

Autonomy by default versus popular participation : The Paliyans of South India and the Proposed Palni Hills Sanctuary

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Autonomy by default versus popular participation: the Paliyans of South India and the proposed Palni Hills Sanctuary

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Since the late 1980s a shift in attitudes and policies concerning environmental issues has taken place within environmental movements and State agencies. Earlier, advocates of nature conservation excluded almost all other human activities from areas designated for conservation. The new environmental ideas, in contrast, allow for a certain degree of mutuality between nature conservation and local people's interests. In India this fact has been most obvious in the new approach to forest management commonly called Joint Forest Management (JFM), a kind of joint administration by the different parties involved, which has been recently suggested for the management of national parks and sanctuaries under the name Joint Protected Area Management (JPAM).

In 1994 the Tamil Nadu Government in southern India proposed a new sanctuary in the Palni Hills,¹ the same forests and mountains where, during the first half of the 1990s, I conducted fieldwork among the Paliyans,² a 'scheduled tribe'³ usually characterized in the literature as hunters and gatherers (Gardner 1965; 1972), and the only forest-dependent group in the area.

As my main research focus was on relations between the Paliyans and outsiders,⁴ I became personally involved in the new environmental strategies. The establishment of national parks and sanctuaries in India is regulated under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, which in the case of sanctuaries significantly limits people's rights of access to the notified areas, and in the case of national parks totally excludes access. While a variety of interests in India now advocate changing this state-monopoly in management, they have made similar suggestions for a greater recognition of local people affected by the creation of these protected areas, including issues such as settlement schemes, compensation, increased access to certain resources, alternative management organizations, and suggestions about local people's empowerment.

However, my reading of and experiences with these questions suggests another common denominator among these different strands, namely a tendency to approach policies and management from an exclusively instrumentalist viewpoint. They are seen as instruments to solve problems and effect change through rewards and sanctions, but they are otherwise considered neutral when it comes to the wider scope of how different groups relate politically and culturally, both internally and in relation to others. This, I feel, is a major reason why participants in this debate ask for more information on local

traditional nature conservation practices, rather than paying attention to different means of negotiating and fostering cooperation between groups of people likely to be affected by national parks and sanctuaries; appealing to what Foucault would call different 'rationalities of governmentality or governance' (1991).

The concept of governance seems useful in considering these circumstances because governance is a way of 'acting on the actions of individuals, taken either singly or collectively, so as to shape, guide, correct and modify the ways in which they conduct themselves' (Burchell 1993: 267). Following Burchell, Shore and Wright state that 'In this sense, governance is understood as a type of power which both acts *on* and *through* the agency and subjectivity of individuals as ethically free and rational subjects...' (Shore and Wright 1997: 6, emphasis in original). In contrast to an instrumentalist view of policy and governance, Burchell's view refers to a more complex process whereby policies not only change conditions from 'outside' or 'above' but also influence indigenous norms of conduct (Burchell 1993: 267).

The question of governance becomes extremely important and explicit in the case of national parks and sanctuaries because most people concerned with these issues in India today agree that no party, neither the state nor a local group, should exercise power and rights without negotiating with other concerned parties. We may say that liberal democratic ideas are gaining ground in the arena of conservation and ecology in India, and with them the issue of how to conduct these negotiations, or to use Foucault's terminology, techniques of domination, becomes more evident (Foucault 1980).

The proposed sanctuary in the Palni Hills was originally suggested and outlined in 1986 by the Palni Hills Conservation Council (hereafter the PHCC), a local influential environmental organization (PHCC 1986). Although the PHCC approached the State Government with this proposal for several years running, nothing happened until 1993. Locals have an explanation for why the State Government finally responded. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at that time, Jayalalitha, made a visit to the famous hill station of Kodaikanal, the urban center of the Palni Hills. Early one morning Forest Department staff took her on a ride in their jeep into forest areas outside the town. While driving through the scenic countryside of the undulating upper parts of the Hills the Chief Minister suddenly pointed towards a grass-covered slope between two patches of mountain rain forest (*shola*) and asked, 'What kind of animals are those over there?'. 'They are bison, madam', answered the senior staff member. In the grass a herd of gaur (*Bos Gaurus*), the south Indian wild bison, were grazing calmly. 'Oh, so fascinating and beautiful, we must protect them', was her spontaneous answer. Of course there was more to it than this locally told episode, but the fact 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 outline a plan for a sanctuary in the Palni Hills (Tamil Nadu Forest Department 1994).

So far the suggested sanctuary exists only on paper, and steps to design and implement it have not yet been taken. Exact details of the character, geographical outline, and management of the sanctuary are still to be developed. However, as will be shown below, if anything close to the current general proposal of the sanctuary and its associated

significant changes in land-use is implemented, it will have a major impact on most people of the Palni Hills and, in fact, will be one of the greatest single acts of centralized social engineering in the history of the area.

My focus on local people is here limited to the Paliyans. With a history of hunting and gathering throughout the region, it is no wonder that the suggested sanctuary coincides to a great extent with their home areas. Even though the Paliyans only constitute between one and two percent (about 3500 individuals) of the Hills' total population, otherwise dominated by Tamil caste groups, my data show that in the area of the suggested sanctuary they will constitute from 20 to 80 percent of the population, and will be, by far, the group most affected by the establishment of the sanctuary.

I am not able to evaluate different aspects of the establishment and construction of this sanctuary as that process has not yet started. However, instead of being wise after the event, I will follow Paul Richard's proposal that 'social scientists ought to re-focus their skills on complex political emergencies *as they happen*, and perhaps try to anticipate the trend of events' (1996: xi). I will compare my experiences of the Paliyans and their earlier negotiations with outsiders with the new trends of policies put forward by environmental organizations in India and developments associated with the suggested Palni Hills Sanctuary.

In the next section I will briefly present the new ecological policies developing in India with a focus on national parks and sanctuaries, and discuss the proposed program of Joint Protected Area Management, followed by a review of the Palni Hills Sanctuary and the role so far taken by the PHCC. From there I will move on to give an outline of the recent history of the Paliyans of the Palni Hills which shows that they have to date enjoyed an autonomy in relation to the state similar to what James Woodburn calls 'autonomy by default' (1979: 248). This autonomy has allowed for a form of governance among the Paliyans significantly different from that of other people in these hills, a culture of politics which has created severe problems in recent relations between the Paliyans and outside organizations, including state agencies. This will be exemplified by a detailed description of the Paliyans living in one valley of the Palni Hills and their alliance building with outside organizations during the first half of the 1990s, including the above-mentioned PHCC, and the way different rationalities concerning governance have played a significant role in the outcome of these alliances. In the concluding remarks I will place Paliyan 'autonomy by default' and their system of 'minimal politics' (*ibid.*: 248, 244) in the context of the new policies suggested for national parks and sanctuaries in India.

Ecological policy in India

Until the 1980s environmental policy in India was based on bureaucratic intervention in selected tracts of land, with the exclusion of local residents. Criticism of this policy increased rapidly in the second half of the 1980s, with the development of a rich and complex array of alternative policies and organized alliances, including different views on state control, commercialization, the importance attached to livelihood and interests in maintaining biological diversity (Rangarajan 1996: 2394-2404).

In spite of the existence of many different strands of environmentalism, during the late 1980s the various parties involved shared similar reasons for increasing their activities, namely the Government's double standard in nature protection issues and the increasing conflicts between local people and the management of national parks and sanctuaries. At the same time, the state was developing joint forest management strategies and seemed to be listening more to the grievances of local people. The Government also 'denotified' parts of some sanctuaries, allowing industrial exploitation; for example the Narajanan Sarovar Sanctuary in the state of Gujarat. Further, in 1994 the Ministry of Environment and Forests put forward a new draft forest act to replace the Indian Forest Act of 1927. Called 'The Conservation of Forests and Natural Ecosystems Act', it proposed the protection of biodiversity through the further curtailment of local communities' rights to access and use of more forest resources (Guha 1994).

I will now look more closely at two aspects of the discourses concerning the creation and management of national parks and sanctuaries. First, I will discuss the comprehensive Joint Protected Area Management (JPAM) proposal, suggested by the urban-based Non-Government Organization (NGO) Kalpavriksh. The second example returns to my main concern, the Palni Hills and the PHCC, and gives a brief picture of this organization's general development and change over time, and of the proposed Palni Hills Sanctuary.

The idea of joint management of national parks and sanctuaries arose in the 1990s as a response to the increasing conflicts between local people and protected area management, in combination with industrial pressures on these areas. In 1994 the Indian Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi held a workshop called 'Exploring the Possibilities of Joint Management of Protected Areas' to summarize and set the stage for further discussions (Kothari, Singh and Suri 1996). A tentative definition of JPAM was formulated:

JPAM is the management of protected areas and their surrounds, with the objective of conserving natural ecosystems and their wildlife, as well as of ensuring the livelihood security of local traditional communities, through legal and institutional mechanisms which ensure an equal partnership between these communities and government agencies. (Kothari 1996: 26-27)

Most advocates of JPAM agree generally on which parties should be recognized as part of joint management schemes, and one of the important questions is to find means for conflict resolution between these parties, and especially between local communities and government agencies. It is also acknowledged that social scientists as well as NGOs should be looked upon as resources in this process.

Ashish Kothari, one of the initiators of the workshop and a leading member of the Delhi based NGO Kalpavriksh, lists several important steps to achieve this goal, including a management plan with a central role for local communities and mutual learning between protected area staff and local people (*ibid.*: 42-44; see also Kothari et al. 1995a; 1995b). It is recognized that this form of re-empowerment of local people may

vary from one place to another (Kothari 1996: 24). At the same time, the definition of JPAM above gives an equal role to government agencies. We are left with the important issue of balancing these rights. However, the suggested steps give no clue as to how this will be achieved; instead they only state in general terms what should be given to local people in terms of power and resources. The closest we get to an answer to the question of how the negotiations should be organized and adjusted to local politics is that everything should be based on a participatory process and that (unspecified) 'cultural rights' should be respected.

What then does Kothari mean by 'culture' and 'cultural rights'? Under the heading 'Nature of the Community' he asks whether a local community should still have traditional rights after converting to a modern lifestyle (ibid.: 32). His answer is that if local communities are linked to the outside world, politically, economically and through the media, they are largely alienated from the local environment as a result. They are still local but not traditional. They have, according to Kothari, abandoned a self-sufficient lifestyle 'for the "comforts" (and pains!) of modern commercial life' and therefore, 'these [traditional] rights would cease, much as they have ceased for urban dwellers like myself' (ibid.: 33). Such ideas reflect an ignorance of power relations and political processes, and an essentialist view of culture and culture change. Furthermore, they also reflect an attitude that the right to define the 'culture' of a group, its authenticity as 'traditional' or 'modern', and what should be included in these concepts, lies in the hands of people outside the group in question.

According to such views, I wonder which groups would fit the criteria of 'traditional', and thereby enjoy the support of advocates of the JPAM. Further, if a group fits the criteria, the question of how local ideas about decision-making, accountability, and representation should be recognized and integrated into the negotiation process remains unanswered and causes me to wonder what is actually meant by participation. As Nici Nelson and Susan Wright point out, participation is a persuasive word that never seems unfavorable, but can mean anything from being a more or less passive part of others' projects to running your own project with the help of or together with others (Nelson and Wright 1995: 2-7). In the JPAM proposal this question is not clearly developed, and although the supposed intention is for more power and resources to be transferred to local people, the way of achieving this is mainly by means of an organization based on principles developed between state agencies and NGOs.

I will return to these questions at the end of this chapter, but now turn to the environmental organization the PHCC and the local area of the Palni Hills. The PHCC was established as a non-government conservation society in 1985 as a response to the environmental deterioration of the Palni Hills. With slogans such as 'Green belt around the Palnis' and 'Protect our forest - plant more trees', the organization developed a tree-planting program and a town plan for Kodaikanal, the urban area of the hills (PHCC 1993). The tree-planting project was soon considered very successful and became established in many places in the area, both in the hills and in the surrounding foothills (Ministry of Environment and Forests 1994). Although the PHCC believed in the involvement of local people, especially planters and farmers, these people were outside

the direct design and implementation of the program.

This distance from local people is reflected in the PHCC's first proposal of a Palni Hills National Park (PHCC 1986). This proposal was formulated according to the prevailing principles of nature conservation at that time, that is, 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 and their dependence on the forest for survival.

However, intensified fieldwork by PHCC members resulted in closer relations with local people. In the early 1990s two nurseries started small programs aimed specifically at Paliyans, including evening schools and beekeeping. More important though was the fact that these programs started for the first time relations between the Paliyans and members of the PHCC on rather equal terms. Several land-owning board members of the PHCC had had relations with Paliyans before, but on those occasions the Paliyans were hired as wage laborers on their farms, and were thus within the hierarchical structure between castes and tribes in the local area. The new relations provided opportunities for another way of understanding and respecting each other's arguments and ways of dealing with everyday matters.

A major break in the PHCC's general policy came with the proposal of The Kadavakurichi (Tiger Hill) Interface Forestry Project, where a forest area in the foothills was planned to be managed jointly by the PHCC, the Forest Department and the local people (PHCC 1993). This project was the first of its kind in Tamil Nadu and included different caste groups but no tribal groups. In 1995 a Management Agreement was signed with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (Tamil Nadu Forest Department and Palni Hills Conservation Council 1995), and in 1997 all nineteen villages in the area had been drawn into the project.

Although this project is in its early stages and few benefits have yet materialized, the successful start may be attributed to several factors. First, the positive response from local people was partly facilitated by the PHCC staff recruitment system, where staff members were recruited from local areas. Second, since Joint Forest Management was not established in Tamil Nadu at the start of this project, part of the early negotiations between the PHCC and the Tamil Nadu Forest Department involved clarifying the idea itself. In these negotiations the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and its representatives, who had had several decades of experience in cooperating with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, were important mediators, according to the PHCC (1993).

The PHCC's relations with the Paliyans intensified, especially through their involvement in 1995 with the Paliyans of the Pandju valley⁵ and the establishment of the Paliyan village of Arrivellam.⁶ Compared with the PHCC's earlier relations with Paliyans, their program in the Pandju valley was more comprehensive, something I will deal with in more detail below.

Let me conclude this section by giving some information on the proposed Palni Hills Sanctuary. It will comprise around 900 km², more than a third of the total area of the Palni Hills (2400 km²). The area is within reserved forest, and no settlements, apart

from small Paliyan settlements, come within its borders. The main idea is to link this sanctuary to several sanctuaries to the west, creating a corridor of protected areas from the state of Kerala into the Palni Hills and Tamil Nadu. This area of mountains and forests is, among other things, an important migratory route for elephants and contains examples of most types of vegetation in southern India.

Prior to 1998 the only negotiations regarding the sanctuary which had taken place between the PHCC and the Tamil Nadu Forest Department related to some basic ideas concerning the proposal. The Government had not taken any initiatives or measures on the ground. Most local people did not know about the plans, although on 2 May 1997 a small item in the local daily newspaper *The Hindu* (published both in English and Tamil) made them public (Oppili 1997).

The board of the PHCC, in contrast, felt an urgent need to increase their knowledge and relations with the local people to facilitate future negotiations with the Government. This urgency was expressed in a 1996 report:

While this news [the Government declaration of the sanctuary] is heartening for the environmentalists, there are apprehensions about the bad effects of this change of freedom of the tribals living in the interface area between the agricultural lands and the proposed Palni Hills Sanctuary. (PHCC 1996)

As a result of this concern, I have been invited several times since 1995 to the PHCC's board and staff meetings to share my experiences, where the main concern was to establish some general knowledge of forest dependency among the Paliyans in the hills.

Despite developing closer relations with the Paliyans, and an increasing knowledge of Paliyan ways of dealing with everyday matters, the PHCC could not avoid complications in their relations with the Paliyans. I will show this by discussing the situation in the Pandju valley and the trial establishment of a Paliyan village in that area. Before that, though, it is necessary to give a brief history of relations between the Paliyans and other people in the Palni Hills.

The Paliyans of the Palni Hills and 'autonomy by default'

The Paliyans claim descent from the original inhabitants of the Palni Hills, while the dominant caste groups all trace descent from people of the surrounding plains. The name 'Paliyans' is used by both themselves and other people and, in accordance with caste rules, marriages rarely, if ever, take place between Paliyans and caste people, although such unions are not stigmatized among the Paliyans to the same degree as elsewhere.⁷

The Paliyan economy was previously dominated by the use of various forest resources, such as the collecting of edible plants, fishing, and the hunting of small game. This period is referred to by the Paliyans as a time when they 'only lived on yams, honey and monitor lizards'.⁸ Such a phrase emphasizes the most important food resources, but is actually a condensed description of a hunting and gathering economy which utilized more

than two hundred different plants and animals (Gardner 1993). Nowadays most Paliyans earn wages by working for others. Some Paliyan groups initiated employment relations with neighboring Tamil land-owners early in the twentieth century (Dahmen 1908), and such arrangements have increased significantly since the 1950s. Employment by land-owners includes work as daily laborers on estates and plantations, cattle herding, collecting non-timber forest products, and in some cases cultivating recently-acquired land (Norström 1996). In several cases these relations have developed into a kind of patron-client relationship, where expectations and responsibilities between the land-owner and the Paliyan families involved have extended outside the economic domain. However, most Paliyans still hunt and gather forest resources in combination with working for outsiders, making the patron-client relationship, where it exists, relatively weak. Although most Paliyans today are engaged in wage labor they still prefer to live inside or on the fringe of the forests.

Paliyan relations to the state have mainly been through contact with representatives of the Forest Department, the state custodians of the forests of India. The main features of the present-day administration, organization, and rules governing Indian forests were set in place by British colonizers during the nineteenth century. They introduced the term 'forestry', and declared most forest areas to be reserved forest, implying a centralized system of forest management for conserving and exploiting the forests according to capitalist principles (Tamil Nadu Forest Manual 1993).

Government regulations did not affect the Paliyans directly. Their staple food was wild yams (various species of *Dioscorea*), and hunting was mainly restricted to small game; these forest resources were of little concern to others. The Paliyans used only smaller trees for hut construction, food extraction and household implements. Their few numbers, semi-nomadic lifestyle, and habit of staying in the more inaccessible parts of the Hills, left them outside state concern and, thus, with a high degree of autonomy. This autonomy, however, was not a result of any agreement between the Paliyans and the Government. It was what Woodburn terms 'autonomy by default' (1979: 248), where the administration, for their own convenience, did not bother too much about the Paliyans as long as they did not give the Government trouble.

Following independence, when the Forest Department assumed management of the forests, Paliyans continued to avoid contact with the authorities as far as possible. This was part of an overall 'avoidance strategy' towards outsiders, usually stated by Paliyans as, 'If we met strangers we ran away because of fear'.

When Paliyans started to work for others, their relation to the state did not immediately change. If they came into conflict with the Forest Department, especially as a result of working for land-owners, this was usually taken care of by the land-owner as part of the patron-client relationship between the land-owner and the Paliyan families.

From the 1960s the collecting of non-timber forest produce in the Palni Hills was regulated through a contractual system administered by the Forest Department, who leased tracts of the Hills to private contractors. The Paliyans, due to their skills and tradition of collecting from the forests, became engaged in working for these contractors, and in some parts of the Palni Hills the income from this work became their major form

of subsistence (Schmidt 1997). This brought them into closer contact with the Forest Department, although everyday relations were conducted between the Paliyans and the forest contractors.

However, a major shift in Paliyan-state relations was on its way. Through the intensification of relations between Paliyans and Tamils (based on the economic relations mentioned above), Paliyan economic strategies and ambitions changed. Many Paliyan families started to cultivate small plots of their own, mainly within reserved forests, thereby coming into direct conflict with state regulations under which cultivation within reserved forests is illegal. Estates and plantations, which dominated the economy of the Palni Hills, were mainly confined to land which the Government could release for uses such as house sites, village sites and taxable private enterprises, or, in the case of certain cash crops such as cardamom, areas within reserved forest leased by the Forest Department. According to the Paliyans, the main reason for starting the cultivation of their own cash-crops was the possibility of securing an additional source of subsistence and increased cash income, making it possible to buy rice, clothes and other commodities. Apart from material gain, they also sought the opportunity to enhance their independence and status relative to their neighbors.

To solve the conflict with the Forest Department the Paliyans either had to abandon their plots or find a way of negotiating with the Department's local staff. In several cases their attempts at cultivation also brought the Paliyans into conflict with land-owners due to the fact that Paliyan bargaining power with land-owners would increase if their ventures were successful.

Paliyan attempts to cultivate land for themselves were usually not successful in the long run, as the Forest Department would not allow any permanent cultivation within reserved forests. However, one important result of the intensified interaction between Paliyans and forest guards was that Paliyans became better able to negotiate over so-called 'minor offences', such as the occasional cutting of small trees, and small game hunting. They learned 'the system of bribes' and today claim with confidence that 'we can easily face the forest guards'.

What occurred was a shift in relations from avoidance to negotiation between Paliyans and the state where, because of changing circumstances, both parties have had reason to interact directly with each other. Overall, however, these Paliyan-state relations were restricted to the Forest Department and sporadic in nature.

In the 1980s Paliyan relations with the state took a new turn, mainly due to a change in Paliyan settlement patterns. The Paliyans had earlier lived in small semi-settled groups based on sibblingship⁹ and comprising between ten and thirty individuals. These groups lived either on their own in the forest or attached to estates or other properties. During the 1980s several sibling groups joined together and established more permanent villages, generally at the fringe of the forest, close to cultivated fields. These villages were usually located on revenue land,¹⁰ resulting in increased relations between the Paliyans and the state, including the village administration and other departments within the district.

Some Paliyan families still prefer to avoid close relations with state representatives, but most Paliyans in the Palni Hills have established or are in the process of establishing

such relations. These new relationships all have one thing in common: relations between the local Paliyan group and the state are mediated by outsiders, and especially in the early phase, either by influential local individuals and/or representatives of organizations more or less independent of the state. This is a new step where, alongside strategies of avoidance and negotiation, a new strategy of alliance building has entered the Paliyan repertoire.

In the next section I will give a brief account of one example of alliance building between the Paliyans of the Pandju valley and outside organizations, including the environmental organization the PHCC. This cooperative alliance focused on the attempted establishment of the first Paliyan village in the Pandju valley. I will show that in this case different views of governance, especially related to decision-making, representation and accountability, became major obstacles in the alliance.

Alliance building and the establishment of Arrivellam village

The Paliyan village of Arrivellam, situated in the Pandju valley along the southwestern slopes of the Palni Hills, was established in November 1990. The Paliyan families joining the village had lived dispersed in different areas of the valley where they combined hunting and gathering with wage labor on nearby cardamom estates. During the 1980s the Indian share of the international cardamom market declined, resulting in a substantial decrease in the total acreage of cardamom cultivation in the area (Giriappa 1995: 143-146; Pruthi 1992: 63). In the Pandju valley and its vicinity several cardamom estates closed down, and those still running were in bad shape economically. The cardamom estates had for at least two decades been the major source of wage-labor for the Paliyans in this valley, but due to their decline many Paliyans turned to other economic alternatives during the 1980s.

During this period some Paliyan families started to discuss the possibility of establishing a village of their own. The major proponent of the idea was Andi, who is an extraordinary Paliyan in the eyes of outsiders; he mingles very easily with outsiders, has a clear goal for the future, and is committed to work hard to achieve it.¹¹ However, the idea may have originally come from Paliyans in a neighboring valley with whom the Paliyans in Pandju valley had close connections. There, fifteen years earlier, a group of Paliyans had established a village with the help of some influential local Tamils.

Paliyans in the Pandju valley started the village project in cooperation with a local Tamil land-owner and a non-government organization, the Van Allen Rural Integrated Health and Development Project (VARIHD).¹² Andi and his siblings, especially his younger brother Colras, met Narayanan, a social worker representing VARIHD. Narayanan told them that his organization could arrange land for cultivation and a village site, stone houses, a school for the children, health care, bank loans which could help them establish farms, and so on. With these promises the most eager Paliyan families were able to influence about twenty families (out of a total of forty Paliyan families in the valley) to become involved in the village project.

During 1991 the families cleared and leveled the slope at the selected village site and started to establish themselves in the area. In 1992 a school was established, and soon

after three acres of land for each family was allotted by the Government. For subsistence the families combined wage labor for Tamil land-owners in the vicinity, the collecting of wild tubers and other forest resources, and cultivation of their own land for which they favored the same crops as their Tamil neighbors, silkcotton (*Bombax Ceiba*) and limes (*Citrus aurantifolia*). As the allotted plots were small the Paliyans were able to run this kind of cash-crop cultivation on a family basis which, importantly, fitted patterns of Paliyan social and economic organization.

Everything seemed to work smoothly during the first year. However, in spring 1992 a couple of Tamil caste families from the plains with land in the vicinity settled down in the village and built huts of their own. They also appropriated some village land for their own cultivation. Discussions about how to deal with this problem created a rift between the Paliyans and VARIHD. The Paliyans hesitated to throw them out, as this means of solving conflicts was not part of their customary practice. Traditionally, when conflicts arose within their own group, the final solution was usually that one party, on their own initiative, left the group. This was made possible by the fact that Paliyans usually had a minimum of fixed resources. With a village site and land for cultivation, however, the situation was different. VARIHD argued that they should throw out the intruders or otherwise VARIHD would not be able to support the Paliyans fully. 'You have to act as a group, otherwise these people will take over the whole village', Narayanan repeatedly told them.

VARIHD's program for rural villages included health and childcare training in the town of Kodaikanal. Most Paliyans were reluctant to participate in these programs as they felt that Kodaikanal was too far away and that the several days they were required to attend was too long. VARIHD also suggested an evening school in the village to teach the adults reading and writing, an idea which none of the Paliyans supported. Some families were also reluctant to send their children to the school, as they were sometimes needed for different work activities, which were not possible to plan and regulate in the same manner as school classes.

In 1993 additional conflicts with neighboring land-owners occurred, some involving physical violence. These conflicts increased the Paliyan demand for support from VARIHD. Narayanan and his assistant accused the Paliyans of acting wrongly, thereby creating the conflicts themselves. One reason for these accusations was Narayanan's inability to mobilize the Paliyans for specific purposes. Whatever the activity, Narayanan found that many Paliyans would not attend, even if they had promised to. Andi and his brother Colras, who usually spoke for the whole village and were looked upon by outsiders as village leaders, were blamed by Narayanan for not being able to obtain the cooperation of the other villagers. Although Andi and Colras often tried to persuade the others in the village to be more active, they did not have any means of coercion. The reason for this weakness of leadership lies in the Paliyan adherence to individual autonomy and their rejection of most kinds of authority, something I will come back to below.

Andi and Colras countered Narayanan's complaints by claiming that VARIHD had not fulfilled its promises, that they were not given sufficient support for establishing and

protecting their farms, and that the promised stone houses and wells had not materialized. In late spring 1993 VARIHD's field assistants stopped visiting the village. The only activity left was the school, which closed in late 1993.

The conflict seemed total, and Andi blamed the actions of the field assistants as the main reason for it. He even suspected them of embezzling the money that was meant for the village. However, he still hoped that by confronting the medical doctors, who were members of VARIHD's board, they would in the near future be able to resolve the conflict and cooperate again. This never happened because the board decided to close down VARIHD and its whole program in 1995, thereby ending three years of cooperation between the Paliyans of the Pandju valley and the organization.

When Paliyan relations with outsiders were confined to wage labor, generally through agreements between individuals and families, those relations normally did not create any conflicts outside the immediate parties involved. With new Paliyan ambitions, including the acquisition of village and agricultural land, the situation changed dramatically. Land is one of the most valuable assets in India, and always attracts many interested parties, from the landless poor to the state, each of whom has their own view of how to deal with the matter. From a situation in which the Paliyans of the Pandju valley were basically neglected by outsiders apart from the few land-owners hiring them for work, they suddenly became of regional interest, all due to the granting of some land for a village.

Consequently, conflicts with neighboring land-owners arose repeatedly and with increasing frequency, including accusations of theft against the Paliyans. Usually these conflicts were of a passing nature. However, in the summer of 1994 a newly-appointed Village Administrative Officer (VAO) in the area, a Tamil man originating from the nearby plains, granted land to his father in the vicinity of the Paliyan settlement. This family, which became known as the 'VAO group', started to clear more than one hundred acres on the other side of the ridge behind the Paliyan village and bordering Paliyan land. Soon the Paliyans noticed that the 'VAO group' had also encroached into several of their plots and several Paliyan men went and asked the laborers to stop. Nothing happened until some Tamils from the nearby plains, known to Andi and Colras and connected to an influential political party, decided to join the Paliyans. They sent up some 'ruffians' who threatened the laborers.

The conflict escalated and one of the Paliyans' new Tamil friends suggested that the whole Paliyan community should go down to the local government office in the nearby plains town with their grievances, which they did. This move made the conflict a public matter extending beyond the valley. Journalists were sent to meet the Paliyans at the government office and some journalists visited the village. A local Dalit/tribal organization also visited and questioned the Paliyans and others about the situation.¹³ Within days hundreds of posters were put up by the organization in Kodaikanal, with the headline 'Don't Create a Chota Nagpur Case', referring to the killing of more than one hundred tribals in central India in a similar conflict earlier the same year.

Finally, the Collector¹⁴ decided to transfer the Village Administrative Officer, and the encroachment came to a halt. Despite this positive result, several Paliyan families had

already decided to look for work in other areas. One reason was that they did not want to keep working for some of the land-owners in the Pandju valley who had not supported them in the 'VAO conflict'. Even Andi and his family and others within his sibling group left the village to work on a large estate in a nearby valley. A major reason for Andi's departure was that, despite being considered by both Paliyans and outsiders to be the village 'leader', he had felt unable to control developments associated with the conflict. He had been irritated by the other decision-makers, including those from his own group as well as various outsiders, and by his position of responsibility without power. Another thing that angered Andi was that he and his brothers' families, because of their relative affluence compared with other Paliyan families in the village, were expected to feed all their allies when they visited the village. This 'affluence' came from some land they had been able to secure in their attempts at cultivation. According to Andi, this obligation drained their few family resources and was an additional argument for taking up temporary wage labor outside the valley.

By spring 1995 almost half of the Paliyan families were working outside the Pandju valley for longer or shorter periods. At this time the Palni Hills Conservation Council entered the scene. One day when Andi, a couple of other Paliyans and I were on our way down to the plains, we met Jaya, a leading board member of the PHCC, and some PHCC staff members. At this time the PHCC was steadily increasing its influence in rural areas, but had not yet spread to the south-western slopes of the Hills, the area where the Pandju valley is situated. At this first meeting, Andi, with his usual outspokenness, immediately took the opportunity to explain their situation to Jaya.

As a result of this initial contact, the PHCC decided to establish themselves in the area by building a nursery in Arrivellam. They also started the legal process of trying to clarify the land deeds for the Paliyans. The relevant, correct papers were necessary to retain possession of the plots, but the Paliyans had not been able to pay the annual land tax. (The land tax for the first years had been paid by VARIHD.) The situation was further complicated by the fact that several families' plots were still more or less fallow, making it difficult for them to reclaim the land for cultivation if somebody else encroached on it. Staff members of the PHCC also began to approach officials to obtain approval and funds for the construction of stone houses in Arrivellam, in accordance with Paliyan wishes.

During 1995 the village of Arrivellam became more fragmented than ever, and during extended periods as many as two thirds of the families were absent, although in the following year many families again directed their interest back to the village. One reason for this was that the PHCC nursery became successful. Each family was given 400 seedlings to plant in their plots, and was promised more in the near future. A second reason related to the construction of stone houses. Intensive pressure from the PHCC resulted in a visit to the site from the government official responsible for clearing the necessary papers.

The train of negative events associated with the village of Arrivellam was broken and by the end of 1996 the future of the village looked bright. However, the stone houses were still to be built and the new Village Administrative Officer was only willing to clear

the land deeds for ten families, that is, half of all the families. The others were required to reapply the following year and pay their taxes promptly. The relationship between the Paliyans and the PHCC was working well, but as only a small part of the goods had been delivered, a lot of things could still jeopardize the final outcome. We should remember that VARIHD and the Paliyans also had cooperated well in the honeymoon stage.

The Paliyan rationality of governance

The shift from living inside the forest to settling on revenue land was the major circumstance bringing about changes in relations between Paliyans and the state. In some areas in India, including the state of Kerala on the other side of the mountains, this shift in settlement pattern by forest dwellers has been organized by the state itself through various settlement schemes (Bhowmick 1992; Misra 1978; Morris 1976; Sinha 1972). In the Palni Hills though, no such scheme has been introduced. This fact has allowed for a high degree of variation in the settlement process from one area to another, influenced by both local initiative and the particular parties involved. The lack of state-run schemes is the main reason why there is not always direct contact between the state and local Paliyan groups concerning these matters. The Government has no obligation to establish villages for the Paliyans, but if Paliyans, either on their own or in cooperation with others, settle on revenue land this needs to be regulated from the Government's point of view. However, regulation is a complex process because of the general scarcity of land, and further complicated if the land in question is situated in inaccessible areas, such as in the Pandju valley. For these reasons, together with Paliyan inexperience in handling land matters, Paliyan relations with the state have been mediated through other people, here particularly by VARIHD and the PHCC.

The organizations involved had different reasons for cooperating with the Paliyans. VARIHD's main reason was shaped by the Christian ideology of serving the poor, while the PHCC, as environmentalists, saw rural people in general as important partners in their struggle for nature conservation. The involvement of the local government was based on the Paliyan request for a village site and land for cultivation, and on the local administration's obligation to regulate any major activities taking place on revenue land. However, to get the administration's attention needs constant pressure in the form of petitions and regular visits to their offices, and is helped by good relations with influential people and organizations. In the case of the Paliyans in the Pandju valley, VARIHD initially filled that role, and succeeded in obtaining grants of land for the village and for cultivation. Despite this, Paliyan control over the land has been in jeopardy since the day it was granted, both through encroachments from neighbors and because of problems with their land deeds.

Although cooperation progressed well in the beginning between the Paliyans and VARIHD, the Paliyans were not eager to participate in the full program of health care, adult education, and so on offered by VARIHD. Land and subsistence assets were their main concern, and when conflicts over these matters increased Paliyan interest in the other parts of the program decreased. For VARIHD the opposite was the case. The field assistants were assigned by the board of the organization to improve the health and

education of people in need, not to become involved in political conflicts. However, the field assistants, who were local Tamils (in contrast to the board members who were mainly expatriates), knew that it would be difficult to have any success in matters of health and education if they did not comply with the immediate wishes expressed by the locals. Helping the Paliyans with their land situation was VARIHD's 'ticket' to the people. However, when encroachment problems escalated and even developed into violence, and influential groups from the neighboring plains became involved, VARIHD avoided direct involvement, creating a fissure between the organization and the Paliyans.

Superficially, the PHCC and the Paliyans had different interests in building and maintaining their relationship. For the Paliyans nothing had changed since VARIHD had left; their main concern was still to secure their village and land for cultivation. By contrast, the aim of the PHCC was conserving nature and the ecological balance. However, at one point their different concerns coincided. The PHCC's philosophy includes encouraging agriculture which accords with ecological principles. To this end and for the benefit of farmers, the PHCC has developed expertise in tree and plant nurseries, including a whole range of species adapted to sustainable cultivation. Obtaining the initial input needed to establish cultivation in the Palni Hills, including knowledge and suitable plant seedlings, was one of the main problems for the Paliyans; it was lacking within VARIHD, especially among their leadership, but was the core expertise and asset of the PHCC.

Another important difference between VARIHD and the PHCC was their board members, the people with the actual power within these organizations. As has already been mentioned, the VARIHD board consisted mainly of expatriates, while the PHCC board consisted mainly of Indians, several being also members of influential regional networks. This fact made the PHCC strong and less hesitant than VARIHD when confronted with local and regional conflicts.

Although it is too early to say whether the alliance between the PHCC and the Paliyans will be a success from the Paliyan point of view, the above two factors are promising. Nevertheless, the relationship between the PHCC and the Paliyans is not without problems of the same kind that prevailed between VARIHD and the Paliyans. Even though there are differences of interest between the parties involved of the kind pointed out above, the differences seem to be exacerbated by other factors. I will elaborate on this by looking into decision-making mechanisms, representation and accountability.

Paliyan governance

The Paliyans lack the political institutions common to other societies, both when it comes to regulating internal as well as external relations. In spite of this, they have norms and values, or at least a common code of practice, covering notions of decision-making, representation, and accountability. In their internal relations these are seldom explicitly stated, rather they are taken for granted. In external relations though, these notions may be contested and thereby become explicitly discussed and 'visible'. Although people in general may interpret concepts of decision-making, representation, and accountability in

different ways, most people around the world seem to look upon them as closely intertwined, even to the extent that they are sometimes not linguistically separated at all. The last applies to the Paliyans, and seems to be part of their general avoidance of or lack of interest in discussing their lives in abstract terms.

All in all some forty Paliyan families lived in and around the Pandju valley during the period of my fieldwork, dispersed over the area in several sibling groups. As I have already mentioned, the idea of a village started with a discussion within Andi's sibling group. When Andi and Colras wanted support for their idea, they did not call the other sibling groups to a meeting. Such meetings, where a large group of people discuss a matter to reach a decision, are not a normal part of Paliyan decision-making. Instead, the brothers now and then visited the other settlements and brought up the issue with those who happened to be around. This emphasizes the informal character of these conversations, where the topic was usually one of many different matters discussed. Apart from this, some Paliyans may also have heard about the idea through others. According to the other Paliyans, Andi usually brought up his idea, commented on the drawbacks of their current situation, and repeated the promises and possibilities which VARIHD and other outsiders had given. Most Paliyans in the valley had agreed that the idea was very tempting, provided that the promises were fulfilled in the near future.

On the final day of the move to the new village in November 1990, the different sibling groups acted in significantly different ways. While all members of some sibling groups decided to move, only some members of others did so, and several groups chose not to join at all. Of those not joining, the reasons openly stated were that it was too risky or insecure a project, and that it would need too much hard work, or that their situation at the moment did not allow them to join but that they might move later.

After six months an additional number of Paliyan families moved to the village, while others, who had joined initially, left. When I visited the settlement in October 1991, ten months after the creation of the village, half of all Paliyans in the area (twenty families, about eighty individuals) were living at the new settlement. However, the shift of settlement changed internal relations among all the Paliyans in the valley, not only dividing sibling groups but also, in some cases, families.

What we see here resembles Woodburn's (1979) description of 'minimal politics' and decision-making among the Tanzanian hunters and gatherers, the Hadza. Decisions were made on an individual basis rather than through group consensus, nor were they made and authorized by 'leaders' or 'family heads'. Rather, decisions were more in the form of a series of announcements by individuals or families, where everyone made their own decisions (Woodburn 1979).

This form of decision-making takes place among Paliyans in all matters, for example, when several Paliyan families or individuals decide to go together to hunt, to collect forest produce, or to go seeking wage labor with the same land-owner. The norms and values guiding this form of decision-making are founded on their strong emphasis on what Gardner calls 'individual autonomy' (1966; 1991). Evidence for individual autonomy includes, among other things: the training of children which emphasizes self-reliance, independence, and individual achievement; the extreme social egalitarianism;

the techniques for prestige avoidance and social leveling; the absence of leaders; the resolution of conflict through fission and mobility rather than by violence or appealing to authorities; and the lack of corporate groups above the level of the conjugal family (Gardner 1991: 548-549). An important condition for this kind of 'individualism' is that in hunting and gathering economies basic subsistence resources may be procured individually or on a family basis.

Although relations and conflicts between Paliyans and outside organizations are complex and take place on several levels, these seem as a whole to be based on the group as a unit. A prerequisite for VARIHD, which was also included in agreements with funding agencies, was to work with whole villages rather than individual families. A similar strategy is adopted by the PHCC. The result was that relations were conducted between groups, that is, the organization *vis-à-vis* the village/settlement. This does not, of course, necessitate total unity of opinion within a settlement, although a minimum requirement is that an identifiable group of individuals/families expresses its willingness to cooperate, and usually the larger the group the better, from the organization's point of view. This kind of cooperation also needs an outside organization which is more or less coherent within itself. An important element of this coherence is the field assistants, who are paid staff members and therefore represent the organization rather than themselves.

Within this framework, VARIHD and the PHCC needed leaders among the Paliyans who could mobilize and organize the Paliyan group, and represent the group as a whole. From the outset this role was taken by Andi and his younger brother Colras. In accordance with Paliyan norms, they were not elected in any way, but were more or less accepted by the others after acting on their own initiative. This fact meant that they had no special authority; they were only supposed to take care of direct negotiations with the outside organizations and their representatives.

Despite this organization of relations between the parties, problems developed. One such problem related to representation. The commitments and actions of the field assistants towards the Paliyans were sanctioned by the leadership, in other words the boards, of the outside organizations. Among the Paliyans though, the relationship between the 'leaders', or rather 'spokesmen', and the rest of the villagers was different. Although Andi and Colras usually spoke for the group as a whole, despite the expectation that in the long-term their co-villagers were as committed to establishing the village as they were, they could not control the degree of cooperation within the group. This was because even though the other Paliyans accepted them as spokesmen, Andi and Colras lacked any means of direct control over them. Individuals or families would often go to other valleys for work, sometimes for months. Sometimes village residents participated in the health programs, and sometimes they promised to join certain activities but did not turn up. When other matters interfered with the work the organizations expected the Paliyans to do as part of the program, all Andi and Colras could do was to appeal to the other Paliyans by stressing the value of cooperation. Sometimes this was successful, but if not, Andi and Colras could only accept the others' decisions.

The above reflects the different notions of representation that prevailed between the Paliyans and the organizations. When pressured by the field assistants to 'bring the group

together', there was not much the Paliyan spokesmen could do. The spokesmen, in the eyes of the Paliyans, could not 'speak for the others'; Andi and Colras did not really represent the Paliyan villagers. This Paliyan 'elusiveness' as Tamils usually put it, is part of the Paliyan view of accountability. Even when individuals or families decide to cooperate with others, be it for long or short periods, they never feel obliged to fulfill an agreement if other matters turn up.

One of the main reasons for this lies in Paliyan ideas of cooperation. Paliyans put a strong emphasis on self-reliance and seldom, if ever, explicitly ask others for help, which would be to denigrate oneself. Therefore, when they cooperate with others, be they land-owners or outside organizations, it is always the others who have to take the initiative. Both VARIHD and the PHCC arrived in the Palni Hills area with strategies, including the offering of different kinds of support to people; it was not the Paliyans who sought their involvement. The same behavior is demonstrated even more clearly when Paliyans work for others. If a Paliyan is asked why s/he works for a particular land-owner, the answer is always 'He called for me'. Paliyans stress that they would never ask for work; the land-owners have to come and ask them. Access to resources outside their own domain is, in other words, in the hands of outsiders, but the political resource of autonomy, the ability to end an agreement whenever they like, is one they try to keep in their own hands. One important condition for being able to uphold this position is the continuous availability of forest resources, access to which they can always turn without the need for cooperation with others and without the risk of losing their independence (Gardner 1985). In parts of the Hills where these resources have today become scarce, the Paliyan ability to uphold this bargaining position has become limited.

Paliyan internal conflict-solving mechanisms make relations with outsiders even more problematic. Conflicts between Paliyan individuals or families sometimes occur, and increasingly so in recent times when several sibling groups have come to live together. Such conflicts sometimes end by one party leaving the area, whatever agreements they may have made with other people. This is why land-owners and field assistants of organizations sometimes, in their own interests, try to mediate between conflicting Paliyan parties. Even an anthropologist, as an outsider with his or her own interests, may find himself in this situation, as Gardner did when he first met one particular Paliyan group. He happened to turn up in the middle of a quarrel when many of the Paliyans involved were about to disperse into the surrounding forest. In order to keep at least some informants long enough for questioning, he felt the need to intervene (Gardner 1985: 413). Such interventions, however, are not always successful. When one of the PHCC's field assistants found to his disappointment that several families had not come back from a neighboring valley, although he had visited them several times and tried to persuade them to come, an old Paliyan woman in Arrivellam tried to console him 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 stay together in one place'.

The 'weakness' of leadership displayed by the Paliyan spokesmen, as perceived by the outside organizations, seems to be part of the Paliyan stress on individual autonomy.

To be more specific, if a Paliyan makes a decision which in the eyes of another Paliyan would have a negative effect on others, his or her right to make that decision is stronger than any concern for the effect it might have on others. In any case, such effects should be handled by the affected individuals themselves as part of their right to make their own decisions. Apart from the conjugal family, an individual is generally not accountable to anyone else (except when it comes to short-term contracts mainly concerning labor and the exchange of certain foods, cash or goods). This is, for example, why Andi did not condemn one of his brothers for never joining the village, although both Andi and Colras thought that they would all have been in a stronger position if he had done so. Paliyans can and do influence each other, and will very often agree. However, to disagree and not follow others' decisions is considered an individual right by the collective.

Paliyan decision-making is in sharp contrast to decision-making practices within the outside organizations. There all decisions are oriented towards group consensus, and field assistants are expected to obey orders, even if independent decisions would produce better outcomes in certain circumstances. Lower level staff are always accountable to those above them, and in most cases are prevented from making decisions beyond those sanctioned from above.

Accountability is also built into relations between the outside organization and their target group, on the surface usually in the form of expected inputs and results. In this case, while the outside organization was expected to provide material and expertise, the target group was expected to provide input with their participation, labor, and sometimes expertise. Each party was held responsible if its inputs did not materialize, although such failures produced differing reactions among the parties. This became clear when the conflict between VARIHD and the Paliyans escalated. Paliyan disappointment resulted in accusations against certain field assistants, but not the outside organization as a whole, in accordance with Paliyan norms of individualizing relations. The outside organization's disappointment was even greater. The outside organizations are accountable to their funding agencies, so they need results, particularly quantifiable results. If, as happened in this case, most villagers do not attend programs, do not repair damaged school buildings after the monsoon to allow schooling to continue, or fail to plant the seedlings raised before they die, the results look rather meager in the organizations' reports. For VARIHD the disappointment resulted in a total withdrawal from the Paliyan village, and ended in the closing down of VARIHD and the whole program, effecting not only Arrivellam but several other Paliyan settlements.

Different views on how to come to terms with their problems put severe stress on each party's patience, and were not part of any project design, neither of the organizations nor in the minds of the Paliyans.

Because the Paliyans in the Pandju valley thought they would be helped through cooperation with the organizations, their contact with local government authorities became more or less indirect. The organization mediated between the Paliyans and the local government. This indirectness was also often the case when Pandju valley was visited by government officials. These visits were planned by the organizations' field assistants, who would accompany the government party up the valley to the village site

(usually government officials were unable to find the way on their own). During the meetings there was a tendency to neglect the Paliyans, apart from Andi and Colras, and in the end most discussions took place between the officials and the representatives of the organizations. This also applied to all written petitions from the Paliyans to the authorities. No Paliyans could write, and even when the petitions were written with Paliyan cooperation they were phrased in accordance with the views of the field assistants and the organizations. One example of this was the text on the poster made by the Dalit /tribal organization referred to above. This poster was formulated in cooperation with Andi and some other Paliyans and directed at the local government, something the Paliyans supported. The reference to the 'Chota Nagpur Case', however, was the organizations' idea. They incorporated the Paliyan case into the Dalit ideology of a general conflict between, on the one hand, tribes and low caste people and, on the other, high caste, rich people and the State of India. Framing the local conflict in this way would have felt strange for most Paliyans.

The Paliyans could only get the attention of the authorities if they took their own initiatives, either alone or with the support of outsiders. This was due to the authorities' general ignorance of Paliyan life inside the forests. The authorities did not feel accountable to the Paliyans, especially when there were no special orders from the State Government. In the case of the Paliyans of the Pandju valley, the pressure on the authorities became strong when the Paliyans cooperated with outside organizations. When this cooperation weakened, the pressure on the authorities also weakened, and in the end the whole Paliyan project of creating a village and farms of their own was jeopardized.

The outside organizations' expectations of corporate community sentiment and action, which were expressed in the demand that the Paliyans should 'act as a group', were in conflict with the Paliyan stress on individual autonomy. This resembles Myers' descriptions of the Pintupi Aborigines in the early 1980s who refrained from 'defining individuals in relation to a higher-order social unit' (1986: 264). Instead, 'Pintupi practice continues to award priority to personal autonomy' in relations with the Australian authorities (*ibid.*). The Paliyan lack of a corporate community sentiment points to a specific kind of rationality of governance, which differs from and puts stress on the rationality and policy making of outside organizations and state bodies. What we find is a group of people who do not automatically conform to outsiders' models of social order. In light of this exposé of Paliyan politics it is time to return to the issues concerning national parks and sanctuaries.

Joint protected area management (JPAM) and popular participation, some concluding remarks

The Paliyans of the Palni Hills have enjoyed, as I have mentioned, a kind of autonomy by default in their relations with caste people and the state. This autonomy, although rare today, has been a product of a state policy and system of governance that seem to belong to former rather than contemporary times. Other, less positive, products of the Paliyan relationship with outsiders include the abuse, exploitation and even bonded

labor of Paliyans which have occurred without them receiving any outside protection or support. However, compared to other groups in the area, such situations seem to have been relatively rare. The main reason for this has been the availability of forest resources, resources that Paliyans could always enjoy with a minimum of interference from other people, including inaccessible areas which were used as retreats (Gardner 1985).

Up to now the combination of freely-available forest resources and a lack of state-run schemes within the forest areas of the Palni Hills has allowed Paliyans to maintain their traditional political system, although as I have shown above, they have expanded both their economic and political strategies. The establishment of a sanctuary in the area would dramatically change this. The central idea of nature conservation is to protect forest resources, and a sanctuary would change land-use patterns in the forests, by, among other things, officially protecting those forest resources which have traditionally formed the basis of Paliyan subsistence. It is also important to point out that limiting Paliyan access to and use of forest resources would affect not only those Paliyans who still use substantial forest resources for their subsistence. It would also dramatically affect those Paliyans who undertake any kind of wage labor because their bargaining position towards employers is partly based on the possibility of returning to the use of forest resources if work relations are unsatisfactory. Thus, almost all Paliyans of the Palni Hills would suffer from the founding of a sanctuary there.

The new environmental ideas of JPAM and the increasing acknowledgement of the rights of local people show that the intentions of many conservationists and other concerned people are more benevolent towards local people than previously. However, good intentions are one thing, solutions another. As part of the new environmental strategies, popular participation and the involvement of scientists and NGOs in new policies of governance within the state have become established. The proposed implementation of the Palni Hills Sanctuary means that Paliyans confront a situation in which, at its best, autonomy by default will be exchanged for popular participation. The key question is, what kind of participation?

Chambers, discussing participatory development and a paradigm shift, discerns three main types of participation: first, participation as a cosmetic label to make proposals and projects appear good; second, as a co-opting practice to associate and mobilize local labor and reduce costs; and third, as an empowering process in which local people do their own analysis, occupy positions of command, gain confidence, and make their own decisions (Chambers 1995: 30). As part of the latter, outsiders participate in local peoples' projects, rather than vice versa, thereby creating, in Chambers' view, a shift from 'top-down' projects to locally initiated and managed projects.

In the case of JPAM, I feel it is not enough to talk about empowerment and local rights without highlighting the issue of participation and the idea that all parties should be prepared to negotiate the way projects are defined and organized on an equal basis and without preconceptions.

In the case of the Paliyans and the PHCC, I have tried to show that close relations and long-term cooperation which do not fully acknowledge and adjust to different ways of dealing with negotiation and decision-making processes, fail to create a basis for the

third form of participation proposed by Chambers. The Paliyan rationality of governance is contrary to that of most outsiders, and has worked against them in these relations. This situation will probably continue into the near future as long as Paliyans are able to turn to the alternative of their former lifestyle and means of subsistence. Whether the implementation of the sanctuary in the Palni Hills will allow Paliyans that alternative we do not know. If it does not, there will need to be a lot of learning and adjustment on the part of the Tamil Nadu Government and the PHCC if Paliyans are to feel that they are engaged in their own project which, according to Chambers, is a prerequisite for a paradigm shift in environmental development.

Notes

- 1) The Palni Hills; an alternative spelling is The Palani Hills.
- 2) Fieldwork was conducted for 24 months, mainly between 1993 and 1995, sponsored by a two-year grant from the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) and several smaller grants from Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen. The Paliyans live on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats, along the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu in southern India. This chapter only deals with the Paliyans of the Palni Hills, an offshoot of the Western Ghats. Most of my fieldwork was conducted in the Pandju valley in the Palni Hills.
- 3) 'Scheduled tribes' are groups listed by the state authority that do not belong to caste communities.
- 4) Throughout this chapter the term 'outsiders' refers to non-Paliyans and is used interchangeably with 'Tamils' or caste 'people/groups' unless otherwise stated.
- 5) I use pseudonyms for personal names and rural places in the Palni Hills to protect the privacy of the local people.
- 6) This project is separate and not part of the Kadavakurichi Interface Forestry Project.
- 7) Caste groups are usually endogamous, and particularly condemn sexual relations between caste individuals and indigenous people.
- 8) All expressions in Tamil have, for the sake of simplicity, been given in English.
- 9) A sibling group consists of several siblings, their spouses, children, and parents, if alive. Usually the family consists of the conjugal pair and their children with their own hut and household.
- 10) 'Revenue land' is land leased from the Government. When the authorities release such land for cultivation, they usually give, in the first phase, only the right to use the land. This kind of land deed is called a 'B-memorandum', the form that regulates the user's obligation to pay tax every year for his/her right. If the user refuses to pay tax, the state can withdraw his/her rights. If the user is not using his land for cultivation, that is, the land is kept fallow, others can approach the authorities and claim the land, or the Government itself can reclaim it. If the land is well kept for several years, the user can apply for *patta* land rights which give the user full ownership of the land, including the right to sell the land.
- 11) Both Andi and his brother Colras have, in contrast to other Paliyans in the Pandju valley, studied for a couple of years at a school in a nearby Tamil hill village. This may have contributed to their relative ease in dealing with outsiders. I will refer to Andi and Colras as 'spokesmen', since they were the most eager to push the idea of a village and were considered 'leaders' in the eyes of outsiders. However, Andi had strong support from his wife, Shanti. (Colras was a bachelor.) The secondary role played by women in this chapter is mainly related to Tamil views on gender. In male-dominated Tamil society negotiations between groups are

normally conducted by males, thereby contributing to the rise of male 'leaders' among the Paliyans.

- 12) VARIHD was the rural wing of the Coordinating Council for Social Concerns in Kodaikanal (CORSOCK), whose main aim was to 'coordinate the efforts for serving the poor in Kodaikanal' (CORSOCK 1976: 1). With a hospital, home for elderly and destitute residents, craftshop, and the like, CORSOCK has, since 1970, striven 'to enrich the lives of people in Kodaikanal regardless of race, creed, caste or income' (ibid.). Some of the medical doctors working for CORSOCK are missionaries from the American Baptist Mission, and most of their funding comes from the Lutheran Church in America and other Christian organizations in the Netherlands (Tegenfeldt 1980).
- 13) 'Dalit' literally means the 'downtrodden' and is used to refer to low-caste people taking a radical stance against the caste system.
- 14) The Collector is the chief administrator of a district.

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