

Fishing Methods of the Malabar Coast

MR. JAMES HORNELL, formerly Director of Fisheries, Madras, has recently published the second part of his account of "The Fishing Methods of the Madras Presidency"¹ in which he describes the fishing craft and methods of fishing employed on the Malabar Coast. The first part of this series, it may be recalled, appeared in 1924 and was devoted to the fishing methods of the Coromandel Coast.

The geographical limits of the Malabar Coast are slightly extended to a total distance of more than four hundred miles on ethnological grounds. The area thus defined is divided into three separate sections—a southern, a median and a northern—according to the distinctive types of fishing craft and methods. The southern section is called the Catamaran coast, as the fishermen here use the same type of Catamaran as is used by the fishing communities on the western coast of the Gulf of Manaar; their fishing methods are also closely related, the only difference being the use of a primitive trawl (*Kurukku Made*), which is described in detail, by the former. The median section comprises the coastal region dominated by Malayalees, who use dugout canoes and employ totally different methods of fishing. The northern and last section is coincident with the entire coastline of the South Kanara District. Here the dugout canoes are used for inshore and backwater fishing, and plank-built boats for offshore fishing. The methods used in the last two sections are either similar or differ in minor details, and the author has, therefore, dealt with the fishing methods of both the sections together.

The methods and implements of fishing are different for different types of waters, such as backwaters, estuaries and the sea. The various methods and implements used in these waters are described in detail, and illustrations and vernacular names are given so far as possible.

The paper is of additional importance on

account of the ethnological information embodied in it. According to the author some of the implements are not indigenous, but had been introduced during the time of early influence of the Europeans on the Malabar Coast. For instance, the South Indian Cross Bow, in common with that of West Africa, is undoubtedly of European origin. The author supports this hypothesis on two considerations, namely, its vernacular name and the character of its release. The Malayalam name of the Cross Bow is 'Parangi pathi'. 'Parangi' is the Dravidian corruption of 'ferringhi' or Frank; this term in later times has come to be accepted as the virtual equivalent of Portuguese and hence the association of this weapon with the Portuguese. The details of the release are identical with those of the typical mediæval Cross Bow used in Europe in the sixteenth century. Similarly, from the vernacular name of the Chinese Balanced Dip-net used exclusively near Cochin, it is generally assumed to be an introduction from China, as are several other items in the material culture of Malabar. The author is however, against the theory of its direct introduction by the Chinese, who were undoubtedly trading with India prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, for, the technical terms in use in Cochin for the principal parts of this complicated implement are of Portuguese derivation. Cochin being their chief settlement on the Malabar Coast, the Portuguese might have introduced this effective dip-net after noting how the Chinese use it with great advantage and skill. Another rather unusual fishing method is the one in which a sickle is used; according to Hornell, the use of this agricultural implement in fishing outside India is only known from the Channel Islands and the northern coast of France.

Another very useful feature of the paper is the large number of beautiful photographs illustrating the life and methods of fishing of the people of the Malabar Coast.

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¹ *Madras Fisheries Bulletin*, 1938, No. 27, pp. 1-69; 21 text-figures, 11 plates.