Chapter - III

SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF PARAVAS

Social history primarily concerns itself with the daily life of the people and the character of family and household life. It also comprises human and economic relation of the different classes to one another, the social stratification of groups, occupation, culture, arose out of these general conditions and the reflection of this culture on religion, literature, arts, architecture, learning and thought. Intimately connected with this, there appears the history of ideals and aspirations of manners, customs and beliefs and superstitions.

The Paravas occupied mainly the villages on the fishery coast. In some villages, Maravas and Carayars also lived. The Muukkuvars were found in Kanyakumari and in the villages west of it. The Paravas, Cariyars and Muukkuvars were involved in fishing pearls and chanks on the coastal areas.

The Paravas were honest, trust worthy and partly friendly. They greeted others with folded arms. The fishermen, with dark brown complexion wore only a small loins and white scarf around their head. The Parava males, in former days, considered it as a mark of caste prestige to bore the ear lobes and to hang on them with gold ear rings sometimes studded with pearls. The people in the Comorin Coast were illiterate. Early accounts of the Paravas and Muukkuvars task about crushing poverty, wide spread alcoholism and universal illiteracy.

---

301 Ibid., p. 559.
302 Ibid.,
303 Ibid., p. 557.
Religion of Paravas

The Paravas were originally Hindus and had pagodas (temple with idols) in their villages as objects of worship. They had a special attachment to the Hindu temple at Tiruchendur. They believed that God Subramanian was married to a Parava girl named Deivanai. The inhabitants of the seven villages (Manapadu, Alanthalai, Virapandyappattanam, Punnaikayal, Thoothukudi, Vembar and Vaipar) took active part in the religious festivals of the temple. Their Jathi Thalaivan (head) who resided in Virapandyapattanam (a hamlet of Tiruchendur) was to give the first pull to the chain with which the processional car of the idol was drawn. The Parava aristocrats of Virapandyapattanam should have their palanquins placed on the shoulders of Idayars (shepherds) who were the bearers of the idol of the temple.\(^{305}\)

The soothsayers venerated devils. The Paravas would weep before the devils and plead with them to forgive their sins. The Brahman priests pronounced magical formulas destined to ward off the sharks from the pearl divers. The Paravas did not kill cows.\(^{306}\)

3 Cars made by Parathavars:

First car was gifted to the marriage functions of Madurai Meenachi Amman Sunthareasvar by Parathavars who belonged to Fishermen community.

Second car was gifted by Parathavars, to ‘Thirichendur Murugan’ the first wife belonged to Fishermen community.

Third car was gifted to St. Panimaiya Annai by Parathavars who belonged to Fishermen community. This famous car is called Golden Car by people.\(^{307}\)

---

\(^{305}\) Ibid.,


87
21 symbols of Parathavar:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elephants</th>
<th>Harp</th>
<th>Veangai</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bull</td>
<td>Garudan</td>
<td>Aravan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clam</td>
<td>Parrot</td>
<td>Cock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varagam</td>
<td>Kanagam</td>
<td>Annam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaanaram</td>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Cheal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chank</td>
<td>Drum</td>
<td>Magaram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship</td>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Thaayam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These all are Parathavar’s symbols.

Even now, it can be seen in *Meenatchi Amman Temple.*

**Social Conditions of Paravas**

The Portuguese found that certain social evils existed against women and they (the Parava women) were not treated on par with men. In order to establish equality of woman, several measures were adopted. The Jesuit missionaries took up this task and passed several resolutions in the form of decrees in their Provincial Councils held in Goa from time to time. It is important to note that even before the British, the Portuguese had sowed the seeds for the emancipation of women. The widows were asked not to commit sati or shave their heads on the death of their husbands. The Jesuit missionaries urged the Portuguese King to instruct the Brahmins in India that the latter should not force women to do such things. The widows were allowed to re-marry if they were below the age of fifty. The

---

Portuguese were not only particular about Christian women but also were concerned about the entire society that was under their jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{309} Decree Seventeen declared that women should not be deprived of their property rights. As property right is a question of human conscience, both sons and daughters should enjoy equal rights. The decree further said that whoever violated this right would be ex-communicated and forgiven only after returning the share to the affected person.\textsuperscript{310}

The Fifth Provincial Council of Goa forbade the superstitious ceremonies at the time of wedding and child-birth and considered them as unwanted. Christian women after their delivery were asked to go to the church when they found themselves fit and could take their child to the church after forty days as a pious practice in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{311} A married woman could become a foster mother to bring up the child of another married woman by a contract. The contract should be made with the permission of the foster mother’s husband. At the end of the agreement, the foster mother would leave the child and go back to her husband. The adoption of children was licit only when the foster parent had no biological children.\textsuperscript{312}

Xavier proscribed the consumption of arrack.\textsuperscript{313} He executed his desire by giving one fanam for each drunkard woman captured and she was to be confined for three days. The Meirinho\textsuperscript{314} was asked to proclaim such an order in all the villages.\textsuperscript{315}

\textsuperscript{309} Da Cunha Rivara, \textit{op.cit.}, Fascículo 4, Decrees 11 & 12, 1862, pp. 211, 218-219.
\textsuperscript{310} \textit{Ibid.}, Decree 17, p. 500.
\textsuperscript{311} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 279.
\textsuperscript{312} \textit{Ibid.}, Decree 9, p. 264.
\textsuperscript{313} Uruqua (urák), a wine made from the sap of palm trees. Costelloe, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{314} Meirinho in Portugal is a local official charged with executing the orders of the sovereign. In India meirinho was a warden or justice of peace.
\textsuperscript{315} \textit{Letters of Xavier}, March 14, 1544, pp. 75-76.
The Portuguese were not very parochial and aimed at reforming and bring changes only among Christian men and women. The Non-Christians were also bound by certain decrees. The officials wanted the Christians not to be affected by scandalous acts of the non-Christians. Some Hindus had more than one woman as life partner and had even unmarried or married women as concubines. As this was scandalous for the new Christians, the Fifth Provincial Council of Goa requested the Portuguese King to authorise the ecclesiastical judges to punish such persons. The Second Decree said that Christians of low castes as well as non-Christians should be considered as equals before God and were therefore bound by the same laws.\textsuperscript{316} The children of the non-Christians should also be given care by the Portuguese when their parents died. Baptism would be administered to them when only if they really desired it. Slaves professing one religion could not be sold to the owner of another religion. If a Hindu slave was sold to a Muslim, then the Hindu owner would be condemned to go to jail. The negligence of the kanakkappillai in checking the co-habitance of the domestic servants between fields and infidels led to its occurrence. So, the First and the Third Provincial Councils prohibited any such co-habitance between the various religious communities.

Whenever there were Christian women in the house, Non-Christian men should not enter their house. The Christians were forbidden to learn to sing or dance in the schools. They were threatened with ex-communication. The teacher one who taught music and dance was punished with fifty\textit{ pardaus} and the half of which would be given to the complainant. The culprit would remain out of the school for two years.\textsuperscript{317} It was quite

\textsuperscript{316} Cunha Rivara, Fas. 4, Decree. 2, p. 489.
\textsuperscript{317} Cunha Rivara, Fas. 4, p. 269.
prevalent among the Hindus to get married to their first cousins. But, the Christians were persuaded to avoid such alliances.\textsuperscript{318}

\textit{Affonso-de-Albuquerque}, the governor of Portuguese India encouraged the Indian unmarried Portuguese male residents in India to marry the local Indian women so as to increase the population of those living within the sphere of Portuguese culture. The intent was far reaching to have many armed men to fight the enemies of the Portuguese Government. Muslim and Brahmin ladies, were preferred as they were of fair colour and could mix easily with the Portuguese race. Such encouragements helped in bringing many of the Portuguese men to settle down in India, and they in turn helped the Government to form new colonies.\textsuperscript{319}

\textbf{Consolidation of Yelu Urs}

After eliminating the Muslims from their presence and influence over the pearl fisheries and other sea-faring activities, the Portuguese resorted to consolidating their strength on the Fishery Coast. As a first step, the already existing seven villages (with their ports) were fortified. These villages were controlled by the \textit{Pattangattis} and all the pearl and chank fishing and commercial activities were supervised by the \textit{Pattangattis}. They (the \textit{Pattangattis}) were advised by the elders of the villages called \textit{Urars}. The Portuguese established cordial relations with these Parava leaders to further their (Portuguese) interests. There were other villages also in the Fishery Coast, south of Manappadu and north of Vaippar. These villages had their own headmen. Above the \textit{Pattangattis} and the \textit{urars}, they

\textsuperscript{318} \textit{DL., Vol. IV}, p. 30.
(the Paravas) had the Jathi Thalaivan as head of the caste who resided at Thoothukudi and controlled the entire politics and economy of the coast.\textsuperscript{320}

Immediately after the conversion of the Paravas, the Portuguese moved systematically to consolidate the commercial and strategic position of the Paravas. Because the Portuguese power was restricted only to the Fishery Coast, they decided to re-locate the entire Parava community within the Yelu Urs (Seven Villages), and these villages were to function as pivotal centres of security, trade, and educational and religious activities and were accordingly fortified by the Portuguese. Continuous military harassment and a defensive mentality became pervading hallmarks of subsequent Parava history, finding expression in such repeatedly exacted measures as the shifting concentration of the Paravas to these centres was most conducive to defense and security.

Sanjay Subramanyam sounds as though the Portuguese introduced the ‘Pattangatti system’ in the Fishery Coast. He further said that the Portuguese intervention in Parava affairs saw the utilization of pre-existent hierarchies to a new end. But, it is not true in the sense that the Pattangattis were already there in Fishery Coast and they went to Cochin to present their Parava-Muslim conflict to the Vicar General and made an agreement (Mass Conversion) with the Portuguese, though in fact, the Portuguese made use of the existence of the then hierarchical system to promote their interests.\textsuperscript{321}

It is true that the seven villages were turned into fortified ports by the Portuguese but their presence was less compared to their presence in the West the reason being most of


the factories were centred in Goa and Kozhikodu, and so the Portuguese had to preserve a
greater part of their naval and military forces on the West Coast. They had delegated a
small part of their colonial officials down to the isolated areas of the East Coast. Although
the Portuguese governor and captains encouraged an overall repository of power on the
Pescaria (Fishery Coast), they utilized indigenous caste leaders as agents of local
Government. The Portuguese administrators and priests increasingly relied upon the
authority of the “natural leaders” of the jati.322 These positions became hereditary and as
symbols of their new and elevated status that they wore gold Crosses and chains and
assumed the title “Senhor” or “Senhor Don”. The creation of a jati leadership provided
another means for jati consolidation and a clearly defined group emerged within the jati
with an economic and power interacts in maintaining a caste identity and solidarity. The
Portugal intervention in the affairs of the Fishery Coast in 1530s and 1540s probably did
save the Parava jati from precipitous social and economic disintegration. The consolidation
of the Parava jati resulted in the flourishing of Parava economy and polity.323

The running of the ports depended upon the Parava leadership. It was in this area
that the impact of the Portuguese upon the structure of the Parava society appears to have
been more. Development in settlement patterns, economy, political structure and religion
during the period indicate the part innovative and part conservative traits in the Portuguese
impact on Parava social and internal organisation.324

The Pattangattis and the Urars who were the political brokers between the jati and
the colonialists were transformed into commercial brokers known in major port settlements

as “Campagnie Adepenars” and “Seethathys” (assistants). Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that the brokerage function performed by older caste leaders led to the centralization of the jati’s political structure under the direction of the Jathi Thalaivan during the Portuguese times.\textsuperscript{325}

**Social History of Paravas**

Fishing is not an individual profession but requires the active and collaborative involvement of a team of four to five individuals.\textsuperscript{326} The actions involving -pushing and immersing the boat into the sea, then pulling back the returning fish laden boats, alighting the fish from the boat need a lot of hands. Moreover as there always exists the danger of the a boat sinking into the waters, it is always pivotal that fishermen are available handy and reside near the coasts itself.\textsuperscript{327} Hence, the fishermen could also be termed as the protectors of the seas and coasts.\textsuperscript{328} Those fishermen who live even today on the East Coasts are part of the historic generation who once were brave warriors. Presently, these folk have not shown any keen interest in any other field except fishing.\textsuperscript{329}

**Status of men**

Men have always been portrayed as those who are constantly struggling with seas. Boys on reaching a stage, in spite of being at schooling stages, join hands with the elders and are introduced to the art of fishing.\textsuperscript{330} This is so because fishing is the only occupation they know of and they do not show any particular interest in other trades. When the

\textsuperscript{325} *Ibid.*, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{326} Paramasivan, A., *Parathavar Ena Meedduruvakka Varaivayal*, Kavya Publications Chennai 2005, p. 28
\textsuperscript{327} Natrinai – 4.1-4.
\textsuperscript{328} Antony Swamy S.B., *Uvari Meenavar Vazliyali*, FRRC Palayamkottai, p. 27.
provinces were under the Pandiyan Rule, it was badly affected by famine and at those times, it was the fishermen who got good name for proving tons free fish to feed many thousands of families on the entire land. Fishermen prefer to spend most of their life on the seas itself. A fisherman who goes to the sea has to spend a minimum of four to five days at the deep sea itself. When not in the sea, they are occupied by repairing fish nets.

**Men and the sea**

Men go in teams or as individuals and locate places where the fish are available in plenty and begin their fishing. At regular intervals, fishermen schedule a time to collect shells and pearls. The Paravas of *Neithal* also have the claim of taking the first initiative of transporting fish on catamarans for trading with other countries. To keep the seas safe from invasions of other nations, Pandyan kings had given special training to the fishermen to be warriors at sea. Regularly the fishermen leave to the seas by night and return by day and on reaching the land, they cleanse themselves and have complete rest. As the men would be weary from the wearisome struggle at the sea, the women take up the task of selling the catch. Every year, the dive for pearls begin at March and April and they go on for forty days. Prior to the pearl hunt, some specialists in deep diving will be sent before-hand to identify the exact location of the availability of the pearls. During that period, many makeshift structures would be built on the coasts for the trading of these pearls and they are known as *Muthu Nagar*. These shed and structures would be in place until the pearl hunting period continues.

---

332 *Aganaanuru* – 320: 2-5.
Men and Pearl fishing

During the pearl fishing period beyond pearl divers, a team is assigned to go on a regular surveillance of the area, to keep the pearl pirates at bay. Mostly three to four boats go together for the pearl fishing and once they arrive on the earmarked area of a ninety to One hundred and eight feet depth, they would lower their anchor and begin their pursuit for the pearls.333 In such an area, a stone is suspended on a rope into the water and a diver protects his ears by blocking it and applies oil all over his body and he enters into the deep water to collect the low-lying pearls. In this way, fisherman gets into the deep sea and then on collecting his catch of pearls ascends to the boat. Immediately another fisherman takes his place and in this manner all go for a dive. Each boat will accumulate their catch, and heap them separately on the selling zone at the Muthu Nagar. The pearl catch for the period of fifty days will not be touched and will be guarded by a group of fishermen. Then, after fifty days the teams would open their pearl shells and separate them according to their value, then they are bought up by businessmen as per their worth. Hence men play a vital part in the collection of pearls.334

Salt Cultivation

After choosing the land for salt cultivation, they will maintain the land in a good condition. Then, they will form beds. Big bed is called as male beds and small one as female bed. In male bed, the sediments which is seen at the bottom is called as “Gypsum”. This is used widely in cement factories. From female beds, soft salts (table salt), cultivation salts are manufactured. First three big beds will be large in size. In these beds, ground water

334 Ibid., p. 9.
is stored. Water stored here will be very salty. As the water is exposed to high temperature, the density of water will be approximately 6 to 8 degree and the water level gets deegreased. In this stage, this high density water will be directed into the female bed.\footnote{335}

This high density water even gets evaporated and attains a solid state. That is called as “Salt”. This salt is gathered and brought to the factory for cleaning. After cleaning, “Iodine” is added and sold out by companies. High breed salts are called as “Solid Salt”. This is brought and cleaned in fertilizing company and then it is used for medical use also. This land is taken from Government on lease in term of 99 years and this salt manufacturing is done. These lands are called “Saltern”. These contractors are called as the boss. Yearly once, these contactors gather and determine the “Salary Scale”.

\textbf{Courage of Paravar}

Paravas are very bold and daring people without any fear. They faced pierce whales and powerful sharks with spears.\footnote{336} To strengthen themselves, they took up rigorous muscular training and made themselves ever-fit.\footnote{337} Then, they used to fight with each other hiding their backs and attacking by hand knives and spears.

\textbf{Status of women}

In the Paravar community a lot of duties were entrusted on women. They still seem as lacking real freedom. A married fisherwoman plays a great role in the family life of Paravar. In the Neithal land, Paravar women took up the task of selling the fish.\footnote{338} They either sell it for money or in exchange of goods. At fair sand processions, they seemed to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{335} Nevish Victoriya, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 9.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{336} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 14.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{337} Madurakkanji.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{338} Natrinal.}
disposs of their fish quite briskly. They also marketed their fish in the roads, lanes, streets and places of common gathering.\textsuperscript{339} The Paravar women involved in the marketing of the fish had profound negotiation skills\textsuperscript{340}. On selling the fish for cash or in exchange they would keep the leftover and unsold fish to get dried up fish to form karvadu (Dry Fish), that too is for selling. As the men would be fatigued by their long hours at sea, the women would take up the onus of selling the fishes caught. Hence from the Sangam Era itself, the women had played a mutual role in being a background support to their husbands.

The Paravar women employed at fish factories undergone unbearable stress at their workplace. At fish plants, they come across many physical and mental agonies. Some issues they have are undue working hours, late night shifts, low salaries, poor working conditions and environments, poor shelter. In this way, these women have to face undue pains at work station. Women faced there physical tortures like Swedish harassment, physical misconduct, usage of double meaning are a few tortures. The Paravar women have to pay exorbitant amount to the conductor to take their fishes to the market. At times, they were looked down upon by co-passengers. As women have to go long distances to sell their fish and being expected to sell all the fish at hand, they were unable to return to their homes on time, this badly destroys their family life.\textsuperscript{341} Though the women returned after a day of slogging to sell their fish, it is only after entering their homes that their house chores begins. In this way the lives of the working Paravar woman was a life of abject struggle.

\textsuperscript{339} Aganaanuru.
\textsuperscript{341} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 40.
Women at fish plants

Internationally Keralaiete Paravar women are the most employed at the fish plants all over the world. Most fish plants make use of Kerala Paravar women for all their jobs. These women are appointed in three categories …

- Administrative staff in the Office
- Machines and maintenance.
- Daily wages.

In these categories, the Paravas were employed only in the lowest strata of jobs. Their tasks involved chopping the fish heads, removal of scales, cleaning of the fishes and insertion of ice bars. Some other tasks were the segregation of fish, freezing the fish. Most of the Paravar women were employed on a daily basis.

Health conditions of Paravar women

The cool water, the ice and the heavy duty fridges played major role in affecting the health of these women. Many women who had been employed in these plants for years suffered from rashes, sores and skin diseases. They were forced to continuously stand and handle the chilling fish at freezing temperatures without any gloves. At places of sorting of fish, women had to spend several hours, seated in unbearable cold conditions. Because of this, they had irritations in their eyes, difficulty in breathing, body pain and cold. The native (MPEDA) had clearly tabulated certain rules and regulations to be followed by the factories. According to it, the factory were mandated to create clean and

---

342 Vareethiah Konstantine, Neithal Suvadugal, 2005, p. 117.
343 Ibid., p. 121.
344 Ibid., p. 120.
345 MPEDA.
sanitized environments, gloves and body and head cover, coats to be given to protect themselves during work. At many work spots women were made to handle fish and the sharp bones and shells, this had led to serious health threats. After their working hours, they suffered from scars and cuts at their finger tips, blisters and the traumatic experiences. As they did not have any other alternative employment opportunities, they simply endure of the pain-staking work.\textsuperscript{347} In Kanyakumari, the Catholic Church had formed an organisation called Coastal Peace and Development and had enlisted all women who carried and sell fish on their heads.

**First women**

The male chauvinst world considered women as weaklings and one who depended upon on others and who led a second class living status. In such a scenario, the women had rised themselves to dive deep to peaks. This had been in practice footer many years in Asian countries. In Andhra, the women accompany their male counterparts into thick mangrove forests. In Sri Lanka women had been bold to fish at back waters on catamarans. In Eastern countries, women had engaged in mechanised attempts of fishing. But, fishing in deep waters is a very strenuous task. But, this task was easily attempted by Kanyakumari's Rachel Vincent.\textsuperscript{348} A team of women had gone on a ten day expedition to Chinna Mutton harbour on Jan 14, 2004 by a SHG. This has been enlisted in the great records achieved by Indian women.

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid.,  
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., p. 135.
Jewels of Paravas

The conches which were taken from the sea are used as Bangles. On those days, all women had worn Bangles made of conches. The bangles made of conches were worn to show the good purpose on those days. Those bangles were made with many minute works Itampuric conches bangles were given to the normal women and the bangles made of Valampuric conches were given to the princess and the aristocracy family women.

Clothings of Paravas

Paravas wore the bright colour clothes, especially yellow, red and green also blue. They also liked Lungies and towels which was suitable good for fishing.

The chairs were made of pearl. The place of pearl diving was called as pearl calapam. String of pearl, pearl for studs, gold bangles with pearls in it, pearl with big string were worn as the jewels.

Women wore gold and silver jewels studs, bangles sized studs, old studs, string chains, bangles, rings were worn by them.

Usually the women in seashore used more money in clothing and jewels. The festivals in houses and christian festivals were celebrated by buying new clothes.

Food – fish food and hygiene

Ethnic food

Fish is not considered as equivalent to the starch laden grain food. One of the reasons being fish does not provide sufficient calories. A nation’s food requirement is

\[^{349}\text{Aganaanuru.}\]
\[^{350}\text{Nevish Victoriya. M.,}\ Op.cit.,\ p.\ 6\]
\[^{351}\text{Ibid., pp. 7-8.}\]
measured only in terms of availability starch in food. But, the human body cannot thrive merely on starch-rich grains and tubers. In addition, protein and lipids are essential.

Sea fish offers easily digestible high grade protein. Essential amino acids like Lysine are not present in the rest of the proteins. Fish is a cold-blooded living and hence has less fat. This is what makes fish food more easily digestible dietary components. Fish meat contains some of the highly valuable fatty acids like Omega-3- fatty acid- an ingredient of absolute necessity for the growth of brain in children.\(^{352}\)

The ethnicity of ancient Tamil people was reflected not only in their customs and rituals, but also in their food too. They relied on the produces of each genre of land for food and medicine and the same augured well with the climate and the nature of their labour. Grains, millets and pulses were the chief dietary components of the people of MaruTam; tubers, honey, fruits, seeds and meat constituted the staple food of the Mullai communities. To the fisher folks, fish was their staple diet like grains and tubers. These time – tested combinations of diet provided them with the energy for manual labour as well as catered to the protein, fat and vitamins and minerals needs of the growing body to sustain. The Mullai communities farmed these millets and grains as Ragi and maize, gingely, black gram, green gram and dal and hence these were available in plenty for consumption. During the World War - II, India faced a famine and imported rice from Myanmar and was supplied to these communities. The machine – polished rice grain ( devoid of the bran containing minerals and vitamins ), could furnish nothing but empty calories. A recent statistics, Tamil Nadu has the highest incidence of diabetics mellitus (ailment connected to blood suger

metabolism) says a recent report. The problem targeted the middle class which hardly engages in manual labour in order to burn the calories.

In post phase tsunami relief food materials were distributed at the relief camps. In a couple of days after the disaster, the fishers summarily rejected these supply. Some of the men approached the neighbourhood and asked for some dry fish. As for the fishing community, bread item is associated with sick people; curd rice, lemon rice, sambar rice or chappati was never part of their menu. They are not in the habit of adding pepper water or butter milk. These are perhaps the items preferred by white collar community that doesn’t engage in manual labour and for them digestion of carbohydrates is an issue.

Enacting new laws like Coastal Management Zone Notification and fisheries Bill\textsuperscript{353}, the Government are attempting to chase away the traditional fisher folks from the sea and sea coast.\textsuperscript{354} The summary result of these development is the loss of livelihood to the native communities and deprivation of all communities of their nourishing, staple and ethnic diet. Over 50\% of Indian population is fish eater. As with the case of thrusting alien grain on labouring communities, the deprivation of land based communities of cheap fish protein might result in far reaching consequences.\textsuperscript{355}

Fish is cheap protein food and protected fat food. It is the best food in Kanyakumari district. This is also the best food for the people in the seashore.

Fish is the earthiest protein food. ‘Omega’ is the fat chemical, which gives Nutrient and Vitamin fish foods are found more often, that you can find their things\textsuperscript{356}. The people

\textsuperscript{353} CMZN, 2007 – 2009.
\textsuperscript{355} Ibid.,
of fishing, marketing, shaning, conditioning and their families were almost 8% in the world who depend on the fishing work.\textsuperscript{357} But fish is the food which will be easily spoiled than other food. It must be conditioned before it gets spoiled. There are three categories in which fish can be conditioned.

1. \textit{Using ice cuber, freezing process (Cooling process)}

2. \textit{Smoke forming, Boiling (Heating Process)}

3. \textit{Drying, Salting}

The conditioning process depends on the breed, time, amount and the place where the fishing is done. The quality of the fish depends on the Hygiene, process, machine of conditioning. The time between fishing and conditioning decides the quality of the fish.

The developed countries are importing fishes from the developing countries. Those countries are seenly watching the hygiene of the fishes by seeing the harbour where the fishes come in, seashore and also the place of conditioning.\textsuperscript{358}

\textbf{Food of Paravas}

The hunted foods are eaten after hunting. Later such foods which are remained are used for commodity to commodity selling.\textsuperscript{359} After civilization, people sold food and saved for the future even in those days. Like-wise, the fishermen took fishes as their food. Even during civilization, they took different types of food but the important food was fish.\textsuperscript{360}

Rice was the main food eaten by them. Cooked rice and food is their daily food which fills their stomach. The remained fishes are dried and produced as dried fish. The

\textsuperscript{357} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.  
\textsuperscript{358} \textit{Act} – 1995.  
\textsuperscript{359} Stephan Sam, \textit{Kanyakumari Mavadda Meenavar Valviyal}, Thangam Publication, p. 123.  
\textsuperscript{360} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 124.
women and the fishermen ate such fishes. The men who goes through ocean may suck and loser all his food, he will suffer because of starving. This life is commonly known as “food in houses” and “starving in the ocean”.

**Pulikulambu**

Tamarind and salt is mixed in which fish was also boiled. This mixture is eaten with rice, turmeric water, onion, chilly, tumeric tamarind and salt is mixed and fishes were also mixed. This is boiled in liquied form and it is taken in.

**Kallikai**

During drought time, the conches that is sticked in the rock and kallikai is joined and eaten. This will stop the hunger of one day.\(^{361}\)

**Moorai**

Moorai is the one type of conches. This lives in the deep sea. The inner body is eaten both cooked and also without cooking.

**Hunter fish**

Usually this people take some animals as their helpers. They may take those animals as their important species. They will also have a rule that those animals as their important species.\(^{362}\) They will also have a rule that those animals must not be eaten or killed. This was their love towards them. This rule is for hunter fish. This hunter fish shows the place of other fishes and helps them in fishing.\(^{363}\) So, to show their gratitude, these fishes are not

---


\(^{363}\) Vaanamalai N, *Kulakkuriyeyalum Meenavar Vazhakkarakalum*, 1971, p. 201
eaten. They will be disturbed. If a hunter fish is inside the fishing net, they were put back to the water.\footnote{The Hindu, 18-12-89:3.}

**-Cola fish** is also such a type. This is big in size. Hunter fish comes near the top of the sea and plays near the boat which shows and has a good relation with the fishermen. Those hunter fish goes near the group of fish and hunts. This helps the fishermen to fish. So, the hunter fish are the friends of fishermen and the hunter fish are praised by Paravas.\footnote{Dhananjeyan A, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 196.}

**Tortoise**

The people of many areas believes that their ancestors were born of tortoise. So, they don’t eat tortoise. Andaman people has the function for praying with the milk of tortoise.\footnote{Ibid., p. 203.} Nagpur people also believe tortoise as the symbol of ancestors and it is not eaten.\footnote{Indra Neildass (1995 :24).}

In Tamil Nadu, the people living in the water and land took tortoise and kuiavas take it as their food. Srilankan people also intakes tortoise. The fishermen and Paravas will not eat tortoise.\footnote{Kalai Kalanjiyam (1985 :5 : 396).} Earlier, the Asuras and Thevars made a Magical mountain to if with a snake named Vasuki and it is stirred in the ocean to take the drink named Amutham.\footnote{Dhananjeyan A, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 203.} During that time, the mountain falls down suddenly ‘\textit{Maha Vishnu}’ took the shape of the tortoise and holds the bottom of the mountain. In \textit{Maha Vishnu 10- Avatars}, the second Avatar itself is tortoise.\footnote{Ibid., p. 204}
Another old story which talk about the ancestors, that tortoise taught how to swim and how boats are to be moved in the sea. The tortoise swims with the hand the same strategy is used in boats and it is followed.

Tortoise is also seen as the one which brings boat deads. When a tortoise comes inside a house or a cow born, is then it is considered as a bad time. This is common for both the farmers and fishermen. Whenever a tortoise is caught in the fish net then it is left into the sea and they took bath there. Usually, when a tortoise a caught in a fish net then it is believed that it will decrease the quality of the net.\textsuperscript{371}

**The structure of the body – Paravas**

Even living things has its structure according to the atmosphere of the earth. The structure, colour and other things depend on the atmosphere where the people live and also according to the climate.\textsuperscript{372}

Daily work was also the main thing which changes the structure of the body. This is explained by the theory of France Polin.\textsuperscript{373}

Usually, fishermen have a structure that was because of fishing but that also depends on their hardwork which have some differences from normal people. The face of Paravas was somewhat dim and wide. Their legs and hands are also strong. The women of Paravas have normal tone and structure in the body.\textsuperscript{374} Their daily life is too hard that they are good both from heart and body.

Because of hard work, men drink alcohol as their part of food. This is usual in the

\textsuperscript{373} *Bhavani Banerjee* : 1966 : XIII.
\textsuperscript{374} *Census Of India* : 1961 : Vol. I.
seashore village in those days. So, because of their alcohiols they look. This is also because of their body exercise and their food. They also take eggs of fishes and the varieties of food in fishes.

**Education**

Generally, Paravas are not good at education. Their education depend on their economic status. Because they only go for fishing. They took their son for fishing work when he was grown up. They thought that if world suffice for their sons to read and write.375

Almost all their studies end in 8th or 9th standard. Because of their low economic condition go for fishing work. After seeing their money daily, they forget to study. To help their perants and after seeing the economic status they go for fishing during their schooling age. Nowadays, initiative from the Government and also from the churches the higher secondary schools are in the place of fishermen.376

Now, in these villages, we could see many people getting degree and they are also in Government jobs. They also study in Fishing Training Centre (FTC) and the education that tells about fishing which was the main aspects and the backbone of their life.377

**Women Education**

Women education is seen as the one which is not needed. Anyway they were going to get married with a fisherman, the image of women is seen such a way “why education is needed for a woman who is going to cook and work in kitchen” the saying is told. Even

---

though all the family responsibility is given to the women, they are not allowed to schools\textsuperscript{378}. They usually stop their education by 9\textsuperscript{th} 10\textsuperscript{th} or 12\textsuperscript{th}.

In those days.......If a woman has to go for the higher education or college then, she must ask excuse from the uncle. If there is no intervention of uncle then her brother must give permission. If not she could not continue her studies.\textsuperscript{379}

**Medical Treatment**

If the village Paravas or their relatives or their children or the age-old people get then at first they are given medicines called Mother’s medicine. Only after that, they are taken to the Doctor in the village he would check-up the pulse and give them medicine. Even after that, if they are not good, then they will be taken to the nearby hospital.\textsuperscript{380}

**Free time Work**

The people of the East Coast who only depend on the marine work, will make ready the things that is needed for fishing, they also weave new net readjusting or re working on the net which is damaged. These work were done during the free time or leisure time.

During free time, they also buy thread and knit the net for fishing. This may be for their own use or they may also sell these net to others.\textsuperscript{381}

**Playing cards**

The coastal areas fishermen play cards as entertainment. There are two parties. One party loses the game. The loser party is shown as keeping card in their ears or a fiber of a

\textsuperscript{379} *Ibid.*, p. 46.  
coconut in their ear or they may also tie a rope in their head. Some spends all their time in playing cards. The people in coastal Uvari, Edinthakarai, Manapad, Tuticorin spends their free time in playing cards as their main entertainment. They also play cards with money. The one who wins gets all the money.

Other games

They collect all the conches in the coastal areas and play many different games. They play games like hiding conches in hands or like playing games like hide and seek with conches, these games are played by the old people.

Conches or eal (Sanga Muthiraiah)

A person takes an amount of conches and keep it in the others head. This is played by three people. If the amount of conches is said by the person, then the person having the conches in the hand must give it to the other one. The one who is left out with no conches will be considered as the loser. He will be given punishment as running till distance or kneeling down.

Playing with closing hands (odd or even)

The sea conches are taken in hand by two persons. Both will have same number of conches. One will hide some amount of conches in their hands and he if or even. Other will choose one. If that is a right then they will give it to the other one. If it is wrong the other one must give the conches.

---

382 Ibid., p. 125.
383 Ibid., p. 223.
385 Ibid., p. 126.
386 Ibid., p. 126.
Cinema

The important entertainment of Paravas was cinema. There are many fan groups and fan club for Paravas youth. That was why the fans gone by group to cinemas women spend time in watching serials.\(^{387}\)

Chatting

Aged men spend time in unwanted chatings and some songs in form of teasing these were their entertainment.

Maximum, their entertainment was sports. These fishermen while they were not at work youth play Kabaadi, cricket, Rye stick and making small floating ship with wooden.

They also play bedding matches with the nearby village youths. They keep money or cup as the bedding.\(^{388}\)

Kaliyal

Kaliyal is the oldest form of matches in Tamil Nadu. This is an oldest art in the Eastern Coast Paravas. If this is played without error, then it will be a good entertainment for the audience.\(^{389}\)

Totally, there will be eight players for each player there must be two stick and totally sixteen sticks are needed. The sticks are made up of various trees.

There are different names in Tamil. This is usually played in happiness occasion. It is given two names which is played during happy times and also with sticks.\(^{390}\)

\(^{387}\) Ibid., p. 127.
\(^{388}\) Ibid., p. 224.
\(^{390}\) Ibid., p. 157.
In times, it was not found in many villages. Some villages have this matche still now. It is from Kanyakumari District through many villages, this Kaliyal is played. This is also played in Tirunelveli District is Kuuddapuli to Kooduthalai and in Tuticorin District from Periyathalai to Chippikulam. This is also played in Coastal areas.

Presently, it is played in the East Coastal area of *Uvari Mr. S.P. Anthony* Samy was born in Uvari. He got Kalaimamani award for this game.  

**Entertainment for children and women**

Children play hide and seak, cripping, playing with stick, top as entertainment. They also play by building sand houses in seashore.  

Women play by pointing out catching games, *swinging, pallankuli* as their entertainment. Aged women pass their time by stiching, weaving net, making dry fishes. They spend more of their time in serials.  

**Men during Alcohols**

While the men were on leave, they spend time in drinking. They also played cards. It is because of the tiredness they drink they also drink to pass their time.  

**Praising Christ**

During leisure time, many go to church to pray. “All their problems could be solved if they pray in churches”. This was their belief, so they pray more during their free time.

---

Breeding of Domestic animals and pets

Usually, it is not good to grow cow, goat, bulls in the Coastal Areas, as we could find food like straw, grass in the seashore. Their major work depends on sea, so they don’t put more effect on growing such domestic animals. Even though they grow because of some freebies scheme of Government giving goats and cows.

They grow dogs, cats as their pet animals. The Paravas living in the Coastal areas have poult farms and pig separately to grow. The food are easily found in the coastal area. So, they could gain a major income through these farms. Paravas women work on these farms as it a found in all the houses.395

Relationship with other castes

During Sangam period, Paravas could not have all the things needed for fishing. So, those who are not going for fishing or work, then they are called as “Menakatan” (loan for work). Others get things from them for work and go for fishing. They also get some money for their work when they return from fishing, these men must give some fishes to who gave money as loan for them. They must always give it for the money they free.

They must also give the income of one – third to the one who gave money for working. The people in Coastal areas are free-minded. Even though they look like hard and wild people they have a very good relationship with others.396

People of Nadar caste

In the Coastal villages Paravas, Muukuvars did the work in Coastal side and fishing. Almost Nadar people work in their Coastal region. In the Eastern Coastal region like Manapad, Periyathazhai where Nadar people did the fishing work.

The Paravas and the Nadar people have a good relationship all over other villages. They extend their friendship by selling fish and also commodity for commodity.

Those people who come for sight seeing in sea and for sighting the fish. They have a good relationship with them. They also extend their friendship by selling fish at cheap rate or for free.

Dresser (Barber) (Naavithar)

Those who does the barber work are called as Navithar or Dresser. There are separate barber for both Muukkuvar and Paravas. Those who shave for Muukuvar does not shave the Paravas. Those who shave for Paravas does not shave for Muukkuvar. They play an important role in all the duties of fishermen. They play a role of telling sad demises to the nearby villages. They get gift from house to house during new year and other functions. They are considered one among the family.

Dobby (vannar)

There is no dobbi for fishermen. They come from other areas for washing clothes. It is not given that much importance as barbers but they get gifts during the functions.\(^{397}\)

Other than working days and festivals

Every year, to increase the source of fish, the fishermen are given leave for 45 days for the reproduction of fish. Also during the time of October, November and December the fishermen are given leave due to high tides in the ocean. They won’t go for fishing. During this time, they weave new net and they also repair their boats.398

On those days fishermen pray to the sun and also monthly prayers are done other than their prayer to Varunan. Those who pray to the moon are called Moon Paravas and those who pray to the sun are called Day Paravas.

During the Portuguese invasion, Paravas and Muukkuvas are converted to Roman Catholic by the conversion of St. Xaviers. In 16 AD century, Christianity made a foot print in India. Those converted christians do not go for work during the Christian festivals.

During those Christian festival, they won it go for work even though they are at fougheat situation.399

Sunday

According to the belief in Christianity, six days in a week is for work and one day, the seventh day, is to take rest. The fishermen who work on six days, take rest on Sunday likewise, christion fishermen take Sunday as the special day and they go to churches to pray and they eat chicken and mutton in the good day.

Palm Sunday

The Sunday before the Friday when Jesus christ is put on cross, is called as palm Sunday. On that day Jesus comes by cus and all his followers sound as prave to the son of

Thavid. The day is given leave. Likewise, Christins have palm in their hands and walk to the churches. The palm leaf which is taken to churches is kept safely in houses.\textsuperscript{400}

**Good Thursday**

Jesus christ prayer on the day before Good Friday for which he is going to get in hands of his enemies and feeling for all the problems to be faced after that. He prayed by thinking all these immortals. To console Jesus Christ, Christians pray all day in the Church.

**Vow on Good Friday**

On Good Friday, the aged people in the village throw coins by standing in the temple side. The children will collect all those coins. This is nothing but the silver coins that was thrown by *yuthaar* who was the called as thief of coins. This thing is still continued by Kanyakumari Paravas and Muukkuvas.\textsuperscript{401}

**Path of great cross**

The Paravas move all over the streets on Good Fridays by having cross. Then, they will assemble in front of the church and pray. They will leave all their work in this day to meditate.

**First of Avani**

First of Avani is the Tamil New Year which is considered to be special day for Tamil people. On this day the Mother of Jesus came up from Heaven and the fishermen do not go for work and they do the work in church all the time.

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., p. 119  
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid., p. 120.
Fasting

According to Christianity, the seven weeks before the crucifixion of Jesus is considered to be the fasting days. During those days, they eat one time food and pray on other times in a day. On these seven week, first Wednesday is to be considered as fasting day. The people more that to fast age. 402

The game in Ash Wednesday

The Monday before Ash Wednesday, when the ashes are mixed and poured over relations. They mix turmeric and pour on Tuesday. These are the signs of the fasting days.

The process of work

Paravas do not see time for fishing to go into sea. They go on their comfortable and night time. And they also go only after analysing the streaming of water.

Paravas who get up seeing ocean analyses the streaming of water, direction of wind, the position of ocean, the moisture in air, only after that they go for work. 403

They know everything about ocean, they meet on the night and analyse the position of ocean by the lightning and thunder.

The streaming of water is divided into two as high tides and low tides. There will be high tides for six hours and low tides for six hours. There will be high tides for two times and low tides for two times in a day. This is calculated by the full moon day and new moon day.

The months are divided into summer and winter. There are different kinds of fishes found in different month. For which different fish nets are used at different times.

402 Ibid., p. 117.
During fishing, there may be some unforeseen weather and disasters. During disaster, the ocean will be dark and water everywhere.\textsuperscript{404} They find the seashore by the high tides and stars.

Likewise, they will go for work during the early time or during the evening time or may be after their breakfast.

Sometimes, they must stay in the sea at night to fish. They stay for about four to five days in the sea for fishing. They will not go for work, if there is high wind or high tides.

These things could not be analysed during the rainy season. If such ethic are not seen such time, they would unknowingly go to other small coastal villages. So, they must go for fishing only after getting more experience.

\textbf{New fishnet for work}

The festivals based on work is more important for Paravas. So, this festivals for starting work with new fishnet is more important. This is important as a wedding festivity.

They use a net for fishing. If those nets are to be used for the first time, then there are some rituals to be done. That celebration is called as “\textit{Puthumadi Irakkal}”.

This is celebrated at the time when the nets are weaved for work. At that time, they invite all the children and relatives. Usually, almost 50 to 60 persons may go for this fishing work. This new net is spread entirely in the sand. Coconut and jiggery are put over those nets. Children took away those things. This is compared how children took away all the food that the fishes would get into the net after the net is used for fishing.\textsuperscript{405}

\textsuperscript{405} Stephan Sam, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 133.
Then, the Priest pray for the net and the fishermen. There will also be a feast arranged in the village. Milk rice is the main dish in this feast. The food is the mixture of jaggery and rice. This rice is also put into sea as a ritual.

During that new net, no other net is used for fishing. Only after the new nets others work. The fishes that are from new net is given for free and also it is used for giving feast.

**Deck wood**

The most important need for the Paravas work in deck wood. The work in deck wood is more safety.

New deck wood are produced by the best wood and also the one who make deck wood. The trees for deck wood are bought from Kerala. Such deck wood are kept in a safer side of the Coast\textsuperscript{406}.

They make a sign of cross by lighting candles and incense. Then, they give coconut, fruits, dhoties and towels to the deck wood craftsmen. After checking the deck wood, it is left with anchor in the seashore for one week. After that, the deck wood are read for work.

For the work with deck wood almost 5 to 6 people are needed. To move and to come back to sea shore. The men are needed for help.

Then, for the new deck wood, the priest pray for the persons going for work after coming, they give fishes for free to the relatives and friends. They cook and eat.\textsuperscript{407}

---


Beliefs and superstitions

Fisherfolk believe in superstitions. They do believe in the existence of ghosts and evil spirits. They are superstitious about certain occurrences too. They are afraid of demons who, they believe, cause illness and misfortunes. They propitiate them with gifts when children in the family die one after another. They believe that an evil spirit called ‘Muni’ eat these children. Hence, after the birth of a child, they immediately make a round hole in the upper portion of the child’s ear hoping that the evil spirit would not eat a disfigured child. The Catholic fisherfolk offer money for ‘nerchait’ and offering to Murugan temple due to the Hindu influence. They propitiate the goddess ‘Mariamman’ with offering at the time of plagues. When they wish to build a new house, they first erect a hut on the proposed site and live there for sometimes to check on the auspiciousness of the place.

The belief of Paravas

If beliefs or rituals that are done continuously that are called as rituals. These are done by praying and believed. Presently people have different habits. Some things are stopped by these habits due to some changes habits are changed in the world, but the rituals do not change.

“Belief” is something that is connected with feeling. This is connected with the mind and then it is with single-minded. This single mindedness grow and gets the help from inner soul. Belief about God.409

Olden Tamil people have the belief of praying to God. They pray to Nature God like the water, the Varunan and the sun. As they work, they pray before they go for fishing. Only then, they believe that they could get more fishes.

**The belief about fishing**

The fishermen going for a long distance, stay for 4, 5 days, when they are about to get shark. During those time, they and their family women must maintain dignity and be clean. If they are put into some disaster, then they believe, it is because of their uncleanliness. During that time, they pray to God.\(^{410}\)

If they get some special fishes, it is considered for some good things to happen. If Vela fish is found, then there will be some family marriage. If it is bengal fish, then all their problems could be changed. If Soorai fish is found, then they could get more income. If tortoise comes in, then they also believe that they could get less fish. If they do not get fishes for many times, then they believe some other has given incantation and they do rituals to get back.

**The way of Praying (Worship)**

Fishing Paravas who depends only on sea have more belief in God by nature. This praying helps in their routine life. According to the wordings, “My Job is my God”\(^{411}\) they believe sea as their God. On those days, they also worship the Sun, the Moon and also the Varunan. Those who worship the Moon are called “Nela Paravas”. Those who worship the Sun are called “Pagal Paravas”.\(^{412}\) In time, they worship to Murugan and the worship to

\(^{410}\) *Ibid.\*
the Varunan had stopped. Then that they leave worshipping Murugan, and moved to Christianity. Before converting to Christianity, they are called as Hindu Paravas. During those times, the car of Thiruchendur Subramaniyan (Murugan) will never move without the hand of Paravas. They worship in such a way to Murugan the Hindu God.413

Almost 2000 years ago, Hindu Paravas offered worship to “Shark”. During festival, they keep the horn of sharks and the sea Gods were kept over these horns, and worship by keeping flowers. They also celebrate by drinking414. This rituals of shark worship is referred in the work “Pattinapaalai”. Hindu Paravas also worship to Maaramman, Kaliamman, Muththaramman, Thiruchendur Murugan, Kulasei Muththaramman….etc.415

Worship to Shark

Worship to Shark is very old. Even now, the fishermen in Coastal areas worship to shark in Nagai and Quide-ye-Millath. This shark worship is seen only in few places. The Sindhu river falls through Macron beach, Andaman Coastal areas, there shark worship is seen in those places.416

“Pattinapaalai” Refers about Shark worship

Pattinapaalai refers about the power of Buddhism and Sanskrit, Pattinapaalai also refers about the shark worship as follows.417 The rituals are clearly explained in Tamil lines with more references in this work. In 14 A.D Century, worship to shark is told as worship

413 Ibid., p. 115.
417 Ibid., p. 171.
to Varunan. 418 It is told as the impotent opening of lines in “Pattinapaalai” is only by the God Varunan. They also tell shark as the Vehicle of Varunan. To know the clear worship of those days Paravas and their power of worship will come to know by the word in Tamil “Anangku”. 419

In Sangam Literature, there were many meaning to the word “Anangku” as…1. Sad, 2.God, 3.Suffering, 4.Fear, 5.Ghost, 6.Beaufy, 7.Feature of God, 8.Dancing ferociously, 9.Disease, 10.Shape 420 such ways it is not right to say this as the worship to Varunan. The worship to Varunan is for the people living in Coastal areas.

According to Tholkaappiyam, Varunan is the God to the people living the sea side. Pattinapaalai refers to “Sinaisuravin Kodu” 421 which is not the sea God and that is also not Varunan. Likewise this gives different meaning as God, vapouring up of sea. This is why because there are many obstacles in the fishing work, that will be more harmful to humans. Such as Cyclones, hurricanes, thunder and rain and also blue whales and sharks. These fear of natural calamities to the worship of god. This worship will give them security, source of fishing net and also the source of fishing will increase.

The Coastal fishermen in Kerala refers about the Sword shark and the god who is connected with the fish which is referred to in many Epics. This is referred in different names in Malayalam. This fish has different names like “Seaking”, “Theva Machan”. This shark is also used as vehicle and comes over it, such Epics are there in the State. So, these

---

418 Kadiyalur urthhirangannanar Pattinapaalai, 78-93, Somasundaranar, Patthupaddu, Muulamum Uraium, pp. 28-29.

123
rituals of worship of horns of shark were not only in Tamil Nadu but also in many other States.\(^{422}\)

In India, Macron beach where Sindhu river flows has also this “Suravukottai” worship. This is not only followed by the Hindu Paravas but also by other Paravas and fishermen in all religious faith. This worship is to get more fishes during fishing and also for the security of men who goes for fishing. This “Suravukottai” worship is also seen in Andaman also.\(^{423}\)

This worship is also referred to in many Tamil literary works. Even now, this “Shark pin” worship is seen in Andaman, which is also seen in Tamil Nadu.

The worship by keeping the horns of Shark as said in Tamil literature, is not seen nowadays. Evennow few things and rituals are seen in some places. In Kaviripooppattinam, there is a man named Perumal in the fishermen colony who is preserving the horns of shark. He offers workship during the special days.\(^{424}\)

There are many “Horns of Sharks” kept for show in Danish Fort in the district of Nagai, Quids-e-Millath by Tamil Nadu Archeiological Department.\(^{425}\)

The outer part of shark will appear as if the long nose in the face and then two teeth in the side which looks like a blade, which helps sharks to attack other fishes by cutting the body into pieces which will be taken as food.\(^{426}\) This will also dig the sands in the ground

\(^{425}\) Ibid.,
and eat the living underneath. This will also attack humans with tails. Sometimes, it will also pierce the boat using the horns.\textsuperscript{427}

**Worship to Sea God**

Poor fishermen also live in the Coastal areas of Southern part of Tamil Nadu. Those Paravas depends on the sea foods. The Sea God gives them food. So, they worship Sea God. During special days, both men and women come together to worship the God.

Those fishermen who go for fishing leaving their family and safe pray for their return without any problems alus to storms or wind or rain or the things in sea.

**Special Marks of Fisher Paravas**

The Paravas living in Tamil Nadu Coastal areas have fish as their sign. In Sangam period, tribal people have *Munda, Oran, Villangu, fishes* as their signs. In southern side, Hunterfish and Tortoise are the signs of Paravas.\textsuperscript{428}

Usually there are some connections with the people and the fish. The fishing, eating of fish, God, human have connection with the fish, the belief over it, rituals are the important connections and routine. This connection deals with the people of Paravas and fish as it witnesses their connections.\textsuperscript{429}

The people of Tibet do not catch fish which over flows in the lake as they consider as the “water god”. In India, the fishes are considered as special in Haridwar and Benaras. “*Life after the death*”. Other countries consider shark as the special fishes or Sanctity.\textsuperscript{430}

\textsuperscript{430} Crooke, William and Enthoren, R.E. 1925: *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Delhi : S. Chand & Co. Pvt LTD, p. 377.
In Central Australia, the Tribals and the other people consider some sign of their caste and accordingly they make rituals through Mantras in coaches. To increase the breed and life of animals and birds of their group they make these rituals. So in Sangam period, they wish to increase their group as the group of fishes. Usually, if the people want the power of any animals and fishes then, they make them as their mark. The main feature of the mark is in behalf of the power in animals and birds. So, Dolphin and Tortoise were the sign of some of the rituals of fishermen Paravas.\footnote{Encyclopaedia of the Social Science XIII and XIV combined, p. 658.}

Dolphin

Dolphin is the most seen mammal in the Tamil Nadu coastal region and which is seen in lakhs and lakhs in other countries. In water living, the most trusted by human are the Dolphin fishes. This Dolphin will also help people who unfortunately gets into the ocean. With this, there are many stories in Tamil Nadu. These are used as food in Japan, New Gineya,\footnote{Verrier Elwin, On Totenism of Indian Tribes, and Vanama malai .N, Kalaigalin Thorrnam, July 1971, p. 283.} South America, Turkey. This must not be eaten in South African, even though yearly so many Dolphins are eaten. In Tamil Nadu, it is said that Dolphin must not be eaten by the old people.\footnote{Valli .S, Op.cit., p. 196.}

Paravas and Muukkuvas who live in South Tamil Nadu calls Dolphin as “Onkan”. If it is caught during fishing, it is left back in water. This also cry like humans and helps the humans. This also predicts the disasters before it happens. So Dolphins are not caught or eaten by people.\footnote{Dhananjeyan .A, Op.cit., p. 205.}

\footnote{Ibid., p. 206.}
**Tortoises and Ancestors of fish Paravas**

There were many signs that the ancestors were born from tortoises. There time relation, Tortoises are not eaten. People *Andaman* have some rituals over Tortoises. Chotta Nagpur believe tortoises as their signs and they do not eat them.\(^{436}\)

During fishing, if tortoises were caught in the net, then they believe it as bad time and they also believe that they could not get that much amount of fishes.\(^{437}\)

Tortoises were considered with the Ancestors in the *Sangam* period. They say tortoises and Ancestores were one. Ancestore got idea from the tortoises how on hoco to ride Deck woods, they also did the sea work by this way.

In those days, the people of *Asurars and Devars*, make the Magical Mountain as the tool and they make snake as the rope, then they churn the sea to get Elites. During the time, Mountain could not withstand stable and then falls. Suddenly, Maha Vishnu stands and transformed into tortoise and then holds that mountain in ten Avatar of Maha Vishnu, the second Avatar stands the tortoise. So, this stands special to the Hindu God and they consider tortoise as the sign of their group.\(^{438}\)

But now, when they are converted to Christians they took tortoise as the food. They eat the meat of tortoise and the egg of tortoise is also eaten. The egg of tortoise is cooked as the way the chicken egg is cooked and is eaten.\(^{439}\)

---


\(^{437}\) *Kalaikkalanjiyam, Part IV, Tamil Valarchi Kalagam*, 1958, p. 396.

\(^{438}\) Vettam Mani, *Paranic Encyclopedia*, Delhi 1975, p. 79.

New Goodness

“Uruthi poosal” a ritual that was made as the Christ comes and blesses. This is made once in 5 years. This day is chosen by the parents for getting the good deeds\textsuperscript{440}. People of the Coastal area who are poor make the special days in church as getting the day of good deeds. The children were trained separately for this. This function must be done for all the christion fish Paravas. There was no age for this but it must be done for all the people.\textsuperscript{441}

In this function, the parents of wisdom takes the lead. They are informed before the function. These parents take part in all function for the growth of the children.\textsuperscript{442}

Dilution of Evil eye

If some one comes from any marriage and they put into ill then they believe it is because of evil eye. If they get more income, or if they get more fish then they dilute the cast of evil eye.\textsuperscript{443}

They use comphor and sugar Alkali to apply in their body or in the things used for the work. Then they burn it by this way dilution of the cast of evil eye is made.\textsuperscript{444}

Astrology

The Paravas go for work and also do family functions only after seeing all the good and bad times in Astrology.

\textsuperscript{442} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{443} Stephan Sam, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 139.
Birds

Usually birds come to seashore for catching fish. The Paravas when they found a kingfisher over a particular place in the ocean, then they believe there could be more fishes. Then they stop and fish.

If they found any black sparrow while going to work, then they believe it as bad time and they also believe, they could not succeed in their work. If cats crosses during the time of work, then they consider if as bad time.\textsuperscript{445}

Plate and talisman

In olden time the Tamil letters are written in a copper plate and the plates are given to the particular person after prayer. After that, they put those copper plates in front of the gate and they put it framed.

Talisman

This is put inside a small silver pipe which is round. They get this from the Blacksmith and put those plate inside it. It is tied with a black rope in the neck or in the hands.\textsuperscript{446}

Watering in face

If a child cry or if child did not eat, then they believe that it would have scared by seeing something. For such children, some mantras are told and prayers are changed and then the water is sprinkled in the face.

These things are done by those muslims living in the coastal areas of masjid. They apply the feathers of peacocks in the body and face. Then the water is sprinkled in face.

after changing the mantras. From this, the children would recover and eat well. This is their belief.

**Ghost**

The belief about Ghost and the news about ghost is from the olden times. In *Kanji Thinai, Tholkapiyar* told about the wife who wanted to save her husband from the ghost.447

Likewise, fishermen believe that the one who do more bad dead become ghost.448 This ghost would disturb others these ghost could be controlled by mantras. This is their belief.

They go for some wizard or some one who could control the ghost.449 He asked bring coconut, fruits, flowers, lemon and cock to pray and then he puts “Sacred Ash” over the face and throws into the sea. These type of belief were with fishermen.450

**Christians Uprooted**

The second effort in implementing the segregation policy of the Portuguese resulted in the uprooting of the Christians from their old culture. The Christians were asked not to consult sorcerers and soothsayers before marriage, to identify a thief, to get rid of disease or to beget children. Receiving articles inscribed with charms from the sorcerers as a cure from certain infirmities and placing such articles in the fields for a good produce was also forbidden.451

---

448 *Maduraikanji*.
449 *Porulathigaram* – 77.
451 Cunha Rivara, Fas.4, Decree 28, pp. 104-105.
The Christians were told that it was irrational to perform purificatory ceremonies in connection with water tanks or any inanimate things. The Provincial Council requested the Portuguese king to order the Brahmins to abolish all ‘devilish rites’ before a wedding since they were scandalous to the Christians. It further said that no public celebration should be held during marriage ceremonies and that extravagant rituals on the occasion of marriage should be avoided.

**Village Festivals**

The festivals that the Jesuits introduced in the villages continue to be celebrated with gaiety and fervour. Each village has a patron saint like *St. James, St. Joseph, St. Antony*, etc., and the celebration of these saints’ festival is an annual event in every village. All the elements of the feast of “Our Lady of Snows” are found in these festivals too. The shrines in some of the villages are very popular with extravagant paraphernalia and attract large gatherings at festival times. Money is spent lavishly on decoration and other.

The Portuguese had the custom of putting up small structures called *kurusadis* (small shrines) with a Cross, in all the corners of the villages. A *kurusadi* is a raised structure with the Cross and a niche for a lamp. In the coastal villages, the Christians build *kurusadis* mainly at the entrance, and at each direction of the villages. The devotion and piety demonstrated here is greater than the solemnity and devotion at the main churches. Though the Portuguese criticised the Hindu marriage and other rituals as devilish and meaningless, the Christians have perceived all these in a different way. The liturgical ceremonies take place in the church are given less importance compared to the ceremonies

---

which take place at home before and after the wedding mass. In case of death also the same attitude prevails.

**Religious Festivals**

Like the Catholic Missionaries meritorious services for the spread of Christianity in southern part of India, the most popular among them was St. Francis Xavier. He started his work in the middle of the 16th Century A.D. in southern area. Due to his arrival to “Kottar”, majority of the inhabitants from the coastal areas from cape comerin to Manapad embraced Christianity. He preached Christianity from village to village. He baptized nearly 10,000 Fishermen known as Muukkuvas. In due course, this number got increased considerably as a result, St. Francis Xavier converted a large number of Hindus to Christianity. Due to his hard work, most of the people of coastal areas embraced Christianity.454

As the activities of the missionaries centered around the churches, they constructed more churches with a view to extend their activities. No doubt that the Christian missionaries constructed churches to organize the people in and around the area.

Festivals are one of the important parts of social life which provide happiness and new life of people. Every region, race and the people of various languages observe Festivals according to their cultural and social background. Most of the festivals are social oriented while some have its religious background. The social life of the Paravas is also a typical one.

---

All saints Festivals

Every Catholic church is having its own protector like that at Coastal area has the protector called as “All saints”. The Festival of the church usually held for 10 days every year. Parish Council headed by parish priest used to conduct the festival. The expenses are planned by a Committee with a clean budget. The expenses are usually met from the church fund, collection from the parish people and the Festival Tax on the members.

On the first day of the festival, flag hoisting is conducted at 6.00 P.M. It was hoisted on the 50 feet flag mast with the celebrative meet at drum beats, ringing of the church bell and had the claps of the children. Then, the mass prayer was conducted with a small sermon. Till the eighth day, sermons are given daily, on the 9th day morning and evening special masses were conducted. After that, the chariot procession is held in the night. On the 10th day two masses were conducted. In the evening on that day the anniversary of catechism are conducted in a good manner.

Christmas

Christmas and Easter are the major festivals of Christians. It is celebrated all over the world. It falls on the 25th of December. It commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ. There are special services in all churches in connection with the festival. The Christmas tree is arranged in every church and also at Uvari churches. There is a feast in every Christian home with meal as a special item. The people of the Fisherman community in Paravas and other coastal villages begun to celebrate Christmas on December first itself.
every year with the advent of the Christmas. Most of the households on the Coastal are put up stars made up of colour paper or light transparent polythene or plastic sheets.

Almost all the Catholic Churches used to celebrate high mass at the middle of the night on December 24. The Catholics of the other coastal villages wear the new sets of clothes purchased for the occasion and go to the church in high spirits to hear the mass.

None of the fisherman goes to sea on Christmas day, on the other hand, they spend the whole day in merry making at home and eating sumptuous food, meat products are the main items of their food. On the Christmas day, some of the fishermen take liquor on this day.\textsuperscript{455}

\textbf{Easter}

Easter, which commemorates the resurrection of Jesus, falls in the month of April. The holy week is preceded by 40 days of fast and prayers. The Easter week starts with Sunday and special prayers are offered during the week. Easter Celebration has its accent on spirituality rather than to festivity.\textsuperscript{456}

The Catholic Fishermen community and all people of Coastal villages in Tirunelveli District have much importance to this period. The pious among them observe great, austerity in their day to day life during this period and eat only one meal at noon on Fridays.

\textsuperscript{455} Uvari St. Antony’s Church, \textit{Notice Board}.

\textsuperscript{456} Uvari St. Antony’s Church, \textit{Annual report}, 2007.
Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday means the Sacred Ash which apply on their forehead after prayer like the Hindus are doing. This day marks the beginning of the 40 days vent. The tender palm leaf given to the believers on the previous Palm Sunday are collected and burnt on the church premises after the holy mass on Ash Wednesday.

Good Friday

Good Friday is the most solemn day not only for Roman Catholics but to all denominations. It is, on this day, that the believers remember in great solemnity the passion of Christ. The all coastal villages people do not work on this day and the pious among them spend most of the time on this day in the Church participating in the solemn prayers and soul string sad songs. The rituals connected with Good Friday starts on Monday and Thursday.

After the holy mass in the evening of Monday, Thursday the Eucharist is taken to a specially improvised after admit the singing of Gloria and the Faith full keeping themselves wake throughout the night and till the end of the rituals of Good Friday.

Fisherfolk culture

Rituals, Customs and Practices differ from religion to religion and caste to caste. Fisherfolk community follows many religious rituals and customs which they adopt with much care. They observe the rituals and customs relating to child birth, puberty, marriage
and death with strict accordance to Christian custom. They have developed culture and
customs of their own.

**Life Rituals of fish Paravas**

Some functions are celebrated in routine, So, it is considered as rituals. Such rituals
change with the religion and caste.457 The birthday, puberty stage, Marriage, are celebrated
by all the people. Such functions are celebrated for the good growth of people and it is
combined with the life growing wheels, House warming function, the things bought for the
beginning of new business. Such things were checked and it is closely connected with the
life of fish Paravas.458

These functions and festivals were celebrated in very grand and happy moods.459
The rituals and celebrations vary according to the people, group and country. Now, let us
see the functions after the women conceiving, the time of pregnancy their parents taking
them to their house.

**Inviting to the Mother’s house**

The conceived woman is invited to the Mother’s house from the husband’s house by
bringing more sweets. At the seventh month or ninth month of pregnancy woman inviting
to the mother house according to their own wishes.460 If they go on the seventh month, they
bring seven types of sweets, if it is in the eighth month, then they bring eight types of
sweets, if it is in the Ninth month then they bring nine types of sweets, to the husbands

houses, to invite the conceived woman. They must also give feast to everyone and all the relatives on the day of inviting. 461

**Birth customs**

In fish Paravas, they don’t have any gender differentiation. They see both gender with same mentality. If it is boy child, then it must be sent to the sea one day. If it is the first child then everything happens in the Mother’s house. 462 The spending for the birth and delivery is all borne by the woman’s house. The first news of child birth is told only to the uncle. The mother and baby is kept untouched by anyone in one place for about 15 days 463. They were given food in separate plates. Their clothes must by washed only by the barbars. They must change clothes which is given by them. At the third day of child birth, they are given the food cooked of shark fish. The next day, a widow was brought and she was asked to wear the jewels and dresses for the child. This is because, the child must also are all the sufferings which was suffered by the widow. 464

In second and third pregnancies, it is not a compulsion that it must be made in the mother’s house. The spending in child birth must be borne by the husband.

Procreation is indeed one of the main objectives of marriage. Pregnancy is an eagerly awaited one in the life of the couple. To ensure the safe delivery and a healthy child, several precautions are taken. The mother avoids new clothes and ornaments since all

---

these will attract the evil spirits, the jinns. The pregnant women do not eat during the lunar
eclipse. A ceremony similar to Valaikappu (of the Hindu custom) is performed during the
seventh or ninth month of pregnancy (Valaikappu or bangle wearing ceremony is believed
to possess virtues toward of evils from the evil spirits hovering about a pregnant woman
since she is considered to be more susceptible to the influence of the evil spirit than others.
During this auspicious ceremony, the pregnant woman is decorated with a large number of
glass and lac (Kankanam) bangles and elderly women bless her for a safe delivery).

The customs observed when births by this community are similar to that of the
customs adopted in the Hindu community. During the seventh or ninth month of the
girl’s first conception, parents go to the son – in – law’s house and invite the girl for her
delivery at her mother’s house. They caring with them many things when they visit them.
The first delivery mostly takes place in the mother’s house. Mother or the parents meet the
expenses at the time of delivery and also the expenses following the birth of the child.

A grand function is celebrated on the 7th or 9th months during pregnancy. The
function is called as ‘Valaikappu’, on this occasion, the girl’s relatives adorn the girl with
colourful glass bangles. At this time, another ritual termed ‘Sadangu kalithal’ takes place.

The girl is adorned by her cousins with sandal paste, vermillion and scented water.
Sweet and ‘Seemantha Paniaram’ are exchanged between the two families. After the
celebration, the parents take her to their house.

---

466 It is a special sweet prepared by the girl’s family using rice flour, Jaggery, suger and coconut scrapings.
Seemantha is a function to mark the 7th or 9th month of pregnancy, K.S. Singh, India’s Communities Vol.VI,
p. 2762.
After the delivery, relatives and neighbours come to see the newly born baby. They offer clothes, money and dresses to the midwife who serves there. She happily collects them from the visitors and hands them to the people in the house. Finally, she takes away all those items from them when she leaves for her home. This is still in practice in their community.

Rite on the 8\textsuperscript{th} day

Fisherfolks celebrate the 8\textsuperscript{th} day of the child’s birth well. They take the baby to the church and the child in named by the priest there. Sometimes, the Father of the church selects the name\textsuperscript{467}. On this occasion the parents of the baby should not accompany the child. The Mother or Holy Father alone takes the baby to the church.

Ritual on the 40\textsuperscript{th} day

The mother of the baby should not go to the church till the 40\textsuperscript{th} day. On the 40\textsuperscript{th} day, the mother goes to the church and waits outside. The priest is informed of the mother’s arrival there. The priest immediately hands her a candle and leads her into the church.

Function of Naming the child

Before Naming the child, they pray for child which is called “Trishti” to make away all the bad eyes from the child.\textsuperscript{468} The child and Grindstone were taken in hand and then the Grindstone shown above and then at the front side of house was kept inside the cradle. After that, Grindstone is taken away and the baby was kept inside the cradle. The uncle plays a major role from the birth till the marriage of the child. If the child asks all the

\textsuperscript{467}\textit{Ibid.},

things to uncle and sleeps in the cradle. This is shown very clearly without hiding. The uncle gives sweet in the mouth and names the child of his own choice. Paravas believes that they give birth only the ancestors who had died. This is the main reason also why they name the child with the name of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{469}

**Ritual on the 41\textsuperscript{st} day**

Parents of the girl on the 41\textsuperscript{st} day send back the mother and the baby to the husband’s house. They send with the mother and baby, the essential items like rice, vegetables and other grocery items too. They select an auspicious day to send the mother and the baby to the mother –in – law’s house.\textsuperscript{470}

On that day, everyone in the place like relatives, friends come. Then they send the mother and child to their husband’s house with happiness.

**Tenth month**

On the tenth month, the mother takes the child to the seashore and then they dig some sand and keep the child inside the sand by showing the hands and head. During that time, the child beats the sand with the hands and through which they believe that the power of neck and the hip will be increased and soon it will walk. Nowadays, they don’t take child to the Seashore rather bring the sand in a big box and the same thing is followed. This shows their intelligence in Science.\textsuperscript{471}

After a year of birth arranged they have rituals of ear boring function and the offering of hair. This function is made according to the each god of family deity and the

\textsuperscript{470} *Ibid.*, p. 95.
Church. This is to thank the God who has given them a child. The majority things are offered by the uncle. The uncle and relatives were given feast on that day.\textsuperscript{472}

This offering of hair is done in the Uvari St. Antony’s Church by the coastal Paravas. There, the wearing of ear stud and offering of hair is done. They also offer Goat for God and the feast is given. In all these things, the uncle and the parents of wisdom are given more importance. The dresses, jewels were given as gifts during the offering of hair.\textsuperscript{473}

**Christening Ceremony or Baptism**

Another important ceremony is Christening ceremony or baptism. This is a religious rite, which is performed a month after the child’s birth. This is a ceremony to mark the child’s entry into the Catholic Community. It is performed when the child is nine or ten years old. The child is taught the religious prayers and principles.

On the Eighth day of child birth, Baptism is done in the church. At that time, the priest waved name the child with the chosen name of the parents.\textsuperscript{474} If the parents did not choose the name, then the priest waved name of his own choice. During Baptism, a middle class parents choose a couple of their wish or a couple from their relatives.\textsuperscript{475} They ask permission to them to be as “The parents of Wisdom” to their child and then they arrange the Baptism.\textsuperscript{476}

\textsuperscript{474} Dr. Stephan Sam, *Op.cit.*, p. 94.
Such parents who take their child for Baptism and the parents of wisdom are called “Kumpaathiri”. They are called God father and God mother.

On the day of baptism, the child who gets the dress and towel and the spendings are to be barred by the “Kumpaathiri”. After baptism,477 the feast will be arranged for the relatives and friends. Such parents of wisdom. The child was given as gift according to the financial side of the parents.478 The child will be obedient to the parents of wisdom. They obey the parents of wisdom more than their parents. If the God mother and God father are informed about the special day of child then they are given some gifts. If the child has an uncle then, on the 28th day of birth, the child, is gifted with things based on their financial class. Usually, these gifts will be jewels of Gold or new dresses.479

After Baptism, the child is first taken to the house of the parents of wisdom also going, the father and mother of child must give Rice, Chicken, Goat, Banana as a gift to the parents of wisdom. They will also gift new dresses to the parents of wisdom.480

**Ceremony at the time Puberty**

When a girl attains puberty, it is considered as an important occasion in every community. Likewise, in fisherfolk community also many rituals are performed at that time. Relatives are immediately informed of this by giving them betel leaves. Relatives and neighbours visit the girl’s house. The girl is given a special food with ingredients like gingily oil and eggs481. Maternal uncle’s family brings sarees, oil, egg, vermilion, sandal

paste turmeric, flowers to bathe the girl\textsuperscript{482}. They dress her with new dresses, adorn with flowers and other decorations. Relatives are entertained with dinner. The girl’s parents take the girl to the church on the following Sunday. A food stuff called ‘kali’ (a combination of rice and black gram flour) is prepared and given to the girl for a few days.

Puberty, attaining stage, is the important stage in give’s life. When a girl attains puberty, it is considered as the life blossoms for her and many functions are arranged.\textsuperscript{483}

In Paravas, the puberty attaining stage is considered as more important. This news is also first informed to the uncle.\textsuperscript{484} The wife of the uncle, and the women in relatives pour water on the head and an iron rod or Neem leaf is given in the hand and asked her to sit in a corner of the house. The clothes worn by them are given to the dhobis\textsuperscript{485}. The clothes are changed given by them only. Such girl should be untouched. They are not allowed to touch any things in the house. The seven days from the time of Attaining Puberty is considered as uncleanness.\textsuperscript{486}

On the seventh day, varieties of fruits, flowers, clothes, jewels were brought by the uncle and he takes the charge in making all arrangements in the function. This functions is made special by inviting all the people and women in the time. For seven days, the girl was given egg and flour and oil in large amount to eat.\textsuperscript{487}

\textsuperscript{482} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{485} Eruthayaraj S.S, \textit{Op.cit.}, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{487} Ibid., p. 98.
The Paravas who are rich will make arrangements for audio set, Banners and Pandhitals. But nowdays, these Paravas inform this puberty attaining stage only to the relatives and uncle, and do the function in a very simple manner.\textsuperscript{488}

**Rituals, Customs during Marriage**

Many rituals are observed by fisherwomen during marriage. The average marriageable age was between 18-21 for females and 20-25\textsuperscript{489} for males in the fisherfolk community. A practice of marrying maternal uncle or his children was common among them. Monogamy is the only code in the society. Bridgroom ties ‘tali’\textsuperscript{490} a marriage pendant which was the marriage symbol for women.

Fisherwomen are very strict in following the customs of the community. Marriage is conducted in the churches only. They spend a lot on dresses, jewels and other needed items. House and the church are beautifully decorated. The bride and the groom are led to the church. A reading is done at the church to make known to the public of the proposed marriage.\textsuperscript{491} The priest conducts the service in the church.

On the day of marriage, the bride first goes to the groom’s house. The sister of the bridegroom receives the couple in the house. The bride presents her with something for the reception. In the bride’s house, the bride’s sister welcomes the groom. For this, the groom presents the bride’s sister with money or gift. The next day, the sister-in-law bathes the

\textsuperscript{490} *Tali* is tied around the bride’s neck as a token of marriage bond. It might contain a picture of a saint, image of our Lady, a cross or a bird. Stephen Jayaseelan, Social changes: Portuguese and the Native Christians in Tamil Country, 1537-1759: K.S. Mathew, *Indian Ocean and the Cultural Interaction, Indica* – 35, p. 505.
\textsuperscript{491} A public declaration of an intended marriage in the church, *Interaction, Indica*, p. 505.
bride and gives her new dresses to wear. Likewise, the bride’s brother bathes the bridegroom and offers new dresses to wear.

The elders in the family sing special songs during marriages. A peculiar feature of the wedding is the wedding procession from the church to the bride’s house followed by virudhus or banners. Their customs are similar to the customs observed by Hindus.

**Rituals associated with the death of a person**

Burial rituals too differ from religion to religion. In fisherfolk communities, they adopt their own rituals. Like other communities, the rituals in fisherfolk community are religious in character. After the death of a person, the body is cleaned and neatly dressed up. Then, it is kept in a coffin. The coffin is taken to the church. Holy mass is conducted in the church and finally buried in the pit dug in the community graveyard. At the death of the husband, the wife is given white dresses to wear. In some families, the son-in-law offers the widow a white dress. Sometimes, the husband’s sister also offers the widow white dresses to wear and gruel to drink on the 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th day after the death.

A woman at the death of her husband gives expression to her grief in wild lamentations. If a person commits suicide, the community does not allow the body to be buried in the community graveyard.

On the 3rd day, family members take bath to put an end to the mourning period. A rite called ‘Karuppu Mattuthal’ takes place. The family members invite relatives and

---

neighbours for a treat on that day. The rite performed after the death varies in each village. In some cases, ceremonies are conducted for the repose of the soul on the sixteenth day or the thirtieth day. Some rich people give dresses or presents to poor men if the person died is a man and vice versa. ‘Varusham Kalithal’ is another ceremony which is observed to mark the first anniversary of the person’s death. The community allows the widow for remarriage after one year if she wishes.

**dress**

The dress of fisherfolk community does not differ from the members of other communities. Dhoti, Lungi and shirt are preferred by men. Women wear sarees and blouses. Grown up girls in the community wear “Paavadai” and “blouse”. Pants and shirts have become popular among young men. Young boys wear half trousers and shirts. Young girls opt to wear nylon and cotton sarees like other urban girls. Widows of older age normally wear blue or white sarees. Young widows wear dull coloured sarees.

**Ornaments**

Depending upon the economic status of the fisherwomen, they wear ornaments of their choice. Women uselly wear ‘tali’ with the emblem of the Holy Spirit engraved in the pendant. It is the custom among the fisherwomen community to wear ‘Tali’ of that type. The design of the ‘Tali’ varied according to their tastes. Presently, girls wear fashionable jewels which are popular among the urbanites.

---

*ibid.*
In the olden days, women wore conventional jewellery like ‘Pambadam’ and ‘Urukumani’ on their ear lobes. These conventional ornaments are not used by the younger generation now. They wear bangles called ‘Kappu’ which is worn around their wrist. They also wear gold chains and necklaces. ‘Vazhi’ is worn by men in the ears. Some boys wear these votive rings as nose rings as a mark of devotion to Mother Mary, fisherfolk men and women wear scapular called ‘Uthariyan’. Some children also prefer to wear Talisman or ‘Thayatthu’ to drive away evil spirits. ‘Thayatthu’ is normally worn around the waist.

**Hobbies**

Playing cards is an important pastime among the fisherfolk. Some people spend their whole time in gambling also. Apart from this, they collect different types of sea shells from the shore and play different games. Their main entertainment is cinema. Some fisherfolk knit fresh nets during their leisure time. They also sing song and pass their time telling stories. Children play Hide and Seek. Swinging is popular among women. Grown ups play Kabadi. They sing so many songs during this time.

**Dialects of fisherfolk**

Tamil is the mother tongue of these fisherfolk. Their language or dialect is phonetically lengthy and musical. The name ‘Cruz’ is popular among them.

---

Paravas Folk Songs

Songs occupy an important place in their culture. Their songs have rhythms and verses sung to the music. There are different kinds of songs which are sung on the occasions like marriage, birth and death. The songs are mostly religious and moral by nature and tones are simple but melodious in character. They sing beautiful songs while rowing boat in the sea. During the village festivals they sing many special songs.

Art and Literature

The superemacy of the fisherfolk’s in art, literature and culture is worth mentioning here. They have a natural taste for art and culture. The community has produced many eminent poets, artists and sculptors\(^{498}\). They claim that the poet Nakkiram belonged to fisherfolk community.

Many songs in praise of God and Saints have been composed by poet Antony Annavi of Manapad. Another important poet of the age was Inbakavi, a native of Manapad, who secured a patronage of his own chieftain at Thoothukudi. He wrote a drama called ‘Kuravangi’. Which is known for its musical cadence and imagery\(^{499}\). The songs composed by J. S. Lobo are very popular in these villages.

Besides, they showed great progress in sculpture, painting and craft. Thus this Chapter vividly analyses the customs or rituals and social ceremonies of fisherfolk relating


to birth, puberty, marriage and death. It also records the supremacy of the fisherfolk’s in art, literature and culture.

**The Sea Coast in Sangam Literature**

The coast, a narrow transitional ribbon that occurs where a continental land mass meets a tidal sea, is among the most productive zones of the world. The coastal zone is a buffer to the most densely inhabited land areas—nearly 60% of the world population. To a fisherman, it is a nursery ground for many of the most valuable species such as shrimps and oysters. It is a bundle of natural resource of immense value for commercial, recreational and aesthetic reasons. The coast constitute the tail end ecosystem and the receptacle of all upstream externalities including the heavy load of pollution. They form the dynamic interface between the land and the seas and oceans. They play a pivotal role in world economy as the gateway to cargo transit, and support to industries.

The Sea and Sea Coast based biotopes, referred to as *Neital Thinai*, like any other biotope, as self-sustaining, the Sangam literature elaborately delves into the *Netal Thinai* and the ethnic people therein. Significant among them are those of *Maamoolanar, Ulochanaar* and *Amoovanaar*. The ethnic communities along the coasts, like their counterparts in forests, drew the bare minimum from nature and led a life of contentment. Theirs was not a life of wants and worries, but fulfilment.

The fisherfolks of the ancient period heavily relied upon the coastal water bodies rather than on the sea for sustenance. Significant among these are the estuaries. Going by the classical definition of Donald Pritchard\(^500\), the estuary is a semi-enclosed Coastal body

---

of water which has free connection with the open sea and is strongly affected by tides that mix sea water. The estuary is an ecotone—a transition zone between marine and fresh water habitat. It forms the junction zone or tension belt with considerable linear extent, yet narrower that the adjoining community areas themselves. The estuaries are endowed with rich biodiversity which fall into three categories-residents, transients and migrants.

The sea coast of the Tamil country was dotted with fisherfolks’ settlements, small or hamlets called paakkam or seaside towns called pattinam. These settlements were not evenly distributed but selectively placed close to freshwater bodies confluent with the sea. The brackish water bodies that lay connected to the near-shore waters formed the habitats of many a killer shark. Along the littoral regions of these waters were seen the Neithal plant that cast an expanse of its flowers—enthralling like the blue gem stones. Pollens from the flowers of Pandalis and Calophyllum kept falling on these flowers covering their petals like a carpet.

The chest-high-huts of fisher folks were so small and as simple as a cow hide placed over a spear would appear. The hutments faced the coastal water bodies rather than the sea. These pristine water bodies were sandwiched with lush green vegetations called Sholas. They made their roofs either with dry grasses or dry palm leaves that kept falling from nearby trees occasionally. Furnishes a realistic picture of what a fisher’s hut would look like, a low roof as if placed beside hook-fastened-bamboo poles appearing like shields

---

502 *Natrinai* – 78.
503 *Natrinai* – 78.
504 *Silappathikaram*.
505 *Kurunthokai* – 228.
506 *Natrinai* – 192.
placed beside planted spears. The huts were as compact as a stone edict encircled by a fence.\textsuperscript{507}

A poet stands awestruck at the high heaps of sand along the shore. Most of these sand dunes have grown to the extent of almost covering the top of tall palmyrahs.\textsuperscript{508} The high heaps of sand gathered by winds are detailed in Kurunthokai. The people were aware of the two major coastal processes that led to the accretion of sand along the shore— the ferocious waves that kept on lashing the beaches \textsuperscript{509}. One could see along the South West Coast and the undeterred wind as occurs along the east coast of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{510} What the streams were to the hilly terrains, the sand dunes were to the coast.\textsuperscript{511}

The ancient fisher folks depended on the sea only for avocation and their neighbourhoods were situated beside the dunes and kaanals. Sand dunes, referred to as ekkar, stood guard to the fisherfolk’ settlements protecting them from the fury of waves and tides as well. The kaanals and ekkars lay in close association with one another.

These sea tribes led a simple life in small hutments drawing very little from the environment for food and shelter like their counterparts of hills and forests.\textsuperscript{512} This was due to the simple reason that they could finely fit themselves into nature. Akanaanuuru and Natrinai bring to the fore the carefree lifestyle of the sea tribes. They let nothing come between their happiness and daily chores.\textsuperscript{513} The sea tribe’s life was guided by contentment and not by insatiable desire, a mark of modern living. Though their hutments were very

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{507} \textit{Patinapaulai} – 77-81.
\item \textsuperscript{508} \textit{Natrinai} – 135.
\item \textsuperscript{509} \textit{Kurunthokai} – verse 236.
\item \textsuperscript{510} \textit{Natrinai} – 35.
\item \textsuperscript{511} \textit{Natrinai} – 135.
\item \textsuperscript{512} \textit{Natrinai} – 191.
\item \textsuperscript{513} \textit{Natrinai} – 87.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
small and humble, any visitor who happened to spend a day with them in their huts will forget their own houses for good.

The *Sangam Literature* pays rich tributes to the fisherfolks’ charity. Tribals along the sea old tribal values of charity and hospitality. The fisherfolks sit themselves along with their guests in front of their huts by the sand dunes and generously share their food with the guests. Like farmers do in times of harvest, a fisherfolk fill the vessel of all those who approach for alms and then he goes to the ekkar and lies down there peacefully with little worries over the next day. The shark hunters, overjoyed by the grand catch of striped shark the previous day, refrain from fishing the day after. Fishers of the *Sangam* period celebrated egalitarianism. Social equity celebrated by the fisherfolks is a feature common to hunter-gatherer community. In a fisher family, both parents were labouring in order to raise the income. While the father had gone to the sea for shark hunting shortly after recovery from injury on previous expedition, the mother had set out for salt trade.

Sea watching is part of the Barathavar’s traditional avocation. It is by such keen observation that a traditional fisherfolk decides upon the appropriate season time of the day to venture into the sea. And seldom do their predictions fail. The fisherfolks engaged a large variety of fishing gear meant to harvest different species of fish. *Mathuraikaanchi* speaks of Korkai Barathavar who were engaged in pearl diving and chank diving ventures.

---

514 *Natrina* – 91.
515 *Natrina* – 135.
516 *Akanaanuru* – 30.
517 *Natrina* – 49.
518 *Akanaanuru* – 10.
519 *Kurunthokai* – 269.
520 *Natrina* – 4.
They had mastered the art of collecting the mature chanks and most valuable pearl, which activity called for exceptional skill and traditional wisdom. They were well-versed with selective fishing.\textsuperscript{521} Sing of the great skill of the Barathavar to engage in chank diving, cautiously keeping away from the cruel killed sharks.\textsuperscript{522}

Venturing for shark hunting is vividly and severally enumerated in classical literature like \textit{Natrinai} and \textit{Akanamuru}. The tribal children train themselves in the art of hunting. The fisher boys who remained the poet of the jungle boys mounting on tall woods in order to keep watch and block the herds of deers.\textsuperscript{523} Line fishing was common in shark hunting.\textsuperscript{524} Shark axes well fastened to mature bamboo poles were employed in the hunting of horned shark.\textsuperscript{525} Sometimes the fishers used axes with ropes tied to one end.\textsuperscript{526} \textit{Akanamuru} picturises an unparalleled and first hand experience of the deep sea shark hunting expedition.\textsuperscript{527}

The mighty shark got trapped by the piercing axe of the bold Barathavar, bleeds profusely, turning the meat smelling sea, red. Unable to bear the agonizing pain, the beast agitates vigorously, darts listlessly to no avail and jumps high on the sky like the arc of the rainbow and dropped by the side of the fishing boats, thoroughly exhausted. Such true-to-life experience of deep sea fishing is hard to come by anywhere since the Sangam Literature except for the recent exposition by \textit{Joe D Cruz} in his fiction work \textit{Aazhi Soozh Ulagu}.

\textsuperscript{521} \textit{Kurunthokai} – 123.
\textsuperscript{522} \textit{Akananuru} – (350: 10-11).
\textsuperscript{523} \textit{Natrinai} – 111.
\textsuperscript{524} \textit{Natrinai} – 199.
\textsuperscript{525} \textit{Kurunthokai} – 304.
\textsuperscript{526} \textit{Natrinai} – 388.
\textsuperscript{527} \textit{Akananuru} – line – 210.
Minor literatures like Kuravanchi and Pallu, mostly subaltern in character, also celebrated nature. The Shenbakaraaman Pallu, whose author is unknown is a work devoted to the description of the wealth and life in a sea side town called Kovai Kulam near Cape Commorin around 1740 AD. The work was later compiled and published by Kaalingaraayan in 1942. Though the work makes a fair treatment of the four Thinais, it speaks considerably on the Neital Thinai. The poet details the rich diversity of fish fauna of Paraliyar estuary.528

The cultural heritage of fisher folks

Death and the Deep Blue Sea

At Marakkaanam, a somber sea side town in north Tamil Nadu. A fisher youth sets out to the sea for fishing. Before he leaves his hut, his wife invokes the grace of Kuttiyandavar, the sea God and gives him betel with a few grains of rice on it. This forms part of the last nights normally the next of kin performs before the dead is buried or consigned to flames. As for her, every venture of her husband into the sea is nothing less than a journey into death. She will remain sumangali if only luck is by her side and her husband returns to shore alive the next day.

Death and the deep blue sea remain imminent realities of the fisher folks, though, as the German existentialist Martin Heidegger views death as Dasein’s own most possibility, to a fisher folk, death is part and parcel of his avocation; uncertainty is the certainty about a fisherfolk’s life. Every cruise into the sea is an experiment with death, which awaits him in ways more than once: while crossing the surf, unforeseen storms, diving – either for chank

and pearls or in order to release the nets struck at some sea reef, a slip from the Catamaran while dosing off in the wee hours, hit by the ships; attacks from gaint fishes… Life’s uncertainty in terms of one’s avocation on the one hand and the inestimable vastness and hiddenness of the sea on the other, makes one stay close to her and sustain firm faith in the heavenly powers. It is quite logical that the world life of the fishing community revolves round ethnic values, rituals, and practices that emerge from this deep faith. Tribal life is basically one full of struggles with nature. Hunter – gatherer communities all over the world share these traits. The folks of the jungle will soon acquaint themselves with their habitat once they come to terms. The sea never stays but, it keeps moving, often violently and always unpredictably.529

The people of the fishery coast…live in world where their religious pratice segue seamlessly into that of the Hindu world surrounding them; brutality of caste prejudices; where the Church alternately exploits, offering the one true dwelling for their faith…”530 In his fiction work Aazhi Soozh ulagu, Joe D Cruz brings in an instance of the shark caught and tied to the Catamaran being closely followed by its pair in fidelity. This is a metaphor to the age old beliefs and rituals of traditional faith folks closely following their newly professed Catholic faith.531

Simplicity – The Seminal Virtue of Tribal Life

Here is a popular zen story about a fisherman. A business executive, strolling by the sea shore sighted a fisher folk casually lying down on the Catamaran, elegantly smoking his

529 Arumugathamilan, Karu, 2005.
cigar and gazing at the sky. The executive went nearby and their conversation went on something like this.

Like their counterparts in hills and forests, the sea tribes lead a simple life, drawing very little from nature for their needs. This is due to the simple reason that they could finely fit themselves into nature.532 Akanaamuuru and Natrini bring to the fore the carefree lifestyle of the traditional fisher folks. The shark hunters, overjoyed by the grand catch of striped shark the previous day, refrain from fishing the day after.533 Nothing comes between their cheerfulness and daily chores.534

Pattinapaalai535 furnishes a realistic picture of what a fisher’s hut would look like: a low roof as if placed beside hook-fastened-bamboo poles appearing like shields placed beside planted spears. The huts were as compact as a stone edict encircled by a fence. A poet stands awestruck at the high heaps of sand along the shore. Most of these sand dunes have grown to the extent of almost covering the top of tall palmyrahs.536 Such heaps gathered by winds is detailed in Kurunthokai.537 What the streams were to the hilly terrains, the sand dunes were to the coast.538 The fisher people of those times had knowledge about the two major coastal processes that constituted the accretion of sand along the shore – the ferocious waves that kept on lashing the beaches539 that one could see along the west coast and the undeterred wind540 as that occurs along the east coast of the Indian Peninsula.541

532 Natrini – 191.
533 Natrini – 49.
534 Natrini – 87.
535 Pattinapaalai – line 77-81.
536 Natrini – 135.
537 Kurunthokai – verse 236.
538 Natrini – 135.
539 Natrini – 15.
540 Natrini – 35.
The sea coast of the Tamil country once remained dotted with fisher folks small settlements or hamlets called Paakkam or seaside towns called Pattinam. These settlements were not evenly distributed, but selectively placed close to freshwater bodies that lay confluenced with the sea. The brackish water bodies that lay connected to the near-shore waters formed the habitats of many a killer shark.\textsuperscript{542} Along the littoral regions of its flowers-enthalralling like turquoise. Pollens from the flowers of Pandanus and Calophyllum kept falling on these flowers covering their petals like a carpet.\textsuperscript{543} The chest-high-huts of fisher folks were so small and as simple as a cow hide thrown over a spear would appear. These hutments faced the coastal water bodies rather than the sea. The pristine water bodies lay sandwiched with lush green vegetations called Sholas.\textsuperscript{544} The fisher folks made their roofs either with dry grasses or palm leaves that occasionally dropped from trees.\textsuperscript{545}

**Shark Hunting Valour**

Sea faring is an arduous avocation and daring venture, the most dangerous at that. Men of valour brave the waves and inclement weather; they have acquired exceptional skills of navigation to identify hunting grounds and bring ashore a decent catch in order to feed their dependents. As head and bread winner of family, fisher’s foremost task is to toil at sea every day to raise his family, fisher’s foremost task is to toil at sea every day to raise his family. A tribal male who is unwilling to venture into the sea will command little

\textsuperscript{541}Vareethaiah K, *Environmental Consciousness in Tamil Literature* – A historical perspective. 15\textsuperscript{th} Endowment Lecture in the Name of Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar of Chettinad, University of Delhi, New Delhi. Dept of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies. 09.04.2012.

\textsuperscript{542} Natrinal – 78.

\textsuperscript{543} Natrinal – 78.

\textsuperscript{544} Kuranthokai – 228.

\textsuperscript{545} Natrinal – 192.
respect in his clan and his own family.\textsuperscript{546} Jayapathy\textsuperscript{547} recalls an incidence he witnessed during his Study at Chinnavilai fishing village. A mother, who enters her hut, finds her young daughter serving meal to her brother. Her son hadn’t gone to the sea fearing rough weather. The furious mother throws the plate of meal out of the hut saying, “\textit{there is no food here for an invalid like you.}”\textsuperscript{548} cites an instance where the father had gone to the sea for shark hunting shortly after recovery from injury due to shark bite on previous expedition while the mother had set out for salt trade leaving their young daughter alone in the hut.

Shark hunting expeditions find vivid enumeration in classical literature like \textit{Natrinai} and \textit{Akanaamuuru}. The tribal children train themselves in the art of hunting. The fisher boys, crossing the high surf, venture into the sea in their boats which reminds the poet of the jungle boys mounting on tall wood in order to keep watch and block the herds of deers.\textsuperscript{549} The fisherfolks employed a large variety of fishing gear meant for harvesting different species of fish. Such resource friendly fishing methods prevalent among ethnic fishers lay in sharp contrast to today’s greed that leads one to resort to destructive and indiscriminate fishing. In fact, this greed was thrust on them in the recent years by policy makers. Line fishing was common in shark hunting.\textsuperscript{550} Shark axes well fastened to mature

\textsuperscript{548} \textit{Kurunthokai} – 269.
\textsuperscript{549} \textit{Natrinai} – 111.
\textsuperscript{550} \textit{Natrinai} – 199.
bamboo poles were employed in the hunting of horned sharks.\textsuperscript{551} Sometimes the fishers used axes with ropes tied to one end.\textsuperscript{552}

**Altruism**

Egalitarianism and social equity are found to be inseparable ingredients of the fisher folks culture.\textsuperscript{553} They treasure the tribal values of charity and hospitality.\textsuperscript{554} Their life is guided by contentment, but not by insatiable desires, a mark of modern living. The fishing community seldom yearns for material wealth nor has the desire for savings for future; it believes, mother sea will provide for them in time. Though their huts are very small and humble, any visitor who happens to spend a day with them in their huts will forget their own houses for good.\textsuperscript{555}

Whereas valour is held high as a prime ethnic value in a fishing clan, charity is something iconic about them. Even today, no one who approaches a fisher folks neighbourhood has died for want of care; no window, destitute, aged or orphan is left to fend for him(her) self, claims Malathi Maithri.\textsuperscript{556}

As for the fisher folk, owning a housing plot or saving for his family is never a priority. The growth of Catholicism in the Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu for instance, is by and large the outcome of the charity of fisher folks. The first printing press in Tamil Nadu was founded at Punnaikkayal with generous contributions from fishermen as evidenced by *Doctrina Christiana* (first book printed here). What the Church has done to

\textsuperscript{551} Kurunthokai – 304.

\textsuperscript{552} Natrirai – 388.

\textsuperscript{553} Akanaanuru – 10.

\textsuperscript{554} Natrirai – 91.

\textsuperscript{555} Natrirai – 91.

them in return for the latter’s emancipation is a disturbing question. More institutions to impart basic and higher education could have been established; critical interventions on health, occupational mobility, right sensitization, and infrastructure development could have been initiated.\textsuperscript{557}

However, a more specialised Study of the social life of Paravas of Maabar Coast will yield very interesting materials for research. A generalised Study is attempted here.