

Segmentation and Hierarchical Social Relationships of Mukkuva Muslims in Kerala

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I. Introduction

This article, as the title itself indicates, is an attempt to examine segmentation and the hierarchical social relationships of the Mukkuva community of Kerala. To recognize Kerala's fundamental condition of innovation and modernity, it is critical to comprehend the divide and political history that the people of Kerala have endured. Simultaneously, new conceptions of modernity and renaissance will be debated, investigated, and pursued. Renaissance and Modernism are socioeconomic phenomena that began in Europe with colonization and capitalism and spread throughout the world. Changes in a society's public life as a result of modernity and the renaissance can only be researched and judged in light of that society's social and political history. When analyzing the above principles in the Kerala context, the socio-political history of the land, as it is everywhere else, is crucial. Although ostensibly part of India, the world's largest democracy, reaching worldwide levels in terms of development indices and leading in education, it should be remembered that just two centuries ago, it was in a different or opposite condition; Today's Renaissance Kerala society is the victim of a reactionary social system that surreptitiously clings to outdated conventions that do not stray far from this. Segmentation and hierarchical statuses are the most severe issue confronting our supposed renaissance society.

Mappila fisherfolk in Kerala

Muslim fisherfolk live mostly in the northern districts of Kerala.; based on the quick assessment conducted by the department of fisheries in 2019, fisherfolk houses in the coastal belt are estimated at around 25000. A detailed survey conducted in 2022 resulted that there are 18685 fisher folk houses in the coastal belt. 98961 adults and 22349 children are living in the houses respectively. The Mappila Mukkuvans have a very strong organizational set-up with social cohesion and class differentiation. The main religious body amongst these fisherfolk is the Mosque. The elected council of the Mosque decides on ethical matters of the community. These 'imams' who conduct prayers are highly respected among the Muslim community. There are also the madrasa committees that are in charge of schools for religious instruction and for the council of elders who take decisions about the working of the village and even the fishing operations. The members of both these bodies are elected by the fisherfolk (Houtart and Nayak, 1988; Aerthayil, 2000).

Historical Background of the Mappila Fisher People

The Mappila fisher folk are indeed a distinct social entity in the coastal life world, as well as in Kerala's Muslim community as a whole¹. The rulers of Malabar, particularly the Zamorin of Calicut, had encouraged Arab traders to marry women from untouchable castes, particularly those from the local fishing community, the Mukkuva. Thus, the Mappilas are thought to have originated from marriages between Arabs, who maintained commercial links with the Malabar coast during the period immediately after the birth of Prophet Mohammed, and native women. The Mappila fisher folk of Malabar hold the lowest social status in Kerala's Muslim society hierarchy. As with the Latin Mukkuva, the Mappila fisher folk's social identity as a fishing community is submerged inside the macro-religious identity of Kerala's Muslim community. That is the dual-identity issue, as well as the stratification politics, which occur in the coastal sector of the Muslim community and among Latin Catholics.

¹P. R. G. Mathur did a study on the Mappila Fisher folk. He refers to the works of Maj.P.Holland Pryor (1904), C.Gopalan Nayar (1922), William Logan (1857), P.A.Sayed Muhammed (1958), George Woodcock (1967), etc.

The transposition of religious identity above social identity is also present in the Mappila group. The Mappila community's identity is anchored in both occupational and religious underpinnings². Another implication is that the term Mukkuva is not limited to Latin fishermen or the southern regions of Kerala alone. As previously stated, the term Mukkuva had a pan-Kerala significance. It is thought that the *Mukkuvan* converted to Islam, at least in the Malabar region of Kerala, and that they were known as *Puislam*, neophytes, or fresh converts since then. The umbilical relationship between these two settlements is described by Edgar Thurston (1909). The *Mukkuvans* and Mappilas coexist on the fishing grounds and in the curing yards, and the two classes eat together. Previously, the Mappilas were allowed to make partnerships with Mukkuva women, and the male children produced from such unions were handed over to the Mappila community on Friday. Like the Latin Catholic community in this instance also, there is a hierarchical social organization between the *Mappila* fisher folk and the rest of the Muslims. This is discernible from the composition of the Muslim community in Kerala. This is attempted from the Malabar picture, specifically based at Malappuram, which is taken from Mathur as an indicative one.

The Segmentation and Hierarchical Social Interactions

Sunni, Shia, and Ahmadiyyah are the three major sects of Muslims. Wahabis and Ahl-Hadis claim to be mutually exclusive sects. The majority of Muslims in Kerala follow the Sufi sect, one of the four Sunni sub-sects. Sunnis and Shias are the two sects of Mappilas. Sunnis follow the Ponnani Thangal, the orthodox party's chief priest, while Shias recognize the Kondotti Thangal as their religious leader³. Tanur's Mappilas are separated into three exogamous groups: Tangals, Angadikkar, and Kadappurathukar.

The *Thangals* rank highest among the Mappilas and are traditionally landlords. Hypergamy is prevalent among them... *Thangals* are the highest ranking Mappilas and are traditionally landlords. They are prone to hypergamy... The *Angadikkarmay* may have converted from high castes such as the *Nambudiri* Brahmins and Nayers, who rank below the Thangals. *Angadikkar* who converted from *Nambudiri* follow a patrilineal system, whilst Nayers follow a matrilineal system. They are socially inferior to the *Tangals* yet economically equal to them. A handful of them sells dry fish and chilled fish. The Mappila fisherman, known as *Kadapurathukar* or those who reside on the coast, ranks below the *Angadikkar*. They are at the bottom of the village's Muslim social system.

Based on their traditional activity, the *Kadapurathukar* are separated into two endogamous groups: the *Valakkar* (those who use nets) and the *Beppukar* (the hook & line fishermen). They are polygamous and patrilineal. The former is descended from high caste Hindus. They also claim to be the original *Angadikkar* today. They claim to be of higher social standing than the *Valakkar*. *Angadikkar* and *Beppukar* do not usually marry. There are also *Kabarukilakkunnavar* (gravediggers), *Alakkukar* (washers), and *Ossan* (barbers) in the village... They are ranked lower than the *Kadappurathukar*. *Beppukar* and *Valakkar* accept food from the *Kabarukilakkunnavar* but do not marry. Similarly, the *Valakkar* and *Beppukar* refuse food from the *Alakkukar* and *Ossan*, despite the fact that the latter two groups accept food from the former. *Ossan* and *Kabarukilakkunnavar* that one.

Although the fishing community is divided among Dheevara, Latin Mukkuva Christians, and Muslim fisher folk, development and social mobility are the key elements that tie them together. Regardless of their distinctions in religion and caste, they are all in some way inferior. And because of their subordinate status, they have not been able to fully benefit from the development and social reform activities that have taken place in Kerala in general and the coastal region in particular.

II. Conclusion

The subject of subalternity could not be handled by the social movements, no matter how little they may have been, because identity concerns have always been dealt with at the level of religious and micro-religious identities. The topic of whether a religion-based identity, a sub-religion-based identity, or an identity defined in terms of subalternity can aid the fishing community's social mobility is crucial given that religion is always projected as a source of self-identification.

² Bokhari, Sayed Abdul Repack, 3955. 'Islam Tradition in Kerala*. In Caravan, No. 387.

³ P.R.G.Mathur, *The Mappila Fisher folk of Kerala*, 1977, Kerala Historical Society, p.2

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