

The Ethnography of South Asian Foragers

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Annu. Rev. Anthropol. 2009.38:99–114

First published online as a Review in Advance on June 23, 2009

The *Annual Review of Anthropology* is online at anthro.annualreviews.org

This article's doi:
10.1146/annurev-anthro-091908-164345

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0084-6570/09/1021-0099\$20.00

Key Words

contemporary hunter-gatherers, egalitarian societies, subsistence foraging, human ecology, cultural resilience, indigenous peoples

Abstract

Forty contemporary South Asian societies continue to carry out hunting and gathering as their primary subsistence strategy, but who are these societies? In which ways are they similar or dissimilar? Are they like contemporary foragers in other world areas? This article reviews ethnographic research concerning contemporary South Asian foragers with a focus on subsistence, cosmologies, and social organization. Major conclusions are that evolutionary/devolutionary theories about foragers during the documented ethnographic period lack reliable data and that theories of trade between farmers and foragers ignore the paramount importance of subsistence foraging practices. Currently, theories based on interpretations of foragers' own cultural categories and standpoints constitute the most reliable ethnographic studies, and notable contributions are highlighted. Contemporary foragers themselves advocate that their best chances for cultural survival depend on state governments that maintain environmentally diverse, healthy forests, provide contemporary foraging communities access to their traditional natural resources, and implement projects that foster cultural survival rather than assimilation.

SA: South Asian

Forager: Used interchangeably with “hunter-gatherer” in this essay, one who carries out food collecting; one who hunts, gathers, and fishes for resources

South Asian geographic region:

A geographical area bounded by the Indus River watershed; Brahmaputra River watershed; Andaman Sea; Sri Lanka; and Maldivian Islands

Contemporary

foragers: People who carry out food collection activities presently or within the last generation

Recent foragers:

communities of foragers documented in ethnographic studies who now have few or no families that rely upon food collecting

INTRODUCTION

The ethnography of South Asian (SA) foragers has played an important part in the theory and historical imagination of contemporary anthropology, although specific contributions have not always been apparent. Who exactly constitutes a forager in the South Asian geographic region remains a product of particular intellectual histories and colonial projects shaping cultural identity. Foraging societies historically have been defined by subsistence practices, in the manner of Sandhwar (1978, p. 157), who distinguished foraging Korwas, whose “economy depends on food collection,” from agricultural Korwas, whose “economy depends on food production.” The distinction between contemporary foragers and agriculturalists nevertheless involves more than the exploitation of wild versus domesticated resources. For this review, the foraging lifestyle is modeled as a particular set of economic and social structures, which are buttressed by a variable yet characteristic cosmological worldview (Ingold 1999; Lee 1999, p. 4). It is the trio of work, sociality, and cosmology that forms the fundamental criteria distinguishing foraging from other forms of social and economic life.

Current census data list 84.3 million of India’s 1 billion people as “scheduled tribes” (Census of India 2001). Including Nepal and Sri Lanka, ~1.5–2 million of South Asia’s scheduled tribes rely upon hunting, gathering, and fishing and may be defined as contemporary or recent foragers (Gautam & Thapa-Magar 1994, Singh 1994). Reviewing ethnographies and census data, an estimated 150,000 people from these societies continue to derive their subsistence from foraging. To put these figures in perspective, the population of native peoples in the United States and Canada is estimated at three million, of which 150,000 people historically have been considered recent hunter-gatherers (Hitchcock & Biesele 2000, pp. 4–5); about 15,000 of them are part-time contemporary foragers who continue to garner much of their subsistence from hunting, gathering, and fishing. Thus, South Asia is home to several times more full- and part-time contemporary

foragers than are other world areas. Excluding cultures described in the ethnographic literature in which foraging is a minor activity and not valorized, there are 40 contemporary societies whose work, sociality, and cosmological worldviews meet the definition of foraging societies. Their names are given below according to language family using the most common exonyms applied in scholarly literatures.

CONTEMPORARY SOUTH ASIAN FORAGING PEOPLES

The foraging societies of the SA region speak one of six language families with Dravidian languages being the most numerous and the isolate language, Kusunda, being the most distinctive in grammatical form and vocabulary (Emeneau 1989, Van Driem 2001, Watters 2006). In terms of population, Hill Kharias and Yanadis have the largest contemporary foraging populations with about 20,000 members of each ethnic group continuing subsistence foraging (Das 1931, Dash 1998, Reddy & Reddy 1987, Rao 2002, Thurston & Rangachari 1909, Vidyarthi & Upadhyay 1980). Several ethnic groups are highly endangered with less than 350 members who continue subsistence foraging. These include the Aranadan, Jarawa, Jeru, Kusunda, Onge, Shompen, Vedda, and Yerukula. Additionally, a number of ethnic groups that discontinued subsistence foraging in the 20th century are omitted from **Table 1**, below. The Nayadi, for example, are described as hunters who were being assimilated into the Hindu caste system as professional beggars at the time of ethnographic documentation (Aiyappan 1937).

Labeling foragers by ethnic names implies a cohesive ethnic identity, but in reality, there rarely is a correspondence between a named ethnicity and a mode of subsistence; three situations can arise. First, a one-to-one correspondence does exist in some situations. When virtually all people of a named ethnic group practice foraging, and few or none do not, naming is unproblematic. All Onges of the Little Andaman Islands, for example, practice foraging (Basu 1990, Pandya 1991). The

Table 1 List of contemporary South Asian foraging peoples

Language Family	Contemporary South Asian Foraging Peoples
Andamanese	Jeru, Jarawa (Eng), Onge, Puchikwar, Sentinelese
Austroasiatic	Birhor, Hill Bondo (Remo), Hill Juang, Hill Kharia, Hill Korwa, Shompen
Dravidian	Allar, Aranadan, Betta Kurumba, Chenchu, Chingathan, Cholanayakan, Jenu Kurumba, Kadu Kurumba, Kadar, Kanikkar, Malapandaram, Malamalasar (Mahamalasar), Malavedan, Mavilan, Mudugar, Nattu Malayar, Nayaka, Paliyan, Paniyar, Sholigar, Ulladar, Urali, Yanadi, Yerukula (Kurru)
Indo-European (IE)	Vedda
Isolate	Kusunda
Tibeto-Burman	Banraji, Raji, Raute, Chepang, Puroik (Sulung)

second situation arises when a named ethnic group has various subsistence pursuits and a minority of them practice subsistence foraging. For example, few Veddas pursue foraging for their livelihood, whereas others are recent foragers and the majority practice food cultivation and fishing (Brow 1978, 1990; Dharmadasa & Samarasinghe 1990; Schalk 2004; Seligman & Seligman 1911). Third, in other situations, dominant polities give several different foraging groups one ethnonym, such as “forest people” or “hill people.” Examples include *Banraja* (“forest kings”), *Kurumba* (“shepherd, nomad, mountaineer, jungle people”), *Allar* (“forest people”), and *Kattunaiken* or *Kattu Nayaka* (“wild/forest leaders”). This ethnonymic merging occurs when nonforagers lump together a number of seemingly similar ethnic groups living in remote areas. For example, of the 180,000 people known as *Kurumba*, many of those considered foraging communities are differentiated using modifiers such as the Upland *Kurumba*, Elephant specialist *Kurumba*, Neem tree-collecting *Kurumba*, Honey-collecting *Kurumba*, and Firebrand wielding *Kurumba*. Most of these groups today complement part-time foraging with food cultivation. A few of these groups continue subsistence foraging such as the Jenu *Kurumba*, also known as *Kattu Nayaka*, who number ~35,000 people, with subgroups using the self-designation *Nayaka* (Bird-David 1994, 1999b, Demmer 1997, Zvelebil 1981, 1988). Thus, lumping foragers of different locations, dialects, and cultural practices obscures, yet reflects, the process and politics of ethnic naming.

From foraging peoples’ perspectives, identifying social difference is based on criteria such as territory, sartorial choice, language variation, or clan group. Our list of foraging societies does not assume a one-to-one correlation between ethnic names and foraging groups and may not represent foragers’ own ethnic divisions. Furthermore, contemporary forager identities are not diachronically accurate. Over time, foraging groups may splinter and create new identities through ethnogenesis (Fortier 2009, p. 27; Schalk 2004), or they may be assimilated into surrounding dominant polities (Reddy & Reddy 1987, Zvelebil 1981).

“MOST PRIMITIVE TRIBES” IN THE BRITISH AND INDIAN COLONIAL IMAGINATION

While describing the people of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the seventeenth century, Director van Goens of the Dutch East India Company noted, “The Veddas are the original inhabitants of old. . . those people neither sow nor cultivate, but live off of hunting, honey, and a type of earth-acorn [wild yam] which grows abundantly in those forests” (Valentijn 2002, pp. 208–9). Thus began a series of descriptions by colonial scholars and administrators to catalog the foraging peoples of South Asia who were given epithets such as “aboriginal tribes,” “broken tribes,” or “primitive tribes” (Aiyappan 1948, Ananthakrishna Iyer 1909, Atkinson 1884, Dalton 1872, Forsyth 1889, Hamilton 1819, Knox 1681, Krishna Iyer 1941, Man 1885, Parker 1909, Radcliffe-Brown 1933, Thurston

Subsistence foraging:

Food collecting for a significant or major proportion of one’s subsistence

Part-time foraging:

food collecting for a minor proportion of one’s diet and valorizing the foraging lifestyle

Food cultivators:

People who plant crops and/or keep livestock. A continuum of productive forms ranges from full-time foraging to full-time cultivation

& Rangachari 1909). The anthropologists who followed the colonial scholars were fascinated not only by exotic forest-dwelling peoples, but with the idea of their primordialism. Evolutionists and diffusionists supposed that SA foragers represented an original state of humanity (Das 1931, Ehrenfels 1952, Fürer-Haimendorf 1943, Roy 1925, Seligman & Seligman 1911). Yet other scholars viewed them as devolved former members of agrarian society; Veddas were assumed to be Sinhalese colonists who gave up agriculture to pursue forest foraging (Parker 1909). The case for devolution to forest-based castes rested on circumstances that some tribal peoples told folk stories of once being high castes (S. Sinha 1962), whereas medieval Indic literatures described ferocious forest-dwelling peoples who paid tribute to the early states (Thapar 2001). Generally, premodern ethnographers combined descriptions of everyday practices of foraging-based communities with large doses of preconceptions, yet their works can be reread as texts containing new insights into historical interactions.

Devolutionary models have remained difficult to validate but have gained popularity in the ensuing years. Part of the popularity stems from political interests. Coveting the resources of forest-dwelling peoples, states denied foragers their rights to raw resources (Gadgil and Guha 1993, Sivaramakrishnan 1995, Skaria 1999). Some scholars even tried to fit existing data into devolutionary theories serving nation-state interests by describing foragers as “criminal tribes” (Tolen 1991) who steal forest resources from dominant state ownership. From a colonial viewpoint, it was better to treat foragers as people who needed to be reintroduced into modern society rather than people who deserved respect and territories as distinctly different forest-dwelling societies. If some anthropologists furthered state policies as the handmaidens of colonialism, others were the manservants of development. After Indian independence, numerous projects sprang up to solve the “problem of tribal isolation” (Mahendrakumar 2005), a euphemism referring to ethnic groups that had not

assimilated into the Indian state and had not succumbed to ethnocide. Some anthropologists such as Majumdar (1929) argued for the preservation of technologically simple societies. Yet many anthropologists advocated the introduction of schools, clinics, and farming technologies to the “backward tribal communities” (Tiwari 1997:1) which are now officially categorized by the Government of India as “Primitive Tribal Groups” (Bose 1963, Bhattacharjee 1980, Misra 1977, Mohanty 2002, Sharma 2006, Sinha 1968). As Shashi (1994, p. 64) noted when writing about the Yanadi, the fallout from such policies resulted in ethnocide, and “the government’s denial of Yanadis to their foraging areas caused the death-knell of Yanadi traditional subsistence” (compare Raghaviah 1962). Likewise, other foragers succumbed to the loss of their resources; they became landless tenants, suffered declining birthrates, and were assimilated into complex societies (Gurung 1989, Keyes 2002, Patnaik 2006, Reinhard 1976a, Verma 1977, Vidyarthi & Upadhyay 1980, Watters 2006). Broadly speaking, SA foraging studies concerning long-term histories and evolutionary change over time are not scientifically illegitimate pursuits; rather, they are founded on colonial interests in the absorption of small-scale societies together with the capture of their forest resources. Ethnographic studies grounded in primordialist or devolutionary positions are manifestations of the colonial imagination in primitive peoples and, as such, represent untenable folk theories.

THE NATURE OF FORAGING CULTURES

SA foraging-based societies display a range of kinship systems, ideologies, and subsistence strategies, but all are marked by a set of ideologies, work, and sociality, which differ in recognizable ways from those of food cultivators. SA foragers share certain features with other foragers worldwide, such as diffusion of authority, mobile settlement patterns, sharing of resources and tools, immediate consumption of foods, limited control over others, a

valuing of individual autonomy, and a valuing of food collection rather than food cultivation. Like egalitarian foragers elsewhere, SA foragers reject the notion of being part of a society; they are free from a social framework structured by political control over individuals (Ingold 1986, 1999). Instead, they live in families, bands, and clans in which decisions are achieved consensually within social systems that are marked by diffused power. Some researchers depict such micropolitical relations as anarchies, citing notable lack of authority over labor and decision-making of other group members (Barnard & Woodburn 1988, Gardner 1991, Morris 1982). Other researchers, working with formative states and complex foraging societies, depict political decisions as forms of heterarchy, in which social power is distributed along a continuum of individuals, temporary leaders, and regionally situated bands; the elements are unranked relative to one another (Crumley 1987, p. 158). SA foraging societies generally do display political decision-making that can be defined as either heterarchical or anarchic because individual decisions cannot be enforced by elders, religious edicts, or written legal systems. Instead, people learn to be good orators, using the rhetorical power of persuasion to influence other individuals. As such, various bands and individuals form their own decisions about when to move camp and what foods to forage (Fortier 2009, p. 27). SA foraging families share not only an emphasis on individual and group autonomy, but also a distinctive form of sociality, which stresses relatedness to others rather than objectifications of others. As Bird-David (1999a) noted, SA foragers ask not “What is it?” but “Who is it?” when dealing with other sentient beings (animals, wind, weather, spirits) in their environment. Another of the key features of foragers worldwide, and in the subcontinent, involves the sharing of food, materials, and skills within foraging communities. The moral economy of sharing has been explored among communities of Onge (Pandya 1991, 1993), Raute (Fortier 2000, 2001), Nayaka (Bird-David 1990), and Paliyan (Gardner 1993). Although there are

contours of difference, all the region’s foraging communities demonstrate extensive sharing of materials and resources.

One means of exploring the range of SA foraging sociality involves study of the relationship of subsistence strategies to settlement practices. South Indian foragers often adopt broad-spectrum foraging patterns. Nayaka and Paliyan, for example, opportunistically hunt a broad range of mostly smaller species and incorporate flexible settlement patterns, which enable them to adopt nomadism or sedentism under different conditions (Bird-David 1992, Gardner 1985). Northern foraging groups living in steeper montane environments, such as Rautes, Puroik, and Birhor, favor more focused foraging of medium-sized prey (langur, macaque, porcupine). Such hunting necessitates nomadic, flexible settlements near ever-changing hunting patches (Fortier 2003, Kumar 2004, Roy 1925, Stoner 1952, Williams 1968). Yet others such as Hill Kharia, Raji, and Chepang favor a mixture of broad-spectrum foraging of bats, porcupines, and deer combined with semisedentary settlements (Das 1931; Fortier 2009, p. 36; Gurung 1989; Reinhard 1976b; Roy & Roy 1937). A key feature of all SA foraging societies is that they tend to carry their technology “in the mind” (Ridington 1988, p. 107); techniques and knowledge are critical to understanding forager sociality. Spear hunting, for example, involves the hunter’s knowledge of animals, their location, their habits, and also hunting techniques. For example, Chenchus use a long-tip male arrow for hunting smaller game (hare, monitor lizard, jungle cat, barking deer, giant squirrel, mongoose, jungle fowl, pea fowl) but use a triangular, barbed female point for hunting larger game (nilgai, wild boar, porcupine, mouse deer, langur). Chenchu hunters also use *kattamararam* (catamarans) to hunt sambar deer wading in rivers (Füerer-Haimendorf 1943, Shashi 1994).

Other studies explore how political contingencies shape foraging strategies. For example, there have been few prohibitions against Tibetan peoples hunting langur and macaque. Whereas Rautes in Nepal rely on monkey

hunting, the Banrajis in India ceased hunting monkey a century ago because of Hindu prohibitions (Atkinson 1884, p. 367). Banrajis now hunt porcupine as their favorite prey species, one more acceptable to Hindus and forestry officials (Fortier 2009, p. 173; Negi et al. 1982). In Indian forests, officials have taxed forest resources, making traditional hunting difficult. Yet Indian foragers continue to hunt the dozen primate species of the subcontinent, often surreptitiously to avoid condemnation of their activities (Adhikary 1984b, Bhanu 1989, Morris 1982). Broadly, SA foragers adapt their prey choices and techniques to protect themselves from laws and competition from agrarian settlements. Kadars discontinued archery to avoid threats from forestry officials (Ehrenfels 1952, pp. 27, 56), Paliyans and Nayakas discontinued using hunting dogs (Gardner 2000, p. 243; Naveh 2007, p. 198), and Rautes claimed that they throw deer out of their hunting nets because this prey is reserved for farmers (Fortier 2009, p. 80).

Researchers have highlighted several commonalities and differences in the hunting and gathering repertoires of SA foragers. For example, Shompen, Banraji, Raute, Onge, Jarawa, and Chepang all use wooden-tipped spears while hunting (Caughley 2000, Fortier 2009, Pandya 2000, Patnaik 2006), yet particular spear uses are distinctive. Banrajis, for example, whittle mountain ebony (*Baubenia variegata*) into spears shortly before dispatching prey, but they may also flip one to wield as a club, mount on the shoulder as a carrying pole, establish it in a hut as a shelter pole, reconfigure it into a digging stick, or utilize it as a walking stick. The wooden-tipped spear becomes an efficient multipurpose tool and Banrajis use few other weapons. Note, however, that Banrajis give different names for these items: spear (*lo'be*), digging stick (*dzaa'to*), and mainstay pole (*khaa bung*). Thus these spears become eminently distinct cultural items rather than undifferentiated multipurpose tools. Other foragers, such as Kusundas, have also relied on spears but incorporate them into larger hunting repertoires

to complement the use of bow/arrows, poison, axes, nets, and traps (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1959; Reinhard 1968, 1976a; Watters 2006). Investigators have found a few uncommon technologies, as well. Chepangs and Jenu Kurumba (and recent foragers, the Chidimar) attach birdlime, a gummy resin, onto bamboo poles, which they telescope into trees to stick birds, causing them to fall to the forest floor (Caughley 2000, Gautam & Thapa-Magar 1994, Kayal 2009). Although SA blow-guns are infrequently used among SA foragers (Hutton 1924), Hill Kharias employ unique bamboo blowguns fitted with darts that have an array of two or more sharp tips (Peterson 2006, p. 279). Bow-and-arrow hunting is still a common activity among Hill Bondos (Anderson & Harrison 2008, Elwin 1950).

Hunting techniques also influence settlement sizes (Kelly 1995; Roscoe 1990, 2002); larger groups of Chepang, Raute, Raji, and Soligar use communal hunting techniques. Various people carry nets, act as beaters, and dispatch multiple animals caught in nets. Among Chepangs, spread nets are flung over large fig trees where sleeping bats are then entangled and dispatched (Caughley 1976, Gurung 1995). Among Birhors and Rautes, spread nets are tied to trees, and hunters persuade monkeys to run into the nets (Fortier 2009, Roy 1925, Singh 1997). To have enough hunters, nomadic Rautes maintain a fluctuating group of 8–30 hunters within a total settlement population of 85–150 people (Fortier 2000, Reinhard 1974). Living in smaller settlements, foragers such as Chenchu, Hill Kharia, and Shompen use spears, traps, and bow and arrow to capture single prey. Hill Pandaram have been theorized as having smaller, more autonomous groups because of commercial trade (Morris 1982). Paliyans hunt individually or in small groups using spears, billhooks, and deadfall traps (Gardner 1991, 1993). Hill Korwa and Puroik have both communal and individualistic hunting techniques (Majumdar 1929, Stoner 1952). Although investigators have researched hunting and settlement patterns in other world areas,

additional research is needed in South Asia to understand the relationship of settlement patterns and hunting techniques.

With the devastation of the subcontinent's faunal resources, many South Indian foragers are better known for their foraging and knowledge of plant resources, especially those living in monsoon climates with variations ranging from warm, temperate mediterranean climates to temperate or cool subtropical climates (Peel et al. 2007). They rely on key wild resources such as yams (*Dioscorea* spp.), palms (*Borassus* spp.), and taro (*Colocasia* spp.) in addition to 100+ locally available plants. In addition to edibles, SA foragers use many similar construction materials, including *Bauhenia*, *Boehmeria*, *Dendrocalamus*, *Urtica*, and *Giardinia* for thatch, rope, woven baskets, nets, and traps. Harvesting honey and beeswax has been a key feature of many SA foraging societies. The region is home to native stinging (*Apis* spp.) and stingless bees (*Melipona* spp.), giving SA foragers an added dimension to their subsistence compared with other foragers worldwide (Crane 1999, p. 11). Veddas have kept nests of stingless bees in their rock shelters (Seligman & Seligman 1911), Malapandarams collect honey from five bee species (Morris 1982, pp. 84–87), Paliyans and Rajis climb cliffs to reach combs of aggressive *Apis dorsata* bees (Gardner 1993, pp. 126–27; Valli 1998), and Birhors collect honey from the milder *Apis* species living in tree trunks (Dash 1998, p. 216). Other studies have analyzed honey-collecting rituals, fictive relationships between hunters and bees, and emotive ties of collectors and bees (Demmer 1997, 2004; Ehrenfels 1952; Fürer-Haimendorf 1943; Gardner 1993; Rai 1985). Although there appears to be a trend toward increased commercial trade of honey and other forest products, many SA foragers incorporate honey into their subsistence diets.

FORAGER SOCIALITY

Foragers' sociality must be appreciated not only through their subsistence strategies, but

also through their social and kinship organizations. Most SA foraging societies feature bilateral descent reckoning, bilateral cross-cousin marriage preferences, bilocal residence patterns, and Dravidian or Hawaiian kinship nomenclature. When clans exist, they are mostly patrilineal, in which children name their father's family as the consanguinal kin. Many of the foraging societies valorize marriage with either parent's cross-sex sibling's child, enabling a social balance between consanguines and affines. Such double-helix marriage preferences extend upward in generation, enabling ego to marry a variety of kin and meshing the boundaries of consanguinal and affinal kin (Fürer-Haimendorf 1943, Morab 1977, Rao 2002).

Concerning band organization, most societies are composed of clan-based groups. Clan-based kin systems indicate flexible changes in clan identities over generations; some foraging groups even adopt the clan names of neighboring food cultivators. For example, Caughley (2000, p. 332) records Chepang-speaking groups as maintaining their traditional Red-Earth and Black-Earth clans, whereas Rai (1985) records other Chepang groups recently adopting Hindu lineage names. As part of their impression management strategies with outsiders, Rautes have recently adopted Indic clan names (Raskoti, Kalyal); whereas Banrajis also have Indic clan names (Pateto, Patchpaya, Galdiyar, Barpelo) (Fortier 2009). Broadly, SA foragers' clan identities may be of apparently long duration in some cases or, in contrast, have been recently adopted in other cases. In cases of societies with clan systems, these identities have been based on totemism (i.e., Chenchu, Puroik), territorial affiliations (Raute, Korwa), or features such as hunting specialities (Hill Korwa, Mannan, Kurumba, Yanadi). In cases of societies without clan systems (e.g., Paliyan, Kusunda, Mahamalar, and Malapandaram), social relations are based on classificatory kinship, causing consanguineal versus affinal affiliation largely to order social relations. More complex descent groups also occur, such as moiety systems (e.g., Hill Bondo) and phratries

(Kanikkar and Kadar). Matrilineal societies reportedly include the Kanikkar, Ulladar, Mahamalar, Malavedan, and Urali (Krishna Iyer 1941).

In the subcontinent, all the foraging societies use Dravidian forms of kinship, indicating that marriage is preferred with a cross-cousin but that parallel cousin marriage is considered incestuous. The only exception involves societies of Andaman Islanders who reportedly use Hawaiian kinship systems, which merge all cousins and siblings, making cousin-marriage untenable (Basu 1990, pp. 54–65; Radcliffe-Brown 1933, pp. 53–70). Although most of the societies under discussion valorize bilateral cross-cousin marriage, the Malavedan, Kanikkar, Kharia, Kusunda, Ulladan, and Yerukula reportedly prefer matrilineal cross-cousin marriage only. This practice may be native to these groups or otherwise indicate adoption of the marriage preferences of the surrounding dominant agrarian societies.

The foragers of the subcontinent are egalitarian, yet forms of shifting authority are invested within the kinship system. Broadly, foraging groups recognize married elder men and women as having more authority: Kinship forms denote primogeniture, persuasive elders act as temporary leaders (Sanskrit: *nayaka*), and opinions of rhetorically gifted elders hold more political weight. Among patrilineal Kusundas, for example, political power varies by the relationship of ego to others in their kinship network. Ego's paternal uncle carries more authority than do other relatives, and ego addresses him by one of six names according to his marital status and relative age (Watters 2006). In dealing with outsiders, many foraging societies have designated particular male elders to speak on their behalf. For example, among Chenchus, a "big man" (*peddamanchi*) speaks with outsiders concerning administrative issues with government officials (Turin 1999, p. 254).

Just as kinship systems regulate forager sociality, so do foragers' religious and cosmological beliefs. Foragers manifest their beliefs using portable materials and techniques,

with strong emotive ties to ancestral spiritual essences rather than to memorialized individual ancestors (Adhikary 1984b; Bird-David 1999a; Gardner 1991; Morris 1982; Pandya 1993). Foragers such as the Birhor, Chepang, Raute, and Vedda believe that community members become benign human spirits (Adhikary 1984b, Caughley 2000, Fortier 2009, Meegaskumbura 1990, Seligman & Seligman 1911). Onges propitiate benign and malevolent ancestral spirits (Pandya 1993, 2000); Jenu Kurumbas argue with lonely, potentially angry beings in need of reconciliation with the living (Demmer 2001).

When conducting healing ceremonies or communicating with deceased relatives, SA foraging communities conduct shamanic rituals (Bird-David 1996, Gardner 1991, Morris 1981, Reinhard 1976b). Foragers' handling of illness and injury has been examined in terms of etiological beliefs, diagnostic practices, ritual symbolism, and dialogic discourse (Bird-David 2004; Demmer 2001, 2004, 2006; Gardner 1995). Shamanic ceremonies involve cacophonous music, possession and altered states of consciousness, confrontations with deities or spirits, and night-long events (Rahman 1959, Riboli 2000, Watters 1975), and philosophically complex belief systems have been recorded among Onges (Pandya 1993). Disease etiologies of SA foragers can be related to supernatural conflicts or attributed to natural causes and treated with herbal remedies. Studies of ethnopharmacology and ethnomedical systems suggest that foragers' naturalistic medical knowledge particularly concerns both indigenous theories of disease causation (Gardner 1995) and practical knowledge concerning fractures, bruises, stomach aches, sore muscles, and bites, among others that are common to nomadic foraging lifestyles (Manandhar 1998).

Foragers' rituals and cosmologies include not only human relatives, but nonhuman relatives and other-than-human persons. Ethnographers have recorded SA foragers as recognizing rock ancestors, grandparent deities, yam beings, bee mothers and comb lords, monkey

brothers, and bear kings as relatives. For example, Chenchu youths compliment a girl by comparing her to a monkey (Thurston & Rangachari 1909, pp. II, 35), and Rautes call monkeys their “little brothers” (Fortier 2000). Broadly, SA foragers create a distinctive egalitarian, relational bond with other sentient beings whom they honor as integral to their social relations. This view asserts that animism is understood as a subjective relationship with other sentient beings and has been reformulated as a relational ontology (Bird-David 1999a, Bird-David & Naveh 2008). SA foragers also honor supernatural relatives and beings. For example, the solar deity among SA foragers in central and northern areas is known by the root cognate *Gwab* among Kusunda, Raute, and neighboring foraging horticulturalists; another name uses the root form *Dar*. A detached, distant persona, the solar deity is figured as a creator-parent figure. The Birhor described themselves as the “children of the Sun (*Darba*)” (Adhikary 1984b, Roy 1925), Banrajis say the Sun (*Dibo*) created yams and water before creating themselves so that they would have something to eat, and Rautes say “*Damu* created us” (Fortier 2009, p. 147). A male deity, known as *Ber*, regulates hunting among Korwa, Kharia, Juang, Birhor, and Raute, and a female deity known as *Kayu* acts similarly for Banraji and Kusunda. Chenchus propitiate *Gare(la)*, giving flowers and asking this female deity of the forests to keep them safe during hunts, to avoid predators, to find food, etc. Veddas propitiate a male hunting deity, *Kande*, with elaborate dances, and Paliyans ask male and female deities for aid during hunts. A class of impersonal supernatural forces, representing mostly thunder, earthquakes, and other weather storms, is prevalent among some of the foraging communities. The Banraji of Kumaun, for example, fear *Bayna Ha’wa*, a “great [wind] force” that causes people to die immediately (Fortier 2009, p. 156), whereas Andaman Islanders determine camp moves according to supernatural wind forces (Pandya 1993). SA foragers acknowledge many borrowed Hindu deities, yet these play a

minor role; occasionally foragers conduct rituals for Hindu villagers (Gardner 1988), attend major yearly Hindu celebrations, or incorporate local Hindu deities into healing rituals.

The ritual life of SA foragers involves expressive and material culture; SA foragers learn about rituals through observing, imitating, experimenting, and mimicking their adepts (Bird-David 2005, Gardner 2000, Naveh 2007, Pandya 2005). They also incorporate expressive cultures of play and painting (Gardner 2000, Pandya 2009), wood carving (Ehrenfels 1952, Fortier 2009), and verbal and performance arts (Demmer 2006, Elwin 1950, Fortier 2002). Expressive cultures vary, but emphasize using portable materials, verbal arts, simple/repetitious design elements, empty/open design spaces, symmetry, few boundaries, and practical arts combining form and function.

TRADE, POLITICS, AND INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS

All contemporary foragers worldwide are tied to external economies and political institutions, becoming encapsulated within neighboring dominant systems (Lee 2006, Woodburn 1982). SA foragers, too, have interacted with larger polities, and a number of writings address cross-cultural politics and social relations (i.e., Morris 1982; Obeyesekere 2009; Tharakan 2003, 2007). Unlike Native Americans, or Australian Aborigenes, SA foraging societies have experienced no great transformation during which spreading farm-based societies suddenly impinged on foragers, at least in the ethnographic record. Instead, foragers of the Old World, including Africa, have managed contact and trade relations with complex agrarian societies for millenia and continued to maintain their distinctive foraging mode of production (Allchin 1958, Denbow 1984, Lukacs 1990, Morrison & Junker 2002, Robbins et al. 2000, Stiles 1993). Contemporary SA foraging societies represent those who, despite having lost many of their natural resources to deforestation and spreading farming populations,

have been unwilling to cross over to food cultivation and its distinct cultural differences.

Contemporary SA foragers reflect a continuum of adaptive responses to encapsulation, encroachment, and increasingly intensive trade. Their strategies involve activities such as protecting their beliefs and practices, accepting government land allotments and development grants, and collecting forest products for trade. For example, of the 66,000 Korwa of northern India, ~3164 depend on a food collection-based economy (Majumdar 1929, Sandhwar 1978, Singh 1994). With shrinking forest resources, these remaining foragers continue broad-spectrum hunting, using bow and arrow, axes, traps, and a few old guns to hunt pig, blackbuck, deer, feral cow, sambar, rabbits, and birds. But while hunting, they have intensified their bamboo collections, chopping reeds to weave baskets that are sold in nearby villages. Whereas bamboo used to be valued for subsistence, it has increasingly become valued for exchange, causing increased social interaction between foragers and farmers. Malapandarams too now gather forest produce in exchange for rice, cloth, and iron (Morris 1982); Birhors weave and sell *Baubenia* rope (Roy 1925); and many SA foragers trade honey to nonforagers.

Most researchers who refer to SA foragers as “professional primitives” (Bose 1956, Fox 1969, Seligman & Seligman 1911) have failed to appreciate the degree to which foraging economies have depended on forest resources for their own subsistence. While SA foragers engage in trade with others, it hinders understanding of forager economics and sociality to label them “professional primitives,” as people who subsist by selling forest products in markets. Indeed, such interpretations prevented foragers from claiming cultural rights over traditional hunting and gathering territories, causing undue hardship when they were denied access to forests by state governments. In the last generation, however, foraging studies researchers appreciate better the relationship of foragers to their environments and their resources, focusing less on trade itself and more

on the role of trade within foraging economies (Bird-David 1990, 1992; Fortier 2001; Gardner 1985; Tharakan 2003). Although there exist primary ethnographies on forager resource uses, contemporary researchers need to spend much more time documenting the ethnobiology of foragers’ subsistence practices and beliefs (compare Dash 1998, Singh 1997).

SA foragers have conducted not only trade with others, but a variety of economic exchanges, including patron-clientage, wage labor, bonded labor, and payment of in-kind taxes of forest produce. In their dealings with agrarian societies, foragers have used a variety of intercultural exchange strategies. Gardner (1985, 2000) describes “bicultural oscillation” and “bicultural versatility” as the flexible movement to and from underclass worker to forest forager in cultural frontier settings. This notion has enabled some scholars to account for transitions in forager lifestyles and identities (e.g., Stiles 2001). Fortier (2002) sees impression management as an interactional strategy allowing foragers to engage safely in trade with outsiders. The Seligmans (1911) described Veddas performing dances for outsiders rather than delivering forest produce. Various researchers have described silent trade techniques that foragers employ. For example, Banrajis wordlessly leave wooden bowls in villagers’ courtyards, expecting them to fill the bowls with grain and keep the bowls (Atkinson 1884). Kusundas leave deer in villager courtyards hoping for an exchange for villager goods (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1959). Puroiks provide forest produce to their agrarian neighbors on occasion (Fürer-Haimendorf 1955, p. 157; Stoner 1952). One area of notable difference among SA foragers involves their perceptions of outsiders and their reactions to outsiders during trade and communication. Whereas some societies, such as Paliyans, are notably peaceful (Gardner 2004), even being characterized as “original peaceful societies” in popular literatures, others such as Sentinelese, Ongees and Jarawa are known in the literature for violent reactions to encroachment and outsiders’ trade initiatives (Pandit 1990, Pandya 2000, Radcliffe-Brown 1933).

Thus, SA foragers have engaged in intercultural trade and communication through a variety of strategies. Reviewing the literature, it is notable that foragers who traded in nonrenewable resources, particularly bushmeat, often fell into patronage or peonage and/or assimilated into farming communities. Foragers who traded in quickly renewable resources (jute, rope, carved wood, bamboo, honey) apparently have experienced more cultural resilience. Such economic relations may have been based on barter in the past, but with agrarian encroachment, some foragers engage in other types of economic exchange such as wage labor and marketing. It may not matter whether SA foragers developed economies of exchange with others for them to be considered foragers; such relations affected but did not alter the fundamental realities of SA foraging as founded on hunting and gathering, kinship-based social organizations, and spirit-based religions.

EMERGING TRENDS AND CONCLUSIONS

Foraging groups throughout the subcontinent continue to share a constellation of features distinguishing them from neighboring agrarian populations. In addition to avoidance of food cultivation, contemporary SA foraging societies use simple tools, share tools and resources, rely on short-term food storage systems, consume food resources directly, avoid manipulation of uncultivated resources, live in biologically rich and diverse environments, avoid sociopolitical control over others, use kinship-based social systems, worship relatively complex groups of spirits and deities, and use animate relational ontologies to organize their cultural worlds. Compared with agrarian populations, SA hunter-gatherers are more mobile and flexible in their land use, influence others through persuasion rather than physical force, place sanctions on accumulation of property, and employ political practices to ensure that elders' authority is limited. All the contemporary foraging societies of southern Asia in this review

are egalitarian rather than nonegalitarian foragers (Kelly 1995, p. 31; Woodburn 1982).

As Hymes (1973) advocated years ago, the best theory making is done among a field of theories rather than among dominant paradigms that are constantly challenged, torn down, and reconstituted. The study of SA foragers ultimately benefits from the creative theory making of many rather than the top-down theory making of a few. However, considering there are 40 distinct foraging populations in South Asia, the production of notable anthropological dissertations and monographs in the past decade has been relatively minimal (Demmer 2006, Fortier 2009, Gardner 2000, Kumar 2004, Naveh 2007, Norström 2003, Pandya 2009, Rao 2002, Riboli 2000, Samal 2000, Venkateswar 2004, Watters 2006). Offsetting this trend, however, studies of SA foraging societies are broadening and being undertaken in development studies, sociology, cultural geography, linguistics, and botany, among other disciplines (i.e., Singh 1997, Manandhar 1998).

In the near future, one should expect to see anthropological research concerning politics, identity, ethnobiology, cultural ecology, sociolinguistics, cognitive studies, native epistemologies, and human rights. For example, foraging communities soon may be able to demonstrate rights to their aboriginal territories and resources. SA area scholars will conceivably facilitate contemporary foraging peoples' efforts to gain their land and civil rights. Most groups emphasize that they need access to rich forest resources to continue their foraging lifestyles, yet many have been evicted from their traditional habitats (Gardner 2004, Reddy & Reddy 1987, Stegeborn 1999). Giving oral testimony to their hardships, researchers increasingly facilitate their endeavors to obtain rights to traditional resources (Norström 2003, Singh 1997, Venkateswar 2004). Overall, although SA foraging communities have had many different historical experiences, they all continue to depend on foraged foods and anchor their identities as people living in biologically rich and diverse environments.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research relevant to the preparation of this article is gratefully acknowledged from the Fulbright Foundation in 2004–2005 and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research in 1997 and 2001. Special thanks go to Peter Gardner for helpful comments on the manuscript.

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Errata

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