

The Colorful Kaleidoscope of Peripatetics

Not all itinerant peoples are pastoralists. Some are fishermen, some lumbermen migrating to the forest in season, some mobile farm workers. Often peripatetics are despised by members of the larger society. Being agents of Christ in conveying his love to them requires special effort.

by David J. Phillips

There are hundreds of itinerant peoples who are not pastoralists. The peripatetic has to be directly involved with the surrounding society and does not so much have assets, such as the herds of the pastoralists, as he or she is his or her own asset with whatever training, skills, experience, and mobility he or she has. The peripatetics have their lives shaped by the major skills they use, a craft or service provided more conveniently than society can. This skill and life-style is the source of their social distinctiveness. The entertainer has his props, the craftsman carries his tools, the trader leads his pack animals or cart, and the hawker offers his goods, but above all he has his own and his family's abilities and resourcefulness to develop other skills. From this point of view the peripatetic may be called a professional or service nomad, using 'profession' in the sense of having skills not available to most people. The tools and resources for his profession are easily accessible to him or carried with him, so that he needs no long-term or involved ties with others in society.

They are often despised for being of a lower social rank or of even a different origin, with the result that they assimilate the language and customs of the host culture. But this is a pose, when underneath they have their own sense of identity, customs and even language. Their craft is often associated with occult powers, and they can be feared for this as well as despised. Many have myths of their origin that involve a sense of guilt, that their itinerant life is due to some mistake of the past: The Gadulyia Lohar because of their cowardly flight from the Muslims. The Inadan their ingratitude to Mohammed. The Ghorbati also have tales of ingratitude being the cause of their nomadism.

A special effort must be made to reach them, seeing them as distinct in their own right and not assumed to be reached because the dominant society is being reached. They can be dismissed as 'unstrategic' because small or scattered. A definite strategy must be worked out to include them, either as separate or with others

Only a few examples can be given here. (See separate articles on "Romany Origins and Migrations" and "The Dom of North Africa.")

Inadan

(pron: InHADan; Enad Sing.) are the blacksmiths and leather workers of Tuareq society in Mali and Niger, totalling perhaps 10,000. The men wear the blue veil as the Tuareq do. While they are an integral part of Tuareq society, they can be also encountered in groups of as many as a few families to over a hundred well away from the Tuareq, both in cities like Bamako and as itinerants

with their own camels or donkeys. They make jewellery, silver ornaments, saddles, camel bags, various tools, bowls and utensils of all kinds. They manufacture swords and spears and many are stone and wood carvers. Their most prestigious work to be the making of the highly decorated saddles of the Tuareq. They are also the minstrels. At night they will put away their tools, bind a turban of talismans around their head to play a local guitar, sing and others dance

The two chief characteristics of an enad is his craft, with its association with magic, and his persuasive sales talk. They consider craftsmanship is 'in the blood' so that no-one can practise it

except an Inadan, anyone else who attempts to practise these crafts is attacked or harassed. They claim to be descendants of King David, because in some early Islamic legends David is considered the first blacksmith. One theory suggests they are descended from Moroccan Jews. They believe they are condemned to subjection to the Tuareq nobles and misery because of ingratitude to the prophet Muhammad. While many can be reached by the work with the Tamajeq or Tuareq there is a need to survey whether a specific outreach is needed, especially to the scattered groups needed, especially to the scattered groups.

Ghorbati

Also called Qorbati or Kowli Iran. (For the Dom see separate article) These are Gypsy tinkers and smiths, and itinerant musicians, dispersed throughout Iran and as sieve, drum and basket makers in Afghanistan. They also attach themselves to the nomadic pastoralists in the Zagros Mountains such as the Lur, Basseri and Qashqa'i. They consider being called Luri derogatory; it also confuses them with the Lur, a com-

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pletely different Iranian pastoralist people, who number over 4 million. They have no sheep or goats, but manufacture or repair horseshoes, spindle whorls for weaving, sheep shears, pots and pans, etc. Their women move between the camp groups selling their wares, pass on news and gossip, but otherwise there is little communication between the two ethnic groups. They have various tales of how they came to Persia to be nomads, and also of their disdain for farmers and the settled life. Muslims consider them ritually 'unclean'. The Islamic revolution banned the music between 1979-1989 and they suffered great hardship. However, since then the situation may be improving for them. The Luti speak the language of their host people and possibly the Kurbat dialect of Domari.

Sorogo

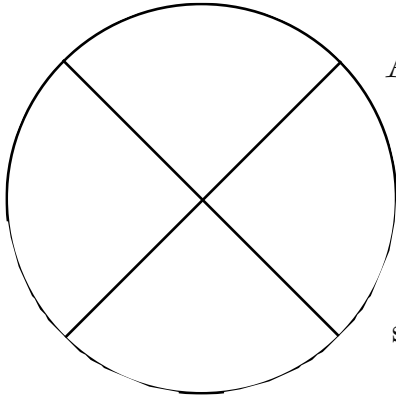
Sorogo (also called Bozo or Sebbe) are semi-nomadic fishermen and boat builders on the Niger and Senegal Rivers and lakes created by the new dams in Mali. In fact Soroge is the own name of one group, in a group of peoples of four different ethnic origins. Others are Marka, one of the original peoples of the Niger Delta before the arrival of the Fulbe, and considered to be Soninke farmers to changed to fishing. Somono are other fishermen other than the Soroge. The fourth group are of mixed descent from the Bambara, Dogon, Malinke and Sorogea. They use four languages, one of which is Sorogama with six dialects. Estimates of the numbers are up to 200,000. Soroge villages are often cut off by water and difficult to find. Typically, they consist of compounds or drift wood fences joined on to each other, with low barrel roofed palm leaf or woven mat huts. Usually the roofs have fish laid out to dry in the sun.

Khyampa

Khyampa, which means 'wanderer' are a 1,000 strong community in the Humla region, in Far Western Nepal, who the Nepalis consider the Bhotia. Their 170 'households' live in tents all the year round and migrate together, transporting salt and rice on their sheep and goats. Their domestic goods are carried by cows, or on their few horses. Their trade route reaches from Purang in Tibet to near the Indian border through the Kuwari, Kurna and Buriganga valleys in four districts of Far Western Nepal. They took up trading, because they had no land to grow wheat and settle themselves, because the long-established Bhotia had all the fertile land. However, the Bhotia and Tibetan Drok-pa nomads lacked rice, but the Drok-pa in Tibet used to exchange Tibetan salt for Nepalese rice that the Humli brought north in August each year. They travel south in autumn to sell the blankets they make from their own sheep' wool. They migrate further to the Indian border to barter Nepalese rice for Indian sea-salt in the Terai, the southern lowlands of Nepal, exchanging Nepalese currency, which is obtained by selling. Then they move north to trade the salt and rice with the Bhotia and rice with the Drokpa of Tibet, during the brief summer that the passes are open. As far as is known these people have no Christian contact.

Fuga

Fuga (Southern Ethiopia) is a term used by Gurage, Kambata, Yemma, Oromo and Wolayata agriculturists for their associated groups of craftsmen. They work as blacksmiths, tanners, potters and woodcarvers. The term fuga is derogatory. They may have originated as a one of the early hunter-gatherer peoples of the region.



A refrain in reports on peripatetic peoples is that there is no known Christian outreach to them or that there are no known followers of Christ among them. Often Christian witness will need to overcome suspicions from both the people themselves and the surrounding community.

They cross tribal boundaries according to the opportunities to practise their trades and their farming host peoples consider them nomads. They settle temporarily in flimsily built huts, just outside their host village on a plot set aside for them. They are considered to make their hosts houses and food unclean and the fields infertile. They are both feared for the magical powers and despised for not being farmers. Usually the host society denies them the ownership of land and doing agriculture and this may be the reason for their itinerant life style.

Riasiti

Gypsies are 15 million non-pastoral Gypsies in Pakistan. The Riasitis were the original inhabitants of Bahawalpur, the southern part of the Punjab. When the Punjabis moved south in the early 20th century many Riasitis sold their land for cash, and then were reduced to a peripatetic life as shepherds, migrant farm labourers, basket weavers, trinket sellers, circus workers, breeders of hunting dogs, and trainers of bears and monkeys. They are constantly mobile and sustained contact with the same family group is often difficult. They are Muslims, but they trust more in taweez, or amulets, and pirs or holy men. Their language is Siraiki, which is spoken by many others totalling about 35 million. A Bible translation is underway and genesis and Jonah are ready. Only about 20% of the Riasitis can read, but there is a literary movement active in the language. A Baptist church and SIM are ministering to them. Community health care is a need that is being met.

Tahtaci

The Tahtaci (Turkey) are 'those working with planks', a name they have had since they worked as lumbermen in the forests working for feudal landlords in the Ottoman Empire. Their number is over 100,000. They keep to themselves and are found in settlements in the mountains of southern and western Turkey; they spend the winter in the valleys and in early spring move into the mountain forests as family groups. They start felling trees on the lower slopes gradually working upwards as the weather gets warmer until in the heat of summer they are working at the cooler high altitudes.

The clan is the main social unit, consisting of up to 20 nuclear families. Some clans have been able to buy marginal land, build houses, and grow a winter crop of barley and corn, planting it in autumn and harvesting it in early spring. The Tahtaci keep to themselves, even when living in the towns, and tend to be secretive. Other Turks are

suspicious of them, accusing them falsely of being thieves or immoral, mainly through prejudice against them for being Shiites. The Tahtaci, among a number of Shiite groups in Turkey, are followers of Ali. They have pre-Islamic beliefs and taboos about which they are secretive, and they offer prayers for the trees they fell. They have a tradition of coming from Khorasan, Iran, and it is possible they originated as Iranians arriving in Turkey in the 15th century. Because of the distrust and even harassment they suffer from the Turkish majority, they have been favorable to any movement that counters Sunni power, such as Ataturk's vision of a secular Turkey, and are said to be vaguely sympathetic to Christianity. They also distrust Iranian fundamentalism. There is no known Christian outreach among them.

Qalandar

The Qalandar (Pakistan) are some 900 families of animal trainers, acrobats, jugglers, magicians and impersonators. There are others in North India travelling leading Himalayan bears monkeys and other animals and beating a drum. There are probably many more of these groups in South Asia. They think of their nomadic life as paryatan, which means 'purposeful planned movement to carry out specialised skills'. Each family camps in bender tents that are owned by a married

couple. They have a myth that connects them with the time of Alexander the Great, when a woman among their ancestors refused to give food to a beggar. The beggar cursed them to always wander like hungry stray dogs, so that they are condemned to be nomads. In both India and Pakistan, they are Sunni Muslims and their main shrine is at Abu Ali or Bu Ali Qalandar who died in 1323. They have their own secret cant with many Persian words. There are no known Christians among them.

Karretjie

The name Karretjie (Cape Province, Republic of South Africa) means 'donkey cart people.' The Karretjie support themselves as itinerant sheep-shearers in the season and any other casual farm labour. They are descended from the original inhabitants of the Karoo region, the Khoi nomadic pastoralists, who resisted the European colonists, but were finally reduced farm labourers, and more importantly landless. They are treated as the lowest rank of society, and have been discriminated against for 200 years. The Karoo, meaning 'thirst land', covers 260,000 sq. km. (100,000 sq. miles), but the farmland is owned by a few thousand sheep farmers. Most of the Karretjie have lost their position as farm workers, and been forced into a precarious itinerant life seeking what work the dominant white farming community might give them.

The Karretjie camp, in groups of five to a dozen families, either on farm lands with the permission of the farmer or on the outskirts or verges of the roads. They travel considerable distances, perhaps hundreds of kilometres, for a few days work. They use donkeys and donkey carts, but also walk and hitchhike with trucks. Families will use the same site as

their 'home' outskirts. Any Christian witness would have to overcome the suspicions of both the people themselves and the farmer community.

Chamaars

This is a populous "untouchable" caste who were leather workers, but are now mostly agricultural labourers or day workers in the towns. In Uttar Pradesh they number over 13,000,000, in Rajasthan 2,500,000, Bihar 4,000,000 and Orissa 146,000. There are a number of nomadic subcastes: Siyar Marwa or jackal killers. The jackal is usually killed by setting a trap with a small explosive device in it. The meat is dried into strips to preserve it, and eaten as required by this subcaste. The Chamaar Mungta make a living by begging both in the cities and in villages. They travel in small family groups, camping in a village for days at a time. They also earn some money by working as ear cleaners in the cities, plying that trade in busy areas such as railway stations. The ear-cleaning method involves the use of oil and hand-made cotton swabs. Apparently they are territorial, with each family group being assigned a particular group of villages from which to make their living. The Kangkali are travelling musicians. The Patharkat make grinding stones and hawk various goods around the villages. These groups never build huts but camp under a tree and stay for a few days, especially at harvest time. The villages on the North Indian plains have at least one large grove of mango trees in an open space.

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