CHAPTER THREE

A COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION: THE NATIVE CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS OF MADRAS, 1640-1750 A.D

The native Christians of Madras were the less known social group in the academic scholarship of colonial Madras during the period of our study. This is despite their continuous presence in the place since the early days. The main reason behind such neglect are: first, they are not well documented in the English records; second, they are almost all the time included in the study of Portuguese or Catholic society despite many differences; third, it appeared that they did not draw the passion of academic scholarship and very irrelevant for historical exploration. But it should be argued here that the native Christian community was one of the most vibrant social groups in Madras. This was mainly because of the new opportunities provided by the colonial urbanism. They were seen to be engaged in various spheres of the Company’s services. Of this the most important was their valuable services in the shipping activities where almost all the Boatmen were of Catholic Christians. The erstwhile fishing community now becomes an important part of the Company’s overseas trade as indispensable port workers generally known as boatmen. Their fishing boats have become an indispensable part of the colonial networks of international trade and commerce. With this gaining economic importance, the erstwhile fisher folks now resorted to gain more and more social recognition as well. This is most apparent in their participation in the various caste activities alongside their traditional right hand caste groups. This was a more necessary for this community who constituted mainly of migrant inhabitants that need a strong social base which seems to have been most urgent in a strictly partitioned caste based social and spatial arrangement made under the colonial urban Madras. This was despite their strict adherence to their newly acquired Christian religion. Further, the dynamic nature of the fishing community can also be seen from their frequent schemes of resistance against the government, both openly as well as through non-cooperation. But what is most interesting about this community was that the English government had separated them from their caste groups
and also divided them into different occupational caste units, both socially and spatially.¹ This is mainly because the English government wanted to ward off the influences from both the caste heads and also from the strong Capuchin priests and ultimately enters into their social networks to further their colonial interests. In the following pages an attempt is made to look into various aspects of the social and economic life of the native Christians within the colonial schemes of caste, space and governance on the one hand and the response of the local people to such schemes. Further, this chapter underlines the fact that under the colonial schemes of space, caste, profits and governance this erstwhile insignificant social group not only gained social and economic importance but also resorted to gain more and more of them, predicated with varied forms of resistance to further their demands.

THE SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE LOCAL CHRISTIANS
It should be noted that the colonial construction of the urban space was not simply a physical entity; it was also a relational identity, socially arranged and functionally specific. In Madras and elsewhere in colonial Asia, space was identified with identities of different social groups along the lines of religion, language, race, caste, colour and class.² Colonial Madras was predicated with divisions of ‘white’ and ‘black’, ‘left’ and ‘right’ hand castes and within it was segregations on the basis of functional specialization of various caste groups; there were about 32 traditional occupational caste groups within the black town. There was also a competition for power and privileges amongst the various upcoming urban social groups; intense struggle developed over space, idioms, symbols, colour and neighbourhood.³ Within Singer’s orthogenetic-heterogenetic transformation

¹ Patrick A. Roche has observed that the British Merchant Government of Madras has tolerated the caste demarcation and even fostered because these were especially useful to British commercial interests and values. See his article, ‘Caste and the British Merchant Government in Madras, 1639-1749,’ Indian Economic and Social History Review, (IESHR), 1975, pp-381-407.
was also the interaction between tradition and modernity through the caste heads or ‘intelligentsia’ who mediated the west and east encounter. But so far no attention is given on the divisions within the larger right or left hand caste groups. The fishing community of Madras called Mucquas and the Christian Pariahs, who were mostly Catholic Christians, were also subjected to the colonial divisions of caste and space within the domain of the larger right hand caste group. It is to emphasis here that the stabilization and even redefinition of caste structures and the social demarcations within the larger right and left hand caste divisions by the colonial administration was most ostensible in the fishing community. But before we do that a brief notes on the population of the local Christians is thought necessary.

The population
As far as the numbers of the local Christians are concern, they have constituted a larger part of the Catholic Christian population in Madras. The Tamil Christians of Madras were mostly migrants from other parts of the region, very less converted in Madras. We do not have much account on the Tamil Catholic Christians excepting few accounts of the Mucquas or Boatmen of Madras. So this chapter will mainly concentrate on this community in order to generalize the other local Christians who are not well documented. As far as this fishing community was concern we are told that when the English first settled down at Madras there were ‘about six fishermen houses’ in the place. But it is not clear whether they belonged to Catholic Christians. However, this reference makes something clear: the large fishing community that inhabited Madras during the later period came from other places. So to entice more people to inhabit the place a proclamation was made in the name of the Company that ‘for the terme of 30 yeares noe custome of things to be eaten, dranke, or wore should be taken of any of the towne dwellers.’ Many of Portuguese, Mestizos, local Christians and their dependent from different parts of the region such as San Thome, Armagaon, Pulicat, Negapatinam, and

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also from the hinterland came to Madras in the expectation of employment and security. Migrants from its neighborhood St. Thome seems to have been most numerous. We are inform that after the Dutch attacked San Thome in 1644 the number of Catholic population decline to a mere 1700 from their earlier population of 200 native Christian families inside the walled city and about 6000 outside it in 1635.

By 1652 the population of the fishing community must have becomes already large and settle. This is shown by the fact that in a caste dispute settlement of 1652 a separate streets were also allotted for two Christian ‘cast’ groups, ‘the Pattnawarrs’ (Cattamaran men) and Cariallwarrs (Muckquas or Boatmen), who would have to pass through those streets during their weddings and burials procession. The streets allotted were from their colony to the streets that passed through ‘the back side of Mr. Porters House (Middle Gate Street) to the middle of the Quarter Porters house and soe to proceed to the Portuguez Church’ in the ‘white town.’ They were also allowed to pass through the Great Street. Their population increased further due to more and more migration which seems to have continued throughout the 17th century for various reasons. Perhaps the largest number of migration took place during the late 1650s and during the 1670s. We have already noted in the previous chapters that the Portuguese-Dutch war of the time which went against the Portuguese of Coromandel Coast devastated their premier port centres like St. Thome, Negapatnam, Pulicat, and others. This receding trade was also to the detriment of their dependent boatmen. Obviously, many of these boatmen have to seek new employment in other ports such as in the English Madras and other Dutch control ports.

After the capture of San Thome by the Golconda Army in 1662 most of the Portuguese inhabitants as well as the local Indians including the fishing community were

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7 Ibid., p.34-35.
8 Andrew Lopez, The Annual Letters of 1644, the Jesuits Malabar Province, Translated by L.Besse (1907), p.29.
9 J. Thekkedath, History of Christianity India, II, p.204; Meersman, The Franciscans in Mailapur, pp.15 & 17.
10 Pattanavan: the fishermen on the east coast from Kistna to the Tanjore district are popularly called Karaiyan, or seashore people. Lit: dwellers in a town or pattanam. E.Thurston, Castes and Tribes of South India, Vol. vi, pp.177178.
11 The full text of the settlement as reproduced in the Records of Fort St. George, Diary and Consultation Books, (hereafter referred to as D&CB), 30 October 1707, p.75.
said to have migrated to Madras.\textsuperscript{12} Manucci also inform us that it led to the dispersal of the Portuguese and other Christian inhabitants to Madras and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{13} As far as the migration from other parts of the Coast is concerned the account of Fr. Freye, the Jesuit missionaries in the Madurai Mission, reported that during the famine of 1675-78 the 'entire population were destroyed and villages completely abandoned...very many people died and other fled to the Coast where famine was not so acutely felt.'\textsuperscript{14} It continued to write that the 'vicissitudes of war have scattered them (Christians) a little everywhere, and I believe there is not at present a province in Asia where Christian from Thanjavur cannot be found' and 'if we go among the Dutch in Ceylon, and the Chinese in Melaka, we find them there, for they sold themselves to escape famine and misery.'\textsuperscript{15} It was possible that many of this wretched must have came to Madras as well as it was one of the most flourishing port by that time. The migration of this fishing community into Madras becomes so huge that another fishermen town was created near the southern portion of the Fort wall known in the records as 'Mucqua Town.' Therefore, the local Christians of Madras were mostly those who migrated from other places and who were already converted to Christianity before coming to Madras. Possibly they must have formed the bulk of those erstwhile Mylapore Christians for whom, as we already noted, the Bishop fought stiffly with the English government over the control of them.

Although we did not have a clear cut account of their numbers, a rough calculation can be made from the available sources. According to one estimate the total number of Catholic Christians in Madras were 3,000 in 1663;\textsuperscript{16} 8,600 in 1693; 7000 in 1707; and 17,000 (only in Black Town) in 1787.\textsuperscript{17} In 1693, when Fr. Ephraim was disabled by age another Capuchin Father was called from Pondicherry to assist Fr. Michel Ange in the Church in Madras 'whereunto there are belonging about Eight

\textsuperscript{13} Manucci, Storia do Mogor, III, p.263.
\textsuperscript{14} S.J. Stephen, Letters of the Portuguese Jesuits from Tamil Countryside, 1666-1688, IIES, Pondicherry, 2001, p.66, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva, 8 May 1677
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.79.
\textsuperscript{16} J. Thékkedath, History of Christianity India, II, p.207.
\textsuperscript{17} E.M. Hambye, History of Christianity India, III, p.146, where he cited Penny, Church in Madras, I, pp.223 & 466.
Thousand Christians, as they call them, within the bounds of this city'.\textsuperscript{18} We have already noted that by 1673 the population of the Portuguese, according to John Fryer was about ‘thousand.’\textsuperscript{19} So, if we take the population of Catholic as about eight thousands in 1690s, by computation the Native Christians would constitute a proportion of about 7:8 to the Portuguese (i.e. 1000 Portuguese and 7000 Indians). This proportion might likely go up as the number of local Christians keeps on increasing due to continuous migration from the hinterland, unsettle political conditions and other natural calamities forced many to migrate. No wonder, by 1787 Sir Archibald Campbell took a census and found that there were 17,000 Roman Catholics within the walls of Madras.\textsuperscript{20} According to 1871 Census, there were 18,090 native Roman Catholic Christians only in Madras.\textsuperscript{21} But how was their settlement arranged within the colonial scheme of space, colour, race and religion is something deserved to be investigated as this people have now becomes Christians and could not perfectly fit into the right and left caste divisions which was strictly carried out in Madras whereas they could be neither fit within the racial scheme of divisions on the urban space.

The ‘casted’ Christians: social and spatial divisions

We have argued that the local Christians of Madras have migrated mostly from other places. The fishing communities to which we are mostly concerned have also came from other places and for different motives. But once in Madras they were herded together under a well understood colonial scheme of urban space and identity. We have already noted that the notion of race, colour, caste, and religion were in vogue in the urban planning of the English government. The \textit{Mucquas} were also triply subjected under this scheme. Religiously, they were Christians so that they should have separate space from non-Christians but as they belonged to the native Indians or the ‘black’ they cannot be located inside the ‘white town’. Socially, they were separated from their right hand caste group and located somewhere outside that group but they were also subjected to division on the basis of their traditional caste connection. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how these divisions actually took place in Madras.

\textsuperscript{18} D&CB, 25 September, 1693.
\textsuperscript{19} Fryer, \textit{A New Account of East India and Persia}, p.38.
\textsuperscript{20} Madras Tercentenary Commemoration volume, p.377.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Census of the Town of Madras, 1871}, Madras, Fort St. George Gazette Press, 1873.
To begin with, John Shortt was able to trace thirteen fishing ‘tribes’ in Southern India out of eighteen ‘who make fishing their calling’ according to the legend.\(^{22}\) Of these Putteenevens, Currean and Shembadaven corresponded to the fishing communities of Madras (as was recorded in Madras records) viz: ‘Pattinawars,’\(^{23}\) ‘Cariallwarrs,’\(^{24}\) and ‘Chumbudoo’ or ‘Chomboddevar’\(^{25}\) respectively. He said that Shembadaven is the chief among the fishermen who only fish in the inland rivers and never took to sea fishing as ‘it is against their caste to do so.’\(^{26}\) On the other hand, he also said that the Putteenevens and Curreans took to fishing on the sea.\(^{27}\) In 1706, in the assessment for the construction of the Black Town Wall, we have the list of the three fishing community by their occupations viz: ‘Chomboddevar cast alias Fishermen,’ ‘Correala war alias Muckquas,’ and ‘Pottanapwarr alias Cattamaran men’\(^{28}\). The erstwhile fisher folks are now divided into three functional units: Fishermen, Boatmen and Catamaran men. This seems to have been a colonial construct as such divisions might not have been much in vogue in Madras among this people. This is shown by the fact that all of them were known to have involved both in fishing and shipping activities depended upon the seasons and that the erstwhile Chomboddeewar or Shembadaven caste has now taken to sea fishing as well.

Further, evidence also shows that these fishing communities have already converted into Catholic Christians and went to the same church under the Capuchin priests of Madras.\(^{29}\) For instance, we have already noted that in the 1652 caste dispute settlement the ‘Pattinawars and Cariallwarrs are to pass with their weddings and burials from the back side of Mr. Porters House to the middle of the Quarter Porters house and soe to proceed to the Portuguez Church, they may likewise goe through the great street.’\(^{30}\) This means that they belonged to the Catholic Christians. Again in 1680 one Black Tom


\(^{23}\) D&C, 30 October 1707, p.75.

\(^{24}\) D&C, 28 November 1695, pp.152-153.


\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.196.

\(^{27}\) D&C, 6 July 1706, p.55.

\(^{28}\) C.Fawcett, English Factories in India, (N.S.), 1670-1677, II, p.146.

\(^{29}\) D&C, 30 October 1707, p.75.
was appointed ‘to be Muckadum or master of the Boatmen for the better keeping those people in order and fast to the place… the Boatmen being Christians as he is.’ Further, in 1695, two fishing caste groups were mentioned for the contribution towards the building of Town Hall: ‘Christian Polla Warra cast’ and ‘Christian Chumbudoo cast’ along with other castes. Thus, we can see that Shembadaven or Chumbudoo cast, Putteenewers or Pattnawars, and Currean or Cariallwards (Mucquas or Boatmen) fishing communities of Madras were Catholic Christians. Therefore, such division might not have been much in vogue among this Christian ‘castes.’ It mainly signified their predominant occupation redefined in corresponds to their traditional caste units to suit the colonial interest. In fact, this fishing groups have now took up both the fishing and shipping activities depending on the seasons besides other employment under the colonial Madras.

Other Christian social groups as appeared from the records were Christian Polla Warra Cast. This group is later identified as Docter Leuis cast viz: ‘Polliwarr cast alias Docter Leuis cast’. As they did not relate to any of the fishing castes mention by John Short it would mean that they belonged to non-fishing Christian groups. However, unless further evidence suggest it is difficult to say anything about this group. Besides, Thomas Bowrey had also mentioned that there were many Pariahs converts in Madras who were ‘laborious, as bricklayers, masons, smiths, fishermen or the like.’ We have noted elsewhere that there was a church in the ‘black town’ generally known as ‘open pandal chapel’ and another one in the Parchery or ‘Parriars Town’ and also later another church also came up in Vepery donated by a rich Armenian merchant, Petrus Uscan. This means that there were many more non-fishing Catholic Christian communities in Madras who did not go to the fishermen’s church in ‘Mucquas town’ or in the ‘Mile end.’ The predominantly low caste Parchery area was an important centre of Catholic devotion, and the church there was built by the Pariahs with financial help from Thomas de Souza, a

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31 D&C&B, 27 November 1680, p.87.
34 D&C&B, 6 July 1706, p.55.
rich merchants. This ‘Pariars Town’ was already in existence even before the inception of Fort St. George. Curious evidence also came from the petition of the right hand caste during the caste disputes in 1707. The petition was concerning their disapproval on the erection of pillar stones in their areas as a boundary demarcation in which they claimed that about one hundreds of their houses were included in another side besides ‘several wells, Churches, gardens and choultrys’ belonged to them. If the word ‘churches’ referred to the Christian church it is significant in that many Christians have also settled amongst the left hand caste groups in the Peddenaigue Petta. Possibly the ‘Padres Garden’ we have just noted near the Company’s garden must also have been used for the service of these lay worshippers. Except for some important ceremonies such as marriages, burials, Mass, or other religious festivals, it seems that St. Andrew Church in the ‘white town’ was rarely frequented by the local Christians. Therefore, we do have good number of local Catholic Christians who might also have been probably divided on the caste line have inhabited Madras in large numbers. But unfortunately the existence of these Christian groups in Madras was not well documented which make us to concentrate on the Mucquas or Boatmen. However, efforts will be made to highlight the aspects of these groups wherever possible.

The social divisions of the erstwhile fishermen are further intensified by the spatial arrangement of their settlements. This was mainly due to the stated policy of the English colonial government to intensify the caste divisions and other demarcations. They were consciously located in a separate zone wherever possible. This is most apparent for the Boatmen, Fishermen and Catamaran men. They were mostly located in the seaside of the town. But to see this on a mere pretext of their sea activities would be too simplistic and in fact misleading. Rather it was born out of the deliberate colonial scheme of the urban space. Before we come into the full analysis of the matter it would be pertinent to locate historically on the settlement of the various Christians groups in Madras.

Usually, the fishermen were allotted the lands by the sea side. John Shortt has said that these people live all along the Coromandel coast and the village they occupy was

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37 D&CB, 19 August 1707, p.53.
called ‘Coopum’, they claimed propriety right to the soil extending from the sea-beach to 120 yards inland and the village on the coast are two to three miles apart; certain landmarks in between, in the coast and on the sea, marks the boundary. We have already noted that when the English first began to settle down there were five fishermen’s houses there. According to the Dutch sources the site of Fort St. George or nearby it was first occupied by around fifteen or twenty fishermen’s huts. This means that they were removed to other nearby places.

The *Mucquas* or Boatmen were first seen to have been located at the seaside in the ‘Black Town.’ This is shown by the fact that after the caste dispute of 1652 separate streets were also reserved for the Boatmen and Catamaran men for their weddings and burial procession in the ‘black town’ till the ‘Portuguese Church’ in the ‘white town’. By 1707 there are still many Boatmen’s houses ‘by the sea side in Mootell Patta’. But, later, when the population of the Boatmen increased in numbers due to migration many *Mucquas* or boatmen were grouped in a newly created ‘town,’ mentioned again and again in the records as ‘Mucquaw Town’. Salmon (1699/1700) succinctly puts that ‘there is a little suburb to the southward of the white town, inhabited only by the black watermen and fishermen.’ This place is also shown in the Map of Thomas Pitt (1710) as ‘Coupong’ probably a corruption of ‘Coopum’ (a fishermen village). Lockyer (1711) also said that ‘The Black city calls Madras and sometimes by the moors Chinnepatam, joins it (the ‘English town’) to the northward: and Maqua Town, where the Boat-men live, to the Southward.’ This ‘town’ was probably inhabited between 1673 and 1679 as the first reference of it came only in 1679 and had escaped the descriptions of Dr. John Fryer in 1673 and others who described about the Coast very minutely. However, it seems likely that the said town was cleared after the French occupation and removed them to nearby in the other side of the river in a place called Chepauk where they erected

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38 John Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of Southern India,’ p.196.
40 D&CB, 30 October 1707, p.75.
41 D&CB, 25 August, 1707, p.56.
44 See Pitt’s Map (1710) in H.D.Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol.II.
a church there in ‘Mile end’. Besides, many of them have also now settled in an around the areas of Luz Church adjacent of Chepauk.48

As far as Catamaran men were concerned they were located near the seaside in the sandy tract between the sea and the ‘Black Town.’ This is shown by the evidence of the English factory records. On 21st November 1695, a heavy storm devastated the city of Madras where ‘from York Point (the North East corner bastion of the white town wall) to the Mud Point (the North East corner bastion of the Black town wall) the sea hath washed down a considerable number of houses inhabited by Cattamaran men and poor people’.49 This is corroborated by the fact that in 1652 they (Pattawars) and Boatmen were given separate streets in the ‘black town’ by the government for their weddings and burials processions to St. Andrew church in the white town.50

The Fishermen were settled in the seaside of the Mutial Petta where they live together with the Boatmen and Laskars. This is shown by the fact that in 1707 when an agreement was made between the right and left hand castes for regrouping their settlements it was decided that the ‘Boatmen, Laskars and Fishermen that have their houses by the sea side in Mootell Patta’ were to remain undisturbed, but they should not give ‘any molestation to the left hand caste’.51 Thomas Pitt Map (1710) had also identified some ‘fishing huts’ by the seaside in the other side of the river opposite to ‘Mucqua Town’. This place later came to be known as ‘Chepauk’ where many Christian fisher folks were relocated after the rendition or probably already by the French. Bowrey’s fisherman from Egmore who was overtaken by storm and survived after four days on the sea also suggests some of them lived in that place.

As far as the ‘Polliwarr Cast alias Docter Lewis cast’ is concern we have no reference for their settlements in the record. However, it is possible that this group must have settled among the other castes of Madras. If they belonged to what is generally known as the ‘Pariah caste’ they would certainly be amongst this group who mainly inhabited the ‘Pariars Town’ or Parchery in the western suburb of Pedda Naigue Petta.52

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49 D&CB, 21 November 1695, p.151.
50 D&CB, 30 October 1707, p.75.
51 D&CB, 25 August, 1707, p.56.
52 Thomas Pitt’s Map, 1710.
We have already noted the possible settlements of many of the local Catholic Christians among other inhabitants in the ‘black town’ as was pointed out by the existence of some churches for them. This is also corroborated by the fact that in 1740, as a part of war preparation against the threat of Marathas, 70 houses lying under the North Wall of the Black Town Wall were cleared to provide space for the Guns in which about 21 houses appeared, as per the name of the owners, to be of Christian inhabitants.\(^{53}\) In this respect the account of Danish missionary Mr. Fabricis is also relevant. He wrote in 1649 to the Madras government that the Capuchin priests should not be given the Church at Parchery as ‘there always dwell the most part of the black soldiers and palanquin boys’ who seems to have been mostly Catholic Christians which they desired should be given to them to be converted into Protestants.\(^{54}\) But to our predicaments we could not give any further accounts on these groups than just recognizing their presences which seems to have been not in so small numbers.

In the above social and spatial arrangement three things can be noticeable: first, the erstwhile fisher folks were divided into three occupational or working ‘caste’ groups despite the fact that they have already become Christians. Second, these allegedly different ‘caste’ units were separately located in three different places. Third, although they belonged to the right hand caste group they were located in the seaside amongst or adjacent to the left hand caste habitation, in the ‘black town’ and Mutial Petta, which separate them physically from the right hand caste groups of the ‘black town’ and Peddanaigle Petta. Some Boatmen were later transferred or regrouped in a separate location, in the ‘Macqua Town’, south of the ‘white town’. Besides, all protections were also given to them by the Company government whenever there was any transfer or regroupings of settlement amongst the various castes were made; say in the wake of caste conflicts in 1652 and 1707.\(^{55}\)

Then, how do we explain about such evidences? Patrick Roche has shown that this social and spatial arrangement was mainly made because of the stated policy of the British Merchant government to intensify the caste divisions and other demarcations in

\(^{53}\) D&CB, 27 May 1740, pp.89 & 91.
\(^{54}\) Letter of Mr. Fabricis dated 17 May 1749, cited in Love Vestiges, II, pp.397-398.
\(^{55}\) D&CB, 30 October 1707, p.75; and 25 August, 1707, p.56.
order to further their colonial interests. The same view is also taken here. Generally, the motive of the Company was most clearly expressed in their letters to the Madras Government in 1708. It directed that Madras government must encourage the coming of more and more people to the town but it ‘must never let the people find they are too many for you, for if you once throw the reins on their neck the next step may be they will throw you out of the saddle.’ It strongly recommended that ‘government must be preserved though it is best done with a gentle hand.’ The gentle hand it referred to was to divide the people as small as possible so that they could be control most effectively. And each of these caste groups has to clearly specify their basis within the larger division of left and right hand caste. For instance, in 1708, the heads of Weavers and Oilmen castes were summoned in the Council to declare their caste as ‘they were very fickle in their cast...which trouble to both casts’. The ‘weavers declared for the left hand and the Oyl men for the right hand’ to which ‘they were ordered to keep too, or be severely punished.’ Then, what are the interests of the government over these poor fisher folks of Madras?

To explain this, it would be pertinent to begin with the religious perception of the English government. We know that Madras was divided into ‘Christian Town’ and ‘Black Town’ which symbolized some sort of religious concern. As far as Catholic is concern they were thought to be closer to the English Protestants than the Hindus or Muslims were but were segregated within on the basis of colour and race. The Indian Catholic Christians were separated from Portuguese and other European Catholics socially and spatially but were firmly protected by the government as can be seen from the instances of caste disputes in 1652 and 1707. In 1677 the Company at home ordered that the persons employed in the Choultry Mint and boats must be ‘English and other Christians who wee require shall have the principal charge therein, and if any natives be imployed they must be but under their direction and at their command.’ As such religion was one important factor in considering the divisions of fisher folks in Madras.

58 D&C&B, 15 January 1708.
59 Dispatches from England, 1670-77, 12 December 1677, p.123.
Second reason was probably to avert the influence of the caste heads and the Capuchin priests over the fisherfolks on the one hand and to control this people more effectively to be loyal subjects of the English government. This is done through the ‘caste’ heads who were appointed by the government. For each occupational ‘caste’ unit was appointed one head ‘for the better keeping of those people in order and fast to the place.’ For instance one Black Tom was appointed as the ‘caste’ head of the Boatmen in 1680 for 70 fanams per month.\textsuperscript{60} Another head was appointed during Governor Pitt’s time (1708) to ‘the person who discovered the theft’ committed by the Boatmen.\textsuperscript{61} Caste heads were also instrumental in collection of taxes and other revenues for the government such as Quit rent, etc.\textsuperscript{62} John Shortt also noted that each ‘Coopum’ had a headman who settled any disputes that may arises among themselves and he acted as master of ceremonies and other occasions.\textsuperscript{63} Thus, each occupational caste units were responsible and accountable separately and directly to the Company government through their caste heads who would act what Singer called the ‘intelligentsia’ and who ‘mediated between alien cultural influences to the natives and interpreted indigenous culture to the foreigners.’\textsuperscript{64}

Thirdly, it was also the implicit colonial policy to enter into the social networks of the local people, of which, channeling through the caste heads was thought to be most viable. This is especially crucial for the English government in the land where they are minute minority as compare to the local inhabitants. Over each caste unit was appointed a chief or head whom the government paid salary and bestowed him with some powers over his people. By their association with the Company these group of chiefs form an elite class in the local society. Therefore, through the power of appointment and dismissal of the caste heads the Company government hold swayed over the whole inhabitants of Madras very effectively.

Lastly, and most importantly the economic importance of the fishing community was very crucial for the smooth running of Company’s business in Madras. This can be seen in two ways. First, regular supply of fishes to the town, to the Fort and for salting for

\textsuperscript{60} D&C\textsuperscript{B}, 27 November 1680, p.87.
\textsuperscript{61} D&C\textsuperscript{B}, 12 November 1711, p.159.
\textsuperscript{62} D&C\textsuperscript{B}, 6 July 1706, p.55.
\textsuperscript{63} John Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of Southern India,’ p.196.
\textsuperscript{64} M.Singer, \textit{When a Great Tradition Modernizes}, Delhi, 1972, p.70.
the use of voyages, etc., was an important function of the fishermen. This is shown by the fact that in 1680 when the fishermen stopped supplying fish to Madras in protest against the person who rented ‘fish farming’ the ‘townes people’ complained to the government to redress their grievances so that the ‘fishing farming’ was discontinued.\(^{65}\) Second, no shipping business at the port of Madras was possible without the valuable services of the Boatmen. This is also expressed in the Council in 1711 when it was agreed that the President must ‘reconcile’ with the Mucquas as ‘the business of the place is not to be done as it should be unless those fellows are continued in their employs.’\(^{66}\) Their importance lies not only on the nature of the coast which required extraordinarily expertise boatmen but also that these tasks were not likely to be taken over by other caste conscious persons who despised them as unclean jobs. Thus, the unique spatial and social arrangement invented by the Company government in Madras was mainly to foster their colonial interests of trade, profits and governance. In the following pages an attempt is made to show the economic importance of this fishing community in the services of the Company.

**Diversification of Works: The Local Christians in Company’s Services**

In this section attempt is made to examine how the poor local Christians strived to survive within the colonial urban space of Madras. It should be noted that in the urban space of Madras people generally took up employment that was to their traditional calling which was also encouraged by the Company. But this gradually gave way to people to take up jobs which were not much related to their callings. This was mainly due to the expanding opportunities under the colonial regime in urban Madras. Such diversification of works was most apparent in the Christian community of the town. This is most visible in the boating and shipping activities in which the traditional fisher folks now took over as an additional or perhaps their main occupation for majority of them. Besides, the native Christians also took up several other jobs hitherto restricted to some caste such as house servants, cooleys, cooks, sweepers, palanquin bearers, bricklayers, smiths, peons, lascars, etc. Therefore, this section will underlines these facets of the Christians community in Madras wherever possible.

\(^{65}\) D&CB, 1 July 1680, pp.43-44.

\(^{66}\) D&CB, 12 November 1711, p.159.
To our predicament we have no specific accounts in the Company’s records concerning the various activities of the native Christians and it is more difficult to reconstruct this out from the general details of the occupational caste groups. However, this cannot lead us to the conclusion that all these occupational caste jobs were not done by any Christians. In fact it would be misleading to do that way. In this respect, the account of Thomas Bowrey (1669) becomes relevant. He said that many Pariahs ‘nowadays are yearly converted to the Christian faith by the Portugal Priests and Jesuites...they are all of them laborious, as bricklayers, masons, smiths, fishermen, or the like; those are called Moquaes.’ Bowrey account is important in seeing the diversification of occupation undertaken by various Christian groups in Madras. Now, the erstwhile Pariahs took up the jobs of bricklayers, masons, smiths, fishermen, etc. Another interesting case came in 1779 from the petition of the Pariahs who generally inhabited the Parchery areas of Madras or the ‘Parriars town’. They said that since their first coming to Madras they were allotted that place for their sole habitation and that if it is given up to others most of them will be forced to go to other places where they will not be accepted in the village as they were hated by everyone. They also said that they are good in Madras as they have the opportunities to work as menial servants in the houses of ‘the Gentlemen and Ladies’ and other European inhabitants, such as ‘butlers, butlers mates, cooks, cooks mates, roundel boys, coachmen, Palanquin boys, horse keepers, grass cutters, dry and wet nurses, water wenchers, scavengers, cart drivers, totys, women sweepers, lamp lighters, etc.’ This petition clearly pointed out the fact that many of the erstwhile outcastes Pariahs could now take up such jobs hitherto denied in their traditional caste set up.

Many native Christians also joined the Company services as lascars (native sailors or crew men). For instance, in 1718, one Mathews, a Christian lascar, on board the ship Shrowsberry was mercilessly killed by its commander Capt. William Weld. After killing him the said captain asked some ‘Hindu Lascars’ to unbind him and threw him overboard which they refused to do because ‘he was not their caste’. He then ordered ‘some Christian lascars to unbind the deceased which they did, and found his legs and arms so

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stiff as not to be moved out of the posture he had been bound in, but they also refused to throw him overboard... These lascars were taken to the Consultation where they all gave their testimony regarding the gruesome incident leading to the imprisonment of the said captain in the ‘Cock House.’ This shows that the native Christians have also joined the Company services as lascars for the overseas trade. Thus we can see the diversification of works performed by the native Christians under the Company government. However, the diversification of occupations can be seen most clearly in the shipping and boating activities in which the erstwhile fishermen were mostly engaged. The English record interchangeably used the term boatmen, fishermen and catamaran men and sometime the term Mucquas is used generally for the three groups. This is because the new shipping activity was now taken up by the erstwhile fisher folks without any discrimination. Thus, fishing and boating became the pre-dominant activities of the Christian Mucquas, Catamaran men and the Fishermen. Therefore, in the following pages an attempt is made to look into more details on fishing and shipping or boating activities undertaken by the Christian Boatmen of Madras.

From fishermen to boatmen: Mucquas in Madras overseas trade

By far the best account of the new jobs undertaken by the erstwhile caste groups can be seen in the shipping business of the Madras port. The main task in this shipping activity was in loading and unloading of goods and men to and from the ships which was centre to the survival of Madras overseas trade. Hence, this job was centre to the core interest of the English merchant government and more so if we considered the inaccessibility of the coast or land by a large ship except through the use of certain boats called catamarans and masulas. Besides, this task cannot be entrusted to everyone who would wish to take up. It demanded certain expertise and acumen. Under such demanding circumstances the Mucquas of Madras have become the natural choice for this new job. It was because of this indispensable task that they performed, the Mucquas acquired the name Boatmen, a categorization that would have an important social implication in later period. As the merchant government did not want to keep this important task in the hands of either Hindu or Muslims, the Christian Boatmen becomes the nearest choice to take up such job when no European would be able to do such intricate and specialized job. Therefore, in

69 D&CB, 23 June 1718, p.110-111.
the following pages we shall look into this important task undertaken by the Christian Boatmen in details. However before we take up the actual activities it is thought pertinent to begin with the description of the two boats used by the Mucquas in order to carry out such important job.

The ‘extraordinary crafts’ of Madras: Catamarans and Masulas

The boatmen and fishermen of Madras generally used two types of boat for loading and unloading goods in the port as well as for fishing: Catamaran and Masula. Both are country boat equally used by them but there are certain differences in their structure, composition and nature of its used. Catamarans are ‘nothing more than three or four little planks or beams joined together and fastened securely like a raft...covered with mat and could carry a little sail made of bark of trees...But when they wanted to row, the fishermen, or the owner are sat partly in the water rowing with his feet, and also with oar which had flat ends, so that he got along very quickly.’ According to John Fryer (1673), catamaran is a ‘log lashed to that advantage that they wast off all their goods, only having a sail in the midst and paddles to guide them.’ Francois Martin (1673) said that ‘depending upon their size, the catamaran is made of five or six pieces of wood which are bound and fastened together. These are commonly used in some parts of India, particularly by fisherfolk.’ According to Abbe Carre catamarans are ‘three pieces of wood tied together.’ Colonel W.Campbell (1864) wrote that catamaran ‘is merely three rough logs of wood, firmly lashed together with ropes formed from the inner bark of the coconut tree. Upon this one, two, or three men, according to the size of catamaran, sit on their heels in a kneeling posture, and, defying wind and weather, make their way through the raging surf which beats upon the coast, and paddle out to sea at times, when no other craft can venture to face it.’ Lady Dufferin on her state arrival at Madras writes that a catamaran is ‘two logs of wood lashed together, forming a very small and narrow raft. The rower wears a ‘fool’s cap’, in which he encounters a big wave, he leaves his boat.

70 Henry Yule, Hobson-Jobson, Catamaran: Kuttumaram in Tamil is a ‘raft, consisting of three logs of very buoyant timber, Madras Manual of Administration, vol. iii, p.137.
slips through the wave himself, and picks up his catamaran on the other side of it.75 She called those fleets of *catamarans* that came to receive her with a guard of honour sarcastically as ‘the mosquito fleet.’

According to John Shortt, *catamarans* or ‘floats,’ consist of ‘two to five logs of wood with curved extremities.’76 He also said that the wood used for the purpose is that of ‘Peruvian lilac, or *Melia Azadarach*, the Tamil name is Mullay bamboo, sometime the wood of the *Erythrina Indica*, or Moochee wood, is brought into use’ and ‘the dimensions of the logs are 20 feet long and 2 feet wide’; ‘single logs are sometimes used by men who fish with a hook and line.’77 He continued to say that Catamarans have small sails, which are fastened to the log by an upright poll, and brought into play when the wind is favourable; otherwise each man uses a short oar or paddle’ and the anchor consist of a forked stick, which is weighted with stones.78 Thus, we see the whole structure of catamarans which are made of logs fastened together, having curved extremities, small sails at the middle and row with oars or paddle.

*Catamarans* were used both for fishing as well as for loading and unloading heavy goods to and from the ships. Thomas Bowrey had succinctly puts that ‘when any great Ordinance, Anchors, butts of water or the like ponderous ladeinge is carried off or on, they seize 4, 5, or 6 large pieces of boyant timber together, and this they call a *Cattamaran*, upon which they can lade 3 or 4 tunns weight. When they go on fishinge, they are ready with very small ones of the like kind.’79 These *Catamarans* were extremely useful in Madras port especially that the flourishing trade of import and export constituted of different kinds of goods which are not possible to carry by means of *Masulas* (more commonly used at Madras) alone such as elephants, horses, teaks and timbers or other heavy goods which came into this port in large numbers.

The other means of transportation was by means of *Masulas*. This is a large surfboat built of planks sewn together. This country boat was variously labeled by European accounts as *mussulas, mussoolas, massolas, massoolah, macule, masuris*, etc. But it was later largely standardized as ‘*masula*’. Thomas Bowrey described that *Masula* is a boat

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75 Ibid., p.180.
76 John Shortt ‘The Fishermen of Southern India’, p.197.
77 Ibid., p.197.
78 Ibid., pp.197-198.
'built very sleight, having noe timbers in them, save thafts to hold their sides together, theire planks are very broad and thinne, sowed together with cayre,\textsuperscript{80} being flat bottomed and every way much deformed, as on the other side demonstrated.\textsuperscript{81} Dr. John Fryer (1673) had also described as 'a boat wherein ten men paddle, the two aftermost of whom are the steersmen, using their paddles instead of a rudder; the boat is not strengthened with Knee-Timber, as ours are; the bended planks are sowed together with rope-yarn of the coco, and calc'd with Dammar (a sort of rosin taken out of the sea) so artificially.'\textsuperscript{82}

Francois Martin (1673-4) called \textit{Masulas} as \textit{chelingues or masuris}. According to him it is a 'flate-bottomed boats made of several planks joined by rope yarn.'\textsuperscript{83} Lockyer also said that \textit{Masula} is a 'large, flat-bottomed ill-shap'd Boats, not nail'd as ours, but sow'd together with coyr-twine, whence they are so pliable that the planks never start with the most violent shocks.'\textsuperscript{84} According to Lady Dufferin \textit{Masulas} are 'deep burges, the planks of which are sewn together to give elasticity, and the interstices stuffed with straw.'\textsuperscript{85} According to John Shortt \textit{Masulas} are made of 'pieces being sewn together with cocoanut coir yarns, and from their yielding nature, resist the force of the waves better.'\textsuperscript{86}

The \textit{Masulas} were mainly used to load and unload lighter goods from the ships or vessels. Bowrey said that \textit{Masulas} are 'for little use save carryinge of light goods (as bailes of Callicoes or silkes, not exceedinge 6 or 8 at one time).\textsuperscript{87} Abbe Carre also said that Masulas, which he called 'piphilis', are 'used to load merchandise on board ships.'\textsuperscript{88} This boat was most commonly used at Madras port as textiles and spice bales were most common products of export and import here.

These two boats were most proper and in fact indispensable for the Madras port due to the shallow sea and the high surf in the coast. Bowrey said that this kind of boats 'are most proper for this coast, for all along the shore, the sea runneth high and breaketh,

\textsuperscript{80} Coir: rope made from coconut husks.
\textsuperscript{81} Bowrey, \textit{A Geographical Account}, p.42.
\textsuperscript{82} Fryer, \textit{A New Account of East India and Persia}, p.37.
\textsuperscript{83} Memoirs of Francois Martin (1670-1694), vol. I, part I, p.84.
\textsuperscript{86} John Shortt, 'The Fishermen of Southern India', p.197.
\textsuperscript{87} Bowrey, \textit{A Geographical Account}, pp.42-43.
\textsuperscript{88} Fawcett, \textit{The Travels of the Abbe Carre}, vol. ii, p.594.
to which they doe buckle and also to the ground when they strike.\textsuperscript{89} This is supplemented by Lockyer’s account. He said that ‘here being a very high surf which sometimes breaks a great way from Shore, our English boats are of no use for landing or shipping of goods. For this end therefore they have Mussoolas.’\textsuperscript{90} Fryer also said that \textit{Masulas} were built in such a way that ‘it yields to every ambitious surf, otherwise we could not get ashore, the bar knocking in pieces all that are inflexible.’\textsuperscript{91} According to Salmon ‘no large vessels can ride within two miles of the place, the sea is so very shallow; nor is there any landing but in the country boats, the surf runs so high and breaks so far from the shore.’\textsuperscript{92} Francois Martin’s account substantiates this when he said ‘descent is made difficult all along the Coromandel coast by the sea which is almost always rough here. If an attempt is made to board by launch, there is every danger not only of losing the boat but also of losing one’s life...These light crafts are very responsive to the billowing waves which cast there ashore without the least damage.’\textsuperscript{93} In sixteen century, Gaspardo Baldi also said that ‘the boats do not break, because they give to the wave; and because the beach is covered with sand, the boats stand upright on their bottoms.’\textsuperscript{94}

Again, in 1727, when the Company at home enquire about the absence of platform in the Madras boats leading to the damage of many bales by water, the Madras government responded that it was because such boats were too small to have a platform, and that such platform would make the ‘boat so stift that they would not bear our surf but either break to pieces or overset.’ To prevent the bales from damages they placed a large quantity of brushwood in the bottom of the boat which keeps the bale high enough to prevent the water.\textsuperscript{95} In 1746 the Company was also advised that although the Fort wall was very near to the sea it would be difficult for the French to approach the town ‘which it is very rare they can do in their own boats’ and they would not find it easy to persuade the boatmen under the fire of guns.\textsuperscript{96} Thus, \textit{Masulas} and \textit{Catamarans} were the most

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., pp.42-43.
\textsuperscript{90} Lockyer’s account cited in Love, \textit{Vestiges}, II, p.81.
\textsuperscript{91} Fryer, \textit{A New Account of East India and Persia}, p.37.
\textsuperscript{92} Thomas Salmon, \textit{Modern History or the present state of all nations}, 1724, cited in Love, II, p.75.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Memoirs of Francois Martin (1670-1694)}, vol. I, part. I, p.84.
\textsuperscript{94} Cited in Eric Kentley, ‘The Masula’ pp.122-123.
\textsuperscript{95} Dispatches to England, 22 September 1727, para.22.
\textsuperscript{96} Dispatches from England, 14 November 1746, para. 22, 23.
"A MASSOOLA. A CATTAMARAN."
efficient means of transportation from and to the ships in Madras port. The above account also shows that no other boats can be used for the transportation of goods and men from the shore to the roads. In fact this was the case in throughout the coast of Coromandel excepting few ports.

*The extraordinary 'aquatic feats' of the Boatmen*

We have already shown the structure and use of *catamarans* and *masulas* and how they were indispensable for the shipping of Madras. Here it would be pertinent of look into how they were handled by the Boatmen most expertly. Campbell said that ‘of all the extraordinary craft which the ingenuity of man has ever invented, a Madras catamaran is the most extraordinary, the most simple, and yet, in proper hands, the most efficient.’97 These ‘extraordinary crafts’ being in proper hands of the Madras Boatmen were the most efficient means of running Madras shipping industry. Their special expertise was shown by the account of the early Indian voyager’s log-book which says: ‘It is very curious to watch these catamarans putting out to sea. They get through the fiercest surf, sometimes dancing at their ease on the top of the waters, sometimes hidden under the waters; sometimes the man completely washed off his catamaran, and man floating one way and catamaran another, till they seem to catch each other again by magic.’98

Gaspardo Baldi account of sixteen century is also interesting in this regard. He said: ‘merchandise and passengers are transported from shipboard to the town by certain boats which are sewn with fine cords; and when they approach the beach, where the sea breaks with great violence, they wait till the perilous wave has passed and then, in the interval between one wave and the next, those boatmen pull with great force and so run ashore; and being there overtaken by the (next) waves they are carried still further up the beach.’99 This is in fact an extraordinary art which no ordinary man can do anyway. The Boatmen of Madras by virtue of their age-old tradition in using such boats for fishing on the high sea sustained to pass on such important expertise from generation to generation.

It was because of this special expertise that the Boatmen of Madras got a world wide reputation. John Shortt (1857) said that the Boatmen of Madras got a world-wide

reputation in ‘aquatic feats’, ‘for courage and daring in times of danger and difficulty’. He said that they are like ‘amphibious animals, for they can live on land or sea, and are from morn to night naked and exposed to cold and wet in plying their boats to and from the roads…and appear to glory in the sea, and are altogether a very hard-working set.’

Their aquatic or amphibious life on sea makes them most adaptable and ultimately most efficient person to handle the shipping task most expertly. In this respect, it would be worthwhile to recall the account of Thomas Bowrey who had seen himself one fisherman who was taken over by the bad weather while going out for fishing on the sea but return to the coast after continuously four days on the sea without being with his boat that was already swept away by the storm.

The Boatmen of Madras, their expertise and their crafts were also extremely felt in some other English settlements. For instance, in 1713, the Directors in England wrote to the Deputy Governor and Council of Bencoolen that some slaves from Madagascar were dispatched for the West Coast of Sumatra which they will have to ‘train severall of them up to manage the boats for unlading and relading’ ships. These slaves were to be train by the Boatmen of Madras. For this, they wrote that the Madras government had promises them to send some Masulas and were trying to prevail over the Mucqua men of Madras to go to the West Coast and ‘stay for a time till they have taught the Slaves.’

Again in 1726, the Governor and Council of St. Helena wrote to Madras government requesting ‘some catamarans and people to manage them’ from Madras to be send there in order to ease their growing problems of shipping in that place. It was possible that some of Madras Boatmen were generally sent out to various places wherever they were required and in fact this marked the beginning in which the knowledge and technology of Indian fishermen gradually spread out to other countries in later period. Therefore, it can be said that the world-side reputation of this ‘amphibious’ Boatmen could have been already taken place by this time.

One can also visualize their expertise from the comparative absence of drowning either of goods or men in such violent surf despite working almost on daily basis. Besides

100 John Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of the Southern India,’ pp.199-200.
101 Bowrey, A Geographical Account, p.44.
103 D&CB, 12 April 1726, p.41.
few cases of drowning goods while crossing the surf only two instances of drowning people came in the records during our period of study. In August 1678, three Englishmen were said to have been drowned by the upsetting of Masula boat and the fourth been rescued by the Boatmen.\textsuperscript{104} Abbe Carre also mentioned three Englishmen drowned in the high surf ‘in full view of the towns-people.’\textsuperscript{105} Some instance of drowning of goods would be interesting to note here. On 22 November 1697 six chests of treasure were drowned in the sea while bringing ashore by Masulas, therefore, the Catamaran men, Laskars and Divers were immediately employed to recover the treasure in the midst of high surf. They were later awarded generously.\textsuperscript{106} In 1721 the Mucquas boat overset in the surf with the soldiers that were ordered to the Southward and a Grapnell was lost. It was ordered that ‘if the Boatmen do not find it and restore it, they shall be obliged to pay for the same.’\textsuperscript{107} In 1727, eight piggs of Lead were washed off from the Masula by the strong surf while bringing ashore in Madras port. The Directors, without confirming the details and being suspicious of some foul play by the Boatmen, ordered an enquiry ‘whether the Boatswain was to be blame in not making better care that the Mussoola should be firmly bond.’ They even ordered that a ‘proper officer’ should be order ‘to be very careful to prevent another like accident.’\textsuperscript{108} To this, Fort St. George government wrote back and said that ‘the 8 Piggs of Lead were not lost by the Mussoolas splitting by the weight of the lading but by the sea breaking into and filling them.’\textsuperscript{109}

Thus, we have seen that the nature of the violent surf necessarily requires not only special kind of boats but also special expertise or professional boatmen to cross over, which the erstwhile fisher folks of the Coromandel Coast only posses. Hence, the Boatmen of Madras and their ‘extraordinary crafts’ have now become an indispensable part of Madras global networks of trade and commerce. Madras overseas trade was not likely to happen without the valuable services of the Boatmen who acted as a link in importing and exporting goods and men between Madras and the various ships harbouring on the sea off Madras which was about two miles away from the coast.

\textsuperscript{104} Public Consultation, 1677-1678, p.78.
\textsuperscript{105} Fawcett, The Travels of Abbe Carre, II, p.552.
\textsuperscript{106} D&CB, 22 November 1697, pp.136-137, 144.
\textsuperscript{107} D&CB, 18 December 1721, p.194.
\textsuperscript{108} Dispatches from England, 14 February 1728, para.17.
\textsuperscript{109} Dispatches to England, 27 January 1729, para.22.
As far as their shipping activities were concerned we have already noted that the main task of the Boatmen was to ferry men and goods between Madras and the ships anchoring at the roads which was about two miles away from the shore. With their traditional knowledge of crossing the high surf for fishing on the high sea the Madras Boatmen now carried the goods and men to and from the ships of the ever-growing merchant communities including the Company without which such flourishing trade might not be possible in Madras. But it is not clear for how many rounds a boat can take to the ship in one day. Lockyer said that they can take two or three rounds.\textsuperscript{110} But later evidence shows that a boat can take four rounds. Further, we have noted that the volume of goods carried by this boat were quite less: 6 or 8 bales of light textiles for a masula and 3 or 4 tones of weight for a catamaran. This means that the Madras port required large number of boatmen to complete the ever increasing ships and goods traded.

The Boatmen of Madras were not only instrumental in carrying out the shipping at Madras road but they were also equally felt for other purposes on the sea. In 1696, due to a strong storm several ships were cast away towards St. Thome. The heads of the Mucquaws, Cattamaran men and Cooleys were immediately ordered to send their men to secure scattered goods.\textsuperscript{111} Again, in 1717 Ship Success was wrecked against the impact of the storm in nearby Madras. Soldiers, peons and Catamaran men were immediately sent with Masulas to recover the scattered goods.\textsuperscript{112} Besides, the Boatmen of Madras also lent their valuable services as messengers and postmen between Fort St. George and other nearby English settlements such as Fort St. David. All these evidences show that the Boatmen of Madras were quite beneficial for the Company in several ways. But how these activities were carried out? In the following section an attempt is made to look into the organization of such important activities in Madras.

\textit{The appointment of head Boatmen}

As far as the organization of shipping activities in the port of Madras was concerned we have reference of organizing through the selection of head Boatmen by the merchant government. Through this headman the government could organize and control the whole

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Lockyer’s Account of Madras} (1711) in Love, \textit{Vestiges}, II, pp.81-82.
\textsuperscript{111} D&C&B, 19 April 1696, p.55.
\textsuperscript{112} D&C&B, 21 September 1718, p.168.
activities of the Boatmen. We have already noted that Christians were preferred for this important task. Therefore, the head of the Boatmen should also necessarily be a Christian. But it is not clear when did such system of appointing head or chief and for that matter why a Christian chief have to be appointed. It was possible that the Christian Boatmen have already dominated the shipping activities since from the inception of Madras as our earlier accounts would point out and perhaps such activities were carried out through the traditional leader that was already existed. However, by seeing that the government had little control over the existing system it must have desired to take the rights of appointing their heads by themselves so that the Boatmen could be more effectively control and also depended more on the Company for their various needs. In this respect, the Company, in 1674, directed the Fort St. George Council that those persons to be employed in the ‘command of the Boats to bring goods to and from the ships’ must be require ‘to cause them to enter into covenants to render you true and just account and be bound to make oath to the truth of such account soe often as you shall require it.’\textsuperscript{113} This means that from this time onwards the headmen of the Boatmen were required to subscribe before the government for loyalty and truthfulness through a ‘covenants’ or ‘taseriffs.’ This also means that the headmen have to function from now at the pleasure of the government who now has arrogated the right of appointment and removal. This was followed by another order from the Directors in 1677 that the persons to be employed in the boats must be ‘Christians who wee require shall have the principal charge therein, and if any natives be imployed they must be but under their direction and at their command.’\textsuperscript{114}

On the basis of such new power of appointment the Madras government appointed one Black Tom as the new headman of Mucquas or Boatmen in November 1680. He was appointed ‘to be Muckadum or master of the Boatmen for the better keeping those people in order and fast to the place’ and as he was ‘formerly in that imploy with the same charge, the Boatmen being Christians as he is, and his wages to be 70: fanams per mensem.’\textsuperscript{115} The circumstance in which he was appointed is also interesting. In early November many of the Mucquas and catamaran men joined the

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Dispatches from England}, 8 January 1674, p.29.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Dispatches from England}, 1670-77, dated 12 December 1677, p.123.
\textsuperscript{115} D&CB. 27 November 1680. n.87.
Painters mutiny and deserted Madras for Mylapore until they were forcefully brought back.\textsuperscript{116} So in order to avoid such problems again in future the former heads were dismissed and new head appointed. It is also seen that Black Tom was formerly one of the head Boatmen which means that he must have previously been the traditional head of the Boatmen. Again in 1696, the Mucquaw men quarreled with their chief and presented a petition that he might be discharged and another placed on his room.\textsuperscript{117} It is not clear whether another new chief was appointed after an enquiry was made on the basis of this complaint. It seems that more chiefs were appointed which is shown by later evidence.

By 1708, there were four heads of the Boatmen. It is not clear when did they were appointed. But on 21\textsuperscript{st} January 1708, they were taken before the Council and one of them was appointed as the chief Boatmen ‘for his discovering this villainy’ of the Boatmen for stealing the Company’s bales on board ship Ductchess to the Peddenaigue whereas other three were whipped around the town. After seven months in prison they were release after payment of 500 pagodas as fines.\textsuperscript{118} But Mr. Frasers found such punishment unfair and reinstated them later.\textsuperscript{119} After him, in November 1611, the case was again considered in the Council and upon finding that ‘these boatmen had served the Company very well a great many years and it does not plainly appear to us that they were any way more guilty than the person that discovered the roguery who was a stranger in the place and by his poverty unqualified to be made an example of by way of fine tho all equally guilty’ it was resolved that the President do endeavour to reconcile them that they may go on cheerfully in repairing their boats ready against the arrival of the shipping.\textsuperscript{120} It seems that the new chiefs appointed after the imprisonment of the three did not have any sympathy from the Boatmen of Madras as he was a stranger so that the shipping activities were greatly affected. So unless those men were reconcile or reinstated the ‘the business of the place is not to be done as it should be.’

By 1722 there were two heads of the Boatmen. In October the President proposed for the appointment of two new heads by discharging the two old heads so that ‘they can procure the bringing in more macquas in order to have the business of the port done to

\textsuperscript{116} D&CB, 1 November 1680, p.75; 6 November 1680, p.76; and 8 November 1680, p.76.
\textsuperscript{117} D&CB, 24 September 1696, p.112.
\textsuperscript{118} D&CB, 21 January 1708, pp.10-11; 20 January 1708, p.7-8; and 19 Aug. 1708, p.46.
\textsuperscript{119} D&CB, 9 November 1711, p.156.
\textsuperscript{120} D&CB, 12 November 1711, p.159.
the Merchants satisfaction.121 It was agreed and on 13th October they were appointed with the assistance of the French Padres.122 It seems that such decision was taken when there was a conflicts between the boat cooleys and these two heads for a reason not specified in the records. The said headmen were confined into prison until the other two new headmen were appointed and settled.123 Interestingly, it was also known that whenever new headmen were appointed the boats people of Madras and those Boatmen of St. Thoma were also taken into confidence as in this case. The President informed the Council that he had finally appointed the two headmen of the Boatmen after taking the confidence of all, including the Mucquas of St. Thoma who were ‘of the same cast.’ He said that he ‘sent for and signing to a Cajan’ to the Mucquas of St. Thoma who responded in ‘writing that they were all satisfyd with the alteration.’124 This mean that the head Boatmen of Madras was also the head to those boatmen of Mylapore for which their prior acceptance was thought to be important for the smooth running of Madras shipping. The name of the two new heads were not mentioned in the record but one of them must have been one ‘Tomes (Head Boatmen)’ whose name appeared in the petition of ‘the right and left hand casts in behalf of themselves and all the inhabitants of the city of Madras’ in December 1725.125

In this way the heads of Mucquas were appointed by the English government from time to time throughout the period of our study and beyond. But as far as the choice for the headmen were concern we have no specific evidence. But one later accounts pointed out that the same family of headmen, who seems to have the confidence of the government, were continued to be appointed. In 1795, one Droomo Nursoo (Dharma Narasu), the Boat Overseer of the time, requested for the grant of pension to his father. In his petition he mentioned that from his great grand father who had been first appointed by Governor Pitt in 1705, his family continued to hold the office of the head Boatmen till date. His great grand father was commissioned to Vizagapatnam to engage the boatmen of that place who would not be subservient to the Right Hand Caste people of Madras. For this valuable services he was granted ‘in him and his heirs the employ of sea-side

121 D&CB, 6 October 1722, p.126.
122 D&CB, 17 October 1722, p.131.
123 D&CB, 17 October 1722, p.131 and 30 October 1722, p.134
124 D&CB, 30 October 1722, p.134.
125 D&CB, 27 December 1725, p.198.
dubash and headmen over the Massoola and catamaran people' by a cowle on 12 December 1705. His father succeeded his great grand father and later became blind from where the said Droomo succeeded him. The government agreed to give his father a pension of 1 ½ pagodas per month.\textsuperscript{126}

Before we close this section it should be noted that the appointment of head Boatmen was critical to the interest of the Company government as far as their trade and economy in the place is concerned. We have noted the importance of such job for the survival of Madras itself. We have also noted that Christians were preferred for this crucial task so that their loyalty towards the merchant government would be more ensured. But in order to discipline and utilized the potent of Christian Boatmen they were organized under their heads who was appointed or removed by the government. By bestowing the power over the whole Boatmen not only in terms of shipping activities but also on social aspects as well these headmen gained importance and gradually becomes the meeting point between tradition and modernity and also within Singer’s orthogenetic-heterogenetic transformation they were transformed into an elite ‘intelligentsia’ who mediated the west and the east encounter.\textsuperscript{127}

\textit{Number of boats and Boatmen in Madras port}

As far as the number of Boatmen and boats employed in Madras port we have no clear references in the record. However, it can be reconstructed from some other evidences. Given the volume of trade and number of ships anchoring at Madras port each year, the need for boatmen to run the shipping business appears to be very large. Generally, more than sixty ships frequented Madras every year. For instance, in the year 1710 about 74 ships came and went with full loaded goods in Madras.\textsuperscript{128} Besides, there were many more sloops, ketches and brigantines plying in the coastal entrepots. These smaller vessels came and went more often than the bigger ships. Even the large ships plying to Bengal could go for two round trips in a year, for example, ship \textit{Chalton} and \textit{Morning Star} in 1710. The carrying capacity of the overseas bound ships was generally larger than intra regional or 'country ships,' which usually ranged from 400 to 600 tones. Given the

\textsuperscript{126} Public consultation 11 December 1795, as reproduced in Love, \textit{Vestiges}, II, p.539.
\textsuperscript{128} D&CB, 1710.
volume of goods to be loaded and unloaded from and to these ships vis-à-vis the maximum number of three trips in a day for one Masula or Catamaran the need for large number of boatmen at Madras can be established. It should be noted that a Masula can ply two or three turns/trips a day 'being the most fellow can make.'\(^{129}\) No wonder, it was said that when President Pitt left Madras for England in 1709 there were fifty trading ships and above two hundred small crafts at one time in the road of Madras in June.\(^{130}\) Further, the number of ships that have resorted to Madras in 1638 was said to be 'one hundred and twenty sail of ships.'\(^{131}\) Given this figure of two hundred boats with that of Fryer account of ten men for each boat the number of boatmen required at Madras port will shoot up to more than 2000.

In fact, because of the ever growing trade and merchandise goods to be loaded or unloaded Madras government faced a perennial problem in getting enough boatmen to carried out the works of shipping in Madras port which was time-bound.\(^{132}\) This was mainly because this work was not be done by anyone but the Boatmen who only possesses the special knowledge that was require for the job. Therefore, to ease the work of Madras Boatmen many boatmen from other places have to be admitted during the peak season who would but worked under the command of the headmen of Madras Boatmen. We have already noted that a new town called 'Mucqua town' was created in the southern portion of the Fort in the 1670s to cater and encourage the increasing number of Boatmen who have migrated to Madras. We have also noted that one head Boatmen was sent to Vizagapatnam to procure more Boatmen during Pitts time. But by far the boats and boatmen of Mylapore constituted the largest number of Boatmen who used to come to Madras port in peak shipping season. This was not only because it was the nearest place to procure them but was also probably that they were also Christians and of the 'same caste.'

But it seems that even with all these measures the problem of shortage of boatmen could not be adequately resolve. This is apparent in the reports of President Nathaniel Elwick in 1722. He informed the Council that though the number of boats employed in

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\(^{129}\) Lockyer's accounts of Madras in Love, *Vestiges*, II., p.81.

\(^{130}\) *Dispatches from England*, 1706-1710, p.153, dated 7 July 1710.

\(^{131}\) *Dispatches from England*, 21 March 1739, para.41.

\(^{132}\) Shipping season mainly stretched from November till August of the next year.
Madras 'have been as many as usual and the Boatmen kept constantly at work when the weather would permit and notwithstanding he has frequently sent to St. Thoma and been supplied with their Boats yet there have not been sufficient to do the business of the Port.' He also reported that 'he had many and daily complaints and many ships have been obliged to stay here so long that their passage to their next Port became doubtfull amongst the rest several ships.' Therefore, he proposed some measures to solve this problem. First, thirty Boats be built immediately at Company's expenses and later deducted from the earnings of the Boatmen. Second, two new heads of Boatmen be appointed. Third, best method to 'procure the bringing in more macquas' be find out 'in order to have the business of the Port done to the merchants satisfaction. Fourth, a shed or 'Banksall' for the workmen to 'repair or build boats under fifty foot long and fifteen foot broad' should also be built at the Company's charge. All the proposals were accepted by the Council and it was according carried out. It seems that such measures greatly ease the problems of shipping in Madras.

The Company also owned some boats at their disposals to defray upon during emergency. The need was especially felt due to the rebellious nature of the Boatmen. In 1687, when many Mucqua men deserted Madras Mr. Fraser (land Customer) was directed to buy 'forty young sound slaves' for the Company and 'dispose them to the several Mussolas.' Again after many Boatmen joined the caste dispute in 1707 and deserted Madras, Governor Pitt ordered to the Paymaster to build 12 boats immediately for the Company's account and 'procure such people to man them as have no dependence on the right hand cast.' Such moves were also strongly approved by the Company at home. Lockyer (1711) had also noticed seven Masulas belonged to the Company at the rate of one pagoda per trip during his stay in Madras. However, such move was not successful and in any case they cannot be substitutes to the large number of boatmen in Madras who posses special expertise which they were not likely to give up to others who may be intended to take over their lucrative job.

133 D&CB, 6 October 1722, p.126.
134 D&CB, 6 October 1722, p.126.
135 D&CB, 17 October 1722, p.131; and 30 October 1722, p.134.
136 D&CB, 29 September 1687.
137 D&CB, 20 October 1707, p.72.
Wages for the boatmen

As far as their wages was concerned we have some important record during our period. In 1654, it was recorded that 'the Macwaes had always for each Massoola turne 3 fannams...but now they have but 2 fannams in the Presidents time.'\textsuperscript{139} This means that the usual pay for the Maquas was 2 or 3 fannams per boat from the beginning of Madras settlement. In 1678, after a strong protest and desertion the Company was compelled to increase to five fannams 'per Musulas lading of 6 bales.'\textsuperscript{140} By 1711, Lockyer said that the 'hire' of Mussolas was 'six fannams or eighteen pence a trip; but the Company has seven Boats per pagoda, which is money dearly earned, two or three turns a day being the most fellows can make'.\textsuperscript{141} By 1727 the charge for one masula was still five fannams.\textsuperscript{142}

Given the enormity of the jobs the Boatmen earned much below their deserved pay but enough for their sustenance. We know that one Masula can ply two or three turns a day and more than ten persons have to row the boat to cross over the violent surf.\textsuperscript{143} This meant a boat can earn maximum of 15 fannams in a day which is to be divided among them. By computation each boatman can earn more than forty fannams in a month which is reasonable. Lockyer also said that 'goods are seldom landed the first day, it being sufficient to secure the ship, send the Company's packet ashore, and get refreshments for the men, which they are presently supply'd with from country Boats and Catamarans, who make good penny at the first coming of Orombarros (new comers), as they call those who have not been there before.'\textsuperscript{144} Although they earned good penny 'dearly' from this job it seems to have been much below their crucial role at the port and more so to sustain and improvised their gaining social importance in the local society. This may be the reason why the Mucquas were seen to be so restless.

Advance payment to Boatmen

The Fort St. George government was rather seen to have encouraged the Boatmen so that they were more serviceable to the Company all the time. Seeing that the boats are to be repair every year to prevent them from damages the Company helped in lending advance

\textsuperscript{139} Love, Vestiges, I, p.143.
\textsuperscript{140} D&CB, 12 January 1678, p.128.
\textsuperscript{141} Love, Vestiges, II, p.81.
\textsuperscript{142} D&CB, 25 July 1727, p.93.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p.81.
\textsuperscript{144} Love, Vestiges, II, p.85.
money annually for the purpose. Witsen (1690) said that Masulas are ‘useful boats but have to be taken to parts and resewn often.’ For this reason the Company made the tradition of advancing money, initially 100 pagodas and later 200 pagodas, to the Boatmen of Madras every year for repairing their boats before the onset of the new shipping season, around the month of October or November. This money used to be deducted later from their account of earnings. It is not clear when they started the payment of such advance money but it is probable that such practice must have begun since the early days of Madras trade. We came across the payment of such money during the off season annually. For instance, in 1711, the warehouse keeper was ordered to advance the Mucquas ‘two hundred pagodas according to custome to repair their boats during this vacation that they be in good condition against the arrival of the Averilla.’

But in many cases it seems that such advance money could not be repaid by the Boatmen and sometime they were indebted for several years. On certain occasion such debts were paid for them by the government. For instance, in 1724, the Storehouse keeper requested the Council that he be paid 200 pagodas out of the earnings of the Boatmen for the quantity of planks he supplied to the Boatmen ‘to repair and new build their boats’ which they cannot pay him anymore even after he demanded for several time. When the Warehousekeeper was asked for any money of the Boatmen he also informed that the Boatmen were rather indebted to him as well but since the beginning of the previous years it had been decreased. It was decided in the Council that the debt of the Boatmen should be paid by the Warehousekeeper from the Company’s account as it was necessary to supply the Boatmen with such plank and that the ‘busy time of the year is coming on wherein all probability they will be able to discharge a further part of that debt.’ But the Directors were not happy with owning the debts of others to the Company. Accordingly, they have directed that ‘due care be taken to reimbursed that money and that if there is any necessity of supplying them it should take the prior permission of the Council.

146 D&CB, 1 November 1711, p.144.
147 D&CB, 27 January 1724, p.16.
148 Dispatches from England, 2 February 1724, para.79.
Usually the Boatmen were able to pay their debts in the following season due to sufficient works. However, there was time when they could not even repay their debts in a bad year. For instance in 1730 the Export Warehousekeeper informed the Council that the Boatmen were unable to pay the money advanced them in the previous year ‘for want of having employment sufficient to work it out.’ But as the Council felt it ‘absolutely necessary that their boats should be repaired’ they ordered that the Boatmen should be paid 125 pagodas as advance, after deducting 75 pagodas, their debts, from such usual advance pay.\(^{149}\) It should be noted that Madras was hard hit by famine in 1728-29 leading many Boatmen unable to sustain themselves; the assistance of government could not help them out.\(^{150}\) But in most cases the Boatmen earned several time more than those advance payment because of the flourishing trade. For instance in 1733, the Boatmen were paid another 171.19 pagodas above their usual advance payment of 200 pagodas.\(^{151}\) In this way advance payment for the repair of their boats during the off season was annually made by the merchant government. This was felt necessary for the smooth running of the Madras business as the Boatmen were poor and could not afford by themselves while their boats required annual refurbishing.

*Other assistance given to the Boatmen*

Due to their crucial role in the shipping of Madras the Boatmen were also taken care of by the Company in several forms such as during natural or man-made calamities. For instance, on 25 November 1695, the paymaster was ordered to advance 100 pagodas to the Boatmen ‘for building new Mussulas and repairing the old ones, there having been blown away and broke to pieces in the late storme (on 21st Nov.) seven or eight.’\(^{152}\) On 20th February 1718, when provisions were very scarce in Madras the Boatmen asked money in advance for their subsistence; 300 pagodas were advanced to them. Again on 19th March 40 garse of rice was provided to the Boatmen and washermen.\(^{153}\) During the great famine of 1728-29 the government also provided them with money and rice. In December 1728 they ‘requested a further advance towards supplying themselves with

\(^{149}\) D&C\textit{B}, 31 October 1730, p.141.
\(^{150}\) See for instance D&C\textit{B}, 4 December 1728, p.161.
\(^{151}\) D&C\textit{B}, 29 October 1733, p.151.
\(^{152}\) D&C\textit{B}, 25 November 1695, p.151.
\(^{153}\) D&C\textit{B}, 20 February 1718, p.33 and 19 March 1718, p.52.
rice in this time of scarcity all that they had before received being expended about their boats.\textsuperscript{154} Thus, they were generally taken care of during difficult time because of their invaluable service to the Company’s business.

Further, because of their importance in the Company’s service the government was compelled to forge good relation with the Boatmen at all time. For instance, the relationship between the Boatmen and the Company was strained after Governor Pitt disposed their three headmen for stealing goods in 1708, which seems to have caused the Company dearly so that Mr. Fraser immediately reinstated them. The matter was taken up again in 1711 in which the Council, disapproving the judgment of Pitt, entrusted the President to ‘endeavour to reconcile them that they may go on cheerfully in repairing their boats ready against the arrival of the shipping’ as ‘the business of the place is not to be done as it should be unless those fellows are continued in their employs.’\textsuperscript{155} It should also be noted that after the rendition of Madras the question of Boatmen become all the more important than ever before. Due to their indispensable services in the port the Company government wanted them to remain in the town at all cost. They fear that if the Capuchin priests be expelled from Madras the Boatmen would also migrate to other places. For this reason they found themselves compelling not to expel the Catholic priests from Madras. In September 1749 the Fort St. David Council wrote to Admiral Boscawen, who was in charge of Madras, to let those Catholics who were not under the French rule ‘to dwell in some part of our bounds and to have a small church with a priest a native of Portugal’ as ‘most of Our Boat people are of that Communion.’\textsuperscript{156} Mr. Boscawen replied that the church of the Luz (which has been much enlarged and repaired) may be left to the present possessors (St. Thoma priests); first because of our Boatmen are all settled near it, and lastly because it is so very close to the edge of our bounds, that it is barely within them.\textsuperscript{157} This was agreed and done, but the Governor and Council also thought more prudent that the Capuchins should also be reinstated to their former office (as the head of Catholic Church in Madras) than sent them home that was proposed by Boscawen. Accordingly they were given the possession of the Fishermen’s Church in the

\textsuperscript{154} D&CB, 4 December 1728, p.161.
\textsuperscript{155} D&CB, 12 November 1711, p.159.
\textsuperscript{156} Fort St. David Consultations, 2 September 1749, pp.174-175.
\textsuperscript{157} Fort St. David Consultations, 11 September, 1749, p.183.
‘Mile End’ south of the Fort as the Boatmen ‘who are of that communion, may probably be induced to leave us should we expel them [the French Padres] our limits.’\textsuperscript{158} Thus the importance of the Boatmen in the business of the Company was felt continuously.

**Fishing and the fishermen of Madras**

Fishing was another important occupation of the Mucquas in Madras. We know that about eighteen castes in Coromandel Coast took to this profession as ‘their calling’ and had become the mainstay economy since time immemorial. John Shortt has pointed out that the beach from the sea to 120 yards inland belonged to the fishermen all along the coast predicated with fishing villages two to three mile apart and correspondingly the sea was clearly demarcated for each villages by pieces of wood that are made to floats by anchors. He also said that the fishermen may go out as far as they think it is safe to do so in their small but ‘extraordinary’ boats seawards to fish, ‘but are not permitted to encroach upon each other coastwise; any attempt of the kind is sure to lead to a row, terminating in a fight; if on land skulls are broken; if afloat, attempts are made to drown each other.’\textsuperscript{159} Probably this must have been the only hurdle the fishermen might have faced from other persons before the advent of the Europeans. However, since the coming of the English fishing within the bounds of Madras was controlled in one forms or the other.

The Company rented out the fishing rights in the river of Madras to a person who would have to pay the yearly rent to the government. Likewise, fishing on the sea was also restricted and controlled through the entry point at the sea side where fish customs was collected by the government. The two rights were generally given to one person, the ‘fishing farmer’ as it was known. A *cowle* or license was issued to the highest bidder for the ‘sole liberty and privileges of fishing in the rivers adjoining the towne’ of Madras and ‘full power and authority to take and received custome of fish of all’ brought into Madras.\textsuperscript{160} Thus, the erstwhile communally owned sea, river or fishes now become the sole property of one person or for that matter the Company. All fishermen must now take permission to fish from this renter, the fishing farmer.

\textsuperscript{158} Fort St. David Consultations, 11 December 1749, p.277.
\textsuperscript{159} John Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of the Southern India,’ p.196.
\textsuperscript{160} D&CB, 3 May 1694.
The motive behind such control was three-fold: first, the Company now becomes the sole owner to river and sea within the bounds of Madras in total disregard to the age-old notion of communally owned water and other natural resources. Second, the Company earned a yearly income of 50 pagodas from fishing and fish customs. Third, the government wanted to ensure regular supply of fish in the town including that of the ‘general table’ in the kitchen of Fort St. George and for salting them for the Garrisons and voyages. The control of the government over fishing was done through the renters of fishing farmer. But it is interesting to investigate when such system began and how was it rented out.

Initially, the Company collected fish at the sea side for their own consumption as tax for entering Madras. This was collected by a peon ‘at the sea side and bring it to the kitchen for the Companys general table.’ But somewhere before 1680, the Company started renting out this right to the highest bidder. But it was withdrawn in 1680 when there was a strong protest from the fishermen. In 1694, it was again rented out to Mrs. Anne Delgardner who continued to hold it for two years consecutively. She was granted ‘the sole liberty and privileges of fishing in the river adjoining unto the towne, forbidding any other person to catch fish in said river with any manner of nets whatsoever, without leave first obtained from said Anne Delgardner, under penalty of forfeiting their netts.’ She was also given ‘full power and authority to take and received custome fish of all Catamarans and others, as has been usually received by the Rt. Honble Company.’

The cowle was initially leased for 30 pagodas per annum and in the next year it was increased to 40 pagodas. But from 1696, the fishing cowle was rented to the heads of the Mucquas for 50 pagodas as ‘it being much more convenient for them then any other farmers who meet with great trouble from the Mucquaw men in the collection of the custom fish.’ Since then, the fishing farm remained with the Mucqua men during our period of study, usually with their chief, who yearly paid to the Company’s Cash 50 pagodas.

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161 This can be seen in the Consultation Books in which the renter yearly paid fifty pagodas to the Company Cash. Initially it was rented out for 30 pagodas but from 1696 it was fixed at 50 pagodas.
162 D&CB, 1 July 1680, p.43-44.
163 D&CB, 21 May 1695, p.67.
164 D&CB, 3 May 1694.
pagodas which remains unchanged. This cowle was generally granted for five years at a
time and the payment was done half yearly i.e. twice in a year. In 1697 the cowle was
given in the name of Deigo Pasquall,\textsuperscript{166} Pasquall and Joan in 1707,\textsuperscript{167} Pasquall,
Errlepow, Andee Percoun in 1710,\textsuperscript{168} Thome and Joanne in 1716\textsuperscript{169} and Pasquall, Deigo,
Ershiah, etc. in 1724\textsuperscript{170} and so on. As per the cowle granted to the ‘Company of
Mucquas’ they were granted ‘the sole liberty and privilege of fishing in the river
adjoining unto the Town forbidding any other person to catch fish in the said river with
any manner of Nets whatsoever without leave first obtained’ from them ‘under penalty of
forfeiting their nets and suffering such punishment as the Justices shall think fit to
inflict.’ But the Company reserved to itself the ‘liberty of fishing there once in a month
for the use of the Genera Table.’ Further the cowle also granted ‘full power and authority
to take and receive Custom fish of all Cattamarans and others as has been usually
received by the Honourable Company.’\textsuperscript{171} Besides, giving fish customs and other fees
that may be collected by the Company of Mucquas, the fishermen also paid the Town
Conecopoly: 325 fanams per annum; for fishing in the river ten fanams per annum; out of
every draught of fish ten fish; and to those that carried out to town shall pay out of every
fanam worth 4 cash.\textsuperscript{172}

Fishing seems to have been generally a private affair although there were also
possibilities of groups fishing in Madras. While the river fishing was already been
contracted out to the ‘Company of Mucquas’ who have the sole liberty and privilege and
other being forbidden sea fishing continued to remain open for everyone. Although many
of the erstwhile fisher folks took up various new jobs under the new colonial urban set up
especially as boatmen for loading and unloading goods in the port as their main
occupation now, their erstwhile fishing profession continued to remain predominantly in
their hands. This was mainly because sea fishing, like the shipping, requires the same
expertise over the deadly surf and that shipping job was not perennial but seasonal
ranging from November to July/August of the following year. During the off shipping

\textsuperscript{166} D&CB, 24 September 1696, p.112; 2 May 1698, p.49; 16 May 1699, p.41.
\textsuperscript{167} D&CB, 2 December 1707, pp.86-87.
\textsuperscript{168} D&CB, 4 April, 1710, p.35.
\textsuperscript{169} D&CB, 12 March, 1716, p.36 and 23 June 1720, p.102.
\textsuperscript{170} D&CB, 10 April 1724, p.45.
\textsuperscript{171} D&CB, 10 April 1724, p.45-46.
\textsuperscript{172} D&CB, 24 December 1701, p.109-110.
season many Boatmen took to fishing as a stop gap employment. In fact, there were many more people who could not be employed in the port. This people continued to practice fishing profession ever more than before; the ever growing population of Madras and its increasing demands rather encourage more and more of them. This increasing interest in fishing was pointed out by the fact that the erstwhile inland fishermen, the ‘chomboddeewar cast’ now took to sea fishing. The urban environment as well as their conversion into Christianity must have probably helped the inland fishermen to do away with their traditional caste inhibition in taking sea fishing.

Nets were usually used for catching fish. In the inland rivers and tanks the fishermen generally used ‘a circular form, and about 10 feet in diameter, and from 8 to 12 feet in length, terminating above is the pointed cone; the lower, or open end is loaded with iron or leaden rings, to enable the net to sinks under water rapidly.’ This was flanged on the river in such a way that it opens out and fall into the water like a bell.\(^{173}\) Fish traps made of bamboo were also been use but hook and line are rare. On the sea there are two types of nets: ‘drag’ and ‘oblong’ nets ‘extending to a couple or three hundred feet in length, and from three to four feet in breadth’.\(^{174}\) The nets are made from the fibre of the Crotalaria Juncia, Janapha, coconut fibre and cotton wool. These are prepared for the purpose by steeping in a decoction made from the bark of the acacia speciosa or cantoovaya palla, or wrightia tinctoria, etc., on account of their great astringent properties, which they impart to the fibre a rust-brown colour that protects them from the destructive effects of salt water.\(^{175}\)

Taking the kind of nets used by the fishermen seining seems to have been known during this time. This is also supported by other evidence. In October 1719, when the warehouse keeper asked for the supply of fish from Mucquas for salting he was told that enough fish cannot be supplied till the next January i.e. 1720.\(^{176}\) This evidence probably pointed out to the seining season which begins in January. The seining season, where large catch was made, was restricted to three or four months, January to April. This

\(^{173}\) John Shortt, 'The Fishermen of the Southern India,' p.194.
\(^{174}\) Ibid., p.198.
\(^{175}\) Ibid., p.198.
\(^{176}\) D&CB, 19 October 1719, p.190.
season brings the pelagic shoals of anchovies, sardines, whitebait, silver bellies and caranx in towards the land where large catch was made.\footnote{Eric Kentley, 'The Masula,' p.131.}

Thomas Bowrey said that the fishermen or 'Moquaes' use *Catamaran* for fishing on the sea. He said, 'when they go on fishinge, they are ready with very small ones of the like kind, that will carry 4, 3, 2, or one man onely, and upon these Sad things, they will boldly adventure out of sight of the shore.'\footnote{Bowrey, *A Geographical Account*, p.43.} He also said that he had often seen them 'one league or more off shore, when the westerly winds have blown very hard, which is right off, soe that they could by noe means paddle any nearer in, and they have made sleight of it, onely let fall there line with a stone fast thereto, and let the Cattamaran ride by it, (for such are theire anchors) and they swimme on shore both against wind and sea.' Bowrey also mentioned one fisherman who was taken over by the bad weather and lay scattered on the high sea for four days and finally thrown upon the shore by a 'stronge tide of flood and an Eastern rowlinge sea, after he had been 90 hours at least upon the water.'\footnote{Ibid., p.44.} Abbe Carre also said that the 'Patanavars' and 'Macouas' used Catamarans and Masulas in which 'two nude men spend all the day in the open sea to catch fish, which abound on this coast.'\footnote{Fawcett, *The Travels of the Abbe Carre*, vol. ii, pp.594-595.}

John Shortt noted that the nets, boats and catamarans are generally owned by one or two of the chief men. These are lent out to fisheors or labourers and on their return from fishing excursions, divide the fishes into seven portions, two given to the owner of the catamarans and nets and the remaining five shared amongst the fishermen equally. If it happen to the Masulas which can take larger nets, it was divided into two parts, one part to the owner of the boat and nets and the other part shared amongst ten fishermen. He also said that fishes were usually delivered to a contractor, usually a Muslim merchant who also lent money to the fishermen as loan at usurious rate.\footnote{John Shortt, 'The Fishermen of the Southern India,' p.198.} But as far as the fish contractor is concern we have no references in the record but what is most probable was that the fishermen of Madras directly delivered their catches to the town which is pointed out by the fact that in 1719 the warehouse keeper of the Company demand fish supply
directly from the Mucquamen, possibly from the Mucqua headmen.\textsuperscript{182} We have already noted that the fish custom was paid to the ‘Company of Mucquas’ to whom we felt that they might also have that contract on their capacity.

A part from supplying to the markets in Madras, fish was also supplied to the Company and other seafarers for salting to be used on the sea journeys, in the garrisons and other settlements. We have just mention about the demand made for fish by the warehouse keeper for salting.\textsuperscript{183} The fact that the fishermen asked warehouse keeper to wait for January (seining season) pointed out the requirement of large proportion of fish for salting. Therefore, fish must have certainly constituted a part of the provisions for ships and garrisons apart from pork, beef, etc. Thus the high demands of fishes for consumption in the town as well as for salting not only have necessitated sufficient and regular supply but also certainly increased the earnings of the fishermen necessitating more and more people to work for it. Regular supply was ensured through the renters of the fishing farmers.

Fishes, which are caught by the fishermen of Madras and supply to the town includes: Cybium guttatum, commersoni, lanceolatum (Seir); Sillago sihama (whiting); Stromateus (silver pomfret); Stromateus nigre (black pomfret); Mugal subviridis (mullet); Psettodes erumei (sole); Lates calcarifer (cock-up); Lutjanus roseus and marginatus; Polynemus tetradactylus, Chorinemus lysan and whitebait.\textsuperscript{184} Thus, the new circumstance has made the fishing business more prospective and hence improved the earnings of the fishermen to great extend despite certain restrictions which were hitherto unknown.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE NATIVE CHRISTIANS
We have noted that the local Christians of Madras were socially and spatially divided in the urban space of Madras under the English government. Here, the various social or religious aspects of this Christian community will be taken up. To begin with, it should be noted that the Boatmen of Madras were mostly a Roman Catholic and got close relationship with the Church under the guidance of the Capuchin Priests of Madras. But despite acquiring these various tenets of Christianity the Boatmen continued to maintain their caste connection with their traditional caste groups. As they belonged to the right
hand caste they continued to join them whenever there was occasion to do so. This means that the caste heads of the right hand caste continued to influence the Boatmen greatly. This can be seen from several instances. The Boatmen joined the Painter mutiny in 1680 alongside the right hand caste groups.\textsuperscript{185} The Boatmen also joined the ‘black town’ wall agitation in 1686 at the instance of the caste heads.\textsuperscript{186} Again in 1707, they also joined in the caste conflicts between the right and left hand castes and were apparently in the forefront; again at the instance of their caste heads.\textsuperscript{187} These instances will be dealt with in details later. Besides, we also came across the participation of head Boatmen on the side of the right hand caste groups whenever any representation was made before the Government as a form of protest or otherwise.\textsuperscript{188}

Besides adhering to their traditional right hand caste groups the Mucquas also continued to professed many of their traditional believe system. For instance, there was reference to show that the Boatmen continued to depend much upon the Mucquas ‘ordinary astrologers for weathers’ in the forecasting of the sea weather. For instance, on 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 1684, ‘great raine and stormes’ occurred as per the prediction of the Mucquas weathermen, killing several people, destroying houses and 14 Masulas ‘dashed to pieces.’\textsuperscript{189} The importance of the Mucquas astrologers hinged upon the violent sea in the Bay of Bengal. Madras was frequently hit by storms and hurricanes during our period of study. It struck in March 1640, February 1662, November 1668, April 1674, October 1679, November 1684, October 1687, November 1695 and so on. Every time it occurred, the seaside dwellers were hit most. For instance, on 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1695 the strong storm almost drowned the whole of ‘Mucquas town’ and the Cattamaran men settlements in the black town and Mutial petta; a quarter part of their houses being washed away by the sea or blown downe by the wind.\textsuperscript{190} However, interestingly we have no references on the drowning of boatmen and fishermen in the high sea during such trouble storms, probably because of their astrologer’s precise predictions. In fact, such weather forecasting knowledge was passed on from generation to generation among this fishing

\textsuperscript{185} D&CB, 1 November 1680, p.75; 6 November 1680, p.76; and 8 November 1680, p.76.
\textsuperscript{186} D&CB, 4 January 1686, p.5.
\textsuperscript{187} See for instance D&CB, 21 August 1707, p.54.
\textsuperscript{188} See for instance D&CB, 1725, p.198.
\textsuperscript{189} D&CB, 3 November 1684.
\textsuperscript{190} D&CB, 21 November 1695, p.151.
community which becomes part of their social discourse. This is the more necessity for them as their life and occupation mostly hinged in the knowledge of the sea and its various feature.

Again, we have also noted from the Manucci account concerning one old blind women called Adroza who lived with the reputation of a saint so much so that 'a whole village of fisher-folk had recourse to her, presenting to her good fish and some money' so that they stop coming to the church and 'the alms that they usually brought to church at the time of mass and their other offerings were also missing.' When the Vicar discovered this she 'was admonished, expelled from Madras,' only to find her new rendezvous at the foothills of St. Thomas Mount. This account of the fishing community of Madras is significant in that there was still a strong favour for the traditional goddess worship as well as for the saints who were generally imbued with some supernatural powers of healings or curses. The old women who could perform some miracles or healings or tell their past or future were generally given reputation of possessing some supernatural powers. They were regarded in high esteem in the local society. So the Christian fisher folks were not exception to such general feelings in the larger society. We have noted that even the Portuguese were generally influence by such practices.

The fishing town or village on the seaside of Madras was rather appeared to look as if they are modern slum jhuggies. Salmon in 1699/1700 said that the houses of the 'the black watermen and fishermen ...consisted of little, low, thatched cottages which hardly deserve the name of buildings.' We have just cited about the 'Mucqua town' that was wholly drown during the storm in November 1695. The Catamaran men settlements in the black town and Mutialpetta also equally suffered. John Shortt said that very few of the fisher folks could afford three meals in a day and their meals usually consisted of rice, seasoned with fish or greens cooked into curries. Shortt also noted that as a body, the fisher folks were 'dissipated set, and, whenever they can afford it, partake freely of toddy or arrack. They are also particularly partial to tobacco, which they chew and smoke.'

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193 D&CB, 21 November 1695, p.151.
194 John Shortt, 'The Fishermen of Southern India,' p.197.
195 Ibid., p.196.
Their women-folks assisted them in cleaning, repairing or making the fishing nets or in selling the fishes.

Life at the seaside of Madras during the shipping seasons appeared to look like the modern bazaar. Lockyer said that ‘on the arrival of a Europe ship, the sea-gate is always throng’d with people, some laying wagers, others waiting for Masters, and the rest to satisfy their curiosities.’ The Boatmen sailed out their boats to get people and goods from the ships and carry over goods and provisions to the ships. From the Boatmen the cooleys have to carried those goods to the godowns in the town. The new comers and other dignified persons necessarily boarded on the Boatmen’s masulas, risking their very lives over the deadly surf, and after passing for about two miles with fear, finally landed on the beach of Madras from where they were taken by palanquins ‘on the shoulders of the blacks’ and must forced their way through the Sea Gate. Thus, lives at the seaside during the shipping season were full of activities, fears and merry makings. Every body came out in the expectation of earnings something out of the flourishing shipping trade. As the fisher folks were settling near the sea side they were always part and parcel of this vixissitudes of life on the seaside. This will go from November to July of the following year.

On the sea the Boatmen or for that matter all the fisher folks of Madras were most cheerful chaps. In early morning they set out for fishing excursions on the sea as far as forty to fifty miles away from the shore and returned with their catches in the evening. Lockyer also said that, the Boatmen, despite their long journey from the shore to the ships and amidst the high surf was never been a sad men but ‘they are merry birds, howling out a Ela, Yela as chorus to their songs at almost every stroke.’ Bowrey also saw them swimming as cheerfully as the ‘Spanyall dogs.’ We have also seen the accounts of the early Indian voyager’s log-books who witnessed the ‘catamarans putting out to sea’ who ‘get through the fiercest surf, sometimes dancing at their ease on the top of the waters, sometimes hidden under the waters.’ Lady Dufferin’s ‘mosquito fleets’ were also equally curious and joyful. Thus, for the brave fishermen and boatmen of

197 Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of Southern India,’ p.197.
198 Love, Vestiges, II, pp.81-82.
199 Bowrey, A Geographical Account, p.43.
Madras sea life have been rather sources of pleasures, a part of life and not just an occupation.

As far as their religious life was concerned it may be said that the Christian fishermen and Boatmen were virtually under the care of the Capuchin priests of Madras. Most of their spiritual needs were being provided by the said priests. Perhaps this fishing community must have constituted the largest numbers of the Catholic population in Madras. But unfortunately we have scanty references from the Company records concerning this aspect. But this can still be reconstructed from some passing references. As far as their marriages and burials affairs were concerned we have evidences to show that such ceremonies took place at the St. Andrew Church in the ‘white town.’ As late as in 1652 a separate streets were allotted for the Christian Pattnawars (catamaran men) and Cariallwars (Boatmen) who ‘are to pass with their weddings and burials from the back side of Mr. Porters House to the middle of the Quarter Porters house and so to proceed to the Portuguez Church, they may likewise goe through the great street.’

Another street in the ‘white town’ called St. Thomas Street was allotted for the same purpose after the ‘Mucqua town’ was created in the southern portion of the Fort town. This Street was later changed by creating a separate ‘convenient passage’ along the walls behind the back of the English houses as it was ‘often complained as a nuisance’ by many to let the Mucquas passed the St. Thomas Street with their weddings and burials procession. On various other occasions also the local Christians have resorted to St. Andrew Church where ‘some thousands meet every week.’

There was also a separate Church in the Fishermen’s town to cater their daily spiritual needs. It is not known when such church came up but in 1749, after the rendition, it was restored to the Capuchin priests of Madras: the church in the ‘Mile End.’ Abbe Carre (1673) also said that the Capuchin priests of Madras have ‘three schools of different sorts of Christians whom they teach there with fruitful results, viz. Portuguese, Hindus and Malabars.’ The beginning of such schools among the local Christians have by far the greatest social implication during the later period in that many educated individuals began to came up among the erstwhile

201 D&CB, 30 October 1707, p.75.
202 D&CB, 10 April 1722, pp.57-58.
203 D&CB, 29 Feb. 1676, p.89.
204 Fort St. David Consultations, 11 December 1749, p.277.
low caste people and bring about many change in the society. The Boatmen were one of those first beneficiaries from the new learning.

The great influence of the Capuchin priests over the fishing community in temporal spheres was also shown by some evidence. For instance, in 1707, during the caste disputes, these fishing communities also joined on the side of the right hand caste groups and later, in protest against the government policy, deserted to St. Thoma. When all means of persuasion failed the government sent the Capuchin Fathers to persuade them on their behalf.206 Again, in 1722, the government wanted to make new regulations for the Boatmen of Madras. For this the President ‘had discoursed with the Portuguese Padrees about regulating them by changing their heads, they being CHRISTIANS but very mean and numerous, over whom the CLERGY have a Great Command and in discourse he found it absolutely necessary to confine the two of the heads and appoint two new.’207 This two references show that the Capuchin Priests of Madras have a great say over the affairs of the Boatmen not only in religious affairs but also in their temporal aspects as well. Consulting the Capuchin priests or for that matter seeking their help whenever some problems arises on the affairs of Madras Boatmen illustrate the indispensability of the Capuchin Fathers on the one hand and their undisputed influence over the Boatmen on the other.

**Boatmen as ‘all notorious thieves’: a mere colonial construct**

For John Shortt (1867) the Boatmen of Madras were but ‘amphibious animals’ and ‘appear to glory in the sea, and are altogether a very hard-working set.’ But he added that ‘at the same time they are great rogues, and would rob one to his face, if allowed to do so. They are great expert in robbing the cargo in their boats, when to and from the shipping in the road, as well as tapping casks of beer or spirits.’208 Because of such ‘roguerys’ the Boatmen were considered to be the tribes of ‘all notorious thieves’. But it would be interesting to see how such discourses began to take place in the writing of the later English ethnographers such as Shortt and look into it whether such thing really occurred.

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206 D&CB, 26 June 1707, p.36; 21 August 1707, p.54; 25 August 1707, pp.55-56 and 24 September, p.66.
207 D&CB, 17 October 1722, p.131.
208 Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of Southern India,’ p.199.
To begin with, the case of stealing Company’s goods came up again and again in the Consultation against the Boatmen of Madras. In 1687, the President ordered for immediate enquiry when he was informed of ‘robbery committed by the Muckwaes of a parcel of corall stolen out of chests bringing ashore.’ Upon hearing this orders all the Mucquas, ‘being conscious of their guilt, left their dwellings to secure themselves from Justices’ for Pulicat and Sadraspatam. However, they were recalled with the assurance that ‘only the guilty shall suffer for this crime’ but it seems that many did not return.²⁰⁹

Again, in 1697 another case came up in the Consultation. The weight of pepper brought from York Fort was found to be less then was in the account. The Government suspected ‘the roguery of the Boatmen in bringing it ashore.’ But no action can be taken without reliable evidence. To prevent such things in future some new measures were adopted to be followed while loading and unloading goods in the ship. The ship master, searcher of the sea custom house and the warehouse keepers are to keep records and every time sends a note with every boat for verification and a packer must be send before hand to ‘sew up the mouths of all the bags of pepper, and mend them if defective to prevent the Mucquaws stealing.’²¹⁰

In 1708, the Company’s bales were opened by the Boatmen and many pieces were stolen. One of the Boatmen themselves informed to the Peddanaigue who immediately secured the head Boatmen in whose house was discovered ‘four pieces of Betelaes buryed under ground.’ Upon this evidence order was issued to apprehend all the boatmen. When some of the boats returned from the road ‘their associates and this villainy made them some private sign, so that they returned as far as the Paddy boats.’ Governor sent two boats of the Vizakapatnam boatmen with soldiers to prevent them. Seeing this, ten boats run away to the southwards upon which the Governor ordered the gunner ‘to fire shot from the battery and sink them if possible, several of which fell very near.’ It was decided that once the losses were known from England where it was to be unladen, the warehouse and sea gate conicopolys, seaside peons and Boatmen should equally repay them.²¹¹ The Company’s warehouse keepers in England found that eighty pieces of cloths, including 16 pieces of Longcloth, 3 pieces of Salampores, and 61 pieces of

²⁰⁹ D&CB, 29 September 1687.
²¹¹ D&CB, 20 January 1708, p.7-8; see also Dispatches to England, 1707-08, p.93.
Bettellees, were stolen from the bales. This was not small pieces indeed and signified the participation of all Boatmen. Accordingly, the Company directed the Governor and Council of Madras that 'the carelessness in not sending Peons with every boat of goods is very blamable and must never again be practiced whether it be for goods received on shore or sent on board which wee hope you will take care of and punish the faulty as the case deserves.'

On 21st January 1708, four head Boatmen were brought before the Council. One of them was immediately set at liberty 'for his discovering this villainy to the Peddenaigne.' He was also awarded to be the chief Boatmen of Madras. Whereas other three Boatmen were ordered 'to be whipt round the town, stand three several days in the Pillory from 10 to 12, and the last day to have their ears cut off, and kept prisoners till the ship goes to the West Coast and then sent thither' as slaves. The first part of the sentence was duly carried out, and the men were sent back to prison, where they lay for seven months during which time they continuously pray for mercy. Only when they offered to pay a fine of 500 pagodas in substitution for being 'pillared and loose their ears,' the three Boatmen were released. This action was also highly approved by the Company at home as they also strongly felt that 'such villains ought to be made publick examples of to the terror of others.' But this instance must have brought lots of discontented feelings among the Boatmen so much so that the three heads that were disposed by Pitts were soon reinstated to their previous position by Fraser so that they again work for the Company more cheerfully. But it seems that there were no further instance of stealing after this throughout our period of study; whatever came from the records were on mere suspicion.

It would be interesting to note few of such instances of stealing where it occurred on mere suspicion, not real. In June 1738 'near a fifth part of the rice' brought from Moco Moco was found deficient 'where upon a new tub was ordered to be sent thither for a fixed measure.' The head of the Boatmen was summoned in this regard as the government suspect 'it was stole by the Boats people.' They wrote home that they would

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213 D&CB, 21 January 1708, pp.10-11.
214 D&CB, 19 August 1708, p.46.
216 D&CB, 12 November 1711, p.159.
‘watch them more narrowly’ but found none. Upon this the Directors appreciate the President for immediately summoning before him the head Boatmen for explanation or otherwise. They also asked the government to go for further enquiry on that respect.\textsuperscript{217} Again, in 1742, several pieces of clothes were missing while loading on the ship. The government again suspected the Boatmen but as there was no evidence to proof that they reported the lost to the Company at home. The Directors ordered that ‘a Serjeant and soldiers or two’ be placed on each Boat while loading or unloading the ships so that ‘such Roguerys may be prevented.’\textsuperscript{218} Except these two incidents in which the Boatmen were suspected of stealing, but not proved, we have no other evidence after the 1708 incident. The various instances of stealing even before the 1708 incident were of doubtful condition as there cannot be any clear proof for such thievery. Hence, excepting the incident of 1708 which was done in unified manner by the Boatmen we have no clear cut instance of stealing throughout our period of study. Even the incident of 1708 was something more than a mere stealing; but certainly not the inherent nature of Boatmen. This will be explain later. Therefore, the assumption of Boatmen or for that matter the fishing community of Madras as a tribe of ‘all notorious thieves’ was a mere colonial construct not existed in reality. This discourse went further from this Madras records to such ethnographers like John Shortt who said that the Boatmen of Madras were but ‘great rogues, and would rob one to his face.’\textsuperscript{219}

A COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION: SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG NATIVE CHRISTIANS

We have seen that the native Christians have undertaken various jobs provided by the new urban set up. We know many of the erstwhile low caste people now took up several jobs under the Company. Many Pariahs now work in the houses of the Europeans as servants, cooks, nurses, palanquin bearers, water boys, grass-cutters, etc. But, of all the new jobs undertaken by the native Christians, the most important was the shipping activities performed by the Mucquas or Boatmen. We already established the importance of these Boatmen for the smooth running of the Company business in Madras and how much the Company valued them. But how far these new services gave the erstwhile

\textsuperscript{217} Dispatches from England, 2 January 1739, para.24.
\textsuperscript{218} Dispatches from England, 21 March 1743, para.52.
\textsuperscript{219} Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of Southern India,’ p.199.
fishermen socially more preponderance is something difficult to explain from the records. However, an attempt is made here to show that this upcoming urbanite social and religious community has experienced a transitional phase of social change during our period of study. By virtue of their indispensable services to the colonial government as boatmen, fishermen and others the erstwhile fisher folks and low caste people have now become economically more powerful than they were before. This new economic status would not fail to have any social implication as well. In the case of Boatmen, the notion of gaining a world wide reputation in aquatic feats would have certainly brings about new social outlooks locally. Also that by becoming economically important to the ruler there was also a need of reforming or revitalizing their social standing amongst other caste groups. This new social outlook was generally manifested in two ways: first, the Mucquas resorted to gain more social standing and expanded their social base vis-à-vis the local society by participating in various caste activities; second, they persevered to gain more and more economic powers to reinforce their gaining social importance by demanding more from the Company government. Therefore, in the following pages an attempt is made on these two aspects of social change.

**Participation in caste affairs for broader social base**

The assertion for higher social standing and broader social base by the erstwhile fishermen was most apparent in their participation in the Painters Mutiny (1680), Wall Tax Agitation (1686) and Caste Disputes (1707). The fisher folks were considered to be right hand caste people. Although many have became Christians, and the Boatmen, Catamaran men and Fishermen being almost all Christians, they continued to maintain their traditional caste linkages by joining their former caste groups in activities such as in the agitation against the government and also in the left and right hand caste disputes. It would be too simplistic to interpret such participation for fear of the caste whips as this people have already become Christians and can easily avoid such threats from the caste heads. But this can be seen in much better light if we take into account the changing social and economic circumstances of the fishing community in Madras. It should be noted that the general social demarcation of the larger part of the Madras population was made on the basis of left and right hand caste and if any group find difficulty in accommodating themselves within this fold it was apparent from the spatial division that
it would seem to be quite difficult to get any foothold not only in the physical space but also in the social space of Madras. Under such circumstances it seems unwise to sever ones caste linkage from any of this two broad division. This becomes more prudent for the upcoming social group especially the fishing community of Madras due to their gaining new economic status under the colonial urbanism. Therefore, such participation was taken on ones conscious resolution in order to gain social foothold and more so for higher social standing in the local society.

In 1680, there was Painter’s Mutiny against the English government for the increase of their pay for painting the Company’s cloth. In protest, they withdrew to St. Thome and threatened others to follow them. Many Mucquas and Catamaran men also joined them in the ensuing rebellion. The mutineers stopped all provisions and firewood to pass through into Madras, threw cloths off the oxen and burnt some houses. However, the government decided to take strong action against the mutineers. When the mutineers did not return after sending pardon, it was resolve and ordered that ‘the wives and children of the Muckwaes, Cattamaran men and Cooleys and others that have left the towne upon this Mutiny of the Painters be taken out of their houses and driven into the Pagodae as an expedient to bring the men back againe.’ It also directed the soldiers and peons to get them by force or disperse them away from St. Thome. It seems many had returned later but the Council decided to change the head of Boatmen because of their participation in the Mutiny. One Black Tom was chosen and his pay was fixed at 70 fanams per month as he is Christians and the ‘Boatmen being Christians.’ By joining the Mutiny the fisher folks might have the chance of entering the social networks of the right hand caste groups and hereafter their caste solidarity would also be extended upon them although they might already have become Christians.

Again, in 1686, the Madras Government proposed to raise tax for the construction of the Black Town Wall. However, there was strong protest from the townsmen. On 3rd January 1686 the whole inhabitants of Madras ‘in contempt of the government...desist from their labours and services’ to the Company and also forbid and

220 D&CB, 1 November 1680, p.75.
221 D&CB, 6 November 1680, p.76.
222 D&CB, 8 November 1680, p.76.
223 D&CB, 27 November 1680, p.87.
hinder all the shops to be open and grain to be brought into town, 'insolently declaring that they would continue their rebellion, till they were freed from the said present and all future taxes.' In response, the government clamped down heavily on them forcing the grain and other provisions to come in and threatening the shopkeepers to open their shops with penalty of seizing them and finally warned all the caste heads to abjure from rebellions else they will be banished from the town.224 On the 4th morning the caste heads came to the Fort and begged pardon. They also delivered a petition requesting the government to abstain from the proposed tax. They said that as they are just recovering from the blockade of Lingapa and as they were also been subjected to many other taxes such as on arrack, paddy, scavengers, choultry customs, quit rent, etc. they may be exempted. The Governor told them that they have no power to write off such taxes as it was an order from home. In compliance to the order all the Company servants such as 'Washermen, Muckwaes, Cattamarn men, Cooleys and servants returned to their several businesses.225 Here also we find that the fisher folks also joined the rebellions against the government by ceasing their works in compliance to the orders of their caste heads.

As far as their participation in the caste disputes was concerned the Mucquas and Catamaran men seems to have been in the forefront. In 1707 a quarrel of unusual broke out, which lasted in an acute form upwards of six months, and was not finally settled for the full year. The origin of the difference was due to an infringement by one caste of the alleged exclusive right of the other to the use of certain streets in Peddanaikpetta.226 To resolve the issue the government erected four boundary stones for the Left hand caste in the area. This was resented very strongly by the Right hand caste. Some contemp paper was pasted on the stones inciting the right hand group who took wedding procession in the prohibited streets which however were dispersed, many of them being arrested by the troops. Consequently, many right hand groups deserted and removed to St. Thome and the other shut themselves up in their houses and ceased their work. The deserters were 'chiefly consisting of Boatmen, Washermen, Fishermen and other necessary handicrafts'.227 On 25th August Pitt summoned the heads of the two castes and shut them

224 D&CB, 3 January 1686, p.3.
225 D&CB, 4 January 1686, p.5.
226 D&CB, 26 June 1707, p.36.
227 D&CB, 21 August 1707, p.54.
up in the room to resolve their differences. Their agreement was sanctioned by the Council but it failed to satisfy the deserters, who refused to return. Even after the intervention of the Capuchin Fathers to reconcile the deserters, which have many Christian boatmen and fishermen, did not help. The caste heads of the right hand were then imprisoned as intelligence sources informed the Governor that they incited the poor masses to desert the town by providing subsistence during their stay in St. Thoma, poor craftsmen, boatmen, washermen and fishermen were paid their wages and subsistence during their stay. The govt. even contemplates to use force to bring the deserters back. It was deferred at the instance of Peddanaik and other inhabitants who later brought back the deserters into town in the night of 4th October after a long desertion.

What is interesting for our purpose is that many Mucquas and fishermen also took part in the conspiracy and deserted in large numbers. These instances need be seen in the backdrops of the contemporary socio-economic changes amongst the fisher folks of Madras. By improving their economic standing in the local society the fishing community now looks for higher social foothold and their participation in caste conspiracies was to be taken mainly in this respect. Such new consciousness was especially spearheaded by their caste heads who acted as ‘elite’, ‘mediator’ and ‘intelligentsia’ for the fishing people. The dismissal of their caste head after the Painter’s Mutiny was one case in point. Seeing such consequences, the head Boatmen, Pasquall and Joan, have submitted a petition to the Governor after joining the caste dispute in 1707, dated 2nd December, claiming that they joined the conspiracy inadvertently and ‘by the instigation and ill advice of some designing people’ and after returning from there they were informed that they were ‘neither’ of the castes as they are already Christians. Now they asked the protection of the English government from any caste exaction so that they will remain loyal to the Company. This letter is rather seen to be a lame excuse as many other caste groups have also already submitted petitions citing their inadvertent behaviors; all blaming their caste heads. In fact the Boatmen were the last to do so. However, it should be mention that their participation in the caste disputes of 1707 seems

228 D&CB, 25 August 1707, pp.55-56.
229 D&CB, 24 September, p. 66.
230 D&CB, 2 December 1707, pp.86-87; see also Dispatches to England, 1707-08, p.79.
231 On 20th October 1707 the Washermen did already and other right hand caste groups also did the same on the next day (21st Oct.); see D&CB, 20 and 21 October 1707, pp.71 & 73.
to have been the last time these Christians fisher folks ever participated in the caste affairs as we don’t have any references after that. Therefore, we can say that they have joined the caste conspiracies with a deep resolution in their mind to elevate their social standing in the local society. This new social outlook must have also makes them to be very assertive for gaining more and more economic benefits from the prolific trade of Madras.

**Resistance for higher social status**

In the foregoing accounts we have seen the mutual dependency of the English government and the native Christians especially the Madras boatmen, catamaran men and the fishermen, for the smooth running of the Company’s business. But such relationship was not always smooth sailings as it was thought to be. This was mainly because of the low attitude shown to the fisher folks by the government towards their welfare and also toward their gaining social importance. The local Boatmen felt reaping much below expected in comparison to their valuable services. Their grievances over the new system were manifold but it can be condensed into: control of their traditional fishing rights, low wages, and the various odd taxes. They resorted to various means of resistance to make their voice heard and hence become the most rebellious group in Madras earning the names of being most ‘villainous’, ‘roguers’ or ‘being all notorious thieves.’ And interestingly such struggle did not take place in isolation but was generally taken on the basis of wholesale community participation. But it should be noted that the Mucquas were known to be poor, innocent and peace loving by nature. We know that they are ‘merry birds’ at their work, demonstrated by the kind of chorus singing as *Ela Yela* while rowing against the high surf.

Therefore, when the poor Boatmen and Fishermen revolted against the government they did not do in haste of mind. They acted and reacted within the compass of their consciousness against the colonial set up. If they could not confront the well armed Company government openly in the battle field they did not remain subjugated without showing any sense of resentment and resistance. Usually lead by their headmen or chief, the poor fisher folks resorted to various techniques of resistance to further their protest heard. Some important methods used by them were petitions, ceasing of works, stoppages of their supplies as fish, avoidance of payment of taxes, stealing of Company
goods and finally desertions or migration. This reminded us of James Scott’s penetrating studies on the rural Malaysia where the poor peasants demonstrated the daily forms of resistance by giving false information to officials, non-co-operation with the imposed rules and regulations, migrations, etc. 232 These forms of resistance are called by Scott as ‘weapons of the weak’. The Mucquas or Boatmen of Madras also resorted to such forms of resistance quite consciously.

As far as their pay is concern, in 1678, the Mucquas pleaded to the Government of Madras to increase their pay. Till then they were given 3 fanams ‘per Mesullas lading of 6 bales, which require 10 to 12 men.’ They claimed that they received from others ‘five fanams of Madrass and at Paliacat they have fanams: five, of 24 to the pagodas.’ They also said that their low pay ‘put them very much upon stealing and filching whatsoever passeth through their hands.’ But when their initial plea was not responded many Boatmen deserted Madras and some have even ‘forsacking it and settling elsewhere.’ 233 On 7th of January 1678 they again requested the government to pay them ‘five fanams of Madrass per Mussulla.’ The matter was taken up in the Council that as the ‘Honourable Company have often been and are continually in danger of disappointment in the landing and shipping off of their goods, which requires all the hast that can be made,’ it was finally resolved ‘to be for the service of the of the Honourable Company to agree to allow them fanams: fower (four) from this time forward upon condition that if any steal, that the head of the cast shall make good the loss, or else deliver up the man to be transporting to St. Hellena or elsewhere as the Agent and Council please, and that if they offer to run away as heretofore they shall become slaves to be transported as aforesaid.’ Upon knowing this resolution all the Mucquas, on the night of 10th January, deserted Madras ‘carrying their Oars with them.’ 234 The Fort St. George government was surprise to see this sudden desertion especially because they thought that the ‘Mucquaus appeared satisfied’ with four fanams during the previous day. Realizing that there is no other way to reconcile them than consenting to their demands of five fanams per Mussolas, the government immediately send one Cassa Verona to recall them

233 D&CB, 12 January, 1678, p.129.
234 D&CB, 12 January, 1678, p.129.
with a promise of paying five fanams per boat and 'pardon for the offence.' By such assurance the runaway Mucquas finally return to Madras on 12 January 1678.\textsuperscript{235}

This event clearly exemplified their mode of protest such as petition and appeal, and then migration and desertion if their pleas were not accepted. Such 'weapons' are cleverly employed by the Boatmen with a predetermined state of mind, not just a spontaneous response to government policy. They knew that the best time for such agitation was when their labour was most required. January was the peak season for shipping at Madras port. We know that Madras shipping can be carried but only with the valuable service of the Boatmen. At this juncture any \textit{en masse} migration or desertion by the Boatmen will put the Company business in a standstill. They also knew that no other person can substitute them because of the special nature of the task. The Company was thus put with no option but accept their demands. This is clearly seen in the Council's minutes which says that 'there being no other remedy nor possibility of prevention, for if bigger guards were sett upon them it would but make them the more subtle in the attempt, and difficult to reclaim; as for their wives and children which were stopped, they neither doubt our starving them nor much value it.'\textsuperscript{236} This mean that the Council was put in a tenterhook and it also realized that the more control it imposed over the Boatmen the more they are vulnerable to desertion and migrations to other places. Thus by prevailing upon the necessities of the Company the Mucquas boatmen pushed through their demands. However, to prevent such problems in future, the Council on 29\textsuperscript{th} January 1679 had contemplated that 'it is of absolute necessity to build the curtain next the Muckwa or Fishers' Town from St. Thomas point by the river side.' This did not happen however, but it signified that the Boatmen usually run away to St. Thome from this strips by crossing the river. Instead one 'black outguard' was posted later in this part 'to give intelligence to the fort.'

In 1680, there was another strong protest in Madras. The Mucquas fishermen, realizing their bargaining power during the previous year, now launched a concerted protest against 'the fellow that hath Rented the custome of the fish.' The exclusive right to fishing in the river of Madras was first given to someone (not the fishermen) by the

\textsuperscript{235} D&CB, 12 January, 1678, pp.129-130.
\textsuperscript{236} D&CB, 12 January, 1678, p.129.
government. To put forth their demand heard all the fishermen stop supplying fishes to Madras. This seemed to have caused lots of inconveniences to the townsmen as it 'gives great offence to many people.' The 'townes people' then complained to the government that 'the fishermen being discouraged they did not bring fish into the market.' Therefore, the Governor and Council immediately decided 'not to rent it' further to anyone but 'to let it remaine as it did formerly.' 237 If they could not stop the Company from controlling their traditional rights to fishing in the river, the Mucquas strived to take for themselves the fishing cowle so that the river remains in their hands. This, they got it in 1696 after a long struggle. We know that the Company finally rented out the fishing cowle to Mucqua headmen as 'it being much more convenient for them then any other farmers who meet with great trouble from the Mucquaw men in the collection of the custom fish.' 238 Naturally, the fishermen will resist the appropriation of the communally owned river, water, fishes or any other natural resources by someone as ones sole property. They resisted the fishing farmer by not paying any fees to him that has become another form of resistance.

In 1681 the infamous Quit Rent was imposed to all inhabitants of Madras. This rent seems to have been of nominal charges upon every house to the Company's exchequer as the ruler of the land. But it brings about strong protest from the townsmen of Madras. The reason behind such protest was seen to be more on the nature of the tax as derogatory one and less on the poverty ridden mass of the town. The Mucquas are especially reluctant to pay this tax. In 1693 the Company was 'forced to accept' their labour in filling up a ditch near St. Thomas Gate in lieu of the quit rent. Again in 1695 the Company insisted the Mucquas to repair their boats themselves in lieu of the quit rent. 239 As the Mucquas were continually reluctant to pay the quit rent citing their poverty it became a troublesome affairs for the Rental General every year. So from 1697 the government initiated some other way out to ensure that the said rent was collected by way of paying from the Company accounts and later deducted from their accounts of shipping and fishing. It was recorded that 'The Mucquaw men giving the rental Generall yearly trouble in the collection of the Quit Rents, and avoiding payment, it is ordered that

237 D&CB, 1 July 1680, p.43-44.
238 D&CB, 4 May 1696, p.63.
239 D&CB, 14 November 1695, p.148.
the Paymaster General pay unto the rental general pags. 8:18 fanam and at the end of the year charge it to their account.\textsuperscript{240} This was not done only to the Mucquas but the Company did also to the poor talliars and washermen. Even the soldiers and gunroom crew resisted, they were later exempted.\textsuperscript{241} The Pariahs were also exempted from the quit rent as it appear from their 1779 petition to the Company. When the collectors of quit rent were found to be abusing power and corrupted it was decided to be collected through the heads of the castes since 1695.\textsuperscript{242} Thus, avoidance of payment of taxes is also regarded to be another form of resistance employed by the Mucquas or Boatmen.

We have noted that the Boatmen also used to involve in stealing Company bales, the only and clearest instance being the 1708 incident; the rest being only on mere suspicion. To explain this incident due to their inherent nature of thievish would be a complete misleading as we have already shown that such mindset was a mere colonial construct not existed in reality. From the 1708 incident we know that such stealing was done by the whole community in concerted efforts. This pointed out to something more than a mere stealing. It can be said that stealing Company goods is not just a lure but more of a protest against their low pay. This is clearly spelt out in their petition to the government in 1678 in which they said that they should be paid higher wages as their low pay 'put them very much upon stealing and filching whatsoever passeth through their hands.'\textsuperscript{243} But it should be noted that their demand for higher pay was more for replenishing their economic status than to ease their poverty. We have already noted Salmon accounts of the houses of 'black watermen and fishermen' which consisted of 'little, low, thatched cottages which hardly deserve the name of buildings.'\textsuperscript{244} This apparently manifested their state of poverty. But it should be remember that the Mucquas were not the exception for such state of living. What Salmon had noticed in the 'Mucqua town' was also the case for most of the houses in the 'black town'. He said, 'except for few brick houses the rest are miserable cottages, built with clay and thatched, and not so much as a window to be seen on the outside, or any furniture within, except the mats and

\textsuperscript{240} D&CB, 19 April 1697, p.34.
\textsuperscript{241} D&CB, 30 March 1699, p.27 & 8 January 1700, p.3.
\textsuperscript{242} D&CB, 14 November 1695, p.148.
\textsuperscript{243} D&CB, 12 January, 1678, pp.129-130.
\textsuperscript{244} Salmon’s account of Madras, 1699-1700 in his book pub. in 1724 cited in Love, Vestiges, II, p. 75.
carpets they lye on. This is supplemented by official record. In 1695, the Council of Fort St. George was informed that 142 pagodas was found wanting for the Quit Rent from about one thousand houses belonging to the poor people 'whose houses the collector has several times searched for something but could not find anything of greater value then an earthen pot for boiling of victuals.' So it can be said that the Mucquas were much better folks for being in the employment of the Company and other merchants as boatmen from which they earned 'good penny dearly.' Therefore, it can be said that the Mucquas resorted to stealing as a form of protest against the Company's low attitude on their higher need for their various social agendas that mainly hinged upon their economic viability. They required higher wages and other incentives which was not coming forth.

Thus, the Mucquas assertion for higher pay is rather seen to get more and more economic power to reinforce their social standing. We have calculated that their monthly earning were more than 40 fanams per head which was quite reasonable. Compare this to the earning of there head: 70 fanams per month. The earning of the Boatmen was base on three trips in a day. But if we take for four trips in a day as the later evidence pointed out their earning will shoot up to 60 pagodas per month for each man of ten persons for one boat. Their economic strength can also be seen from other evidence. In 1696, when the sea had continuously approached the seaside dwelling places some regrouping was done in which many of the Catamaran men bought the houses of some Pariahs. This shows that the Catamaran men become financially sound to buy houses and plots in the town. Therefore, it can be said that when the fishermen avoid paying taxes, demands high pay and stole Company's goods it really mean to enrich themselves for the elevated economic status and ultimately to reinforce their social standing in the local society.

Therefore, we see that the Mucquas asserted to expand their social base by joining the caste affairs and also aspired to improve their social standing in the local society by improving their economic status. They employed various techniques or forms of resistance against the government to further their demands. These forms of resistance includes pleads and petitions, avoidance of tax payment, ceasing of works or non-co-

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245 Ibid., p.75.  
246 D&CB, 14 November 1695, p.148.  
247 D&CB, 26 November 1696, p.143.
operation, stealing and finally desertions and migration to other places. We have seen that these ‘weapons of the weak’ were so cleverly utilized by the Mucquas that many of their demands were conceded by the government. Thus, the Mucquas or Boatmen of Madras become the first champions of passive resistance movement against the colonial government in India. And in fact because of such dynamism they gradually become one of the most vibrant social groups in later period. This section may be close with the account of John Shortt who said that among the Catholic Christians fishing community was ‘found men of wealth and influence, and many well-educated individuals’ by his time in 1867.\textsuperscript{248} This transformation process began during this period of study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the erstwhile fishermen or Mucquas of Madras and other low caste Christians were also subjected to the colonial policy of divisions: socially, spatially and on occupational specialization. The division of the fishing community also underlines the intensification of divisions within the larger left and right hand castes demarcations in Madras. However, within all these subjections the native Christians strived to become one of the most vibrant social groups in the town. This is mainly because of their proximity to the Company government on the one hand and their indispensable shipping services to the Company’s business. Under the colonial urban set up they took up several jobs hitherto unknown to them. Of these the most important was in the shipping activities where the erstwhile fishermen mostly took up the tasks of loading and unloading goods at the port with the help of their ‘extraordinary’ boats and becomes an indispensable part of Madras global networks of trade and commerce. Besides, fishing has now become more profitable than before due to the increasing demands in the markets. By virtue of such economic privileges under the Company government the erstwhile fishermen now not only gained some social importance but also strived to gain more and more of them by participating in the caste disputes and other caste based activities although they were already converted to Christianity and strongly adhered to their new religion under the Capuchin priests. They also demanded for more and more economic power to reinforce their social standing in the local society which

\textsuperscript{248} Shortt, ‘The Fishermen of Southern India,’ p.199.
made them to be so restless. They demanded higher pay, exemption from taxes, withdrawal of controls of their fishing rights, etc. Their forms of resistance include petitions, ceasing of works, stopping supply of their goods such as fishes, non-co-operations, stealing of Company’s goods and finally desertion and migration. They employed these methods to bargain something from the flourishing trades in which they become one important part. Because of such bargaining edges the Mucquas of Madras have become one of the most vibrant social groups during the later period.