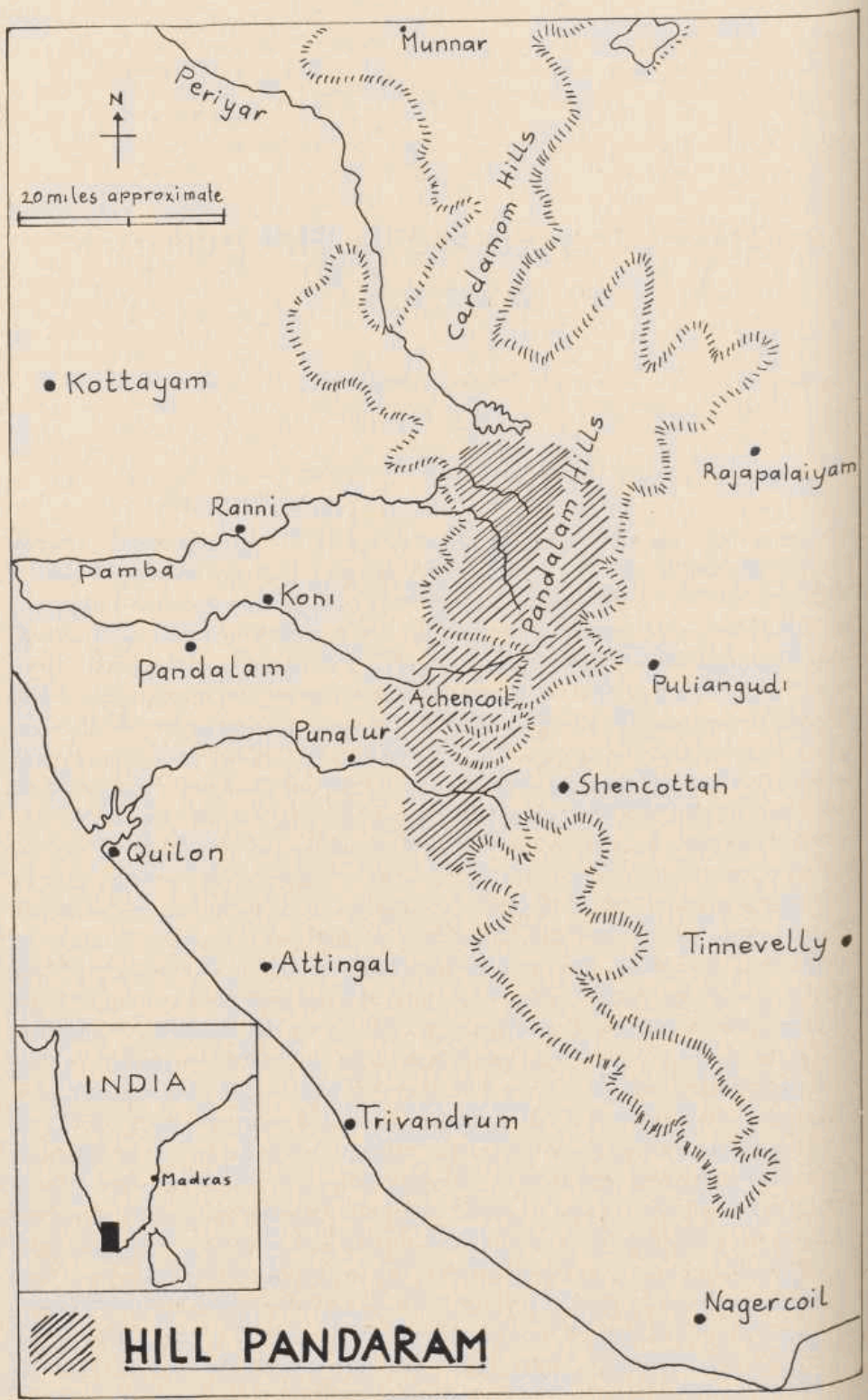
Tappers, Trappers and the Hill Pandaram (South India)

Brian Morris

In a now classic paper on the socio-cultural implications of trading contacts Murphy and Steward (1956) showed that there was a certain parallelism in the specific adaptive responses of two very different cultures – the Mundurucu of Brazil and the nomadic Algonkians of Canada. Although these societies had comparable levels of 'socio-cultural integration' these authors demonstrated that as these cultures became integrated into a wider national economy, which was essentially one of mercantile capitalism – as rubber tappers and fur trappers respectively – so this led to a reduction in the level of local integration. With the processes of change incumbent on a shift from a subsistence economy to one geared to external barter so the individual family emerged as the primary economic and social unit. Thus the original structures of pre-contact times – the village and band respectively – were drastically modified. Additionally, and linked to such changes, Murphy and Steward emphasized the importance of the personal ties linking the collectors of the forest products to individual merchants; the lack of any media of exchange in the transactions; and the part which a system of indebiture played in binding the primary producers to the market system. The aim of the present paper is to provide further illustrative material for this interesting thesis, and to discuss the ways in which one particular hunter-gathering society constitutes an integral, even if a marginal part, of a pre-industrial state. That this particular community is located in a very different socio-cultural environment to that experienced by the Mundurucu and Algonkian Indians and yet evinces a similar adaptive response to an intrusive mercantile barter economy, lends support to Murphy and Steward's seminal ideas.

Throughout the remaining forests of nuclear and South East Asia there is – or was in the early part of this century – a scattered population of hunter-gatherers whose pattern of living was largely focussed on the gathering of forest products – both for subsistence and for external barter. These communities are often described as if they were isolated hunter-gatherers: as if,


Munnar
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Quilon
Tinnevelly
Attingal
INDIA
Madras
Trivandrum
Nagercoil
HILL PANDARAM

in the words of EHRENFELS, they were "food gatherers in the strict sense of the word" (1952: 47). It is evident however from early ethnographic reports on these communities [1] – the Kadar, Veddas, Semang and the Kubus are examples – that trading contacts formed a significant and integral aspect of their cultural life. Various jungle products such as dammar resin, honey and wax, meat and turmeric were traded with specific individuals in the plains area in exchange for tobacco, salt, billhooks, arecanut and cloth. Although silent barter with villagers was recorded such trading was done mainly through a system of patronage, the gatherers of the forest produce being considered the 'vassals', or owing allegiance to specific individuals whose orientation was essentially mercantile [2]. The social patterns and cultural life of these various Asian communities were remarkably alike, for they filled a similar economic niche and experienced the same kind of harassment and exploitation from surrounding agricultural peoples. A comparison between these communities is of course instructive, but need not detain us here, for they constitute the type of hunter-gatherer which GARDNER has described as 'individualistic culture'. Causally related, according to this scholar, to inter-cultural 'pressure', the integral aspects of this culture are a stress on bilateral kinship relations, the avoidance of overt agression, and an emphasis on self-sufficiency, symmetric respect, individualism and memorate knowledge (1966: 1969). But what is of equal interest with respect to these Asian communities is the seeming fragmentary nature of their social aggregates. In all these cultures the nuclear family functioned as the primary economic unit, and residential aggregates consisted essentially of between one and five families camping together, either in temporary leaf shelters or rock caves. Like the Shoshone Indians they are perhaps best described as living at the 'family level of socio-cultural integration' (STEWARD 1955), for rarely more than thirty individuals were ever found associating together. Equally important, as FOX stresses in his discussion of the Indian hunter-gatherers, was the lack of extensive reciprocity and sharing among family groups, and the prevalent pattern of highly migratory individuals – features which FOX suggests are consonant with "the fragmentation of the society into individually competitive units, each geared to external trade" (1969: 142). What is of interest is the contrast between these cultures and the Andamanese Islanders who, though living in a very similar forest environment, lived in larger, more settled aggregates. Indeed RADCLIFFE-BROWN (1964) and MAN (1883) speak of the 'forest dwellers' in the Andaman Islands as living in 'villages' or 'permanent encampments' that sometimes took the form of large communal habitations. Moreover their nomadism was limited to dry season movements only. Equally significant is the paucity of myth and ritual ceremonial among the Asian hunter-gatherers as

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[1] Relevant information on these communities is given in FRYER (1868), BAILEY (1863), SELIGMANN (1911), SCHEBESTA (1929), EVANS (1937) and FORBES (1885). Also important are DAHMEN (1908) and ROY (1925) on the Paliyans and Birhor respectively.

[2] See for instance ANNANDALE and ROBINSON (1902: 414), MACEDA (1964: 48), HOSE and MCDOUGALL (1966: 177–193) and EVANS (1937: 34).

compared with the Andamanese [3]. It seems reasonable to assume, as GARDNER and FOX have argued, that this differential pattern is either causally related to pressure from dominant neighbours or a function of their economic enclavement, as gatherers of marketable forest produce, within a wider economic system. Both these factors, as I have argued elsewhere, seem to me relevant in understanding the social organization of contemporary Asian hunter-gatherers. The present paper is concerned essentially with offering some ethnographic notes on one South Indian community, the Malapaṇṭāram (Hill Pandaram), whose present status I think typifies that which was to be found more generally among Asian hunter-gatherers in the past. It consists of three parts. Firstly I shall offer some historical notes on South India stressing what has hitherto been overlooked, or at least considered of secondary importance in accounts of Asian hunter-gatherers, namely the trading contacts. Then I shall give a brief outline of the Hill Pandaram, focussing on their pattern of subsistence, thus introducing my main topic – the nature and scope of the contractual trading system that links them to the wider society. In my final paragraphs I shall discuss the socio-cultural implications of these external contacts with reference to MURPHY and STEWARD's thesis broached at the beginning of this paper.

It is clear from early Tamil texts of the Sangam period (circa 200 B. C.) that the forests of the Western Ghats (the Kurinci region) were inhabited from the earliest times by tribal communities who had important trading contacts with their agricultural neighbours. It is also evident that the early Tamil kingdoms had important and well-developed trading relations overseas, especially with the Roman Empire with whom they traded living animals. External trade also included important forest products such as sandalwood, ivory, pepper, ginger, cardamom and myrobalam – all of which are mentioned as being exported from the Malabar Coast. As the forests came under the jurisdiction of the Tamil kingdoms, or under the control of semi-independent chieftains or zamindars, from ancient times 'royalties' were levied on such forest products as cardamom, bamboos, ivory, honey and wax. Furthermore hunting expeditions into the forests by the Raja or by members of the dominant castes seem to have been regular events, and on such occasions the services of the hill-people would no doubt have been requisitioned. All these facts make it extremely unlikely that during historical times those communities – whether hunter-gatherers or shifting cultivators – would have escaped the influence and the dominance of the surrounding agriculturists. And such dominance would have stemmed not from the peripheral cultivators, but would have been related to the needs and requirements of a pre-industrial state and a highly developed civilization, centred for the Pandya kingdom at least on Madurai [4]. Yet many writers on the hill tribes of Southern India

[3] The relative scarcity of myth and ritual among Asian hunter-gatherers is mentioned by several writers. See for instance SELIGMANN (1911), EVANS (1937) and LOEB (1935: 284–285).

[4] Important sources on the early history of South India are to be found in MENON (1924–1933) and SASTRI (1966, 1972).

speak of these people as 'social isolates' or as 'aboriginals' the implication being that they are autochthons of the forest, historically without contact with the plains people. EHRENFELS for instance considers the Kadar as having been "isolated in their forests" for a long period, thus protected from the influence of the plains culture. He in fact regarded the advent of forest contractors at the turn of the century as having radically altered the Kadan economy, changing it from one based exclusively on subsistence food gathering to one based on the collection of forest products for barter (1952: 47–48). This perspective seems to me misleading for there is ample evidence, as I have suggested, that external trading contacts had been going on since earliest times. The letters of JACOBUS VISSCHER who resided at Cochin from 1717–1723, the writings of the Abbé DUBOIS [5], and the economic survey of the Travancore and Cochin states made by WARD and CONNER at the beginning of the 19th century – all indicate the importance of trading links between the hill people and the caste-system of the plains. What is significant about these contacts, and this is brought about particularly in the latter survey (WARD and CONNER 1863: 138–139) are twofold. Firstly, the hill tribes were considered to 'belong' or have allegiance to specific states or petty chieftains, and that the exploitation of the forest resources was organized through specific merchants or 'renters'. Secondly, that these forest products formed an important revenue item for the respective kingdoms. In fact some 78 per cent of the revenue of the state of Pandalam, which was a small buffer state between Travancore and the Pandya kingdom, was derived from temple offerings and the sale of hill produce (*addeyerrae*). Even as late as 1913 the sale of minor forest produce constituted some 25 per cent (Rs 24, 616) of the total revenue of the Tinnevelly district. It is probable that the main collectors of this forest produce were such shifting cultivators as the Kannikars and Muthuvan; nevertheless the three main communities of the Western Ghats who were still hunter-gathering at the end of the 19th century – the Kadar, Paliyan and Hill Pandaram – seem to have been equally enmeshed in trading functions. In turning then now to the Hill Pandaram [6] I can but conclude that the gathering of forest produce for barter has always been a crucial factor in the cultural setting of South Indian hunter-gatherers, and that it is doubtful if they can ever be regarded as being culturally isolated from wider Hindu society – within historical times at least.

The earliest note I can trace on the Hill Pandaram comes from the pen of a missionary, and records the observations of a fellow missionary, the Rev. HENRY BAKER who began the "work of evangelizing and civilizing" the Mala Arayans about 1849 in the forest areas near Mundakayam. The extract reads:

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[5] In this context see MENON (1924–1933) and DUBOIS (1905).

[6] Research among the Hill Pandaram was undertaken between June 1972 and July 1973, and was supported by research grants from the Social Science Research Council and the Horniman Trust. To these agencies I am grateful. I would also like to acknowledge here the help and theoretical stimulus I have received from James Woodburn, and the support given to me in the field by E. N. Bhaskaran of the Kerala Forest Service.

He also met with a few miserable beings calling themselves Hill Pandaram, without clothing, implements or huts of any kind, living in holes, rocks or trees. They bring wax, ivory and other produce to the Arayans and get salt from them. They dig roots, snare the ibex of the hills, and eat jungle fowls, eat rats and snakes and even crocodiles found in the pools among the hill streams. They were perfectly naked and filthy, and very timid. They spoke Malayalam in a curious tone, and said that twenty-two of their party had been devoured by tigers within two monsoons (MATEER 1883: 81).

Thus the earliest note on the Hill Pandaram makes mention of trading contacts, and this observation is reiterated by THURSTON (1909/5: 51) and by D'PENHA who writes of their collections of minor forest produce for forest contractors (1902: 392).

At the present time the Hill Pandaram remain "wandering hillmen of sorts" (as D'PENHA described them) for their livelihood still largely depends on the gathering of forest products – for subsistence and barter. Living in the forested hills south of Lake Periyar, and numbering about a thousand individuals, they are to a large extent isolated from the wider culture. With a population density of 1–2 per sq. mi., their pattern of social organization was succinctly expressed by KRISHNA IYER who some forty years ago wrote that they live "in families of two or three in a locality. They do not stick to any one place. They remain for a week and move on when the food supply is exhausted" (1937: 97).

Although their movements cannot be explained in such simple economic terms KRISHNA IYER in this paragraph indicates the two essential features of Hill Pandaram residential patterns. The first is that their camps are extremely limited in size, consisting of one to six leaf shelters with, typically, each shelter housing a conjugal family. Each family is a separate commensal and economic unit. Only meat is exchanged between these units, and then only when the meat is for direct consumption and not for barter. Some thirty per cent of the camps visited by me consisted only of a conjugal family; but typically an encampment was comprised of 2 or 3 co-habiting couples with their children. Secondly, the Hill Pandaram are in fact, and in sentiment, nomadic, and are so characterized by local agriculturists – who denigrate this aspect of their culture. The usual length of stay at a particular camping site or cave is from 5 to 10 days usually, and distances travelled vary between ½ and 4 miles. Linked with such nomadism is that there is a continuing pattern of separation and re-aggregation between families and individuals (even children); but significantly this is not linked to any seasonal variations in the supply of forest produce. Many of the latter of course are seasonal commodities, but the pattern of aggregation nonetheless does not indicate any fluctuation. There is no seasonal concentration of families such as we find in many other hunter-gathering societies.

Although in subsistence terms and as individuals the Hill Pandaram display a varied pattern of adaptive response for specific individuals may cultivate small tapioca plots or engage in temporary survey work for the Forest Department, the Hill Pandaram essentially have a gathering economy [7].

[7] Efforts were made some forty years ago by the Forest Department of Travancore

It is one moreover which involves two modes of production, for the collection of forest products is both for subsistence and barter. Subsistence food gathering involves the hunting of small forest animals – those primarily taken being the monitor lizard, tortoise, chevrotain, hornbill, two species of monkey and several varieties of squirrel – either by means of a muzzle-loader, or with the help of dogs, as well as the collection of certain wild vegetable foods. The most important of these are wild yams (*Dioscorea* spp.), the flour from the inner pith of two palms *Arenga wightii* and *Caryota urens,* and the nuts of a small cycad which grows profusely in certain types of deciduous forest. This aspect of their economic life I have discussed more fully elsewhere; suffice to mention here that subsistence food gathering presents the Hill Pandaram with a certain economic security, forest life offering a relatively adequate subsistence. Indeed long before the discussions on the original affluent society KRISHNA IYER wrote that the Hill Pandaram obtained "food so easily that they did not suffer from want" and put this down as a disincentive to progress (1937: 116). Of significance is the fact that although the gathering of vegetable resources for direct consumption is done on a family basis, any meat not bartered is shared amongst all individuals camping together. It is therefore misleading to characterize the Hill Pandaram by such labels as 'atomistic' or to describe them as a 'non-co-operative' culture (GARDNER).

The collection of forest products for external barter falls under three clearly distinguishable spheres. Firstly, there is the illicit trade associated with the Nilgiri langur, a species of black monkey which is common in montane forests. Certain Hill Pandaram have specialized in the hunting of these monkeys (whose meat has a high market value in the plains area) there being throughout the Ghats an organized though undercover marketing system facilitating the exploitation of this resource. Secondly, a number of products, especially meat, honey and incha bark are traded with local villagers or with Tamil labourers working in the reserve forests. These transactions usually do not involve cash payments; the Hill Pandaram bartering their commodities for specific provisions. Invariably the exchange is to the disadvantage of the forest people, especially when honey or dammar resin is involved. As many Hill Pandaram have no knowledge of current marketing prices in the plains, and little economic sophistication when it comes to such trading relations, they are, to put it bluntly, usually cheated. And very often the villager indi-

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to induce the Hill Pandaram to settle down and cultivate – a venture which was largely unsuccessful. At the present time, however, some 70 per cent of Hill Pandaram are associated with 'settlements' – either with the government sponsored scheme at Achencoil (which is an attempt to settle forty families) or with 'hillmen settlements' within the forest. These older settlements have no corporate functions or unity, and consist of between 2 and 8 grass shelters. Up to about 12 families may be 'associated' with a particular settlement but the land alloted to the Hill Pandaram by the Forest Department is rarely cultivated by the Hill Pandaram themselves – they lease out the land to local agriculturists and take a share of the produce (usually tapioca). Thus the majority of the Hill Pandaram are essentially nomadic gatherers of forest produce.

cates the imbalance only to deride and ridicule the Hill Pandaram for their ignorance. It is indeed worth noting that until comparatively recently silent barter was recorded between the Hill Pandaram and neighbouring agriculturists (FORBES 1939: 218). Finally there is the barter of forest products through forest contractors. It is this third system of exchange which is the predominant form of external barter, and which is of primary significance to the Hill Pandaram.

The Hill Pandaram are a scheduled tribe of Kerala. Coming under the protection and surveillance of the Welfare Department, they have historically been considered the virtual 'wards' of the Forest Department, and like most hunter-gatherers have no lands rights in the forest areas they inhabit. All forest products therefore are deemed to be national resources, and their exploitation and extraction, as government property, is executed and controlled by the Forest Department. With respect to minor forest produce each forest range – which vary in size from 30 to 91 sq. mi. – is leased out annually to forest contractors who pay a varying amount for the right to collect the forest produce of a given forest area. Usually an auction is held in May or June each year, and the contract given to the highest bidder. Depending on the size and quality of the range, and on the keenness of the bidding the lease-amounts vary from 3 to 10 thousand rupees – an average of £ 300. A contractual agreement is drawn up through the local forest officer between the government and the contractor, such agreements stipulating not only the products to be collected but also the conditions of the contract. These conditions forbid the collection of ivory, timber and bamboo, and demand that not only are monthly statements of the products collected to be submitted to the forest officer but accurate and separate accounts of all produce obtained be available for inspection. There is also a significant but ambiguous clause stating that the contractor or his men shall not appropriate for themselves any produce collected by the "hill tribes for their bonafide use". Whether the term 'use' here covers the right of hill tribes like the Hill Pandaram to dispose of their collections in a manner of their own choosing is unclear, but certainly the forest contractors regard the forest produce of a particular range as their exclusive property. And they go to considerable lengths to ensure that the Hill Pandaram do not sell dammar or honey to outside agencies – even employing agents to visit Hill Pandaram encampments in the forest in order to check upon the latter's economic activities. This does not curtail the Hill Pandaram to any great extent for they trade a minimal amount of honey and incha bark and other products to local foresters, and to other outside contacts, and may even sell the produce collected in one range to the contractor (through his agent) in a neighbouring range. But the fact that the right to buy minor forest produce is, by government warrant, placed in the hands of one contractor means that the trading relationships in which the Hill Pandaram are primarily involved are, as far as prices are concerned, almost inflexible. Because the contractor has a monopoly and can dictate prices, the Hill Pandaram are paid what is essentially a nominal price for the produce they collect, and they have no means at their disposal for influencing these

prices; they have to be accepted on a take it or leave it basis. They have no opportunity of offering the produce elsewhere, for the contractual system instituted by Government severely limits the market, placing it solely in the hands of one man. It is not the place here to examine in detail this marketing system, but the profits which are made by the merchant contractors can only be described as exhorbitant – and such profits are primarily at the expense of the principal collectors, namely the Hill Pandaram. Accurate details on the collection of minor forest produce are difficult to obtain. The monthly reports sent to forest officials are highly inaccurate (if indeed they are submitted) and do not itemize many of the products collected. The contractors themselves are very unwilling to disclose details of their business affairs. But some idea of the nature of their profits can be gleaned by analysing the sale of 75 tins of honey, which represents a monthly collection from one range during the honey season. This is usually bought from the Hill Pandaram at the price of 45 Rs for a 4 gallon tin (19 litres). In Trivandrum a bottle of honey (–.68 litre) is normally sold for about ten rupees, thus, excluding transport costs, on the sale of one months supply of honey, contractors can make something in the region of 17580 Rs which more than covers the cost of the lease payment of the whole range. Likewise, white dammar which agents buy from the Hill Pandaram for about one rupee per kilo. is sold in Trivandrum, on market stalls, for ten times that price. If we take into account the fact that the Hill Pandaram collect honey for five or six months of the year, and that large quantities of other marketable forest produce are 'sold' to the contractors or their agents – dammar, cardamom, ginger, incha bark, turmeric and various medicinal roots – then we can see that huge profits are involved.

It is difficult to assess with any precision the degree to which individual Hill Pandaram families are involved in the collection of marketable commodities as specific families vary in the extent to which they collect the various products. In addition the availability of certain products varies not only according to season but also according to locality – and this too makes it difficult to estimate the 'income' derived from this source. No accurate figures are available for specific trading localities to enable me to estimate over a long period, and with respect to those Hill Pandaram bringing produce to the sheds, the amount of minor forest produce collected by individual men and families. And nomadic as the Hill Pandaram themselves during my research my notes on the collecting activities of individual families are intermittent and fragmentary. But inspite of these difficulties some attempt must be made to indicate the extent of their collecting activities. This can be done by reference to one trading shed. At the Kallar shed at the end of September the following amounts of forest produce were recorded on site – the result of two months collecting activites by the Hill Pandaram inhabiting this forest locality.

Dammar	450 kg.	Beeswax	20 kg.
Honey	10 tins	Cardamom	10 kg.

During August-September eight men and their families had been camping in the valley, and thus the average weekly collections per family amounted to 7 kg. of dammar, 3 litres of honey, about ½ kg. of wax and a small amount of cardamom. At the current prices this would give an income per family of about 19.5 Rs per week. This is verified to some extent by the credit note-book kept by the agent at the shed. Two typical 'account-sheets' will illustrate the collecting pattern during the two months.

	Date of Visit to the Shed	Value of Produce Traded		Value of Provisions Taken
a)	6/9			39.00
	12/9	37.50		4.00
	13/9	2.10		53.50
	22/10			1.80
	2/11	39.10		5.00
		78.70		103.30
			balance owing	24.60
			balance b/f	115.60
b)	11/10	67.25		69.92
	24/10	17.20		3.10
				11.80
		84.45		200.42
			balance owing	115.97

The 'income' of many Hill Pandaram families from the sale of forest produce is less than this, but for the typical gatherer an income of about 20 rupees a week seems to be a valid estimate – it being slightly higher during the main honey season (March-May).

Several points of interest emerge from a consideration of these trading contacts.

The first is that there is considerable variation in the degree to which individual Hill Pandaram families are involved in the trade of marketable forest produce. Some young men are almost professional honey gatherers collecting over 15 tins a year; some families maintain a continuous exploitation of marketable commodities and come regularly each week to the trading contact to exchange their collections for necessary provisions. But other families collect only dammar, honey and wax systematically and then only on an intermittent basis, and depend for long periods wholly on food resources gathered from the forest.

The second point of interest is that many Hill Pandaram have only intermittent contacts with the outside world, coming every ten days or so to the trading shed for the purposes of trade, but otherwise remaining socially isolated. Their contact with other communities therefore is limited almost entirely to those engendered by trading relationships. The third point alludes

to the large debts the Hill Pandaram often incur with the agents of the forest contractors. Not all agents give provisions on credit, though they may occasionally advance loans, but most do, and the general pattern is one where the Hill Pandaram are often paying-off debts with the forests products they have collected. Sometimes these debts are considerable, like that of the Hill Pandaram detailed above, for 116 rupees is equivalent to six weeks collection of forest produce. In certain forest localities individual Hill Pandaram often incur the wrath of the contractors (and their agents) by taking provisions on credit, and then disappearing into the forests for extended periods. I have several records of agents refusing to give provisions to certain Hill Pandaram who had been lax in meeting their 'payments'. Forest contractors at the end of the year frequently have to 'write-off' unpaid debts and they may lament over their 'losses'. But these debts have a functional value to the contractor for not only do they put him in the guise of a benefactor, but they serve as instruments of coercion enabling the agents to cajole and pressure the Hill Pandaram into collecting the valuable minor forest produce.

The collection of dammar resin is an important aspect of Hill Pandaram trading relations for not only is it available throughout most of the year, but it is found in all forest areas, being common in both deciduous and evergreen forests. Consisting of the congealed resin of the trees *Canerium strictum* and *Vateria indica* it is a fairly easily exploited resource, and its collection fits in neatly with their pattern of eclectic gathering. The collection of dammar is usually done by men, and it ranks next to honey and wax in its importance to the Hill Pandaram. The latter commodities are gathered either during eclectic foraging or, with respect to the large honey bee, at night by a small group of 2–4 men and boys. Usually the men are affines. This activity is highly dangerous, for the honey is taken from the outer branches of large evergreen trees. Dammar, honey and the illicit gathering of the black monkey are the main commodities collected by the Hill Pandaram for trade. But they collect many other forest resources for this purpose. It would of course be tedious to catalogue them all here, but the following list includes some of the more important items.

Incha bark	*Acacia intsia*
Cardamom	*Elettaria cardamomum*
Kuranthodi roots	*Sida rhombifolia*
Turmeric	*Curcuma longa*
Nellikai fruits of	*Phyllanthus emblica*
Orila roots	*Hemionites cordifolia*
Soapnut	*Sapindus trifoliatus*
Maravathi seeds	*Hydrocarpus weightiana*
Wild Ginger	*Zingiber officinalis*
Kanjiram beans	*Strychnos nox-vomica*
Nangu seeds	*Messua ferrea*

In his work on the Kadar EHRENFELS has little to say on the collection of minor forest produce, though he clearly recognized the contractual system as an exploitative one. And he primarily sees it as a male activity which has

led to a fundamental change in their socio-economic system. Men are thus portrayed as the 'rice winners' of the family, the women idling away their time "doing nothing and becoming lazy, weak and even moody" (1952: 31). FÜRER-HAIMENDORF, who visited the Hill Pandaram of the Koni range in the early 1950's, paints a very similar picture (1960: 46). It is very easy to view contemporary Hill Pandaram life along these lines and to see a complete disjuncture between the "days of yore" (to use a phrase of EHRENFELS) and the present situation; to look upon the past as one where food gathering was the exclusive mode of subsistence. Consequently, it is tempting to see view the collection of forest commodities as having indirectly led to the displacement of wild food plants by such staples as rice and tapioca, the women, in the process, having become redundant. But to see a change-over from subsistence food-gathering to the systematic collection of marketable forest produce in such stark terms seems to me misleading. And for various reasons. Firstly it ignores the fact that such trading relations, as I have indicated earlier, have a long history, the marketing of forest produce through contractual system having been in operation since at least the beginning of the 19th century, and perhaps earlier. Secondly, it ignores the fact that although the collection of dammar, honey and black monkey is mainly the prerogative of men, women are also actively engaged in the collection of forest products – the gathering of turmeric, gooseberry (*nellikai*) and many other marketable products being primarily done by women (and children); although it is worth stressing here that there is no pronounced economic division of labour. Thirdly, because the digging of yams (like so much else of Hill Pandaram culture) is denigrated by local villagers, the Hill Pandaram when questioned about their diet, will invariably stress that they 'always' eat rice, although in fact (because this is a relatively high-priced commodity) many families take this staple only infrequently. Finally it is important to stress that the income derived from the sale of marketable forest products is only partly spent on acquiring such staples as rice and tapioca, and much less than one would expect if these

Provision		Value in rupees
Small packet of salt		–.30
Chillies	250 gm.	1.88
Small onion	250 gm.	–.35
Coriander seeds	100 gm.	–.40
1 Coconut		–.95
Coconut oil	200 gm.	1.70
Palmyra sugar	500 gm.	1.80
Coffee powder	100 gm.	1.20
Betel leaves	20	–.30
Arecanuts	5	–.40
Lime paste		–.10
Beedie cigarettes	1 packet	–.25
Box of matches	2	–.60
Bar of cheap soap	2	–.25
Dried tapioca	6 kg.	6.00
		16.48

staples had ousted wild yams from the Hill Pandaram diet sheet. This is evident by an examination of some typical provision lists (given above). It itemizes what constitutes essentially a week's 'rations' for a family, collected from a trading contact by one of its members.

It will be seen that a large proportion of their income from trade is spent on beverages, tobacco and chewing materials, and on herbs and condiments, and that staples constitute less than 40 per cent of the supplies taken. This is the typical pattern; the amount of staples taken being hardly sufficient to provide for a family for more than a day or so. Frequently no staples will be taken at all. Thus for most Hill Pandaram families the acquired staples can be viewed as supplementing the collection of wild food plants rather than the reverse.

In the above paragraphs I have described in broad outline the nature of the contractual system through which the Hill Pandaram market forest resources. And I have stressed that this is not a recent institution. Thus I cannot subscribe to the view tentatively put forward by Fürer-Haimendorf (and strongly argued by Ehrenfels with respect to the Kadar) that there has been a change-over from a purely food-gathering subsistence economy to one based on the systematic collection of forest produce. Rather, the over-all changes have been more complex. But what is significant about this trading system is its affinities to the pattern of exchanges described by Murphy and Steward with respect to the Mundurucu and Algonkians. Although barter with local village communities has been, and is still important to the Hill Pandaram, the bulk of trading is done through the above contractual system. And this exchange system is geared less to local village needs than to the requirements of a wider urban economy. The forest contractors are in fact urban traders with extensive mercantile interests, and are for the most part either Syrian Christians or Moslems – both traditionally high 'caste' trading communities. As the forest contractor is to an important degree dependent on the collection of the minor forest produce, and as the Hill Pandaram traditionally (in the forest area under review) are the collectors par excellence, then inevitably these entrepreneurs go to some lengths to induce the Hill Pandaram to collect the valuable produce. I have earlier described the role which indebtedness plays in this inducement. All forest contractors employ two or three men to act as personal agents in this respect, their duty being to check upon the activities of the Hill Pandaram living within the leased range, and to cajole or coerce the Hill Panadaram into collecting the forest produce. These men are often feared and the Hill Pandaram when camping in remote forests will refuse to answer calls of anyone attempting to locate the whereabouts of their camps – fearing it might be one of the unwanted agents. Indeed in the Sabarimala forests the Hill Pandaram express a generalized anxiety and antipathy towards the agents of forest contractors, and intimate that they are physically assaulted by them. It is very probable that in the past physical coercion against the Hill Pandaram was freely indulged in – and that this largely accounts for the 'timidity' and 'shyness' which characterizes their behaviour in the village setting. But compared with shifting cultivators

their nomadic tendencies, and the fact that they could retreat easily to more remote forests in order to evade the intrusions made upon them by the agents of the forest contractors gave them, no doubt, a certain independence [8].

The forest contractor himself visits the forest localities only infrequently; the Hill Pandaram deal primarily with his agents in the forest. In the Achencoil and Kallar ranges (some 110 sq. mi. of forest) there are two trading 'sheds', at Pallivasal and at Chitarmuzhi on the Kallar. Here in temporary thatched sheds an agent of the forest contractor lives, somewhat isolated from the wider society, the nearest town being Shencottah about twenty miles away. In Achencoil village, set in the heart of the forest, a local Nayar (Maran) landowner acts as a further agent for the contractor, taking an agreed percentage of the takings for handling the forest products. His 'shop' in the village has very much the atmosphere of a trading post, and on their visits to the village the Hill Pandaram are usually to be seen hanging-about this particular venue; it is very much an 'economic centre of gravity'.

Each of these trading localities carries the necessary provisions needed by the Hill Pandaram inhabiting the surrounding forests. Significantly the Hill Pandaram do not sell their forest collections to the agents, but rather a modified form of barter takes place. The agent takes the products which the Hill Pandaram bring to the shed – dammar, honey or incha bark – and the value of these is assessed, usually by measure rather than by weight. The amount is noted down by the agent. The Hill Pandaram will then take what provisions they require (the list earlier gives an example) and the value of these too will be calculated by the agent, and recorded, often in a small credit notebook, but sometimes on a scrap of paper. Sometimes the collectors will take a small advance with the provisions, and on an occasion may even sell their produce directly to the agent – but typically there is no medium of exchange involved in the transactions. Although this relationship is essentially an economic one, a fair degree of intimacy is engendered between the Hill Pandaram and specific agents by these contacts. Sometimes a Hill Pandaram family may camp near one of the trading sheds for a few days (though never close to the village). Loose sexual relations between the agents and Hill Pandaram women are evident; but it is noteworthy that I recorded no permanent liaisons. Village gossip often refers to the activities of past agents, alluding primarily to the alleged 'promiscuity' of the Hill Pandaram. A Kurava man I knew in Achencoil told me graphically how one Naidu contractor, who had a shed near Ambanad Tea Estate in the past, gave all the Hill Pandaram of the nearby forests muzzle-loaders, and while they were away hunting in the forest, and collecting other forest produce, made himself at home with their womenfolk. Several Hill Pandaram I knew were considered to be the

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[8] There is an essential similarity between the social situation of the Hill Pandaram and that of the Mbuti pygmies as described by TURNBULL (1966). Like the pygmies the Hill Pandaram move between "two worlds" – the forest and the village. But the "village world" the latter community comes into contact with is not a tribal one but a highly developed agrarian civilization.

children of the contractor. The story had a suitable ending; after a carefree, lustful early life the Naidu contractor later became a *swami* and now, according to the Kurava, lives a secluded life in Madurai temple.

The intrusive nature of this contractual trading system, geared as it is to the needs of a wider market economy; the fact that it is essentially one of mercantile barter and that credit arrangements serve to bind the collectors to the merchant trader; the increasing reliance of the Hill Pandaram on manufactured goods brought in by the merchants – all these features are reminiscent of trading contacts elsewhere, not only in South East Asia but also in the Americas – as described by MURPHY and STEWARD. The causal link these scholars postulate between such trading contacts and the emergence of a social pattern in which the individual family is the primary unit is equally apposite for South Indian hunter-gatherers. For as I have argued elsewhere inter-cultural factors are highly relevant in attempting to understand the present fragmentary nature of Hill Pandaram society – their nomadism and their limited group structuring. The hunter-gatherers of South India have been described as "culturally the most backward" (DARLINGTON 1969: 29) and as the "most primitive" (ELWIN 1943) of contemporary cultures. But their present cultural condition has it seems to me nothing to do with their genetic make-up or with their status as hunter-gatherers, but rather it is functionally related to their enclavement, as gatherers of forest commodities, within the environs of a pre-industrial state. The alleged cultural impoverishment of these cultures therefore has little to do with the fact that they are hunter-gatherers, still less that they are a 'survival' of some primaeval food gathering culture that was once widespread in Southern India; rather their 'individualistic culture' (as both RAGHAVIAH 1962 and GARDNER 1966 so describe South Indian gatherers) is an adaptive response to external pressures, and to their economic enclavement in, and exploitation by, an urban pre-industrial civilization.

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