**The Original Affluent Society - by Marshall Sahlins**

**"A Kind of Material Plenty"**

Considering the poverty in which hunters and gatherers live in theory, it comes as a surprise that Bushmen who live in the Kalahari (Southern Africa) enjoy "a kind of material plenty", at least in the realm of everyday useful things, apart from food and water: "As the Kung (A South African Tribe) come into more contact with Europeans they will feel sharply the lack of our things and will need and want more. It makes them feel inferior to be without clothes when they stand among strangers who are clothed. But in their own life and with their own artifacts they were comparatively free from material pressures. Except for food and of which the Nyae Nyae Kung have a sufficiency - but barely so, judging from the fact that all are thin though not emaciated (starving) - they all had what they needed or could make what they needed, for every man can and does make the things that men make and every woman the things that women make... They lived in a kind of material plenty because they adapted the tools of their living to materials which lay in abundance around them and which were free for anyone to take such as wood, reeds, bone for weapons and implements, fibres for cordage, grass for shelters. The Kung could always use more ostrich egg shells for beads to wear or trade with, but, as it is, enough are found for every woman to have a dozen or more shells for water containers all she can carry - and a good number of bead ornaments. In their nomadic hunting-gathering life, travelling from one source of food to another through the seasons, always going back and forth between food and water, they carry their young children and their belongings. With plenty of most materials at hand to replace artifacts as required, the Kung have not developed means of permanent storage. They do not even want to carry one of everything. They borrow what they do not own. With this ease, they have not hoarded, and the accumulation of objects has not become associated with status..

In the non subsistence sphere, the people's wants are generally easily satisfied. Such "material plenty" depends partly upon the simplicity of technology and democracy of property. Products are homespun: of stone, bone, wood, skin-materials such as "lay in abundance around them". As a rule, neither extraction of the raw material nor its working up take strenuous effort. Access to natural resources is typically direct- "free for anyone to take"- even as possession of the necessary tools is general and knowledge of the required skills common. The division of labor is likewise simple, predominantly a division of labor by sex. Add in the liberal customs of sharing, for which hunters are famous, and all the people can usually participate in the going prosperity.

But are hunters so undemanding of material goods because they are themselves enslaved by a food quest "demanding maximum energy from a maximum number of people", so that no time or effort remains for the provision of other comforts? Some ethnographers (a social scientist who studies a group/culture) testify to the contrary that the food quest is so successful that half the time the people seem not to know what to do with themselves. Of the hunter it is truly said that his wealth is a burden. In his condition of life, goods can become "grievously oppressive and the more so the longer they are carried around. Certain food collectors do have canoes and a few have dog sleds, but most must carry themselves all the comforts they possess, and so only possess what they can comfortably carry themselves. Or perhaps only what the women can carry: the men are often left free to reach to the sudden opportunity of the chase or the sudden necessity of defense. As Owen Lattimore wrote in a not too different context, "the pure nomad is the poor nomad". Mobility and property are in contradiction. That wealth quickly becomes more of an encumbrance than a good thing is apparent even to the outsider.