

Free the kung bushmen of the kalahari essay sample

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Introduction

“ Eating Christmas in the Kalahari” (1969) and “ The Hunters: Scarce Resources in the Kalahari” (1968) are two articles by Lee Richard Borshey that detail the everyday life of the Kung bushmen of the Kalahari Desert. The author spent some time living and interacting with members of this community and learnt a lot about their way of life. His experiences shed light on some of the characteristics that define different societies including adaptive strategies, means and modes of production, division of labor and reciprocity.

One of the most interesting thing that comes out in the article “ The Hunters; Scarce Resources in the Kalahari” is that the life if the Bushman is not perhaps as a boring and hard as many would contend it to be. In fact, the tribesmen seem pretty contented with their lives. The Kalahari Desert is known for its scorching sun and little rainfall. It is assumable that such factors would make the lives of the Kung tribesmen not enjoyable at all, but as shown by Lee, the Kung have adopted various adaptive strategies to cope with such factors. Lee for instance talks about how the tribesmen, usually, cluster around well especially during the hot season (Lee, 1968, p. 31). Staying close to the well is particularly an excellent adaptive strategy as in addition to the guarantee of water, adjacent to the well is a hinter land within a radius of six miles that Kung Bushmen exploit for animal and vegetable foods.

The other interesting thing and that has perhaps often been a victim misconception is that member of bush tribes are extremely close knit and isolated. However as Lee shows fact that an individual in this tribe only

spends about a third of his life living with close relatives while the other fraction is spent travelling and entertaining guests (Lee, 1968, p. 831). This is an excellent adaptive strategy that keeps the Kung tribesmen in the move and therefore very active, just like in the real world where individuals are often on the move.

The main food of the Kung tribesmen includes both vegetables and animal meat. This is not an uncommon feature as there are thousands of bush tribes across the world that have a similar food culture but the interesting thing about the Kung Bushmen is that in spite of the fact that they live in the desert, vegetables actually take preference over meat (Lee, 1968, p. 31). Therefore, the major means of food production in this community is the picking of wild vegetables and not hunting as many would expect. As Lee shows, hunting is, in fact, an extremely difficult and tiresome activity whose possibility of positive results are significantly low. For instance, the probability of making a kill for a man who sets out to hunt in is 0.23 whereas that of a woman who sets out on to collect vegetables is 1

This activity of food production also reveals an interesting thing about the divisions of labor in this community. Men are charged with the duty of hunting while the women are responsible for gathering vegetables. While in many communities men are the breadwinners, there is almost an indirect reversal of this role among the Kung tribesmen because as shown earlier, the main diet is actually comprised of vegetable's which have been collected by women.

Literature often documents the Bushmen as individuals who are isolated from other communities, but as Lee's experience reveal, this is not the case

because there are elements of reciprocity with other communities such as the Tswana. This is not just in terms of exchange of goods, but also in other aspects such as collaborative celebrations, for example the trance dances. It is also interesting to find out that the King have their own distinctive code of keeping members of the society in check, that is ensuring that members do not go overboard about their achievements and therefore become arrogant (Lee, 1969, p. 34). Lee is, for example, taunted about his choice of the ox to be slaughtered for the tribesmen during Christmas. To him, it is the fattest ox in the land, but people taunt him telling him it is only composed of bones and will consequently not satisfy all the members of the tribe. Putting down the achievements of individualism the Kung way of decreasing levels of arrogance and extreme pride in the society.

The two articles by Lee reveal a great deal about human nature as well as the characteristics of society, in this case the Kung society. It shows that adaptive strategies, modes and means of food production, division of labor and reciprocity are some of the defining elements of each society.

References

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