



Socioeconomic conditions of Muslim Fishermen Community in Kerala a Case Study of Vizhinjam Village

Sumayya Beevi L.

Research Scholar

Dept. of Islamic History

University College Trivandrum

E-mail: sumayyabeevilsumi@gmail.com

Abstract

This article focuses on the social connections and underdevelopment of the local fishermen in the Vizhinjam hamlet of Trivandrum district in Kerala. The history of the village of Vizhinjam, its fishermen, and the fishermen community's economic and social conditions were the main objects of the current study. The study of this article aims to comprehend the Muslim Fishermen's culture, way of life, and sense of community in the village of Vizhinjam. The historical, social, and economic backgrounds of fishing villages are also covered in this study, as well as the Muslim fishermen themselves. It is concerning that Muslims in India currently lag behind non-Muslims in terms of development. The objectives of the study are to assess the socioeconomic situation of coastal people in Vizhinjam Village and to identify the basis

Introduction

In 1956, Kerala was created from the former princely realms of Travancore and Cochin, the Malabar district of Madras, and the Kasaragod district of South Kanara Taluk. A state where Latin Catholics practice artisanal marine fishing in the southern coastal district and Hindus and Muslims in northern and central coastal villages resulted from the union of these two regions. Due to Kerala's long history of trading with Arabs, coastal settlements in the Malabar region are heavily populated by Muslims. Thus, Islam was peacefully propagated throughout Kerala by the local



fishermen who served as their hosts throughout their invasion. The community of fishermen formed marital partnerships with Arabs and Muslims, and eventually, the majority of them converted to Islam. Arab and European colonizers in Kerala brought about social and economic changes to coastal life.

The Historical Importance of Vizhinjam

The Vizhinjam region is located in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of the Indian state of Kerala. It is located 17 km south of Trivandrum International Airport and 16 km southwest of the city Centre. Vizhinjam is historically known for ancient civilizations and a rock-hewn temple. Archaeological digs revealed an ancient port.

Vizhinjam's history begins with the Aay Dynasty. Between the 7th and 11th centuries AD, the Aay dynasty, with Vizhinjam as its seat, ruled Kerala before the Cheras became a significant force there. The Ay kingdom was located between Nagercoil and Thiruvalla. The Ay dynasty's monarchs constructed a fort in Vizhinjam, which is today thought to be Kerala's oldest fort, when they relocated their capital there in the eighth or ninth century. The Ay dynasty built a fort in Vizhinjam, which is today thought to be the earliest fort in Kerala, when the rulers relocated their capital there in the eighth or ninth century. Famous archaeologists have conducted excavations that have shown traces of old international marine trade that thrived between Vizhinjam and the Red Sea Coast during the early Christian era (Roman period). The association of the port with Balita or Blinca in the Greco-Roman records would be supported by this. Sherds of the Torpedo Jar and Turquoise Glazed Pottery kinds were abundant, which further suggested commercial ties to the Persian Gulf region. Chinese and Thai pottery provided evidence of the East Asian trading ties.¹

The Muslim population of Vizhinjam constitutes the vast majority of the locality's population. The villages of Ambalkulam, Vaduvachal, Township Colony, Harbor, Theatre Junction, and Vizhinjam Junction are located on the coast and are administered by the Thiruvananthapuram district Municipality/Corporation body. The majority of the population in this region is from the minority community, and they primarily work in Gulf nations as fishermen, entrepreneurs, and laborers. The majority of the residents of this region are members of minorities, and they primarily work as fishermen, entrepreneurs, and laborers in Gulf nations. Based on religion, the village is geographically separated into three sections. It indicates that they are residing with a community of followers of their religion. The district's coastline parts are uniformly separated into sections for the most part. They are



adhering to a life cycle program that states that the men obtain education and work in Gulf nations. People in coastal areas do not place a lot of value on their children's higher education. The education of the Muslim community in Vizhinjam village has been hidden by the rise in Gulf migrants from this area.

Fishermen community in Kerala

In terms of generating cash and jobs, fishing is a significant industry in the majority of both developed and developing nations. Because they come from many castes and have varied geographical, social, cultural, economic, and traditional frameworks depending on the coast where they live, fishing communities in India are not homogeneous. Kerala has the richest fishing grounds in the region, according to assessments of the prospective fishery resources of the west coast, notably in southwest beaches. About 20% of the nation's marine fish production comes from Kerala. However, when compared to the overall population, the economic situation of the state's fishermen is appalling. This is evident from their employment patterns and other factors. The decline in fish stocks is a significant factor in fishermen's sluggishness. They are struggling to make ends meet and are also heavily indebted to their daily lives. The majority of the fishermen's settlements along the coast are made up of religious people. Due to the harsh climate, the restriction on trolling, and other causes, the fishermen's community is phasing out the issue of low income. In Kerala, the socioeconomic situation of the fishing community is poor. Due to fishing being a seasonal sport, they are gradually phasing out the issue of restricted income.

The district-wise population of the fishing community in Kerala

Kerala Marine Fisheries Census Report:2010, the population of the fishing community in each district is shown in the data. The majority of people in the fishing communities of Malappuram, Alappuzha, Kozhikode, and Trivandrum are Muslims. More Christian and Muslim fishing communities can be found in the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Alappuzha. Hindu fishermen predominate in Ernakulam and Thrissur. Because religious principles and rituals have such a strong cultural influence on these communities, each one has its way of life and culture.ⁱⁱ

Family structure of the community

One of the most significant social institutions is the family. It is one of the social interaction units inside a developing institution that contributes to pattern changes



through time, such as the shift from the Extended family (koottukudumbam) to the nuclear(anukudumbam) system.ⁱⁱⁱThe Extended family system (koottukudumbam) was used in fishing settlements throughout the state, but in 2000 residents began to choose the nuclear family structure.^{iv}

During a conversation with Imam Suleiman of Vizhinjam He stated that fishermen in Vizhinjam use both joint and nuclear (Koottukudumbam& Anu kudumbam) methods, but there are still many families living in one house, which is mostly due to a lack of a place to stay, or faith, their property is not distributed, or poverty, and there are also those who live in one family for about three generations and rely solely on the sea for income. According to Grama Sabha reports, there are three to four families per house in coastal wards. Furthermore, the impact of Gulf income would have a significant impact on other construction sectors in the Vizhinjam Grama panchayath area. All of the men in the fishing community work on small boats (veppu/ thoni/ vallam). Along with this, a small sum of money is given to the other members of the family and this is called (Chaya kash). The rest of the money is held by the eldest member of the family who is fully responsible for the family. They skip breakfast and head to work in the morning. By midday, they would purchase fish and begin cooking, and the family would wait to eat till then. In one pot, the entire family cooks together. Tapioca is the primary food in their breakfast. Breakfast and dinner will be prepared separately in one kitchen (Basheer, 2020). Due to poverty, the guardians do not prepare them for further education; especially the girls are kept at home for some time and married off at the age of 18. The women and children of the family help the fishermen in drying and folding the nets, drying the fish, and taking them to the market for sale.^{vi}

Living Conditions of Muslim Fisher Folk

The Muslim fishermen community in Vizhinjam also has a very solid organizational structure with class distinction and social cohesion. The Mosque makes ethical decisions for the community as the primary place of worship for these fishermen. The Muslim community holds these prayer leaders in the highest regard. Additionally, there are Madrasa committees that oversee Islamic education in schools and the council of elders that makes decisions regarding village operations, including fishing. Both of these organizations' members are chosen by the fishing community.

Meanwhile, estimating the revenue of Muslim fisherman is challenging due to the volatility of the catch and their lack of revenue from their line of work. Since



the fishing boats are collectively owned, the fishermen are forced to go in groups to catch fish. There are 17 traditional trades in the area, and each one employs between thirty and forty fishermen. Thus, each person, who is typically frugal, receives only a portion of the total catch. The fisheries department's figures show that at least 60% of Kerala's fishing community is impoverished. A fisherman often earns between Rs. 50 and Rs. 300 per day. The fishermen of Vizhinjam go fishing only for 6 months a year because of the low returns and trawling ban.^{vii}

Because of the choppy waters and monsoon, the months of June through August are considered off-season for fishermen. Therefore, they will be unemployed during this period and forced to spend the thrifty savings they would have amassed while working. During this half of the year, they work additional part-time jobs to help maintain their family. In the fishing village of Vizhinjam, the majority of the women work in related fields including fish sales and fish drying. In times of hardship, nongovernmental organizations also step in to help the populace.

Fish that was dried and stored will be used during the off-season to meet personal requirements and generate extra cash. The kids are leaving the traditional occupation that their ancestors had practiced for years because of the low returns and unpredictable income. They work in jobs like welding and fabricating Aluminum, among others one of the primary causes of professional shift is financial difficulty; the socioeconomic status of Kerala's fisher folk is among the worst in all of India. They currently spend 70% of their money on food. However, they are unable to buy enough calories for everyone in their houses. Since fishing is a seasonal activity, they must look for supplemental employment, which is not always possible. The lowest-paid fishermen worldwide are those who practice Islam, and they are from Kerala.

Present condition and Backwardness of fishermen folk

The fishing industry underwent a complete transformation with the advent of mechanized boats and sophisticated nets. The problem became more complex with the recent advent of inboard engines in addition to outboard engines. Traditional, outboard, and inboard all have different operating costs. The frequency of fishing operations with mechanized vessels is dictated by market demand. During a cruise, the inboard engine uses only 15 liters of diesel per hour, compared to the outboard engine's 44 liters of kerosene per hour. The inboard sector also has lower maintenance costs.



Distinguishing between the mechanized and non-mechanized sectors is incredibly challenging. Most traditional fishermen have, at the very least, crossed the threshold towards mechanization. This has become necessary for several reasons.

The absence of fishing along the shore due to overexploitation of the fish population. It is this that forces fishermen to pursue deep-sea fishing. Fishermen's mechanization is either unmatched or inconsistent. Deep-sea fishing is pursued by trawlers and other large fishing vessels, which encourages regular fishermen to follow suit. The ubiquitous process of fluctuating "price" Once the fishermen have returned from a long day at sea, the middlemen set the price of the catch. Inconsistency between the rising cost of gasoline and the market price of fish. However, it prevents the traditional fisherman from going back to their previous way of fishing because doing so could lead to poverty. increased trade union action in the marketplaces and harbors. In the past, the community members handled all labor related to fishing, but now the trade union has a claim based on labor regulations. The poor fisherman's pocket has eventually been emptied of its money. People from outside the community of fishermen have been drawn to Kerala's growing trade union scene to take up the job in its entirety. Even though fishermen are members of labor unions, there has been an increasing trend in recent years for outsiders to take the lead in this industry.

The administration prioritized increasing production to improve foreign exchange revenues. Since then, decisions have been made based on the strength of the larger organizations. In the context of heightened competition, traditional fishermen also pursued mechanization in its broadest sense. However, this has taken on new dimensions.^{viii}

With time, the hostilities between the traveler crews and the kattumaram (traditional building material used in India) fisherman became more intense. There are several accounts of traditional fishermen and boat crews battling in the open ocean. There is a significant risk to the lives and equipment of Kattumaram fishermen if trawling is done in the same region as them. Furthermore, the catch of traditional fishermen is impacted by the trawlers' extremely high catching capability. Trawlers never followed the law, even though it said that traditional fishermen could only fish down to a depth of twenty-two kilometers in the sea.

Socio-Economic Issues of Muslim Fishermen Community

Those who make their living primarily from fishing and associated activities are referred to as fishermen. He is equally superstitious and carefree due to their



proximity to nature and significant risk to life. The most valuable resource for the fisherman in Kerala is their vast knowledge of fish behavior, waves, currents, and stars. From generation to generation, they have carried on the tradition of learning by doing. Children's mental abilities are influenced by their family background through nutrition, prenatal and postnatal care, and the capacity to engage in a long-term educational process. Attending school means not going fishing. The majority of fishing skills, especially those involving traditional equipment and craft, must be learned by experience starting at a young age. As a result, attending school causes some people to leave their traditional vocation, and it also increases the dropout rate among fishermen. mostly due to factors like overcrowding, recreational facilities, health issues, the housing crisis, a lack of funding, media participation, economic regression, behavioral problems inadequate resources for learning, Political party influence and the high unemployment rate among educated fishermen children have a detrimental effect on the advancement of education

Problem of Crowding

The fact that the state's marine fishing community is concentrated on a small stretch of coastline is one of the main causes of their poor quality of life and subpar habitat. Consequently, 222 fishing communities exist, and not a single one of them is farther than 500 meters from the coast. In certain regions, like Trivandrum and Quilon, their width is only half a kilometer. This is one of the reasons why the sea may steal fishermen's homes and land during the monsoon. Life is perpetually depressing. That renders the setting inappropriate for learning.

A study by the Central Marine Fisheries Institute (CMFRI) 2021 and the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) indicates that disguised unemployment affects India's marine fisheries industry. Simply put, the situation known as "disguised unemployment" occurs when more people are employed than are truly needed. High capital expenditure and an increase in motorized and mechanized fishing vessels are primarily responsible for the economic expansion that has been observed over time. While fish output in Thiruvananthapuram has been declining (CAGR: -4.64% since 2016), the number of active marine fishermen has increased at a rate of 2.5 percent. This has led to a decrease in fish production per capita. Additionally, throughout these years, the number of migrant fishermen to the capital from Kanyakumari and surrounding areas have increased

Therefore, there is a chance that the port will eventually provide more job opportunities for the populace. However, the creation of a port alone might not be



enough to alleviate the current suffering of fishermen, which has worsened as a result of the pandemic, Nipah, catastrophic floods, and unpredictable weather.^x

Health Condition

According to a report on the state of health in Kerala, the state's coastal regions had much higher rates of respiratory and skin diseases, diarrheal illnesses, and hookworm infestations. This is brought on by overpopulation, a lack of waste disposal facilities, and a shortage of drinking water, all of which naturally provide the perfect environment for the growth and spread of various illnesses and infections. A significant issue that is linked to their health concerns is the inadequate facilities and unsanitary conditions. This will result in consistent absences from studies and fishing. Traditional fishing settlements in Vizhinjam have lower rates of school dropouts and inadequate access to clean drinking water and sanitary facilities than the average household in the region. The dropping ratio of men to women (from 953 in 2016 to 885 in 2020, Fisheries Statistics 2020) among the fisherfolk of Kerala is an indicator of gender bias and healthcare issues. This sex ratio trend of fisherfolk is in contrast to the state-level rise.^{xi}

The Housing Problem

The structure of land holding reflects one major effect of crowding. The majority of Muslim fishermen don't own a homestead site. They have no little deed and are living on government-owned land called Purampoke. The primary cause of their children's illnesses and lack of education is inadequate home conditions. Their valuable health and all of their money have been eaten by illness, leaving them in complete poverty and experiencing socioeconomic immobility.^{xii}

Recreational Facilities

The majority of fishing villages lack amenities for leisure and enjoyment. Many Muslim fishermen squander their time playing cards, going to the races, or drinking, which is bad for their finances and health. That hurts kids and young people.

Economic Backwardness

The Muslim fishermen spend the majority of their earnings to buy bread. He makes some small expenses for housing, clothing, education, and leisure. A significant sum is allocated to healthcare facilities. The bulk of Kerala's fishermen suffer from chronic alcoholism, and associated problems are another factor that contributes to their low level of schooling.^{xiii}



A 50-year-old (chippi/kakka) clam collector from Kovalam, a seaside village close to Vizhinjam, is named Prabhaster. For more than 35 years, he has been harvesting clams in his kattumaram. He launches his boat a few meters out into the water, comes to a rocky area, and submerges himself for no more than a minute at a time. The tool he uses to remove the clam shells from the rocks resembles a knife. He used to make between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 1,500 every day. Sand now fills all the rocks from the dredging, and when it gets into the clams, it kills them. He no longer even makes Rs. 200 a day. He is trying to find another work.^{xiv}

Remedy for the Muslim Fishermen community's backwardness

This study in my opinion Eliminates foreigners' deep-sea fishing licenses. Provide fishing fuel through cooperatives. Incorporate fishmongers into the program for accident insurance Increase the capacity of storage facilities to conserve fish. The pension for fishermen was raised, and a system was put in place to ensure that it was paid out correctly. bolster resources for instruction aimed towards Muslim fishermen in particular Light up the streets for night-time fishing. Give fisherman licenses. A mechanism for loans to be used to buy work equipment Allow loans to be obtained for the purchase of work equipment. Make it easier for them to obtain financing and buy work equipment. Establish centers for self-employment and Establish co-ops for women fishers.

Conclusion

The Primary concern of this article is to explore the social and cultural history of the Muslim fishing community in Vizhinjam Hamlet Kerala. Vizhinjam one of the fishing hamlets from the Trivandrum districts has been selected as a case for the study. The paper has elaborated on the history of the Muslim fishing community in Kerala, their socio-economic conditions, and Their lifestyle during different periods.

The prejudice they encountered from other communities was critically analyzed in this Article. They were viewed as less valuable than others, although sharing the same religion. I've seen from my work experiences that they continue to face numerous covert forms of prejudice. They used to get direct orders from others on how to go about their daily lives, such as keeping a certain distance from others, making reservations for particular locations in both public and private settings, and giving them free fish, among other things. However, the nature of discrimination has now changed. Although they are all interacting with one another and the ban on public places has been lifted, non-fishing communities are still unwilling to develop social relationships with them. As a result, some have suggested moving



to nearby villages to avoid being close to this community. Even while fishing communities actively participate in various political alliances, they are nevertheless marginalized from executive positions in some way due to their status as fishermen. In summary, the history of the Muslim fishing community, which is marginalized by the mainstream community, was the only subject of this paper.

End Notes

- i Trivandrum Vizhinjam Grama Panchayath. (1996) Vizhinjam panchayath committee.
- ii Kerala Marine Fisheries Census Report:2010
- iii Chapin. (1928 March). A New Definition of Social Institutions, Social Forces (Vol. 6).
- iv Mujeeb. (,2022, July 20). personal interview. (Fish Seller,).
- v Ilias, M. (2007). Mappila Muslims and the Cultural Content of Trading Arab Diaspora on the Malabar Coast. Asian Journal of Social Science, 35(4/5), 434-456
- vi Sulaiman imam of pettah Muslim Jamath living in Vizhinjam coastal area personal interview 29/09/2023.
- vii Statistics Department of Fisheries, 2005.
- viii John Kurien (1986), Kerala marine fisheries development- Socio-economicprofile, Centre for development studies.pg 08
- ix Central Marine Fisheries Institute Report 2021
- x Personal interview fish selling woman, living in Vizhinjam coastal area 2023 September 04
- xi from 1049 in 2015-16 to 1,121 in 2020-21, NFHS report.
- xii Basheer. Telephonic interview (2023, July 20).
- xiii Mathur, The Mappila Fisher folk of Kerala, a study in between habitat, technology Economic society and culture
- xiv Prabhaster is a 60-year-old (chippi/kakka) clam collector from Kovalam, a coastal village next to Vizhinjam