

今日人类学民族学论丛

Anthropology and Ethnology Today Series

国际人类学民族学联合会第十六届大会文集

Book Series of the 16th World Congress of IUAES

黄忠彩 总编


Editor-in-Chief Huang Zhongcai

人文发展与文化多样性

Humanity Development and Cultural Diversity

[印度] 马图拉◎主编

Edited by P.R.G.Mathur

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Preface

China won the right to host the 16th IUAES World Congress in July, 2003. After six years of preparation, the Congress will be held in Kunming, China during July 27–31, 2009.

The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) was established on August 23, 1948, when it merged, in fact, with the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES), which was founded in 1934. The latter was the product of various Congresses of Anthropological Sciences, starting in 1865.

The IUAES is one of the member organizations of the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and also of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies (ICPHS). The IUAES is also a member of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU). Its aim is to enhance exchange and communication among scholars of all regions of the world, in a collective effort to expand human knowledge. In this way, it hopes to contribute to a better understanding of human society, and to a sustainable future based on harmony between nature and culture. The IUAES once noted a draft statement on the future of world anthropology in "Current Anthropology" (1979): "The scope of anthropology in terms of areas of human interest includes such critical issues of the contemporary world as problems of environmental management, pressure for the progressive reduction of disparities and the restructuring of the world order, the future of the nation-state, ethnic pluralism and the future of national society, and the harmonization of the roles and functions of institutions with the basic and derived biological and psychic drives of man." The IUAES itself consists of national and institutional organizations in more than 50 countries in all parts of the world, and also includes some hundreds of individual members. The research effort and involvement of the IUAES is principally arranged by its scientific commissions, of which, currently, there are twenty-seven, and each of which concentrates on some area of anthropological interest. They included ethnic relations, aging and the aged, women, children, youth, migration, epidemiology and Aids, tourism, primatology, linguistics, and so on.

The theme of the 16th IUAES World Congress in Kunming, China is "Humanity, Development, and Cultural Diversity". The Anthropologists and Ethnologists around the world will present over 4000 papers, which covered 33 sub-disciplines or research fields as follows: Aging and the Aged Studies, Aids, Archaeological Anthropology, Children, Youth

and Childhood Studies, Communication Anthropology, Development and Economic Anthropology, Educational Anthropology, Enterprise Anthropology, Ecological/Environmental Anthropology, Ethnic Culture Studies, Ethnic Relations and Ethnic Identities, Food and Nutrition Anthropology, Gender and Woman Studies, Globalization Anthropology, Historical Anthropology, Human Ecology, Human Rights Studies, Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development Studies, Legal Anthropology and Legal Pluralism, Linguistic Anthropology, Medical Anthropology and Epidemiology, Migration Anthropology, Museum and Cultural Heritage, Nomadic Peoples Studies, Physical Anthropology and Molecular Anthropology, Psycho-anthropology, Religious Studies, Sport Anthropology, Theoretical Anthropology, Tourism Anthropology, Urban Anthropology, Urgent Anthropological Research, and Yunnan Studies.

As the organizer of the 16th IUAES World Congress, the Chinese Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (CUAES) decided to edit and publish “Anthropology and Ethnology Today Series”—the paper collection series of the above sub-disciplines or research fields, for example, Physical Anthropology, Molecular Anthropology, Migration Anthropology, Museum and Cultural Heritage, Nomadic Peoples Studies, Linguistic Anthropology, Medical Anthropology, and Ethnic Culture Studies. We hope that the scholars from different parts of the world can share with all the achievements in the book series of this congress.

**Zhou Mingfu, Executive Vice-president
Chinese Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences**

**Huang Zhongcai, Secretary-general
Chinese Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences**

July 14, 2009

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PART I

Maritime Anthropology: Relevance of Empirical /
Action Research



Humanity Development and Cultural Diversity among the Fisherfolk

P.R.G. Mathur*

Introduction

This panel paper focuses attention first of all on the ecology, technology and economy of the fisherfolk of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in South India followed by an analysis of their ecology, their social and cultural diversity and the impact of development processes affecting them.

The Mappila, Latin Christian and some Hindu fishing communities inhabiting the coastal regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in South India have adapted technology to suit their socio-cultural and economic development in varying degrees. The Latin Christian fishermen are mainly distributed in the southern districts of Kerala and Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. The Hindu fisherfolk are segmented into Nulayan and Arayan of the southern district of Kerala, Mukkuvan, Mogeyar, Bovis-Mogeyar, Mogavirar of the former Malabar and Valans of Cochin.

That the fisherfolk belonging to the Mappila, Latin Christian and Hindus, especially the Bovis-Mogeyar of North Malabar are able to adapt modern technological innovations more easily and thereby rise in economic scale while others remain stagnant and, at times, even see their lots worsen. This calls for an in-depth understanding of the social, ecological and other factors functioning within and outside the various fishing communities. These factors do play important roles in the various fishing communities affecting their ability to accept or reject modernization.

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Ethno-science of the Mappilas

The development of transport and modern communication has offered facilities to the Mappilas to have constant contacts with the neighbouring towns and cities in India as well as places abroad including the Gulf countries although their villages are far away from the urban and industrial centres.

We have already given a short description of the marine environment and the fishermen's traditional knowledge of the relevant eco-system including the behaviour of the fish, different kinds of winds, currents and waves in our work on the Mappila Fisherfolk of Kerala (Mathur, 1978). We have tried to correlate this traditional knowledge of the Mappilas with those of the Hindu fishermen. An attempt has been also made to focus attention on the relevance of specific technology in the context of the marine environment. It has been demonstrated that the Mappilas and also some Hindu fishermen, particularly the Mukkuvas have a remarkable capacity to adjust activity using knowledge of ecology and nautical cycles and seasons. The Mappilas' knowledge of the various fishing grounds and the species inhabiting them is impressive. They adjust their fishing techniques according to the depth of each fishing ground.

The Mappilas and Hindu fishermen employ their techniques of fishing according to the habitat of the species. The habitat of any species of fish is related to the availability of food (plankton). They have over the years, stored enormous knowledge of the kinds of plankton which serve as the food of different species of fish. They have remarkable knowledge of the migration, behaviour of the fish and spawning period of most species of fish and they correlate the catch with these phenomena. They classify fish on the basis of their habitat, viz., (1) demersal, (2) pelagic, (3) mid-water fish.

The Mappilas, Latin Christians and Hindu fisherfolk employ various techniques according to the occurrence of winds, currents, cross-currents, waves, tides and phases of the moon. They have acquired, through their age-old experience, knowledge of cosmology and climatic conditions, and phases of the moon. They know of eleven types of waves, eight types of currents and eight types of winds. They maneuver their fishing crafts according to the nature of the waves and occurrence of currents and winds.

Environment plays an important role in their cultural behaviour. The Mappilas particularly possess vast cosmological knowledge technologically and ecologically useful in fishing expeditions. Although the cognitive mapping of the natural environment and cosmology of the Mappila, Latin Christians and Hindu fisherfolk is often associated with myths, supernaturalism, and magico-religious notions, they do not stand in the way of

detailed objective assessment and classification of the environment based on inductive reasoning.

Technology and Change

The adoption of nylon nets, mechanized boats, trawlers fitted with GPS, Echo-sounder and Wireless, and *Valiya Vallam* or *Valiya Vanchi* fitted with inboard engines by the Latin Christians and rich Mappila fishermen helped better catch of fish, besides extending the range of fishing grounds. The fisherfolk's knowledge of the secrets of the ecosystem including the behaviour of the fish helped them in reaping the benefits of new tools and technological innovations. But the poor Hindu fisherfolk could not adapt modern technological innovations.

Building a boat in conformity with ritual and magical practices is done without the slightest deviation by the fisherfolk of Kerala irrespective of religious affiliations. Not a single boat or canoe in Kerala has been built without performing the prescribed religious rituals and magical practices. Similarly not a single net has been manufactured and launched without observing the prescribed rituals. They have a strong conviction that if the traditional rites are not observed, evil will ensue. The boat, built without performing the prescribed rituals, would not be seaworthy, but slow in sailing and unlucky, they believe.

Malinowski (1953: 16) observed that "magic puts order and sequence into the various activities, and it and its associated ceremonials are instrumental in securing the co-operation of the community, and the organization of communal labour. It inspires the builders with great confidence in the efficacy of their work, a mental state essential in any enterprise of complicated and difficult character".

Economic Organization

There are significant differences in the response to modern technology and innovations among the *Valakkar* and *Beppukar* among the Mappilas. The study has revealed that *Valakkar* and *Beppukar* originally belong to two different Hindu fishing communities with distinct cultural heritage. Similarly, it is found that the Arayans of Quilon and Alleppey, and Nulayans of Trivandrum are very slow in adopting innovations as compared to the Mappilas. The reason for the Hindu fisherfolk's rejection of innovations can be explained by the social system, socio-economic organization and natural environment. (Mathur, 1978)

Social System

The Hindu fisherfolk of erstwhile Travancore, like other groups, are composed of various

castes. Caste membership is acquired by birth and caste differentiation is sanctioned by the Hindu notion of Karma, i.e. the deeds done by an individual in his life-time. "The idea of Karma teaches a Hindu that he is born into a particular caste because of certain actions he performed in a previous life (*Janma*): Dharmasastras mention that if a man does evil deeds he will be born in a low caste, or even as an animal, a pig or a donkey" (Srinivas, 1962:10). This religious belief is noticeable among the Arayans, particularly those of Alleppey and Quilon, and Nulayans of Trivandrum, in a marked degree. On the other hand, the Mappilas do not believe in the Karma theory. The Bovis-Mogeyar of Kasargod with the help of their temple organization have responded to modern technological innovations to a great extent. The Mappila social system is highly flexible. Unlike the Hindu fishermen of Travancore, the Mappilas accorded little authority to social prescriptions. Men achieved renown or became rich by virtue of their entrepreneurship. Any Mappila with the necessary qualities of leadership could achieve recognition, and gather a following to become a "big man".

Socio-economic organization

The owners of fishing units among the Arayans and Nulayans of southern districts of Kerala have hereditary links with fishing labourer households. They have almost the same customary relationship with the craftsmen and serving castes, whose services they regularly require. These hereditary services get customary rewards in kind. Fishing labourers turn to their patrons for the solution of any socio-political problem and the latter are responsible for their welfare.

The Mappilas, particularly the *Valakkar*, who took to innovations like a duck to water, accumulated wealth by fair and foul means. The shrewd among the Mappila often secured labour by advancing loans in times of need. Affluent patrons gave presents in kind, such as ornaments and clothes, in addition to cash, to their clients, on ceremonial occasions like circumcision, *Kudikalyanam* (a feast for mobilization of credit), *Cayakalyanam* (a tea party for mobilization of credit) and marriage.

Variation in Natural Environment

The Arayans of Puthantura, Quilon district, owned three inboard *Vallam*, 55 outboard fibre *Vallam* and 15 trawlers in 2006 while the Latin Christians in the neighbouring Neendakara fishing village owned over 2000 trawlers. The Latin Christians, therefore, were able to adapt modern technological innovations very quickly by comparison to the Arayans inhabiting the same ecosystem.

The Mappila and Latin Christian fisherfolk of Kerala have responded to economic change quickly whereas the Hindu fishermen have lagged behind. The Mappilas' keenness in buying trucks, mechanized boats, establishment of ice plants etc. is the outcome of a flexible social system in which they operated. By contrast, the caste system among the Arayans of Alleppey and Quilon discouraged innovations.

Organizational Change

The Mappila and Christian fishermen have extended their relations beyond the field of fishing. This has resulted in decreasing the reliance on fellow fishermen to a limited extent; as a matter of fact, the personal element in the hereditary relationship has given way to an impersonal one. Thus, the participation of the Mappilas and Latin Christians in the regional economy has increased mobility. Personal drive, rather than membership in fishing units, has become the decisive factor in social status. This, in turn, has given birth to the competitive spirit which is seen in the eagerness of acquisition of ownership of shares in the fishing units.

A number of conclusions may be drawn from the preceding discussions. The Mappilas mobilize most of the working capital by borrowing funds against the security of their catch. Financiers stipulate that the catch should be sold to or marketed through them and thus they get a monopoly over the fish trade. Although no interest, as such, is charged, it is implied that the financiers shall be paid 5 to 10 percent commission on the sale proceeds. As a rule, the commission is not fixed and this results in the exploitation of the fishermen. This is also true in the case of the Hindu fisherfolk.

Ownership of a fishing unit with nylon nets and trawl nets, mechanized boats, big canoes, fibre *Vallam* and fibre glass *Vallam* and trawlers confers a certain amount of prestige among the fisherfolk of Kerala. The highest status among the Mappila and Hindu fishermen is generally enjoyed by a fisherman who is the owner of more than one fishing unit and does not go out personally for fishing for his livelihood.

The Mappilas' economic activities are based partly upon ritual relationships and kinship. This is evident from the rate of interest charged on loans which vary according to the social relationship of the debtor and creditor. Uterine and affinal kinsmen are preferred as creditors among the Mappilas even though fishing equipment is given as security. The same is true in the case of ritual friendship. Social status is a relevant factor in obtaining credit. The *Valakkar* borrow from non-fishing Muslims as well as rich *Valakkar*, but *Beppukar*, for reasons of prestige, prefer to take loans from the *Angadikkar* only.

Various forms of term credit exist in the Mappila economy. The Mappila traders who

make weekly settlements operate in fact on the capital of the sellers. There is no dearth of agencies to provide long term loans to the Mappilas. In our analysis we have focused attention on the general difficulties in their repayments, including the role of money-lenders. Sometimes the fishermen borrow money from many small money-lenders for short periods to make part payment to the initial creditor. These short term loans are advanced against personal security. Sometimes the daily fish catch is given as security.

In the study on "Trade and Market", we have tried to discuss certain economic aspects of marketing of the Mappilas in the wider social context. We have shown in our analysis that the cause of shortage of capital is not merely economic but also some existing social patterns. The wholesale fish trade is handled and financed mostly by the non-fishing Muslims (*Angadikkar*). The capital resources at their disposal and their business acumen are largely due to their social organization. (Mathur, *ibid.*)

The retail fish trade is in the hands of Mappila hawkers, as consumers are very widely distributed in the Coastal villages of Kerala. These hawkers have no capital but contribute, instead, their own (unpaid) labour and local knowledge. The wholesalers have to maintain a large establishment spread over several fishing villages and towns in the marketing region. This is difficult and expensive, particularly in places with poor communication and transport facilities. There are three distinct spheres and kinds of operation in the marketing system: large scale trade (relatively) using "capital intensive techniques" (Dewey A, 1963:232) which is dominated by the *Angadikkar* (both fresh, cured and iced fish merchants), small scale trade, which is mostly operated by the Mappila traders "working with a minimum of capital and depending on labour intensive methods, local knowledge and individual initiative" (Dewey, 1963:233) and hawkers who are relatively small traders turned into head-load workers.

The development of modern communications and transport since the beginning of the 20th century, particularly after Indian Independence, has solved the communication gap to a great extent and fish is marketed to distant towns and cities as soon as the catch is landed. This has enabled the fish traders, particularly the *Angadikkar*, to centralize the trade. In olden times the communication difficulties did not allow circulation of market intelligence. Information was, in fact, transmitted from one middleman to another as an accidental part of business. This limited the area over which any trader could operate successfully, because it was difficult, if not impossible, to maintain face to face contact with people in more markets than one. This was the situation in the 1970s. But the introduction of STD, ISD and Mobile phones has enabled the Mappilas to get market intelligence every second.

The marketing of fish is governed by the availability of transport and communication,

ice, packing and loading charges, commission to the intermediaries and curing and peeling charges in the case of cured fish, besides the quality and size of the species. Thus, the cost of marketing varies from one species of fish to another. As the wholesale trade is monopolized by the *Angadikkar* and Latin Christians, the Mappila and Hindu fishermen have little control over the marketing, processing and exporting of their own catch. The majority of them continue to be at the mercy of the traders.

Ritual and Supernatural Beliefs

Those Mukkuvans (Hindu fishing community) who embraced Islam are called Mappilas in Malabar. The Mappila society today presents the spectacle of a remarkable process of adaptation from the elements of Islam and retention of some of the original Hindu cultural traits. Conversion has made it imperative to adapt some modifications in the ritual idioms, beliefs, customs and practices among the Mappilas and pronounced changes in the complexion of rituals and magic.

The breakup in the customary economic relations between the owners of fishing units and their fishing labourers in Malabar did not lead to a severance of ritual relations that involved the individual households. Even today, the Mappilas perform the rituals connected with the technology of fishing, calendar festivals and life crises and practice sorcery and magic by inviting their religious leaders and sorcerers. Hindu sorcerers are invited to render their services for which customary dues are paid. Moulavis and Qazis officiate at rituals in connection with the making and launching of new nets and boats. They perform these ritual duties as the fishermen consider them sacred. The advent of technological innovations has only buttressed the ritual ceremonies in Tanur and other fishing villages, thus giving rise to enhanced prestige for religious leaders. Technology has thus cemented the ritual.

Summary & General Observations

From the accounts presented in the preceding pages, it is apparent that the Mappila fishermen of Malabar and Latin Christians of South Kerala have shown remarkable resilience in accepting modern technological innovations. This has not only displaced their traditional structure and cultural values, but also in some ways it has even reinforced their cultural focus. They are more committed to fishing today than was the case before. This is evident from the fact that 300 to 500 Mappila fishermen migrated to Arab countries to work as fishing labourers from the fishing villages of the Malabar area. Also, it has been recorded that the traditional social structure and status hierarchy has been fairly adaptive to the demands of the new technology. Both Hindu and Muslim rituals connected with fishing

continue to be applied to the new techniques.

However, we do not want to convey an impression that nothing has changed on account of the incorporation of modern technological innovations. We find that the traditional spirit of individualistic competition has been exaggerated in the present scenario. Also the lower strata of fishermen belonging to the Mappila and Hindu fishermen are getting more opportunities to own shares in the new fishing units. However, the over-all picture is that the bulk of the fisherfolk of Kerala engaged in the primary activities of fishing are under the stranglehold of the enterprising capitalistic upper strata. It appears that this stranglehold cannot be broken through indigenous efforts in Tanur and other fishing villages of Malabar but some kind of external government intervention is required.

Our study has revealed that some of the fishing communities like Bovis-Mogeyar who are Hindus have been able to successfully adopt modern technologies in marine fishing, while their counterparts, particularly the Mukkuvans, occupying the same marine environment have failed miserably and for reasons that were generally unknown.

The religious organizations of the fisherfolk of the Latin Christians, Mappilas and Hindus were also the traditional structures that dispensed with external mechanisms of social control. However, the establishment of the religious, political, ritual and economic bodies of the successful fishing communities have an additional feature that runs on similar lines. They all have provisions for group related development programmes, mechanisms to mobilize funds, and to use the same for the different needs of their members in acceptable ways.

In undertaking this detailed ethnographic analysis, we have sought to address central issues in Indian anthropology and culture, as well as more general issues of social theory. In analyzing the changes in the lives of the Mappila, Latin Christian and Bovis-Mogeyar fishermen, we have tried to show a gulf between two major issues of social theory, the inadequacies of each, and the possibility of going beyond them, in a way that can begin to span the gulf.

“The first body of social theory is the Marxist tradition. Despite all attempts at reassigning a greater role to the ‘superstructure’ in Marxist theory (such as the Althusserian attempt to delay economic determination ‘till the last instance’), the crushing weight of ‘economism’, and even more fundamentally, of an attempt to separate culture from material practice, allows the residual power of old Western dualisms to continue to haunt the philosophical premises of Marxist theory and political practice.” (Ram, 1991)

For several Marxist scholars (Mencher, 1974; Meillassoux, 1973; Gough, 1971), what is distinctive about caste is the organization of power around a moral hierarchy of purity