into the market economy due to increasing social and economic pressure on their territories. This anthropological study analyses this process in the 1990s among the Paliyans of South India. During the first half of the twentieth century most Paliyans avoided contact with outsiders, preferring a livelihood based on the hunting and gathering of forest resources inside the steep forested valleys of the Palni Hills. By the end of the century their lives had significantly changed to a situation involving wage labour on plantations owned by neighbouring caste people, the collecting of non-timber forest produce for forest contractors and the herding of other people’s cattle.

In spite of these changes the Paliyans still hunt and gather forest food and through the building of temporary alliances with non-governmental organisations they try to uphold a high degree of autonomy towards outsiders, comparable to the individual autonomy they enjoy within their own group. This autonomy is based on individualism, gender equality, social and economic flexibility and individual rights to common resources.

Today many hunter-gatherers around the world have reformulated their history and identity to link up with the more politically recognised identity as ‘indigenous’. In India many forest-related groups have adopted this notion. Tribal organisations in the region of the Palni Hills have regularly invited the Paliyans to join such a general tribal cause. In spite of this the Paliyans, due to their downplaying of group interaction and authority, have so far stubbornly ignored these invitations. For the Paliyans, in a life-world where individual autonomy seems more rational, the virtue of group loyalty has little value.