Gender, Exchange and Person in a Fishing Community in Kerala, South India

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the nature of gender relations in a fishing community in South India. Among the Mukkuvar of Kerala, sea fishing in small artisanal craft is carried out by men, while women take responsibility for selling fish in the markets, and control household finances. Women are particularly prominent in dealing with credit, essential to a fishing economy where incomes fluctuate daily, and are also involved in day to day exchanges of fish, money, childcare and small gifts which link households, especially those related through women, in a web of interdependency. The thesis looks at how transactions and exchange between people are understood in terms of gender.

The strict sexual division of labour within this fishing economy leads to a series of gendered exchanges within the household between husband and wife, of fish, money, food, labour and sex. There is here an unusual emphasis on the husband wife relationship, which is an important site of demonstration and constitution of gender difference, but which is also the site of merging of the different potentialities represented by women and men into one productive and reproductive unit. Gendered opposition is seen as leading to interdependence and complementarity, an understanding vividly expressed in the idea that husband and wife are said to be two halves of the whole, and to become "one body".

This idea of gender opposition and complementarity seen in exchange is found also in the understanding of relatedness which I argue underlies the kinship system. Here people are related through both women and men, but differently, so that the difference gender makes in tracing relatedness can be seen to give rise to the Dravidian kinship terminology and the associated practice of cross cousin marriage. At the heart of Mukkuvar ideas of both exchange and relatedness lies an understanding of gender difference which is categorical, and focused on ideas of substance and bodily difference, which in turn is seen to give rise to different potentials for transaction and performance.

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The production of a thesis is a long process: one which I might have been more wary of embarking on had I known in advance just how long and just how much of my life it would occupy. Over the course of this PhD there have been many people who have been important to me at different stages, and who have helped to shape the final result.

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Introduction

At night, from any point on the long coastline of southern Kerala, you can look out to sea and see a row of distant, twinkling lights on the horizon. These are the kerosene lamps of the night fishermen, lit to attract the fish towards the small, fragile craft which float on the dark waters, one or two men perched precariously on board with their long lines baited and cast, hoping to hook at least a good sized tuna or a seer fish. In the dawn, they put up the mast and triangular brown sail, and head back for the beach with the onshore breeze, towards the waiting lines of women, their fish baskets ready, hoping for a good morning at the market and a fine profit.

This thesis is about the relationships between the men and the women of the fishing community; about the importance of each to the other, the interdependence that a strong sexual division of labour has fostered between them, and the ways that this division of labour mirrors the division of men and women into two different kinds of people, with different skills, characters, abilities, and with different productive and reproductive potentials. It is also about how men and women come together in marriage in a strong bond of cooperation, in which their equal contributions to a single (re)productive unit are celebrated in an understanding that the two have become one body, one person.

The context of this study is the fishing community of Trivandrum District, Kerala, in South India. Because of the focus on understandings of personhood and gender, there is little in this thesis on the wider political, historical and economic context, either of the fishing community or of Kerala itself, yet for people themselves these things are of course an important part of their lives. In this introduction, I shall try to partly remedy this, before going on to look at the particular context of the village where I did my fieldwork, at some aspects of the fieldwork itself, and finally at some of the theoretical background to the thesis.

The Sea Fishing Community in Kerala: Politics and Economics

The fishing community of Kerala has historically existed on the margins of Kerala's society, both politically, socially and geographically. They have been until recently isolated from the main trends in the population, with lower literacy levels, standards of health, housing, and sanitation, as well as lower levels of political participation. In Trivandrum District the majority of fisherpeople are Latin Catholic Mukkuvar (over 70%). For the Catholic community, religion as well as occupation contributes to a distinct identity separate from the majority Hindu agricultural population of

Kerala, a sense of difference which is increased by the strong links with the Mukkuvar fishing community in Tamil Nadu, with intermarriage common and the Tamil language often used within the southernmost fishing villages. The sense of a separate identity and the strength of the Church in the fishing community are intimately linked and mutually reinforcing, with the large and imposing church invariably found in each village a powerful material symbol of community[1]. While Catholicism, however, is clearly important, especially as part of an identity of opposition, it is a particular, local form of Catholicism which shares much with local Hinduism in terms of ideas about power, personhood, substance and exchange which form the main subjects of this thesis[2].

The fishing population of Kerala is estimated at about half a million people, of whom 130,000 are active fishermen (Kurien 1984). The long coastline of Kerala provides rich fishing grounds, and small artisanal fishing villages are scattered in an almost unbroken line along the coast. In the southern district of Trivandrum where the Latin Catholic community predominates, fishing technology is small scale, mostly built around the four log *kattumaram* (a log raft tied together with coir rope), which is combined with hook-and-line fishing or gill netting according to season and preference. The small scale and relatively cheap nature of the technology here means that there is a high level of individual ownership and little stratification in this region (SIFFS 1991). Smaller catches predominate, and this favours small scale distribution, with over 70% of the fish being marketed by women headload vendors from the community (Kurien 1984).

The introduction of mechanized trawling in Quilon in the 1960s by the Indo-Norwegian Project (see Klausen 1968 for an early study), has had a profound effect on the fishing economy of southern Kerala. The rapid expansion of the trawling fleet in the 1970s and the resultant increased competition for declining fish stocks have made it increasingly difficult for the small kattumarams to continue to operate profitably, and have consequently driven forward a process of motorization in the region. Motorized boats, predominantly small open plywood boats with outboard engines, were introduced to this area in the early 1980s, and the new technology has been taken up rapidly: in 1981 only 6% of the catch of the artisanal sector in Kerala was from motorized craft, but by 1989 the proportion was 93% (SIFFS 1991; Kurien 1991). The other major change which has resulted from the expansion of mechanized fishing in Kerala

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[1] Kalpana Ram (1991: Chapter 1) similarly argues that the Mukkuvar of Kanyakumari District in Tamil Nadu form a relatively isolated and marginal community, who define themselves in opposition to the majority Hindu population.

[2] Lack of space precludes a detailed discussion of this issue, but see Busby (n.d.); Mosse (1986; 1994) makes a similar argument for Tamil Nadu and Bayly (1989), for South India more generally.

has been the political response, and the widespread politicization and unionization of the fishing community.

An Introduction to Kerala's Politics

No description of the fishing community of Trivandrum or the upheavals that have taken place within it over the last decade can afford to ignore the particular context of Kerala State, and its peculiar history of mobilization and class struggle. In 1957 Kerala voted in the world's first democratically elected communist government, led by the Communist Party of India or CPI. Much of the political will for the sweeping land reforms, radical policies of redistribution, and the strengthening of workers' rights for which Kerala has become famous, has come from successive CPI and CPM[3] led governments since then (Radakrishnan 1989). But what is most striking about past and contemporary politics in Kerala is the high degree of popular mobilization and politicization which have made these reforms not something handed down by a benevolent socialist government but a continuous process in which massive numbers of ordinary people have played and continue to play a part. The rise to power of the CPM and its continuing strength in government has been built on the high degree of political organization, education and awareness of the mass of Kerala's population. It is this which has ensured that even Congress governments in Kerala have been unable or unwilling to reverse the progressive policies of the Left, and have even been responsible for enacting radical measures themselves under popular pressure.

Franke and Chasin (1991) in a recent study of Kerala's development strategies, have examined some of the historical factors behind Kerala's striking political culture. Centuries of trading links with the Middle East, China and Southern Europe have given Kerala a long history of heterogeneous cultural influences and left with it a significant non-Hindu population (21% Christian, 19% Muslim), factors which Kannan (1989: 112) suggests may have contributed to the strength and success of the anti-caste movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These movements themselves were responsible for the early mobilization and radicalization of large numbers of people, particularly among the numerically large Izhava caste, later a mainstay of the CPM.

By 1925 the beginnings of a working class movement were emerging in Kerala, encouraged and given focus by the newly formed Kerala Communist Party. Crucial to this emergence was the existence of a large rural proletariat in Kerala, a result of the early penetration of capitalism under British colonial rule and the development of large scale plantation

[3] Communist Party of India (Marxist) which formed after a split with the CPI in 1964.

agriculture and rural industrial enterprises such as the coir and cashew nut processing industries (Franke and Chasin 1991: 25). It is this large rural proletariat, organized and radicalized by a strong trade union movement and the growing influence of the CPM, that has been primarily responsible for the struggles over land reforms and workers' rights that has characterized Kerala's politics over the last half century, and continues to characterize it today.

It is in this context of continuing high levels of popular mobilization that we have to see the emergence in the early 80s of a strong radical movement among the fishing community. The politicization process took place later and more rapidly among the fishworkers than other sectors of the population, but in many ways their struggle echoes former ones in the state, and their political activism and agitations took place within an already existing framework of mass politics.

Political Mobilization among Kerala's Fishworkers

The Christian fishing community in Kerala, dominated by the anti-communist Catholic Church, was until recently marginalized by both main political parties, and historically played little part in Kerala's militant struggles over caste or land reforms. In 1959 the fishing community, mobilized by the Church on the issue of control of church schools, together with the Nair Service Society and the large Syrian Christian community, was responsible for the anti-Communist demonstrations that brought down the state's first Communist government after only two years. Since then they were considered a sure vote bank for the Congress (I), and largely ignored by both Congress (I) and CPM.

Since the early 1970s, however, a number of factors have contributed to the growth of a politicization process among the fishing community, which has given rise to one of the state's most militant popular mobilizations in recent history. The fishing community moved firmly centre stage in Kerala's politics in 1981 with the first big anti-trawler demonstrations, and this was to mark the beginning of the end of the automatic Congress (I) vote. It was notable that in 1987 the CPM came to power largely due to the massive swing of votes towards them in the coastal areas.

The discovery of a large market in the USA and Japan for Kerala's abundant prawn resources led to the rapid expansion of the Quilon-based trawler fleet in the late 1960s and early 1970s, mostly owned by non-fishermen merchant financiers (Kurien 1985; Meynen 1989). These boats fished the same inland waters as the artisanal fishermen, and while initially they simply contributed to a growth in total harvest, by the mid-

1970s they were in active competition with the artisanal fishermen for declining catches. The sheer numbers of such boats and the cumulative effects of destructive fishing techniques meant that total fish stocks were beginning to be depleted, and at the same time the share of the catch going to the artisanal fishermen was rapidly declining. There was a growth of direct conflict at sea, with the trawlers frequently running down the small country boats, especially at night, and destroying their nets. By early 1980 the pressure for some kind of action against the trawler sector was strong, and it needed only effective organization and mobilization of the community. It was here that the growing cooperative and union movement was crucial.

Early unionization of the fishermen had begun in the Alleppey region, just north of Quilon (see map, p. 15), initially among the Latin Catholic community, through the impetus of local priests influenced by Liberation Theology. In the late 1970s these unions joined forces with the activists of the Programme for Community Organization, based in Trivandrum, another originally Church-initiated project which had since become independent and was organizing the development of cooperatives in the community. At this stage the strategies and demands of the movement followed the classic Kerala pattern of agitations for workers rights, with demands for better living conditions for the fishermen, more government money, the establishment of a Fishermen's Welfare Fund. However, the battle lines for a different kind of struggle were already being drawn. The demonstrations of 1977 and 1978 included violent confrontations between the workers in the mechanized trawling sector and the artisanal fishermen, with trawlers being set on fire and fights breaking out. Pressure was growing within the movement for further agitation against the trawlers, and particularly for the call for a ban on monsoon trawling (between June and August) when most fish species spawn and the damage done by trawling is greatest (Murickan 1987: 8).

In 1981 the newly-elected Leftist coalition government enacted the Marine Fisheries Regulation Act, which prohibited trawling within the nearshore waters, in response to the fishermen's agitations. They were however powerless to enforce the ban, and the trawlers simply ignored it. Soon after, the coalition broke up and a Congress (I)-led government came to power, which stalled on the trawling issue. At the same time, the fishermen's union had come into conflict with the Catholic Church, which succeeded in splitting it into two factions, and effectively ending the agitation. It was not until 1984 that the secular faction of the union, now the Kerala Swanthara Malsya Thozhalali Federation (KSMTF)[4], had recovered sufficiently from the split to start a new series of demonstrations on the trawling issue.

[4] Kerala Independent Fish Workers' Federation.

By this stage "the KSMTF had taken the form of an umbrella organization with well knit cadre-based and regionally decentralized autonomous units. The agitation call led to a total upheaval of the coastal belt for well over two months" (Kurien 1991: 23). Fishworkers were involved in massive rallies, marches on the Government Secretariat in Trivandrum, road blocks, and high profile fasts by the leaders. The National Highway, which runs all along the coast, was blocked in several places by canoes and kattumarams placed across the road, and many demonstrations ended in violence between police and fishworkers.

The matter of the monsoon ban is one which has rumbled on in Kerala, with partial bans implemented and then lifted in response to pressure from both the artisanal fishermen and the trawling lobby, and it is an issue which still remains to be resolved. Regardless of the success or failure of the movement on the matter of the trawling ban, however, one of the major effects of the agitations has been to bring the fishing community into the mainstream of Kerala's politics, and to vastly increase the levels of politicization within the community.

It is also interesting to look at the particular discourses which have grown up in the context of the demand for a trawling ban: specifically, a discourse which emphasized the ecological issues, a discourse of green rather than red politics. Thus, while the expansion of the trawling sector led to increasing proletarianization among a certain sector of fishworkers, the lines of battle were not drawn between workers and capitalists on this sector, but rather between the capital intensive sector as a whole, and the artisanal sector. There were no direct relations of exploitation here, rather there was unfair competition over an open access resource[5]. The fishermen could not claim that the merchant owners were exploiting them, but they could claim that they were exploiting the sea, and hence those who depended on it. The battleground thus becomes the sea itself, and who has access to it becomes a matter of competing claims about rights and protection. The artisanal fishermen articulate these claims in ways which are bound up with ideas of identity. They stake their claim as "the sea's children", and the protectors of a precious resource on which their livelihood depends and has always depended (e.g. Murickan 1987). The claim of greater rights is about asserting an identity of greater connectedness with the sea than the trawler owners, the outsiders. This matter of identity and the connection to the sea is an important one, and one to which I shall return.

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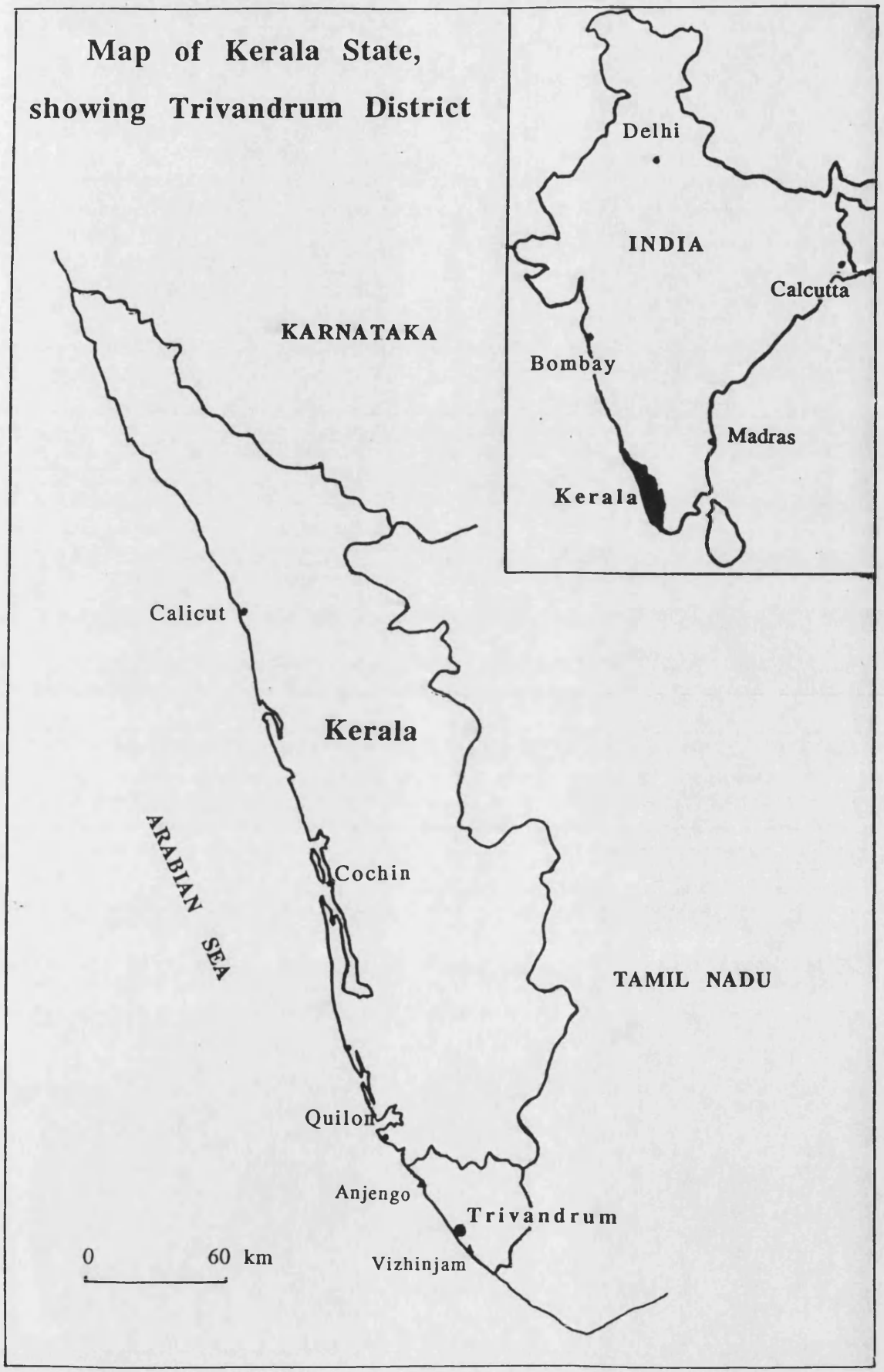
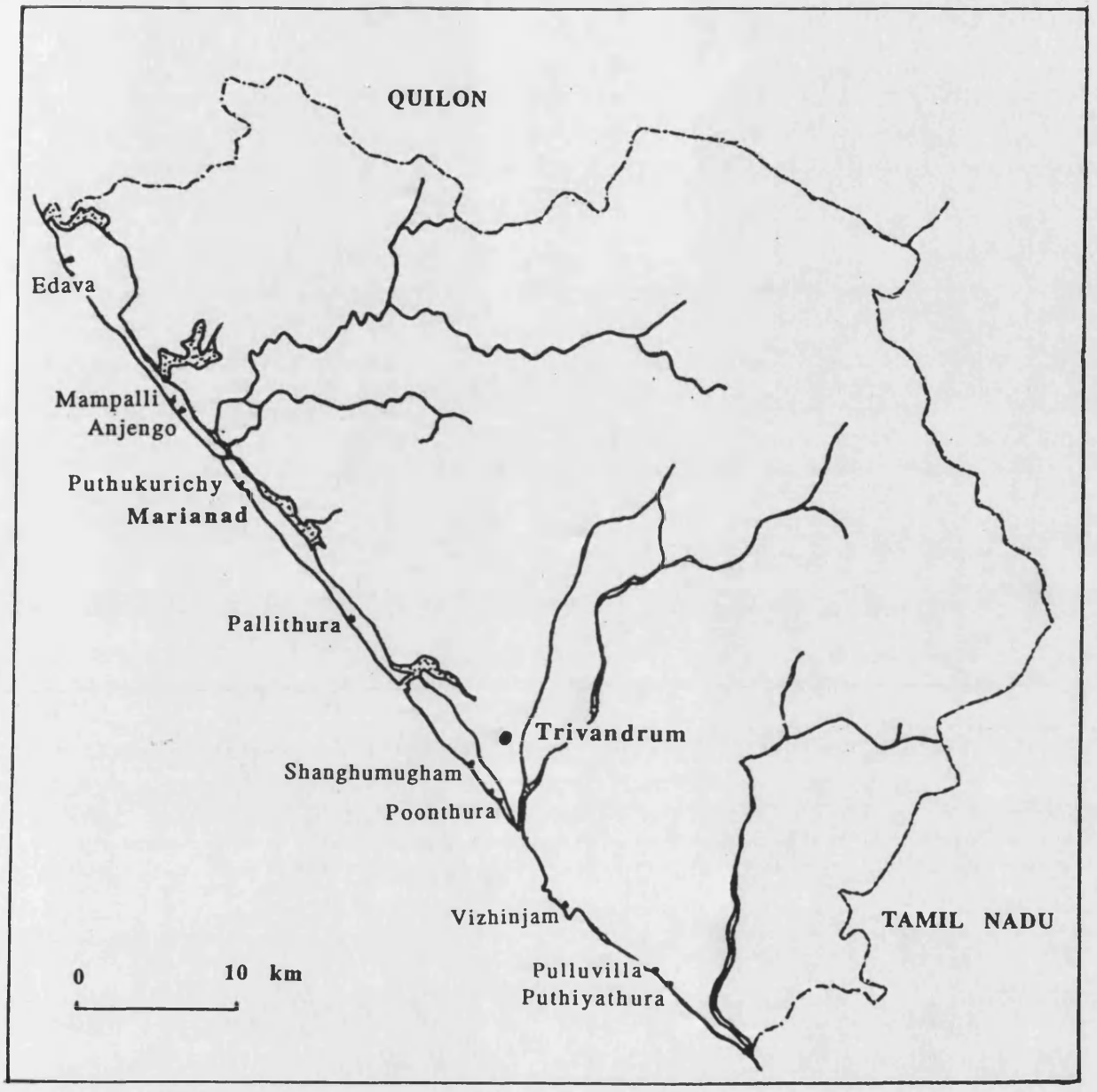
[5] The particular nature of the sea as an open access resourse and the problem of conservation was first raised by Hardin (1968). For a more recent anthropological approach to this issue see McCay and Acheson (1987).


Map of Kerala State,
showing Trivandrum District
Delhi
INDIA
Calcutta
Bombay
Madras
Kerala
KARNATAKA
Calicut
Kerala
ARABIAN SEA
Cochin
TAMIL NADU
Quilon
Anjengo
Trivandrum
Vizhinjam
0
60 km



Map of Trivandrum District, showing main fishing villages

Marianad

The place where I did my fieldwork, Marianad, is a village which has extremely close associations with the history of the fishworkers movement which has been outlined above. It is in fact the place where the first cooperative in the area came to be set up, and where the organization now known as PCO (Programme for Community Organization) was first formed. In 1961 the Trivandrum Social Services Society, under the leadership of the then Catholic Bishop of Trivandrum, Bishop Pereira, initiated a unique community project in the coastal district. Thirty acres of land was purchased in a sparsely populated stretch of the coast, known as Alillathura ("shore without people"), and selected families from a number of fishing villages in the district were invited to move there. A house building cooperative society was set up, building low cost concrete houses. Initially fifty families came to this "tract of coastal area known for its ghost stories, poor fishing and isolation" (Kurien 1980: 25) and together with a team of community workers, three women with experience in social work and public health, began to build a new community. The village was named Marianad, "Mary's place".

Initially the community organizers concentrated on health programmes, nurseries, children's clubs, savings schemes and the housing cooperative. After about seven years they started up a fishermen's marketing cooperative, which was registered with the state government and started to function fully by the early 1970s. It was remarkably successful, and when, in 1987, the Leftist government decided to set up its own network of fishermen's cooperatives, the Matsyafed societies, it took the Marianad cooperative as its model (Kurien 1980; Kumar 1988).

The process of setting up the cooperative, and fighting the entrenched interests in the area, had been a radicalizing one for the society members and the community organizers. The original activists in Marianad began to distance themselves from the Church and "community work" and to become more active politically, extending their work to other villages. In 1977 they formed the Programme for Community Organization (PCO) and shifted their base to Trivandrum.

In 1978 Bishop Pereira died, and the new bishop ordered an inquiry into the activities of PCO in Marianad. The inquiry was part of a concerted attack on PCO by the Church, particularly by the local priest in Marianad, who saw the PCO as a threat to his absolute authority in the village. In 1979 the PCO team withdrew completely, but the fight went on for the control of assets of the different societies by the Church and PCO members, the right and the left. For months the only subject at Church sermons was the communist agitators at PCO. There was unrest in the village, fights between

the two factions, and one man was killed. But control of the societies effectively went to the Church, and they fell into disuse.

The story is one of only temporary triumph for the Church however. While it succeeded in destroying the original cooperative society, Marianad currently has two cooperatives functioning along the same lines, with a total of 800 members. For a village of about 5,000 people this represents almost all the active fishermen and a high proportion of women vendors. As with the original society, all members pay a nominal sum for share ownership and get a passbook and savings account. Fish is auctioned on the beach by the cooperative salesmen, who give the fishermen some cash up front and the rest in the form of a credit slip to be cashed at the society. 3% is deducted as sales commission, and 2% is invested in their savings account.

In the wake of the violence in Marianad the priest, Father Joseph Maryam, was transferred. Now there is a new priest in the village, and there is a widespread perception that this one, as is only fitting in a village where the majority support the Leftists, is CPM. According to one woman, "We have a communist priest, because we are all communists here. They had to take the other one away and give us a new one who is CPM. He can't say he is, but we know secretly he is CPM".

Fieldwork In Marianad

I first visited Marianad a little before Christmas 1991, having been in Trivandrum since October, setting up house, making contact with the local research institutes and fishworkers' organizations, and learning Malayalam as best I could with a local assistant and a text book from Austin, Texas. My initial contact came via the Trivandrum District Fishermen's Federation: Eugene Culas, who was TDFF Chief Executive, suggested that I worked either in Marianad or Anjengo, in both of which villages they had a strong presence. Of the two, Marianad turned out to be much more congenial: somewhat smaller, nearer to the city, and with a ready made place to live - sharing a small (two roomed) concrete house with Janet, the coordinator of the local branch of TDFF; Victor, her husband, who worked as the manager of the SIFFS boatyard at Anjengo; and their four year old daughter, Kithu. Both Janet and Victor spoke a little English, and seemed surprisingly keen that I should come and stay with them, and carry out my study in the village: they were, I think, both genuinely interested in what I was doing, and also looking forward to having someone with whom to practise speaking English[6]. I arranged, then, to stay with them, and

[6] There is a great enthusiasm for learning adequate English in the villages: good English is a mark of high status and is still the passport to a good job in Kerala: while government ministers have legislated

arrived in January 1992, with a pile of bedding, clothes, books and papers, feeling exceedingly sick with nerves.

It became rapidly apparent, once I had settled into the village, that there was no one there who had enough English to be able to assist me with interviews, and that my own Malayalam was not adequate enough. I had Malayalam lessons every day with Flossy, a young woman of my own age who was a good friend of Janet's, and whose sister Agnes lived opposite us: her English was probably the best, but still often required several hilarious attempts at each sentence for both of us before light dawned. For very simple surveys of households, boat crews, and fish vendors, I was able to work with Flossy with a mixture of my Malayalam and her English: from March onwards, for anything more complicated I worked with another assistant, Chitra Pannikker, who lived in Trivandrum and came in on the bus each day.

Through Janet and Flossy I came to know a number of other women in the village well, and my connection with the cooperative society meant that most people who were attached to it or on the Left (the majority), were willing to talk to me and sympathetic. I was able to gather a lot of economic data on fishing from the cooperative sales records, and from sample surveys and questionnaires to boat owners and crew, most of which does not appear in this thesis, for reasons of lack of space. Most of my understandings of life in Marianad, however, were gathered in the course of informal interviews and conversations with people in their houses or on the beach, mostly with Chitra present as a translator, or through my experiences of living as a part, even if a rather dysfunctional part, of a household and family in the village.

I want just briefly to discuss here something of the background to these experiences, which were not for me as smooth and automatic as they seem to appear in so many accounts of fieldwork. I do not believe that a fully-fledged reflexive confessional is either essential to understanding someone's ethnography or necessarily interesting to the reader; nevertheless, there are too many glossed over descriptions of easy integration and adoption as "one of the family" which fail to deal with the very real problems of fieldwork, and contribute to making the next generation of anthropologists feel miserably inadequate when faced with their own experiences. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to redress the balance somewhat.

There are two things which I wish I had read before embarking on fieldwork: one is Malinowski's *A diary in the strict sense of the term*, and the other is the preface to Michael Moffatt's *An Untouchable Community in South India*. Both might have helped me realize a little earlier than I did

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for all state schools to teach through Malayalam medium, they send their children, without exception, to private English medium schools.

that not all fieldwork lives up to the cosy mythologized ideals that appear to lie behind most ethnographic accounts, not even the one that inspired most of these ideals in the first place. Malinowski's schizophrenic existence, half his mind in the Trobriands, half still caught up with events and people thousands of miles away in London or Sydney, and all of him often tetchy, bad tempered and fed up; and his frequent admonishments to himself to get on and do some work, and *stop reading novels*, was all instantly recognizable to me. Moffatt's discussion of the difficulties he faced in living alone in a Harijan village, and trying to emulate what he believed was Malinowski's method, was even more poignant. Attempting "proper fieldwork", meant for Moffatt, as it did initially for me, integrating as much as possible, relying on your own basic linguistic skills and hoping to learn the language thoroughly through daily interaction, making relationships with people and trying, on some level, to become an unintrusive part of their lives. His description of being sent slowly mad by the strain of this attempt, and of fleeing abruptly after three months, determined to give up the PhD, made me feel like perhaps I was not so inadequate after all: I had managed to last five months before I found myself in approximately the same state.

Like Moffatt, it was not physical hardship that was an issue: I was quite happy to live in one room, to draw water from the well, to use an outside latrine and wash in a bucket of water. In fact, it was in carrying out such tasks, getting water for the family, cooking on the paraffin stove, cleaning the dishes with sand, that I managed to feel most at home, a useful member of the household. What was however a greater strain than I had ever imagined, was the experience of living in a situation in which I was completely socially de-skilled. Language difficulties meant that there was no possibility of subtlety or nuance in my communications with others: everything had to be larger than life, a great joke or else a great problem. I blundered blindly through situations, sensitive to body language and tone that told me I was doing something wrong, that I was not living up to others' expectations of me, yet unable to remedy this or to explain how I felt. My sense of self, of personality, disintegrated under the onslaught of a constant reflection of self from others that was not me, but some stranger: a moody, difficult girl, well meaning but a little slow, very prone to lock herself in her room for hours, with a phenomenal need for sleep and a strange tendency to burst into tears for no very good reason.

I would not want to give the impression that this is all there was. On the contrary, there were often times when I felt quite happy and at home, and surrounded by friends; especially in the evenings, when we would sit on the verandah, eaten alive by mosquitoes, often with candles when the electricity went off, and I would give "English lessons" to some of the girls and women who lived nearby. These started off with grammar (*he washed*

the clothes, he is washing the clothes, he will wash the clothes), went on to conversation (*What would you do with one million rupees? I would give it to my mother*), and ended in long gossip sessions, half in English and half in Malayalam. People would wander by and join in, or just watch for a while; sometimes the young men joined us and added to the gossip, flirting with the girls and trying to persuade me to sing English songs. Sometimes the meetings became more serious, as people discussed local politics, the trawling ban, the murder of a young girl nearby, the Church committee business. Once I was asked to show everyone the photographs I had brought from home: one that attracted most attention was of a demonstration in London, and myself with a banner with some friends. "Freedom fighter!" said Janet, looking at me with approval, and the others all smiled and passed it round, nodding: the next time there was a sit-down demonstration at the local police station, I was invited to join them. In many such ways people tried to make me feel at home, and liked; tried to find ways to lessen my sadness. "Come to Mass" suggested Flossy once, when I was inconsolable, "You will feel better" (and in fact I did). Nevertheless, by the end of six months I had reached a point where I could no longer continue, and over one weekend back in Trivandrum, I decided to go home, and booked my flight for three days later. Though I had dreaded telling Janet and Victor that I had so suddenly, out of the blue, decided to go home, in fact they saw it as quite normal: I was homesick, I wanted to see my mother, I should have a good holiday and come back happy.

The second half of my fieldwork was carried out in a slightly different manner to the first. After much questioning of my own sanity and strength of character I had decided that it was not I who was to blame for being unable to reproduce the accepted fieldwork experience, but rather that the ideal was impossible[7]. This took a great deal of the burden of guilt and feeling of inadequacy out of the experience, and enabled me to simply get on and do the job in what felt like the best way for me, regardless of whether it approximated to the standard ethnographic accounts of fieldwork. In practice this meant a greater emphasis on the informal interview, with Chitra Pannikker coming in every day from Trivandrum. She had just finished her PhD in English Literature, and was working part time on translating *Ulysses* into Malayalam: anyone who could contemplate wrestling Joyce's prose into her native tongue, it seemed to me, could cope with the subtleties of meaning ordinary interviews were likely to throw up. The qualms I had about how a high caste, educated, Nair

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[7] Having since met a few people who did manage to reproduce what approximates to the ideal, I have now revised this opinion. The standard anthropological fieldwork *is* possible, but I think it has a lot to do with how easy the local language is, how easy it is to join in with practical tasks, how small the community, and how lucky you are with first contacts. Even so, it is difficult: the one person I know well who managed what is probably as close to the ideal fieldwork as possible, nevertheless spend considerable periods of time in his hut, crying.

woman would get on with the low caste fishermen and women, soon disappeared: people accepted Chitra as they had accepted me, appeared to have no problems with her status, and seemed to like her, while she in turn was quite at ease with them, and had no hesitation for example eating or drinking in people's houses. I more or less gave up, at this point, attempting to formally learn more Malayalam: I was never going to get to the stage of being able to conduct interviews on my own, and thus it seemed to me that my energy and time would be better spent in talking to people, with Chitra's assistance, than in beating my brains out over the language, and never getting the time to use it to any good purpose. My linguistic ability remained poor, then, but it was sufficient to introduce myself, to ask a few questions, to understand maybe half the answers I received, and to know when someone had said something interesting, even if I didn't know exactly what it was. I allowed myself to go back to Trivandrum more frequently, to catch up with friends there, relax in my own place, write up my interviews, and do some comparative research in the libraries at CDS and PCO. Using a motorbike, rather than the unreliable and slow bus service, meant that Marianad was only 40 minutes away from the city, so I could commute between the two with relative freedom, and thus leave the village for much shorter periods of time, maybe just an evening, but more often.

This period of fieldwork was for me much more fruitful than the earlier one. I found I was learning by leaps and bounds, and that paradoxically I was becoming closer to people than before. I talked to a lot more people in this period, and there were certain families or individuals whom I visited a lot, and with whom I discussed all manner of things, often going with the intention of asking about fishing techniques, and ending by sitting around telling ghost stories, or having lunch together, accompanied once, hilariously, by a duty free bottle of whisky from a Gulf returnee[8]. For them, as well as for myself it seemed, proper conversations and full discussions with the aid of a translator were far more satisfying than stumbling through simple broken sentences of no great interest to anyone.

This then is the background to my fieldwork, and from having thought it represented a unique failure, I have come to realize that it probably approximates more closely to the norm than is usually admitted. I believe that in the time I was in Marianad, through constant observation and questioning, through exercising to the full a theoretically informed curiosity, I came to understand quite a lot about people's lives and their

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[8] For some reason, foreign alcohol is assimilated to the category of "wine" (in India, a particularly sweet and heavily spiced, almost non alcoholic, beverage) and thus considered fit for women and children as well as men. No one would ever have offered me toddy or arrack in similar circumstances, although the whisky (I, together with the other women present, was given a full half glass) was probably much stronger in fact than either.

views of the world. It is an outsider's understanding, for sure, even particularly an anthropologist's understanding, but I think it would probably be foolish to think that it could ever be anything else.

Theoretical Background

There are two main bodies of literature and theory which have informed the approach taken in this thesis: feminist anthropological literature on gender, and the general literature on gifts, exchange, and person, which takes as its starting point Mauss' (1990) essay on the gift. Particularly important has been the Melanesian material, especially the work of Marilyn Strathern (1988), which combines the two concerns. While I have drawn on the insights offered by these theorists however, the situation found in the context where I worked differs quite considerably from that most commonly presented in the Melanesian ethnography, and the thesis develops a rather different perspective. Here gender can be seen to be a categorical attribute of persons, and one that is primarily understood through notions of bodily difference and gendered roles in procreation, as well as through an understanding of the importance of gendered exchanges at the heart of the economy which create and maintain individual households.

For the most part the relevant theoretical literature will be discussed together with the ethnography in the chapters that follow. In terms of the literature on persons and exchange in India, however, the work of the ethnosociologists forms an implicit background to much of the discussion, and it seems appropriate to consider here more explicitly the implications of this approach.

Persons and Exchange in India

The ethnosociologists in India have since the beginning put transactions and bodily substances at the centre of their understanding of person and caste, and thus, though there are clearly many problems with this approach which have drawn some criticism over the years (e.g. McGilvray 1982; Dumont 1983c: 153-159; Good 1991: 181-2; Parry 1994: 113-115), I have found their framework initially the most illuminating for my own work. Here I want to discuss some of the diverse work which has come out of the ethnosociological school, and to consider some of its drawbacks as well as its strengths.

The initial impetus for the ethnosociological approach came from the work of David Schneider on American kinship (1968), with a similar

cultural approach being taken to the understanding of caste. For Marriott, caste ranking could be understood in terms of a pervasive monism present in India which failed to distinguish between a person's biological substance and his moral state; between his self, and his actions or conduct (Marriott 1976, 1989; Marriott and Inden 1977). Thus "a South Asian's moral qualities are thought to be altered by the changes in his body resulting from eating certain foods, engaging in certain types of sexual intercourse, taking part in certain ceremonies, or falling under certain other influences" (Marriott and Inden 1977: 228). The "code for conduct" enjoined by his caste affiliation, and the particular substance of his person, are mutually implicated: the actor and the act are one and the same.

Persons in South Asia thus, in this view, continually engage in transfers of coded substance through marriage, kinship, services and food transactions. These become part of their person and thus their nature: "persons, who must exchange in such ways, are therefore always composites of the substance-code they take in" (Marriott 1976: 111), and hence, in the context of caste, such transactions are highly regulated (e.g. Marriott 1968). There are two main implications of this view of the person: firstly that the person is a relatively fluid and malleable entity, "channeling and transforming heterogeneous, ever-flowing, changing substances" (Marriott and Inden 1977: 233), and, related to this, that the person is substantially connected to others, and is not therefore a stable, bounded individual, but rather a "dividual", constantly giving out and receiving parts of the self from others[9].

The idea of the "fluid person" has been explored by Daniel (1984), who argues that it is this understanding of the person as open to diverse substantial influences that underlies Tamil preoccupation with the maintenance of equilibrium through the search for compatibility. For his Tamil informants the compatibility of person and place, person and house, husband and wife, are all crucial to well being, because of the strong substantial influences that each can have on the other. Ultimately all are connected, all are one, so that, as with Marriott's understanding, there are no individuals here.

Both Marriott's and to some extent Daniel's understanding of the person in India are drawn for the most part from discourses of medicine (particularly Ayurveda) and from ritual: ideas about transactions in food or marriage, about religion and pilgrimage. Thus this represents only one particular discourse about the person and not necessarily the only one (McHugh 1989: 76). While there is much here that is very persuasive, and finds immediate parallels with ideas expressed by people in more ordinary

[9] An alternative view of the Indian person has been put forward by Dumont (1980): although opposed to the ethnosociological perspective, he also concentrates on the importance of the physical body in the concern with purity and pollution, and contrasts the Indian person, structured as part of an encompassing whole which is society, with the Western individual.

contexts, there is, as Parry has noted, something also which is "overdrawn" (Parry 1989: 494). The idea of the person as completely fluid, constantly changing, and non bounded, seems difficult to reconcile with the rigidity of caste and gender identities in South Asia, or the clear conception of the discrete nature of the individual expressed in many contexts (e.g. McHugh 1989). Ethnosociological concepts of the person must, I believe, be taken seriously, but not, perhaps, too literally, and it is to the question of how literally, how seriously, that I want to turn.

How fluid is the person, really?

In *Fluid Signs*, Daniel (1984) turns at one point to precisely the question of how literally the identities he posits should be taken. He is aware of the criticism that he may be "overliteralizing... a set of concepts that were intended to be merely metaphoric" (1984: 105) and hence "denying Tamils the capacity for figurative speech and thought" (ibid: 106), but he concludes that the criticism would be misplaced. Figurative language clearly abounds in Tamil speech, poetry and song, but what is equally true is that "the line which divides the figurative from the literal is a thin and fragile one" (ibid). This understanding, that a relation can be one *both* of literal identity and of metaphoric resemblance, that the balance can tip easily from one understanding to the other and back again, can be related to another argument Daniel makes about the pre-eminence in South Asian symbolic thought of the *iconic sign*. Icons "are signs that act as signs by virtue of the fact that they share some quality with the object they represent" (ibid: 216), as for example the map, the diagram, the blueprint. On one level the map and the territory it represents are one and the same; on another they can be clearly distinguished. The "shared quality" of icon and object can lead in the direction of either identity or distinction, either the enchantment of metonym or the everyday rationality of metaphor.

The preoccupation with steering a line between these two possibilities which we see in Daniel is interestingly reinforced in Smith's (1989) recent discussion of Vedic religion in India. Smith identifies in the Vedic texts a concern with *making connections* between diverse entities, things, forces, activities and cosmic planes, connections which are often represented as equivalences. For Smith, they should, however, properly be seen not as relations of identity but rather of *resemblance*, the two entities neither exactly the same nor totally separate (1989: 47). There is a preoccupation seen in these texts with avoiding the twin dangers of either too much resemblance, the problem of homogeneity (*jami*), or too much differentiation, the problem of total isolation (*prthak*). Neither are productive states of being: "things and entities must be differentiated in

order to avoid the quality of *jami*, but they must also be connected to escape the equally dangerous, and ultimately lifeless, condition of *prthak*" (ibid: 52)[10]. Identities made between elements, then, are clearly not complete identities, since this would imply *jami*, yet equally they are no mere metaphors, since this would imply excess disconnection, sterile atomism, *prthak*. Though Smith uses the concept of resemblance to indicate the nature of the connections made in Vedism, it is a special kind of resemblance which implies a certain interpenetration of elements, a shared quality between them. It seems in fact not a hundred miles away from Daniel's notion of the icon.

The identities postulated by ethnosociological accounts of the person, the interconnectedness of persons, things, places, should be seen then as neither entirely literal nor banally metaphoric. Consequently the difference between this "monistic" view and the "dualistic" view of the West cannot be entirely maintained but neither can it be entirely collapsed. From the point of view of an analytic Western philosophy which defines through difference, and takes separation as axiomatic, the South Asian sense of ultimate connectedness seems mystical, yet in more everyday discourses in the West the interconnectedness of persons is acknowledged, and the separate, bounded individual seems a more fragile concept[11]. If the South Asian person is not entirely an amoebic entity, neither is the Western person the autonomous hard edged individual (the frontier hero) of Western philosophy (or Westerns). The difference becomes a matter of emphasis, rather than the basis for a radical dichotomy of the sort Marriott would maintain.

If, then, the sense of interconnectedness between people, places and things which is emphasized by ethnosociological accounts is not completely literal, if South Asian monism is not completely monistic, then just how fluid is the person, really? The sense of completely malleable and changeable entities that is given by Marriott's account is difficult to reconcile with the relatively fixed nature of caste and gender identities in India, as has already been noted. There are in fact two solutions to this apparent contradiction. One, put forward by Parry (1989, 1994), is to emphasize that a discourse of fluidity in fact shores up the rigid practices of caste; the other, seen in the work of Daniel (1984) and C.Osella (1993)

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[10] This imagery of the unproductive nature of too much resemblance or too little connection is drawn particularly from ideas about human copulation and reproduction. Thus *jami* is used in kinship terminology to refer to those who are too closely related to oneself to marry (ibid: 52) and is also compared to a homosexual union, the "barren joining of those too alike" (ibid: 52). Thus, "what is uniform is incapable of copulation and is unproductive" (*Jaiminiya Brahmana*, quoted in Smith 1989: 52), while for reproduction to take place there must conversely be some connection made between the two elements: isolation is equally unproductive. This emphasis on difference and yet connection, on male and female, on reproduction, has clear parallels with my data on gender and kinship (Chapter 2, Chapter 7).

[11] McHugh 1989: 83; C.Osella 1993: 37, also make this point; c.f. Gilligan 1982 for a Western alternative discourse of connectedness.

modifies the theory of the completely fluid person, and emphasizes instead the presence of an unchanging core identity.

Parry, in his discussion of Hindu funerary practices, notes the problem with the ethnosociological view of the person, which seems not entirely to square with "the quite robust and stable sense of self which many of my Indian friends seem to project ... nor ... the assumption of equivalence between all members of the same caste" (1994: 114). However, viewed as an ideological discourse which emphasizes the dangers of unrestricted transactions, the theory clearly acts as a justification for quite careful control of interactions with others. As Parry puts it, "what .... the ideology of fluid substance implies is nothing less than that the disintegration of the self results from stepping off the tried and tested tracks of the established patterns of caste interactions" (ibid). Thus, rather than the concept of a fluid and changeable person subverting the rigid hierarchy of caste, in fact, "it is the symbolic elaboration of louring disorder which creates and sustains the world of order and regulation" (ibid: 115).

The idea that transactions between persons, places and things inevitably involves to some degree the substance of the self clearly does underlie much of the concern in India with engaging in such transactions in limited and conventional ways. Relatively stable caste identities, however, are not merely maintained by rigid and careful caste practices. There is a clear sense of the core self which is not affected by transactions - the actor is not entirely identified with the act. This sense of relatively fixed identity is described by Daniel (1984) for Tamil Nadu, and has been confirmed more recently by C.Osella (1993), for Kerala.

In his description of the Tamil idea of the person, Daniel makes a distinction between two different kinds of quality of persons, things and places, *kunam* and *putti*. *Kunam* is a relatively deep level trait or character, for the most part stable and unchanging; *putti* is a more surface level trait which is susceptible to diverse influences and relatively easily altered. The difference between these two was illustrated for Daniel by an informant thus: "A calf that spends its time with a pig will, even as a pig will, eat feces. Here it can be said that the calf has gotten (sic) the feces eating putti. If the calf is returned to pasture it will certainly go back to what is natural to it - grass. The pig however eats feces not only because it is its putti to do so but because of its kunam. You can't change that" (Daniel 1984: 92). A person's *putti* can be altered and influences by the place he lives, the food and water he drinks, the people he interacts with, but his *kunam* will, except in exceptional circumstances, remain the same. The *kunam*, then, is something a person is born with, and *kunams* are shared to a large extent by those from the same caste or *jati*. The fixed and durable dispositions of the *kunam* are what makes certain actions and substances

fitting to one *jati* and not another. The search for equilibrium and well being is, in fact, for the most part, the attempt to harmonize the *kunams* of self and environment.

Caroline Osella, working in Kerala, describes a very similar split between the fixed and stable *jenniccu gunam* (birth quality) and the relatively malleable *samsa gunam* (environmental quality). Interestingly, in a context where a high degree of political awareness means that overt emphasis on the fixed nature of caste difference is muted, she found that, "the idea that people are unstable, changeable and can have influence on each other is a commonplace" whereas "to find out about the fixed core, by contrast, requires careful probing" (1993: 427), and in fact its very existence is denied by some. Nevertheless most people did have an understanding of a relatively stable, inner self, given at birth and passed on from the parents, which was relatively impervious to the alterations of the *samsa gunam.*

The idea that discourses of fluidity and change exist in parallel with those that emphasize fixed natures, suggests that the line drawn between the two may be variable, and contested or manipulated by people in different contexts. In the next section I want to look at some of the ways in which discourses of fluidity and interdependence can be emphasized or de-emphasized for different reasons.

Are Some Persons More Fluid Than Others?

The idea that a person's interactions with place and others changes the nature of their person is perhaps most radically represented in the common understanding in virilocal north India that a wife becomes part of her husband's lineage and family. This idea has been taken up in a recent paper by William Sax (1990), who contrasts male and female views and argues that the idea of total transubstantiation is in fact a predominantly male discourse. In the male view, and in the religious texts which for the most part represent this view, "the 'Gift of a Virgin' (*kanyadana*) ... both illustrates and accomplishes the substantial and moral transformation of the bride" (Sax 1990: 496).

For the Garhwali villagers with whom Sax worked, men, in their capacity as husbands and fathers-in-law, emphasized this transformation and held that "because places and persons affect each other so strongly, the bride is transformed by moving to a new place" (ibid: 495). Women, however, argued that, "the natal village's affect on a bride's nature is so

strong that it can never be entirely effaced" (ibid)[12]. The understanding that a woman was still essentially part of her natal village could be seen particularly in the practice whereby women were expected to return to their village for the annual festival of the goddess Nandadevi: their presence, as a daughter of the village, was considered essential, and if any were not present it was believed misfortune would result. The acknowledgment of continued connection is clear also from Helen Lambert's data on women in Rajasthan, where women from the same natal village call each other "sister" and often form strong relationships on the basis of shared background even where they did not know each other before marriage (Lambert 1993). Sax concludes, then, that the idea that women are completely transformed on marriage acts as a male ideology: "for Garhwali males, such an ideology justifies and makes 'natural' their privileged position in the socio-cultural order... The males' choice of interpretation is a matter of self-interest, of gender politics" (ibid: 498).

Caroline Osella has also noted that interpretations of the potential for transformation can be used as part of politics, this time particularly caste politics. In the village where she worked in Kerala, "*samsa*, the possibility of change via action in this world, is used by low caste people as a means to challenge Brahmanic discourses on caste" (C. Osella 1993: 426). In this view the relatively fixed, inherited core of *jenniccu gunam* is under emphasized, and "its very existence is sometimes denied, especially among the upward aspiring middle ranking communities" (ibid: 427). In general, "low status informants repeatedly asserted that [the *jenniccu gunam*] could be over ridden by *samsa gunam*" (ibid: 432), whereas high caste informants expressed "the more conservative sentiment that *jenniccu gunam* cannot be changed", at least not that part of it in which was lodged the essential caste status (ibid: 433, 436). Over generations, most informants agreed that *jenniccu gunam* and thus caste status could alter, but this was clearly felt to be a long and slow process, and implicated the whole group rather than individual members (ibid: 438-40). Nevertheless, there is clearly enough ambiguity about the matter for those whom it suits to emphasize change rather than fixity, so that, for one family of carpenters, "birth *jati* was no longer an indicator of true *jati*" (ibid: 437).

If there are variable understandings of the fluid, changeable nature of the person, there are no less variable understandings of the separate and bounded nature of the person, and again these are related to caste, and gender. Thus Osella notes that the emphasis on the mutual interactions of person and environment has implications for the understanding of individual autonomy and the interdependence of persons. In general, the

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[12] Sax concentrates on the effect of place, but it is likely that, even if this is the dominant idiom, the influences of food and sexual interaction between husband and wife are also extremely important here, as elsewhere.

subject/agent "should not be seen as proactive, driven from the inside by desire, by temperament, by character, and so on, but rather as reactive, responsive, partly driven from the outside by the environment, the actions of others, by the concatenations set off by connections" (1993: 449). The partial exception to this understanding is the high caste Brahman male, who strives rather to realize an unconnected autonomous existence. Thus "Brahman men ... gain their strength by retreat into the self. They remove from their bodies outside influences before they have a chance to penetrate, and then seal their external bodies" (ibid: 442). Discussing the power of *sakti*, Osella notes that Brahman men "seek to develop and incorporate *sakti* in their own bodies", rather than the bodies of their wives, as is the case for most lower caste householders[13]. Thus "the ultimate Brahman male unit of agency is the person, the body, the individual; the renouncer is self contained" (ibid: 446). Brahmans, widely represented as cool and self contained, contrast most strongly with "hot women, Harijans, Devi and low caste ritual specialists [who by contrast] scatter and disperse their power" (ibid: 448).

This contrast between the apparent connectedness of women and non-Brahman castes, and the Brahman male valorization of separation and self containment is also noted by Parry (1994). Thus the differential behaviour of men and women at funerals illustrates, he suggests, a widespread understanding that, "inferiors [here women] are to a greater extent enmeshed in the world of physicality, more deeply sunk in a mire of social dependency, than their superiors" (1994: 157)[14]. The relationship of interdependence between spouses, for example, is more strongly acknowledged in the case of a woman (whose status as a widow is strongly affected by the death of her husband) than in the case of men, whose "social persona ... is, in general, scarcely touched by the death of his wife" (ibid). This pattern can be seen also to operate in the hierarchy of caste, where the rules governing death pollution hold that a Brahman is polluted by the death of a close relative for ten days, a Kshatriya for twelve, a Vaishya for fifteen, and a Shudra for thirty. The principle appears to be that "people of lesser purity and spiritual power are more closely bound to each other ... than their betters" (ibid: 218), and as a corollary, "the inferior is ... more closely bound to the superior than the latter is to him" (ibid). In general, Parry concludes, those at the top of the caste system, the Brahmans, seek to deny their dependence on those below them, despite the latter's representation of the relationship as one of mutual complementarity. The Dumontian view of caste is thus more properly

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[13] Sakti is a predominantly female principle. For a discussion of the importance of shakti and women's power in South India see Wadley 1975; Wadley (ed) 1980.

[14] That dependency is here represented as unremittingly bad accords with the high caste male perspective: C. Osella by contrast valorises connectedness over the sterility of Brahman individual autonomy.

regarded as a view "from the bottom up" than a Brahmanical ideology (ibid: 247-8). Brahmans, on the model of the Renouncer, as far as possible dissociate themselves from their inferiors and pretend to a phantasmagorical independence from them (c.f. also Fuller 1988).

Discourses of interconnectedness, of the flow of substance and the changeable nature of persons, are clearly variable and contested. This becomes particularly important when examining the matter of transactions between people and their implications for substantial connections between the transactors; it is a consideration to which I shall return in the pages to come.

In general, as is clear from the above discussion, the work of the ethnosociologists has been concerned with caste and caste practices and has not touched substantially on gender. As Howell and Melhuus (1993: 46) have pointed out, anthropological theories of personhood easily elide the difference between male and female persons and too often present a concept of personhood which is by default male. Focusing on gender not only extends the insights gained by the ethnosociological approach but also provides another corrective to the overdrawn view of fluidity criticized above, since gender forms a very definite part of the "fixed core" of the person which is not subject to change. In this thesis I shall be concerned to show how an understanding of gender which is categorical and linked to the notion of bodily difference interacts with an understanding of gender operationalized through exchange, through the transfer of gendered substances and through gendered transactions, predominantly between husband and wife, which lie at the heart of the household and the wider economy.

Thesis Outline

In the first chapter of the thesis I look at marriage and residence in the fishing community, two aspects of life which will come up again and again in the following chapters. Marriage is an extremely important event for both women and men, perhaps the most important: it defines them as adult members of the community, and most importantly it is in relation to each other that husbands and wives are most fully able to demonstrate and enact their gender, to form a productive unit capable of creating both wealth and children. Residence after marriage is likewise important for it keeps women together while dispersing men, and thus gives rise to the dominance of women in exchange and credit networks between households. This chapter also considers the matter of dowry and marriage payments, and compares the structure of marriage here to that seen in the North, where dowry is accompanied by the "gift of a virgin", and residence

after marriage is strictly virilocal. In the fishing community women receive dowry more as a "pre-mortem inheritance", and a groom price component transfers the labour and loyalties of the groom to his wife's family, indicating a very different understanding of the relations between men and women, between the bride's family and the groom's.

These differences are brought out with greater force in Chapter 2, which considers the kinship system of the fishing community. In this Dravidian system, marriage with close relatives is fairly common, and status differences between wife-givers and wife-takers are not emphasized as they are in the North. Even more importantly, the tracing of relatedness between people here indicates that men and women are seen to bear an equal part in procreation, so that the system has an essential bilateral symmetry that kinship systems in the North do not have, being mostly patrilineal. The matter of tracing links of relatedness between people in fact indicates that, though male and female links are equally stressed, they are not identical, and it is the difference between them that makes the distinctions of the Dravidian categories and gives rise to the possibility of cross cousin marriage. My argument here is very different from that of Louis Dumont (1953), who has previously offered the most accepted explanation of the Dravidian terminology. Where Dumont sees the categories as arising out of a structure of marriage alliance, I would argue that they are in fact markers of relatedness and hence marriageability.

This chapter also discusses the importance of gender as it emerges from a discussion of person and substance, the passing on of differently gendered substances in procreation and the implications of this for a understanding of the nature of the gendered person. In the next two chapters I look at gender as it is manifest in performance, at the ways in which men and women demonstrate their gender through work and daily practices, and at what it means to be a man or a woman in this society. Chapter 3 deals with men and masculinity, looking at how men come to be fishermen, at what the work involves and how they learn the skills and knowledge necessary. It also looks at the matter of identity, at what distinguishes fishermen from others, and at how a sense of identity is not tied to place, as so common in inland villages, but is rather bound up with the relationship to the sea. Chapter 4 looks at women and women's work; at fish vending and at women's strong control of money within the household. Women's control of money gives them a certain centrality, which does not always automatically translate into power, but nevertheless means that they dominate an extremely important part of the economy, and that is credit.

Chapter 5 looks at the matter of credit, and more generally at household exchanges, in both of which women are central. Credit is extremely important in this fishing economy, both for small day to day

consumption and also for larger items of expenditure, such as fishing equipment, and especially dowry. This chapter looks at how women attempt to build up networks of neighbours and friends to whom they can turn for small subsistence loans when necessary to tide the household over, and how they are also prominent in organizing larger scale loans both as lenders and borrowers. In fact there is no clear cut money lending class here, and anyone who has a surplus will lend out, at a relatively fixed rate of interest of 3% per month. The chapter ends with a discussion of the comparative literature on households; at how they cannot be considered in isolation, but always have permeable boundaries, overlapping with others through productive, consumptive, and exchange networks. Here, the vagaries of fishing income mean that lenders can often be borrowers at the same time, and the ties of debt and credit link households together in a complex web.

Chapter 6 deals with more informal ties between households, with the matter of gifts and consumption. Here we begin to return to the question of gender, persons and substance, looking at the ways in which certain exchanges between households imply links of shared substance, and at the ways they are linked to gendered exchanges prototypically made between husband and wife. In this chapter I return to the comparative literature for India on persons and exchange, and particularly the matter of the giving of gifts. Certain exchanges here do seem to imply a transfer of substance, but not all, and it seems that whether gifts do or do not implicate the person depends to a much greater extent here on the prior relationship between the transactors, or on the nature of the object itself, than on any culturally specific understanding of the relationship between persons and things which operates in all contexts.

The emphasis placed in transaction on the prior relationship between transactors leads us into a discussion of perhaps the most important relationship for a understanding of gender, and one which is also central to most exchanges, that between husband and wife. Chapter 7 starts with a discussion of the comparative theoretical literature on gender, and looks at how gender can be understood both in terms of the understanding of the body and bodily difference, and in terms of performance, gender as enacted through everyday practice. A brief discussion of the construction of gender in diverse contexts, from pre-17th century Europe (Laqueur 1990) to North American Indian societies (Roscoe 1991), and Melanesia (Strathern 1988), indicates that a simple binary separation of two genders is not automatically privileged by the presence of what the modern West sees as two clear cut sex categories, and recent work in the West itself indicates that gender here is as much a matter of performance as it is of bodily difference (Butler 1990). Looking at the material on India, however, indicates that here performance implies

substance, and gender is primarily a matter of bodily difference, which both dictates and allows differences in gender potential for action, particularly in the matter of procreation. Turning to Marianad, and the fishing community, we can see the importance of gendered exchange between husband and wife, and the ways in which definitive bodily difference here leads to a notion of complementarity. Men and women, oppositely gendered, yet equal, come together in a union which realizes the potential of each of them, and drives forward a process of exchange and creation, the production of a household, wealth, and children.

Chapter 1

Marriage, Men and Women

In the coastal village of Marianad, barely a week goes by without the unmistakable evidence of a marriage celebration taking place. Loudspeakers attached to nearby coconut palms throughout the village bellow forth a riotous medley of Tamil and Malayalam love songs from sunrise until late into the night, while close to the bride's house brightly decorated canopies are going up in the midst of a bustle of preparations and comings and goings. For three days the music will continue to play: in the brief intervals of power cuts the silence is almost tangible. The wedding itself, as is common in India, is a big affair, with guests in the hundreds rather than tens, and long trestle tables laid out under the canopies (*pandals*) where people eat in rotation from conveniently disposable banana leaves. Everyone is dressed up: the bride herself ideally in an expensive silk *sari*, and wearing the gold necklaces, earrings and bangles that form part of her dowry. The families of both bride and groom will also have new clothes for the occasion, though some look more at home in them than others. The wedding of her eldest daughter was the only time I saw Rajamma, a fish vendor, in anything other than the standard blouse and *lunghi*. She put the bright expensive silk *sari* on at the last minute, thrown on any old how, with a clashing blouse, and she took it off again the minute the ceremony was over. Meanwhile Shobha, just eighteen, looked rather self conscious and solemn in her blue and gold outfit with the long white veil, but it was a beautiful dress, as all the women agreed. Better anyday than the *sari* chosen by the last bride whose wedding we had all gone to, which was leaf green and shocking pink.

Marriage is perhaps the most significant event in the lives of both men and women in the fishing community. It marks their emergence into true adult status, their joining together to form a new unit, the beginnings of a new household, a new family, children. From now on, their work is primarily for themselves and each other, oriented towards the new household they have created, and ultimately aimed at the next generation, at the marriage of their own children. Marriage is marked by the transfer of wealth, mostly from the family of the bride and mostly in the form of a dowry payment: by the time they have successfully married all their daughters, a couple are usually left with very little themselves. Then, they say, the hard work is all over: "You can relax then, and just wait for death!".

In this chapter I want to look at the meaning of marriage for both women and men, at how marriage represents a distinctly different yet equally important change in both their lives, and at how this difference

between them affects the attitude of a family towards its daughters and sons. This means looking particularly at the issues of residence and marriage payments.

The payment of dowry with daughters and not sons is an obvious marker of difference between siblings of different genders, but perhaps equally important is the matter of post-marital residence, which in the fishing community is predominantly uxorilocal. Thus for example, when Shobha was married, though clearly nervous and overwhelmed by the occasion, she had the comfort at least that she would not be leaving home. She and her husband, a boy whom she has known since childhood, a relative of her mother, will stay in her parents' house for the first few years of married life and when they do move out and set up their own house it will most likely be close by.

Unusually then in the context of India, marriage here represents a much more radical change for men than for women. Here it is men who most often move between households, even to a different village, and who have to fit in with a new set of relatives and work mates, while women maintain their kin networks, stay in the old familiar surroundings, continue to enjoy the support of their mother and sisters. At the same time, it is women who will receive most of the wealth accumulated by their parents, and men who will leave with very little. This has a profound effect on the ways sons and daughters are viewed by the family. Sons are transient, they do not cause so much worry, they are destined eventually to leave, and will owe their loyalties to another family. Daughters are always with you, daughters are the ones you must work and suffer for, daughters are the ones who will look after you in old age.

I shall start by looking at the matter of residence immediately after marriage and subsequently, and at the sort of household structures that are most commonly found in the village, before going on to look at the differential effect this change of residence has on women and men as they make the transition to married life. I shall go on to look at some of the other profound changes that marriage represents for the new couple, and for their respective families, and at the ways these affect decisions over the marriage of daughters and sons. There is something to be said here also about how marriages are made, what factors come into play in the matching of bride and groom, and the kinds of negotiation that go on over dowry, before coming to the matter of marriage payments in general. Dowry in this context can be seen to function in a profoundly different way to dowry in the classic North Indian case with which it is usually associated, for reasons which have much to do with the nature of the conjugal unit after marriage, the control of money by women, and the particular forms of property and wealth extant in Marianad.

Dowry payments are in fact extremely important in providing the newly married couple with a capital sum which forms the nucleus of a new household fund. Marriage thus sets up a new economic unit, centred on the relationship between husband and wife. It also initiates the series of important exchanges which take place between them at the heart of this productive and reproductive unit, exchanges which will prove crucial to the analysis in the rest of this thesis.

Residence and Household Structure in Marianad

Post-marital residence among the Latin Catholic fishing community in Trivandrum District is predominantly uxorilocal. In Marianad, nearly 80% of the marriages which have taken place within the households there have been uxorilocal: the men of the family have gone to their wives' place, often to a different village, while the women have stayed. Initially, the couple take up residence in the wife's family home, but they will usually move out after a few years into a place of their own, usually nearby. The nuclear family is thus the most common household structure in the village, but after this comes that of a family living with one or more married daughters and their children. Only 7.6% of households included a married son, compared with 28% which included a married daughter (Table I).

Type	%
Nuclear Family	56
Single Mother and children	6.4
Family with one married daughter & children	19
Family, more than one married daughter & children	6
Family, married son & children	4
Family, married son and daughter(s) & children	2.6
Married sisters & children	4
Married sisters and brothers & children	2

Table I: Household Structures in Marianad. (Total number 165)

Looking at the ages of the primary couple in these different household structures (Table II), it is clear that the pattern is a biographical one, so that the household structure depends very strongly on age. Poverty is also a factor, so that those families who share a house longest and with most people will tend to be the poorest, where couples simply cannot afford to build a new house. Nevertheless there is a tendency for young couples to live initially with their parents, for middle aged couples to be most commonly living in a nuclear family, and for older couples to be living with their married children.

Thus when Agnes got married she and her husband Lawrence, from Puthiyathura, lived with her parents and younger siblings in their small concrete house, and it was there that she had her first two children. When Agnes' younger sister, Emilie, was about to marry, Agnes managed to get a loan for a house from the cooperative, and they moved out to leave room for Emilie and her new husband. She now lives with just her husband and children, but when the oldest daughter is married, she too will stay for a few years in her parent's house before moving on. Eventually it is common for the last child that is married, usually a girl, to get the house as part of her dowry, and to continue living there with her husband. Thus the practice of married daughters living with their parents merges indistinguishably into that of elderly parents living with their married daughter[1].

	Under 30	30-40	40-50	Over 50
Nuclear Household	23 (14%)	46 (28%)	16 (9.7%)	8 (4.8%)
1 married da/son	-	-	18 (11%)	20 (12%)
2 or more married da/sons	-	-	7 (4%)	8 (4.8%)
Married siblings only	-	6 (3.6%)	2 (1%)	-

Table II: Average ages of the primary couple within these household formations. (Numbers given are of households, total 165; numbers in brackets are % of households)

[1] Fuller (1974: 129-30, 177) notes very similar household developmental cycles for both Nayars and Syrian Christians in Kerala, with a similar preponderance of nuclear households. Beck (1972) also describes a high proportion of nuclear households in Konku, Tamil Nadu, except among Brahman groups (1972: 210).

In general, as is clear, most marriages involve the movement of men from one household to another, and often in fact from one village to another. In Marianad in particular there has been a great deal of inward migration as the village has expanded since its inception in the mid 60s. Because it is known as a fairly successful village, with good fishing, people from other villages down the coast are keen to move here, and one of the most common paths to migration is through marriage. Men come in to live with their wife's family, and will often later be followed by brothers or other relatives. Some of these processes of change in household structure, residence and migration, can be seen in the following examples.

Mariamma (aged 50) was born in Vizhinjam, 50 km down the coast. She arranged the marriage of one son, Simon, to a girl in Marianad whose family was originally from Vizhinjam, and thus known to her. Through this connection she came to know of two boys in Marianad who would be suitable husbands for her two eldest daughters, Janet and Jegudasie, then 23 and 21. Mariamma was widowed, but relatively well off, with her own kattumarams, and three other sons working. She made arrangements to move to Marianad, bought a plot of land and built a thatched house. Her two daughters were married at almost the same time and now live nearby in their own houses, with their husbands and children. Mariamma lives with her remaining sons and two more unmarried daughters.

Not far from her lives a friend, Lily, who is originally from a village in Tamil Nadu. When she was married her husband, Vincent, came to live in her village. Lily's brother was later married to a girl in Poovar, near the border between Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and soon after marriage this couple moved to Marianad, following the wife's family. Hearing of the opportunities in Marianad, Lily and her husband came here too. They live now with their five younger children: their eldest daughter (aged 27) is married to Lily's brother's son, and lives close by in her own house.

Though most couples aim to set up house for themselves, this is not always easy. Cecilie (aged 35) is a fish vendor, married to her mother's brother's son, and has three children. She lives in an unusually large extended household with her two sisters and their families. When Cecilie's parents died, her oldest sister Rosemarie (aged 43) took charge of the family. She was already married, to her father's sister's son, and she took it upon herself to get her two younger sisters married. She arranged their marriages and paid their dowries, from which she still has a large debt to pay off. The youngest sister, Jemilie, was married at the same time as Rosemarie's own daughter, to two brothers from Puthiyathura, and both now have two children. They all live in the same house, together with Rosemarie's two younger sons, as yet unmarried.

Elizabeth (aged about 30) is a fish vendor, who lives in the next house. She has two young children and lives with her husband in her

father's house (her mother died when she was quite young). Her younger sister, husband, and their child also live in the house, together with her brother and his wife and their baby. The last member of the household is Elizabeth's youngest sister, not yet married.

These examples give some idea of the variation of possible household structures, but also I hope show some of the principles operating in the processes of household formation and change. They also indicate something of the interdependence of households: married daughters who have their own house often live in close proximity to their mother and sisters, sometimes to their brother: the importance of these connections will become clear in later chapters, in terms of credit links (see Chapter 5) and gifts and exchanges between households (see Chapter 6). Kin links are important too when it comes to migration, with families often following a married brother or sister to the same village. The importance of matrifocal links in this instance is very clear from the fact that, of those couples who moved here after marriage, 72% followed the wife's relatives and only 16% the husband's (12% had relatives here on both sides). As with the examples above, however, the relative initially followed is most often a man (a brother, a son, a mother's brother), just because it is most often men who move away on marriage.

I have discussed residence so far mainly in terms of uxorilocality, and certainly this is the most common form of marriage. However, it is not an inevitable choice, and there are families who may keep their married sons in the household or send a daughter to live in her husband's village. "It's a matter of adjustment between the two families: it will depend on how much space there is in the house, on how well they all get on". Stella for example explained that her daughter was to go initially to her husband's family (they lived in the same village), but that she could always choose to return. "If they are good to her, she will stay. But if she doesn't like it they will come here."

There are a number of reasons why people might find it convenient to keep their sons with them, or send their daughters away. In the case of the bride's family the most important consideration is likely to be space. It is not uncommon for maybe one or two daughters out of a family of four or five to move away on marriage, and this has a lot to do with the problem of space in the house, especially where there are still a number of unmarried sons remaining. Even where the space is available, it is possible that if a family already has a number of daughters settled with or near them, they may be more willing to let the next daughter go, if the groom's family so desire.

From the point of view of the groom's family relative wealth and household space also play a part. James' parents have a large concrete house and a big piece of land. Their older children have been able to set

themselves up in separate households after marriage, and so they have kept the youngest son, the baby of the family, with them. When he married, his wife moved into the house also, and they now live there together with their two children There was little trouble persuading the wife's family to let her come to them when the advantage for the couple was so clear.

Another factor would be the need of the groom's family to retain his labour and support, and thus to try and arrange for a wife to join them rather than lose him to another family. This clearly played a part in the decision of one man's parents to keep him with them. Here there is only one son, Robert, and the eldest daughter's husband has abandoned her, leaving the family responsible for her and her children. The younger sisters need to be married, and it would be difficult to attract a husband for them into a household with so many dependents and so few earners without Robert present. While a son may not contribute directly to the household finances once married, there are plenty of indirect compensations which make it desirable to keep him near: for his general help and support around the house, as a work partner with his father, and as a possible source of loans. Thus Robert's wife has moved in with the family, and they live in the house with their young baby.

It is not only the situation of the groom's family which may require virilocal residence however, but, as the matter of Robert's sisters hints, also their assessment of the potential bride's family situation. It is often the case that the eldest of a number of daughters may marry out while the younger ones are able to stay. Thus Lily, who has three daughters, sent the eldest daughter to live with her husband, but has kept the younger daughter and her husband with her. Similarly Pakashia, who has four daughters and a young son, has just married off the eldest, who has gone to live with her husband in Puthenthope. Here the calculations of the groom's family are decisive: in both these cases there were no male (earning) members in the family, and there were younger sisters. A man might think twice before he joined such a household, with the expectations of support and responsibility which this would entail. He would almost certainly be involved in the process of trying to get the younger sisters married, and much of the couple's initial savings could be drained in this way. In Lily's case, although the eldest daughter married away, it was possible to bring a husband in to the household for the next daughter, when only one sister remained to be married. With Pakashia, the fact that her son will soon be old enough to earn should make it more likely that the next daughter will stay in the household.

In general, the decisive factor in the practice of virilocal residence tends to be the needs and claims of the groom's family. This reflects in part the fact that it is the more unusual form, and thus to press for it the

groom's family must have quite strong reasons, which the bride's family will usually have little reason to object to. Often it is to the advantage of their daughter in fact to agree (as for example in the case of James' wife, who was going to live in a much more spacious and desirable house).

The emphasis on uxorilocality in general obviously means that marriage for men and women means very different things in terms of their relationships with their natal family. There are other ways in which marriage differs for men and women, in terms of change in status, in responsibility, in work, and in their relationships with others. In the next section I want to examine the difference marriage makes to the lives of women and men, and the different meanings it has for both of them.

Women and men: before and after marriage

Losing one family, gaining another

For men the most obvious change after marriage is the change in residence. They join a different household, often move to a different village, and have to come to terms with a whole new set of family relations. It is not just the physical move that is at issue: the shift of household represents a whole shift in loyalties, in sense of belonging, in the expectations of others. The new husband is accepted as part of his wife's family, and his duties and responsibilities, formerly to his natal family, are now to them. While his wife will continue to refer to her husband's family by affinal terms, he will most commonly start to refer to his new family after a few years as his sisters, brothers, mother, father. As Bridget explained to me, "It's usual for the boy to consider this is his own home after marriage. Especially if he has married the eldest daughter, then it's almost as though he were the eldest son: he looks after the others in the family, he is expected to help with all the affairs of the house. They call him son." Simon described the transition with rather more bitterness: "Once a boy gets married and goes, he's nothing in his parent's house, nobody. For both mother and father the daughter is the most important, the son is not really part of it". Simon, as the eldest son, had spent most of his twenties working to ensure his sisters were married before he himself married and moved to Marianad; now his family are relatively well off, having managed to send his younger brothers to the Gulf, but Simon and his wife get nothing from them.

In general men are expected to become fully part of their wife's family on marriage, and to owe them support, help with small jobs, and generally to maintain close relations. In the common type of uxorilocal and inter-village marriage this is in fact what tends to happen: husbands

go along with their wife's support of and closeness to her natal family, and the couple have very little to do with his family, except for occasional visits. In the case where both families live in the same village, however, uxorilocality does not represent such a drastic break for the man, and the option of retaining links with his own family remains as a possible strategy. Rajamma's family for example is noted for being an unusually close and successful one: though all the children (of whom Rajamma is the eldest) have married and moved to separate houses, there is still a very strong sense of an extended family network, and this includes the brothers as well as the sisters. As Rajamma explained, "If I have some spare money, I will give it to my mother, and say, 'It's for the family'. If I have need of money myself, then I can always get it from her - mostly it will have come from my brothers". Her brothers both have jobs in the Gulf and so are relatively well off. Though they live with their wives' families, they still give money to their own parents. "They feel we're all the same family, that's why they give". When her daughter Shobha got married, Rajamma's family, including her brothers, were responsible for finding a considerable proportion of the dowry. In this case the fact that Rajamma's brothers remain a close part of the family group has a lot to do with the efforts of her parents to maintain a sense of unity among all their children, and particularly not to lose the sons, who have extremely well paid jobs. In other cases men might choose to stay close to their families for the advantages it brings them, particularly if they are better off than the wife's family, or simply because they find it difficult to get on with their wife's family. Thus although the most common and expected course is for the husband to switch his loyalties from one family to the other on marriage, it is important to realize that this is by no means a given, and men may in fact retain strong links with their parents and siblings, as a strategic choice on their part or on the part of their family.

Most commonly however marriage represents a strong break for men. The change in household can often also mean a change in work partners, even a change in the sea shore and the area of work. From working with his brothers or with his father, a man may start to work with his brothers-in-law or father-in-law, he may have to build up new relationships, new partnerships, and work to prove all over again his competence and be accepted as a good crew member. A particularly common work partner after marriage is the wife's sister's husband, who is in fact a classificatory if not an actual brother. When Paulos moved to Marianad with his wife and children and discovered what a good place it was for fishing, he went back to Puthiyathura to bring his wife's sister's family here as well: "That was so I could have someone to work with." The difficulty of making this transition is eased however by the individualistic nature of kattumaram fishing, which means men can quite easily fish

alone if they want to, and by the prevailing practice among fishermen in this area that makes the recruitment of crews an ad hoc daily process where anyone should be allowed to join a crew if they ask and if they are competent, on a "first come first served" basis (See Chapter 3).

Marriage for men, as for women, represents an increase in status and wealth. A married man is a full adult, and the dowry which the couple receive often gives him the opportunity to become a craft owner, after years of only working on other people's boats. Before marriage, any money he earns goes to his family, and if they use it to buy a kattumaram or part finance the purchase of a plywood boat, that boat remains their property after he leaves. Although he can ask for money for his needs from his mother, he will not own money or property in his own right, however old he is, until he is married. After marriage, whatever he works for remains with him and his wife, and will not be dissipated into the larger family.

If marriage means an increase in status however it also means an increase in responsibilities. The money a man makes from working no longer goes to his natal family but equally they no longer support him. In a large household with other adult men and women bringing in some income, the obligation of any one member of the household to work is not so great. Elizabeth, who is a fish vendor, complains bitterly of her sons' laziness. While she and her son-in-law provide the household income, they make very little attempt to look for work: "They just won't go. They leave it all to me, they always have." When however the household unit consists of only a couple and young children, the pressure on the husband to go to work each day is strong, particularly when the couple have daughters who will eventually need to be settled with a dowry. Some react badly to this pressure, resenting it, and refuse to do anything. James, laughing, described how men often "change their natures" on marriage: "See, he may have been a good man and a hard worker before, but then he marries and takes to drink and lies around doing nothing. Maybe they have a daughter, and then his wife will say to him, 'Look, now you will have to work', and so he will instantly get up and go - and drink twice as much as before!"

The final important difference marriage makes to the lives of men is one I cannot elaborate on greatly but which has to be mentioned for the great significance it has to the fishermen themselves, and that is the opportunity for a sanctioned and full sexual relationship. Sex is seen as incredibly important to men particularly, and is a subject frequently discussed among them, especially in the context of gossip about others' and one's own sexual exploits[2]. While there is certainly some opportunity for

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[2] While some hint of this was clear to me from my own conversations with people, I am indebted to my friend Sahadevan for observations about men's gossip.

affairs within the village, they are unlikely to be very long term, and suffer from the need for secrecy. Thus, although few men will actually be virgins when they marry, for most it will be the first opportunity they have had for a regular and measured sex life, for the fulfillment of what is seen to be a man's most pressing and important need. Talking of the dependence both wife and husband have on each other, Paulos explained, "If a man gets married, it's difficult for him to imagine a life without *that*, to be single again. OK if he is single for a long time before marriage, you cope with that, you don't know what it's like, but once you get used to this bond, then you can't do without it."

From Daughter to Wife

For a woman, the initial changes on marriage seem on the whole less radical than for a man. She remains in the family home, in the same familiar surroundings and with the same networks of friends and kin. Her status is of course quite different, she is now an adult married woman, and there will be plenty of joking and teasing about what this means: a new found responsibility, a pride, almost of possession, in this new husband, the discovery of sex. Because women marry much younger than men, and their freedom is on the whole more restricted before marriage, they are unlikely to have had any sexual experience, and they are likely to be in fact, as they should be according to religious and customary morality, virgins. Marriage is, then, in this respect, a more significant watershed for women than for men, and this is acknowledged, but in terms of the long term importance of the sexual relationship it is perhaps equally significant for both. As will become clear, the sexual exchange, and procreation, are central to the marital relationship, to the binding of husband and wife together as a new unit capable of the creative production of both wealth and children, and as such, of profound importance to both (see Chapter 7).

For men, as we have seen, marriage makes a difference to residence, but not really to the nature of work: though they may change the place and the work partners, essentially they continue to go to sea in the same way as before. For women, it is precisely in this area, of work, that marriage ultimately makes the most difference. In terms of domestic work there is a strong continuity: for the first few years they will almost certainly continue to divide the domestic jobs of the household with their mother and sisters in much the same way as they did before marriage, and even after they have moved to a house of their own it is not uncommon for them to continue to feed younger siblings for example, or rely on their mother to do the shopping - especially if she goes to the market anyway to sell fish. Children will of course make a difference to the amount of work

and responsibility a woman has, but most of them will already be used to having to care for young babies, either young siblings or the children of their older sisters, and will in turn be able to draw on the labour of female relatives for help with their own. None of this represents a radical change from what they were doing before. Where marriage really makes a difference to women is in making them the linchpin of a new economic unit, giving them control of the joint finances of themselves and their husband, and starting this joint fund off with a lump sum in the form of the dowry payment.

As soon as she is married, a woman becomes responsible for the money of her husband: she will also initially control the money they have between them from her dowry. This is the beginning of a long engagement with matters of money, with the responsibility for keeping track of loans given and taken and the interest payments resulting from these, the responsibility for managing the monetary affairs of the household. The credit economy in the fishing villages is very much the domain of women, and once a woman is married, and has access to money of her own, she will begin to build up those networks and relationships of debt and reciprocity which are essential to the household's ability to cope with the fluctuations of income that are characteristic of a fishing economy. Initially she will rely on networks already in place, of kin and friends, and these often remain the most important, but new relationships will be made with the giving of loans, joining chitty funds, perhaps even starting one up (see Chapter 5). Her responsibility will be to maintain as far as possible the fund of credit on which the house can draw, to build up the savings they have by careful management, and to build as wide a base as possible of potential support and inter-dependence.

The other area of the economy that opens up to women after marriage is fish vending. As a married woman, she can go to the beach on her own, she can go to the market, she can allow herself to interact with men in both these public places in a way that would be impossible for an unmarried woman without compromising herself. Marriage here provides the key to a certain economic independence for women, the chance to earn money for themselves. In general, it is something that women turn to after a few years of marriage, after the oldest child can start to be to some degree responsible for the younger ones, and some women will of course never take it up; nevertheless it exists as a possibility for all of them.

Keeping Daughters, Losing Sons

The differences as they have been outlined above between women's and men's experience and expectations of marriage have profound implications

for the ways in which families view their relationships with daughters and sons, and for the strategies they follow when considering the matter of their marriage. As has been mentioned, the likelihood that sons will move away on marriage and daughters stay behind means a different sense of commitment to girls than to boys. There is a strong feeling that boys will always be all right, they are not such a worry - firstly from an early age they will be able to earn their keep, and secondly they should not have any trouble marrying, there will be no problem of finding a dowry for them. "You don't have to earn for boys like you do for daughters. Boys will earn for themselves." But eventually boys will leave, and earn for someone else: "If it's a boy, you know that he will reach a certain age and go his way. But a daughter is always with you." This sense of boys as transient, as not really part of the family, can often be reflected in the setting aside of rooms in the family house - this one for Stella, this one for Jaysie (and their future husbands), and the verandah for the boys. The daughters, once married and even living separately, remain part of the family network and an important resource of help with domestic chores, lending or giving small amounts of cash, food, other items, giving larger loans. When Emilie married she gave her dowry straight back to her mother on loan for a period of three years, until she was able to return it for them to buy some land. Rajamma ,even after twenty years of marriage, still sends fish caught by her husband to her mother for consumption by the household and for distribution to her sisters' households. In return they are often treated as still part of the family in a way married sons rarely are. At festival time, when the family usually gets new clothes, Lily buys clothes not only for her unmarried children but regularly also for the two married daughters - though not for her married son.

If girls are always with you, if marriage is in fact much less of a break with the family for women than it is for men, then it makes no sense to delay the marriage of girls once they are old enough, and in fact there are many reasons why it is sensible to marry your daughters, once they are old enough, as soon as the dowry can be found. Young unmarried girls are restricted by convention from going out alone, to the beach or to the shops, and they need to be kept out of trouble with boys, for gossip, and even more so an unwanted pregnancy, will make marriage that much more difficult. As married women they will have more freedom, will be less of a worry to their family, and importantly, as I have discussed above, will have open to them economic possibilities closed to an unmarried daughter. They will in addition bring into the household another earning male member, an important source of additional support. Sons, however, are a different matter. From an early age, maybe 16 or 17, their fishing will have been an important additional source of income. It is often the money earned by sons that enables a family to rise above subsistence level and finance the

marriage of their daughters. Once the sons are married their family can no longer depend on them automatically - they have no rights over their earnings, their labour, their support. For most families, then, it makes sense to delay the marriage of sons as far as possible. It is in fact common for men to be married around the age of 25 or 26, compared with an average of more like 19 or 20 for girls[3].

When to marry your daughter or son, however, is not the only consideration for the family when contemplating their child's marriage. There is also the matter of to whom, and for how much. It is to these aspects of marriage that I want to turn now, looking at the negotiations and strategies that come into play, and at how marriage payments are determined.

Marriage Negotiations and Strategies.

A Good Family

The initial move in the marriage game is made by the girl's parents, who will approach the parents of the boy and ask if they are willing to give them their son. Before reaching this point however a good deal of discussion and consideration of the available boys will have taken place, and there will have been much consultation of the wider kin network and friends for any suggestions as to suitable boys in other villages. The boy should ideally be sober and hardworking, not too old, with a good character, and, ideally, a relative. The actual cross cousin, if one is available, is often considered, as are more distant relatives. "It is good to marry a relative", people say, because then the bride and groom know each other, and the families know each other. If he is not a close relative, then he should at least be from "a good family". What then constitutes a good family?

"What is a good family? If they have good clothes, then they're a good family!" The issue of wealth is perhaps the most important defining factor. "It's a matter of education and wealth, normally a prosperous family is called a good family". But it is not the only consideration. "Unity in the family is also important". A good family would be one that was looked up to in the village, its men known as good fishermen, its women clever with money, the sort who are consulted by their neighbours when advice is

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[3] This is relatively late by Indian standards for women, and certainly ten or more years ago the average would have been nearer 16-17. Kerala however has a long record of promoting later marriages and currently it is illegal to marry in the state under 18. The practice has begun to take hold in the fishing villages with the increasing emphasis on education in general, but it has certainly progressed further in Marianad than elsewhere, with a lot of commitment to upholding the law from the Cooperative Society and Church Committee. Higher dowries may also be responsible for later marriages, particularly of second and subsequent daughters.

needed or a small favour, the sort who are active in village organizations, the Church Committee, the local Prayer Group. "A family who can always pay their debts". To understand more fully the considerations and strategies that are relevant to a family's choices in the marriage game, and the changes that are affecting these choices, it is necessary to look at the issues of class and caste.

The Latin Catholic fishing community is hardly divided along caste lines, and in most areas of life could be considered to be homogeneous. They themselves deny the existence of subcastes, and although when pushed will admit that there are, of course, the Barbers, who "used to be considered lower", they assert that "things are different now, they are not treated any differently from anyone else". In the matter of marriage, the question of subcaste difference even within the non-Barber community becomes an issue, but it remains a distinction which is inextricably bound up with others, of class and village status, so that whether subcastes as such even exist becomes a matter for debate.

In the nearby village of Puthukurichy, there are families who call themselves "A class" people, there are those who would claim to be "B Class", and there are the rest, "C Class". A slightly weakened form of this division exists in the village to the other side of Marianad, Alillathura. These are mostly endogamous groups, though not wholly. A and B might intermarry, and a poor B family might marry with the C group, but in general it would not be likely that anyone from the A group would marry with the C group. They are wealthier, more educated, and often have white collar jobs, rather than relying on fishing. As far as the people from Marianad are concerned however, they are not a subcaste, they are just an economic elite. Simon gave me an explanation which was repeated by many: "That A and B - that is just because some families in Puthukurichy became well off and sent their children to get educated. So then they had both money and education and they got government jobs, and they set themselves up as A class. Some who were less lucky with their sons- in-law [i.e. they failed to get boys with good jobs] became poor and started to fish again, and they are the B class". Paulos explained further how well connected these A class families were: "Peter Bernard Pereira, the Bishop - he's from Puthukurichy". But he saw it as an isolated phenomenon. "It's only in Puthukurichy they have this - and actually we don't give a damn about them". To the nodding agreement of his listeners, he continued, "What is all this A and B anyway? It's all the difference brought about by money. In Marianad you have different sorts of people, like in any place, good men, bad men, people who are educated and less educated. There are lots of people who live without principles. But what can you do about that?" As far as Marianad is concerned, "There is not this difference. They are like me and I am like them".

To some extent this difference may reflect a difference between the north and south of Trivandrum District. In the south, from whence come the majority of the families in Marianad originally, there is much greater homogeneity within villages, in terms of wealth and status. There is, however, some sense of the differential status of different villages, with some considered better in terms of the average levels of wealth and education, with perhaps more space and better houses, better fishing conditions and thus greater prosperity. There is a tendency here, especially with the bigger villages like Puthiyathura, for village endogamy, though inter-village marriages do take place. Roman, explaining the common occurrence of marriages between people from Puthiyathura and those from Poovar, gave an insight into the kinds of status considerations and strategies that operate: "See, Poovar is a place where there are a lot of Muslims. These people are rich and the fishermen there can easily get money from them, and they have a lot of influence through them. So if I have a daughter, I might want to marry her to someone from Poovar because then I know the contacts of my family would naturally be better that way. The people from Poovar know that in terms of status it's good to marry someone from Puthiyathura. If a person from Puthiyathura asks for a boy from Poovar, there's no denying them, because Puthiyathura is anyday a better village than Poovar and people know it. In Puthiyathura they are happy to get a boy from Poovar not only because of the contacts but also because they know he'll be strong and independent" (people from Poovar also have a reputation for this).

The status of a family in the fishing community, and the choice of a suitable marriage partner, clearly depends on a complex combination of factors which may include wealth, reputation, village, and claims to membership of particular caste or class groups. None of these factors are fixed or over determining, rather they interact with each other to produce a very fluid hierarchy which I would be reluctant to describe in terms of subcastes, except in the case of the Barber families. Even in the case of the A, B, C groups in Puthukurichy and Alillathura, the ranking seems to be relatively recent, and very much based on wealth. The wealthy elite here almost certainly made its money in migration to Malaysia in the early part of the century, and through education and entering non-fishing professions, has managed to entrench its class position. There are a small number of such families in many of the villages to the north of Trivandrum such as Puthenthope and St. Andrews, and it may be their concentration in Puthukurichy which has led to the elaboration of the distinctions along these quasi-caste lines.

Among the vast majority of the fishing community, the most relevant considerations are simply reputation and wealth, and here there is great scope for individual mobility. In an economy with very low levels

of capital investment, a family's prosperity is to a large degree a result of their unity, skill in fishing and good standing in the credit market, rather than any inherited class or caste position. As the demand for boys from Poovar indicates, their personal reputation, as strong and independent men, as well as the contacts they have with rich patrons, outweighs the village status consideration. Similarly the fact that a man was known as a highly skilled fisherman would compensate for much in the way of family background.

In recent years, the situation has been greatly changed by the increase in Gulf migration, which has contributed to the emphasis on the individual character of the groom and his immediate family rather than the status of the wider kin group or village[4]. Access to the extremely lucrative world of Gulf migration now outweighs virtually all other considerations, and has meant a shift in the nature of the "good family" and the ideal groom. Now a family with access to the Gulf is automatically a good family by virtue of their wealth and contacts, and since they are not concentrated in any one village or social group this has made such considerations less relevant: "Any village now has Gulf families so you cannot say that such and such a village is better or worse". It has also reduced the value placed on the skills of a good fisherman: however good a man is, he is never going to bring in the kind of income you can get as a migrant worker in the Gulf, and consequently he will be less sought after as a husband.

So far the newly wealthy Gulf families have not differentiated themselves a great deal from other fishing families: many of them continue to have members who go fishing, they have very similar lifestyles, and the only restriction on marriage is a monetary one, the high dowry demanded with the bride of a Gulf worker. It may be that in second and subsequent generations the fact that they can afford to educate their children and aspire to professional qualifications and jobs will result in an entrenchment of class differences such as those that resulted from an earlier generation of successful migrants to Malaysia. At the moment, however, the situation is still fluid, and there is ample opportunity for manipulation of connections, character and monetary stakes in the arranging of marriages.

From the point of view of the bride's family, then, the aim is to find a "suitable boy", hopefully one from a good family and with a good character.

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[4] From the early 80s onward there was a high level of labour migration to the Gulf states from the fishing community, which reduced considerably during and after the Gulf war, but has since been increasing again. In Marianad relatively few households had members working in the Gulf (perhaps 5%), but in villages with a large Muslim population the percentage would have been much higher. The perception of what men did when there was exceedingly vague (most probably did manual work, some worked on trawlers) but the rewards by Kerala standards were astronomical. A successful Gulf worker could come home eventually (after ten years) with Rs 4-5 lakhs (1 lakh is 100,000).

Once found, however, his parents must be persuaded to part with him, and here considerations of money come into play. The boy's parents will be looking to see him settled with as good a dowry as possible: not only because this will ensure he himself is comfortably off, but also because part of the dowry payment is in fact made directly to the groom's parents, for their own use, something I shall return to below. In the next section I want to look more closely at how the qualities of the groom and his family status translate into dowry demands, and the kinds of negotiation that determine what the bride's family will pay.

The Price of a Groom

As we have seen, the first move in the marriage negotiation is usually made by the girl's parents, who ask for the boy to be their son-in-law. Once the boy and his parents have said that they are willing, the dowry haggling can start[5]. "The boy's parents say what they want. Then the girl's parents say whether they are willing to pay that, and they make an adjustment between them. Some will insist that they pay that amount, others will come down". The actual haggling is done by the men of the family, but all are involved in the decision: "The father and the mother's brother or maybe mother's father will go to the boy's house. But they will have previously discussed with the other members of the family and it will have been decided beforehand what they will say. They will come back for further discussion if necessary. The people involved in the decision are the mother, father and the mother's family. Some people even consult the father's family"[6].

What, then are the considerations that enter into these decisions over what dowry to pay? Rajamma paid a dowry of 1 lakh (Rs 100,000) for her daughter, which was divided as follows:

Rs 35,000 for the boy's parents
Rs 25,000 in the form of arranging a visa for the Gulf
Rs 25,000 as cash, to the couple
Rs 15,000 as gold jewelry

The visa to the Gulf was arranged by Rajamma's brother, who works there, so that although it had a nominal value of Rs 25,000 it in fact cost the family

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5 The prospective groom is usually given the choice of refusal, after seeing the girl (often he will know her vaguely anyway). He is by this stage too old and potentially independent for his parents to force him into a marriage if he is strongly opposed. The bride has less choice in the matter, and is expected to defer to her family.

6 This up-front haggling is very different from the kind of apparently disinterested exchange that ideally takes place in North India, where the dowry is supposed to be a gift freely given along with the 'gift of a virgin', whatever the behind the scenes negotiating that may go on (e.g. Parry 1979: 241).

very little. The entire dowry, even so, came to Rs 75,000, a substantial sum[7]. Rajamma's family are relatively well off - although they live in a thatched house, they own a plywood boat with an engine and she earns a fair amount as a fish vendor. She is part of a very close extended family as well, with a good deal of support from her parents and unmarried brothers (Gulf workers). The boy who married her daughter is a relative of Rajamma's mother, originally from the same village, Puthiyathura. He is tall, relatively good looking and has some education beyond SSLC (the Secondary School Leaving Certificate, at 16).

In general, at the time of fieldwork, for a boy of good family with some education and good fishing skills a dowry of 1 lakh was not seen as unusual. For a boy who was already set up with a Gulf job the dowry might have been 1.5 lakh or more. It would be easy to conclude that dowry depended quite simply on the boy, that it was entirely determined by the "price of the groom", but there is more to it than that. For any particular boy, given his family background and personal qualities, there would be a certain expected and reasonable level of dowry which could be demanded by his family. To this extent it would be true to say dowry is determined by the groom. However, from the point of view of the bride's family, it is they who initially decide the level of dowry they are willing to pay, and the kind of boy they then choose to approach will be predetermined by this decision. The haggling, then, takes place within defined parameters which are already accepted by both sides, and their ideas of what is a reasonable amount are relatively harmonized. For the bride's family, this decision rests on their perception of their own wealth and status, the kind of man they feel befits this, the sort of amount they feel willing or able to raise for their daughter. It will also depend on her position in the family: with two other daughters close behind she would have to accept less than she might get as the youngest or only daughter. As Emilie put it, "People give as much as they can for dowry. There's no fixed amount. It depends what their income is". While it would usually be the case that during the actual haggling the interest of the bride's family lay in reducing the amount and that of the groom's in increasing it, in the initial decision which sets the parameters of the payment their interests may well both be, in fact, to go as high as they can. Not only does this ensure that their daughter gets a good settlement, it increases the perceived status and wealth of the family in the eyes of others, and means they can demand a greater dowry for their sons. As Bridget explained, "Whatever I give for my daughter, I'd expect at least that for my son. If I give her 1 lakh, I'd ask maybe 1.5 lakhs for him. Maybe I'd only get 1.25 but I'd definitely get more than I gave".

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[7] An average day's share for a kattumaram fishermen is Rs 50 - 100: the annual profit for a plywood boat owner is around Rs 15-20,000 (see Appendix 2).

The fact that the bride's family has at least as much to do with setting the price of the dowry as the groom's family explains what might otherwise seem rather puzzling, that vastly disparate dowries can be given in cases where the objective qualities of the groom seem very similar. Although I have mentioned the high price demanded for an educated man or one with a Gulf job, these men are few in number, and among the rest the range of education, skills and personal qualities is relatively narrow, yet dowries can vary, for a good fisherman, from Rs 25,000 to Rs 1 lakh. Among the poorer families in Marianad, dowries of nearer Rs 10,000 were quoted. Some couples interviewed said that they had not got a dowry at all, and it seems that among the poorest this was sometimes the case, yet these men were at least adequate fishermen with basic education, and sometimes they were highly skilled and known for it. They were unable to demand high dowries because they were not approached by families who could afford high dowries, and here we come to the question of marriage and kinship.

There is a strong preference among the fishing community, as has been mentioned, for marriage with relatives. The actual cross cousin, if one is available, is often considered first, but more distant cross cousins or other relatives are also popular. This means that to some extent the price of a groom depends on the wealth of his wider kin group, who form the group of most likely potential affines. It could be argued that this wider kin group is in fact acting as a subcaste, whose perceived status in the hierarchy determines the value of the dowries they will give and receive between them. However, as I have said above, I believe that it is in fact a much more fluid situation than such an analysis would allow, with a great deal of mobility, and with status much more immediately dependent on present wealth and position than claims to innate superiority.

Dowry amounts depend, as I have shown, on strategies of both bride's and groom's families, but they also depend on what is seen as a "reasonable" amount in the given circumstances, and this is currently subject to some change. Gulf money has created a degree of inflation in dowry in the community over the last 10 years, so that *when* a woman married often has more to do with what dowry she got than *whom* she married. This means that a group of sisters may often receive quite different dowries depending on their age, and can lead to disputes in the family. When I asked about whether sons-in-law demanded more dowry after marriage (as is notoriously the case in North India), people denied it, but I was told, "Sometimes the eldest daughter will see that her younger sister is getting a much bigger dowry than she did, and she will complain, 'You never gave so much to me, it's not right', and so on, but this is not usually serious".

We can see all these factors at work in the case of Rita's family. Here the eldest daughter, Agnes, married with a dowry of Rs 37,000 (Rs 25,000 to the couple, Rs 12,000 to the groom's parents). Her husband has a fairly

good education and is a member of the Church Finance Committee - he migrated to work in Malaysia for a while but got malaria and was forced to return after only a short time. The second sister, marrying fairly soon after, got only Rs 25,000 of which Rs 10,000 went to her husband's family. Her husband is a good fisherman, but less well educated than his brother-in-law. Now, some eight years later, the family are considering the marriage of the third daughter, and are agreed on a dowry in the area of Rs 1 lakh. Not only have dowries increased with inflation, the ability of the family to pay has also increased, with the eldest two sons working on a plywood boat owned by Rita and Agnes jointly. Also the third daughter, being well educated herself (she has been to college) deserves an educated bridegroom, and "such a boy will be expensive".

This section has, I hope, given some idea of the strategies and negotiations that go on around marriage, and the payment of dowry. I want to look now at what dowry is in this community, at the different components of the marriage payment and how they are understood: particularly, in the context of comparative discussions of dowry, I want to look at the matter of to what extent it constitutes wealth or inheritance for women.

Marriage Payments

Before I go on to look at dowry in the fishing community, it is perhaps relevant to look briefly at some of the comparative literature for India. Goody and Tambiah's classic work on dowry and bridewealth attempted to demonstrate that dowry in India could best be considered as a from of pre-mortem inheritance for the bride, an inheritance in moveable valuables that was associated with a system of diverging devolution of property from the estate to all children equally (Goody and Tambiah 1973). This formulation has however been much criticized (eg Sharma 1984; Srinivas 1984; Caplan 1994) since to a large extent dowry in India is controlled by the groom's family, rather than the bride or even the conjugal couple, and in any case is not usually calculated as a proportion of the family estate. Tambiah himself in a later paper has been forced to concede that, "the proposition that dowry in North India is primarily meant to form part of the conjugal fund of the marrying couple cannot be sustained in its original form" (1989: 421). There is widespread evidence in South India at least that the groom's family are often at liberty to use the incoming dowry of their son to pay for the dowries of their daughters (Gough 1956: 824; Beck 1972: 237; Fuller 1974: 180; Visvanathan 1989: 1342; Caplan 1994: 360). Thus in fact there are many ways in which dowry, certainly in modern India, operates as a form of *groomwealth* directly comparable to the

"circulating social fund" which bridewealth represents in parts of Africa, rather than radically distinguished from it. There are however broad differences between dowry as practiced in the North of India and in the South, where it is historically a less common phenomenon, which relate to kinship and marriage practices, and make it difficult to maintain any one simple analytical frame.

The North: The Gift along with the Virgin

In North India dowry is characterized as a gift freely given by the bride's family along with the bride herself, the "gift of a virgin", *kanyadan*. The size of the dowry is a matter for the prestige of the bride's family and kin, and often associated with the status of the groom, which should ideally be higher than that of the bride's family. The bride is completely transferred, together with the goods that accompany her, to the groom's family, who may live at a considerable distance, and certainly in a different village. The marriage sets up a long term relationship between bride's kin and groom's, which is characterized by the continuing flow of gifts from the former to the latter, a flow which must be unreciprocated (see e.g. Vatuk 1975; Madan 1975; Parry 1979; Raheja 1988).

Dowry in this case is very far from being considered the property of the bride, and apart from a small proportion which is specifically considered to be hers alone, usually some items of clothing and jewelry, the rights over it belong with the groom's family. Even the groom may not have a great deal of control over the dowry, which, as the property of the joint household, is most often controlled in fact by his parents. As Vatuk has noted, even where a couple set up house on their own immediately after marriage, it is still for the groom's mother to allocate them what she chooses out of the dowry property, it is not their right simply to take it (Vatuk 1975: 163). Likewise the continuing gifts which are sent to the groom's family from the bride's are best seen as part of an ongoing relationship between the two families, rather than goods given specifically to the daughter. Under these circumstances, it makes little sense to think of the dowry as a woman's property, equivalent to that of her brother's share at inheritance, as Sharma (1984) points out.

Madan (1975) suggests that dowry here in fact serves three purposes, none of which are strictly that of inheritance. It is a means of compensating the daughter for her *lack* of rights of inheritance, rather than her loss of rights , for "what one does not possess in the first place cannot be lost" (1975: 235); it encourages the groom's family to treat the new bride well; and it enhances the prestige of the girl's family by demonstrating their wealth and status (ibid: 234). The amount of dowry

given then is something which relates to the situation of the family at the time, and the strategic choice of groom, and thus can vary considerably from one daughter to the next. It is certainly not a carefully calculated proportion of the family estate.

The South: Closeness of Kin and Equality of Gifts

In South India the kinship system and marriage practices differ quite considerably from the North, and consequently dowry payments have somewhat different implications. As Dumont (1983b) has described, marriage in the South tends to be typically an alliance between close kin, in which both sides are considered to be equal in status, and often live in the same village. Marriage payments, whether they can be represented overall as dowry or as bridewealth, tend not to be greatly imbalanced towards either one side or the other: a series of exchanges takes place which are characterized mainly by reciprocity.

The South Indian Dravidian kinship system is characterized by bilaterality, so that even where patrilineal principles are relatively stressed, there remains an essential bilateral symmetry which is not found in the North. Here women are more likely to retain control over the property they receive in dowry, and the contribution of men and women to the conjugal fund is likely to be more even. The fact that women often remain in their natal village makes it possible for the dowry to consist not only of moveable valuables but also of *land*, and this is a crucial difference between the North and the South (Tambiah 1973). It is in the South, in fact, that dowry can come closest to acting as a form of pre-mortem inheritance for women, as Upadhya (1990) has recently argued for coastal Andhra Pradesh. Nevertheless, even here there is a strong component of the dowry which is about marriage alliance, about the matching of bride's family and groom's family, and about the marking of status, and as such the calculation of dowry amounts often has more to do with the current strategies and situation of the bride's family than any calculation of a "just share" (e.g. Fuller 1974: 173; Visvanathan 1989: 1341; Caplan 1994: 363-4). While the dowry here may function more effectively as women's wealth, it cannot be considered simply to represent women's inheritance.

I want to turn now to the meaning and function of dowry payments in Marianad. While the situation here is clearly more comparable to that of the South than the North of India, there are a number of differences which can be explored.

Dowry in the Trivandrum Fishing Community

When talking in Marianad of the payments made at marriage the term most frequently used is that for dowry, *stridhanam*, literally "women's wealth". While much of the literature on dowry in India could be said to be an investigation of the misrepresentation inherent in this term, with the wealth exchanged being very far from the control or interests of the bride, in the fishing community there is a misrepresentation of another kind going on. Here the term dowry in fact covers two distinct kinds of payment. Of a dowry of 1 lakh (Rs 100, 000) ideally two thirds, Rs 60,000 or so, will go to the couple, and the remaining Rs 40,000 will go to the groom's parents[8]. When people talk of the dowry they received, they usually refer to the amount they actually got themselves; when they talk of the dowry they gave for their daughter they commonly refer to the whole amount, including the share of the groom's family. These two components are in fact quite distinct, and have very different meanings and implications. I shall start then by considering the payment that goes to the couple, a "dowry in the strict sense of the term".

Dowry as women's inheritance

In the previous section we touched on the difference between daughters and sons in terms of their continuing connection with their families. One of the most crucial markers of difference between them is of course the matter of dowry, which one has to give for daughters but which one gets for sons. If the practice of uxorilocal marriage gives a sense of greater connection to and closeness with daughters, then dowry adds to this the sense of burden and responsibility that a daughter represents compared with a son. "Boys are better because you don't have to earn for them like girls. Boys earn for themselves". Not only that, but boys bring money *in* on marriage. Thus Bridget joked, "I have one daughter and two sons. When I've settled my daughter then I can look forward to my sons' dowries and be self sufficient!" From the point of view of the family who gives dowry the crucial issue is that they give it to their daughters and not their sons, and it is this aspect which I want to look at first, before turning to the issue of how much control women in fact have over their dowry.

For most families in the village, the successful settling of their daughters is the ultimate aim of all their work. "When the dowries are paid,

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[8] As has been noted above, the payment of a 'groomprice' component to the groom's family seems to be in fact quite common in South India (Gough 1956; Beck 1972; Fuller 1974; Visvanathan 1989; Caplan 1994). Among the Syrian Christians of Kerala, this formed a much larger proportion of the whole, around 2/3 to 4/5 (Fuller 1974: 180): in the other cases the relative values are not given.

then the hard work is over. Then you can sit back and wait for death!" If there is any money or property remaining to the couple when they die, this is shared out among all their children, sons and daughters alike, but it is in fact rare that there would be anything left by this time: any savings or property would have gone long before in settling the daughters of the house with as good a dowry as possible. There is then a sense in which this works as a matrilineal inheritance system by default. In fact for the boys it is not just a case of not receiving money from their parents but rather the other way round: it is often money earned by the sons in their early twenties which is essential to raising the dowry in the first place.

Daughters, then, may be a burden and responsibility, but they are also the heirs, those to whom all the work is oriented, the ones who make it all worthwhile. When I asked Jemilie to whom their savings belonged, whether her or her husband, she explained: "We don't talk about money and savings belonging to either of us. We say it's the children's. It's their money." Another woman told me, "We keep our savings in a bank account, which is in my daughter's name. It's for her, when she marries." The story of Jayraj gives, I think, an insight into this feeling that daughters are the ones for whom you work and save.

Jayraj is a relatively successful fisherman, who has made enough money to now own a plywood boat and outboard engine. Mabel Mary, his wife, explained how at first she had born only sons: "Then Jayraj prayed to the Virgin Mary and said, 'Mother, if you give me a daughter, till I die I will come to your shrine'. Then we had *four* daughters! Jayraj was happy - he says he asked only for one, but look - she has given me four! He sees it as a great gift. But I worry sometimes about finding the money to settle them well". I asked her why Jayraj wanted daughters so much. "You see, he was at that time a very good worker, and we were making a lot of money, but without a daughter there was no-one that it was all for. He was afraid that all my relatives would come round and ask me for it, and especially that I would give it for my sisters. He was afraid I'd take all the money to my house! But if we had a daughter then the money would be for her. So he said, 'Please give me a daughter I can spend my money on'."

This idea of daughters as in some sense the heirs, the ones to whom whatever money the family has will eventually go, gives dowry a meaning that it does not have in more patrilineal societies. It emphasizes the daughter as the recipient of dowry, rather than the son-in-law or his family: it is seen as hers, as given to her by her family. "The dowry is the wife's property. It's given to her by her parents, a form of insurance in case her husband is not a good man and does not support her properly. The dowry is hers, to look after her". Rajamma, talking of her daughter, said, "The dowry is Shobha's money. He must ask for it if he wants to use it for anything." Flossy was equally adamant: "The dowry is usually held in a

joint account. But the girl can always say, 'It's my money', and if he wants to spend it he will not only ask her but he should ask the parents as well. This is to guard against later accusations from them that he did a stupid thing with it and lost it and if he'd only taken their advice. Especially if he tries to get a visa [for the Gulf] and fails, then the parents would say 'Why didn't you consult us?'" Even where people admit that this is not always followed in practice, they agree that in principle it is wrong of him not to. "There are some who ask and some who don't. But if they don't ask, that's when a quarrel would begin... Generally he would be expected to ask."

There is, then, a strong moral discourse which asserts the right of the wife to exert control over her own dowry, and the obligation of a husband to consult her if he wants to use it. The extent to which women do in fact have any control over their dowry is a more complex issue, and it is one to which I will now turn.

Dowry as women's wealth

Dowry is given to the couple on marriage: primarily, as the family see it, to the daughter. Yet the uses to which dowry is put could be seen as removing it from the wife's control to that of the husband. There are four principle uses to which it can be put. Ideally it will be used to buy boats and other equipment, which will mean that the couple have an assured income from fishing, and a much higher income than is possible from working on a share basis. In the last ten years an increasingly popular yet risky enterprise is to use the dowry to buy a Gulf visa, enabling the husband to go and seek work as a migrant labourer. Unless the family have good connections (ideally a brother already working there) this strategy has a high chance of failure, with the money either being lost to a crooked agent, or the man failing to secure a job once he has got to the Gulf and having to return empty handed. The money may also be used to buy a plot of land and put up a house, usually no more than three rooms with coconut thatched wall and roof, maybe with a concrete base. Finally the money can be lent out at interest, providing a steady income of 3% per month.

Of these options, only the last could be said to result in the wife retaining direct control of the money. In the business of lending, though it is acknowledged that it will be the couple together or even the husband who will ultimately decide where large sums are concerned, it is often the wife who is approached initially by potential borrowers. It is usually the wife also who deals with the practicalities of credit, and it is almost certainly she who will arrange to collect the interest when it is due, and decide what to do with it when she gets it. The issue of who has most control over the credit relations of the household is a complex one, which

is dealt with more fully elsewhere (see Chapter 5), but certainly women have considerably more say over the use of money than they do over the use of boats and fishing equipment.

Dowry used to buy boats could be said to be dowry that has passed from the wife's control to that of the husband - it is seen as his boat, and decisions as to who will crew it with him or what kind of fishing will be done and when are mostly his[9]. The same could be said of the Gulf visa. Though women may have a lot to do with the decision to try for a visa or to send their husband to the Gulf, ultimately the job is his, the wages are his, and once he has gone, the matter is out of her hands. The spiralling increases in the expense of these kinds of investment, with the growing emphasis on motorized fishing and Gulf migration, has led Kalpana Ram to see a historical transformation of dowry in the community from "women's wealth" to male capital accumulation (Ram 1991: Chapter 8). Nalini Nayak, who has worked closely with the fishing community for many years, clearly sees dowry as having always been very far from the control of women: "Which woman has control over her dowry? First of all, initially it went in terms of equipment. Now it goes in terms of cash to buy equipment. OK - if it goes to buy a piece of land, fine, then the woman sees something of it - but if it goes to buy an NOC[10], a visa, what control does a woman have over that?" (Nayak, interview 1992).

There is certainly a sense in which control has passed from husband to wife in most of these cases, yet the situation is more fluid and complex than such characterizations would imply. The shift from female to male wealth has to do with the gendered nature of the economy. If the money is to be put to productive use to ultimately generate an income for the family as a whole then it will almost inevitably pass into male hands, since the two most productive areas of the economy, fishing and Gulf migration, are almost entirely male concerns[11]. Women, however, see the benefits of such investment in the form of increased male earnings, and thus increased household income, over which they have, I would argue, a great deal of control. Although they could be said to be put in the position of being dependent on their husbands for this income rather than controlling it directly themselves, with their rights to it solely as wives, in fact women have a good deal of control over how the household finances are run, and over decisions made with respect to fishing or migration, and there are strong obligations on men to hand over their earnings directly to

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9 While some women own boats in their own right, this is usually because they are widowed, or their husband is incapacitated: when the husband is an active fisherman the boat will always be *de facto* his.

10 No Objection Certificate.

11 A few women find jobs in the Gulf, as domestic servants or labourers, but I have very little information on this and I believe it is relatively unusual.

their wives[12]. There is also a strong sense here of the married couple as a solidary unit, their work mutually oriented towards each other and the next generation, so that, as Jemilie explained, "We don't say it's my money or his money, we say it's the children's money". Under these circumstances, to characterize fishing equipment as "male wealth" and cash reserves or gold as "women's wealth" in fact makes very little sense.

So far this discussion has concerned the dowry proper, the sum transferred to the couple at the wedding. The other component of dowry, the sum transferred to the groom's parents, is quite separate, and has a very different set of meanings and implications.

Mulukudi Panam: the groom price.

People talk commonly of dowry in terms of saving for their daughters, as I have claimed above, but there is another common idiom of dowry, as the price of a son-in-law. When talking of marriage, there is also much talk of what sort of boy the family can afford, of how expensive the boy will be, of what this family or that family will ask for their son and if he's worth it. This sense of dowry as the price of the groom is one that is loosely applied to the whole of the dowry, but which in fact relates particularly to the component of dowry which goes to the groom's parents.

"Suppose I want to get my daughter married to a boy I think is really nice, who will look after her well. I will go to that place and ask his parents if they are willing to give their son to us. They can demand any amount they like, and if I think it's worth it I will agree to pay". Mabel Mary's description of the process of arranging a marriage was echoed many times by other people. Always it is the girl's parents who approach the boy's - in contrast to the practice of most Hindu groups in Kerala, where it is strictly supposed to be the other way around[13]. People in Marianad freely admitted that it was like a transaction: "Yes, it's like buying a son-in-law. It's bad that it should be that way but you cannot do anything about it individually. The whole of society must change. You must buy a son-in-law or you won't get one at all".

The component of the dowry that goes to the groom's parents is given to them before the wedding actually takes place, maybe one month or so, in contrast to the portion that goes to the couple which is given on the wedding day itself. It is used partly to finance new clothes for the groom's party, for the immediate family and for the uncles and aunts. The groom's

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12 Chapter 4 explores in more detail this matter of women and money, and shows how women are predominantly associated with household financial management and control over money, a theme which is extended in Chapter 5 where we see how crucial women's involvement is in the credit economy.

13 To a Hindu friend of mine the idea was extraordinary: "To ask for the boy like that, to say, 'Give me your *son*' - it's shameful!"

family are also responsible for buying the *tali*, the gold pendant which the groom ties round his bride's neck to signify her married status. This should be about a *paven* of gold in weight (one gold sovereign, or 8 grams) and would be worth around Rs 3,500 in 1992. Often people emphasize these expenses of the groom's family, and play down the significance of the dowry payment to them. "Whatever the boy's parents get, it's only nominal really, because they have to spend a lot taking new clothes, and to buy the *tali*". It is referred to politely as "pocket money" (the English term), implying that it is a small matter, that after their expenses they are left with only small change. There is another term for the payment however, which gives a completely different twist, and which relates directly to the understanding of the transaction as an exchange of rights between the two families, and this is the Malayalam term, *mulukudi panam*, or "breast feeding money" (literally, breast-drinking money).

Mulukudi panam is seen as an old fashioned term, and is not much in use any more, but everyone knew of it, and was aware of the implications it carried. Bridget explained, "It's a colloquial name for it. Usually it's politely referred to as 'pocket money'. But people will refer to it as *mulukudi panam* when they want to hurt, when you want to make a point about it, or have an argument... Because that's basically what it *is*, but we would refer to that underlying reason only to make a point". Shobha also disapproved of its use: "*Mulukudi panam* is only used as a joke, it's not nice... It's because the mother feeds them and brings them up - there is an obligation to her for that". But it is not only about nurture, as Shobha's husband pointed out, "Because girls are equally brought up by the mother and you don't get anything for them". The crucial factor is that girls remain with you and boys go to the wife's family: "People expect it for the boy and not for the girl. It's because they go to a different family. Once they are married they go to the wife. You could see this money as a kind of deposit for the future for when the calamity happens [i.e. he leaves the house]. There will be no more income from him then".

Mulukudi panam is the money a family gets for the boy they have fed and brought up. Particularly the reference to breast milk points to the mother as the one who does most of this work of feeding and nurturing. The money compensates the family for the transfer of the boy to his wife's family - frequently a physical transfer from one house to the other but in any case a transfer of the rights over his labour and his earnings. As we have seen above, there is a common expectation that the man will switch his loyalties and support to his wife's family on marriage, and here we can see this same expectation in the context of the marriage payments. "Once boys are married their responsibility is to the wife's family. The money that goes to his parents, it's for this, to compensate them for this loss".

Conclusion

Dowry payments in the fishing community, both dowry proper and the groom price component, differ quite considerably from dowry as it has been described for North India, and indeed, there are significant differences from the classic South Indian pattern also. Dowry here, as elsewhere in India, cannot be said to function as pre-mortem inheritance, for the simple reason that, as we have seen, calculations of the amount given relate to the strategies of marriage and the current wealth of the family rather than some inheritance portion. Nevertheless, dowry here does in fact seem to lead by default to a rather uneven process of inheritance of family wealth by daughters, and certainly there are ways in which it is seen as such by people in the community themselves. Because there is virtually no property here in land, the transfer of cash to daughters in fact usually leaves the parents at the end with very little by way of inheritance at all[14]. What little there is would in principle be divided between all the children equally, leaving sons with very little indeed passed down from their parents. In fact sons in general are net contributors to their parents (and thus sisters) not only through their wages when unmarried, but through the institution of the groom price.

The idea of dowry as in fact a "groom price" can be seen to be increasing as an idiom and practice in marriage in modern India (e.g. Srinivas 1984; Upadhya 1990; Caplan 1994). Though there are similarities with the situation in Marianad, here groom price has a quite different ultimate basis in the idea of compensation for the transfer of a man from his natal house to that of his wife. This is related to the dominant practice of uxorilocality and the associated idea that men become relatively detached from obligations to their natal family. In this the fishing community differs quite considerably from the classic South Indian pattern of marriage alliance and continuing exchange relations between bride and groom's kin: here there is no ongoing relationship, or certainly not a formally recognized or necessary one.

This in fact relates to another important factor which gives dowry in Marianad its particular configuration. Marriage here creates an entirely new and separate economic unit. While the conjugal couple may very well stay with the bride's parents for the first few years, and may be involved in a number of arrangements with them as a consequence, of lending, borrowing, and mutual support, their finances are in fact considered to be quite separate right from the beginning[15]. There is here no joint family

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[14] In fact even where immovable property exists, in the form of land or a house, it is often transferred to the youngest daughter as dowry, as we have seen above.

[15] This is in marked contrast to the Nayar and Syrian Christian households described by Fuller (1974; 1976), where although the conjugal couple ideally formed their own household unit fairly soon after the birth of their first child, until then their finances were completely merged with those of the joint

wealth, no control over the household's money by the senior members: each married couple is responsible for their own money, and each contributes separately to the joint household expenses. The dowry is the property then solely of the married couple, it forms the nucleus of a new economic unit, a unit in which responsibility for and control of finances is predominantly the role of the wife, as will become clear in later chapters (particularly Chapters 4 and 5). Dowry then here comes quite close in fact to being "women's wealth".

This chapter has looked at marriage in terms of residence and marriage payments, in terms of the setting up of a new unit, the beginnings of a joint enterprise between husband and wife. Marriage sets up a relationship between husband and wife of mutual interdependence, of exchange, and the importance of such transactions for an understanding of the links between people will become clear in later chapters. The next chapter looks at another crucial aspect of marriage, another exchange, the procreation of children. The links of kinship that are set up between parents and children give rise to divisions between close kin which in turn are crucial to considerations of marriage, and to the understanding of gender and the person. While this chapter has given an important sense of the practices and strategies of marriage and the significance of gender difference in the changing relations between families and their children, the next chapter will be concerned with more underlying symbolic ideas about gender and connections of substance.

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family. Thus: "it is very rare indeed for any Nayar household, or a household of any other community in this region of Kerala for that matter, not to form a single economic unit" (Fuller 1976: 64).

Chapter 2

Gender, Kinship and the Tracing of Relatedness

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance....Always substance and increase,
Always a knit of identity....always distinction....always a breed of life.
To elaborate is no avail....Learned and unlearned feel that it is so.

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass.*

When Rajamma was looking for a husband for her daughter Shobha, she turned first to her own family: the boy they eventually decided on was Rajamma's mother's sister's son's son. In analytical kinship terms he is Shobha's second cross cousin: to Shobha he is simply her *aliyan*, her cousin, or, more suggestively, her *murapaiyan*, the "right boy". Rajamma herself is married to a close relative, her mother's brother's son, and she feels that it was a good choice. "Joseph and I knew each other before we married - he liked me, and we were happy about it. It's better that way, when you know each other, and the families know each other". Marrying a relative, a cousin, is not an unusual occurrence in the village, and from an early age girls and boys can be teased by pointing out that their relationship is that of *murapaiyan* and *murapennu*, the "right boy" and the "right girl", ideal spouses. Though they are kin, *sondham*, nevertheless they are considered marriageable, they are considered different from each other, in the way strangers are different, so that marriage remains "always a knit of identity....always distinction". But marriage is also, above all, "substance and increase ... always a breed of life". In this chapter I want to explore the meanings of relatedness, of marriage and procreation, of "substance and increase", and the ways in which gender difference underlies the understanding of what makes people marriageable, and what makes them the same.

Mukkuvar Kinship Terminology

Shobha and her new husband are cross cousins, as are Rajamma and Joseph. In general the terms for kin in use in Marianad distinguish sharply between cross kin, and parallel kin, and it is only the cross cousin who is eligible as a *murapaiyan*. Shobha's mother's sister's son, James, is not her *aliyan*, but her *chetan*, her brother, and to think of marrying him

would be quite ridiculous. The full scheme of kin terms used in the fishing community is given in Figure 2: it is in fact a Dravidian terminology, as can be seen from comparison with the outline Dravidian system (Figure 1).

The preferred spouse in this system is the cross cousin of the right relative age (older for women, younger for men): the parallel cousin, by contrast, is quite out of bounds as a marriage partner. There is, then, a radical distinction made between siblings and their children on the basis of gender, separating the children of same sex siblings, considered to be related as sister and brother, from the children of different sex siblings, considered to be marriageable. The cross cousins are all referred to be terms which are also used for affines (*nattun* - brother's wife, husband's sister; *aliyan* - wife's brother, sister's husband). In the case of the cross cousin who is opposite in sex and the right relative age the term is even more relevant - *murapaiyan* (right boy) and *murapennu* (right girl) indicate clearly the preferred spouse. The assumption of cross cousin marriage is also implicit in the terms for the parent's and children's generations: *maman*'s wife (MBW) is *mami*, regardless of whether she is in fact father's sister or not.

		Male			Female	
		Cross	*Parallel*		*Parallel*	*Cross*
G2		grand fathers MF FF			grand mothers MM FM	
G1	e	MB FZH SpF	FeB MeZH	F	MeZ FeBW	FZ MBW SpM
	y		FyB MyZH		MyZ FyBW	
G0	e	e(FZS) e(MBS)	eB e(FBS) e(MZS)	EGO	eZ e(FBD) e(MZD)	e(FZD) e(MBD)
	y	y(FZS) y(MBS)	yB Y(FBS) y(MZS)		yZ y(FBD) y(MZD)	y(FZD) y(MBD)
G-1		ZS (ms) BS (ws)	S BS (ms) ZS (ws)		D BD (ms) ZD (ws)	ZD (ms) BD (ws)
G-2		grand sons DS SS			grand daughters SD DD	

Figure 1: The Categories of Dravidian Kinship (from Trautmann 1981)

Similarly *valiyachan* is always married to *valiyamma*. One's spouse's parents are *maman* and *mami*, one's children's spouses *marumakan* and *marumakal*.

This kinship system, while using many of the same terms, differs quite considerably in fact from those usually described for communities in Kerala (e.g. Gough 1959; Aiyappan 1965; Mencher 1967; Fuller 1974, 1976; F. Osella 1993). The in-law terms *nattun* and *aliyan* are here applied to the cross cousins, and the distinction between cross and parallel kin is maintained in the generations above and below ego's. For the Nayar, Brahman and Izhava communities in Kerala, cross cousins are referred to by sibling terms, and it is only the actual affines who are referred to as *aliyan* or *nattun*. Thus, although the terms *murapaiyan* and *murapennu*, or variants, do exist and refer to the actual cross cousin as the ideal marriage partner, there is no classificatory generalization here to the *class* of cross cousins, and the system cannot be considered classically Dravidian in form (Fuller 1976: 76-78)[1].

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2" rowspan="2"></th><th colspan="2">Male</th><th colspan="2">Female</th></tr>
<tr><th>Cross</th><th>Parallel</th><th>Parallel</th><th>Cross</th></tr>
<tr><td>G2</td><td></td><td colspan="2">achacchan /muttacchan</td><td colspan="2">ammumma /muttachi</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">G1</td><td>e</td><td rowspan="2">maman</td><td>valiyachan
acchan F</td><td>valiyamma
M amma</td><td rowspan="2">mami</td></tr>
<tr><td>y</td><td>kochacchan</td><td>kunyamma</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">G0</td><td>e</td><td>aliyan (ms)
murapaiyan
(ws)</td><td>chetan
annan</td><td>chechi</td><td>chetati (ms)
nattun (ws)</td></tr>
<tr><td>y</td><td>aliyan (ms)
aliyan (ws)</td><td>anujan/
aniyen</td><td>anujati/
aniyetti</td><td>murapennu
(ms)
nattun (ws)</td></tr>
<tr><td>G-1</td><td></td><td>marumakan</td><td>makan
(mon)</td><td>makal
(mol)</td><td>marumakal</td></tr>
<tr><td>G-2</td><td></td><td colspan="2">cherumakan (cherumon)</td><td colspan="2">cherumakal (cherumol)</td></tr>
</table>

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Figure 2: Mukkuvar Kinship Terminology

[1] The lower caste Izhava community appears to have had a more strongly Dravidian terminology in the past, with older informants using in-law terms for cross cousins terms in the same way as with the Mukkuvar (Aiyappan 1944: 97). Emulation of the more prestigious system in use by high caste Nayar and Brahmin communities has however spread throughout the region, although currently marriage with the actual cross cousin is more common among Izhavas, especially among the poorer members of this community (F. Osella 1993).

Geographically the Mukkuvar community in Kerala live very close to the borders with Tamil Nadu, and in fact the Latin Catholic fishing community along the lower part of the coast from Quilon to Kanyakumari can be considered in many ways one community. The Mukkuvar of Kanyakumari District have been described by Kalpana Ram (1991): they have a standard Tamil Dravidian kinship terminology. The fishing community of Trivandrum District then can be considered much closer to Tamil groups than to their Kerala neighbours in terms of the distinctions they make between kin. In this chapter, I shall be concerned with some of the ideas that underlie these distinctions and how they come to be understood.

Terminology and Relatedness

The Importance of Gender

It is as children, in fact, that people begin to be made aware of the meanings and importance of the distinctions of kin, most particularly the difference made between male and female in this system. This is a terminology that distinguishes clearly by gender within a sibling group, so that a group of sisters are considered essentially the same as each other, and essentially different from the group of their brothers. For a young child, his mother's sisters are alternative mothers: if older they are referred to as *valiyamma* ("big mother"), if younger they are *kunyamma* ("little mother"). It is common, in fact, for him to drop the prefix and simply call them *amma*, while they in turn call him *mon*, son. Women explain this by saying that with sisters, there is a special closeness: "their children are like your own children".

Similarly with the father"s brothers, the essential similarity to the father is pointed to by the terms used, *valiyacchan* ("big father") and *kochacchan* ("little father"). Although in this uxorilocal community the father"s brothers are not so likely to live in as close physical proximity as the mother"s sisters, and relations will be more formal, there is nevertheless a clear understanding that these men are like fathers to their brother"s children.

Mother"s brother, however, is *maman*. He is neither another mother nor another father, but, like his wife, and father"s sister (*mami*), something altogether different. He is like mother because they share the same parents, the same natal house, they are siblings - yet he is not like mother because he is male. His maleness makes him like father, and brothers-in-law will often be work partners, will fish together, play cards together, do the same kinds of thing. Yet here the resemblance ends,

because he is not close kin to father, they are not from one family. Mother"s brother, like mother in one way, like father in another way, is yet not totally like either of them, and father"s sister, similarly, is different from either mother or father.

The importance of the distinction of siblings by gender manifests itself with even greater force in the second generation. This is a system which distinguishes clearly not only between brothers and sisters but also between mothers and fathers, and thus between the kinds of relations constructed by each parent with their children. The children of two brothers, like the children of two sisters, call each other *chechi*, *aniyetti*, *chetan*, *anujan*: they are brothers and sisters to each other. But the children of a brother and a sister are not so related: instead they are cousins to each other, and potential spouses.

This distinction between the parallel and cross cousins is one which is clearly felt and articulated by people in Marianad. They *know* that their mother"s sister"s children are crucially similar to them in ways that their father"s sister"s children are not, and this is knowledge that is most often articulated in terms of marriage and marriageability. Thus Bridget, asked about the difference between cross and parallel cousins, simply explained, "You can marry your mother"s brother"s son, that is allowed. But your mother"s sister"s son and your father"s brother"s son - that is impossible. They are too close to you. They are like brothers. You cannot marry your *brother*". The strong sense of the unthinkable nature of such a union was voiced more simply by Simon, who said, "To marry my mother"s sister"s daughter - how could I do that? She is my own sister!"

Pushed for the reasons behind this intuitive understanding of the difference between cross and parallel cousins, people become more tentative, they improvise, admit defeat, or simply say, "That"s the way it is". There is here no neat, intellectualized theory of relatedness. Nevertheless, there are some ideas about what constitutes relatedness, and these come out of people"s discussions of blood and other substances.

Relatedness: metaphors and metonyms

The one link between kin that was most consistently explained by a theory of relatedness was, interestingly, that between the children of two brothers. As Francis explained it, "It"s the blood that makes the difference. The blood comes from the father. Your father and his brother have the same blood, so their children have the same blood. Your father"s sister"s children, they have their own father"s blood, so they"re different". This left the problem of explaining why one"s mother"s sister"s children had the same blood as oneself, given that mother and her sister had different

husbands. But for most people , though they recognized the logical flaw, this was the link that was most obvious: "They are your own sisters and brothers. It"s just like that". Women, after all, carried their children in their wombs, and "if children are carried by the same woman, that makes them brother and sister. Between two sisters it"s the same, their children are brother and sister".

The relative ease with which people produced the argument about blood suggests to me that it was precisely this link, between the children of brothers, that they themselves felt most uneasy about, the link that was least intuitive and most in need of intellectual reinforcement. Certainly uxorilocal residence and frequent sharing of child care between sisters meant that children were likely to grow up in the company of their mother"s sister"s children, while their father"s brother"s children may well live in a different village. This theory also makes use of dominant patrilineal Hindu ideas about blood, which play down the female contribution to the child. It is contradicted by the ideas articulated by people in more general discussions about procreation, where children are considered to be part of both their mother and their father. In terms of blood, people will most commonly say, "The blood comes equally from mother and father".

There is thus a substantial connection between both mothers and fathers and their children, but these are not connections which are entirely equal in kind. Paulos distinguished it thus: "See, the father is the *origin* of the blood. But it"s the mother who *makes* the blood, the mother has the child in her womb for all those months, she shapes the child. She has the more important part, I think". Roman also stressed the importance of the mother"s part: "The father provides the seed. But the mother is like the farmer, who causes it to grow. Anyone can scatter seed on the ground, but it takes a skillful farmer and a lot of hard work to make the seed grow"[2].

When talking of mothering, the most common associations are with the womb, in which women carry children and "shape" them, and the breast milk, with which they feed them after they are born. "Children are closer to their mother. The mother carries the child in her womb, and she feeds it. She feeds it with her milk, and even after that she takes most care of it". These associations are also evoked by the term for the money paid to compensate a groom"s family for his loss on marriage, which as I mentioned earlier, is called *mulukudi panam*, "breast feeding money".

There is a dominant sense of complementarity here, of bilaterality, which accords with the widespread presence of bilateral principles across the Dravidian region and the symmetry of the kinship system. This was

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[2]It is interesting to contrast this with the more usual metaphor for the male and female part in producing children, that of seed and *earth*, which stresses female passivity and the relative unimportance of their role (see Dube 1986).

most clearly put to me by Flossy who said, "Babies have part of both their mother and their father. You can"t point to one bit, like the blood or the skin, and say that is the mother"s or that is the father"s. They have something of both". However, although it is not possible to identify parts of the child that have come from the mother or the father, there is nevertheless a sense of difference in the way parents are connected to their children. Children share blood and substance with both their parents, but they are transferred via the semen, in the case of men, and the womb and breast milk in the case of women. These differences between women and men are crucial, and here the metonymic sense of relatedness which has been outlined above is complemented by a factor which makes this more than just a bilateral system: a metaphoric sense of relatedness, based on gender.

Mothers and Daughters, Fathers and Sons

There is a common understanding in Marianad that women are seen as more closely related to their mothers, and men to their fathers, and this underlies the distinctions made between groups of same sex and cross sex siblings. Thus as Cecilie put it: "Father and son are more related than father and daughter. It"s the same for mother and daughter - they are closer. That"s why sisters are like each other, and they are not so close to their brothers". This is reflected in naming practices in the community, with women taking as their family name the first name of their mother, while men take the first name of their father. Thus Lily Rosemary is the daughter of Lily, and George Victor the son of George. This idea of relatedness is seen even more clearly from the early account by Thurston and Rangachari (1909: 106), where they note of the Mukkuvar that, when a marriage took place between a Mukkuvar woman and a Mappilla (Muslim) man, the girls of the family would stay with the Mukkuvars, but the boys would be returned to the Mappillas.

What daughters have in common with their mothers that their brothers do not is, simply, their femaleness. It is the metaphoric link that, I would argue, is operating here: in being women, they are both like each other and also different from son and brother, as men. A metaphoric difference becomes a difference in kind: a difference that ultimately makes a difference to the ways people are related to each other. Women are mothers to their children, men are fathers, women"s contribution is a female one, men"s a male one. To their daughters, women pass on their femaleness, to their sons, men pass on their maleness[3].

[3] Trawick (1990: 158-165) describes a very similar understanding in Tamil Nadu. See also Chapter 7.

Thus, the mother"s brother differs from the mother in being male: he is therefore a *father* to his children while she is a *mother* to hers. It is his wife (*mami*) who is his children"s mother, a woman who is as different from ego"s own mother as she could be (except in being female)[4]. Ego"s father is similarly as different from her mother"s brother as he could be (except in being male). The cross cousins, then, have both unrelated mothers and unrelated fathers, and hence are as little related to each other as they could be: they are in fact potential spouses.

The mother"s sister on the other hand is like mother in being from one family, *and* she is like her in being female. Her husband, being of a marriageable category to her, is also of a marriageable category to the mother - he is, in fact, like a brother to the father, whether or not he is actually the father"s brother. Thus the child"s parallel cousins have a mother who is as like the child"s own mother as she could be, and a father who is as like her own father as he could be: these children share both mothering and fathering with her, and are, of course, considered as her siblings.

It is this radical distinction between the children of same sex siblings and those of different sex siblings which provides the conditions of possibility of cross cousin marriage. The preference for the cross cousin is expressed among the fishing community as a preference for marriage with a close relative, so that the practice of cross cousin marriage becomes not just the application of a simple rule that "you should marry your cross cousin", but rather of a series of related axioms: it is good to marry a relative (*sondham*); yet you cannot marry too close a relative (a brother or a sister); your parallel cousins are brother and sister to you and hence unmarriageable; your cross cousins are the closest relatives who are "different" enough to be marriageable; therefore the cross cousin is the best spouse.

My contention is, then, that relatedness crucially depends on the differentiation of a female link from a male, and that a person is constituted by the combination of female and male relatedness. It is possible to construct a model of this kinship system which shows how these factors account for terminology and marriage which may perhaps make clearer the skeleton of my description. I do not claim this is how the system works in reality, merely that as a heuristic device it may have something to offer us.

[4]Her difference from the mother is axiomatic - if she were the same, her marriage with the mother's brother would be incestuous.

Modelling the system

In this system people marry those with whom they share neither mothering, fathering, nor gender (obviously). Gender determines which part, mother"s or father"s, will be passed on to your children: women, like their mothers, shape and feed the child in the womb, give them breast milk as they grow; men, like their fathers, provide the seed, the origin. Children are related to both mother and father, though differently, and brothers and sisters have the same substance.

There is one additional logical element which gives this system its powerful capability to embrace large numbers of only distantly related people: there is an extensionist (metaphoric) logic in operation by which the many links that separate distant kin become compressed into one, by which equivalence becomes equality, and a man who is like your own father (for whatever combination of reasons) becomes another "father" to you and is assumed to be of the same substance. The symbolic logic operating here could be described as *iconic*, the identity being the partial identity of map and territory, the connection that which Daniel sees as at the heart of Tamil culture (Daniel 1984). Thus the man who is assimilated to the father's brother *stands* for the father's brother, he can substitute for the father's brother, and in a sense he *is* the father's brother.

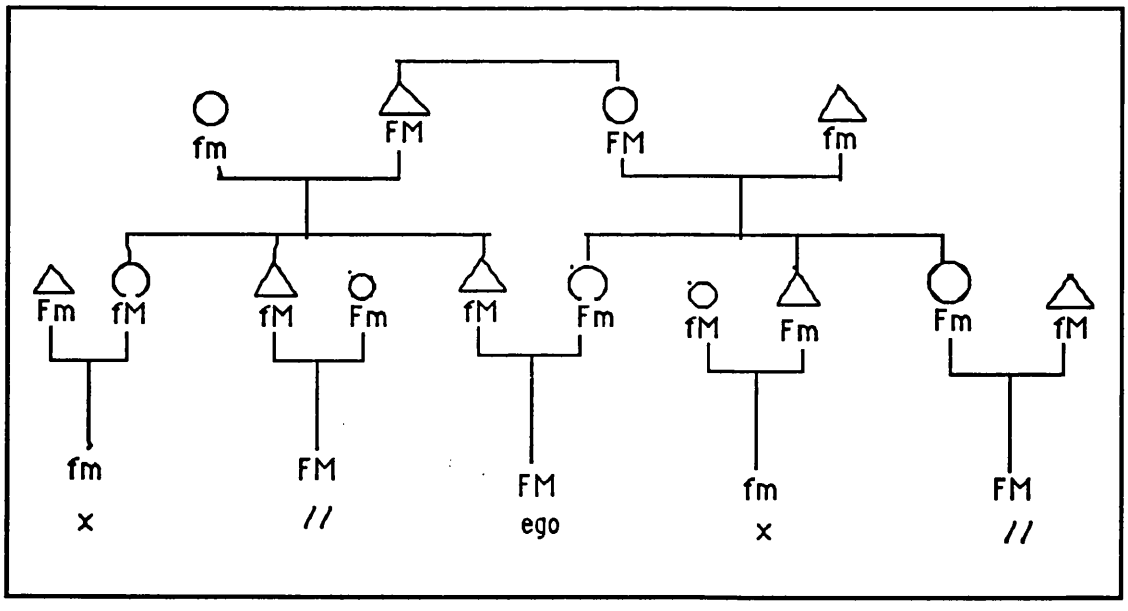

Figure 3: Inheritance of male and female links

F, f are types of female substance: M, m are types of male substance

However, it is only "in a sense" that this identity is to be understood: I would argue that although distant relatives can be assimilated to the category and substance of close relatives, symbolically understood, this does not mean that they cannot be quite easily distinguished when need arises - and indeed be reclassified should occasion demand (such as for example as the result of a terminologically incorrect marriage).

With this caveat in mind, I have constructed a genealogical diagram (Figure 3) making use of the extensionist nature of the system, so that if someone outside marries into the sibling group s/he is assumed to be identical in substance with other in-marrying spouses. Each person then, in the diagram above, is defined by the combination of female substance (F or f) and male substance (M or m) they inherit, their gender determining which they will pass on. Thus children combine the male part of their father and the female part of their mother. The spouse is in each case a person with the opposite combination of male and female substance.

As the diagram makes clear, parallel cousins, like siblings, share both male and female substance, while cross cousins share neither. The crucial difference is created by the switch in gender between the siblings who are their parents: for the one, the same sex parent passes on the same gendered substance, for the other, the opposite sex parent passes on the oppositely gendered substance. It is clear from this how the system both depends on and creates the possibility for, cross cousin marriage, and how differences of substance and gender underlie the categories of the system[5]. Cross cousin marriage is built into the system, and the extensions of terms to more distant kin depends on it. Nevertheless, the fundamental basis of the system, and that on which cross cousin marriage itself depends for its conditions of possibility, is the radical distinction made between relations which are same sex and those which are opposite sex, between brothers and sisters, between a mother and a father.

This analysis of kinship and marriage in Marianad, and of how the underlying categories of relatedness are determined by gender difference and ideas of substantial links, differs considerably from the more conventional analysis of Dravidian kinship put forward by Louis Dumont. In some part this is to do with the context in which I worked: marriage in Marianad was not talked about at all in terms of alliance between groups, as Dumont suggests is true for the Pramalai Kallar among whom he worked. In any case lineality is not emphasized at all among the fishing community: genealogies are relatively shallow and bilateral, focused on the

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[5] Interestingly, this model demonstrates an essential identity (in terms of the two kinds of people who intermarry within it) of *alternate* generations, an identity which is an unexplained feature of some Dravidian systems (where cross relatives in the alternate generations, but *not* in adjacent generations, can marry, or are called by the same terms) (see Trautmann 1981). This aspect of the system has been recently analysed by Testart (1992), who also discusses the marriageability of cross cousins in terms of the gendering of links between people, but does not consider these in terms of substance.

parents and sibling group, as Yalman has described for Sri Lanka (Yalman 1962; 1967), and it makes no sense to talk of lineages in an alliance structure[6]. Rather, as I have said, cross cousin marriage was talked about in terms of the desirability of marrying those who were kin, and thus it is not surprising that my interest should turn to what makes some kin more marriageable than others. However there is another reason for the difference in approach. The analysis put forward here takes seriously the idea that the study of kinship is also the study of gender and person (Rubin 1975; Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Howell and Melhuus 1993). In India, the study of the person is bound up with the understanding of substance, and of substantial relations between people (e.g. Marriott and Inden 1977; Marriott 1989; Daniel 1984). The analysis therefore focuses on ideas about procreation, gender and substance which can be seen to underlie the categories of the kinship system. I want to turn next to the alternative framework for understanding Dravidian kinship, that of Louis Dumont, as well as look at some approaches which are more similar to my own.

Theories of Dravidian Kinship

Theories of Dravidian kinship have a long history in anthropology, from Morgan (1811), who first separated the terminology as a "classificatory" system from the "descriptive" systems of Aryan and Semitic kinship, through a number of more detailed formal classifications (Lowie 1928; Murdock 1949) and associated descriptions and theories as to the logic behind the system (Rivers 1907; Dumont 1953; Yalman 1969; Carter 1973; Beck 1974; Trautmann 1981; Trawick 1990). In recent times the most successful theorist of the Dravidian system has undoubtedly been Louis Dumont, and his thesis that the terminology is essentially one based on alliance rather than descent dominates discussions of the system today. His early paper, "Dravidian Kinship terminology as an expression of marriage" (Dumont 1953) drew much criticism from such die-hard descent theorists as Radcliffe-Brown (who professed not to entirely understand it but was nevertheless convinced it was not right) but, as alliance theories in general became more accepted, it was acknowledged to be a major advance in the field. Despite a large number of critiques of Dumont's theory over the years, it still holds a major place in any discussion of kinship in South India. In his recent book, Good concentrates almost entirely on Dumont's explication of the system, noting that despite "immense amounts of analysis ... the most satisfactory account of the terminology *per se* remains that of Dumont" (1991: 58). Partly this has to be because there have been very few

[6] Lineages are not in fact emphasised by many Tamil groups (eg Beck 1974; Kapadia 1990; Good 1991): the Pramalai Kallar appear to have been relatively unusual in this.

other attempts to provide an overarching explanation for the terminology. Nevertheless, for all the criticisms Dumont's theory and his data have attracted, no one has yet been able to replace it with anything even remotely as successful in meaningfully uniting terminology and social structure.

Affinity as a value

Dumont's attempt to explain the underlying logic of the Dravidian kinship system focused on the marriage relations it entailed. The terminology separates father, and father's brothers, as one class, from mother's brothers as another class. When we consider these two categories *as classes*, rather than focusing on the genealogical relation between them, it is easy to see that what links these classes is an affinal relation. The link, the mother, becomes invisible in this formulation, which is essentially one of relations between groups of men, directly influenced by Levi-Strauss's formulations in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969). However, Dumont is not simply postulating "exchange of women" between groups of men in alliance. He stresses that the alliance relation also holds good for groups of women - indeed the symmetry of the terminology makes this clear. The mother and mother's sisters are separated from the father's sisters by an affinal link traced through the father.

The structural relations between these categories are permanent and passed down to the next generation. Hence a female ego is *already* in an affinal relation with her father's sister's son, since her father's sister is an affine to her mother. Her marriage to him merely confirms and recreates an existing alliance relation: thus, "what we are accustomed to call cross cousin marriage is nothing but the perfect formula for perpetuating the alliance relationship from one generation to the next and so making the alliance an enduring institution" (Dumont 1983a: 14).

For Dumont, then, the social group within ego's generation and the one above and below is divided into essentially two classes, of "terminological kin" and "terminological affines", and individual marriages will confirm and perpetuate the relations between these classes. There is no need for the concepts of "cross" and "parallel" kin which are merely the terms of abstract anthropological analysis with no cultural basis: the division into affines and kin represents the system more accurately from the point of view of the speakers themselves. The fundamental feature of this system is the passing on of the alliance relation, the fact of alliance as a value equal to, or more important than, that of consanguinity.

My criticisms of Dumont are essentially of two kinds. Firstly, epistemologically his approach entails the privileging of a categorical, classes-based understanding over a genealogical one, a privileging which does not seem entirely justified. Secondly and more specifically there are, I believe, a number of internal logical flaws and inadequacies in the final analysis which Dumont presents, and it is these which are, in the end, more fundamentally problematic for his approach.

Classes and Kin

Dumont insists that we should see kinship categories within the Dravidian system as classes, the terms for which apply equally to all members of the class with no privileged or focal relations from whom the term is extended to more distant kin. Thus *maman*, the term for a class of older men which includes the mother's brother, should not be thought of primarily as mother's brother (MB), but as "male affines of the father", or "men of parent's generation who are affines to my kin". It automatically includes the wife's father, who may not be the actual MB but will nevertheless be of that class of men. It is ethnocentrism, Dumont would argue, to assume the primacy of genealogical, consanguineal links just because the kinship system of the West is organized around these principles.

This is an argument which cannot be refuted on epistemological grounds. Clearly we should not prejudge the issue of extension on the basis of our own practice. Yet Dumont's own espousal of the categorical approach seems to me to be based more on the requirements of his analysis of the terminology than on any consideration of people's actual practices or beliefs. This is a complex issue and I believe there are two main aspects: the logic of the terminology, and the logic of practice. As far as the terminology is concerned, it *is* a categorical one with distinct classes, and MB is called by the same term as, for example, MMBS. What is at issue is whether this person is considered a "type" of MB, and thus called MB *by extension*, or whether in fact MB is merely one example of the class whom we tend to see as its focus because of our own privileging of close kin. Dumont appears to believe that the logic of the terminology *necessitates* the latter explanation; Scheffler, in a number of articles, has taken issue with this view, and while I do not entirely go along with his own analysis I believe he is justified on this particular point. While the terminology *may* accompany a class based understanding of kin, it does not automatically demand it (Scheffler 1984).

At the level of beliefs and practices there is, it seems to me, some evidence for the opposite view. Kapadia (1990) has noted that classificatory kin were distinguished from close genealogical kin by her informants with

the use of the suffix *venum*, "as if". Thus for them MMBS was an "as if" MB. This seems to indicate that the logic of the system is one of extension, which the use of *venum* made explicit rather than implicit. Another pointer towards genealogical kin as the focus of the kin class is the fact that, while the cross cousin marriage rule is articulated in terms of the *class* of women or men which includes the cross cousin, in most cases it is the *actual* cross cousin who is the preferred spouse, and who must for example be compensated if the person marries another (Dumont 1986; Good 1981). Similarly the importance of genealogical distinctions within the kin class is made clear in the case of terminologically "wrong" marriages, such as with terminologically parallel kin, which are generally tolerated and reclassified as "right" only when the person concerned is *genealogically distant*, i.e. marriage with the actual first parallel cousin would not be tolerated.

In the end the issue cannot be resolved a priori and must, as Dumont himself has concluded (Dumont 1983a: 33) be settled with reference to the plausibility of the final analysis, and, I would add, further investigation of actual beliefs and practices. It is to the analysis itself that I now turn.

Affines and Kin, Gender and Crossness

Dumont's analysis replaces the concepts of cross and parallel with those of affines and kin (consanguines) though he warns us that these will not have exactly the meanings they carry in Euro-American kinship. Good (1991) sees the use of these terms as problematic in that they refer to concepts that are properly part of the cultural domain (the idea of kin) rather than a neutral structural level. They imply, for example, that affines are not kin, yet there is no question but that in common Tamil usage both cross and parallel kin are referred to as *sondham*, relatives (Kapadia 1990; Good 1991). Thus he prefers to replace Dumont's terms with the original, more neutral analytical ones.

The problem, however, is not just one of inappropriate labels. The whole analysis *rests* on a radical distinction between types of kin *on the basis of marriage*, and the "alliance" relation is precisely one, between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, which cannot be divorced from the notion of affinity. Thus what Good calls "crossness" (instead of affinity) is a concept which for Dumont rests *not* on the definition of a cross sex kinship link, but on the notion of an affinal relationship. The problem is that notions of affinity and of crossness are *not congruent*, and it is only an analysis in terms of one particular gender (usually but not always male) that makes them seem so. Dumont's alliance relationship is in fact not strictly defined by affinity alone but rests also on distinctions of gender.

Because the difference that gender makes is an implicit yet often unacknowledged dimension of Dumont's categories, he finds himself forced to use logically contradictory arguments in a number of places.

Thus the use of only two terms to distinguish men and women in the grandparent's generation is, according to Dumont, because each grandparent is both kin and affine to ego at one and the same time, hence there is no possibility of distinctions other than by sex. This merging of kin and affines in the first and fifth generations (G2 and G-2 above) is, he believes, "fundamental" and his analysis "rests largely on it" (Dumont 1983a: 15). Yet in explaining why FF and MF are both kin and affines at the same time he finds himself reverting to a definition of kin link which contradicts his earlier treatment of the MB[7]. Both Father and Mother, Dumont notes, are kin to ego, "and so are their fathers", who are otherwise in an alliance relationship with each other. Hence "we may consider one of them A as kin, and the other B as affine, or, equally, B as kin and A as affine" (ibid: 15). Yet that both Mother's father and Father's father are kin to ego is by no means given, as Dumont himself concedes in a footnote. His proof that they are rests on the assertion that a parent is kin to her child and also kin to her father, hence they are kin to each other. Yet his whole analysis rests on the contrary assertion that though a woman is related as kin to both her child and her brother, her child is nevertheless an *affine* of her brother (traced through the father).

It is to this latter assertion which I now turn. In urging us to suspend the ethnocentrism which would trace the link from child to mother's brother through the mother, rather than the father, Dumont is also urging us to concentrate on relations between *men*, and ignore women. Yet he is not just leaving women out of the analysis. The same logic applies in reverse when we consider the relation between the child and the father's sister to be actually based on that between two groups of sisters in alliance, and here it is men who are rendered invisible. The symmetry in his treatment of men and women, and the fact that we are accustomed to kinship analyses carried out in terms of one gender only (usually male) blinds us to the fact that *it is this very separation of male and female which is fundamental to the structure of the system* and which itself defines the categories that Dumont calls affines and kin.

Dumont's reasoning leads us to define a group of men (kin) in alliance with another group of men (affines). Yet the father is equally in an affinal relation with the mother's sisters, if affinity alone were the crucial parameter. The fact that the mother's sister is kin, by virtue of her link with the mother and their joint opposition to the father's sisters, as affines, points us to the fact that it is not affinity alone which is relevant

[7]This criticism has also been noted by Good (1991: 59-60) who does not see it as crucial to the rest of the analysis, and by Trautmann (1981: 174-5) who does.

here but *the prior distinction by gender.* Alliance is, as Trautmann has pointed out, "a specially restricted form of affinity ... the relationship that obtains between affines of the *same sex*" (Trautmann 1981: 174, my emphasis). Thus before we can make any sense of the distinctions between kin and affines which Dumont claims lies at the heart of the system, we have to accept that the link ego has with *women* (and their children) can only be defined through their relationship with the mother, and the link he has with *men* (and their children) can only be defined through their link with the father. This is not a system which primarily transmits affinity: it is a system which primarily depends on a radical distinction between the ways links are traced through women and men[8].

Dumont is aware of the necessity of the same sex/ different sex distinction, and in a later comment on his original paper notes, "affinity holding strictly only between persons of the same sex, FZ and her like are affines primarily for females and secondarily for a male ego, through his mother or sister" (Dumont 1983a: 29). Yet this important restriction on the meaning of the word affinity is obscured by Dumont's assertion that the primary distinction is concerned with marriage. Thus he later claims that the categories for F and MB are "more exactly rendered as 'male consanguine of parent's generation' and 'male affine of parent's generation'" (ibid: 33). This is just not accurate: they are in fact more exactly rendered as "male consanguine of *father* (who is mother's affine)" and "male affine of *father* (who is mother's kin)". Their counterparts are "female affine of mother" and "female consanguine of mother".

In short, it seems to me that Dumont's notion of affinity can only be sustained when it is seen to be in operation with a prior distinction of same sex and different sex relations which has not been incorporated into the theory. *Affinity and crossness are the same thing only for people of the same gender*: where difference of gender intervenes, affines become parallel and consanguines become cross. The point is a crucial one: if difference of gender makes the difference between tracing a link as one of kinship or one of affinity then we are dealing with a rather different logic than one predicated on marriage and alliance, and in fact the terms affines and kin become obviously misleading. It is the distinction between cross and parallel links which defines the categories of the Dravidian system, and any explanation of the underlying logic must be in terms which are congruent with this distinction.

That the structure of the kinship system in many areas of South India and Sri Lanka did not in fact support Dumont's theory of alliance

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[8]In order to have a system which truly transmitted affinity down the generations, which Dumont believes is fundamental to the Dravidian structure (Dumont 1983c: 170) the children of any marriage must be assimilated as kin to only one or other parent. Otherwise, since Mother's kin are Father's affines, and vice versa, the child is related as both kin and affine to everybody in the system (a conclusion which Dumont is happy to draw in the grandparental generation).

groups was an early criticism made by Yalman (1962, 1967, 1969). He emphasized the importance of lateral extensions of kin terminology and the relative unimportance of lineage groups, as well as the strong elements of bilaterality that are to be found in the region, all of which had been underplayed by Dumont, and argued convincingly that the terms "affines" and "kin" were in fact best abandoned in favour of the earlier, more appropriate, terms of cross and parallel. However, Yalman made no attempt to offer an explanation for the structure of the system, taking it simply as a set of cognitive categories which ultimately appeared to derive from "a series of brilliant theoretical attempts in the past to order sexual and marital relationships" (Yalman 1969: 625). Trautmann (1981), who has provided the most recent and detailed account of the Dravidian system, also contents himself essentially with describing the internal logic of the structure, leaving its origins lost in the mists of time.

More recently, Rudner (1990) has pointed out that Dumont's argument, that the distinctions made by the terminology are of affines and kin, ignores the fact that the actual affines are quite often distinguished by Tamil speakers from the class of cross kin and potential affines by the use of secondary terms, such as *mamakkarar* for the actual father-in-law, rather than *maman*. The alliance relationship, involving solidarity, gift exchange and so on, which Dumont associates with all potential affines, is in fact operationalized only with this restricted group of actual affines. The group of affines is *not* the same thing as the group of potential affines or cross kin: in effect, as Rudner points out, "Dumont conflates marriage and marriageability" (1990: 167).

Challenges to Dumont on the level of explanations of marriageability have come most notably from the ethnosociologists such as Barnett (1976; Fruzzetti, Ostor and Barnett 1982) and David (1977), who have tried to relate structural features of the kinship system to cultural ideas about relatedness and the person, ideas about blood and substance which underlie the categorical distinctions made in the terminology. Before going on to consider these attempts, which are very similar to my own approach, I want to look briefly at another more recent perspective on the Dravidian kinship system, that of Margaret Trawick.

Love in a Tamil Family

In many ways Trawick is the complete opposite of Dumont, with structural, logical models of the system finding no place in her scheme of things. Her theory of the Dravidian system rests on the application of Lacanian psychoanalytic ideas, with the dynamic behind cross cousin marriage the search for completeness, for merger with the Other, in this case the desire

of the brother for the sister which is completed through the marriage of their children (parts of themselves).

In her search for an underlying pattern which generates the multivaried practices and ideologies of kinship in South India, and her sensitivity to the many representations of these practices in operation within the culture, I am very much in sympathy with Trawick's approach. I do not, however, go along with her conclusions about the nature of this underlying pattern.

Firstly it seems to me that the theory takes an unduly functionalist line: it sees cross cousin marriage ultimately as a neat cultural solution to the problem of incestuous desire. The difficulty with this is to understand just how this institutional "solution" came to be implemented; how a categorical system arose to solve an individualized tangle of emotions. Emotions within the family are too particularistic, too ad hoc and individual. In the family with which Trawick stayed, and on which she bases much of her work, the clear axis of sexual tension was between Anni and Ayya, a man and his sister-in-law, rather than his sister. Meanwhile his wife played out the brother-sister desire myth with *her* brother-in-law, while maintaining an exceptionally physical loving relationship with her female cross cousin. Trawick may argue that it is not real people she is talking about but mythic cultural icons - although in doing so she loses her claim to the moral high ground which rests precisely on the basis of her attention to real people rather than abstract models - but if this is so it is difficult to see how it functions as a *reason* for cross cousin marriage rather than merely an associated ideology: mythic icons do not act.

Even if individual brothers and sisters gained some kind of catharsis out of marrying their children, it is still difficult to see this as sufficient cause to both generate the system and hold it together (particularly since the vast majority of marriages are not with the actual cross cousin at all). Her argument also has problems explaining why the most preferred marriage is not between the sister's *daughter* (who she considers the representative, the *continuation* of the sister) and the brother's son (the continuation of the brother), i.e. patrilateral marriage, rather than, as is actually usually the case, matrilateral marriage.

Trawick's approach "considers the relations between males and females, and children's experience of these relations, to be largely constitutive of the social order" (1990: 154). In her emphasis on childhood experience and the laying down of the habitus I am in sympathy with this approach. But to consider it only in terms of affect particularizes too much. However much you love your mother's brother, for example, and however much he acts towards you like a father, he remains *categorically* different. The kinship system is categorical, emotion and affect is individual and haphazard, and you cannot explain one in terms of the other. Not all

brothers love their sisters (or even *like* them), yet all brothers *are* related to all sisters in a particular way. Trawick makes the point that sentiments grow out of the system, that I feel sisterly (conventional) feelings for someone I call "sister" - or at least I can choose to activate my feelings for such a person within this scheme if I wish. This however (which I think is an accurate observation) negates her premise that the system itself rests on the feelings (real? natural?) for the actual sister. If feeling arise out of the system then the system cannot arise out of the feelings - this is tautology.

In their practices, in the ways in which people use their relationships with others, alter them contextually, choose certain strategies over others, actually marry their children to their brother's children or in fact marry them to a total stranger, emotion and affect, power and love, do come into play[9]. But they do so within a set of understandings about who is marriageable and who is not that do not depend on emotion. People do not just prefer the cross cousin as a marriage partner, rather in this categorical system a "cross cousin" is the only spouse possible, and the parallel cousin is not just "not the best", they are *prohibited.* This seems to me a crucial fact not explained nor addressed by this theory.

Despite its flaws, Trawick's account brings out a number of themes which are very similar to those I have describe for Marianad: ideas about the importance of distinctions between kin made by children, the strong sense of connections of identity and complementarity on the basis of gender, the links between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. Earlier work by ethnosociologists is even more explicitly similar to my own approach, looking for links of substance which would explain the kinship categories.

Ethnosociological approaches

The ethnosociological approach to Indian ethnography is most closely associated with the work of McKim Marriott, whose ideas about substance and code underlying the caste system are in direct contradiction to those of Dumont. In the area of kinship the search for indigenous theories of substance underlying kinship classifications has been most notably carried out by Inden and Nicholas (1977) and Fruzzetti and Ostor (1976) in Bengal, Barnett (1976) in Tamil Nadu and David (1977) in Sri Lanka. Of these it is the last two which are most relevant, since they deal with Dravidian systems.

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[9] As, of course, do economic considerations.

Barnett (1976) is concerned with an indigenous theory of procreation among a Tamil agricultural caste, mainly in terms of a discussion of caste purity as represented by ideas about blood. Blood is here seen as divided into two parts: *utampu* or "substance/body", a male part, and *uyir* or "spirit", a female essence. *Utampu* is passed on by men to their children, *uyir* by women. Marriage unites both spouses' *utampu* (the wife's becoming identical to that of her husband) while their *uyir* remains different. For marriage to take place there must be something to unite and something which remains separate (or they would become identical, like brother and sister), hence the two spouses must have *both* different *utampu* and different *uyir* before marriage. Hence the prescribed marriage partner is the mother's brother's child or father's sister's child, neither of whom will share either component of the blood.

Barnett's representation of the ideology of blood is extremely interesting. It provides a clear and logical explanation of both kinship categories and marriage choices on the basis of difference in substance, and deals also with the widely held idea that husbands and wives come to share substance after marriage. Perhaps ironically the main problem with the theory is its very neatness; in fact ideas about procreation and substance are rarely articulated in quite such a definite and clear-cut form and are often mutually contradictory. Subsequent accounts have questioned Barnett's data, with Trawick (1990) for example giving a much more complex account of the meaning of the term *uyir* which cannot be simply associated with women or female substance.

David (1977) provides an alternative theory found among Tamils in the Jaffna peninsular of Sri Lanka. He reports a belief that a woman's substance changed completely on marriage to that of her husband, so that she and her brother, and consequently their children, were no longer substantially related at all. Although he also notes the presence of ideas about *utampu* and *uyir*, both here change on marriage. Marriage to the father's brother's children, who thus share substance, is not only prohibited, it is ridiculous to his informants: "after all, they are the same body. How can one body unite with itself?" (David 1977: 522). Such relatives are designated *cakotarar*, which David glosses as "sharers of bodily substance". The mother's brothers are "non-sharers", *campantikkarar*, and are marriageable.

As David notes, this leaves the mother's sister's children as an anomalous category of non-sharers who are nevertheless prohibited as marriage partners. These, he says, are called *cakalar*, which he glosses as "non uniters of bodily substance". The explanation for their prohibition is confused, with David's only reference to it explained not in terms of the mother's *sister's* daughter, but the daughter of the mother's MBS. Since the MBS is a potential spouse to the mother, his daughter is counted as one's

sister, despite the fact that *two* (non substantial) links through females separate her from oneself. As David notes, this treatment of potential marriages as though they were actual "yields unambiguous classifications of non-marriageable/marriageable women, even if it does contradict [the] notion of transubstantiation" (ibid: 524).

David's informants were strongly patrilineal and their extreme ideology of total female transubstantiation may well be related to this. It is interesting to note that a very similar argument about transubstantiation was made by a South Indian Brahmin jurist in the fourteenth century in order to justify cross cousin marriage, prohibited by the Laws of Manu (Trautmann 1981: 304-7). It is unusual in the context of Dravidian kinship, where bilaterality is more commonly acknowledged[10].

David's account, like Barnett's, is a suggestive one, and there is much here which is resonant with my own data. Particularly relevant is the notion that the prohibition on parallel cousin marriage relates to the impossibility of uniting with someone who is, after all, just like you, who shares bodily substance, as well as related ideas about the sharing of substance through marriage and the importance of marrying those who are different. Essentially what such authors stress is that the tracing of relatedness has a different logic in this system, and marriage, though it may well be with a person we would consider to be a relative, takes place between those who share nothing of substance.

The ethnosociological approach is, I believe, extremely important, and it has captured several important truths about the nature of the kinship system and marriage practices. Such an approach looks for theories of substance and the person which might explain the categories of the kinship system, and as such it is very similar to my own. The analyses carried out, however, have a number of flaws and have been much criticized (e.g. Dumont 1983c: 153-9; McGilvray 1982; Good 1991: 63-5, 181-2). Mostly they have been unable to dislodge Dumont because the theories put forward are too precise and localized, and it has proved impossible to generalize from them. This is a serious drawback to utilizing such theories to explain a widespread phenomenon such as that of Dravidian kinship. However, this does not mean that more fluid, implicit ideas about person and substance, rather than hard-edged precise theories, could not be seen to underlie the distinctions made by the Dravidian system across this region.

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[10] Even in North India, where an idea of the transubstantiation of women on marriage is more widespread, recent work has questioned whether it is a universally accepted idea, or functions rather as a male ideology (e.g. Sax 1990)

Theoretical and Practical Knowledge

Dumont's analysis is seductive because it posits widespread structural principles which can be applied across the Dravidian region, whereas the particular analyses put forward by Barnett and David are based on intellectual theories of procreation which are grounded specifically in their particular contexts. It is not only that these theories are context specific, however, but also that they are presented as definitive, monolithic, that there is no room in them for the distortions, contradictions and variations in ideas and beliefs that are invariably present even within the same group. Attempting to uncover *the* native theory of procreation or the person means ignoring the multivaried nature of cultural discourses.

This criticism has been made cogently by McGilvray (1982). In his investigation of such ideas among Mukkuvars in Sri Lanka he found no clear ideas about blood and substance, nor any consistent ideas about descent or relatedness. In general, he concludes, "local thinking about blood, descent and pollution constitutes a more complex, more disjunct, more contextual, and more open-ended field than the parsimonious theories of purity and natural substance would tend to imply" (McGilvray 1982: 58). I believe McGilvray is right, that there is no obvious homogeneity of cultural discourses around kinship and marriage across this area, or even within one community. Nevertheless, as I hope to be able to make clear, I believe that those discourses and practices which do exist are *predicated* on certain fundamental, implicit notions about gender and the person which in the first place create the conditions of possibility of Dravidian kinship and cross cousin marriage. This idea of an implicit understanding of relatedness underlying more widespread and divergent discourses in different contexts is one which I take from Bourdieu.

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is usually seen as related only to practices as actions. The idea of action, of doing, is indeed implicit in the word itself and for the most part it is actions which are analysed by Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu 1977). However, it is not only practical action to which the theory refers but also to *understanding*, to a practice based and intuitive knowledge. The idea that an intuitive, non-reflexive knowledge is part of the dispositions, schemes and general habitus of a person is implicit in the theory of practice, although it is only occasionally made explicit: thus he notes that, "the dispositions of the habitus [comprise] schemes of perception and appreciation" (1977: 17), and later that, "[the habitus] acts within ... as the organizing principle...informing all thought and action" (ibid: 18). In discussing the formation of the habitus he is even more explicit, talking of "the dialectic of the social structures and structured, structuring dispositions ... within which the schemes of

thought are formed and transformed, and in particular the logical categories" (ibid: 27).

Such an intuitive and practice based knowledge is not the same thing as the self reflexive and intellectualized discourse which is most easily brought forth in response to anthropological questioning. As with practices, "invited by the anthropologist's questioning to effect a reflexive and quasi-theoretical return on his own practice, the best informed informant produces a discourse which compounds two opposing systems of lacunae" (ibid: 18). As a discourse of familiarity "it leaves unsaid what goes without saying", and as an outsider oriented discourse it excludes references to the concrete particular instance, leading to an emphasis on rules rather than practice. What is perhaps more relevant in the context of knowledge rather than action, it is "the product of a *semi-theoretical* disposition", called up by the intellectualist nature of the questions.

Maurice Bloch has more recently taken up this idea of an intuitive, non intellectual knowledge, of "what goes without saying", arguing that anthropology has a tendency to look for cultural knowledge in the form of articulate texts, which in fact bear very little relation to the way people think (Bloch 1992). People's understandings of the world are less theoretical, less literary, and often have a taken for granted status which makes them less easily accessible to the anthropologist who is searching for definitive statements.

Ethnosociological approaches, then, are right to look for concepts of the person underlying the kinship system, but because they look for the one, correct, native theory of procreation, they have a tendency not only to get unduly intellectualist explanations but, as has been noted above, to ignore alternative theories and ideas present in the same society. What is said leaves much that is taken for granted and implicitly understood out of account, as well as playing down the presence of competing explanations and ideologies, the use and manipulation of which is part of kinship *practices*, rather than kinship theory.

I believe that it is possible to get at the underlying implicit assumptions of the Dravidian kinship system, and that despite diversity at the level of more intellectual, semi-theoretical or ideological explanations, that there is a basic, intuitive understanding of relationships and kinship categories which is universal across the region, which has to do with understandings of gender, and of the difference that gender makes to links between people. This, though it will be less articulated than other theories, nevertheless makes sense of the structure and the practices which are widespread in this region, and will be an implicit predicate on which the other claims and theories are based.

Among the fishing community, elaborately theoretical self reflection was rare, and most practices had a taken for granted status

which precluded questions. What this meant was that what was left, the ideas which I have elaborated above about gender, person and substance, were precisely those more basic, intuitive understandings which in other contexts and communities might be more difficult to get at because more elaborated discourses exist for the anthropologist to focus on, and the gaps and lacunae in these accounts, the "taken for granted", implicit knowledges which underlie or provide the background for them, are less obvious.

Gender and the Dravidian System

I would argue that underlying all practices and discourses associated with Dravidian kinship systems is the understanding, brought out in this chapter, that what links a woman to her children is essentially different from what links a man to his children, and that therefore the children of a brother and sister are not substantially related, while the children of two sisters are substantially related as siblings. This understanding can be overlaid with any number of more elaborated discourses about blood and substance, procreation, gender, marriage alliance and the desirability of certain marriage practices, all of which are used and manipulated by individuals and groups in pressing claims or explaining their actions. Nevertheless it must exist as the *minimum condition* under which a Dravidian system can operate, as the crucial understanding which dictates the categories of the system, which creates the conditions of possibility of cross cousin marriage[11].

It does not, of course, of itself dictate the form of marriage. What does make this a prescriptive system, at the level of terminology at least, is the assumption that the given categories are sufficient to describe and define all those considered *kin* (however loosely defined), that if a person can be considered "of a kind" with a particular relative, they can be assimilated to the same category as that relative. Under this scheme, the *only* group of eligible people is that of the cross cousin, while anyone one actually marries, not previously defined by a term, will automatically be treated as though they were a cross cousin. The term comes to mean primarily a person of the same generation who can be considered kin and yet is of a different *kind*, is not related as a sibling but as a potential spouse. The kin universe is divided, among other divisions of age and generation, essentially into two: siblings and spouses, parallel and cross, with the

[11] As Good (1980) has noted, marriage with the elder sister's daughter, as well as the cross cousin, is widespread in Dravidian systems in Tamil Nadu. The logic of the terminology in this case is slightly different. Nevertheless, I believe it can be shown to be a variant of the Dravidian system analysed here, and to rest on the same essential principles (see Appendix 1).

divisions crucially dependent on the tracing of links differently and yet *symmetrically* through men and through women[12].

Essentially, then, my analysis rests on the idea that categories of kinship in South India are categories of relatedness, where relatedness implies sharing of substance and where substance and person are highly mutually determining(c.f. Daniel 1984). Talking of persons means talking of gendered persons, particularly in the context of kinship, as Signe Howell and Marit Melhuus have recently pointed out: "The sex of a person in a kinship system - or rather the fact that kinship systems are inherently gendered - is of such importance as to call for a distinct type of theory" (Howell and Melhuus 1993: 42). In my analysis, the gender of a person is crucial to understanding how they are linked to others, and the marriage system and the terminology with which it is associated, is seen to rest on fundamental concepts about gender and relatedness.

To assert the importance of these principles in determining the nature of the kinship system is not to deny the crucial influence of other factors on discourses and practices which surround kinship. The system is prescriptive only at the level of terminology, and at the jural level the preference for the cross cousin may be expressed in a number of ways, and is subject to ideological manipulation. In Marianad the idea is current that "it is good to marry a close relative", a justification noted also by Kapadia (1990). Others articulate an idea of the fitness of uniting the children of brother and sister, uniting in the next generation, as Trawick (1990) has noted, that which was split in the previous generation. Dumont's ethnography was carried out among a caste group which was unusually strongly patrilineal, and this may well be crucial to representations of the marriage system as one which allied groups of men, while the patrilineal nature of David's community was surely implicated in the ideological assertion that women were completely substantially assimilated to their husband's group. Actual marriages, whether between cross cousins or not, will certainly involve many practical and strategic considerations, of wealth, status, residence, compatibility, and the use and manipulation of varied and often contradictory ideas about marriage and kinship.

Considerations of this multitude of discourses and practices which surround kinship and the connections between kinship and other areas of social life is clearly paramount in any description of kinship systems in context: I do not believe my approach is inimical to such a study. Nevertheless, while in different sociocultural contexts within the Dravidian area there will be many things related to the kinship system which will change, there will equally be some things which will remain

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[12] I stress the word symmetrically, since of course unilineal systems also trace links differently through men and women: the important additional factor here is that an essential *bilaterality* is operating which makes ego equally as related to their mother's sisters as to their father's brothers.

the same. I believe that the ideas elaborated above, about the difference that gender makes in tracing links between people, are a minimum condition for the existence of a Dravidian terminology and will exist as an implicit background to other discourses. As I have noted above, such ideas are not necessarily fully theorized by people themselves; nevertheless they do have a very strong intuitive sense of the *rightness* of the categorical distinctions they make and the reasons why they operate in the way they do.

Conclusion

Distinctions of gender in the fishing community emerge here as distinctions of the body and bodily substance, distinctions in the ways that substance can be passed on, in the relation to children. A person is understood as wholly and categorically gendered, and as linked to others in ways which are constituted by their gender, by the links of male or female substance which their body is capable of transmitting.

Kinship and bodily substance are however not the only areas in which gender difference is marked, and in the next two chapters I want to turn to the ways in which gender difference is manifest in practice and performance. Men and women daily demonstrate their gender through work and other practices, through the understanding of what it means to be male or female in this community, and it is to these considerations that I want now to turn.

Chapter 3

Men and Boys: the Lives of the Fishermen

They have a dark complexion, short stocky stature, and are easily distinguished by their strong whiskers, though they shave off their beards. They are fond of fish and meat and drink toddy and liquor to excess. In religion they prefer the cult of female deities. They are full of superstition and believe firmly in omens, the evil eye and witchcraft....But on the other hand, they are an adventurous lot, and extremely improvident.

R.E. Enthoven (1922) *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*[1].

When James' youngest son was fourteen, he refused to go to school any longer. His older brothers were all going fishing, and he wanted to be allowed to go too. James wanted at least one of them to get some education, wanted him to sit the exams, but he was adamant. "Kill me," he said, "but I will not go to school. I want to go to sea". James shouted at him, he threatened him, and finally he beat him, but the boy would not relent, and eventually his father, seeing the marks he had left on the boy's body, felt overcome with remorse and agreed to let him leave school and go to sea.

For the men of the fishing community, the call of the sea is said to be strong, and their sense of identity is bound up with their relation to it, their work and their skills as fishermen. They risk their lives at sea; they spend much of their time out there, far from land, with small boats and little protection; they learn to know all its moods and caprices, the contours of the sea bed, the currents and the winds, and the movements of the fish. The sea is a different world, it is a place separate and apart from the world of the land: it is a world of men, where it is unthinkable that women should go.

In this chapter I want to explore this world of men, the world of fishing and the sea, and to look at the ways men's identity is constructed in relation to it. This will inevitably touch partly on the economics and organization of fishing in the community, but there is not the space here to go more fully into these aspects[2]. Here I want to give an understanding of the meaning and importance of fishing to the men of the community, and some feel for the rhythms of their lives.

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[1] Though this quotation does not refer to Mukkuvar fishermen, it comes so close to the sort of description that might have been made of them, and which in many ways they would delight in, that I could not resist using it as an epigram here.

[2] A background description of the fishing economy in Trivandrum District has been outlined in the Introduction: further information on the technology of fishing in the region can be found in Klausen (1968); Kurien (1985); Meynen (1989); Platteau et al (1985) and SIFFS (1991).

Days and Nights, Fair Weather and Foul.

Fishing along the Trivandrum coast is dominated by the pronounced seasons. Here, in addition to the usual daily fluctuations of catches and good fortune, there is a periodic fluctuation brought about by the weather changes and movement of fish, which brings to everyone two distinct periods of good fishing and two of dearth. Both the monsoon period and the calm season are hard times for the fishermen, but the monsoon time is the hardest, bringing as it does rain, winds and high seas which can sweep houses and boats away from the edge of the beach, and destroy homes and livelihoods. It is hardest, also, in that it is the time when the fish are most plentiful, and *conchu* (prawns) are there for the taking: if the weather lets up for a day, and a few brave or foolhardy boats make it across the surf, they are assured a good catch. The temptation is strong, especially after a prolonged period with little or no income, but the risks are extremely high. Many lose their boats, or their nets; some drown.

While fishing everywhere is a dangerous and risky enterprise, here the monsoon season greatly increases the element of risk. The dangers of fishing during the monsoon are so acute that fishing becomes almost impossible, and if the weather were like this all year round, there could be no fishing community along this coast. But the possibility of fishing here the rest of the year makes it feasible for a fishing economy to develop, and once there, the skills and ability of the fishermen and their knowledge of the sea, practised in the periods of relative calm, are increasingly pitted against the rough and turbulent seas of the monsoon period. It becomes a matter of judgment when the increasing dangers begin to exceed the ability of the fishermen to cope, and with good catches to be had, the tendency to err on the side of caution is rare. The dangers of the sea and the bravery of the fishermen along this coast are constant themes in their stories and descriptions, and there is an abundant preoccupation with superstitions, magic and religion which is found in response to the high risks and uncertainties in many fishing economies (e.g. Malinowski 1918; Prins 1965; Tunstall 1969; Poggie and Gersuny 1972; Watanebe 1972; Acheson 1981).

The rhythm of the days in the village, when the fishing season is in full swing, is always the same, and the day is a long one. The first boats return in the very early morning, usually just as it becomes light, and suddenly the beach becomes the centre of frantic bustling activity; with boats being pulled ashore, fish being landed and sorted into neat piles, often four or five separate auctions taking place simultaneously; with women loudly haggling over the piles of gleaming fish, while the men who caught them look on to see what they will fetch, and pass on to each other the news of what others have managed to get. Other men are busy

dismantling the kattumarams, while women who have made successful bids are cleaning and packing their fish in ice in aluminium baskets, or calling for help to steady it on their heads before they set off at a trot up the sand to the road. As it gets later the activity gradually tails off, with fewer boats returning and most fish vendors gone to market, till by midday the beach is almost deserted, only a few auctioneers with their big black umbrellas shading them from the fierce sun, chatting and waiting to sell the catches as they come in. This is the time when most people are indoors, eating, or sleeping off the midday meal, and the main coastal road through the villages, usually busy with people, is almost deserted.

In the late afternoon the beach becomes busy again, with crews coming down and making ready to set off, while others are returning from the day's fishing and women are collecting for the evening auctions. Groups of men and women gather on the beach at this time, in the cool of the evening, to sit and mend nets, to gossip, to enjoy the onshore breeze. Men discuss the day's catches, the almost misses, near disasters, the biggest fish, the most expensive, the luck of the different crews, good and bad. They tell stories of other exploits, how once they caught a shark two metres long, how they once almost drowned, how their father was saved from a storm once by the warning of a sea gull. They discuss too the current prices of different boats, the kattumarams that have been sold or are for sale, who is planning to buy or sell, who has got a loan from the cooperative society and who is planning to buy new nets, and in between times they discuss the latest village scandals and gossip, and call out to those making ready to leave for the sea, good natured insults and banter. Though they return to the house for the evening meal, they frequently sleep on the beach, where it is cooler, leaving the women to sleep indoors. Out at sea, the lights of the night fishermen can be seen winking through the darkness in the relative calm of midnight: by 3 am the cycle is ready to start again as the earliest boats make ready to set off for the morning's fishing.

The daily routines of the fishermen vary according to the boat and technique used, and the season, but essentially there are two, night fishing and day fishing. If they are going at night, the boats start leaving at around 4 pm, and return any time from 2 am to 10 am depending on the catch. For day fishing they go at 3-4 am and return at the latest by 4 pm, sometimes before midday. This is the most usual time for the kattumaram: they will catch the offshore breeze in the early morning and sail out nearly 25 km from the shore, where the water depth is 35-40 measures, or more if they are using hook-and-line. The depth is tested with a weighted line, one measure being the distance between a man's outstretched hands. Knowledge of the geography of the sea bed and the depths of the sea in different areas forms an important part of navigation skills. The boats

from Marianad range up and down the coast from Anjengo to Veli, with plywood boats able to go as far north as Quilon or as far south as Vizhinjam, but they are most familiar with the sea in the immediate area.

Night fishing is common for the kattumarams in the calm season, and for the plywood boats also in March or September. They go with kerosene lamps which, when lit, attract the fish. From the shore, a whole line of tiny twinkling lights can be seen in the darkness, far out at sea, and in the early morning light they return. Kattumarams are beached immediately they return, with the fish well wrapped in a small net and tied to the boat in case it capsizes in crossing the surf. Often those on board can be thrown off by the violent pitching, and will have to clamber back on or swim to shore, and it can take two or three attempts to get across the surf in rough weather. The plywood boats stay anchored just outside the surf line, and the crew swim to shore with the fish in a basket, towed with a rope. They are beached only on Saturdays. The kattumarams have to be dismantled completely to allow the logs to dry out, and are put together again just before the next trip.

Once the fish has been landed it is sorted into piles by the fishermen and one of the auctioneers, and sold to the waiting fish vendors, commonly mostly on credit. The first Rs 100 or so may be given in cash to the boat owner, the rest is given in the form of a credit slip with whichever cooperative society he and the auctioneer are members of. The owner and crew take a small amount of fish each, and each crew member receives Rs 5 or so as tea and tobacco money: their share of the catch will be given later, when the slip has been presented at the society. The money and credit slip is almost always handed straight over to the fisherman's wife, who may be present in person, having met the boat, and it is usually she who will go to the society to collect the money.

When they have returned from fishing, whatever time of day it is, men will commonly eat and then sleep, for at least a few hours. Afterwards, if there is no work to do on the boats or nets, they will spend free time wandering around, chatting with friends, visiting neighbours, playing cards. Some may have work to do around the house: it is not unusual to see men outside the house washing the clothes, scrubbing them down with soap on a flat stone and rinsing them in buckets of well water before stringing them out between the palm trees. When it is time to go to sea again, they gather together all the necessary gear, nets and lines, and newly strung hooks and bait, and take with them rice and curry and betel and *kanji* (rice water) prepared by their wives, and set off for the beach, whether it is late afternoon, the dead of night, or the early morning, ideally all six days a week. Sunday, of course is the day of rest, the day when everyone goes to Mass.

In fact it is rarely that a man will manage to go to sea and get a catch all six working days a week, and though the rhythm of the day's fishing as presented here can seem regular and predictable, there is little else about fishing that is. In the calm season there is always the uncertainty of whether there will be fish; in the monsoon season there is very little fishing to be done; in the periods between the weather and the fish are alike unpredictable, and one day a boat will come in with Rs 2,000 worth of fish, the next day they will catch nothing. Some days they will have to stay ashore for repairs to boat, net or engine, some days they may not find a boat to go on, or a crew to go with them. In one week in September 1992, Anthonyappan, an older fisherman who goes in the kattumaram with his son, Christudasan, fished four days, missing one day because of bad weather and one because the net was torn. In that week they went from an all time high to an average low, with one day's catch coming to Rs 1,560, almost unheard of for a kattumaram, while the other three were all less than Rs 100.

The uncertainties and fluctuations in income that characterize this, as it does other fishing economies, mean that households rely heavily on credit to even out income and to cope with the unexpected: this is something that will be explored more fully in Chapter 5. Here I want to look at how boys learn to be fishermen, and at the knowledge and skills that fishing requires, at what it means to be a fisherman.

Fishermen's Natures

Learning the Trade

Young boys start to go to the sea as early as 13 or 14, though "they are not really useful till 15 or 16. Till then they just watch, and vomit!" They may go with their father, or often their uncle. Roman and his brothers all learned with their father, "because he was a good fisherman", but among other families "the boys may go instead with their uncle, so that if there is an accident the family does not lose both father and son".

At first the boys will not be paid, since they are there to learn. They may get some fish for the household at the end of the day, but nothing more. As they gradually become more useful, they will be paid a proportion of the share. "He will be paid more and more, like quarter of a share, then half, then three-quarters, depending on the work he does. When they feel he can do a man's job he will be given a full share". The transition is an entirely pragmatic one; there is no fanfare or celebration when a boy gets his first full share, no sense that he has become an adult. "Those who go early and learn quickly will be given a full share younger,

those who go later, who stay on for more study, will not get a full share till they're older. It's a function of skill and strength only, not age".

The conflict between work and schooling is becoming more acute as education becomes more widespread and more valued. Among adult fishermen in Marianad, only a very few stayed on at school till 15 for the SSLC, the 10th Standard school leaving certificate: most left at 9 or 10, if they went at all, and this was for the most part seen as normal and inevitable. Now the struggles over whether boys go fishing or go to school have intensified, with the remote dream of a well paid clerical job in the future, or the hope of a better dowry, competing with the certainty of an income from fishing in the here and now. There is a sense that education, even a small amount, confers an undeniable superiority, and this can drive parents to keep their children at school whenever they can, even though the children themselves are often thoroughly sick of it. Thus Paulos described the trouble he had to keep his youngest son at school: "He refused to go and do the exam, he wanted to come fishing but I was determined he would sit this exam. I said, 'Even if they have a question like what is the fruit of the mango tree, you can write the coconut for all I care but you will bring me back a certificate to say you have done, and failed, the exam!' But he was very adamant. Finally he came fishing with me - but after two days he saw how hard it was and he begged me to let him go back to school!"

The lure of the sea, and the desire that young boys have to go to sea, is constantly emphasized. Children often play on the beach, and young boys learn to swim from an early age, mucking around in the surf with their friends. When the boats come in, there is a rush to help, to swim out to the boat, help pull it ashore, to carry the nets, sort the fish. Usually they are rewarded with a few fish, which they either take home or sell there and then to the older, poorer fish vendors who cannot afford to bid in the auction. At the same time they listen to the stories their fathers tell, of this or that trip, how such and such a fish behaves and how best to catch it, and they themselves are caught up in the world of the sea and fishing, and start to feel its pull. For the women, they can only watch this transition with a heavy heart: "Boys go to sea too young - but the lure of the sea is very strong, and often it's the boys themselves who want to go. Once they taste its flavour they don't want to go back to school. Myself, and my mother before me, we dread to see our sons go down to the sea shore and play there. We know they are feeling the pull of the sea".

The pull of the sea is strong in all men, and it is part of their nature, inherited from father to son. "The sea is in them, it's in their blood. They go to sea whenever they can, even going without food for days at a time". The men agreed, "Yes, it's in you, there is a part of the sea in your body". Even when there is no need for them to go, they will still find a need to fish. Josephine's husband, who returned from the Gulf with enough

money to live comfortably for the rest of their lives, still bought a kattumaram and went with his younger brother for hook-and-line fishing. "He likes to go to sea", she said. "It's the only job he knows. I feel he should stay, I worry about him, but he wants to go, especially now when there's *kanava*[3]". Women, especially, emphasize the dedication of their men and their determination to go to sea, perhaps in part because it is an ideal they hope they can make the men live up to.

Crews: Mythology and Practice.

Once a boy has achieved the respect of the other fishermen and is allowed a full share, he can start to fish on other boats. If his father owns a boat, he will often continue to fish with him until the time comes for his marriage, but then there will be new alliances to consider, new possibilities, and often a new village. The organization of crews in Marianad is a complex process, and one that it is made more difficult to uncover by the fact that there is a considerable discrepancy between representation and practice.

When asked how crews are recruited, almost identical responses are given by everyone, men and women alike. "We don't have a permanent crew, anyone who asks can come, it's different all the time". If the boat is full, and one more person comes to ask, then the owner or one of the family will step down in their favour. When asked if there is any preference given to relatives the answer is a swift denial. "Anyone can ask, not necessarily a relative". The people who most often crew together are said to be neighbours or friends, rarely relatives.

Yet pressed a little further, the answers are very different. Francis goes kattumaram fishing, and will usually take a mate with him - "not a regular person, a friend or neighbour, not a relative". Who had he fished with the last time he went, I asked. "With Jasayan," he said. Who is? "My uncle (mother's brother)". Roman has a plywood boat. "There is no permanent crew," he said. But after asking for the names of those who went most often, it turned out that there very much was a permanent crew: five of them, who crewed the boat on a rotation system, with one left behind each day who would be given fish for the household but no share. All five were friends. Simon has been going kattumaram fishing together with his neighbour Titus for one season, though he explained that it was the first time they had done so, normally they just go with anyone. Jayraj, with a plywood boat, told me, "People just come and ask", but the people who have been coming for the last six months were Christopher, his wife's mother's godson, Anthony, a neighbour, and Francis, his own father.

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[3] Cuttlefish: a highly prized variety which fetches a good price.

Most people will eventually admit that the crews are in fact semi-permanent, but there is clearly no formalized agreement or contract which ensures this, none of the binding loans between captain and crew that are found in other fishing economies, nothing of the formal kinship arrangements (e.g. Emmerson 1980; Acheson 1981; Alexander 1982)[4]. It is more a question of an unspoken agreement, the fact that those who come today are usually those who came yesterday, and since everyone else knows it, they do not ask for themselves unless there are exceptional circumstances. Simon confirmed this view when describing the organization of the crew from day to day: "You don't usually discuss this, who is to come next day. It's obvious. But suppose someone was really bad, then you might say, 'Tomorrow don't bother to come'. But only for a very bad case would you say it directly". However, even when admitting that the crew normally consists of these few people, the principle that anyone who asks can come is insisted on. "If another person asks, then a family member will stand down in their favour". There is a clear sentiment behind this, that those who have should be generous to those who do not. "After all, the family will get the boat share, and that other person would otherwise get nothing".

There is an emphasis here on generosity, on the idea that all should have equal access to the sea, and those more fortunate should give way to those who are less so, which is an important part of the fishing community's ideas of themselves. The sea is generous with her bounty, and the fishermen in turn should be generous with others, should pass on what they receive. Thus when a boat comes in with a catch, the crew will often give some of the fish to old people who ask for it: "We give to the old men and women on the shore if they ask. The fish was given freely to us, so if they need it, we should give it to them. If we are not generous with the fish, the sea will not be generous either". In the same way the portion of fish which men receive "for the household" is in general larger than they can personally use, but it is distributed widely by their wives to neighbours and family, and if someone asks for some, they should be given, if it is possible (see Chapter 6). It is rare for men to sell this portion[5].

The denial of permanent crew arrangements fits with an ideology of generosity, of allowing anyone who asks to come on the boat, but it accords also with an ideology of independence, a denial of ties of obligation, which is equally important to people. As we will see in later discussions of credit arrangements (Chapter 5), debt is not used here as a way of enchaining workers or tying people to you: the interest paid on a formal loan is seen as

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[4] Carsten (1989: 126) notes that fixed kin-based recruitment of crews was also avoided in the Malaysian fishing village she studied, though for somewhat different reasons.

[5] This emphasis on giving contrasts with Alexander's study in Sri Lanka, where the portion of fish given to the crew for consumption was an important additional source of cash (Alexander 1982).

sufficient return and there is no extra obligation between the parties. Independence and self reliance are highly valued by the fishermen, and the assertion of total flexibility in recruitment of crews can be seen in this context as another aspect of this denial of debt or obligation to others or from others.

There is a third factor here, and that is that the introduction of motorized plywood boats has probably widened the gap between ideology and practice in the recruitment of crews. With the kattumarams, which take mostly a two man or three man crew, and where the technology is much more universal, the organization of crews on an ad hoc, first-come-first-served basis was, and is, much more possible, and probably more common. With the plywood boats, at least one member of the crew must be familiar with the engine, and since the crews are generally much larger, uncertainty about who is coming makes life more difficult, and the increased need for cooperation and good relations between the greater numbers means that semi permanent arrangements are inevitable. Nevertheless, the belief that this is somehow unfair or unduly selfish probably means that crews are in fact more unstable and shifting than is described in many fishing economies (e.g. Acheson 1981; Emmerson 1980; Alexander 1982).

This pattern is encouraged also by the influence of the changing seasons, which tend to mean that boat crews change with them: some men will revert from plywood boats to their own kattumaram as the weather gets calmer, some will start to fish alone rather than with a mate, while the change from net fishing to hook-and-line fishing means the size of crews can go up dramatically. With the hook-and-line, each extra fisherman brings a correspondingly larger catch, and if they are known to be skilled they are a welcome addition to the boat. "If you are a good fisherman, you don't even ask, when you see the boat being pushed you just say, 'I'm coming too'. Even if there are six in the boat they will make room for a seventh. If you are really good they will turn back for you even though they have launched the boat".

All at Sea: Competition and Quarrels.

For the time that they are at sea the crew is ideally one unit, with very little differentiation. On the plywood boats the person who deals with the engine, generally the owner, is also the captain, but even here there is little giving or taking of orders. If there is a member of the crew who is younger or more inexperienced, they may get told what to do, or expected to do more of the heavy work, but ideally, "everyone knows their job and all are equally skilled and do the same work - when one pulls a weight up, the

other will just automatically pull up the next one without a word being said". The owner may make the major decisions, such as where to fish and what gear to use, but in terms of the work to be done, all work equally together.

This cooperation within the boat contrasts with the competition which is emphasized between boats. "If one kattumaram finds fish then in no time there will be ten or fifteen boats there fishing. Always they are on the lookout for fish and if you see two boats there, you know there's fish". At a depth of 40 measures there may be 15-20 boats within close range, and "there is a great deal of competition. At sea you may not be friends like you are on shore. At sea it's every boat for itself".

This does not mean there are no rules. If one boat has their net down in a particular area, and they are catching fish, another boat must wait for them to haul the net before they themselves can try their luck. In return the boat there first should not leave it too long before moving on In some cases they will even share catches. "If two boats are close by and find fish they may agree to share it. It will be loaded on one boat, which will go to shore, and the other will stay to get the rest of the fish. Then they share the money". But this is unusual: "we prefer to do things individually if possible".

Fishing in close proximity with another boat may result in cooperation, but it can also lead to quarrels, and this is in fact the most common outcome. Lines and nets get easily entangled, sometimes so much so that they get snapped, and to disentangle them and sort out which fish belong to which boat requires the sort of patience and forbearance that the fishermen do not count as one of their strong points. "When there are arguments whoever uses the greatest force gets both lines... Often there will be violence". Francis explained that it was always possible to sort the situation out if you remained calm, "but if you are ready for a fight, then one will develop". Unfortunately, as most people emphasized, they usually are ready for just that. "It's the excitement brought about by the sight of the fish. The very sight of it excites the fisherman. You don't think clearly". But these quarrels are usually short-lived, over almost as soon as they are begun. "Once back on shore the same people who were violently attacking each other will be the best of friends".

This idea of the fishermen as quick tempered, but at the same time almost as quick to forgive and forget, is a common one. At sea, there is constant tension and crisis, when a moment's delay or stupidity can mean a lot, and "there may be a need to shout at someone a lot, but they understand the need for it and there is no offense". This short fuse carries over onto the land: "we get angry very soon, like if you ask a child to get you something and they don't respond immediately you lose your temper... You wouldn't tolerate them looking left or right for it, you expect them to know

exactly where it is". The fishermen have a vast vocabulary of deeply offensive insults and swear words and they use them liberally, with no regard for seniority of age or generation, to the point where they almost lose their meaning. For my research assistant, the insults hurled at people on the beach when there was any hitch in hauling in the boats or nets were so offensive as to have precluded any further relationship between the parties concerned, yet they would be wandering around with their arms round each other just ten minutes later.

This tendency to quarrel easily, and the frequent swearing and cursing, means that the fishermen have a reputation outside the community for being extremely violent and aggressive. It is a reputation that they are not totally displeased with, and do much to live up to[6]. Paulos, lamenting the escalation of the conflict between trawlermen and local fishermen, explained, "You know there was a country boat destroyed in Anjengo by these trawlers, and now here is the end of the world, because these people, the fishermen, they will not stand for that, they will have to react, and then there will be *real* trouble". The fishermen, after all, are great fighters, and everyone knows that.

The quickness to anger, the violence of the fishermen can be linked also to their bravery, and their strength. In all these things the fishermen show themselves to be more than averagely *hot*, men who require strong food and liquor and who burn up their energy in physical exertion, in work and sex and fights[7]. The particular food taken by the fishermen and the way in which they take it, is also seen as important for this strength, and as distinctive of their identity. Fish, however small an amount, is essential at every meal, particularly for men: "We take fish all the time - it's very healthy. It makes you strong. The fisherfolk are strong and it's because of the way we eat food. We attach great importance to food, we take a lot and we waste a lot too".

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[6] I saw this at first hand when on a trip with a number of villagers to the shrine of Velankani in Tamil Nadu. On the way back we stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch, and there was a dispute about my bill, which the waiters tried to insist I had not paid. It was sorted out after a few minutes, but not before I'd done my share of unladylike argument, which I was feeling rather self conscious about. I needn't have worried, since as soon as everyone else realised what had happened, they instantly pitched in on my side, and there was soon a stand up shouting match between the young men on the bus, and the waiters from the restaurant. Everyone seemed to be rather enjoying the confrontation but my friend Devan, a Malayali Hindu, was frankly terrified. "You don't know what these Tamils are like, they are mad bastards, they will kill us all, and you should hear the things these fishermen are saying to them!" Loosely translated, these turned out to be something along the lines of: "You motherfuckers, don't you know who we are, we are fucking fishermen and we are well hard, so you mess with us and you will get your fucking heads kicked in". Amazingly, we escaped unscathed.

[7] Hotness as an attribute of the body, the person, is also seen to be characteristic of Harijans, and a reason for their inferiority compared with the cooler, more superior high castes (C. Osella 1993). For Harijans themselves, as here with the fishermen, the idea that they are hotter may be represented as a form of superiority, a strength that the weaker high castes do not possess.

Knowledge and Skills

What other qualities, then, are emphasized by the men of the fishing community? What makes a good fisherman? "A good fisherman is one whose mind works like a compass, who knows exactly where to go, what to do, where the fish will be, and can tell others also. Once such a man has a reputation others will follow him always. He has a sense of the sea". The two most important qualities for a fisherman are that he has enough knowledge of the sea and fishing techniques, and that he has enthusiasm enough to go to sea often.

The knowledge that a man must have to fish successfully on this coast is considerable. First there is the geography of the coast to learn, the position of the good fishing grounds and how to find them. With no compasses, the method of navigation is by triangulation: landmarks on the shore are lined up behind each other to give a particular line out to sea, and the point where two such lines of sight meet is the desired spot. Landmarks used are churches, particular rocks, large trees, hills - anything that is clearly visible from the sea. Additional information on the boat's position is gained from a knowledge of the sea depth in different areas. The depth is measured using a line with a weight on the end, which is calibrated by *mar*, measures, the length between two outstretched hands. Around Marianad there are twelve such fishing grounds, but not all know them.

Not only must you be familiar with the fishing grounds, but also with the changes that the seasons are likely to bring to the type of fish to be found there and the kind of fishing which will be most successful. Different techniques of fishing require different skills. Thus with the net, you must decide what mesh to use according to the fish you wish to catch, and there is a great deal of skill in getting the net to float at exactly the right depth. "Too low, and the fish will swim over it, and too high and they will escape under it. So you have to judge what they are doing and adjust it accordingly". This is done by altering the depth of line attached to the top floats. The net must also be kept pulled out so as to get the maximum surface area, but not taut or the fish will find it easy to avoid being entangled: this is why the net is attached in folds to the top rope. With hook-and-line fishing a different set of skills comes into play. The fisherman must have an idea of what fish are around to know how to bait his line, what size hook to use, at what depth to cast. He needs to have the skill to agitate the line in a way that will attract the fish, or know how to use sparkling shiny bits of material on his hook. The important thing however is to be able to play the fish once it is hooked without losing it or breaking the line, both easily done when fishing near rocks, where the fish are more likely to be found. In this, a shrewd guess as to what fish is

on the line, and the knowledge of what it is likely to do, is important. "We always know what fish it is on the line. After much experience you can tell just by the way it pulls".

In fact much of the knowledge of the fishermen is concerned with knowledge of fish, their habits, the likely places to find them, the particular seasons when they can be found, their taste, price and qualities. "To be a good fisherman you must be able to think like a fish". People can name and describe all the kinds of fish that can be caught in this area, from the most common to the most rare, and for the most important species will talk of their habits and qualities as though they were old friends. Thus, when I asked what difference the moon made to fishing, I was given a dissertation on the habits of the *kanava*, the cuttlefish. "The kanava gathers when the moon is full. On the day of the full moon they come together to lay eggs. Once the fish see other fish gathering, they too join the crowd and soon there are a lot of them all together. And then when they lay eggs, this is a special arrangement, they don't lay them on the sand but they weave a net (*vala*) from a kind of secretion, and this they attach to something solid standing up out of the sand, like an iron piece or something, and the eggs are inside this net. They don't lay it on the sand, because then the current would take it off and they would not be able to keep track of the young ones. The bigger male, they move into the centre of the crowd then, over the eggs, and the females are around the outside. So if we start to catch a few small females, we know to move across a little and we will find the big males."

In this description there is a kind of admiration for the cleverness of the fish with their "special arrangement", and the reason for it, to "keep track of the young". In many of the asides and descriptions of fish this slight sense of identification, of anthropomorphism, can be found. Patros talked of how fish could be found often near rocks, because this was their "home", and others too referred to these places as the homes of the fish. "You see, when you fish near rocks you require a lot of cleverness. Some big fish will sit inside one of the crevices, and it will come out just to eat. So maybe it takes the bait, and then like a lightning flash it is back in its room, and the line is caught on the rocks. So if we let it loose it's no use and if we pull it it's broken, because the fish is already in its room, you understand?" And just to drive the point home I was given a demonstration, with the line caught on the edge of a door, and Simon, the fish, hidden in the bedroom.

The sense of identification with the fish can be seen also in the descriptions of great struggles with fish which have been hooked, the sense of pitting one's own wit and strength against that of the fish, particularly with some of the bigger ones. "There are fish which are so strong they will pull the kattumaram, and it can take hours before they

will tire". There are also fish which can be extremely dangerous, which can spear the fisherman or poison him, or which may be big enough, like the big sharks, to smash the kattumaram. But with all of them there is a sense of excitement brought about by the chase, the hunt, the prospect of a good catch, and it is this enthusiasm which drives a man to go to sea that really makes a good fisherman.

"A good fisherman is one who goes to sea a lot of days, is not afraid to go to sea, who will not waste time drinking when there's fish to be caught". There are a number of elements in this common measure of the qualities of a fisherman by the number of days he goes to sea. Partly it is a measure of the enthusiasm for the chase, for the catching of fish, the degree to which this man has the sea in his blood, to which he is naturally drawn by the desire to go to sea. Josephine's husband, though he had no need to, bought a kattumaram on his return from the Gulf, because he could not bear ***not*** to go and fish for *kanava* when it was there for the taking. Partly also it is a measure of the man's courage and faith, his confidence, to go to sea even when it is rough, and this is something that can easily be lost. Older men often suddenly find themselves unable to go any more, crippled by the loss of faith in themselves and the fear of death after so long spent narrowly evading it. Jenesten explained, "You need faith in yourself, confidence in the sea. Recently I have lost this, it's odd how suddenly it has happened. I used to be so brave, I always went to sea even in the roughest weather, if it was needed. Now mostly it's my son who goes, he's a good boy, a courageous boy. For myself I feel, how can I go out and maybe die there?". Lastly, it is also a measure of a man's sense of responsibility and duty to family, that he will risk all and go to sea for their sakes, to bring fish back to support them. This latter is the aspect that women often emphasize, torn between the need for their husbands and sons to go to sea and the desire to hold them back for fear of the rough weather and the danger. Agnes, describing the dedication of her brother, said, "This is the kind of man he is. He goes to the sea every day, and even when there was a Youth Group excursion planned to Velankani[8], he said, 'No, now is the time for *kanava* and I will stay and fish'. People who do this for you, how can you refuse them anything?"

Many of these aspects of life as a fisherman, the drive to go to sea and the skills and knowledges that fishermen consider themselves to have, can be found in the stories that they tell each other about their adventures, and it is to some of these that I now turn.

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[8] The shrine of Our Lady of Health, in Velankani, in Tamil Nadu, a popular pilgrimage from the coastal area.

Fishermen's Tales

When they gather on the beach in the evening, men exchange among themselves stories of fishing exploits, their own and others', describing times of danger or times of great luck, stories of storms and drowning, stories of particular fish or particular fishing grounds. These stories are full of asides about the habits of different fish, the methods of catching them, the types of gear used, the particular signs of bad weather, the geography of the sea in different areas. From them young boys learn their first familiarity with the world of fishing, their first taste of the sea.

Before looking briefly at the themes that emerge from these stories, I would like to give a few of them in full. The first two were told to me by Simon and Paulos respectively, in response to a request for stories about the supernatural; the third is from a book of fishermen's tales[9].

Steamers and Black Magic

Then, the sea was horribly rough here and at home we had difficult times. Sometimes I used to go to Vizhinjam [to fish there] so that the children could survive. There if I went to the sea around this time [4 pm] I could return early, at 4 am or sometimes earlier. When I reached there, some people called me to come on their boat. So I asked for a share, you know that's how we ask, sometimes, and they usually oblige because they know how we're in need. If it's a person who doesn't know their job, they wouldn't give a share, but just enough money for tea and a little extra. With us it's different, since they know we know the job and they can't deny it. So I took the share and sent it home to my family through sellers who'd come to Vizhinjam. That was Saturday.

So on Sunday, a relative of theirs who knew some black magic (*choodram*) called me and said, "Simon, come with me to the vallam". He had a pen, a metal piece about this big [6 inches] and an incense stick I saw it only after he entered the vallam. After that he murmured or chanted something and placed this and whatever else he had with him in the vallam. And then he said, "Come, let's go and have a cup of coffee", and he assured me we would get a lot of fish. You can believe it or not, but I'm saying it as I experienced it, and this in the name of that image (*rupam*) that you see there [the Sacred Heart]

Anyway, I went fishing, I cast the net and in no time the net was full of fish. There were lots and lots of fish. As soon as you see a catch you kind of fix the price in your mind, and if on the shore you would say round about Rs 5,000, at sea you would always see it as less, say Rs 3,500... I thought I'd get Rs 5,000 and that means a share of Rs 700. So I said let's go to

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[9] A collection of stories written by a fisherman from Quilon, Andrews, which was published by SIFFS (in Malayalam).

the shore - I wasn't feeling too well either, otherwise nothing stops me, I am not the kind who'd leave the fish even if others go back, I stay for a long time. Everybody knows it, too. But that day I was eager to go back.

Well we ate our rice and curry and had some betel (you see that even now I use it), and then started to pull in the net, but it was a heavy load and the vallam could only just take it. We hadn't got the entire net in, some of it was still left in the water. While we were doing this we could see a light from the north. I identified it as a steamer. We are very much used to seeing and locating these steamers, there'll be a red light, a green light and a white light. The red light is on the right, the green light on the left[10]. If you see all three lights you may well imagine that it is coming straight for you. At the centre will be the white light - you should never see all three like that, even two can be dangerous.

This steamer was fast approaching and I was getting a bit worried. So I asked them for a knife - then if it's really difficult you can cut the net, and then the boat and people can be saved. If we continue pulling the net the steamer would by then come near and nothing could be done. Even as we were saying this the steamer could be seen approaching fast. So, I asked for the knife and I really swore but no-one could find it, we were all getting a bit panicky. I asked someone to start the engine, so that we could move away... You realize, the steamer was then very near, about 1/2 km away and that means in two minutes we'll be struck. We can see all three lights. So. I had asked him to start the engine - I am saying that in very mild terms because you are sitting here, but there I used a lot of swearing, at sea only that works. The engine wouldn't start, the knife wasn't there - we had a torch and if we were to light the torch maybe they would see it. The torch wouldn't work. The steamer was very near. I called on God and jumped overboard.

So you know when the steamer comes it's as though the sea makes way for it - on it's way if it's a kattumaram or a vallam it just throws it about. So I knew we had lost everything, and I was in some place, the others were somewhere else, we were in the middle of the sea. I thought I would die. I was not angry, nor could I abuse anyone - who would I be angry with? I was alone, in mid-sea. I began calling on God, and then I thought I heard a sound, so I swam towards it, and there were the others, clinging to a piece of raft. They were just lying there, hanging on to it, and it was very cold, it was June. There was nobody to help us, and although I tried to comfort the others I was really very frightened. We were drifting further and further out to sea.

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[10] The green light is the starboard light (on the right of the ship as you look towards the bows) and the red to port (the left looking towards the bows). To a boat facing the steamer these lights would appear the other way around, i.e. red to the right and green to the left. The white light is the masthead light.

All of us lost hope and we started praying. After some time we saw a steamer We thought if it came near enough it might see and help us. We were very numb. All of us were praying to God, and we started making promises of offerings to God. The steamer was moving in our direction. We started to wave, and we could see the captain walking down the steps. Now we can be saved I said. You see, we had done all this [the black magic] to get plenty of fish, and there we were, we got the fish, but then we lost everything, the fish, the net, the boat, and only God saved the people too from being lost.

So we were lifted to a lifeboat, and they took us to Vizhinjam, and we were taken to hospital. After some time we could go home, and there were all my children crying to see me. So that's the end of the story.

The Saving of Joseph

My father's brother had an experience. His patron saint was Joseph, he used to utter the name of Joseph all the time. He went to the sea alone one day and out there he grew giddy. He fell from the kattumaram and the current that day was really fast. When he came to, in the water, he knew he was in trouble. He prayed to Joseph, and the next thing he knew a man was pulling him from the water into his kattumaram. He didn't know this person, who promised to take him to his own kattumaram. He rowed him to the other kattumaram, and my uncle knew it was Saint Joseph. By the time he said this, they had reached the other kattumaram, and the man said, Here is your boat. My uncle climbed on to his boat, and then turned back and there was nobody there. So now do you believe this was Joseph? He didn't come in his original form but the form of an old man, but it was him.

The Story of the Indefatigable Kattathala

In the searching heat of March, the winds are sometimes very strong. I was out on the vallam with my line and bait. The idea was to catch the *neymeen* (seer fish) and this time I used the *vala* as bait. By Quilon Point there were nearly some 20 vessels on the sea with the fishing line. It was past 11 am. We had some food and then relaxed.

I hoped for some *neymeen* to come my way. While rowing westward I saw Benedict's boat getting pulled by some big fish. I turned back to help him. I tied my vallam to his and rowed the way the fish was pulling. We knew that the fish was *kattathala*. If it had been *olathala* the pull would have been different. The *olathala* doesn't swim in the depths once it gets hooked, it springs up to the surface and jumps up more than four feet to scare the fisherman. If its long thick horn gets into our neck or body, the result can be fatal. The *kattathala* however shoots up two or three times and then dives to the depths.

Benedict had already caught three *neymeen* which would fetch him three hundred rupees. If he went to chase the *kattathala* these fish would spoil. So I asked him to pass the line to me and go to the shore. He gave me the instructions and made for the shore. Alone, I remembered my father's words, that if one were to bite the end of the line, the poison in the teeth would travel along the line to the fish, and it would rise to the surface. In desperation, I bit the line several times. The fish stopped pulling.

After some time, the fish still showed no sign of movement. I pulled hard at the line but the fish would not come up. Unwilling to admit defeat, this *kattathala* had pierced its spikes deep into the clay at the bottom, and could not be lifted at all. I broke the line, and rowed to the shore, fishless.

Themes

In these three stories we can see many of the themes which run through men's descriptions of their life and work. In the last, there is competition, cooperation, the knowledge displayed of the different habits of the fish, the pursuit of the fish and the struggle to land it, almost an admiration for its unwillingness to admit defeat and the ruse by which it avoids this. The fish here, as came out in an earlier section, is almost anthropomorphized, a worthy partner in an epic struggle. In the earlier stories, especially Simon's, we see the same attention to detail, the knowledgeable asides and explanations directed at the young and less knowledgeable listeners. There is also the real sense of danger, in all the stories, the knowledge that at sea "death is just waiting for you", and only the mercy of God can save you. Especially if you have been so foolish as to trust to black magic.

Other themes which appear again and again in these stories and descriptions is the sense of excitement from the chase of the fish, the struggle between man and the natural elements, the cleverness with which fishermen must outwit the fish and succeed even against the heaviest odds, and the unpredictability with which one moment there will be no fish and the next they will be hauling in a good catch. There is much about the competition with others, and at the same time the ways in which fishermen will sacrifice everything to help another who is in danger. There are stories of quarrels at sea side by side with stories of cooperation, and always the emphasis on the potential and actual dangers, on the bravery and courage of the fishermen. Fishermen in these stories are quick thinking, as they have to be, and there is much made of the narrow escapes, and the ways in which they follow the fish even at great risk.

A constant thread running through all these descriptions is a sense of the importance of the supernatural, the protection of God and the saints, and the dangers that come from trusting to the power of black magic. The

variation of the seasons and the extreme rough weather around the monsoon period along this coast leads, as I have said before, to a heightening of the risks and dangers which all fishermen have to face, and perhaps increases the preoccupation here with the powers of the supernatural. The first trust of the fisherman is in God, but there are other powers too: Kadalamma, the sea goddess, and the power of magic.

Religion

Jesus Christ, the Fishermen's God, and Kadalamma, the Sea Mother.

Before setting out to fish, a crew will always pray to God to protect them; for the most part, though this is less admitted to, they will also dip their hands in the sea and raise them up in homage to Kadalamma, the deity of the sea. Some of the fishermen are aware that the worship of Kadalamma fits uneasily with strictly Christian beliefs, and they will deny her any place in their prayers. For the majority however she is as much a part of the divine as is Jesus Christ, her power is merely different, more circumscribed. She is part of the world of the sea, and rules there equally with God. "When we start out we pray to God, and we also say to the sea, Oh Mother, save us from all trouble... Kadalamma enjoys the same place for us as God, in fact we see her as a form of God. We pray to God and we call on the sea as a kind of witness of the prayer".

The fact that Kadalamma and Jesus can exist in the same world and be worshipped together points to the fact that the Catholicism of the fishing community is not quite the same all-encompassing religion it is in other regions[11]. For the fishermen, Jesus Christ is simply "*our* God", as opposed to the gods of the others, the Muslims and the Hindus, or even in some senses the other Christians. Of all the deities that exist, they have chosen Him, and He them, and thus He looks after them and protects them and is worshipped by them, together with Mary and Joseph and all the saints. Kadalamma, because she is also theirs, their Mother, the sea that they interact with daily and which feeds them and protects them, must be essentially on the same side as Christ. They have each their own place, and Kadalamma is certainly a lesser power than God himself, but there is a sense that they approve of each other in their common concern for the fisherpeople.

Kadalamma is a much more capricious deity than Christ, she has the power to protect or to deal out death, to give or to withhold fish, she is in

[11] There is not the space here to deal more fully with the nature of Catholicism in the fishing community: I have discussed this in somewhat greater depth elsewhere (Busby n.d.)

fact much more the ambivalent Hindu goddess than a Christian deity, though she is the fishermen's mother and as such is for the most part protective and nurturing. The presence of Kadalamma as a deity who joins with God to protect and watch over the fishermen is contrasted strongly with the other form of power to which fishermen can turn, or which can afflict them: the power of magic.

Black magic

There is a strong fascination in the villages with magic and the ways it can be used to influence the world, particularly in the two areas of sickness and fishing. It is firmly believed that by using magic a man can increase his catches, and if someone is seen consistently to land more fish than anyone else, the suspicion that he has done it by nefarious means will be very strong. "If 200 boats go to sea every day and one always comes back with fish when others are denied it, then they must be doing something, they must be using black magic". The agents are often said to be Hindus or Muslims but they are as likely in fact to be fishermen themselves.

Although most people believe that black magic will increase your catches, it is not something that is undertaken lightly. There is a price to pay. "These people, who use this, they will be punished. If something bad doesn't happen to them, it will be sure to affect their family". Because they have strayed from the path of good, they have in effect abandoned God, and can no longer be protected by Him. "After some time they will become unable to go to sea because of the curse of God". The belief that if you use black magic you will eventually be unable to go to sea any more was widely held. Selvam explained it as being due to the need to pray to God with a clear heart. "To go to sea you must pray to God and go, pray for safety and then you will be OK, nothing will happen to you. But if you do black magic you forget God, you cannot pray, and so you become unable to go to sea".

There is no doubt that although magic might provide a quick way of making money, the powers of evil are no match for the powers of God in the long term. Not only will you suffer for your sin, but the money you have made will not last. "If you use black magic to get good catches, then the money you make like this will not last, it will just melt away and eventually you will lose everything you gained. What you get by the grace of God, that lasts forever". The moral is one that is seen strongly in the tale told by Simon, above, where not only the catch, but the boat and gear and nearly the fishermen's lives as well, are lost due to the foolish use of magic.

So far I have talked about the fishermen as though they were a homogenous group, with no distinction between kattumaram and plywood boat owners. This is however certainly a distinction that is drawn within

the community, perhaps more by the kattumaram fishermen than the others. It is bound up with distinctions of time and place, and leads me also into a consideration of the antagonism towards the trawler sector.

Fishermen's Identities

Village Identity

In general along the coastal area a person's village is an important part of their identity and often perceived status, and it will be one of the first pieces of information elicited from a stranger. "People from different areas do things differently. They make their equipment up differently, they bring the fish to land in a different manner. If I saw a fisherman at sea, I could make a rough guess as to where they came from. Even more if I heard the speech". Different villages along the coast have very different characters, different mixes of Hindu, Christian, Muslim, they can be more or less crowded or prosperous, there is often an entirely different class structure from one to the next, and different preferred techniques of fishing. In Puthukurichy and St Andrews there is a strata of much richer, more established fishermen/owners, who control the big beach seine nets which need about thirty men to work them. In Poovar there is a strata of Muslim merchants who control credit in the village and have extensive patron-client ties with the fishermen. Poonthura, on the edge of the city, is the most crowded village in Kerala, with a population density of over 1,500/sq km. Anjengo is known for the extent of motorization, while Mampally, a Muslim village just up the coast from it, uses only the three log kattumaram, a simpler form even than the four log maram generally used. In general certain villages stand out as being more prosperous, better to live in, better to come from, better to marry into, though Gulf migration is beginning to make differentiation within villages increasingly more important than that between villages (see Chapter 1).

In Marianad most of the adult population was in fact born elsewhere[12], and people are perhaps particularly aware here of others' village of origin. Neighbours and friends are often from the same village, and they are more likely to fish together, and often to marry within the group. This is to some extent just a question of being more closely related, having greater networks of connection carried over from the natal village, rather than any sense of distinction from the other people in Marianad. It is noticeable that among the younger adults and children, connections are just as strong between those whose families came from different villages as

[12] The origins of Marianad in a community project started in the 1960s is described in the Introduction.

those who came from the same place, and there is a greater tendency to just see themselves as being "from Marianad" when asked. But even among the older adults there is an acknowledgment that in many ways they too are now "from Marianad", and Marianad has a reputation as a prosperous village and one with skilled fishermen. Roman told me, "I have been here 25 years, and ever since I came this has been my place". Paulos, too, who was nearly 40 when he came, said, "This is the place where my permanent address is, where my ration card is. I am from this place. When I go to Puthiyathura, even now they say I am from Puthiyathura, but in all respects I am from Marianad".

Important in this sense of identity for men is the sense that they know the sea here, that they are familiar with it, and with the fishing in the area. Victor explained, "Fishing is a system where life and work go together. Where you work, that is your place. The sea there will suit you, it will agree with your style of fishing, you will feel that your prospects are better there than any other place". Mutapen, talking about the transition to Marianad, explained how scared he had been of the sea here when he first came. "The sea here is rougher than the sea there, we were really afraid of the sea here when we first came, it was unfamiliar to us. But after a few years, when we went back there we were afraid of the sea there. Because you have to get used to a sea before you can work there". The importance of the sea as the focus of identity and the emphasis on becoming part of a place through learning how to fish there, makes sense in a context where men move easily between villages on marriage, and there is a relatively high degree of mobility even after marriage as people move where the fishing is good.

The relation between people and place here is consequently a much more flexible and processual one than has been described by Daniel for a Tamil agricultural village (Daniel 1984). Not only do people get used to the sea in a new place, they also get used to each other, and to the place itself, and they become gradually more at home there. "People become more similar from living together, being in the same place. For example, those from the East[13] never went to coffee shops to eat and drink, it was not their way, always they ate at home. But now they have become used to it - now they will send outside for tea without a second thought. This change comes from living with other people, but it also comes from the place, the location. Marianad is more Western, so people here now speak more Malayalam - before they would speak a mixture of the two, Malayalam and Tamil, not really either but between the two".

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[13] This commonly refers to those from Tamil Nadu or close to it, the villages in the extreme south of Kerala, while 'Western', later, refers to Kerala proper.

Southerners and Northerners, Plywood and Kattumaram.

Marianad as a place may have influenced the fishermen who moved there, but to those who live in the surrounding villages they remain quite distinctive. The stretch of coast in this area is one where the shore and boat seine predominates, and there is little knowledge of the kattumaram and particularly the many skills of hook-and-line fishing. The fishermen who moved to Marianad are mostly from the southern region of Trivandrum, from an area where kattumaram fishing rules supreme. Once they had become used to the fishing areas around Marianad and the particular features of the sea bed, the greater technical skill of the southerners could be used to good effect, exploiting fishing grounds further out to sea that the fishermen of that area had never attempted to reach.

The relative lack of competition meant that for those who moved here, Marianad was an extremely good place for fishing, and catches were very high. Marianad does in fact still stand out from the villages around it, having a much more active fishing population, much greater numbers of craft, and much better catches. The SIFFS techno-economic survey of the Trivandrum coast concluded that the most dynamic fishermen were now to be found in the motorized sector, but added in a footnote, "The *kattumaram* fishermen of Puthiyathura, Marianad and Mampally will probably challenge this statement and with good reason" (SIFFS 1991a: 8).

The distinction of "southerner" with which those from the surrounding area label the Marianad fishermen is one which is also used within the village, since there are in fact a proportion who come from the more northern villages around Anjengo. However, it is much more strongly bound up here with the distinction between kattumaram and plywood fishermen than with actual place of origin. For the most part, "those from the south fish with the kattumaram and those from the north with the plywood boat". This is partly attributed to their particular skills or lack of them, partly acknowledged to be merely contingent, a result of the fact that boats were introduced first in Anjengo, and so those with connections there had more chance to work on them, to become familiar with the technology, and to take the risk of buying one themselves. As the technology becomes more familiar in Marianad itself the distinction is becoming less and less true: "now the technology is spreading, and there's a noticeable change".

There remains however a strong belief that kattumaram fishermen are different from plywood boat fishermen, that they are stronger, more skilled, more knowledgeable, and altogether more macho. "You can always tell who is a kattumaram worker and who works on the plywood boat from the way they do things. Because the nature of the work is different, then

the way people do things is different. Maram owners are more skilled, more professional, more hardworking. Plywood boat people are more sloppy. Kattumaram workers are better fishermen". Patros told me how kattumaram fishermen would not often get called to work on the plywood boats, "because those people don't want to get shown up, they take it easy whereas we are much harder workers".

Clearly this is a discourse which has more currency among the kattumaram fishermen than the plywood boat workers. Nevertheless, it is given support by those who have plywood boats also, who take great pains to emphasize that they were trained as kattumaram fishermen, that they have often worked on kattumarams for years before obtaining a motorized boat, and they therefore possess the skills and knowledge which this implies even if they are no longer active kattumaram fishermen. Roman, who has a plywood boat, agreed that kattumaram fishing was more skilled. "Kattumaram fishing is the most difficult and dangerous. In the plywood boat, it's easy. A man who has become used to the boat fishing, to this ease, would find it hard to go back to the kattumaram, but a maram fisherman can easily swap to the boat". Francis, who also has a boat, said that he often fished with other people when his own boat had a full crew, and emphasized that he would happily go with friends who had kattumarams, since he knew the work and had grown up fishing with the kattumaram.

There is a fairly strong belief, then, in the superiority of kattumaram fishermen, in their greater skill and courage: a belief which is not difficult to understand when you see the small size and fragility of the craft, pitching and tossing on the waves, yet going miles out to sea using only the power of sail and oar. It is linked to a nostalgia about the past, and the skills of fishermen in the days when there was no outboard engine and only cotton nets.

When Men were Men

The introduction of plywood boats represents an increase in ease for the fishermen, an advancement in technology, and there is admiration for what an be achieved with the engine, but it is seen partly also as a loss, as the gradual disappearance of the skills and knowledge associated with the kattumaram and an earlier age. "My father knew everything there is to know about fishing. Then there were no mechanized aids, everyone back then had to know how to do all the jobs, how to make the nets, how to build the boats. They had great skill and knowledge, it's not the same now. They had a knowledge about everything natural, the sea, the fish. Now they use artificial aids, they could not go back to that lost art".

The stamina and hardiness of the fishermen in the old days is emphasized in stories, like how they used to go to sea for four or five days at a stretch. "By the fourth day they didn't have any food and they would catch the seagulls and eat them raw... It's justifiable because how else would you survive for eight days without food?" The fishermen now have it easy compared to those days. "Now it's Yamaha time. Really it's easy now. All you have to do is start the motor and there's no problem".

The distinction between then and now, the hardship of the past and the ease of the present, the natural methods as opposed to the artificial, is to some extent mapped on to the distinction between kattumaram and plywood boat fishermen, as we have seen above. It is as nothing, however, compared with the distinction drawn between the artisanal fishermen as a whole, and the trawler workers.

Trawler Workers Can't Swim.

If there is some dispute about just how much easier the plywood boat fishermen have it compared to kattumaram fishermen, there is no such doubt about the trawler workers. They are universally despised. "Those people who go on the trawlers, they are not fishermen. They can't even swim". The idea that the trawler crews can't swim is one that was often repeated, and a powerful way of asserting that they were not "real" fishermen: *all* fishermen can swim. "The trawler workers, they don't require any intelligence, they just let the engine do it all. They don't have any experience at sea, they are not familiar with the sea".

Though people know that some of those who work on the trawlers are from the fishing community there is a resistance to the idea that the trawler crews are in fact for the most part from the same background as themselves. "70% of those on the trawlers don't know fishing. 30% may be fishermen, but they will be those who have had bad health and so they have shifted just because it is much easier to do trawling. When they can't do [real] fishing any more, then they have to find something". There are two reasons why it is believed that people from the fishing community would not work on the trawlers except when there was no option: the fact that the workers are merely employees, and the fact that their work is unskilled.

"If you go for that work, you know it is a job, and you won't be in control of what you are doing". Crew relations on the trawlers are much more hierarchical, and the boats themselves are owned for the most part by merchant financiers, who take on captain and crew in a much more obvious relation of employer and employee. "You'd resort to that only if you could no longer fish for yourself - and once you've done it, there's no

coming back, you will not be fit any more for this kind of fishing". Not only are you an employee on the trawlers, but you also have a restricted role as a worker. "They just do one job and that's all, they just do what they're told. They don't have to know all the different jobs, and what needs to be done in different circumstances". They just, "let the rope down and once that's done the engine takes over".

The idea that "the engine does it all" is one that is occasionally used in association with the plywood boats, but in the context of comparison with the trawler workers there is no question that they are counted on the side of the real fishermen. "Plywood boat workers are different, they have worked on kattumarams before, they *know* fishing. You need expertise for this kind of fishing, the net has to be set at different levels, not just on the sea bed, there's more skill involved".

The distinction drawn between the artisanal fishermen, real fishermen who know the sea, and the trawler workers, who "have no intelligence" and "can't even swim", provides a powerful background to the dispute with the trawler sector over fishing rights and the monsoon ban. This has become to some extent a dispute about who has the prior rights to the sea, and the assertion that trawler workers are not real fishermen is at the same time an assertion that they do not have a legitimate claim (see Introduction).

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how men's identities are strongly bound up with their sense of themselves as fishermen, and their relation to the sea. To be a real man, as becomes clear through the discussion of the contrast with the trawler workers, is to be familiar with everything about fishing on a small boat in difficult conditions: to be brave, strong, and clever at finding the fish and setting the lines or nets; to be willing to pit yourself against the elements and capable of winning. Women hover on the edges of this world: they appear in the stories of fishermen's exploits only as wives waiting anxiously on the beach or mothers calling their refractory sons to prayer. Women praise their men for the dedication and bravery they show in going to the sea, they organize them and send them off, they feed them and provide for their needs, but essentially they are estranged from all that it means to be a fisherman, from all the elements of the fisherman's identity that we have discussed in this chapter, which is in essence a *male* identity. Women inherit their natures from their mothers, men from their fathers. It is not just a question of physical strength and stamina, or knowledge and training. Women are simply not fishermen, it is not in their blood in the same way it is in a man's.

In the next chapter I want to leave the world of men and examine instead the world of women, the work that women do and the ways in which they are understood to differ from men, particularly through their relation to money and the market.

Chapter 4

Women, Selling and Money

In Minho ... the woman rules the house and the husband. She exceeds the man in cunning, courage and strength ... When she marries, the girl knows the value of her dowry and the marriage is a business deal which she personally bargains about ... She is not a spouse, almost a serf, who is empowered to her husband: she is rather a companion and associate whose business spirit dominates over the constitutional weakness of the men, who are destitute of a lively intelligence".

J .P. Oliveira Martins, 1881[1].

Women, as we have seen, are completely peripheral to the work of fishing as carried out by men, yet women are in fact extremely important to the fishing economy as a whole. In Marianad virtually all the fish brought to the shore is bought by women from the village, and then transported and sold at nearby markets or door to door. Women are also the main organizers of credit in the village, essential for dealing with the daily and seasonal fluctuations in income and the sudden unexpected demands for repairs or new gear that characterize a fishing economy. In addition women take on the major organization of the household, both in terms of domestic labour and childcare, and also in terms of household finances: women are central to the household and to relations of interdependence and cooperation between households, where men are quite peripheral.

The importance of women's economic roles in fishing communities has been well described in the literature, with women often acting as traders and fish sellers and having a great deal of power within the household (Norr 1975; Drewes 1982; Anharasan 1985; Merikkin 1987; Nadel-Klein and Lee Davis 1988; Stirrat 1989; Ram 1991). In Trivandrum District women's control over fish selling has been well documented (Kurien 1984; Nayak 1986). In this chapter I want to look particularly at women's roles as fish sellers, and their association with money and the financial management of the household, before going on in the next chapter to look at women's importance in credit networks, and as the forgers of links between households in the village.

1 Quoted in Pina-Cabral (1984).

Fish Vending

In Trivandrum District as a whole, as much as 70% of fish distribution is carried out by women, who sell in the local markets or house to house (Kurien 1984). In Marianad the proportion is even higher, with over 90% of the catch at the beach auction being purchased by women, and at least a third of all adult women working as fish vendors[2].

Selling fish in the markets or door to door is considered a stigmatized occupation by the majority in Kerala. Already perceived as low caste, the fish sellers, working in dirty torn clothes, blouse pulled together with a safety pin any old how and a graying towel slung across their shoulders, smelling strongly of fish, are considered well beyond the pale of middle class/caste society. Besides this their work transgresses all the norms of female propriety and modesty, involving moving in mixed company, loudly and aggressively haggling, and traveling long distances unaccompanied.

This stigma however is not one which carries into the coastal community, where successful fish vendors are admired and respected for the work they do and the money they bring in to the household. Certainly women ought to be married before they start to sell fish, and in practice there are very few vendors under 25, but once a woman has been married for a few years, and has children, she can move relatively easily into this area of work. Among women over 25 the proportion who are fish vendors is almost half, while for older women, over 50, the proportion who have never sold fish is less than a quarter. Women who have been widowed, or abandoned by their husband, almost all support themselves at least partly by fish vending.

In her work on the fisherwomen of Kanyakumari, Kalpana Ram (1991) gives only a very small section of her description of women's work to fish vending, and in it emphasizes the "peculiar status of the female fish vendors" (ibid: 217) and their marginality within the community. They are set apart, she notes, by appearance, age, character and poverty, from the other women, and enter fish selling mostly out of necessity. In transgressing the norms of female propriety, and being unable to conform to ideals of femininity, fish traders are cast as anomalous, desexualized figures, partial outsiders[3]. The situation in Trivandrum District, among the same caste community, is strikingly different. Here there is little evidence for fish vendors forming a separate group within the community or being considered lower in status because of their occupation. Women move in and out of vending according to their convenience and need, and may sell regularly, or only in the peak seasons; may be extremely poor women

[2] The proportion working as fish vendors at some time in their lives is more like two-thirds. Those who are not selling fish work mostly in the house in domestic labour and childcare: a very few work in other occupations, e.g. primary teacher, or working for the cooperative.

[3] Lessinger (1986) describes a similar situation for women vegetable sellers in Madras.

barely surviving on the income from selling, or highly successful vendors who transport large quantities of fish by van and employ other people to sell for them. The difference between the two areas can be seen from the evidence that, in Kanyakumari, women will be withdrawn from vending as the prosperity of the household increases, in a pattern that is seen all over India (Bardhan 1985). In Trivandrum however, "fish vending has a logic and autonomy all of its own, there are very successful women vendors operating here, and even what we could call merchants" (Vivekanandan, SIFFS, personal communication).

There is nothing about fish vending here then which is seen to be in conflict with a woman's sense of female identity: in many ways, the fish vendor is the norm, and she merely displays in abundance those qualities of cleverness with words and money and organization which are seen as particularly female traits in the community. There is however a feeling that the market is no place for unmarried or very recently married women, and this relates to a concern with female sexuality. Young unmarried women are considered to be particularly susceptible to men, they are full of heat and desire, and easily seduced: it would be extremely dangerous for them to be allowed to go out of the village, to escape from the watchful eyes of family, kin and neighbours and mix freely with strangers in the market[4]. Women should be virgins at marriage, not only because the Church and propriety demands it, but because in this way they will bond more completely with their husband, there will be no other previous tie to a different man, and the two will become perfectly united[5]. Marriage, as I have discussed, brings two people together in a bond which lasts ideally all their lives - there is no divorce in this community, and in fact very little permanent separation. Once a woman has been married for a while, and has had a child, she is part of her husband and he of her and the potential for another man or woman to insert themselves between the two is seen as small. Thus, although there is of course gossip, and women who go to the market are careful not to give any cause for speculation, their job is not seen as automatically leading to loss of reputation or status.

In the next sections I shall look at the daily routines and practices of the women fish vendors in Marianad, at credit and the economics of selling, and at some of the differences within the group.

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[4] The idea that post pubescent girls are more heated and sexually powerful, and that they require marriage and sex to cool and calm them is widespread in India (see e.g. Shulman 1980; Sax 1991; Fruzzetti 1982; C. Osella 1993: Chapter 4).

[5] It is less important to ensure that men are virgins, and I am not sure why this should be so except that it is almost invariably the case everywhere. Men will often have their first sexual experience with a married woman, and perhaps because she is already bound to another man there is seen to be less danger of a strong tie being formed.

Daily Routines

Although auctioning of fish goes on for most of the day at the beach, especially during the prawn and cuttlefish seasons, there are two periods when most of the landing and selling is concentrated, the early morning and early evening. Of these the most popular is the early morning, which allows women to buy fish and set off directly for the inland markets; after the evening auction, the fish must be stored overnight in ice and taken the next day. The morning auction is usually under way by 6 am. The beach at this time is a busy, confusing meeting place of boats, people and fish: every few minutes a new kattumaram has reached the shore and is attempting to beach across the surf, with young boys rushing in to help in the hope of a few fish; people are looking out to see what sort of catch they have brought in, while other boats are being dragged up the sand or dismantled to dry, and other crews are standing watching to see what their catch will fetch. There are four or five salesmen, employed by the different cooperatives to run the beach auctions: they are easy to spot, in dry clothes and usually a shirt, with a large black umbrella to shade them from the sun which even at 6 am is fierce, and increased by the dazzle of reflections off the water. Each salesman is surrounded by a close group of women, maybe twenty of them, waiting tensely as the price called goes up, and up, the rapid litany of numbers faltering just slightly at the end, before the bargain is struck, and there's a visible lessening of tension, a slight turning away, before the next slithering pile of gleaming wet fish is upturned onto the sand in front of their feet.

The salesman sorts through the fish quickly and decides how to sell it, in one lot or more. He removes a few fish, sometimes just pushing them to one side gently with his foot - these are his commission from the seller. Of the women standing around the pile, not all will bid: they have different requirements, different amounts of money or credit available to them, different markets. A pile of good sized fish, perhaps tuna, will fetch a high price, and will sell to the wealthy middle class buyers; smaller fish, *nettoli*, whitebait, and sardines, will go cheaply and be easier to sell. Some women already have half a basket full and are looking for very specific fish to complete their load, others are just watching out for anything that is a good price. To an outsider, the bidding is just a confusion of numbers, voices and hand signals, and who is in and who is out is impossible to tell, but somehow suddenly a price has been agreed on and a buyer found, and the successful woman is already picking the fish up off the sand and putting it in her basket, while haggling with the salesman about how much she must give up front and how much she can have on credit, and what she still owes him from yesterday. Grudgingly she may eventually hand over Rs 100 or so,

and he will in turn hand it to the boat owner, along with a credit slip to the cooperative society for the balance[6].

Rajamma is a middlingly successful vendor, who goes to the market most days, but feels able to stay at home sometimes if she feels like it, or if there is some family business to see to. Her husband Joseph owns a plywood boat, and one brother and a brother-in-law are working in the Gulf, so the family's position is relatively good. Rajamma's eldest daughter Shobha is eighteen, which means she can be left to do most of the morning's household work and get the younger children off to school while Rajamma is at the market. Like most of the fish vendors, Rajamma wears an old underskirt, with a worn lunghi wrapped around it, and her money tucked into the top fold of the cloth around her waist. A rough worn piece of whiteish cloth, used for wiping hands and knives, is tucked at one end into her waist and then draped across her left shoulder, partly covering her tight, short sleeved blouse in a workmanlike echo of the elegant final folds of the sari. If she is going to market she will be on the beach soon after 6am, looking out for a catch she likes the look of, exchanging greetings with friends and finding out what kinds of fish have been coming in, and what they are selling for.

Once she has bought her fish, which may take an hour or more, it must be cleaned and prepared and packed. All the women carry their fish in an aluminium vessel, about 30" in diameter and 10" deep, a relatively recent replacement for the older fish baskets of woven bamboo. The fish is washed in sea water, and smeared again in sand, both as a preservative and as palpable evidence of its origins fresh from the beach. The fish is then packed with ice, and this Rajamma may buy from someone else who has made the trek out to the ice factory just down the road, or she may, if there is time, go with one or two other women and buy a block to share between them. The ice must be broken up into small pieces, using their fish knives and chopping boards, and distributed around the fish. On top, finally, go the board and knives, and a covering of large pieces of bark to keep the sun off. The basket is now too heavy for her to pick up unaided, and she may call to one of the men hanging around to help her get it up on her head, before setting off up the sloping sand, along the path off the beach which leads through the trees and close built huts up to the road.

If things have gone well, there will be time for her to stop off at home for a quick breakfast, maybe wait for a friend who is going in the same direction to sell. Rajamma sells in a small local market about 20 km

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[6] The boat owner can collect the remainder of the money from the cooperative whenever he chooses - either that day or later in the week, when there are a few credit slips mounted up. In fact it is invariably his wife who collects the money, or children may be sent to get it and bring it back to her. The salesman himself is responsible for ensuring that the money the slip represents gets to the cooperative eventually: he collects the debt from the fish vendor to whom he advanced the fish, ideally the next day, and passes it on to the cooperative. The cooperative thus needs a substantial cash float, part of which is given to the salesman, to cover the difference between sales and returns.

away, and is unusual in that she travels to the market by bus, separately from her fish which she pays a young boy Rs 10 to take by cycle. She leaves by about 8am, and will be set up in the market and selling by 9.30 or 10. If she has too much fish to sell alone, she may pay Muslim traders at the market to sell some for her, for which she pays them Rs 5 or so. At the market she may sell the fish whole, or gut it and fillet it, selling by the piece, depending on who is buying and how big the fish is. Big, expensive fish like seer tend to sell in pieces, the smaller mackerel sell individually, while sardines or whitebait go by weight. A few of the customers who approach her are well known to her, she may call them over and tell them what she has that they might like, exchange pleasantries, discuss how good or bad the catch was today, how terrible the price she had to pay at the beach, what little profit she is making. She has maybe ten such regular customers, the others are casual. At a lull in the selling, she takes a mid-morning break while a friend keeps an eye on the fish, and goes to buy a cup of tea and maybe a banana from the tea stall nearby.

Once all the fish has been sold, the last few bits often at a loss just to get finished, she cleans the basket and knives at a nearby standpipe, and gets ready for the trip home. Before she goes, she will buy whatever is needed at home - some rice, chilies, a few vegetables, a coconut. She will take the bus home, and be back by 1pm or 1.30, a good day's work behind her, and hopefully food, prepared by Shobha, ready for her when she gets there.

This kind of daily routine differs very little between the vendors, with most starting out at around 6am and finishing by 1.30 or 2pm. How far they go, however, and their methods of travel, do vary. Although some, like Rajamma, use the bus, most prefer to stay with their fish, and this makes bus travel impossible: conductors refuse to carry women vendors, claiming that there is no room for the fish baskets and anyway they smell. The government Matsyafed bus which was the concession won by the women in the political upheavals of the late 80s no longer runs, and anyway was not always that convenient, with the result that a large proportion of the women still walk most of the way to the market. Those who can afford it go by Tempo van, and are thus able to reach markets further inland, where there is less competition: they can also transport larger quantities of fish. Those who walk are limited to markets within 10 to 15 km and to the amount of fish they can easily carry (15 to 20 kg). From Marianad most walk north, towards Attingal, which is a major road junction on the fast highway from Trivandrum to Quilon. After about an hour's walking there is a ferry crossing, which costs only Re 1, and then there is another half hour's walk to the nearest roadside market. If it is getting late, the women will often share an autorickshaw the last few km in order to get to the market in good time, and this may cost Rs 2-3 each. In this area

there are a whole string of little wayside markets, separated by only a km or so, and if selling is not good in one, vendors may pack up and move along to the next to try their luck there. Those who travel by Tempo van may pay anything from Rs 10 to Rs 30 depending on how far they are going and how much fish they are transporting; in general they will be selling greater quantities and they will head for larger and more established markets. The differences between the vendors in terms of selling methods, turnover and profit, is something which I shall return to. First, I want to look at the kinds of skills and practices involved in selling, and how women come to learn them.

Selling Practices

Most of the fish vendors claimed that their job was not a difficult one, and that it was relatively easy to learn. A woman who wanted to sell fish would generally start by going with a friend or relative and gradually pick up the skills simply by doing it. She would need to be introduced to the salesmen, to get their agreement to allow her credit, and in the early stages she would join with a group of one or two others to purchase her fish. Learning to sell is a whole lot easier than learning to buy, and in this way she can begin to familiarize herself with packing and transporting fish, with the markets and prices and likely profits, without having to take responsibility for the purchase of the fish at the auction until she is much more confident and practised.

There is no doubt that the most difficult aspect of fish vending for the newcomer is this, the auction. Competition for the fish on the beach is fierce and the bidding is bewilderingly fast: there may be only a matter of a few minutes to assess the pile of mixed fish on the sand, to see what kinds of fish are there, how many of each, how fresh they are (this morning's catch or last night's?) before the salesman has opened the bidding and the price is soaring. A bidder will need to be able to tell at a glance the precise quantity of fish and their potential market value, or she may find herself with an instant loss for the day. Not only must she assess the fish themselves, but she must have a good idea of the various other factors that can affect the price - what kinds of fish are to be expected at this time of the year, which fish are a rarity and will fetch a high price, what kinds of fish the buyers are asking for just now, what sort of night's fishing has it been (is there a glut or a scarcity to push prices high?). A lot of possible parameters to keep in one's head all at once.

Most women will spend some time observing the auctions before they start to bid for themselves, watching to see how prices are shaping up, what kinds of catches are coming in, discussing with the others who has

bought what, what the markets were like the day before. Once they have decided to buy, they may move in closer, catch the eye of the salesman, cast a more than usually proprietorial eye over the next pile of fish. Bidding however is competitive and aggressive, and to get the catch a woman must be fast and sure of herself, with no last minute nerves about the price. Bridget, who started to sell fish only three months before, and cannot afford to lose money, is tentative in her bidding, hangs back, baulks at the high prices, and as often as not fails to get any fish and has to abandon selling for that day. Rajamma, however, more confident, and sure of her good credit status, can usually be sure of a full basket within an hour or so.

Although women frequently cooperate by paying for fish together, dividing the lot between them afterwards, there is never any cooperation over the bidding, and only one of them will make the bids. Women bid individually for the fish, and the knowledge that a friend or relative may be bidding for the same lot will not deter them. My naive assumption that such cooperation might exist most often got a laugh and the stock response: "In the auction there are no sisters or brothers, no father or mother - it's each one for themselves!" It is getting the fish that matters, nothing else.

Fish vending is in general a quite individual affair, and although there is a great deal of casual cooperation between women, there is almost no joint selling or long term partnership. A number of the poorer vendors will pool resources to buy fish, but they then split the lot between them and sell it individually. Similarly, women will travel to the market regularly with particular friends or neighbours, or may share a van or an autorickshaw with them, while in the market itself women will mind each other's plots, fetch each other tea or food, and may even sell fish for a friend if she has gone off for a minute. Such acts of kindness are reciprocated in kind, but where money is involved the amounts are scrupulously added up and divided fairly, and repaid at once or kept in mind as debts. Economically, each woman is strictly an individual, and her expenses, profit or loss are strictly her own.

Bidding in the auction, as I have said, is one of the most difficult aspects of fish vending to learn, but selling skills are also important, and can make the difference between a small margin of profit and a very good one. Prices in the market are not fixed, and although there will be a going rate that day for each kind of fish, it will vary slightly from sale to sale depending on how hard a bargain is driven by the customer, and how persuasive the seller manages to be. Sales talk is important here, as is the ability to know just when and by how much to drop the price to secure a sale, and when instead to hold the price in the hope of further customers. For those women who sell door to door, selling skills become even more important, and make a greater difference in terms of profit.

In the market the buyers come to the vendor, and there is a guaranteed demand, but on the other hand, there is less variation in the price of fish due to the greater competition: if one charges too much, a customer will simply find another vendor to buy from. When making house sales there is more uncertainty, people may not want to buy, and the task of persuading them can be a hard one. But at the same time prices, if one can make a sale, can be much higher than in the market, partly because of the convenience to the customer, partly because they will be ignorant of the day's market price, and partly because the vendors build up a strong relationship with the women they sell to, who then become reluctant to drive too hard a bargain. The element of good will works both ways, with sellers aware that to maintain the relationship they will do well to give good, fresh fish and not charge too highly.

Women who sell in the market do have semi-permanent customers, who will have built up a relationship with them and will tend to always buy their fish from them - these are the people from whom you usually get the best price. But the relationships built by women who sell to houses are much stronger, and involve significant exchanges. Rita sells house to house, and has a number of such relationships. Calling on them virtually every day for years, she knows much of these women's family business, as they know something of hers, and she receives a lot from them in the way of casual gifts of old clothes, fruit, coconuts, small household articles, as well as the occasional loan. But the relationship is one of social superior to social inferior, and though the woman of the house may spend a few minutes in the morning gossiping with Rita, or offer her a cup of tea, there is no question of inviting her inside, or of reciprocating the visit.

Most of the women in Marianad in fact sell in the market, and there is a strong sense that selling door to door is slightly demeaning. Bridget sells at one of the nearby markets, but on her way there she admits she may be called in to houses by the roadside. "I don't initiate it, but if they call me in then I will go", she told me, while her sisters laughed and teased, "Yes she goes, because they give her things, they give her a drink, and then she comes back with two jackfruit!" Other women emphasized how much more tricky it was to sell to houses, how uncertain - "It's better in the market". Rajamma was more unequivocal: "I don't sell to houses, because there you have to please, to be polite, to say *chechi*[7].... The market is better because there you are all equal". For the most part in Marianad those who sell to houses are the poorer vendors, who buy fish for only Rs 100-200 or less.

The divide in Marianad between those who sell in the market and those who sell to houses is not only due to the reluctance of women in the

[7] Literally, older sister, but here it is a sign of a fictive kinship/patronage relationship modeled on that of high to low caste.

village to get involved in the kinds of semi-permanent patronage relations that such door to door selling involves. It is also due to the fact that this is not an urban area, and there are in fact very few rich houses close by. Closer to the city, where there are concentrations of rich consumers in the upper middle class housing colonies, house to house sales are extremely lucrative, and women literally fight each other for the rights to certain routes. Here the potential profit is more than enough to make up for playing servile, and women extract ridiculous amounts of money out of upper caste housewives with a judicious mixture of praise for the fish ("this fish is straight from the beach, it's so fresh it almost speaks to you itself!"), lamentation for themselves (the hard work and, oh! the high prices at the beach), and flattery for their buyer (who buys only the best, the finest fish, "like this here, I got it only thinking of you")[8]. By contrast in Marianad the local middle class households are not so rich, and although the profit to be made is higher than in the market, it is time consuming and turnover is consequently less.

Considerations of profit and turnover in fact point up more differences among the fish sellers than just this divide between houses and markets and it is to these differences which I will now turn.

Prices and Profits

Discussing fish marketing in Kerala, John Kurien (1984) divides women fish sellers into four main types according to type of transport use and source of supply of fish, which roughly correspond also to the amount of working capital the women use and the places they sell. The majority are those who take their fish by headload, and of these the women who buy from the seashore tend to have the lowest working capital[9]; the next highest are headload vendors who buy from the wholesale markets, and both these types may sell either house-to-house or in retail markets. The second two types transport their fish by taxi or cycle load, and in general have a higher working capital: the highest for those women who buy from the wholesale market rather than the beach. Both sell in retail markets only, and together represent about 20% of the sellers.

In Marianad virtually all the women buy from the seashore, and the most relevant distinctions between them, from which many of the other differences flow, is in terms of the price of fish bought. The following, though they are by no means fixed or clear cut categories, give some idea of the kinds of variation in prices paid, and the concomitant differences in

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[8] For this description of house selling in the city areas, I am grateful to Rosemary and Stella, who sell fish from Sanghumugham, inside the city limits.

[9] By this he means the price of fish taken per day, even where this is partly on credit.

selling strategies. The divisions I have made are those most often made by the women themselves when talking about variation between them: they represent locally distinguished categories of sellers.

Below Rs 150

This represents in general the poorest end of the spectrum, women whose financial resources are few, who may be widowed or otherwise without support, whose confidence of a good profit are low, and they form around 10% of the whole[10]. The fish bought for this price is likely to be the cheaper varieties, and women will walk to local wayside markets, small and unofficial, which are often found along major roads and at junctions. Alternatively they may sell to houses in the nearby area, which is more difficult but brings a better profit.

Rs 200 - 500

Women in this category (around 40% of the sellers) will again tend to be headload vendors, although they may share an auto-rickshaw for part of the way, and take the bus home. They too may sell at the unofficial wayside markets, but they will more often go to the more official market places, found at most major road junctions. Here there will be an allocated space, and market taxes are charged. In addition (this being Kerala) there will be a registered workers union at the market to which the women contribute membership, and which can help to sort out disputes with the market owner, as well as provide some assistance and protection for the women sellers. Women in this group will in general be selling better quality fish, to more well off consumers, and tend to be more successful and practised sellers.

Rs 500 - Rs 1,000

Here the likelihood that women will transport their fish by Tempo, bus, or cycle becomes extremely high, since it is almost impossible to carry this quantity of fish alone any distance. In Marianad, since the Matsyafed bus has stopped running, the favoured means of transport is by Tempo van. Most sellers in this category (around 45% of the whole) go to the same small markets as the previous group, but they have a much greater turnover, and may pay others to sell some of their fish for them. Some will go to the major licensed market places in Trivandrum City, at Pettah and Palayam, whose centrality, greater infrastructure and concentration of stalls attracts a large number of urban consumers, and where the demand for the more expensive fish, like seer and cuttlefish, is much greater. Most sellers in this group still buy from the seashore, but when fish is scarce they may travel to the wholesale markets on the outskirts of Trivandrum or Quilon,

[10] These proportions are calculated from a survey of sellers that I carried out in April 1992.

where fish has been transported by lorry-load from the mechanized sector. These are women who have a lot of experience and skill in the business, as well as enough financial resources to cover their losses if need be.

Rs 1,000 - 5,000

Few women have succeeded in building up their business to this extent, but it is not unknown, and around 5% of the sellers in Marianad would spend more than Rs 1,000. In general, such women are no longer really fish vendors but almost small fish merchants. Their work consists primarily of organizing others and overseeing the work. Thus Jessilie buys fish on the shore for around Rs 2,000, which represents three baskets full, and employs young boys to take it to market by cycle load. There she has an arrangement with other traders who will sell some of the fish for her for Rs 10 or 20. Maryamma, probably the biggest trader in Marianad, buys regularly for Rs 4-5,000 and transports the fish by Tempo to Trivandrum, where she sells in the central market at Palayam, "surrounded by fish baskets". Both women tend to buy the most expensive types of fish, so that the price they pay does not entirely reflect the bulk but rather the quality of their purchases, which are sold to the richer buyers.

A final selling strategy, which does not really fit into any of the above classifications, is that of prawn dealing. In the prawn season (roughly June to August) there are a few women who act as "middlewomen", buying the prawns on the beach and selling them straight on to lorry merchants who come down to the sea shore. Although the bulk of prawn catches in Kerala come from the mechanized trawlers in the big fishing ports like Quilon and Cochin, the catch of the non-mechanized sector still amounts to some 500 - 1,500 tons yearly, and most of this is sold to the big prawn merchants (Kurien 1984). Prawns are too expensive for women to risk buying them for the local consumer market, but the demand for prawns for export is good. This kind of selling is only seasonal, and it also coincides with the period when scarcity of fish means good profits for those who have the money to buy. Most women, then, continue to sell ordinary fish in the market, but there are two or three who turn to prawns for this period. They need to have good access to credit since prawns are expensive: each one can cost Rs 20 or more, and in a day they may spend well over Rs 1,000, with payment from the lorry merchant always one day in arrears. The profit, however, is usually good.

Looking at these types of fish selling, the selling costs, profit and turnover clearly varies considerably. In general, percentage profit goes down somewhat as working capital goes up, but because the sales turnover is so much higher, the actual return at the end of the day is considerably higher. The table below gives average marketing costs and returns for

women with different working capital and sales strategies. These figures were arrived at by discussing with a number of different vendors the costs and returns of selling different amounts of fish. This was supplemented by detailed knowledge of a few cases, and compares well with the pattern Kurien details for his earlier survey of Trivandrum District (Kurien 1984).

This table, though it gives some idea of the kind of average costs and returns that can be expected, is misleading in that it implies a fairly predictable and steady return. In fact, women emphasize the variation in profits that they get, and the need to be prepared for losses. Rajamma explained: "You get a basket of *ayela* (mackerel) on the beach for Rs 500. One *ayela* will have cost Rs 2. At the market, you can charge Rs 2.50, or Rs 3 if they are scarce. So the profit is good. On a *very* good day, you might get back double what you put in. But sometimes you might get nothing or even a loss". The range of profit here is enormous, from a standard 25%, to 50%, to the possibility of 100%, or nothing. In fact, both 100% and nothing are fairly rare occurrences, but within the mid range the profit can fluctuate from day to day, depending on the luck of the auction, the competition at the market, the kind of fish being sold, and also from seller to seller, depending on skill and experience. The good, practised vendors with regular customers and a good feel for the prices can make considerably more than those who are just starting out, or do not work regularly.

Price paid	Transport and Selling Place	Costs[11]	Selling Price	Profit, Rs (%)
Rs 100	Headload, house to house	Rs 4	Rs 120	Rs 16 (16)
Rs 100	Headload, retail market	Rs 5	Rs 115	Rs 10 (10)
Rs 300	Headload, retail market	Rs 15	Rs 350	Rs 35 (12)
Rs 500	Tempo, Retail Market	Rs 35	Rs 600	Rs 65 (13)
Rs 1,000	Tempo, Retail market	Rs 60	Rs 1, 150	Rs 90 (9)

Table III: Working Capital, Marketing Costs and Returns

[11] This includes transport, ice, tea/food while out selling and, where appropriate, payment for others to sell for you.

Looking at the average returns and profits, however, does give some idea of the pattern of variation between the groups of sellers. For those buying for the least amount of money, there is a distinct difference in returns depending on whether they sell door to door or in the market. As has been mentioned, door to door selling generates greater profit, because the price charged at each house is individually set and can be much higher than in the market, where competition drives it down. While selling to houses is clearly a better strategy among this group, it depends on having established the rights to sell to particular households, and this is not an easy process. Most households will already have established relations with a particular woman, and if that woman stops vending, the right to sell there will be passed on to a friend or relation. In the more lucrative upper class housing colonies in Trivandrum, the rights to sell in certain houses are jealously guarded, and if a woman attempts to encroach on another's patch, there will be fights. In Marianad, the excess profits are not so high, but still the numbers of women who can choose this strategy is limited.

As the amount of working capital employed by women goes up, so to do the marketing costs. Greater quantities of ice are necessary, and market taxes may have to be paid, but the largest increase is due to transport costs, the need to pay for a Tempo or pay young boys to take the fish by cycle. For the women buying very large quantities there will be the additional cost of paying people to sell some of the fish, a practice which not only drives costs up but also leads to lower average pries paid for the fish since the sellers are less motivated to drive a hard bargain. However, despite similar or even falling rates of return, the increasing turnover as working capital goes up means the actual returns per day increase rapidly, and it is this figure which has the greatest relevance to the women concerned.

Women who buy large quantities of fish can clearly make a very good daily profit: Rs 50 - Rs 100 per day compares favourably with average daily returns for fishermen of around Rs 50-80 for a kattumaram owner, or Rs 70-100 for a plywood boat worker. Those who sell only small amounts do less well. In the next section I shall consider some of the constraints on women which partly determine how much fish they sell.

Credit and Capital

When questioned about the need for working capital for fish vending, women in Marianad invariably claimed that no capital was necessary, because the fish could be had on credit from the salesman: "You don't need to pay until the next day, when you have sold the fish, and then you will get fish again on credit the next morning, so there is no need for cash". This begged the question of why, then, some women bought only small

amounts of fish, while others bought much larger amounts and clearly made more money doing so. There are in fact a number of reasons why women would not or could not enter the big selling league, or why they might be confined to buying very small amounts of fish.

The standard assertion that the salesman will give any amount of fish on credit is, firstly, not strictly true. For the most part he will expect some proportion of the sale price to be given in cash, and although for smaller purchases this may not amount to much, for purchases of Rs 1,000 around Rs 300 may be demanded up front. Access to this kind of spare cash is not easy for everyone, and may place a limit on the amount of credit women can hope to secure. Secondly, the salesman is not willing to advance any amount of credit to anyone: understandably, women who hope to buy fish must be introduced, and will need to build up a relationship of trust with the salesman before he is willing to advance large amounts[12]. His willingness to loan to them will depend partly on how prompt they have been to repay him in the past, and how regularly they default or ask for more time. It will also depend however on his knowledge of their general circumstances, the wealth of their family and access to resources. A woman whose husband owns a plywood boat, or who has brothers working in the Gulf, will more easily get credit with the salesman, since he knows ultimately she will be able to find the money to pay him back if need be. A woman who is widowed, who has many daughters but no sons, who is generally known to be already heavily in debt, will be lucky to get more than Rs 100 advance, and if she defaults she will not get another loan. Thus Elizabeth explained: "If I don't give the money within two days, the salesman will come looking for me, and then I will have to give, or I won't get any more credit. Those women who have proved untrustworthy will find it difficult to get credit; salesmen are reluctant to give them fish. If women get only Rs 100-150 then it's usually because they have not paid their debts".

The potential resources that a woman has to back her up are important not only for gaining access to credit, but in enabling her to cover her losses if necessary, and the larger the amount of fish taken, the larger these potentially become. Whether or not the salesman would advance a woman Rs 500 worth of fish, she herself may be reluctant to take the risk if she feels she could not cover the loan if need be. There are also the marketing expenses, like ice and transport, which must be met in cash before any return is seen, and these too increase as turnover increases.

Within the middle range of fish sellers, between those who buy for Rs 300-400 and those who spend more like Rs 750-1,000, the difference in

[12] The salesman advances fish to women vendors on his own behalf and is personally responsible for the debt to the cooperative: however, he receives a large cash float from the cooperative to assist in giving loans, and in fact if he defaults there is not much the cooperative can do about it. One man was sacked as a salesman while I was in the village, owing the cooperative Rs 15,000.

family wealth and resources is not the most relevant distinction. Rather, those who have built up a large business tend to be women who have sold regularly for much longer periods of time, and who are extremely efficient, organized and practised vendors. Often they are older, and have fewer household responsibilities: their children are all at school or have grown up, and they may have grown up daughters who manage the house for them. Consequently they are able to put in the long hours that are necessary, often involving buying from the evening auction as well as the morning one, and with much longer selling times needed to get rid of all the fish. Younger women with more responsibilities for childcare and cooking, would find the extra burden of dealing with such large amounts of fish difficult, and often also lack the experience and confidence to handle such a large turnover. Consequently women who would be able to gain access to larger amounts of fish on credit often in fact limit themselves to selling more modest amounts.

The loans of fish which women receive from the salesmen are not then freely available: they are also not entirely free. They are not seen as subject to interest payments in the same way as monetary loans, but there are certainly ways in which the salesmen extract a profit from them.

Salesmen's Interests

When women take fish on loan from the salesman, they stress that this is not a monetary transaction: "The salesmen give fish very easily, but they would not give cash - even if I asked for Rs 5 they would not give it". They also assert that he does not charge interest on the advance, and at the end of the day they need to repay exactly the amount advanced and no more. "There is no interest, you just pay the next day if you can, or at least in two or three days". This is a principle which it seems is strictly adhered to: no one would characterize their loans from the salesman as involving any interest payment at all, and the salesmen themselves also stress that they do not charge interest. However, on closer examination of the transactions that take place, it becomes clear that while there is no direct interest payment, there are certain "hidden costs" whereby salesmen may in fact take a considerable cut.

The most standard and universal form which this cut takes is in the removal of a few fish from the pile after they have been sold, the salesman's "commission" from the buyer[13]. Though women may grumble about this practice it is completely accepted that the salesmen have the right to take what they choose from the basket. This is not seen as an

[13] He will have already taken the few fish which represent his commission from the seller before the pile is auctioned.

interest payment, and the salesman's right to take fish is never explicitly related to the fact that they have given the fish in the first place on credit. Nevertheless, the amount of fish taken by the salesman is delicately calculated to reflect the state of indebtedness of the vendor from whom he takes it. This is not necessarily explicit, but is an effect of the fact that the salesman will take whatever he thinks he can get away with, and the point at which the vendor will baulk, and may accuse him of taking too much, is strongly related to her consciousness of indebtedness to him. If she does complain, his justification will invariably be couched in terms of how much she owes him, or how long he had to wait for the last loan to be paid, so that the fish he has taken is only fair.

There is a second way in which salesmen get some return on their loan of fish, and this is as a small gift of money when the loan is repaid. This again is not considered an interest payment, but just a small token of appreciation. Thus Selvam explained: "I get the fish on credit, and then I must repay the next day, there is no interest. But if I get Rs 100, then I will give him Re 1 for his tea, not as interest but just for his tea". This practice is not always standard, and there is certainly no sense in which one *has* to give this amount: in this it differs from the standard interest payment. Nevertheless, most women would give a little extra when they return the loan, partly to maintain good relations with the salesmen, and hopefully ensure that he will continue to advance them credit.

Between these two practices, the salesmen in fact manage to get as much as 2% on each loan of fish that they make. In general, from a pile which may have sold for Rs 300 or so, the salesmen will remove one or two small fish, which would be worth Rs 2-3. Although often talked about as being just "fish for the household", these, together with the fish he will take from the pile before it is auctioned, mount up to a great deal more than he could just use for his own family. Once there is a substantial pile, three or four of the salesmen may pool together and auction the fish they have collected, and divide the money between them. If they give a loan then to a woman vendor of around Rs 300, they can expect maybe Rs 2-3 from the fish they take, and Rs 1-2 when she returns the loan, which represents a return of 1-2%, per day. This represents a monthly rate of between 30 and 60%, which compares extremely unfavourably with the standard rate of interest in the village, of 3% per month.

The vendors are quite aware of how much money the salesman makes, and often complain about it, but nevertheless they do not characterize this as interest. Thus Elizabeth told me: "They don't charge any interest, the salesmen, but they make a big profit, they take fish at every turn, before the auction, and then even after the auction from my basket, they do all right, the salesmen". The loan of fish the salesman makes to them is, it seems, simply not comparable with the loans of money,

for nets, boats, dowry, and general consumption, which are made in the village. The profit (*labham*) the salesman makes is not comparable to the interest (*palishe*) charged on money loans: the possibility of taking a loan in the village at 3% to buy fish rather than taking a loan from the salesman at what amounts to nearly 60%, is not an option that is ever considered. These are two completely separate spheres of exchange, one monetary, the other in kind, each with their own internal logic.

The giving, lending and borrowing of money then is something quite separate from the giving, lending and borrowing of things. Thus in a similar way I described how women vendors will often do each other small favours, will share food, will sell each other's fish, with an implicit ethos of give and take, but in the matter of money they will be scrupulous about repaying exact amounts, or dividing a rickshaw fare to the last paise. The next chapter will look more closely at the matter of monetary exchanges and credit, while more informal gifts and exchanges between households will be discussed in Chapter 6. First however I want to look at another aspect of money in the fishing community, its association with women, and the question of women's control over household finances.

Women and Money

In Chapter 3 I made it clear that the money made from fishing is invariably handed over by a man to his wife, who will give her husband a small amount for himself as pocket money but otherwise uses the rest for running the household[14]. This control of household finances by women is almost universal in the village, and extends not only to managing the day to day money and needs of the household, but also to having a large degree of responsibility for household savings, and for decisions relating to the giving or taking of loans for large scale expenditure (fishing equipment, dowries, Gulf visas), as we shall see in the next chapter. Here I want to look at women's control over money in general, at the extent to which this gives them a certain power within the household, and at decision making and disputes around money.

Women's Management of Household Finances

From the moment they start to go to sea and earn money, men learn automatically to hand over their share at the end of the day: firstly to their mother, and later, when they are married, to their wife. A woman almost

[14] Similar patterns of women handling money in fishing households are described by Carsten (1989) and Stirrat (1989).

invariably controls the money of her sons and her husband, and although in a joint household it may in fact be her mother, daughter or sister who runs the day to day finances of the house, she hands on only what is necessary, and looks after any surplus on behalf of herself and her spouse. Marriage, then, represents the beginning for a woman of a long involvement with money and the management of finances; the opportunity for her to enter the world of borrowing, lending, saving; gradually hoping through shrewd decisions and careful nurturance of the family's money, to build up their resources and enable them to buy a house, a boat, to be able to pay dowries, to live comfortably.

In some ways, women's management of household money is explained quite pragmatically, as a matter of division of labour. Men are away a lot at sea, and they have to concentrate on learning the skills of fishing, on looking after the boats and equipment: they simply do not have the time to keep up with the money situation as well, and they are not around in the house when people come to ask for loans or repayments. Women, however, can be found in the house more easily, and women know the needs of the household, what food there is, whether more rice is needed, whether the children need new clothes; they have the time to go to market, or, if they sell fish, they will be there anyway, and can bring the necessary provisions home with them. Thus Rajamma explained, "Men are away at sea all the time, so they don't always know what is needed or what money there is. People will come to me for money, because I am usually here". Women have access also, in this uxorilocal community, to greater networks of family and friends: they can draw on more resources for the small day to day loans that are essential for running the household, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, and also can ask others to buy for them in the market if they are not able to go. Thus Agnes and Emilie both get most of their provisions bought for them by their mother, who goes to sell fish, and will bring them back with her at the end of the day.

Women's management of the day to day finances however spills over into their generally greater control over, and responsibility for, all household money, and here there is an assumption that it is women's greater financial acumen and knowledge of money that makes this quite natural. Thus Jemilie explained that she looked after all the money, for "Men are less responsible with money in general. Women are more wise. They make most of the decisions about what to spend money on". Bridget concurred: ' "Money is always safe in the hands of women, they know how to handle it. Men, even the best of men, are subject to temptation when they get their hands on money. They just spend it". Men, with little experience of money in the day to day, cannot be expected to have the skill and knowledge to deal with money on a larger scale: it goes to their head, and they just waste it. But there is more here than just the matter of

practice or familiarity: there is a distinction drawn of character or temperament between men and women that makes one particularly suited to handling money, while the other is a potential disaster.

Women are thought to be cleverer in general, more skilled in argument and better able to think their way out of a situation than men: "A woman will always win against a man in an argument". Men are more impulsive, more inclined to deal with a situation physically, less controlled. Women in general have the careful, thrifty, nurturing qualities necessary to deal with money, to save and take account of future expenses, to take the long view, while men do not have the strength of will to combat the temptation simply to spend in the here and now.

The difference is well illustrated by Shobha's description of her mother and father, and their relation to money. Thus she explained: "Mother and father have some arguments over money. Mainly because my father is a very generous man: anyone who comes, and wants to go to Trivandrum perhaps to see a doctor or an advocate, he will always go along with them and will pay out of his own pocket for both of them - bus fares, fees and so on. Then when my mother comes to hear of this she gets very angry about it and she will quarrel with him. When there's an argument like this, my mother always wins - she has a sharp tongue, and he knows he's in the wrong. He just sits tight while she shouts at him". Joseph, Shobha's father, like most men, is not careful with money - if there is a call on him to spend, he will spend: he is soft hearted, almost soft headed. Men, when it comes to money, have no brains: it is predominantly women's business. This is then a discourse which gives women a certain edge when it comes to disputes about money within the household.

Money and Disputes

The control of money and credit by women is in fact a fairly widespread phenomenon in fishing economies, and has been linked with women's generally higher profile and apparent power compared with that in agricultural economies (Thompson 1985; Stirrat 1988, 1989; Ram 1991). Nalini Nayak, and a number of the other activists in the fishworker's movement, strongly deny that women's control of household money implies that they have any real power in the fishing villages, and it is to this question that I want to turn here.

NWhen I talked to her about women's control of money, Nayak emphatically denied that this was to women's advantage: "Which woman has control over her money? That they deal with the money doesn't mean that they have control. Most of the time men are demanding money when they don't even earn, and they would beat their wives up when they don't

get it. Why should women be treated violently if they had control?... You know, it's not as if they don't hand it over, the woman runs the household for sure, she buys food and things like that, but it's not in her control. He can demand at any time and beat her if he doesn't get it. It would be to the *disadvantage* of the man if she had to hand it over to him initially - it means there's more responsibility, because the man doesn't even *care* about the running of the household, she has to do all that"[15]. Aleyamma Vijayan, another activist with PCO, essentially agreed with this assessment, arguing that, "The men take no responsibility, they go fishing, bring back the money and hand it over to the woman - but then demand money to go drinking. The burden of running the whole family, taking on debts, paying back debts - all these are on the woman". She did, however, admit that this gave them some power as well as responsibility: "They do have a strong say in economic matters"[16].

The vision which these women present is a bleak one, and that it is so arises partly out of the context of their involvement with the fishing community. As social and political activists, and particularly concerned with women's issues, they inevitably focus on the inequities that exist, the problems that women face, the burdens that they struggle under. I do not wish to belittle these: there is no doubt that there are women in the fishing community who have a very hard time, and there are countless ways in which men contrive to make their lives miserable and difficult[17]. The fishing community is, in the end, part of a wider society in which men and men's concerns are dominant over women's, and men are in many ways seen as rightfully exercising control over their wives. However, to stress only this view is to get a very distorted picture of the relations between men and women, and to miss the many ways in which women here do in practice control money and through this wield a certain power.

In Marianad, there is no doubt that the day to day decisions relating to money are made by women. Small subsistence loans between households, and the spending of money on daily items, are entirely women's domain. With larger issues, such as giving or getting large loans, or buying more expensive items, it was usual for husbands, fathers, or sons to be consulted, and most people claimed that it was, in the last instance, their decision that was final. Mostly, this was explained in terms of the money being ultimately his, since he earned it, although this was not always strictly true. For some it was simply a matter of men's right, as the husband, or

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[15] Interview, Trivandrum: 22/9/92. In English.

[16] Interview, Trivandrum: 9/12/92. In English.

[17] The most obvious of these is in fact domestic violence: as Nayak and Vijayan emphasise, men have an ultimate weapon in being able to beat their wives, and this is a not infrequent recourse. I do not have the time or space to deal adequately here with the issue of domestic violence in the fishing community, which I regret. I hope to be able to redress this at some time in the future.

father, to have the ultimate say. To this extent Nalini and Aleyamma are right to say that women have no automatic power.

The discourse of men's ultimate right, however, is greatly modified in practice by the discourse I have referred to above, which associates men with an inability to handle money. Women, though they may nominally consult their husbands over matters of money, can in general almost be assured of their acquiescence, for it is women in the end who are understood to be good with money, and to have the best understanding of the household's financial circumstances. Thus Mabel Mary, for example, has an almost free rein: "I get the money from Jayraj and give him a little for his tea and so on. I take care of everything, and if we need a loan I will be the one who goes to get it. He doesn't usually ask how much is left - if there is a lot, I may tell him and we will discuss what to do with it, but usually he just agrees with what I decide"[18]. Josephine similarly can be sure of her husband's agreement: "I am the one who knows what money there is, so that if we need to decide about a loan or something, he will generally go along with what I suggest. Sometimes I will just go ahead and tell him afterwards". Not only do women have greater knowledge of the financial circumstances of the household, and an accepted greater skill when it come to questions of money, they are also known to be more articulate, and better in arguments, so that when decision making comes down to a discussion, it is usually women who can press their case most forcefully. Thus, as Shobha noted, "When there's an argument, it's always my mother who wins", and Flossy also commented on this: "Women are better with their tongues, they can always get the better of a man in an argument".

Men, then, may be widely understood to have the ultimate right to decide matters relating to money, but they are in practice effectively prevented from exercising this right by an acknowledged lack of expertise in the area of household finances as compared with their wives. Not only do they generally lack the knowledge on which to base decisions, they are widely perceived to lack the qualities necessary to good financial management, being too feckless and impulsive to control their spending. A good man, a responsible man[19], tends to leave all such matters to his wife, and though his dignity requires that she consult him over large decisions, it would be rarely that he would bother to argue against her

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[18] In fact, Mabel Mary is known in the village for being something of a holy terror when it comes to dealing with Jayraj: if he wants money for anything he has to plead, and usually gets nowhere.

[19] A good man is one who does not drink, or at least, does not drink excessively. Those who do, may interfere more with household finances simply through demands for more money for alcohol. Though this causes acute problem for women, notably because of the increased threat of violence, it also means that men are seen to forfeit the right to any final say in monetary matters, since they are known to be a drunkard, and their authority can therefore be disregarded. Thus Flossy's mother Rita took all financial decisions in the family, and was under no obligation to even pretend to consult her husband since everyone knew he drank.

recommendation. Thus, as Emilie put it: "If he thinks I am right, he will agree with me. But if he disagrees, that's the final decision. But only rarely will he disagree".

We can see here, then, how any consideration of the kinds of power that men and women have within the household, and the strategies available to them in negotiating control of resources, are profoundly effected by cultural discourses of gender, as recent feminist influenced discussions of the household have suggested (Guyer 1987; Bruce and Dwyer 1988; Hart 1993; Moore 1993a). Often these discourses particularly constrain women, as for example in constructions of motherhood, where women are assumed to be more fully responsible for family welfare than are men (e.g. Whitehead 1984; Moore 1993a) and thus contribute greater proportions of their income. Here however, we see an example where a gender ideology which represents men as more feckless and irresponsible with money can be used by women to justify maintaining control of household finances and withholding money from men.

There is another issue here, however, which relates to poverty. Nayak and Vijayan tend in the main, for obvious reasons, to work with the poorer women within the community, and this may have much to do with their emphasis on women's management of money as a burden, rather than a power. A discourse and practice which associates women with money and asserts their greater ability to deal with money can give them, as we have seen, a certain power *where there is money to control.* However, where there is no money, this can become a burden and responsibility which falls differentially on women and men. Where there is money left over after the daily expenses, a woman has a certain degree of freedom in her power to give or withhold this to both members of the household and to other households. She can maintain the kinds of inter-household exchanges of credit and gifts that are necessary to hold a position within a network of kin and neighbours, a network which she can then draw on when needed and which gives her concomitant power within the household as the link with these outside resources.

However, if the household is on the edge of subsistence there are no degrees of freedom, there is only necessity. The woman has no power of choice, no possibility of withholding money, since there are clear priorities of food and clothing which can barely be covered. Here the discourse and practice which puts women at the centre of household management becomes not a source of power but a burden of responsibility, as Nayak and Vijayan point out. Men remain outside this sphere, and this represents here a freedom for them from responsibility, a refusal to get involved in all the constant negotiation over loans, the scraping together somehow of enough money for the household needs. Men simply demand from their wives enough money for their personal needs and leave it at

that - and if they drink, such demands can be a crippling burden on the household. If this money is not forthcoming the blame is put squarely on the wife, because money is her business and it is up to her to see that there is enough.

We can see, then, how the matter of women's power through their control of money is not a simple one, and there is no necessary homogeneity within the community. There are different discourses here of rights and responsibilities, and different ways in which these work to the advantage or disadvantage of women. What is fairly universal, however, is women's *centrality* in the matter of money, particularly their involvement in inter-household exchange and credit networks, and it is to this that I want to turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Women and the Credit Economy

Women in the fishing community not only regularly handle money arising from their activities as fish sellers, but as we have seen in the previous chapter, are primarily responsible for the financial management of the household. In a fishing economy where daily income can fluctuate wildly, and where disaster at sea can mean large sums have to be found for replacement or repair of gear at short notice, financial management invariably involves institutions of credit (see e.g. Firth 1966; Smith 1977; Acheson 1981; Bavinck 1984; Platteau et al 1985; Abraham 1985). In general credit in fishing communities is often linked to marketing, and has been most often described as the realm of middlemen, often merchants, who tie fishermen to them by advancing loans on the understanding that fish will be sold exclusively to them. The middleman-fisherman relationship has been variously characterized as exploitative (e.g. Saha 1970) or mutually beneficial (Stirrat 1974), but in fact of course neither view is generalizable, and the kinds of relationship that exist, and with whom, vary widely (Emmerson 1980; Alexander 1982). In the artisanal fishing community of Trivandrum District, the importance of middlemen moneylenders appears to be minimal, and this may be related to the relative absence of big merchants or capital intensive methods of fishing. Instead, as a study by Platteau et al (1985) showed clearly, the source of most of the loans in the villages is from within the fishing community itself: in Poovar, an artisanal fishing village just south of Trivandrum City, 84% of loans were from within the community, compared with only 7% from professional moneylenders or merchants (ibid: 76). Lending between households within the community is clearly extremely important here. In addition, an aspect not dealt with by Platteau, the organizers of this credit economy are predominantly women, and thus it is women's networks which are most relevant to this inter-household flow of credit and debt.

In this chapter I want to look more closely at the ways households in Marianad are tied to each other through networks of credit and debt, and the part that women play as the focus of many of these networks, as well as the importance of women's dowry in forming an initial productive fund for new households.

Credit in the Fishing Community

As I have said, the erratic nature of income in a fishing community means that most households rely heavily on credit to cover daily expenses at times when income is low, and will conversely lend money out when they have an surplus. There are various kinds of loans in Marianad, as in the fishing community in general, which can be characterized according to amount, interest and purpose. In general these three variables overlap, so that there are in the main two types of loan: small subsistence loans for household consumption at no interest, and larger loans for productive purposes at a standard rate of 2.5-3% per month. There is however no conceptual distinction made between these by people in Marianad, they all involve "giving credit" (*kadam kodukkuka*) and often one type can shade into the other. Some small subsistence loans may involve interest, some larger loans may be given freely, and there are times when a loan originally free of interest may start to incur it if not repaid within a certain time.

Women, who are most active in maintaining links with friends, neighbours and kin, are for this reason able to draw on the resources of a greater range of people when it comes not only to borrowing small sums in the short term but also to raising large sums of money. Together with women's cultural and practical association with money and financial matters, it is hardly surprising that it is women who are most active in procuring and giving loans within the community.

Most people agreed that it was women who organized the small subsistence loans which every household required at some time or another, loans of the order of Rs 100 or Rs 200 which would tide the family over till they had a good catch or did well at the market. Women took responsibility for loans in the same way that they took responsibility for the household finances: as Janet noted, "If a loan is needed, women will organize it because they know the financial status of the household, what the need is. They make most of the decisions related to expenditure".

Bridget explained that if she were to get or give a loan, she would not bother to consult her husband: "If we don't have enough, then I am the one who will go to get a loan. And people who want a loan, will always approach me. Mostly I will just give it, and if it is a large amount I will inform him of it afterwards, but there is no need for a small amount". The casual borrowing and lending of small sums for food or household needs is organized simply between women who are friends, neighbours or relatives, and the constant giving and taking between them creates a complex web of entangled indebtedness. Bridget that morning gave Rs 100 to her neighbour, Mariamma, from whom she had borrowed it a week ago: at the same time she could clear her debt with Rajamma, next door, and also lend

Rs 50 to her sister-in-law, Rita, who lives in the same house and was short of money to pay for her share of the household expenses that day. She has often borrowed from Rita in the same way; there is give and take between them. Meanwhile Mariamma was relying on Bridget's money so she could clear her own debt with another mutual friend, Claramma, with whom Bridget sometimes joins to buy fish. Explaining how one will sometimes both lend and borrow at the same time, Bridget laughed, "Now Mariamma is going to pay this money I have given her back to Claramma, but Claramma will have to turn it straight over to me, because of Rs 200 I lent her two weeks ago, so you see, it is still my money after all!"[1]

Women are thus closely involved in the subsistence credit economy. However, it is not only small day to day loans which are arranged by women, but also a high proportion of the large production loans, and money for dowry or Gulf visas. While men are more involved in the decision process over the giving or taking of large loans, it is very often through women that the first approach is made, it is women who have the widest networks and the strongest connections and are able to successfully utilize these for raising money, and it is finally women who most often administer these loans and pay or collect the interest accruing. When Stella and her husband Joseph decided that he should try to get a job in the Gulf (a decision that was made more by Stella than Joseph, who was rather reluctant to leave the village), the first obstacle was raising the Rs 25,000 needed to arrange a visa. Her brother-in-law explained: "They got the money within two months - and Rs 25,000 was raised by Stella, and Rs Nothing was raised by Joseph". Stella was able to get the money from friends, neighbours, some from her sister, Rosemary, and some from her parents, but although Joseph was also charged with the task of finding money towards the sum, he was unable to do so[2].

The extent of women's involvement in the giving and receiving of loans in the village will perhaps become clearer in the following sections, which deal with the credit economy in more detail.

Loans, Interest and Obligations

An interesting starting point for considering the issue of credit in the fishing community is to look at the ways in which loans are talked about, and the sorts of exchange relationships which they engender, or in which they are embedded. In general, as we have seen, women will go to friends,

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[1] Platteau et al (1985) find this same tendency for households to be both lenders and borrowers at the same time, even as far as larger loans are concerned (1985: 110-11).

[2] This may of course, have had something to do with his reluctance to go in the first place: nevertheless, it illustrates, I think, women's ability to personally organise the borrowing of large sums of money without male help.

neighbours and sometimes relatives for the small loans which are needed to cover household expenses, and these loans will be given free of interest. "If you borrow just Rs 100 or 200, you wouldn't give anything more when you return it - there's no need". The giving of interest free loans in this way depends not only on the mutual sense of reciprocity between the women involved, but partly also on the fact that such loans are only temporary, they are just needed to cover a shortfall in household income, and they are usually returned within a month. Such loans are most often used for immediate consumption, for food and other necessities, or for small medical expenses, drugs and bus fares to hospital, or doctor's fees[3].

There is a strong sense that if a loan is returned within the month, even a larger one, interest is not really due on it. Thus Jessilie explained, "If the time limit is only one month, or maybe two, then I will give it with no interest". Conversely, if a small loan (up to Rs 1,000) is not repaid for a long time, interest may well be charged: "Sometimes they say they will give it very soon, but it gets delayed. In that case they would give me interest, unless it's a very small sum, like Rs 50 or Rs 100".

The charging of interest can also depend on how someone is approached. Thus Selvamma explained, "Whether you get interest or not depends on how people ask. They may say, 'Can you give me some money on interest?' If you say, 'Take the money but I don't need the interest', then the person will feel obliged to return it soon, so often it's better to give the interest. It all depends on what they want it for, the way they want it. Some people want it only on interest so they don't feel obliged". The matter of obligation for loans is an interesting one. Bridget mentioned how, if she wanted a small loan (Rs 100 or 150), and didn't want to be obliged to anyone, she might borrow it from a young person (unmarried), or an old one, people who might have a little cash and would give it in return for Rs 5 or Rs 10 as pocket money "to buy themselves some small trinket, something they need or want". Then they would be happy, and she would have a relatively uncomplicated loan.

In this transaction, it is Bridget, rather than the lender, who can be seen as the benefactor, since she has enabled those without an income to earn a little money from a loan that, under normal circumstances, would be given interest free. By choosing to transact with those who are somewhat marginal to the household economy, the young and the very old, she is able to avoid the complications of mutual obligation and reciprocity that are involved in such transactions with friends and neighbours. Aware, perhaps, that she has borrowed money just a little too often from these she is closest to, she prefers to pay what amounts to a hefty interest rate, rather

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[3] Although free state medical treatment is available to all in Kerala, many people in the fishing community prefer to go to private clinics, believing that treatment here is better.

than stretch the goodwill of her neighbours too far and potentially endanger their relationship.

It is not only small interest free loans, however, that carry with them this sense of obligation. There is a discourse around the giving of loans in general in the village that sees the extension of credit, even with interest, as a gesture of goodwill, a helping hand, something to be grateful for. Here interest payments are seen as no more than is due to the lender, to compensate them somewhat for the fact that the money which they have given is no longer available to them for their own use, but is in your hands. The sense of gratitude or obligation is related here partly to the size of the sum given which is so much larger than with the small subsistence loans which carry no interest. Although the latter are free, they are still only a matter of Rs 200 or so, and there is a more constant giving and receiving, such that the balance of reciprocity between the parties concerned is ideally more even. With the larger loans, substantial sums are involved (from Rs 2,000 to Rs 15,000), and the loan extends over a greater period (up to two or three years), so that the relationship between debtor and lender remains distinctly unbalanced, and the sense of obligation is that much stronger. When Tracie's house burnt down, she was devastated: "I had to beg for a bed that night from a friend, I was lost, nowhere". But her friends rallied round her and found the money for a new house to be built: "They gathered together and collected the money for me. Out of their concern for me and their goodness, they lent me this money". The loans totalled Rs 10,000, money which she paid them back at the usual 3% per month, yet she was clearly grateful to them for having found the money between them, and the interest payments were neither here or there when measured against that kindness.

The sense of obligation which getting a loan engenders is partly related to the fact that the loan has, after all, been given to you, rather than anyone else, which it might very easily have been. There is a very strong demand for credit in the village, and for each person who has money to lend there will be several who are interested in taking it. Thus when Janet argued that actually there was no reason to feel obliged to those who lend, "because you pay interest, so it's a two way benefit - they live on the money you give them, so you have no need to feel grateful", her husband, Victor, disagreed. "Of course you should feel grateful - they've given you the loan, haven't they?". When she pointed out, "But you give so much back, you will have repaid it completely", his final argument was that, "Still, they gave the loan to you and no one else, so you should be grateful for that", and she had to concede that this was so. This is illustrated further by the fact that, if you have been lent money by someone, and then at a later time have occasion to lend money yourself, that person will have a strong claim on the loan, if they should want it.

The tendency for people to see loans as a benefit, rather than a burden, makes it particularly difficult to talk here in terms of "moneylenders" or "middlemen" in the way that they are usually characterized in the literature on village credit, as an exploitative class. There are some people in the village, mostly those who have an income from the Gulf, who are known as regular moneylenders, but these are few. People estimate that they account for maybe 5% of loans. Even here, however, these people are part of the village, and credit arrangements are not much different from those between anyone else: they are just approached more often and may lend to more people, as well as people who are more distantly connected. Thus Josephine, whose husband, Carlos, has just returned from the Gulf, lends at 3% per month interest, but she still conforms to the usual village practices for small sums: "if it is only a matter of Rs 100 or so, or if it is only for a short while, then I will not charge any interest". There is only one woman who is known to practice a harsher form of lending, again someone with access to Gulf money, who, when she lends Rs 1,000, gives only Rs 900, and then asks 2.5% per month thereafter on the loan. "This", said Paulos with disgust, "is a cut throat practice, but she lends to those who have no choice but to accept".

In general, though, there is no real discourse of exploitation as far as credit is concerned, as Vivekanandan (of SIFFS) acknowledged. "Because we have historically organized around such issues, we tend to exaggerate the role of the middleman or moneylender, but every fisherman whom we talk to is virtually a moneylender today. It's very difficult to make out [the exploitation]. They all feel that they are beneficiaries of the system". Talk of moneylenders is almost meaningless in a community where everyone, given some surplus, becomes a moneylender: "If he has a bumper landing that day and he has got a few thousand rupees extra, then the way they *save* money is by lending it at interest: father will also lend at interest to son, and vice versa". Credit is an integral part of the culture and economy, and fishermen are particularly good at utilizing loans and at repaying them, as compared for example with agricultural workers. Thus, "You need a whole *lot* of money to keep the fishermen with you in the cooperative, because these people are very good at repayment, and the same second they have repaid the loan they will want another one".

Getting and Giving Loans

In general, as I have mentioned, there is a very strong demand for credit in the village, and when it becomes known that someone has money to lend there will be a lot of interest shown. Joseph explained, "It's usual if someone has money for people to flock for a loan... There are some people

who give gifts to ensure that they get the loan - some will take you for a drink. Some might get you drunk so you agree and then afterwards you feel obliged to give it!" Bridget also mentioned an advance gift, "It's a kind of assurance, an advance sum to say, 'If you give it to me you will be sure' - maybe Rs 25 or so. Some don't accept it, others will. If it's between friends you will maybe take them for a coffee or something". The mention of drink indicates that this is a transaction that takes place between men, and in general with the larger loans, the formal agreement is one which is sealed by men, with one or two relatives or friends of the debtor standing as witnesses and assurances of the debt. Although most of the negotiating of the loan takes place between, or at least involves, women, it is, finally, men who are considered the representative of the household and therefore the formal agreement is usually between them. The exception to this would be where the loan was given by a member of the wife's family, when the agreement would be likely to be less formal, and would be with her.

If there are a number of people all keen to get a loan when money becomes available, then there are many who will have to be refused, and this can be a tricky issue. Shobha explained: "There's a bad feeling if you refuse to give a loan - the one who is refused feels like you are judging them incapable of returning the money, they feel useless". There are some well accepted excuses, however, which help to soften the refusal: for example, in general people prefer to lend to someone who will take a large sum rather than to several people all with small sums, and everyone will understand if that is the reason. Alternatively the loan may be given to someone who is known to be very close, or particularly in need, or a close relative, and this also will be understood. Finally, there is always the excuse that, "I'm sorry, but it has already been promised to another".

Loans can be taken for any length of time, but where large sums are involved, over Rs 5,000, the repayment time is likely to be 1-2 years. Repayment is all at once, rather than in bits and pieces, and it is interesting to look in more detail at how such a large sum might be collected up. There is little saving of money as cash in the village, and people would rarely keep more then Rs 1,000 in the house. At the same time there is no involvement with formal banks[4] and it thus becomes difficult to understand how people manage to save the money to repay large debts. In fact, as soon as a woman has built up a household surplus of more than Rs 1,000 or so, she will lend it out, and she may have several such loans out at any one time. When the household has built up enough money in this way, she may recall the loans, by giving a month's notice to those to whom she has lent, and they will be forced to find the money or borrow it from

[4] In Sanghumugham, there is a woman who runs an informal banking service, keeping accounts of people's deposits with her and lending the money out at higher interest than she pays the depositors. However, I did not come across anyone doing this in Marianad.

someone else. Once she has called in all her debts in this way, the money can be repaid to the person from whom the household took the original loan. In this way the credit economy functions almost as a direct saving/banking system. The implications of this ploughing of all spare cash into the credit economy will be considered further below. Firstly I want to look in more detail at the business of who lends money to whom, and for what purposes.

Lenders, Borrowers and Loans

There are basically three reasons for raising a large loan in the fishing community: fishing equipment, Gulf visas, and dowry[5]. The first two could be seen as production loans, in that they will be directly responsible for a potential increase in the family income, and the last as a consumption loan, oriented towards social reproduction, although the extent to which this is in fact a useful distinction will be considered further later. The purpose of the loan is only contingently related to the issue of from whom people borrow, with wide networks of different connections being utilized to raise money, for whatever purpose. These networks frequently extend beyond the boundaries of the village, via families that have some kinship connection, so that the links of credit run up and down the whole coastal region. When a loan is needed, people will of course consider first those who are closest, their family, friends, neighbours, but ultimately, "what is important is who has money" and the final lender may be quite distantly connected.

Thus for example when Jayraj's net, worth Rs 25,000, was lost, he and his wife, Mabel-Mary, needed to replace it quickly, as the season was just beginning. They ended up getting the loan from a family they know in Poovar, where they both come from originally. When Gilbert and Rita decided to buy a plywood boat, they got the loan from different people: Rs 5,000 from Rita's brother's wife's family in Alillathura, Rs 5,000 from a neighbour, Rs 10,000 from a friend of Rita's sister, and Rs 25,000 from the cooperative. When Agnes raised money to pay for a Gulf visa for her husband, most of the money came from her dowry, but Rs 5,000 was also borrowed from Lawrence's friend's brother, who lived in Pulluvilla (or more accurately from his wife, since he worked in the Gulf).

People use, as can be seen, both male and female links in raising money, although for the most part it is women's networks which are primary, and it is often women in fact who work to maintain the links with their husband's family, through visits and gifts. One set of male links

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[5] There are others, of course, like hospital fees, festival expenses, school expenses, to repay a number of small loans for household needs, to repair or build a house - but these are less significant.

which is used when a loan is needed is work-based, and it is common if a man works regularly on someone else's boat, for him to approach them for a loan if he needs it. "They know you, and it's easy to keep in touch, besides they will know if it's a real need and be only to happy to give". There is, however, no obligation created by this loan to continue to work for that person, or for them to continue to employ you. "That used to happen in the old days, when I was a girl", Bridget explained, "But that was loans with no interest, and so there was an obligation. Now interest is charged, so, although you feel grateful to them, there is no need to stick on with them if you don't want".

One of the most important criteria when considering whether to give someone a loan is how likely they are to be able to or willing to pay it back. This can make the issue of lending to close relatives a particularly tricky one, and it is interesting that very few of the loans described above are between immediate family. As Bridget put it: "It's a very delicate issue, it's always safer to give it to someone who isn't a relative. Say I give it to my brother, and he is cheated, then I have to understand his position, and it's difficult for me to insist he repays me, whereas with an outsider it is easier". If you have relatives who need money, and you have it, then, "It's a big problem. If you give it, it's a problem, and if you don't give it, it's also a problem". Rajamma agreed: "Suppose my husband's father comes and asks for a loan, and I give it. After some time, they get some cash, so I go and ask for it back. And then he will say to me, 'This is money that my son earned so how can you ask me for it?'"

The problem is one that seems more acute with male relatives, or those on the husband's side, because here there is a clear claim of relatedness but at the same time less sense of family loyalty or connectedness. Between mother and daughter, or between sisters, there is a sense that the enduring connection is strong and important, and after all, in some sense they are one family: there is no question but that if they had the money and you needed it, they would repay the debt. But brothers or relatives on the husband's side might be more prepared to break off relations over the matter of an unpaid debt, or to argue it out. Lending to close relatives therefore seems to be more common between matrilineally related women, as for example with Emilie, who lent her entire dowry back again to her mother to clear the debt on the boat.

The reluctance to lend to close relatives is stronger where the loan is a productive one, and this is the major difference in fact between the two types of loan. Raising money for a girl's dowry is something which usually concerns the whole family, and there is more obligation on close relatives to lend money for this purpose, if they have it, than for any other. Certainly the mother's parents will give what they can, and often their siblings as well as her own. Rajamma paid Rs 100,000 for her daughter

Shobha's wedding. Rs 25,000 of this was nominal, in the form of a Gulf visa which was arranged by her brother. Rs 35,000 was cash to the boy's parents, and Rs 40,000 as gold and money for the couple. Of this Rs 22,000 was given by Rajamma's parents, as a straight gift. Her sisters contributed Rs 2,000 each, also as gift, and in addition lent her Rs 10,000. Her brother lent Rs 15,000, and the rest was covered by Rajamma herself. Because her family is relatively well off, she was able to cover the dowry completely in this way, but most people would need to go outside the immediate family to raise such large sums. Nevertheless, the proportion of the money that was raised from within the family would be likely to be substantially higher than with other types of loan.

Loans within the family carry the same flat rate interest as those outside. They may perhaps be more likely to be at the lower rate of 2.5%, but it is unusual for them to be interest free, even between sisters. When Emilie cleared her mother's debts with her own dowry, Rita continued to pay the same interest on the loan, but it was to her own daughter rather than the money going outside, and this was clearly a more sensible arrangement. Not to pay interest would have deprived Emilie of a potential income from her money if it was lent to someone else, and Rita would have had to be very hard up indeed to have demanded that of her daughter.

The consciousness of loans being a way of making money, giving an income from the interest, is one which is somewhat at odds with the notion described earlier, that loans are something given to help, something to feel gratitude for. It is a consciousness that is more elaborated among women, who, because they administer the loan and deal with the getting and giving of the interest payments, are more acutely aware of the cost of credit or its potential money making aspect than are men, who see the loan more instrumentally, and are more aware simply of the giving of the loan and then its final repayment[6]. Women are the financial managers, and using money to make money is something they are good at. "That's how we earn money, because if you rely on the amount from the sea alone that won't be enough". Another way women manage money is through the savings fund, or chitty.

The Chitty Fund

The chitty represents a way for households to save up small amounts of extra cash over a long period of time, and to receive in turn a large lump sum which can then be put to productive use. The commitment each month is not great, and can be given in dribs and drabs, when there is a little

[6] It is thus no accident that the argument as to whether one should be grateful for a loan was between Janet and her husband, Victor, and they each took a characteristically gendered position.

extra - if it must be found then somehow it will be found - so that although when the lump sum comes round it has been more than paid for, somehow the effect is of a bonus. As Sylvia put it: "The nice thing about it is you don't have to wait for a big sum to come your way, you can give even small amounts, like you have Rs 50 spare one day and you give it to them, and it all mounts up".

Agnes runs two chitties, and she described the principle to me. They can be run for different amounts and over different time scales, but the basic idea remains the same. With a Rs 10,000 chitty, there are ten members, and the draw will be taken ten times. Agnes herself is one member of the chitty, but as the organizer she has her contribution partly made up by the other members: "For the first payment each member gives Rs 700 contribution, and they each give Rs 50 towards mine. Then I give Rs 250 to make it up to Rs 700, and the total chitty is Rs 7,000. A draw of names is made, and the person whose name is taken gets the whole amount. After that, this person continues to make the payments with the others every six months but they give an extra Rs 300, so their contribution is Rs 1,050, and their name is not put into the draw again". As the chitty progresses, the number of members who are giving Rs 1,000 (plus Rs 50 to Agnes as before) increases, and thus the total amount increases. "This is so those who get it later get some compensation for having to wait. It's better to get it at first otherwise, because you can lend it out and get the interest". With interest rates at 3% per month, the extra payments made by those who have already got the chitty more or less represents the interest accruing from the sum. By the end of the process, after five years, the chitty sum is Rs 10,000, "and that's why it's said to be a Rs 10,000 chitty".

The chitty members are usually friends and neighbours, although they can be family - both Emilie and Rita are members of Agnes' two chitties. They have to be people that can be trusted to pay, since it can often be difficult for the organizer to get the contributions from everyone, especially when they have already received the lump sum. "Some people give their money very punctually, others are more erratic, and with some it's really difficult to get it out of them". Agnes keeps an account book, and each member has their own book also, so that everyone knows how much has been paid. People can give her small amounts whenever they have it, and if they give more than is needed it is simply held over to the next month. She does not lend out the chitty as the money accumulates, it is simply kept in the house, but if she needs she may borrow some herself from it and pay it back later.

Chitty funds are extremely popular in the village: "It's almost a business here, everyone will be involved in one chitty or more". For the women who join the chitty, it's a way of turning small sums into large ones, and a way of ensuring that money which might easily get spent on small

items is in fact saved. "Women would rather invest money in a chitty than spend it: that's how we earn money", Bridget explained. And her friend Jessilie agreed: "You can join two chitties at the same time, and when you get the money you can lend it out and survive on the interest, and thrive". For the woman who runs it, there is a fair amount of work involved, but the rewards are good, and most people run more than one. Agnes runs two, both for Rs 10,000 over five years with payments every six months; she thus receives for herself Rs 450 every six months for each chitty. Other time scales are also common: Bridget for example is a member of a two year chitty (payments every 4 months) and has already received the sum. She lent it to Lawrence, her older brother's wife's mother's brother's son, who is also a neighbour and friend.

It is predominantly women who are involved in the chitty funds - it is women who run them and in general women who concern themselves with collecting up the necessary sums and coming to the draws. Rajamma offered a pragmatic explanation for this: "Women do it because they can go and get things done, because they are here, whereas men are away at sea all the time". However, as with their control of household money, women's involvement is also talked about in terms of their financial ability, thrift and acumen: it is women who save through the chitty because it is women who are good at making money, and who know the value of it: "90% of women are good with money". Women are involved in the chitty because "if you rely on the amount from the sea alone it would not be enough". By careful handling of the small amounts of surplus cash that come in, women gradually manage to build up the household's financial resources, and create wealth from bits and pieces, and then a steady income from that wealth: "That's how we earn money".

Credit and Investment

So far I have dealt with the organization of credit from the point of view of those individuals involved in lending and borrowing. The practice of readily lending money out at interest has, however, interesting implications for the economy as a whole. The good returns that can be got from lending money encourage saving rather than consumption, and the money which is saved goes, in the end, into productive investment, so that levels of investment in fishing in the community are relatively high. There is very little tendency in the community towards conspicuous consumption: the majority of people live in the same kind of houses, wear

the same kind of clothes, and eat the same kinds of food: money, when it is available, is lent, rather than spent[7].

The easy availability of credit leads to high levels of productive investment and makes this one of the most dynamic fishing communities in the region. Plywood boat technology was introduced by ITDG[8], in conjunction with SIFFS, in only 1981, and at first the boatyards were able to supply boats only slowly. However, by 1990, over 1,000 plywood boats were operating in Trivandrum District alone. For a district with a total of 22,000 fishing households this represents quite a considerable shift towards the new technology, and the extent of this shift becomes more impressive when the price is considered. A new plywood boat and engine, at the time of fieldwork, could not be obtained for less than Rs 50,000, a sum which represents over three years salary for a minor clerical worker or teacher, yet nearly one in twenty households had managed to raise this sum over a period of seven or eight years.

There is no doubt that the high levels of investment in the sector are related to the large number of migrant workers in the Gulf, who bring back or send back considerable sums of money in remittances. What is interesting however is that this money is being ploughed into the fishing economy. In other areas of the Kerala economy, Gulf remittances have made very little difference to productive investment, creating rather a boom in consumption, mostly of imported goods (Prakash 1978). Even the guaranteed investment in housing by Gulf migrants, all of whom take the opportunity to build palatial monuments to their economic status in their natal villages, is for the most part flowing out of the state, to Tamil migrant labourers. Those who return to the fishing villages do sometimes also build houses, but they are not the same huge ornate gin palaces that pepper the Kerala countryside elsewhere, and those who live in them do little to separate themselves in lifestyle from their friends and neighbours. Instead, their money goes out to others in the form of loans. Vivekanandan, of SIFFS, described how, when the Gulf War forced a lot of migrants back, the money they made available to the economy was immediately visible in the increased orders for plywood boats: "In Anjengo the boat population, which had reached just about 100 over the previous 3-4 year period, doubled in just one year".

The ready lending of large sums in the fishing community means that, despite the increase in capital investment needed for fishing technology, this technology is not being controlled by an emergent class elite. In a study which looked at the backgrounds of plywood boat owners, John Kurien concluded that family wealth was not an issue, and that the

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[7] Thus a survey of levels of consumption expenditure among fishing households in the region found that they were remarkably similar, despite differences in capital ownership and income (SIFFS 1991: 117).

[8] Intermediate Technology Development Group, an NGO based in Rugby, U.K.

ownership of the new technology was far more related to how good a fisherman you were, and how hard you were prepared to work[9]. The money is there to be borrowed, and if a man is a good fisherman, he should be able to borrow it and pay it off successfully.

Saving and investment, through lending, is encouraged also by the need to gather up large sums of money to pay for dowries: this appears at first sight to be a particularly wasteful form of consumption which removes large sums from the economy. In fact, as we have seen, the largest proportion of the dowry is in the form of cash which is almost immediately recycled into the credit economy by the new bride, and even the gold which she receives as her own is very unlikely to stay in that form for long. Marriage is a moment, where a large sum of money is taken out of circulation and distributed to different people, but it is only a moment, and the same money finds its way back into the pool of available capital very rapidly.

Dowry can in fact be seen as a fund which is partly productive, since it will almost inevitably be utilized for productive purposes: it is also a capital sum which sets up a new household, and as such is socially reproductive (see also Chapter 1). The flows of capital between households which dowries represent are flows which follow women, and it is women also who direct these flows on further and to whom they return. Married women then act here as nodal points in a nexus of links between kin and neighbours which connect each household to others and make it impossible here to talk of bounded or individual unities. As recent work has stressed, households always involve both intra-household relations of negotiation and bargaining, and also inter-household relations of exchange, cooperation, distribution, and consumption (Hart 1993; Moore 1993a). In the next chapter I want to turn to a consideration of inter household exchange, the informal relations of cooperation, visiting and exchange, as well as more formal gifts at ritual occasions, and to examine the meanings such exchanges have, both for an understanding of the fluid boundaries of households and for an understanding of the relations between exchange, gifts and the person.

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[9] This conclusion was passed on to me by Vivekanandan. Unfortunately John Kurien has been reluctant to let me have access to the report, and ITDG could not let me see it without his permission.

Chapter 6

Households and Exchange, Gifts and the Person

As I have already discussed, residence after marriage in the fishing community tends to be uxorilocal, with women staying in their natal villages and often in close physical proximity to their mother and sisters. For the first few years of marriage they may live in the same house as their parents, and a high proportion of the households in the village consist of more than one married couple and their children. The kinds of mutual support and interdependence that living in the same house engenders do not suddenly cease when the couple moves out. In practice the separation is hardly ever total, and networks of female kin, as well as neighbours and friends, are extremely important for household survival strategies. In this chapter I shall look more closely at the kinds of cooperation and exchange that take place between interlinked households, as well as looking at more formal gift exchanges, and at the implications of these exchanges for ideas of the person and connections between people.

Informal Exchanges and Cooperation

Examining the networks of cooperation and support that exist in terms of borrowing and lending between households, such as child care support, visiting, small subsistence loans, distributions of fish, and general interdependence, provides a counterpoint to the earlier description of women's strategies as fish sellers, where we saw that women predominantly undertook the work as individual vendors and there was little permanent cooperation. What cooperation there was, was ad hoc and casual, and tended to take place between friends and neighbours rather than kin. By contrast, in the sphere of inter-household exchanges and consumption we begin to see the importance of networks of kin.

The kinds of informal cooperation that take place between households linked through women are basically very similar throughout the village. The following example, then, illustrates the general principles through a consideration of one detailed case study.

Rita, Agnes and Emilie

Although they live now in separate houses, Rita and her two married daughters, Agnes and Emilie, remain extremely close, and there is constant

coming and going between the three houses. Flossy, Emilie's twin sister and still living at home, explained: "We have different houses but it's more or less one family, because if they don't have we give and if we don't have they give - things like curry, vegetables, cash. The children and also the elders go from house to house whenever they want to". The closeness of mother and daughters has partly been fostered by the wayward and unreliable behaviour of Rita's husband, Joseph, who has gone through periods of chronic drinking and violence, with little income being brought into the house from fishing at these times. Older than her, he has now finished with going to sea, and seems also to have stopped drinking, but any authority he had in the family has long since been left in tatters, and though he is fed and informed as to what is going on, he remains a rather marginal figure to the women of the house.

Rita's eldest son is married and settled in Marianad, nearby. Partly with the money she received when he married and partly from savings, she was able to pay the dowry for her eldest daughter, Agnes, who married Lawrence ten years ago. They paid Rs 12,000 to his family, and Rs 25,000 was the couple's share: this, it was decided, should be used to obtain a Gulf visa for Lawrence. Unfortunately, they lost the money, and although Lawrence managed to go to Malaysia for a while, he got malaria while he was there and was forced to return. Weakened by the illness, he does not go fishing, but is fairly active in the village as a member of the Church Committee, and various Leftist organizations. Agnes and Lawrence have one son, who is nine, and a daughter, Asha, who is five. For the last six years they have lived in a separate house to Rita, a concrete house owned by the cooperative which is divided into two separate dwellings: each with a verandah and three rooms, one of which is used as the kitchen. The house, like most in Marianad, has electricity, but in addition it has the advantage of a standing water pipe, rather than relying on well water. This they bought with the help of a loan of Rs 19,000 from the cooperative[1].

Because Lawrence does not go fishing, the family has no direct income. When, seven years ago, he returned from Malaysia, and the difficult situation Agnes was in became apparent, Rita stepped in. Together, she and Agnes raised the money to buy a plywood boat and engine, paying for exactly half each: they got the loans from friends and neighbours, a few thousand here, a few thousand there, and ordered the boat from the cooperative's boatyard at Anjengo. Rita's eldest son had a plywood boat, and her second son, Andrew, was a regular crew member. She knew, then, how much profit could be made with a plywood boat, and she knew, too, that Andrew could competently captain the boat for them. The strategy has been extremely successful, and Rita and Agnes have long

[1] Thus, although Lawrence's political activism does not bring direct cash into the family, it does, as this shows, have some rewards!

since paid off the loans for the boat. They divide the necessary costs and repairs between them when they arise, and each take a half of the owner's share in the catch. In addition, Rita gets Andrew's share, and latterly that of her third son, who is old enough now to go as crew. Agnes gets enough money from her share to cover most of her family needs; in addition she runs two chit funds and makes some money from these[2].

Emilie and Flossy, Rita's next two daughters, are identical twins. At around the time that Agnes and Rita bought the boat, Flossy was still studying: having done well in school, she was keen to continue and take her BA. Emilie had left school and was looking after the house and her younger siblings while Rita sold fish. With the help of the income from the boat and further loans from relatives and friends, Rita raised the money for a dowry for Emilie, and she was married to Jerome, a young fisherman from Pulluvilla. Jerome's family were given Rs 16,000, and the couple got Rs 15,000 - a relatively small sum, as Rita was financially quite stretched at this time. The Rs 15,000 was in fact recycled straight back into the family finances, with Emilie using it to clear one of her mother's debts. Four years later Rita was able to return it to her in order for them to buy a small plot of land near the beach and build a thatched hut. Jerome goes fishing as crew with Andrew, and he and Emilie and their two children, 5 and 2, manage on this income.

After their marriages, both Agnes and then Emilie spent about four years each living in the house with Rita and their younger siblings. This is common practice in the fishing community (see Chapter 1), with very few couples setting up immediately on their own, and a large proportion of houses in the village in fact contain more than one married couple. These extended households however are not income sharing units: the emphasis remains on the married couple as the basic financial unit, and such households often involve complex financial arrangements between the different couples. Thus Agnes maintained a separate account from Rita, each looking after the money of her husband, while Rita also controlled the money brought in by Andrew and by herself, from selling fish. They all ate together, with Agnes doing most of the household work and cooking (as she had done before she got married), and they shared the household expenses between them. As Agnes described it: "everyone knew how much each had put in, it was kept account of and it all worked out in the end".

During this time, although the accounts of each couple were separate, Agnes kept most of the money, since it was she who was at home during the day. When Rita came back from the market, she would bring vegetables and so on for the whole house, and any money she had left over she would give to Agnes to keep. Thus, "If anyone from the family had any need for money, they would come and ask me, and I would give it, or if

[2] The institution of the chit fund has been considered in detail in Chapter 5.

someone wanted to borrow some money they would know to come to me". Although Agnes now lives separately, they still maintain this system, so that Agnes takes responsibility for her mother's money and gives it out on her behalf when necessary. In general the interdependence that existed between them when they lived in the same house has hardly diminished at all. Flossy explained, "With the profits from selling, Mother manages the day to day expenses, stuff for the household. If she makes no profit, she takes it from the money Andrew brings in - but this comes only once a week, so till then she will borrow it from Agnes. They lend money a lot between them, and then repay it when they have it." Agnes confirmed this, and described how Rita still did the shopping for both households and would get the money from her afterwards: "But we don't keep very rigid accounts between us, we help each other and don't keep too much account of who owes to whom. It's a kind of give and take".

When Emilie lived with her husband in the house, the same system of shared expenses was instituted. Here, however, there was not quite the same degree of involvement in each other's finances since Agnes continued to look after Rita's money, and it was with Agnes that the responsibility and expense, as well as income, of the boat was shared. Nevertheless, even though she has now moved out, Emilie maintains close links with both her mother's house and Agnes', and in many ways they take collective responsibility for the needs of each of the households. Thus, Agnes explained, "Suppose Flossy wants to attend a wedding and she has no money. If my mother has none at that time, then myself and Emilie would get together and we would make sure Flossy had the money she needed, we would not need to be paid back, we would just give it". Both Agnes and Emilie's children move freely between the three houses, and will take food from any of them: they will often spend as much of the day with Flossy or her younger sister as they do with their mothers, and in the evening the whole family often congregates at one or other house. Flossy recently got the job of schoolteacher in a newly set up primary school in the village, and at lunch time she comes to Agnes' house to eat, because it is closer to the school.

The close nature of these three households, and the constant series of exchanges and movement of people and things between them, are illustrated by the interactions that took place over the course of a single week towards the end of my fieldwork (see Appendix 3). This data is based on diaries which were kept by Agnes, Emilie and Flossy for about a month, where each took note of the various comings and goings in their own house, the people who visited, and what was the purpose of their visit.

These diaries clearly show the intensity of interaction between the different households, with all three sisters almost constantly in and out of each others houses, helping with housework, eating lunch, or just

socializing. Other neighbours are frequent visitors, and there are borrowings and lendings of kitchen equipment, or vegetables, repayments of loans or requests for them, social gatherings.

This constant coming and going between the three houses, and the constant in and out of friends and neighbours and workmates is fairly typical of households in Marianad. Rita, Agnes, Emilie and Flossy, though their lives are very strongly intertwined, are not particularly unusual in this. The links between the houses are typical also in being links between women, rather than men. Although Rita's eldest son, Matthias, is married and settled in Marianad, there is hardly any mention of him in the diaries. His family do maintain some links, especially through the children, but there is not the same sense that they are part of the family. Similarly, there are few links in a general way with the families of either Lawrence or Jerome, despite the fact that Lawrence's family live in Marianad.

The connections between certain households, such as those of Emilie, Agnes and Flossy, go beyond simple neighbourly borrowing and lending, and in fact begin to blur the distinction between inter-household exchange and intra-household distribution. These kinds of transaction are linked to an idea of "family" which transcends the boundaries of the individual household. The most common exchange of this kind is the sharing of fish and food between households, but there is another very common, slightly more formalized transaction which mirrors this kind of distribution almost exactly, and this is the giving of clothes. Interestingly, it is precisely these objects, fish, food and clothes, which are most strongly linked to the archetypal set of gendered exchanges between husband and wife, and most strongly associated with substance and person.

The Exchange of Food and Fish

Where more than one married couple share a house, it is common for them to cook and eat together, sharing the household expenses between them: the women may take turns to cook, or if one of them works, the other may regularly cook for her. Thus Elizabeth's married daughter cooks for the whole household, much as she did before she was married, leaving Elizabeth free to go to the market. This sharing of food is a practice that may also go beyond simply cooking for each other within the household, with food sometimes sent from house to house.

Janet lives separately with her husband and daughter, but her house is only five minutes away from the house where her mother lives with two other married sisters and their children, and Janet's younger brother. Janet is the paid coordinator of the Marianad Cooperative Society, and because she is often away most of the day on society business, her young

daughter tends to eat at her mother's house at lunch time. This feeding of children at relatives' houses is very common: what is perhaps more interesting is that Janet's mother quite frequently provides the family with their evening meal as well, sending one of the cousins over at some point in the day with a pot full of fish curry for Janet to heat up when she needs it. Sometimes they will send breakfast over too - if her mother has been up early cooking something special, like the pancake-like *appams*, she may make enough for Janet and her family as well. This sharing of food is bound up with an idea that in fact she is still just one of the family, it is an extension of the sharing of food within the house. There is frequent coming and going between the two houses at all times of the day, and Janet is as often to be found at her mother's place as at her own. She refers to her mother's house as "my house" (*ende vidu*), a word which also has connotations of "family", or "home", and it is partly this extended sense of what the family is, that makes the sharing of food between the two households seem so unproblematic[3].

Flossy, Agnes and Emilie provide another example of a "family" spread between different houses, and here again there is sharing of food between them. Flossy, since she got a job as a teacher at the local primary school, has eaten lunch at Agnes' house, and Agnes and Emilie's children will happily take food from whatever house they happen to be in at the time. Under normal circumstances each woman does in fact cook for her own household, but food will be sent from house to house whenever there is need, or if extra has been made, or if one of them has taken the trouble to make something particularly special, a treat or snack, some chutney or fried savoury.

In general this pattern can be seen throughout the village, so that while the distribution of food routinely is something which takes place within the household unit, there are many occasions on which it goes beyond that boundary, to include a wider definition of family. If we turn now from food to one of the most important constituents of it, fish, it is possible to see this process even more clearly.

While it is usually possible for the woman of the house to do her own cooking, so that distribution of food between households takes place under special circumstances, it is not always possible for her to have access to fresh fish, and the distribution of fish between households takes place quite routinely. When a crew returns to shore, part of the catch is divided between them to provide each with some fish for the house, before the rest is auctioned. In practice, if the catch has been reasonable, they will get more than enough fish for the needs of their immediate family, and the

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[3] When asked, "Who is there in your house?" (*vidill ahrokeh undu?*) people invariably reply giving the entire family (parents and all children, whether married or not) with no distinction made between those who actually live in the house and those who do not. To find out who lived in the house, I always had to specify, "who lives here?" (*ahre ivideh tamisikkunnu?*)

rest will be passed on to others. It is women who redistribute this fish, which is automatically passed on to them by their husbands.

Thus Rajamma usually gets a good share of fish from her husband's boat when they have been fishing, and once she has taken what she considers to be enough for herself from this, she will take the rest and give it to her mother. "I give her a bundle of fish, and then she divides it between my sisters, that way there are no arguments". Both her sisters are married to men who work in the Gulf, so they get no fish from their own husbands, and Rajamma's father is now too old to go fishing so her mother, too, relies on this fish.

It is very common for women to give fish like this to mother or sisters, not only when they have husbands who do not go fishing, but also at those times when their husbands may not have caught anything that day, or have been unable to find a boat to go on. It is much less usual for fish to be distributed to the husband's side of the family, and this reflects the fact that fish is primarily owed from husband to wife, and once it has been passed on to her, it is hers to do with as she will. Thus Rajamma noted that she would only sometimes give fish to her husband's family, "and not on a regular basis, because I am not that close to them. For women their own sisters and mother are closer and so they come first".

Fish, however, is not just passed on within the extended family. It can also be given to neighbours, if they are in need, and if they ask for it can be very difficult to refuse. Here there is that wider sense of obligation to the community, and of the fish as a gift from the sea which you must be generous with in your turn, which was characteristic of men's attitudes to giving fish on the sea shore to those who asked. Here however it is very definitely women who control the distribution of the fish, and whose obligation it is to be generous.

The importance of fish, the obligations on women to give, and the emphasis on men as the providers of fish can all be seen in the following account of a dispute over a particularly beautiful fish, caught by Simon.

The Beautiful Fish

It was a sunny October afternoon, the monsoon was over, and the *kanava* season was in full swing. That morning Simon had been fishing with bait and line in his kattumaram, and he had had a good catch, but among the usual mackerel and tuna and seer had been one particularly striking and very rarely seen fish, a big and beautiful fish with a deep black colour, known as a *kelle*. There are only two other fish this rare, the *karriwappe* and the *sooryameen* (sunfish), and Simon was determined not to sell it on the shore, though it would have fetched Rs 95, because he could not bear to

see it go. "If once I had showed this fish to you", he said, "You would not have given it back, it was so beautiful".

So Simon took the fish home and gave it to his wife, Mary, and she marveled over it, and then started to clean and prepare it for cooking. But news of the fish had spread, and some neighbours came by, and asked Mary if they could have a little bit of the wonderful fish, and so she gave them a portion each. Then after a while some others came and asked, and she said, "No, I can't give, because there is only enough for the family". But they persisted, and said, "If you won't give us some then let us buy it from you for Rs 10 a piece". So she gave in and said, "Take it, I don't want the money". Finally Benedicta came by, and she also asked for some of the fish, but by this time Mary was at the end of her tether and she shouted at her and sent her off with nothing.

A little later, as Chitra (my research assistant) and I were sitting and talking to Simon, we heard a commotion coming from the kitchen. A woman had arrived and was shouting at Mary, who was shouting back. Simon called out to know what was going on, and they both came storming in to the front of the house with righteous indignation, shouting at each other and explaining what was the matter.

Benedicta (to Mary): Look at these! (She shows some fish in a small basket). You won't give me fish but there are others who will! Look what I have got from asking people. I didn't buy this fish, I didn't need to, people gave to me because they knew I needed it, but you are so stingy, Mary, that you refused me.

Mary: How can I give to you when I barely have enough for the family? So many came and asked for this fish, and when you came there was none left. How can I give to you when there is nothing to give?

Benedicta: I offered to give you Rs 10 for one portion. You gave to Bridget, you gave to Tracy, but you would not even let me *buy* this fish! Well, others will give without accepting money from me. (To Simon) See how mean your wife is, Simon, she will not even give me a portion of the fish you caught this morning, and you *know* my husband cannot go to sea, I have no one to give me fish.

Mary: But there was no fish left!

Benedicta: If you had no fish you had only to tell me so in plain words, you didn't need to shout at me and send me away. How can you be so cruel to me, knowing I have no one to go fishing for me?

During this exchange, Simon was generally calm and soothing, attempting to get from each her story and to be as objective as possible, while each wanted him to see it from her side. Benedicta, particularly, played on his sympathy, and emphasized how poorly placed she was, with a sick husband, while *he* was such a good fisherman: "Simon, you don't have to worry about having fish, everyone knows when you go to sea the fish swim to you".

Eventually they both ran out of steam, and the dispute was to some extent resolved, with Mary admitting that she should not have been so rude, and Benedicta accepting that there simply hadn't been enough fish. As for Simon, he shook his head over it all, and said, "I wish I had sold it".

There was no question in this dispute that Simon had any ultimate authority over what happened to the fish once it was out of his hands. He could have chosen to sell it at the very beginning, but once it became fish for the house, it was Mary's to do with as she would, and it was to Mary that the neighbours came to beg a little for themselves. When Benedicta came to complain, she appealed to Simon purely as an independent arbiter, rather than a higher authority. What also comes out clearly in this story, is how important men are as the providers of fish for women. Benedicta clearly felt that Mary's refusal was all the more cruel because she had such a good fisherman for a husband, while Benedicta herself had "no-one to go fishing for me".

In the next chapter I shall go on to look at some of the implications of this in terms of gender relations, but here I wish to turn to another area of giving and sharing, the transactions that take place with clothes.

The Giving and Sharing of Clothes

In looking at the importance of transactions with clothes, there are two main areas of interest: the ordinary everyday use of clothes, and the more formal distribution of new clothes at festivals and other special occasions. The former tend to be more restricted in their distribution and use, staying within the household, while the latter are given beyond the boundaries of the household, again marking the extension of the wider matrifocal family. There is in addition a connection with men here, since one of the major occasions for distribution of clothes is when a man returns from a trip away, particularly to the Gulf.

For everyday use, both men and women tend to wear a *lunghi*, a single piece of cloth, often of bright coloured cotton, which is wrapped around the waist so that it hangs to the ground. Women wear this over a cotton petticoat, with a *sari* blouse or ordinary skirt blouse on top, and often a short piece of cloth or towel slung across their shoulder, like a half-

hearted attempt at a half-*sari*. Men wear it on its own, usually pulled up above their knees and folded a second time around the waist in a loose knot, with the *lunghi* continually being undone and let fall, and then gathered up again as they stand and talk. They will often not wear anything on top, but they may wear a T-shirt or a cotton shirt. For more formal occasions, such as a trip into town, or church, men wear very much the same, but the cloth will be better quality and newer, and a shirt will always be worn. Women, however, are transformed, and will almost invariably wear a *sari*, together with a newer and better-made *sari* blouse in a matching shade. Children wear dresses, or shirt and pants, on such occasions, while for just wandering round the village they may wear very little at all, or just shorts or a skirt.

Ordinary everyday clothes are bought by women, as and when they are needed, or when there is some spare cash and a particular piece of cloth catches their eye at the market. They are usually bought in the form of cloth to be made up to measurements, which is done either at the tailor in town, or by someone in one of the nearby villages who takes in sewing. Men rarely get involved in this kind of casual buying of clothes, and mostly their wives choose clothes for them. Thus Jayraj gets his clothes bought by Mabel Mary, and "only when they're stitched will he see them".

Once clothes are given to someone, however, they become their possession: "You always know whose is whose, they always belong to a definite person". The clothes become a part of the person, connected to them, and if another person wears them, they are always aware of whom the clothes ultimately belong to. Thus although clothes are borrowed and shared frequently within the household, they will never be borrowed, for example, between a man and his sister-in-law.

In Bridget's house, she and her sister and her sister-in-law frequently borrow each other's *lunghis* or *saris*, and the men in the house also will share between themselves, and borrow from the women. But although the three women will all borrow freely from her brother, the other two will avoid borrowing from Bridget's husband, and he from them. "It's fine to borrow from your husband or brother", Bridget explained, "but you would not borrow from your sister's husband, you would feel very reluctant to do that".

Flossy does not wear *lunghis*, she prefers the long skirts and blouses which she used to wear to college, so she has little call to borrow from her brother, Andrew. Her mother, however, who goes to market, does wear the *lunghi*, and frequently uses Andrew's. When Emilie and Agnes used to live in their mother's house with their husbands, they too borrowed and lent *lunghis*, but Rita would not have felt free to use either of her sons-in-law's clothes, nor they hers.

Sharing of clothes, then, takes place only within the immediate family, in general, and mostly within the house, where clothes are kept, where people dress in the morning, where the sharing of clothes is simply casual, a matter of picking someone else's from the pile instead of your own. Sharing clothes with those who are not related to you is unusual. As Bridget put it, "You would not borrow clothes outside the house - unless it was a very close friend with whom there was a lot of love. You'd only wear the clothes of someone who is very close to you". This importance of the relationship of between the people who share clothes is made even more marked by the reluctance with which people would share with those with whom, even though they may live in close physical proximity, they are barred from intimacy - their sister's husbands.

These distinctions change slightly when we turn to the giving of clothes as gifts, and here we see not only an extension of the circle of distribution beyond the household, but also a shift in the ways in which gender and relationship are marked. Just as food and cooking was something which primarily concerned those who ate together in the same house, while the distribution of fresh fish allowed a wider sense of connectedness and family to come to the fore, so the buying and sharing of everyday clothes tends to be of mutual interest mainly to those who live together, while the giving of new clothes at special events is an occasion for marking a more extended sense of interdependence.

Most families, if they can afford it, will try to buy new clothes for the major annual festivals of Christmas, Easter, and the village festival of Mary, on August 15th. They will also get new clothes on the occasion of a wedding in the family, sometimes for a baptism or a girl's puberty rite, if they decide to make a big event out of these rituals. Though not all will be able to afford clothes for all the festivals, most will try to do so for at least one, and all will manage it on the occasion of a wedding, when the new clothes are the least of the expenses they will have to incur.

Clothes bought on these occasions differ from the everyday clothes described above. For women they are invariably *saris*, and if possible they will be in good quality cloth and with a fine pattern. For a wedding, they are likely to be real silk, and very expensive, though for most other occasions they will be polyester or a cotton/polyester mix. Men will get good quality *lunghis*, or for a wedding, the cotton *mundu* (a finer version of the *lunghi*, invariably in white), and a shirt. Children get fancy clothes from the shops in town, flouncy bright dresses or *churidar* (trouser/tunic suits) for the girls, and plainer shirts and trousers for the boys. These clothes will be kept for best, and though for boys and men they can often be used for everyday wear once they have grown old and faded, for girls and women they tend to remain separate from the everyday, of a different kind as well as quality.

As with ordinary clothes, it is mostly women who buy clothes for festive occasions, choosing for the children as well as the men of the household. Unlike wordinary clothes, however, they may give these beyond the immediate family. When Rita buys clothes for a festival, she buys firstly for the unmarried children who still live in the house: Flossy, her younger sister, and her two brothers. If she feels she can manage it, however, and she usually can now that Andrew is earning a good amount with the boat, she will also buy for Agnes and Emilie, though not for her married son. They get clothes for their children and husbands, but need not do so for themselves, because they know Rita will take care of it. Again, this reflects a strong sense that Rita and her daughters are "one family" though they live in separate houses.

At weddings, also, the giving of clothes is an occasion for celebrating the wider family beyond the immediate household. Both the bride's and the groom's family will buy new clothes for the wedding, for the parents and brothers and sisters, but also for the maternal uncles and aunts, while the exchange of clothes between bride and groom is an important part of the ceremony itself. There is another major occasion for giving clothes, and one in which men are particularly prominent, and that is the distribution of clothes when a man returns from a long trip away, usually from the Gulf.

When a man returns from working in the Gulf, he will always bring with him a huge assortment of *saris*, children's clothes, *lunghis*, T-shirts and shirts, which he will give to his wife to redistribute among the family. As with the fresh fish that men bring home, whose distribution the giving of such clothes closely mirrors, he will have little say in which clothes go to whom, and although he may have bought them with an idea of roughly whom they were for, it is his wife who has the ultimate authority to give them. These clothes will be first and foremost for her, for their children, and for her sisters and mother. After that some may go to her sister's children, to unmarried brothers, to her father, perhaps close uncles and aunts and cousins. If the couple are close to the husband's family then they too will get clothes, but as with the distribution of fish, "it's a woman's own family who comes first".

The giving of clothes by men is most common when they work in the Gulf, but it is not exclusively so. If men go for work elsewhere for any extended period, or even if they go on a trip out of the state for a few days, they will tend to return with presents for their wife and family, particularly their wife's sisters. When Victor was set on a management course by the Trivandrum District Fishermen's Federation, he returned with a dress for his daughter, and three *saris*, which he gave to Janet to distribute between herself and her two sisters. Where Gulf returnees differ is in the extent of their largesse, conditioned by the huge amounts of

money that they earn, and the high expectations of all connected with them. Giving here extends beyond even the bounds of relatives, to friends and neighbours, for there is a sense in which families with a man in the Gulf are seen as the recipients of good fortune, and they should share some of this with others. Thus Josephine, whose husband Carlos worked in the Gulf till recently, explained, "It's usual for those who come back from the Gulf to give clothes, they can afford it. It's like sharing out good fortune. You try to give if you can to those who do not have anyone in the Gulf, and would otherwise not get". Like those who are expected to give fish if they have it to those who do not have access to it, those who are lucky enough to have men in the Gulf should remember friends and neighbours who are not so lucky.

The importance of clothes in the community, and the emphasis on the regular distribution of new clothes for festive occasions, means that most families have vast reserves of "best" clothes which they will have few opportunities to wear. Children particularly, who will be the first to get new clothes on any occasion, often have a pile of fancy dresses, with lace and frills and gold braid, but spend most of their days in a plain skirt and worn blouse. When there is an occasion for using these clothes, such as a trip into Trivandrum to visit someone in hospital, or a pilgrimage, or a wedding to go to, then out they will all come, and the family will set off beautifully turned out and dressed in the height of fashion. At the big general meetings of the Trivandrum District Fishermen's Federation in Trivandrum City, the main hall is crowded with women from the villages, in a riot of colour and rich fabrics, with flowers in their hair, and accompanied by scrubbed, ordered children with starched new clothes. It is hard to recognize in them the same women who sell fish in the village markets, wearing an old faded *lunghi* and a torn *sari* blouse done up with a safety pin, or the children who wander round the beach with unkempt hair and very few clothes at all, but it is a transformation that is possible for all but the very poorest families.

The importance of good clothes, and the number of such clothes owned by people in the village, is something which has interestingly not been recognized by the organization which does much of the political and development work among the fishing community, PCO, and this lack of recognition lead to one of its more spectacular failures. In 1988 SEWA[4], the women's group run by members of PCO and others, set up a tailoring project to simultaneously provide women with employment and provide cheap clothes to the fishing community. In order to bring down the price of the clothes, the material used was plain homespun cotton, the *khadi* cloth favoured by Gandhi and popular today mostly with the intellectual left and students. It was simply assumed by the organizers of this project

[4] Self Employed Women's Association.

that the fishing community would gladly buy these clothes, because they were poor, and the clothes were cheap. In fact this was a complete miscalculation, and no-one bought the clothes, which in the end were mostly sold among the academic community of the Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum. What SEWA organizers had failed to understand was that, though the majority of the fishing community are poor compared with the middle classes, clothes are one of their main luxuries, and they would not be seen dead in the kind of rough, simple understated garments that attract the downwardly mobile academic elite.

Clothes in the fishing community, then, are not just functional. The ordinary everyday clothes which people wear to work or around the village take on an extra meaning in their use by others, their sharing within the household and between those who are closely related or married. Good clothes, on the other hand, the new clothes bought on special occasions, or brought back by men from far off places, are important means of creating or marking a sense of connectedness and interdependence between households, between the extended family or simply between friends and neighbours in a wider sense of community and mutual obligation.

With all these things, food, fish and clothes, we can see how resource flows between households make it impossible to talk here of bounded units. Those considered "family" may be defined, as in the distribution of clothes at festivals, so as to include several separate households, or conversely, as for example with the pooling of income, be more narrowly defined so as to separate even those living in the same house. The distinction between distribution within a household, and exchange between households, becomes extremely difficult to make, and it perhaps makes better sense, as Moore has argued, to talk in terms of redistribution and resource flows in both cases (Moore 1993a).

These particular kinds of transaction, in food, fish, and clothes, carry associations of being of "one family", of a certain intimacy, and, I would argue, of relatedness through shared substance. They are also, as I have noted, transactions which are strongly associated with the exchanges and obligations between husband and wife within the household. These are aspects to which I shall return in the next chapter. I want to turn now to more formal patterns of gift exchange in the village, linked to ritual occasions such as marriage, before going on to discuss the implications of these transactions in the light of the theoretical literature on gifts and person in India.

The Formal Exchange of Gifts

Women are the major organizers of gifts in general, and certainly when it comes to formal occasions it is they who will make sure the family's obligations are met. Thus Jayraj does not concern himself with gifts, even for his own family, and Mabel Mary organizes it all. "Men don't organize presents because they are away fishing", she explained, but Paulos had another answer to the question of why it was always women who organized gifts: "Why do you ask?" he said. "This is a woman's village!" Besides, as he added, "If men had the money, they would only spend it if it wasn't with the wife".

It is true that women, being those who look after the household's money, are able to organize presents or give money as gifts more easily than men. But women will also take on the task of distributing presents even when they have originally been bought by men, as when they return from the Gulf with clothes and other items. For most people, it is women who are seen as most concerned with keeping up relationships, and family obligations: "Men don't give a lot of thought to that kind of thing"[5].

In Marianad there are none of the continuing formally elaborated flows of gifts between affinally linked households that are seen as typical of South Indian gift exchange (e.g. Dumont 1986). After marriage, there is no necessary continuing link between the bride's or groom's family, or even between these and the household of the couple, though in practice as we have seen the links between the wife and her natal family usually stay strong.

There are however a number of different occasions for the formal exchange of gifts between friends, relatives and neighbours. By far the most important are weddings, but I shall look briefly at some of the other life rituals at which gifts are normally exchanged before going on to look at weddings in more detail. Most of these are associated with children: baptism, first communion, and puberty rites for girls. After marriage, formal gifts will be given only at the housewarming ceremony, when a family moves house. When families visit each other they very rarely bring substantial gifts, at the most a little fruit or some sweets. Informal gift giving seems to be confined mostly to that between members of the household, and mostly to children.

At the celebration of a child's baptism (*mamodeesa*), within the first month after birth, it is mostly relatives who are invited, and each would bring a small gift for the child, mainly of jewelry. They will bring small items, toe rings, baby's bangles, finger rings, in silver or if they are close

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[5] The centrality of women in the business of keeping up formal gift relationships is seen also in Sharma's study of households in Shimla, where she emphasises women's work here as important to maintaining networks and thus increasing the household's access to external resources (Sharma 1986: Chapters 9 and 10).

family perhaps gold. The nature of these items is much the same whether the baby is a girl or a boy, since all babies are dressed very similarly, and all wear jewelry, though earrings, if bought for later, would be only bought for girls. Cash will not in general be given at a baptism, but it is the most common gift at the child's first communion celebration (*adya kurbana*). Here only very close family or friends are invited, and it is a much smaller affair. The child's godparents are supposed to provide the dress, although they will not always be able to afford it: other people bring straight cash gifts, which will be noted by the family and reciprocated when the next occasion arises.

For girls the next formal celebration comes at puberty, and the rite known as *masayiruppe chadange*[6]. This is a ritual that seems to have become less celebrated than it used to be: for most girls in the village it had been a fairly low key affair, while their mothers remembered far more elaborate occasions. Shobha carried on going to school during the week of her first period, although strictly speaking she should have remained secluded for seven days. For her, it was only close family involved, her mother's parents and brothers and sisters, but when Rajamma had hers, it was a much bigger occasion. On the first day all the neighbours, friends and relatives were told, and there was much celebration - "It's like a wedding, everyone knows, and comes by to congratulate you". The mother's brothers and father's sisters, the people who have most interest in their niece's fertility since she is a potential wife for their sons, come bringing oil, and mix it with an egg from the girl's house. This she is made to drink, "for her health". At the end of the seven days, the girl's female relatives give her a bath, especially bathing her head and hair, and then there is a party. For Rajamma's, some twenty five people came to this, and all brought presents, of soap, clothes, money, earrings, bangles. At Shobha's, it was only close family, though the kind of presents given has not changed.

At puberty celebrations, most people who are family bring presents for the girl, while those who are friends and neighbours may bring cash, to help defray the expenses of the party. At weddings (*kalyanam*) the pattern is reversed, and it is close friends who bring actual gifts for the bride or groom, while the family and relatives concentrate on cash, which they know will be sorely needed. As Bridget explained: "It depends on the occasion, what you give. With weddings there is a great deal of expense, and near relatives know this, and they know the family needs money most of all, so they give money. The closer the relative, the more they will give. They know it's easier for the family if they do that". In fact at weddings the majority of those invited give money, and it is really only the personal friends of bride and groom who give presents. Josephine agreed: "If it is

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6 *masam* is month, *iruppe* is sitting; *chadange* is the general word for a rite.

the wedding of a close friend, you would give a present, something you know they would like. You would only give this kind of gift to a friend, not to family or an acquaintance. You would give cash to them".

The distinction being made here is between gifts which go to the bride or groom themselves, and gifts which go to the bride's family. If you are a close personal friend of the couple, you will want to give them something for themselves, but for most people who attend a wedding it is the bride's family who are giving it, and to whom they therefore owe a gift. As with other occasions on which gifts of money are given, the amounts given by each family are noted, so that they can be repaid. The bride's parents keep account of the gifts, and it they who are responsible for repaying this amount when the time arises, always with a little increment. Cash gifts on this occasion are always given as a round number plus one rupee, for luck. Thus the amounts will be something like Rs 101, Rs 201, Rs 501 and so on. According to Rajamma, "It's the one rupee that has the value, without it the rest is just valueless. If you gave Rs 500 it would be worth nothing". When these gifts are repaid, at the next wedding of the family who gave, an additional amount will be given, so that if Rs 201 was given, Rs 251 may be returned.

There is in fact a general understanding that when gifts are reciprocated, for whatever reason, more should be returned than was given. When gifts between close friends or family are concerned, this is often related to the idea of love, *sneham*. For Shobha, "If you get a present, say, for Rs 10, you would try and give one for Rs 15. The increase, the return, is to show appreciation, it's the *love* you have for them". The practice was also explained to me as an analogy to love by Patros and some of his friends: "If I love someone, and they love me more than that, then that is good. If they only love me the same amount, if they just give back exactly equal love, then what is that? That is nothing". I argued in vain for a concept of equality in love as the ideal: for them that was sterile, calculatedly ungenerous. "If I love her, and she loves me just exactly the same, that is finished, nothing. If I love her and she loves me *more* than that, that is great, that is really love"[7]. For both the exchange of gifts and the exchange of love, it seems, equality of return implies a closed transaction, sterility, the cessation of an active binding obligation between the two, while imbalance implies a continuing tie.

There is another, more pragmatic reason advanced for the addition to the return gift, and this is a reason which tends to be articulated more with reference to the cash gifts between neighbours or acquaintances. This is just a straight explanation in terms of interest and time lag. As

[7] It may be significant that this conversation was with a group of men, and it was consistently women who were supposed to give their husbands more love than they received. I think however that it can be seen as a model of the ideal loving relationship as one of shifting imbalance, and that the imbalance may also lie in the other direction.

Emilie put it, "You always try to give more than you were given. It's because of the time lapse, the value of money changes, so you should give extra".

This difference between the two explanations points to a difference in the nature of gifts exchanged, and in the meaning of that exchange, according to the relationships between people. There is a dialectic between the gifts and the relationship, so that gifts can strengthen a close relationship but only because they take their meaning from the prior existence of that relationship, because they symbolize or contain the love that exists in one person for the other. Gifts are given routinely between people on many different occasions, and are reciprocated over and over again, so that there are ties of obligation between people who are just acquaintances which are simply pragmatic, monetary exchanges. Gifts in this sense do not create relationships, but are part of them, and take their colouring from the nature of the relationship itself. Thus Flossy noted, "If you give and receive gifts with someone then your relationship with them is definitely stronger. But you may also give gifts with people who are not that close".

This idea that certain exchanges, and certain gifts, imply a particular closeness that others, despite being of the same kind, do not, is an important one, and one to which I shall return. I want to turn first however to the ways in which exchange of gifts in India has been linked to theories of the person, and the ways things passed between people can be seen to have implications for the connections between them.

Gifts and Love, Gifts and Poison

As we have seen from the above discussion, and as has been described widely for the Indian context by ethnosociological accounts (see Introduction) certain kinds of transaction, such as in food, almost inevitably implicate the substance of the person, and create a bodily connection between the transactors. With other material objects, particularly of the sort given as gifts, there is a less obvious implication of the person in the thing, and the question can be asked, to what extent persons are seen to be connected by the gift, and what is the nature of the connections made, if any?

In general, there appear to be two main discourses around gifts and the relationships they engender, and these roughly correspond to whether the gift is seen as part of a reciprocal flow, or as one sided and non-reciprocal. In the former case, gifts are emphasized as arising out of and engendering permanent relationships between persons, characterized by love and affection. In the latter, the gift is an altogether more ambivalent

entity, which transfers to an unconnected person sin or inauspiciousness. I shall consider this latter discourse first, since it is perhaps the most well known in the context of gifts in India. I shall then go on to look at the alternative discourse of connection, as well as the question of whether gifts always embody part of the person, and how to untangle the relationship between gifts, substance exchange, and the relationships between transactors.

Gifts as Poison

The discourse of ambivalence and of the transfer of negative substance in the gift is one which is associated with one particular kind of transaction, known as *dan* or *dana*. This "Indian gift", and its distinction from its Maussian counterpart, has been most widely discussed by Jonathan Parry (1980; 1986; 1989) in the context of *dan* given at funeral rites. Parry argues that in the case of the Indian religious gift, *dan*, the object is not to create relationship but to break it, to sever connections with a negatively valued part of the person. *Dan* embodies the sins of the donor, and as such the recipient, through accepting the gift, takes these sins onto himself, and removes them from the giver. Hence "all *dana* is dangerous and all priests are compromised by its acceptance" (Parry 1989: 67). For the Banaras funeral priests with whom Parry discussed these issues, the acceptance of *dan* corrupts them both mentally and physically: "the priest's intellect is enfeebled, his body gets blacker and blacker and his countenance loses its 'lustre' with every gift received" (Parry 1994: 124).

It might be argued that the evil and dangers of the funeral gift are strongly related to their association with death, with the consequent pollution and dangers of malevolent ghosts, and indeed, as Parry notes, some of the problems associated with *dan* are also relevant to money made for example from selling wood for the funeral pyre. "'The money of the cremation ground', people say, 'will never allow anybody to prosper'" (Parry 1994: 130). *Dan* in Banaras may indeed be more strongly associated with evil and sin through its connection to the dead, but there is however clear evidence that the negative qualities of *dan* exist in other contexts also.

Raheja (1988) has looked at the nature of gift giving in an agricultural village in Uttar Pradesh, and has concluded that here too *dan* is inextricably bound up with the transfer of negative qualities from giver to recipient. The dominant Gujar caste in the village where she worked regularly gave ritual gifts to their hereditary priest (*purohit*), as well as to other service castes and to their affines, and these were specifically intended to enhance the well being of the family or caste as a whole

though the transfer of inauspiciousness. For the Gujar, "Brahmans and Barbers and Sweepers and several other castes were all alike in that they were 'vessels' ... for the removal of the inauspiciousness of the Gujar *jajman*" (Raheja 1988: 32). One of the defining features of Gujar dominance in the village was in fact that they themselves never received *dan* but only gave it.

There are a number of interesting questions about gift exchange, and the implied relations between people and things, which are raised by the matter of *dan* and the transfer of inauspiciousness. Clearly some part of the person is here implicated in the gift. Yet, as Parry has noted (1986), this is not classic Maussian gift exchange for here the gift is most definitely unreciprocated and the flow of substance is one way only. What is interesting is why this particular group of gifts is held to embody the sins of the donor, what is their relation to other gifts and exchanges, and what it is that defines a particular gift as *dan*, and hence dangerous.

For Parry, perhaps the most important defining feature of *dan* is its non-reciprocal nature. Not all gifts count as *dan*, and other gifts are not seen as problematic in the same way, because "such gifts are governed by an explicit ethic of reciprocity" (Parry 1989: 73). *Dan*, on the other hand, represents a one way flow. As a form of sacrifice, it is identified with the person of the sacrificer and thus embodies something of his bio-moral substance (ibid: 74), the incorporation of which compromises the purity of the Brahman recipient. However, it is rather his acceptance of a gift with no return which more thoroughly compromises his soul and is the crucial issue. For Parry, "this denial of reciprocity ... seems ... to represent *the* most fundamental source of the peril" (1994: 134). Other defining features of *dan* for Parry are that its recipient must be ritually purer than the donor (hence usually a Brahman, or a higher ranked affine), and that, ideally, it should be given with no thought of gain, entirely altruistically.

Raheja's data on *dan* in Uttar Pradesh contradicts both these last features and provides an interesting alternative discourse on *dan*. For the Gujar caste, the giving of *dan* is quite explicitly linked to material and spiritual gain in this world: it is very much a calculated gift, aimed at enhancing the well being of the donor. In addition, it is given not only to those who are ritually pure, but also to those who are less pure, to the Barbers, Sweepers and other low castes who serve the Gujars. These castes, exactly like the Brahman priest and certain affines, are said to have an "obligation" to accept *dan* from the Gujars and thus remove inauspiciousness from them. Unlike Parry, who emphasizes the importance of hierarchy with regard to gift giving, Raheja suggests that what is important in the context of *dan* is rather the *centrality* of the dominant caste, with hierarchy here not a particular issue. Thus "Gujars do not see the giving of [*dan*] as a matter of hierarchical status; they give such

prestations, in the course of a wedding, to the groom, to the Barber, to the Sweeper, and to the Brahman, and they do not interpret the gifts in terms of the relative superiority or inferiority of these recipients" (Raheja 1988: 147). What they do insist on, however, like Parry's funeral priests, is the matter of non-reciprocity. Gujars give *dan* but they do not (except in the case of marriage) accept it, and what they do give must on no account be returned, even in another form. What Raheja's data suggests, however, although she does not explicitly make this point, is that it is not non-reciprocity as such which defines the nature of *dan*, but rather the nature of *dan* which dictates its non-reciprocal nature.

Much of Raheja's ethnography is concerned with the ritual which surrounds prestations in the village where she worked, and it seems clear that much of this ritual was itself concerned with making gifts into *dan*, that is, with ritual actions designed to draw off inauspiciousness from a person or family and transfer it into an object which could then be given away. This is most explicit when dealing with illness or other afflictions, but it can be seen to operate at some level in all the contexts which she describes, where "disarticulative" agents, such as the action of heat, are used to separate negative substances from persons and places and transfer them to certain objects (1988: Chapter 3). In the case of Arvind, a boy under the inauspicious influence of one of the planets, objects associated with that planet were used in a ritual where, "by coming into contact with the child's body and then being given away, [they] removed the negative 'influence' ... from the boy and transferred it to his Brahman *purohit*" (ibid: 112). In order to ensure that all the inauspiciousness *did* go into the objects, Arvind sat with his right foot on a stone throughout the ritual "so that the negative substances being removed would not flow into the earth" (ibid). It is not surprising that the gifts which result from these rituals are seen to be dangerous to the recipient, nor that they should on no account be reciprocated, for if they were to be so, the inauspiciousness would simply return in the counter prestation. It is also clear why the recipient of *dan* must be seen as someone who is "other" to the donor, who completely removes the gift from any connection with the giver.

That the recipient of *dan* is paradigmatically someone who is "other" to the giver, rather than someone who is ritually superior, seems clear from Raheja's data on the giving of *dan* to low caste recipients, something which is also found in Filippo Osella's data from Kerala (F. Osella 1993: Chapter 6). That the giving of *dan* is a context were hierarchy is completely eclipsed by a notion of centrality, however, as Raheja argues, is something which seems to me more problematic. The idea that the recipients of *dan* have an *obligation* to receive it, and the notion that the (nominally higher status) groom must take gifts "like a beggar" from the bride's family (ibid: 121), points to the strong sense in Raheja's data of the

low status of recipients of *dan* vis a vis the donors. It also accords with Parry's understanding that it is the acceptance of *dan* which explains the relative inferiority of the Brahman priest, and particularly the funeral priest (Parry 1994: 138). In certain contexts (especially perhaps funerals) it may be necessary that the recipients of *dan* be ritually pure, but it seems clear that this purity does not imply power: the donor is in the position of being able to insist that the recipient removes his sins, even at the cost of the recipient's own well being[8].

The question of the status of giver vis-a-vis the receiver of *dan* is clearly a tricky one, and not one which I can resolve here. What can be said about the nature of *dan*, however, is that it is paradigmatically an unreciprocated gift which is understood to contain extremely negative substances associated with the donor. It is not evil because it is unreciprocated (contra Parry) but is rather unreciprocated precisely because it is understood to contain evil, which may return in a counterprestation. Not all gifts, whether unreciprocated or not, contain these negative associations: *dan* contains them because they have been specifically put there by ritual means, or because the context (death, sacrifice) is such that they are understood to be associated with sin or ghosts.

A gift, then, must be defined as *dan* if it is to be understood to transfer inauspiciousness: this does not automatically follow from a gift's non-reciprocity or the context of its giving. Part of the prestations of cloth and other items given by a Gujar family to their affines would often be set apart and marked out as specifically for their newly married daughter, not yet seen as completely other, completely a *dhiyani* or affine, and this part of the gift was not *dan*, for "one does not give ... 'sets of cloth 'like that'", that is, sets of cloth that are *dan*, to one's daughter" (Raheja 1988: 100). Gradually, however, the daughter comes to be defined primarily as other, *dhiyani*, and as such an appropriate recipient of *dan*, so that her share is not any longer distinguished (ibid: 142): other gifts continue to be made to her though which are not defined as *dan*, and in this context she is most usually referred to as a daughter, a sister, or one of "our girls". The fact that apparently identical types of gift, given to the same person, can be defined equally as *dan*, which contains inauspiciousness, or as a simple gift which indicates only closeness and affection, points to the shifting, contextual nature of the definition of *dan* and suggests that whether a gift is or is not *dan* is often a matter of interpretation, which may be contested. Though she is sensitive to the presence of different discourses around gifts from the point of view of the donors, Raheja does not really ever go beyond

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[8] That there is an element of coercion in this is clear from the example of the Barbers in Raheja's village who now refuse to take the *jora*, cloth placed on the body of the dead, because of its extreme inauspiciousness: "in the past, he would simply have been ordered to take it by his *jajman*. But 'times have changed'...Gujars say, and now the *jora* is usually burned with the body" (Raheja 1988: 148).

their perspective, and we learn little of how the recipients represent to themselves the nature of what they are receiving, whether they do in fact simply accept what they know to be inauspiciousness[9]. Filippo Osella's discussion of the nature of Onam gifts in a Kerala village is much more satisfying from this point of view, and shows clearly the presence of conflicting interpretations.

Alternative Definitions

Raheja shows that there are two possible discourses around gifts, which are associated with a definition of the recipient as either "our own", closely connected to the donor, or else as "other", as a suitable remover of inauspiciousness. However, although she notes that in different contexts the same people (daughters-in-law, service castes) can be defined as either one or the other, and thus the gifts given alter their nature, she assumes the power of the donor to define which is appropriate in each context. Filippo Osella (1993) allows us to see that the same gift may be defined in either of these two ways depending on the perspective of giver and receiver.

An important exchange of gifts takes place between landlord and labourer at the time of the Onam festival in Kerala, in September. This is a time of general celebration, when the family comes together, eats well, and gives gifts, especially of clothes, between themselves, and the exchanges between landlord and workers can also be seen in this light, as a kind of extension of the notion of family or kin. This is indeed the way in which it is represented by the labourers, and publicly the landlords will go along with this definition: "by giving gifts...[the landlords] present themselves not as mere employers, but also as caring putative fathers of the labourers. [Their] gifts are presented to the labourers as an embodiment of the *sneham* [love] proper of relations among kin" (F. Osella 1993: 334). However, there is a more private discourse within the landlord's family which emphasizes these gifts in fact as *danam*. The labourers who receive them "are not kin, but untouchable Pulayas: what they are receiving, and are only fit to receive, is not *sneham* (love), but *dosham* (imperfections)" (ibid: 336). The two discourses here exist side by side, and are manipulated by the different parties to the exchange in an attempt to define the

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9 I was intrigued by Raheja's description of the removal of inauspiciousness in one particular case, where the Brahman priest who took the *dan* gave to the family a coin which, he said, would bring "good fortune": it was taken and locked carefully away in a trunk. According to Raheja, "the inauspiciousness had been given away, but the auspicious residue was to be kept in the house" (Raheja 1988: 113). Had I been the family, I would have been rather more suspicious of the supposed good fortune in the coin, and suspected that perhaps it was the Brahman who had got way with the goods, but given back the inauspicious residue.

relationship between them either as one of mutuality or as one of hierarchy.

The discourse which surrounds the mutual giving of gifts, as between kin, is one which here centres on the concept of *sneham*, love. In Marianad, where inter-caste interaction is not an issue, and affines are not ranked, gift giving has very little to do with hierarchy, and the predominant consideration is precisely the matter of connection, and love.

Gifts and Love

As I have discussed earlier, the exchange of gifts in Marianad is often represented in terms of love (*sneham*) between giver and receiver. People give because they have affection for each other, because they are family or close friends, and the gifts make this bond stronger. Not all gifts, however, arise out of love or contain it, and there is a contrast drawn here between the gifts given to close kin or friends, and those given to mere acquaintances. The latter are pragmatic transactions, called forth by the context (of a wedding or other festive occasion) and implying nothing very strong about the relationship between giver and receiver. The return gift here is somewhat increased in value "because of the time lapse", to take account of inflation or interest, rather than, as in the case of close friends, representing "the *love* you have for them".

This discourse of love and gifts is very similar to that identified by Filippo Osella, and it is significant that here too, it is associated with gifts between those who are already considered to be close, to be kin, to be in some way connected. Thus when labourers in Valiyagraman emphasize Onam gifts as containing *sneham*, the force of this claim is precisely that it implies a substantial connection between landlord and labourer and thus subverts the hierarchy of caste which the landlord reasserts through his definition of the gift as *danam*. *Sneham* is not just an emotional bond, it is implicated as part of a substantial bond: "as a highly valued substance [*sneham*] can be detached from the person, re-embodied in certain vehicles (notably food, cloth, gifts) and passed on to others" (ibid: 329). What is interesting here, and clear in the context of Marianad, is that it is not automatically passed on to others: it is in fact passed on only to certain others, with whom there is *already* a connection. The point is made succinctly by Flossy, who noted, "If you give and receive gifts with someone then your relationship with them is definitely stronger. But you may also give gifts with people who are not that close". These latter gifts do not contain love, and do not imply a stronger connection: love flows along channels already carved out by the flow of food, of daily interaction, of substantial connections of blood, milk, semen.

Love, then, implies substantial connectedness, and substantial connectedness implies love. The transfer of substance/body/identity, depends here not only on the material transfer but on the relationship already established between giver and receiver, and on the nature of that relationship.

What all this suggests is that whether a gift can be understood to contain part of the person's substance, and to create a connection between giver and receiver, depends less on the nature of the gift itself, than on the nature of the *prior relationship* between the transactors. In the case of *dan*, which unequivocally contains substances from the donor, these do not create a substantial connection with the receiver because there was no prior relationship: it is in fact crucial that the receiver be defined as "other", as completely separate. In the case of gifts which contain love, it is the *presence* of a prior relationship which in fact defines whether the gifts contain part of the person, their love, or not, and thus whether that relationship is strengthened by the exchange.

The idea that the implication of the person in the gift is not necessarily automatic, and that it may depend as much on the nature of the prior relationship between the transactors as the nature of the relationship between donor and gift, is one which has also been noted recently by Valerio Valeri for the Huaulu of Seram, Indonesia. Valeri (1994) describes how exchanges among the Huaulu are defined by the relationship of the transactors as either "other" or "non other", definitions which are to some extent shifting, contextual and susceptible of manipulation, but which determine whether the transactions are seen to embody aspects of the person or not. Certain forms, and certain objects, are more appropriate for one or other type of transaction (just as we have seen that in Marianad food and feeding, for example, are much more likely to be understood to imply connections of substance than money), but nevertheless, the most crucial determinant of the nature of the exchange is the relationship that is seen to exist between the parties.

It seems likely that this understanding of exchange and person is one which has wider relevance, and that the nature of the gift in any one context is something which is not only about the relationship between persons and things as conceived by that particular culture, but, contra Strathern (e.g. 1988: 162-3), may be contextually variable and dependent on other considerations also. Thus Valeri concludes: "in deciding whether a phenomenon is closer to the 'gift' pole or the 'commodity exchange' pole of the spectrum of give-and-take, the nature of the pre-existing relationship between the object given and the giver ('alienable' or 'non alienable' or whatever) is much less important, and more contingent, than the nature of the relationship between the parties, and than the value and significance of the objects that move between them" (Valeri 1994: 18). Clearly, the

nature of the gift in India can be seen from the above discussion to provide some evidence for the validity of this observation.

The exchanges which I have been concerned with here have been mostly those between households, rather than within them. As I noted earlier, many of these exchanges *between* households shade in fact into a form of redistribution which is also seen *within* households, and in fact it is these transactions, of food, fish, clothes, which are most closely associated with gendered exchange, with obligations and reciprocity between husband and wife, as well as being more obviously associated with shared substance and intimacy. In the next chapter I want to turn to the relationship between husband and wife, and to the meanings of these transactions.

Chapter 7

Gender, Person and Exchange

Women are very different from men. Just as there are physical differences, so there are characteristics which you can point to as female. In almost every way they are different. For example, women don't go to sea, don't go fishing. Men are of the sea, women are of the land. They bring fish, we sell fish, women look after children, men don't. They drink, we don't. They smoke, we don't. You just watch them, and see how different they are - in every way.

Mabel Mary, Marianad.

Men and women in the fishing community are strongly marked out from each other in what they do and what they are: in their work and daily practices, and in ideas about bodily substance and the difference gender makes in tracing links of relatedness between people. Here I want to draw together the threads of my discussions in previous chapters, and to place the arguments on gender in the fishing community in the context both of the theoretical literature on gender, and comparative literature on India.

Theories of Gender in Anthropology

Early feminist anthropology focused on the study of women and women's lives, which it was felt had been overshadowed by a primary concern of (mainly male) anthropologists with men (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Reiter 1975). As well as describing cross cultural variations, however, attempts were made analytically to understand what appeared to be a fairly universal tendency to devalue female associated areas of life and women themselves. Thus women's subordination in the West was approached through an understanding of universal female subordination, predicated on universal associations between women and certain devalued areas of social or cultural life. Women were seen as part of the domestic, encompassed by the public world of men (Rosaldo 1974), or as part of nature, subordinated to (male) culture (Ortner 1974), both of these associations conditioned in part by women's reproductive role (Chodorow 1978).

However, in part because of its necessary relation to ethnography, feminist theory in anthropology has never been able to stand still for very long, and these dichotomies quickly came to be seen as inadequate in

describing the complexities of women's lives in other cultures. The study of cross cultural variation in the status of women gave way to a concern with the status of the category "woman" itself. The idea of universal associations between women and nature, the domestic, even mothering, were questioned, with all these apparently neutral terms seen as imbued with specific Western, particularly 19th Century, meanings (Rosaldo 1980), not easily applicable to other contexts (MacCormack and Strathern 1980). Thus the focus shifted from a concern with women to a concern with the cultural construction of the categories "woman" and "man", and thus to a concern with gender. The study of the meanings and importance of gender, symbolically and in social practice, and the ways "economics, kinship and ritual are experienced and structured through gender" (Moore 1988: 9) became the new feminist project, with an emphasis not on universals but on social and historical specificity.

Focusing on gender allowed for a much more sophisticated analysis of the ways in which difference and inequality were constructed between women and men, and the ways in which gender symbolism was used in other areas of social life. Nevertheless, this focus assumed as relatively unproblematic the fact that everywhere there were two discrete kinds of person, women and men, whose relationship could be represented as "gender". Gender was then merely the culturally variable elaboration of this natural, given division.

More recently, a further deconstructionist move has begun to problematize this notion of gender, which can be seen as resting on a distinctively Western folk model, and to question the ways in which gender itself is constructed, rather than seeing it as a neutral analytical term.

The Relationship Between Sex and Gender

In an early paper signaling this move, Collier and Yanagisako suggested that, "rather than taking for granted that 'male' and 'female' are two natural categories of human beings whose relations are everywhere structured by their difference, we [need to] ask whether this is indeed the case in each society we study and, if so, what specific social and cultural processes cause women and men to *appear* different from each other" (1987: 15). Following Schneider's influential critique of the notion of kinship in anthropology, they attempt to demonstrate how the notion of gender we currently operate with is pervaded by Western folk concepts of natural biological difference. In fact this folk model, particularly as concerned with ideas about sexual reproduction, can be seen to lie at the heart of our concepts of both gender and kinship, which are thus mutually constituted fields of study. For both kinship studies and the study of gender

the fundamental units that define them as fields, males and females, are assumed to be "outside of and beyond culture" (ibid: 29). For Collier and Yanagisako, the next step for feminist anthropology is to begin to investigate the various ways in which gender might structure difference, without assuming that it does so through sex: "instead of asking how the categories of 'male' and 'female' are endowed with culturally specific characters, thus taking the difference between them for granted, we need to ask how particular societies define difference" (ibid: 35), or if, indeed, they do.

What Collier and Yanagisako call for then is an understanding of gender which does not rest on the notion of biological sex, or of natural differences between "women" and "men". Feminist theory has long argued that the cultural construction of gender should not be viewed as *determined* by biological attributes of sex, but to argue that the two need not be related at all seems initially somewhat shocking, and perhaps problematic.

In a more recent collection on gender in South East Asia, Errington (1990) takes up Collier and Yanagisako's argument and attempts to advance it through a more detailed understanding of Western concepts of biology and sex. Taking inspiration from Foucault, she argues that an understanding of gender must involve an understanding of the cultural construction of the body, particularly the gendered body (ibid: 10). The biological "facts" of embodiment are never enough to explain the particular aspects of the body that are taken up as meaningful by different cultures - "the sense made of bodies is far from universal" (ibid: 14) - nevertheless, some notion of the gendered body will be important in any system of gender differentiation. The Western model of the embodied person and of gender difference puts a heavy emphasis on biology, with a "natural" division of persons into two exclusive and exhaustive categories according to genitals, themselves seen as "signs" of internal biological differentiation, and strongly normatively related to sexual identity and reproductive sexuality (ibid: 19-26). The whole complex of beliefs and assumptions that lie behind Western notions of the sexed body Errington labels "Sex", to differentiate it from the basic raw materials of the body and gender, "sex". Biological sex, as feminist theory has previously understood that term, is in fact nothing but "Sex", and by the term "sex" Errington means to indicate a very different and much more empty category: "I have no good neutral alternatives to the terms 'bodies' and 'embodiment' and 'sex' for the materials of which we are made, but by differentiating between sex and Sex I mean to point to something that exists but has no meaning outside the way it is constructed within specific cultures and historical periods" (ibid: 27).

Thus when Collier and Yanagisako emphasize that gender need not be everywhere a particular cultural elaboration of sexual difference, what they are rejecting as the basis for gender is not sex itself, but the Western elaboration of it, Sex. Because they fail to distinguish the two, "they are unable to see what sex would look like if it did not look like Sex, and understandably hesitate to use the term, proposing instead that the study of gender should proceed without it" (ibid: 28). This, Errington believes, is not only unnecessary, because it is only one particular construction of sex which needs to be rejected, that of Sex, but positively problematic: "it is rather difficult to imagine what the topic of 'gender' would refer to if it had no relation to 'sex'" (ibid: 29), that is, ultimately, to the raw materiality of the body. Collier and Yanagisako's radical decoupling of the notion of gender from sex is thus recast by Errington so that gender is in fact seen to be *intimately related* to a culture's understanding of sex, but this understanding must not be confused with the Western model of Sex, and will in fact have different meanings in different "specific cultures and historical periods" (ibid: 27).

Henrietta Moore has taken up this issue of the relation between sex and gender in feminist anthropology in a number of articles (Moore 1993b, c; 1994). As she has noted, the move towards problematizing the concept of gender is to be welcomed, since "it moves away from the view that variation in gender constructions and roles are merely cultural elaborations of the facts of biological sex difference, towards analysing the ways in which cultures actually construct differences between women and men ... and why they construct those differences in the way they do" (Moore 1993b: 196). In this project, Moore believes, it is not necessarily helpful to retain a concept of "sex" at all, and her position can in fact be seen as a more strongly Foucauldian version of Errington. What Errington misses in her discussion of the differences between "Sex" (the cultural construction) and "sex" (the material reality), is that "'sex' is everywhere 'Sex', in other words, that although the particular constitution, configuration and effects of 'Sex' vary between cultures, there is, in each case, no way of knowing 'sex' except through 'Sex'" (1993c: 818). For Moore, the body is always understood in and through culture, and every culture will therefore have a discourse on "sex": this is not very far from Errington's point. However, for Errington, it is still necessary to retain a marker of the material constraints that the real body imposes on cultural discourses, and she calls this marker "sex". For Moore, however, given that "sex" is always apprehended through gendered discourse, it makes no sense to continue to insist on the distinction, and in fact, there is, in the end, only gender (1993c: 819-21). Thus, "there is ... no way in any culture to approach sex except through the discourse of 'Sex' ... In some very profound sense, outside the parameters and spheres of influence of Western biomedical

discourse, sex does not exist" (ibid: 819). Indeed, for many cultures, both now and in the past, the technological means for distinguishing between "Sex" and "sex" have been lacking - and even in the technologically sophisticated West the determination of "sex" can still be problematic[1].

Although Moore's call for the abolition of the notion of sex altogether seems far removed from Errington's insistence that sex remains the basis for elaborations of "Sex", I believe the differences between them should not be overemphasized. For both writers, "what is required is to socialize the body rather than deny its existence" (Errington 1990: 30). While Moore wants to abolish the term sex, it is because she believes it has no useful meaningful content, rather than because she would deny the materiality that Errington wants to point to by the use of the term. In fact she notes that the term "Sex" can be "understood as the culturally specific discursive practices which make sense of body parts and their relation, indexical or otherwise, to physiological processes and substances, including those processes and activities associated with human reproduction" (Moore 1993c: 819). Thinking of sex as always and everywhere gender does not imply, as she notes, "that human populations around the world are unable to recognize differences in female and male genitalia or that they are unable to recognize the different roles which women and men have in sexual reproduction" (Moore 1993b: 198). But for both Moore and Errington, the recognition of these differences does not imply the automatic elaboration of a fixed, categorical, or binary gender (Moore 1993b: 197; 1993c: 820; Errington 1990: 33).

Sex, as Moore points out, is everywhere gender; but it is clearly a particular constellation of gendered ideas and assumptions which are bound up most notably with the understanding of the body and bodily differences or similarities. While this discourse of the sexed body will clearly be related to other gender discourses, it need not be reducible to them, or seen as the ultimate base for them. While our particular culture makes the sexed body seem the ground for gender difference, this need not be so everywhere, nor indeed should it be assumed that there will be everywhere only one model of gender operating. Even in the West, as Laqueur (1990) has recently made clear, the hegemony of the two sex model has not completely eclipsed an earlier, one sex model, and ideas about the essential similarity of men and women can still be found in certain contexts[2]. Nevertheless, the understanding of the sexed body is obviously an important place to start in any attempt to describe and relate the different understandings of gender in any one area.

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[1] For example in those people whose chromosomes do not conform to the XX or XY division, or who have XX and yet appear in every way male, or XY and appear female.

[2] For example James Weiner notes that in the modern West the discourse of "citizenship" constructs both men and women as essentially the same kind of person (Weiner 1988: 11).

Gender on/in the Body

If we take seriously the idea that gender is not everywhere a binary differentiation of women and men based on primary bodily genital difference, then an important focus of inquiry into gender relations or gender systems in any area is the body and the constitution of the gendered person. One way to get at these ideas is through an understanding of ideas about procreation, kinship and bodily substance.

In the Dravidian kinship system, as I argue in Chapter 2, the particular understandings of relatedness that underlie the system rest on an appreciation of the gendered person. A categorical separation of women and men as gendered beings lies at the heart of the kinship system, with gender importantly determining the nature of one's links with others. Women pass on female substance to their children through blood from the womb and breast milk, while men pass on male substance through their semen.

Although men and women pass on gendered substances to their children, these substances are not differentiated *within the body* of the child. Rather there is an understanding that these male and female substances have become entirely mixed, that "there is no one part you can point to and say, 'That is from the mother' or 'That is from the father', there is something of both". The mixing of male and female substance in the body, which might be thought to imply non-gendered status, becomes eclipsed however by the radical distinction between women and men in the ways they can pass on this substance. Girls, who will be able to pass on only female substance, are radically different from their brothers, who will be able to pass on only male substance. By metonymic association women, with breasts and wombs, are considered wholly female, while men, with penises, are considered wholly male. Boys are considered to importantly substitute for the father, and to be like each other in ways girls, who substitute for the mother, are not. Thus the capacities of women or men to forge only female or male links comes to rest on the appreciation of them as wholly and categorically gendered.

The discourse of gender which is found here in ideas about bodily substances and the constitution of the person in their relatedness with others, is a discourse of absolute difference, writ on the body. It contrasts with the ideas about gender difference *within* the body which can be found to operate in Melanesia, and give rise to very different ideas about the gendering of persons.

At the same time work in Melanesia opens up a new focus for the understanding of gender: a focus on gender as performance. The comparative understanding of gender requires not only a focus on the understanding of the body and the bodily constitution of the gendered

person, but also on performance: on the actual practices of women and men and the ways in which these give rise to an understanding of them as gendered persons. Both these aspects of gender have been explored most furuitfully in the Melanesian ethnography, work which has formed an implicit background to my analysis of gender in Marianad. It is to an explicit consideration of this work which I now turn.

Gender in Melanesia: Comparative Perspectives

Gender in the Body

Edward LiPuma's (1988) analysis of the kinship system of the Maring of the New Guinea Highlands is in many respects similar to my own, concentrating on substantial links between people. Thus he argues, "an individual is related to his parents and to the larger universe of clan relations through transmission of male and female substance" (1988: 6). A child is formed by the mixing of the father's semen and the mother's menstrual blood, and develops by the constant addition of these substances and, later, the mother's milk. Most of the substance of the child comes from the female side: bone, muscle, blood and hard tissue is all formed by the mother's blood and milk. The semen forms the lymphatic system (the "grease" system) in all children, and the genitals and hair of boys. Boys are considered to be like their fathers, and girls like their mothers, each receives from this parent their life force or spirit, *min*. The system of relatedness this gives rise to is very similar to the Dravidian system, and cross cousin marriage is the preferred form. The main difference between them is that girls are not considered to have inherited substance from their fathers, only from their mothers, so that men pass substance on only to their sons. This may be related to the strength of the principle of agnation which defines clans. Nevertheless, as in the Dravidian system, a person is understood to be co-substantial with their parallel cousins, and not related in this way to their cross cousins, whom they may marry (ibid: 158).

The idea that there are different male and female parts in procreation is one which appears to be widespread in the New Guinea material[3]. Though the actual elements and the concrete division of body parts may vary, underlying all the understandings of kinship relations and the bodily person in this area is a belief that a certain part of each person is *male* (from the father) and a certain part is *female* (from the mother). At first glance this looks very similar to the Marianad material. Nevertheless, there is a crucially important difference. In Melanesia, the male and female substances can be identified with definite, separate parts

[3] See e.g. Wagner 1977; Herdt 1984b; Cook and O'Brien 1980; Jorgensen 1983; Weiner1988.

of the body, while in the Dravidian case they merge, and are indistinguishable in the final substance of the body, which is itself (metonymically) gendered by extension from the presence of the gendered substances semen and milk (evidenced by the genitals). In the Dravidian system, then, the body is gendered, one finds a wholly male or female person. In Melanesia, gender remains a division within the body, and one finds a concept of the person which, though obviously identifiable on one level as male or female, nevertheless represents a *mosaic* of male and female substance dividing up the body into differently gendered parts. Thus, there is an equivalence of men and women as both mosaically constructed, at the same time as there is a radical distinction made between male and female substance. This has profound implications for the understanding of gender in this area, firstly as it relates to women and men, and secondly in the way gender symbolism operates, and it is to these two aspects that I now turn.

Men and Women in Melanesia

If men and women are essentially similar to each other, then the focus of cultural practices becomes to make them different. Pervasive in the New Guinea material is a sense of the *contingency* of gender as related to men and women, a sense of the necessity of cultural work to separate the sexes. Particularly there is a sense of the contingency of the male person, and the need positively to masculinize boys in order to "make men".

Many of the papers in the collection by Gilbert Herdt (1984a) describe widespread practices in the lowlands of Papua New Guinea which are aimed at making boys into men by direct transmission of semen from older men. Here the initial person is considered to be essentially female, and there is a need for "the transformation ... of female-associated boys into masculine adult men" (Allen 1984: 121). Most of the papers are concerned with semen transfers, but blood letting practices are also mentioned. These "achieve their goal ... by getting rid of female components ... which are now seen as impurities, [while] the semen ingesting practitioners do it rather by the positive tactic of adding extra maleness" (ibid: 121).

There is an emphasis in this literature on the idea that while men are "made", women are "naturally" female, and can be left to develop with no intervention. Thus Lindenbaum notes, "in most interior societies of New Guinea, it is the responsibility of men to 'become' male, whereas women must merely be 'allowed' to be female" (1984: 342). Read goes even further in this association of women with nature and men with culture, suggesting that, in Melanesia, "men are a cultural artifact and women ... are simply what they were born to be" (Read 1984: 221). There is some suggestion that

this might be related to earlier visible signs of puberty in women, who are thus not seen to require any special intervention to cause feminization.

It seems to me more likely that the difference in the treatment of girls and boys arises out of the fact that it is women who carry children in their womb, and suckle them, and thus women can directly transmit female substance to the child, while men can transmit male substance at this stage only via the mother. Where the transfer of direct male or female substance, over and above that necessary to form the *body* of the child, is seen as necessary to masculinize or feminize the person, then clearly it is the transfer of male substance to boys that is going to be problematic. Thus, among the Sambia, "girls have some of their mother's menstrual blood transferred to their own menstrual blood organs *in utero*. Later, during post-natal growth, this stimulates girls' psychobiological feminization" (Herdt 1984b: 180). Boys, however, are masculinized by semen from older men at adolescence. Thus in both cases there is direct transmission of a gendered substance, although it takes place at different times, and much more visibly in one case than the other. The point is that this is not due to a model of "natural" women as against "cultural" men, but an artifact of the fact that women have children inside them, and can transfer substance directly in the womb, while men do not, and must thus transfer substance in a more dramatic way, afterwards.

Ritualized homosexuality and bloodletting practices are not present across the whole of Melanesia (see Lindenbaum 1984). Nevertheless, even where they are absent, there is often a widespread concern with the separation of male and female, and with the contingency of gender as evinced by actual men and women. Thus James Weiner has described Foi concern with the maintenance of maleness, which is considered essentially contingent to femaleness. "Foi male identity ... must be achieved through adherence to various restrictions and regimens" (1988: 41), and this maleness is put at risk through contamination with certain female substances. Men suffer from illness when they have eaten too much "female" food, such as sago, and must constantly replenish their maleness through the ingestion of "male" food - paradigmatically, meat. Although male and female substances are here symbolically embodied in foodstuffs, rather than literally encoded in bodily fluids, gender here is equally tenuous and equally dependent on the transfer of appropriately gendered substances.

Male and Female: A Gender Aesthetic

If the gender of men and women in this area can be seen to be relatively ambiguous and indistinctly differentiated, gender as a relatively free

floating conceptual system referring to the symbolic categories of *male* and *female* is, by contrast, exceptionally elaborated. There is here a strong gender aesthetic, as it has been aptly termed, in which we see a concern with the switching of codes, male for female and female for male, a concern with male and female as analogues and also as opposites, and with relations which can be defined as cross sex (male-female) and same sex (male-male and female-female). The ways in which Melanesians structure their actions and understandings through this aesthetic of gender have been most fully explored by Marilyn Strathern, particularly in "The Gender of the Gift" (1988), but she is not alone in emphasizing these characteristics of gender symbolism in the area.

Thus in his discussion of male susceptibility to dangerously feminizing influences, Weiner (1988) notes that an important source of such influence is not a woman at all but rather the mother's brother or male affine. The ability for objects and people to switch from being seen as male to being seen as female can also be seen in the gendering of particular crops and spaces and kinds of work, which at various points can be apprehended as of either gender, the important consideration being the balance between them, their complementarity. Among the Maring, similarly: "in response to context, agents may identify an object as either male or female and react accordingly. In this sense, almost all objects have both male and female aspects, the aim of practice being to make smooth transitions between modalities" (LiPuma 1988: 72).

In Sambia the archetypal male substance, semen, is considered to be transformed in women's bodies into the archetypal female substance, breast milk, so that, Herdt concludes, it is male substance that is all-encompassing here. But as he also notes, men replenish their semen secretly by drinking the sap of a particular tree, known as *iaamoonaalyu*, "tree-mother's milk" (Herdt 1984b: 196). The source of this all-encompassing male substance is itself, then, female. Similarly, the flutes which are powerful images of maleness among the Gimi can be viewed as at one time like wombs, at another like penises (Gillison 1980) while the kula canoes of Gawa, used in male exchange, are usually seen as male, but can also be conceptualized as having male outer decoration and female inner substance (Munn 1986).

The fact that male and female substances are perceived as remaining *separately identifiable* within the body of the Melanesian person provides, I believe, an understanding of gender which is not rigidly tied to women and men but rather provides possibilities of apprehending objects and relations in terms of same sex or cross sex, and male or female. There is here a constant switching between the understanding of the person as of one gender, and the knowledge of its constituent, differently gendered,

parts. Thus the gender aesthetic, or gender symbolism, of the area, is intimately bound up with the notion of the gendered body.

Gender as a symbolizing aesthetic thus appears to be quite strongly related to ideas about the bodily distinctions of sex/gender. At the same time the Melanesian material opens up another focus of attention in considering gender models, and that is gender as performative, as related to what women and men do.

Gender as Performance

The Melanesian model of gender distinctions within the body can be seen to lead to a relatively contingent sense of bodily gender distinctions between women and men, and a concern to clearly distinguish the two, to make and maintain the difference between them. We can thus see particularly strongly the articulation of gender through action, or performance. As Strathern notes for the Gimi: "what differentiates men and women ... is not the maleness or femaleness of their sex organs but *what they do with them*" (1988: 128).

In most parts of Melanesia, as many writers have noted, there is a particularly strong sexual division of labour, and often sexual segregation, such that what men do and what women do, and even where they do it, is kept quite separate. In the often elaborate initiation ceremonies for men, in ritual cults and in the presence of food taboos, men and women are performatively distinguished (e.g. Herdt 1984; Weiner 1988; Meigs 1984). By doing male things, and by avoiding female things, New Guinea men demonstrate and constitute their gender despite a background of shifting and contingent bodily difference.

In the West, the model of gender takes as base the differentiation of male and female through biological difference: what men and women do, then, is always taken as an external, visible, confirmation of their internal difference, and this is seen as a relatively straightforward process. Where people do not perform their gender in the appropriate way (for example in their sexual practice or by cross dressing) then something has gone wrong, and the reason is often sought in some breakdown of this process (a hormonal imbalance, psychological disorder, defective genes). The difference of the body is always prior, so that even where men and women do the same things, "the context provided by their own bodies genderizes their acts" (Strathern 1988: 129). In Melanesia, on the contrary, "it is because women 'do' things differently from men, because they evince different capacities in the way they act, that their bodies are gendered" (ibid: 130).

The importance of gender performance in Melanesia in constituting gender difference is perhaps more obvious here where bodily differences are often symbolically elided. However, the constitutive power of gender performance should not be underestimated in other contexts. The symbolic dimension of gender, and ideas about the gendered body, by no means exhausts all of social life, and gender as it relates to the actual practices of women and men, and the representations and discourses which surround these practices, provides another crucial arena for the articulation of gender.

The North American Indian institution of the *berdache* provides an interesting example of a gender which is wholly performatively achieved. The *berdache* is a person with a gender which is neither male nor female but has aspects of both: a boy, usually, in childhood, s/he gradually distinguishes him/herself from the other boys by taking on a female role, and eventually dresses completely as a woman (Roscoe 1991). Gender among the Zuni described by Roscoe was not rigidly given at birth but acquired through a series of initiations: "one *became* a man or woman by learning male or female social forms and, in particular, acquiring symbols of gender during rites of passage" (ibid: 129). The *berdache* usually underwent the first initiation rite of boys, but none thereafter: thus s/he was "an 'unfinished male'" (ibid: 144), and since s/he could not undergo the rites of women (which centred around the events of menstruation and first childbirth), the *berdache* occupied a gender quite distinct from either, and thus "could move freely in both male and female social worlds" (ibid: 145).

The *berdache* gender/role is a relatively unusual phenomenon. Nevertheless, the principle that gender is in fact a performatively achieved, rather than categorically given, status, is one which can be seen to operate at some level in many contexts. In the West, although "doing" a particular gender is generally seen as an outcome of "being" that gender, the relation can in fact be read backwards, so that "gender is always a doing" (Butler 1990: 25). In this reading, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender: that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (ibid: 25). In a Foucauldian analysis of stable, binary gender identities in the West as the outcome of regulatory practices and discourses, particularly organized around compulsory heterosexuality, Butler concludes that gendered bodies are in effect just so many "styles of the flesh" (ibid: 139). Gender attributes are "not expressive but performative" (ibid: 141) and "the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (ibid: 140).

In the analysis of gender models in any context there are then at least two focuses for an understanding of gender, focuses which can be seen to some extent to be a version of what Moore refers to as the symbolic and the sociological (Moore 1988: 36). There is the model (or models) of gender that inflect understandings of the body and personhood, the ways in which divisions are made between different kinds of people and are articulated through understandings of procreation, sex, substance, relatedness. This reading/writing of the signs of the body can be related to gender as a symbolizing aesthetic deployed in other areas of cultural life, to the understanding of other distinctions through the distinctions of gender. Then there is gender as performance, and the ways in which gender is made concrete through the practices and interactions of women and men, though the institutionalization of gender roles, through the bodily habitus (Bourdieu 1977) that marks out different kinds of people.

Clearly gender as performance, and gender in terms of the model which underlies understandings of the person, do not exist in isolation from each other. They can be separated as analytical focuses of inquiry, but ultimately they do not constitute separate domains of inquiry, but are instead intimately related. Thus performance - doing, experience - can often come to be written on the body, to be understood as an internal part of the person. Male initiation rites in New Guinea can be understood to make men not merely through their separation from women in terms of what they do, but through the ways in which the experience of doing and the knowledge gained become embodied in them, part of their personhood: "such rites are performed bodily, inscribing a person's knowledge as a performance on the body" (Thomas n.d.). Alternatively, doing can often involve practices which transfer substance and so alter bodily constitution. Thus semen ingestion or blood letting can both be used to make men more male, while contact with female substances can be seen as dangerously feminizing men.

Embodied gender and substance, and gendered practice and performance, are then intimately related. They are analytically separable, but are not isolated from each other in social life. Rather they constitute two alternative frames through which to view/understand the construction of differently gendered persons and the way these persons act and interact. Where these two frames often seem to coalesce, is in exchange.

Exchange and Gender

The analysis of exchange and consumption provides one area where the two focuses for understanding gender may be said to meet. Gender in terms

of practices and roles enters into discussions of exchange through an understanding of the ways in which men and women differentially engage in exchanges, in the kinds of things which they exchange and the form and meanings those exchanges take. At the same time, the exchange of things between people is bound up with the understanding of the relations between persons and things, and notions of substantial transfers between persons. Gender is crucial here, since the understanding of the gendered nature of persons will have implications for how such exchanges are figured, and how the substances so transferred are or are not gendered.

In the Mukkuvar fishing community, the strong sexual division of labour gives rise to a series of crucially important gendered exchanges between husband and wife. Here the concern with gender as performance, what men and women do, meets that with gender as embodied and substantial, what men and women are. Categorical embodied gender makes the things men and women give male or female (by metonymic association), while the fact of their giving or transacting with male or female things demonstrates and in some sense constitutes their gender. Gender can thus be seen to be crucially dependent on cross sex interaction between husbands and wives, and this is something to which I shall return. I want to look briefly first at gender in the fishing community in terms of the two frames which I have outlined above: performance, and substance or body.

Gender in Marianad

Gender Performance

In this section I want to examine the ways in which men and women are marked out from each other in daily practice and in understandings of gender difference. We have seen in earlier chapters how the sexual division of labour in this fishing economy is strictly demarcated: men fish, while women remain on the shore - to look after the household, to manage the money, to sell the fish. This division of labour is extended into differences made between women and men in almost every area of life, so that work, space, and character are all strongly gendered.

Most immediately, gender is here marked out quite unambiguously in physical appearance, in bodily styles and clothing. Though it may seem a trivial observation, it is nonetheless a categorical difference which powerfully reinforces distinctions made in other areas. Though women and men equally wear the *lunghi*, there the similarity ends. Women always wear it full length, and often wrapped over a petticoat: above they wear a short blouse or a sari blouse, and often a length of cloth or towel, tucked in

to one side at the front, draped across their breasts and over one shoulder. Their hair is always kept long: it may be loose, if it has just been washed, or more commonly tied up, elaborately knotted around itself at the nape of the neck in a bun which requires only long hair and competence to keep it up[4]. Ideally, they wear gold earrings, a gold necklace and *tali*, gold bangles: in practice very few will have the full complement, but most married women still have their *tali*, even if it is attached only on a thread, and most wear earrings, though they may not be gold. Men, by contrast, wear little jewelry, though they may have a ring or a gold chain. They invariably have short hair, and a mustache - beyond boyhood there is no fisherman worth the name who would be clean shaven. Beards are less universal, but not uncommon. Perhaps the most obvious difference, however, is in the wearing of the *lunghi* short, tucked up above the knees, and the chest bare above it. Men do allow the *lunghi* to drape long, but usually momentarily, standing on the street and chatting, letting it fall before gathering it up in a tuck again, playing around with the position of the cloth in a kind of counterpoint to their conversation, before finally gathering it up and moving on. For the most part, though, it remains above the knees, and the ability to quite freely show the legs and thighs in public, as well as the upper body, is a quite distinctly male attribute.

It is not only in appearance, however, that men and women differ, but also in what they do. As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, men and women take on quite distinct roles in the economy, and rarely combine their efforts on any one task. Particularly, it would be unthinkable for a woman to go to sea, while although some Muslim men do sell fish, there are no men in Marianad, from the Latin Catholic community, who would do so. The idea that men and women could swap or combine roles was seen as not only unnecessary but ridiculous. Thus, as one man put it, "Women do not have the temperament or the strength to go to sea, they are scared of the water anyway, most of them. It's man's work". In a similar vein, women laughed at the idea of men going to the market: "They would sell the fish for nothing and what they did get they would spend on rubbish: it would be hopeless!". There are certain things that men are good at, and certain ones that are for women: men, as we have seen in Chapter 3, have the strength and endurance to go to sea, they have the courage to face the rough weather and the knowledge and skills necessary to outwit the fish, while women have none of these things. Instead, what they have in abundance is the cleverness and strength of mind necessary to deal with money, and this is something that men emphatically lack[5].

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[4] Something I tried many times to emulate but with very little success, much to everyone's amusement.

[5] Clearly the biggest exception to this is the auctioneers, who are men, and who are acknowledged to be the equal of women when it comes to dealing with money, selling, and haggling. In many ways the contrast drawn here is not with men as such, but with men *as fishermen*: thus I was told, "In some

The distinction made between men and women in terms of character and temperament is in fact most sharply pointed up by the matter of their relationship to money. Men are impulsive, and somewhat reckless: they must be so in order to be good fishermen. The careful, cautious, nurturing attitude that is fundamental to controlling household finances is quite alien to their nature. When men have money, they spend it instantly, and take no thought for the future: especially, they spend it on trivia, on frivolous unnecessary items, and on drinking or smoking. The image here is of money as a rather unpredictable and dangerous force, which needs to be properly handled, and men, it seems, just do not have the strength of mind. Thus Bridget explained, "Men, even the very best of men, are subject to temptation when they get their hands on money. They just spend it". Women, by contrast, are quite capable of resisting this temptation, and it is common to hear people say, "money is always safe in the hands of women", and "women know how to handle money". Women are not only good at keeping money, and managing the household finances, they are also good at making money; making a profit in the market, lending out at interest, saving through the chitty fund, nurturing the small amount they have and making it grow. "Ninety per cent of women," asserted Elizabeth once confidently, "are good at making money", while ninety per cent of men, she might have added, are good at spending it[6].

Women, however, do not just handle money and sell fish: a large part of their expected role is to be responsible, as we have seen, for household domestic labour. Thus women almost invariably cook, and they also take responsibility for the major part of childcare. When asking people who would be responsible for various jobs or decisions, virtually anything to do with children (buying school books, paying fees, buying clothes, washing, dressing, feeding them, taking them to hospital) elicited the response, "Women". Bridget laughed when she explained that she always took the children to hospital, because, "He can't bear to watch the injections!" Men do in fact seem quite genuinely to be more squeamish when it comes to children's illnesses, and I once saw a man pass out quite dramatically at the sight of his child being sick[7].

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families the husband may look after the money, *if he is not a fisherman*". The auctioneers, in a similar way, are not fishermen, and the qualities needed to make a good fisherman are diametrically opposed to the careful handling of money.

6 Stirrat (1989) has noted a very similar situation in the fishing village where he worked in Sri Lanka. Here "to the women, men appeared feckless and rather stupid when it came to handling cash. They were like children who could not be trusted where money was concerned" (1989: 99). Women by contrast exercised much "skill, guile and wit" in the matter of money (ibid). In Stirrat's case, however, men reacted with an ideology that devalued money and thus women's control of it: they treated money as somehow "dirty" and beneath them. This is not a sentiment which I met with at all in Marianad, where most men had a very healthy respect for money and for their wife's part in managing it.

7 In his defence, it should be said that the baby had been quite dangerously ill shortly before and he was perhaps over-anxious about a recurrence. Nevertheless, his wife was quite calm until the point that *he* collapsed, when she, too, had hysterics.

For the most part, household work is the domain of women, but there are men who are willing to help with it, or even to do a major part of it when their wife is ill or at the market. There is one household chore, interestingly, which seems to be almost the domain of men, and that is washing clothes. It was very common in Marianad to see men out by the well in the afternoons, scrubbing *lunghis* with soap on a slab, or rinsing them, hanging them up to dry on a line by the house. Though by no means all men did this, it seemed that if they were going to help around the house, this was the most common task they took on, and it is particularly interesting since for the majority of South Indians, washing clothes is a very low status task, and certainly not one a man would do for his family if he could help it[8]. What made it particularly seen as a man's task seemed to be the fact that it was done *outside*, as was the other archetypal man's job around the house, tidying the garden or compound area and looking after the trees, and this leads me into a consideration of gender and space.

When I asked about men's and women's responsibilities around the house, a distinction which came up frequently was between *inside* and *outside*. Thus Bridget commented: "Women are associated with the inside of the house, with the household chores. Men are good only for outside work". Rajamma too mentioned this as a distinguishing criteria: "Joseph does no work inside the house. Outside the house he works - gardening, fetching water and so on". This spatial differentiation carries over to sleeping arrangements, with men frequently sleeping outside the house, either on the verandah or on the sand outside, and even down on the beach, while women invariably sleep inside. The differentiation between the female "inside" and the male "outside" partially overlaps here with the distinction between the sea, and the sea shore, as a male space, and the house and land as female space. Though the sea shore is a place where both men and women go, particularly fish vendors, it is nevertheless a male space in that it is associated most strongly with the sea and fishing, an exclusively male arena, and it is predominantly the place where men "hang out" in the day time when they are not fishing, where they mend nets and sit and gossip or work on the boats. Certainly it is a space where young girls are discouraged to go, "because the men call out and say bad things, and talk to you in a way your parents would not like", and though older women and fish vendors go there more freely, they usually go in groups, and must be prepared to give as good as they get[9]. By contrast, the house, and especially the inside of the house, seems a very female space, and one where men are peripheral and often hesitant. Here women and their sisters and friends

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[8] Thus my Hindu male research assistant reacted with amazement to the sight of men washing clothes, and was particularly horrified when he told me of one man he got to know who did all the washing for his wife, "even her underwear!"

[9] This is a distinction which has also been noted for the Mukkuvar community of Kanyakumari by Kalpana Ram (1991: 48-9).

gather, with the children in and out and around about, and they prepare food, wash dishes, cook, clean, or simply sit, talking and laughing, and discuss the day's doings, the latest gossip, or more important matters, such as loans, dowries, weddings, or family crises. Men are not excluded from this space, as women are not excluded from the sea shore, but they are generally outnumbered, and there is no doubt which gender is dominant in each place.

Men and women then have clearly demarcated roles, attributes and associated spaces within the village. The strength of the distinction between them may be related in part to the strong sexual division of labour that is characteristic of fishing economies. Here, however, the way the economy separates men and women as radically different kinds of worker, with different abilities, skills and temperaments, also mirrors the way they are separated by the kinship system, as different kinds of people, linked in different ways to others. Gender difference is marked out strongly in both the productive and the reproductive system, or, as we could alternatively view it, in both gender *performance*, and in terms of the body and substance, and it is to the second of these which I now turn.

Gender, Kinship, Substance

The idea of a distinct difference between male and female substance, and the crucial importance of that difference in procreation, is brought out most clearly in ideas about kinship and relatedness. Here, as we have seen (Chapter 2), men can only pass on male substance, and women female, with important consequences for the ways in which people trace substantial links between themselves and others. Men and women, in their differential ability to forge only male or only female links with their children, come to be appreciated as wholly gendered persons. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the idea that fathers are somehow more closely related to their sons, and women to their daughters.

This link between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, has also been noted by Daniel, for Tamil Nadu. Discussing procreation theories, he notes that, "once the intiriam [sexual fluids] mix enters the womb, if the man's proportion of the mix is denser than the woman's, it settles towards the bottom of the womb and results in a male fetus. If the woman's portion is denser, the fetus will be a girl" (Daniel 1984: 176)[10]. Thus girls will have proportionately more female substance, boys proportionately more male: as

[10] There is textual authority for this view also. Thus the Laws of Manu state: "A male child is born when the seed of the man is greater, and a female child is born when the seed of the woman is greater" (quoted in Smith 1989: 84). The Garbha Upanishad similarly states that "An excess of the father's semen produces a male, an excess of the mother's semen, a girl" (translated in Feher (ed) 1989: 178)

in Marianad, a woman will be seen to be more related to her mother than a man.

Trawick also discusses the importance of the relationship between mother and daughter, father and son, putting these at the centre of her analysis of emotional bonds in the family. In doing so, she picks up, I believe, on an important emphasis within the kinship system. In the Dravidian region of South Asia, the strong emphasis on shared identity between mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, make these bonds particularly important. Thus, Trawick notes: "a man sees his son as a continuation of himself" (1990: 158), and "a woman sees herself as a continuation of her mother" (ibid: 163). For a man, "sons were the proprietors of the two substances in which the selfhood of a village man was most invested - his land and his seed" (ibid: 158), while the continuity between generations of women was imagined through the metaphor of the vine, a common image also for the young woman herself.

It is interesting here that it is particularly through their procreative abilities that mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, are identified. It is these that mark out their gender, it is through these that they pass on, differentially, their own substance, and it is particularly and importantly these that make the substantial identity between them. Thus, "sons receive and carry on the seed and soul stuff of their fathers in a way that daughters cannot" (ibid: 159), while the identification between the loins of the daughter and of the mother is seen in one song lament where a sister reproaches her brother: "Have you forgotten my pomegranate garden, the place of your birth?" (ibid: 165).

The links between women and daughters, and fathers and sons, are links of gender: a metaphoric relation based on similarity merges with a metonymic one based on assumed partial identity: a woman has passed on her femaleness to her daughters, a man has passed on his maleness to his sons. Gender itself, then, in this context, is a substantial attribute: it is also importantly focused on the *reproductive* potential of women and men. The links between gender, substance and reproduction are ones that are made even clearer through a consideration of the Indian "third gender", the hijra.

The *Hijra*: Gender, Role and Substance

The *hijras* are ritual performers, who are particularly associated with dancing and performances at births and marriages, and who are found in small loosely defined groups and communities all over India, but mainly in the North[11]. They are predominantly men, who have gone through a

[11] There are estimated to be 50,000 nationally.

process of apprenticeship and ceremonial emasculation, and who dress and act as women: their ritual role is important because they are considered to have strong connections to the Devi, particularly the Baluchara Mata, in Gujerat, through whom they have the power to give the blessing of fertility.

In Serena Nanda's recent study of the *hijras* (Nanda 1990), it becomes clear that the *hijras* define themselves, and are defined by other people, negatively, as what they are not: "neither man nor woman". Unlike the North American *berdache*, then, the *hijra* is not a person that incorporates aspects of both male and female, but is someone who is excluded from the normal activities of men and women, and who occupies a particular, restricted niche of their own. What is particularly interesting here, in the context of a concern with gender, is the strong connection that appears to be made between gender identity, bodily difference, and the expression of gender through reproductive potential.

Although most *hijras* undergo an operation which removes both penis and testicles, some are born hermaphrodites, and many hijras as well as most outsiders emphasize this as the standard definition of being hijra: they were "born that way". There is in fact no linguistic distinction made in Hindi between hermaphrodites and eunuchs (Nanda 1990: xxiv), so that the difference between being made and being born is easily elided. As one hijra put it: "God has made us this way, neither man nor woman" (ibid: 8). Again unlike the case of the North American *berdache* (Roscoe 1991), where the third gender is to a large extent a matter of role, of performance, here there is clearly a strong correlation between gender and bodily difference, so that a third gender must also necessarily be a third sex, and preferably born that way. Where a boy is not born a hermaphrodite, but becomes *hijra*, his body must be refashioned. Thus in the ritual castration his penis and testicles will be entirely removed, and with it the last vestiges of maleness. Nanda, describing the operation, notes that: "When the cut is made, the blood gushes out, and nothing is done to stem the flow...The blood is considered the 'male part' and should be drained off" (ibid: 28).

The negative definition of the *hijras* as "neither man nor woman" points to another crucial defining feature of their gender: the inability to reproduce. Here we see a strong connection made between gender and the ability to act in gendered ways, particularly in the context of procreation. *Hijras* are unable to be efficacious reproductively in either male or female ways: they can neither pass on semen, nor carry and give birth to a child. The are taunted by young boys and called *kaurika*, a word that has connotations of old, useless, "empty shell" (ibid: 9). The importance of this aspect of gender can be seen when considering what makes a non-hermaphrodite consider themselves, or be considered by others, a hijra.

Central to the definition of the *hijra* as "not man" is impotence, the inability to act the male part in sexual relations with a woman. This may not only be through lack of genitals, but through their non functionality. Thus even for those men who still have their male organs, they are considered to be useless, and they may as well be removed. The link here is strongly made between maleness, and the ability to transfer male substance, semen. Thus active male homosexuals are not seen as less than men, and even passive male homosexuals need not be, provided they retain the ability to be potent with women. Where passive homosexuals become impotent, as they are believed to do as a result of the practice, they may come to identify themselves as *hijra*, but "not because they have sexual relations with men, but because they are impotent" (ibid: 14). In a 19th Century account of the *hijras*, quoted by Nanda, "all state that they were incapable of copulation and that becoming [*hijra*] was on that account only" (ibid).

The link between reproductive or procreative ability and gender is reiterated in the case of the few *hijras* who are born and raised as girls. Here, the central factor in their definition as *hijra* is the failure, at puberty, to grow breasts or to menstruate. Again, the ability to reproduce in female ways is denied to them, and thus too the definition of them as of the female gender. As Nanda notes: "This sign - the absence of the onset of a female's reproductive ability - points to the essential criterion of the feminine gender that *hijras* themselves make explicit: they do not have female reproductive organs, and because they cannot have children they cannot be considered real women" (ibid: 18).

For the *hijra*, to whom neither male nor female reproductive action is a possibility, potency is achieved only through the power of the Devi. Unable to act efficaciously in either male or female ways, they become *hijras*, and are therefore able to be "vehicles of the divine power of the Mother Goddess, which transforms their impotence into the power of generativity" (ibid: 5). Gender, then, appears to be bound up not only with a bodily difference, but also with the potential that this body implies for procreation, with the ability to be potent in particular ways. To be a man is not only to have a penis but to be able to use it efficaciously, to pass on semen and blood, to transact in a male way. To be a woman is not only to possess breasts and a womb but to be able to menstruate, to carry a child, to breast feed it, and thus pass on blood and milk, to transact in a female way.

Gendered Acts, Gendered Persons: The Substantialization of Gender

It has become clear in the above discussion that there is a strong connection made here between gender as a bodily attribute, and the ability to engage with others, to act in gendered ways. Men and women are not only separated through bodily difference, but also though their ability to engage with others and transact in particular ways, and the two are assumed to be inextricably intertwined. As we have seen in much of the literature on persons and exchange (see Introduction), there is a strong tendency in India towards substantialization of attributes of persons and things, and gender is no exception. Thus a person's gender not only is understood first and foremost as a matter of definitive bodily difference, but these differences are effectively demonstrated and constituted by a capacity to transact, or interact, in a gendered way, to pass on particularly gendered substances. The inability so to do necessitates a re-evaluation of bodily gender, and even a physical refashioning, as the case of the *hijras* makes clear.

As we saw in the earlier discussion, gender difference in Marianad is marked out performatively in all areas of life: in appearance, attributes, work. As Mabel Mary put it: "Women are very different from men... You just watch and see how different they are - in every way". The relations of production in this fishing economy radically separate women and men as different kinds of worker, with different jobs, different responsibilities, different spaces of operation, in a way that complements their separation as different kinds of people in the kinship system. Gender difference is made obvious in everything that men and women do, in everything that they appear to be, and this demonstration of their differential capacities to act in turn feeds back into, and is evidence of, their different bodily gender. It is *substantialized* through an understanding of the capacity to act as being constituted by bodily difference.

The radical difference which is made between women and men in both these areas, creates the potential for them to come together, to exchange, and through exchange, to create a productive unit. It is to this matter of exchange between women and men, particularly between husbands and wives, that I will now turn.

Gender and Exchange in Marianad

In order to understand fully what gender is in this context, and how it is related not only to performance, but to bodily substance and exchange, we need to look more closely at the ways in which men and women come

together, at transactions within the household, and specifically exchanges between husband and wife. Important here are exchanges of food, fish, money, clothes and sex.

Fish, Money, Clothes

The previous chapter looked at some of the ways in which fish, money and clothes were distributed within and beyond the household in exchanges of formal and informal gifts, and it was made clear that the primary agents of such distribution were women. Here I shall be concerned rather with the source of these goods, and the ways in which they are bound up with ideas about gender.

Fish for the household is given to each crew member at the end of the fishing trip, and then given directly by them to their wife. If they are unmarried it will go to their mother, sister, or whoever runs the household. She will then take what she needs for the family, and distribute the rest between kin, friends and neighbours, as we have seen. Once it is out of his hands, the man has no control over what happens to the fish, so that Simon, for example, was unable to arbitrate the dispute between his wife and Benedicta. There is a sense in which the fish that a man brings to the household is automatically owed by him to his wife or mother, and must simply be passed over to her, to then do with as she thinks fit. As a son, a man owes his labour and the fruits of that to his family, and specifically to his mother, who, as the linchpin of the house, calls in all the debts and then distributes out to each their share, of food, money, clothes, goods. As a husband, this exchange takes place with his wife. As we have seen in Chapter 3, it is partly the payment of the groom price, the *mulukudi panam*, which effects this transfer of rights over the labour of the man, so that where once he owed fish to his mother, now he is seen to owe it to his wife. That the transfer of the fish to the woman of the house is automatic, however, does not mean that it is taken for granted. The importance of men as the source of fish for the household, and the importance of this fish itself, is often reiterated, and the house that has no man to bring in fish is much to be pitied. Thus Benedicta lamented to Simon that she had no fish, for "I have no one to go fishing for me".

Just as men are the source of fish for their wives, so women are the source of money for their husbands, and this is another important exchange which takes place between women and men. In fact the two transactions are closely linked, and just as a man owes fish to the woman of his household, so she owes him money in return, and must provide for his needs. Women, as we have seen, control the household finances, and distribute money to other members of the household when they need it:

particularly, if possible, they will usually give their husbands a small amount each day for tea, tobacco, and other small luxuries. This daily allowance can be seen as an equivalent of the fish for the household: a small but highly significant transaction which symbolizes the larger involvement of each in an ongoing exchange of labour and goods and services. To receive money, from a woman, particularly, implies something about an ongoing exchange, especially a sexual relationship. Men receive money only from their mother or sister, if unmarried, and their wife, if married: outside of these relationships they would receive money only from a lover, and in fact the giving of small gift of money is quite common in this situation. Thus young men joke to each other, "Fuck a Gulf wife and get rich quick!"

Although women are seen as the source of money for their husbands, quite often, in fact, a substantial amount of the money has come from the wages earned by the man in fishing. This is not forgotten, and indeed in disputes about household money, as we have seen, the husband may often lay claim to ultimate authority on the basis that the money was, after all, earned by him, from the fish he caught in the sea. However, though there is a clear acknowledgment of this ultimate source, there is nevertheless an emphasis on women as the immediate source of money, and a sense, as we have seen, that it is women's hard work, thrift and cleverness with money that maintains the household wealth, even where it is not directly augmented by her selling fish. Just as men's importance as the provider of daily fish stands for the wider contribution of their labour and earnings, so women's importance as the provider of money stands for her wider involvement in control of household finances, resources and management.

If exchanges of fish and money are archetypally gendered exchanges, the giving and receiving of clothes is more strongly related to ideas of exchange and shared substance. Exchanges of food, clothes and money all take place at weddings, and are bound up with the idea of what the conjugal relationship means. At the wedding ceremony, as well as eating together and exchanging rings, bride and groom give each other respectively a new *sari* and a *mundu*, in a token of the mutual exchange and support that marriage represents. From then on, the man's clothes will be bought and provided for him by his wife, both ordinary everyday clothes and the special clothes bought for festivals, while he in turn, whenever the opportunity arises, will buy clothes for her. If he works in the Gulf, the clothes that he brings back, as token of his labour, are owed to his wife, and she in turn will distribute them to friends, kin and neighbours, in a very similar manner to the distribution of fresh fish. The source of these clothes, like the fish, lies in the obligation and exchange between husband and wife.

As well as signifying the exchange relations that exist between husband and wife, however, clothes, as we have seen, are bound up with ideas of the person, of substance and intimacy. The exchange of ordinary clothes particularly can be see to be bound up with notions of shared substance, so that close family will borrow and wear each other's clothes, but this would never happen between neighbours. Clothes are seen to be imbued with the essence of the person who wears them, to retain part of their substance, so that only those who are related would happily borrow each other's clothes. Women thus, as we have seen, will not borrow clothes from their sister's husbands, even where they live in the same house, while they will freely borrow from both their brothers and their own husbands. Here then we see another aspect of the exchange between husband and wife, the notion that the relationship between them engenders shared substance. This is made even more clear in ideas about feeding, and sex.

Cooking, Food and Sex

Feeding and food are very much associated here, as in most of South India, with ideas about substance and relatedness. Food cooked and given by a particular person is imbued with part of that person so that those who eat it absorb something of their substance and become linked to each other: hence the many and elaborate precautions taken with regard to food in the context of caste. In the context of the fishing community what is more important about food is the sense of relatedness created between those who eat together, the intimacy between those who cook and those who eat.

Those who share a house tend to be those who eat together, and eating together is a common idiom through which the sense of family is expressed. Thus for Elizabeth, who lives with her married daughter's family and her own younger sons, they are all one family: "we all eat together". As we have seen, this idea of family can extend beyond the boundaries of the household, and when it does so, one of the surest indications is the exchange of food between houses, especially in the feeding of children. Even unrelated people can come to be assimilated in this way to the idea of the family. As Bridget explained: "If you feed someone regularly it's like they are part of the family. My sister has a friend who is counted part of the family because she often comes here to eat. I feel she is just another sister".

Cooking and feeding are matters not only of substance and relatedness, but also of gender. It is almost invariably women who cook, and although men will do many of the household chores, the idea of a man

cooking provokes much amusement[12]. When a woman is ill, it is most often her mother or an older daughter who will cook for her and her family, and food sent between households at other times usually follows these same paths. Men are fed in their natal house by their mother or sisters; once they have married and transferred to another house, it is the responsibility of their wife's family to feed them. In being fed, often, by their wife's mother, and eating with the family, they become one with them, so that for the parents, "He becomes just like a son, he calls us *amma* and *acchan*, we call him *mon*"[13].

Though men gain some sense of kinship with their new family through the process of eating with them, they nevertheless remain distinct in certain ways: they are a husband to their wife, rather than a brother, and they are brother-in-law to her sisters. While women's mothers seem able to move into the position of quasi-mother to their daughter's husband, to feed them or cook for them just as she would, their sisters would be more circumspect. Cooking for an unrelated man is strongly associated with engaging in a sexual relationship with him, and it is in general wives only who cook for their husbands.

The connections made between food and sex, and cooking and the sexual relationship, are many. The celebration of marriage itself is indissoluble from the marriage feast, and the common inquiry, *"Kalyanam kazhikku?"*("Are you married?") literally means "Have you eaten/finished the marriage?"[14]. One common insult for a woman is to refer to her as *velanganekke kanjivachavale*, one who cooks *kanji* (rice water) for the "bad man"[15]: the implication is clear that to cook and give a man *kanji* means to be sleeping with him. Feeding or eating with someone, and engaging in sex with them, both imply an exchange of substance that represents the extreme in intimacy, and for a woman to cook regularly for an unrelated man is tantamount to admitting that they are lovers.

If eating a wife's food is strongly symbolic of the sexual relationship, of the intimacy and connection that exists between husband and wife, then it becomes clear how powerful a weapon is the refusal to eat. When men refuse to take food from their wives in the context of a marital dispute, they

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12 English lessons were given informally in the evenings to a group of interested women on the verandah of the house I stayed in; when it came to practicing verb tenses, the litany, "George cooks the dinner, George will cook the dinner, George cooked the dinner"...etc could be guaranteed to provoke much laughter.

13 Yalman notes that among the matrilineal Tamil community in Sri Lanka, the son-in-law lives with the wife's parents for some years, and the wedding includes a ceremony where he drinks milk give to him by his mother-in-law, and proclaims that it tastes just like that of his mother. He, too, becomes a 'son' of the household and the making of kinship through food is important in this process (Yalman 1969: 290).

14 *Kazhikkuka* means both to complete/finish and to eat/digest: in the context of marriage, the double meaning was played on quite consciously.

15 The person who told me this could offer no translation for the word *velangan*, except that it was some kind of bad man.

are not simply punishing her through punishing themselves, they are repudiating the relationship that exists between them. The sharing of food is the sharing of substance and identity, so that its refusal in any context can be counted an insult, but in the context of lovers or a married couple it is a much stronger statement. A young man who was having an affair with a woman in a neighbouring fishing village complained that if he would not eat her food, she got extremely angry and would shout at him, "You bastard, you can go to any cunt you want, I don't care. You fuck off and don't come back!" The refusal of food is the refusal of sex, of engagement, of the mutual exchange which constitutes the marital bond. For a husband engaged in a dispute with his wife it is an extremely effective strategy, the mere threat of which may distress a woman so much that she will give in. Thus Mabel Mary lamented that, when Jayraj was really determined to have his way she would have to accept it, "Because otherwise he will refuse to eat".

The connection between eating together and the marital relationship is one that is made widely in the region, as we have seen, but among the fishing community it is given added strength from the fact that husband and wife not only eat together but usually eat from the same plate. The refusal of the husband to eat thus affects his wife in another way, in that she will often, as a consequence, feel unable to eat herself. Thus Agnes noted that when she and Lawrence quarrelled, "He will not eat, so I don't eat either, and this will go on until one of us can't hold out anymore". Both in fact, may snatch small amounts of food as and when they can without being found out[16]: the act is as much symbolic as real. Nevertheless it demonstrates the closeness that is supposed to exist between husband and wife, that both eat from the same plate and if one does not eat, neither can the other.

Eating from the same plate marks out quite distinctly in the fishing community those who share food as relatives or friends from those who are sharing food as well as sex, and puts a special emphasis on the marital bond. In eating from the same plate, husband and wife not only symbolically share substance in eating the same food, but literally exchange bodily fluids, or saliva, just as in sex they exchange semen and sexual fluids. No-one else will eat in this way from the same plate, except parents and children, and even this is usually only when they are very young, and need to be fed directly. By contrast husbands and wives may not only share a plate but also feed each other. Thus Stella and Joseph, a middle-aged couple with grown up children, could still be seen demonstrating their

16 Thus when Rajamma and Joseph rowed badly once, they both stopped eating, but when Rajamma moved over to her mother's house for a few days, Joseph immediately started to eat food in the house, cooked by his daughter, Shobha.

closeness and affection by popping a handful of rice and fish into the other's mouth, as often as into their own, when they ate together.

Eating together from the same plate is, in the Indian context, not only a powerful statement about shared substance, but also a powerful and unusual statement about equality. In general women in India eat *after* their men, symbolically ingesting their leftovers just as devotees ingest the leavings of the gods. For women and men to eat at the same time in the village, points to a notion of them here as not only strongly connected, but as equal partners[17].

Sharing and Bodily Substance

The closeness between husband and wife that results from and is demonstrated by their sharing of food, clothes and sex is expressed powerfully in the notion that husband and wife are "one body", *oru sariram*. This is a widely expressed understanding in Marianad, which not only accords with the Church's teaching that husband and wife become one flesh, but also seems to be a deeply felt truth. "Everyone would say that husband and wife are one body", Bridget explained. "It's not just because the Church says so, you feel it, too, like that". Emilie also agreed: "Man and wife are one person. If one is happy the other will be happy, it's like that". The sense of connection and identity that comes from the sharing of bodily substance means that each is capable of strongly influencing the other, in a way that is something like that between very close kin, but stronger. Thus, "When there is this bond it's quite normal that each would feel what the other feels - if they are happy or sad, everything. This can also be true between some family members, between sisters but not so much with others. But once you are married that becomes less and less - it's your husband who is most important".

The idea that husband and wife are one body was often referred to in the context of the belief that a wife's adultery could cause her husband to drown at sea. This is a fairly widespread belief along the coast, among Hindu and Christian fishermen, and the subject of a popular novel by the author T.S.Pillai, *Chemmeen* (1962). In Marianad, the disaster was seen to follow quite inevitably from the fact of husband and wife being one body, so that what one does cannot fail but have an effect on the other. Do you believe, I asked Paulos, that when a man goes to sea his wife must be faithful? "Yes, can you have any doubts? It is her half which has gone to sea and his half which has stayed on the shore. That's how it is after

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[17] S. Daniel (1980) has discussed how a discourse of equality in marriage is also present in Tamil Nadu: less strongly articulated than other, more hierarchical discourses, it is nevertheless important in practice.

marriage, half half". His brother-in-law interrupted him: "Why do you want to say his half and her half, just say half, that's enough". One body? I asked. "Yes, one body". For her to give her body to someone else, then, is extremely dangerous: as Paulos explained, "Once she has become a half body, if then she went astray, it would lead to mishap. It has happened many times".

Others are more sceptical of this belief, particularly women. Thus Clara spoke for many when she said, "People say that if a wife is unfaithful her husband is lost at sea, it's tradition. But I don't believe it, because anyway women who are very faithful may still lose their husband at sea, so it's difficult to believe it". Nevertheless, even those who do not subscribe to the notion would agree with the premise on which Paulos makes his reasoning: that husband and wife are substantially linked, that they are, through sharing of substance, through eating and sleeping together, one flesh, one body[18].

There is a powerful idea here that the sharing of food and sex, the engagement in exchange of things and bodily substances, makes for substantial links between people, links of kinship or identity. Thus a son-in-law becomes a son, through eating and working in the house of his wife's parents; thus husband and wife become one person; thus an unrelated friend becomes a sister[19]. It is to a closer examination of this idiom of the flow of substance between people and the understanding of the nature of the person and of exchange relations, that I now turn.

Transactions Between Husbands and Wives

The marital relationship is very much one of an ongoing series of exchanges, of fish, money, clothes, food, sex. The strong sexual division of labour means that men and women have quite separate areas of operation, and engage in these transactions in quite specifically gendered ways, so that to owe and bring fish to the household is archetypally male, while to handle the household's money, or to cook and feed others, is archetypally female. Men and women, understood as absolutely different in their capacities to engage with others, most clearly demonstrate this difference

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[18] The idea that husband and wife are one body can be found also in Hindu religious texts, as discussed for example by Inden and Nicholas (1977), Smith (1989), Malamoud (1989), Leslie (1991). The comparative emphasis on equality between the spouses in the context of the fishing community can however be seen in the idea that both husband and wife are half bodies: in the examples above the notion is invariably phrased as the *wife* becoming on marriage the half-body of her husband. He remains, by default, a whole body which encompasses her.

[19] Tom Gibson (1985) has identified an opposition among the Buid between *sharing*, of food, sex, work, which is the basis for ties of cooperation and social organisation, and *substantial kinship*, which is downplayed as much as possible. Here however we have a situation in which the two are strongly linked, where sharing in fact *makes* substantial links between people.

through transactions with each other. There is here, then, a particular emphasis on marriage and the sexual relationship.

The closeness of husbands and wives and the importance of the marital bond is daily demonstrated by their practice of eating from the same plate, something that marks their relationship out from all others, however close or warm. For both men and women, it is the spouse who is ideally the most important person, so that while before marriage your family (*kudumbam*) was your parents and siblings, after marriage it is your husband/wife and children. "Once you get used to this bond", as Paulos put it, "it's difficult to imagine a life without marriage, to be single again, you can't manage without it".

The bond between husband and wife is relatively emphasized here even over that between mother and child. Caroline Osella has described how femaleness in a Kerala agricultural village is inseparable from motherhood, and not only in terms of giving birth but more importantly in playing out the nurturing protective role of the mother. Thus, "all women can act as mothers to all younger women, men and children: feeding and caring for them, praying for and protecting them... This quality of *amma*-ness [is] common to all mature females" (C. Osella 1993: 260). In the fishing community, motherhood in terms of giving birth is an important demonstration of a woman's female capacity, and there is no doubt that most mothers are extremely loving and protective of their children. Nevertheless as a generalized capacity, the emphasis on nurturing and mothering is not strong[20]. Women from the fishing community may quite willingly wash and dress and feed and care for their own or sisters' children, but they see no need to extend this nurturing role to others, to men or other adults, it is not a defining feature of their femaleness. More important evidence of their female capacities is their ability to go and sell fish, to run the household, to manage the money that comes in and be able to run chitties or make loans, to engage in ongoing exchanges with their husband, of food, money, clothes, sex. Women here then assert their femininity not through mothering, but through their relation to their husband, through the sexual relation, the gendered exchange that it implies, and, indeed, the production of children. This latter, motherhood rather than mothering, is bound up with an understanding of the marital relationship as one of productive and reproductive potency.

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[20] Aleyamma Vijayan, one of the founders of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in Trivandrum, noted that when SEWA began to train and encourage young women to work as home nurses, their success rate in the fishing community, originally the target group, was dismal. "To take care of someone sick is a very patient, gentle task, and means a lot of caring - removing bedsheets and washing people and so on. And the women from the fishing villages, I don't think many of the women were used to this kind of situation in their own homes, they weren't used to providing that kind of care - whereas women in the agricultural villages, there is this kind of culture that 'women nurture' and so on. Even when some of the women from the fishing villages trained for it, they gave up very quickly, they said they cannot do this".

Conclusion

Husbands and wives in the fishing community are seen as one person, one body. This not only points to the constant exchange of substances between them, but is also a powerful image of husbands and wives as a joint unit, a single enterprise. Each brings to this joint unit distinct, differently gendered capacities: together they form something like a whole. Each side complements the other, and their separate capacities joined together enable both to act efficaciously, to engage in an ongoing and productive exchange that results in a house, wealth, children. We have seen that gender is closely related to the ability to act in male or female ways, to be potent: this potency is most clearly demonstrated in cross sex interaction, in procreation and reproduction, and for each, without the other gender, their potency remains a mere potentiality.

Men, then, need women if they are to fully enact their gender, to be fully effective as a person in the world; just as women need men. Their absolute, categorical difference makes them like two halves of one whole, each inadequate without the other to complete it. Male needs female, female needs male, in order to *reproduce* in the widest possible sense, in order to be efficacious.

The importance of the difference between male and female, and yet of their ultimate merging as one, their necessity each to the other, can be seen to run through all aspects of life in the fishing community. The pairing of husband and wife is here a pairing which, if it is to be productive, must be the union of opposites, the conjunction of different gendered potentialities, the bringing together of two halves of the whole. For their union to be creatively powerful, it is necessary that, in Trawick's words, "male and female are opposed cosmic forces, as different from each other as black and white, as powerfully charged as earth and sky in a lightning storm" (1990: 253).

Afterword

In the evening, as the light fades, the inky shapes of the coconut palms merge into the darkness of the shoreline, and the lights of houses start to flicker among the trees. On the beach, there is a faint glow still on the horizon, and the sea is glimmering. Stella and Joseph, their friends and family, are still sitting on the sandy shore by the kattumarams, chatting, enjoying the coolness after the sweaty heat of day. Gathered together are Stella, her two sisters, Rosemary and Agnes, Rosemary's husband Maryjohn, Joseph, and his workmate, Titus. Then there is Clara, Stella's eldest daughter, just eighteen, and an assortment of younger children mucking around, pushing each other, giggling and climbing on the boats nearby.

The adults are gossiping, teasing Clara about her forthcoming marriage while she sits, head down, embarrassed. Stella and Joseph are pleased with themselves: they have found a good match for their first daughter, a good boy from Stella's mother's village, hard working and known as a brave fisherman, from a good family. Over the last few months, Stella has gradually pulled in all the loans she has given out to friends and neighbours, drawing back together the tangled threads that linked them to so many others, gathering up their resources and adding to them gifts and loans from friends and family, so that now they have a handsome sum for Clara's marriage, to set her up with her new husband, to see her happily settled.

What a celebration it will be, and how beautiful Clara will look in the gold they have bought, and the costly silk *sari* and the white veil...! And Stella, her mother, and Joseph, her father, standing proudly beside their daughter in the church, thinking of all the work and all the years of effort to raise the family, to keep the house going, to feed and clothe them all and save and build up their wealth, and all of it worth it for this moment...

As it gets darker, the time for gossip is over. Joseph and Titus will stay: they are going to sea in a few hours, they will sleep on the shore until it's time to leave and the beach comes alive again with men and boats pushing off into the dark surf. The women set off up the sand, making their way along the narrow paths between the houses to their own huts, ducking into the low doorways and gathering the children together, scolding them to hurry and wash and get ready for sleep, before they, too, wrap themselves in a light blanket and lie down finally on the floor of the hut.

These are the two worlds of women and men in the fishing community: the sea, the men asleep on the sand with the boats; the land, the women inside, in the house, with the children. "Men and women are

different in every way", says Mabel Mary, and the difference is not only demonstrated every day in what they do, how they act, how they engage with others, but it is inherent to them, it is bodily, substantial, it inheres in the links that they make between themselves and others.

The differences between women and men, their opposition, can be seen to run through all aspects of life in Marianad. Yet if there is difference there is also merging, and it is through joining together that, like Stella and Joseph, they see their work and effort come to fruition, they can look around them and see a house, children, wealth, the joint products of their cooperation. It is through the differences between women and men that the potential exists for creative production, for the merging of the qualities of male and female: it is in their coming together that the separate and distinct contribution of each can be most fully recognized and realized.

Appendix 1

Elder Sister's Daughter Marriage in South India

The view that the basic South Indian kinship and marriage system was that which prescribed cross cousin marriage has been consistently challenged by Anthony Good, who has put forward the thesis that at least as important if not more so for the majority of Tamil groups was marriage between the elder sister's daughter and the mother's brother (Good 1980, 1981, 1991). Because early researchers had worked in areas where such marriages were not permitted, the importance of this widespread practice had been underestimated, and where recognised, seen only as an unusual modification of the Dravidian system. Good, however, suggests that the terminology of those groups which practice eZD/MB marriage is importantly different from that of groups which do not, and that it is more than a mere distortion, it is in fact the ordering of principles differently, relative age rather than relative generation taking precedence in the classification of certain categories of cross relative. My claim for an underlying logic to the Dravidian system which is applicable over the whole region must therefore take account of this variation.

The preference in this system for marriage between the mother's brother and sister's daughter means that generational distinctions which are strongly marked in the basic Dravidian system disappear for certain cross relatives, and the categories become merged, as can be seen in the Maravar terminology given by Good (1980). Here the mother's brother (*maman*) becomes the prescribed spouse for women, and this category includes not only MBe but also older cross cousins and even the brother's son, if he is older than the woman. The cross cousin category includes those cross relatives who are younger, hence unmarriageable, while those who are very much younger are called *marumakan*, usually used for the brother's son or son-in-law.

For the male speaker, generational categories are also merged, though the prefered spouse remains the younger cross cousin category, *korundiyal*, which here includes the eZDy. The older cross cousin category, *madini*, includes the eZDe, and the category *marumakal*, usually just refering to the sister's daughter, includes here also the much younger female cross cousins.

For Good this terminology involves a rearrangement of the standard Dravidian system such that the principle of relative age rather than generation takes precedence among the group of cross relatives, with the marriage partner indicated by appropriate age (slightly older for women, slightly younger for men). Thus, "from the male viewpoint, there is

symmetric prescriptive marriage with a cross relative" (Good 1980: 494). However, it is not quite as simple as that. Not only are some of the merged relatives parallel, while some which are excluded are cross, but the terms used by men and women are not always reciprocal, leading to some confusion, and indicating that perhaps contradictory principles are at work here.

The MZy is included in the category *korundiyal*, thus making her a potential marriage partner despite the fact that she is a parallel relative[1]. The FZy is not so included, being referred to as *attai* whatever her age, although she is a cross relative[2]. If we look at these relationships from the female point of view we find the opposite: the BSe is included in the marriageable category, while the ZSe is counted as a brother, *annan*, or if younger, as a son, thus firmly in the parallel and unmarriagable category. It is possible to make sense of this seemingly contradictory state of affairs if we look at it in terms of substance and relatedness.

In the simple Dravidian system described above, relatives of ego's generation can be quite clearly and unambiguously divided into two kinds, those who share substance exactly and those who do not share substance at all, siblings and potential souses. Across generations things become more complex, since people are then *half* related to each other, sharing either female or male inheritance. I believe the practice of elder sister's daughter marriage can be traced to a modification of the Dravidian system such that the female part in relatedness is taken less count of, and those who are only share female inheritence are counted different enough to marry.

If we look at the categories of those relatives who share female substance but not male, they are as follows:

Man:	M, MZ	MB	G1
	-	-	G0
	ZD	ZS	G-1
Woman	M, MZ	MB	G1
	-	-	G0
	D, ZD	S, ZS	G-1

---

[1] Good has suggested (personal communication) that the mother's sister should in fact be seen as a cross relative, for a male ego, and his tendency to reverse the positions of MZ and FZ in diagrams of the Dravidian system would also suggest this interpretation. However, the definitons of cross and parallel in the generation above (unlike in the generation below) do not depend on the sex of ego, but on the link between ego's *parent* and the relative concerned. If MZ were cross to a male ego, then FB would be cross (and potentially marriageable) to a female ego. I know of no South Indian group which allows this form of marriage.

[2] Good has noted that she may in fact be treated as *kolundiyal* if young enough: not having come across this specific case he had omitted to ask. I am reluctant to hypothesize this in the absence of firm evidence, especially since in the light of my later analysis it seems unlikely.

Those who share male substance but not female are as follows:

Man	FZ	F, FB	G1
	-	-	G0
	D, BD	S, BS	G-1
Woman	FZ	F, FB	G1
	-	-	G0
	BD	BS	G-1

If we look at the first descending generation for men, and the first ascending generation for women, there is an exact fit between those relatives who share female inheritance only, and those who are considered marriageable: the MB and the ZD. In the same way, those who share male inheritance, the FB and BD, remain proscribed. If we look at the first ascending generation for men, and the first descending generation for women, things become more complicated, since here the principles of half relatedness and those of crossness are in opposition.

The potentially marriageable relative for men in this generation is the MZ, a parallel relative, while the FZ, a cross relative, shares male inheritance and should therefore be prohibited. This is in fact the way the terminology works, and neatly explains the apparent anomoly of making MZ marriageable and FZ not. If we look at the reciprocals for women however the opposite principle takes precedence, and the BS, a cross relative, is subsumed in the marriageable category, while the ZS, who shares only female inheritance, nevertheless remains parallel and unmarriageable. A woman, it seems, is too close to her sister to allow the shared female link to be eclipsed, and thus the sister's children are not assimilated to the cross relative category. This deployment of different principles by men and women in fact leads to some of the main contradictions in the terminology, contradictions that themselves indicate more than one principle is at work[3]. It seems likely that in fact the relative age requirements make marriages in this direction extremely rare and thus the terminological contradictions are not challenged.

If we concentrate on the most important principle of this system, the extension of marriageability to the mother's brother and the sister's daughter, it is clear that the system is one which takes a less strict view of the marriage of related people than the standard Dravidian one, allowing

[3] Thus for example a woman considers her brother's son marriageable, while a man considers his father's sister *un*marriageable. In Good's formulation of course both are deploying a rearrangement of cross relatives in this generation. He is unable to explain however why these cross relatives are marriageable in one direction and not in the other.

relatedness on one side, the female, to constitute no bar to marriage[4]. In this context it becomes meaningless to continue to divide those who are half related but marriageable from those who are wholly unrelated (the cross cousins) and the principle of generational divide breaks down to give a division based on relative age (too old to marry, marriageable age, and too young to marry).

I believe this to be a secondary and derivative pheomenon, as would seem to be suggested by the fact that it is only in the category of potentially marriageable people that this merging and reorganisation takes place, rather than across the board. In addition, I would be reluctant to concede that this terminology constituted a logical system in its own right simply because of the large number of logical anomalies in the use of terms and their reciprocals. Similarly the retention of standard Dravidian uses even where they are rendered illogical by the new system, such as the use of *maman* to refer to the father-in-law by both women and men, leads me to conclude that this *is* a modification of the standard Dravidian system and explicable as such in the terms I have laid out.

[4] For those in Kerala who do not allow sister's daughter marriage it is quite clearly considered incestuous. Allowing the marriage represents a considerable relaxing of the principles of *marriageability*, but not necessarily, I would argue, of *relatedness*.

Appendix 2

Diary entries for Emilie, Agnes and Flossy (August 1992)

Monday

Emilie: The nets and equipment for the boat is kept at Emilie's house, since she is closest to the beach. At 5am the crew come to her house to collect it and leave with Lawrence for the sea. At 10am a friend, Sophie, who had borrowed some rice, came to return it. At 4am Emilie's youngest sister, Suni, who is 17, came to visit and helped her with some of the housework. By 5pm the crew had returned, and they sat around for a while, talking about the day's fishing - both Andrew and Emilie's younger brother, Raju, were there, and she gave them all some tea. Flossy came by at 6pm and they all left with her after a while.

Agnes: At 11am Sheila and Teresa, neighbours, came by with Flossy (they are friends). They came to read the papers, which are ordered for the village library but are delivered to Lawrence to put there. At 3pm Thelma, a close neighbour and friend, came over for a chat, and later Flossy and joined them. At 7pm Rita returned from the market and came over to talk.

Flossy: At 7am some children from the village came over: Flossy is giving them extra school tuition under a scheme run by the cooperative. At 12am Girija, a friend from Kadinamkulam (nearby large village) came for a chat. Varghese (neighbour) came to borrow a box of matches. At 7pm Andrew, Suni and Raju all returned with Flossy from Emilie's and they ate.

Tuesday

Emilie: Again the crew came at 5am (they do this every day except Sunday). At 8am, Rita came over with some fish, before setting off to sell. At 12am a neighbour and friend, Mary, came over to borrow some soap. At 5.30 Flossy and Agnes' son came over, and they sat chatting. Half an hour later they were joined by the crew who had returned from fishing. They sat for a while, then Andrew took the container to go and buy some kerosine.

Agnes: At 8am Rajamma (Lawrence's MZD) came from Pallithura to get some money they had agreed to lend her. After lunch Flossy and Sheila came to read the papers, and then at 5pm Thelma came to read the papers. A friend of theirs, Pushparaj, came for a chat. At 6pm Rita joined them for

a while. At 8pm Yagappan, a friend of Lawrence's, came over to discuss Church Committee business.

Flossy: Again the tuition students came at 7am (they did so every morning before school). At 10am Shailaja (MeZSD) came over to tell them of someone's death, and stayed for a while.

Wednesday

Emilie: At 10am Mary came over for a chat. At 12 Rita came with some coconuts and tapioca. At 2pm Sabi (MeZD) came with some fish. At 6pm the crew came back.

Agnes: At 8.30 Varghese came with some money he owed. At 9am Annie, Agnes' elder brother's daughter, came for a chat. At 10.30 Cecilia and Chitra came to talk and Marykunye and Daisy joined them and talked for a while. Rita came with some bananas, tamarind and curry leaves. At lunchtime Agnes and the children went over to Flossy's. After lunch, Sheila and Teresa came to read the papers. Christudacie (neighbour) came over at 3am and had some tea. Emilie and the children came at 6pm for a visit, and Rita joined later. She stayed to talk about some business with the boat.

Flossy: At 7am the students came. Agnes and the children came over at 12 and she helped with some kitchen work, then they stayed to eat lunch. At 3.30 Letta, a friend from college, came over and they discussed going to a friend's wedding next week.

Thursday

Emilie: At 9am Rita came with some fish, then she came back at 12 after going to the market and brought coconut and tapioca. Emilie paid her for this and the previous time, and she stayed to play with her son for a while, and ate lunch. At 2pm Mary came for a chat.

Agnes: At 10am Rita's eldest sister Gracie came to borrow some cash and Agnes gave on behalf of Rita. At 12 Christudacie and Kunyamma (neighbours) came for a chat, and Flossy and Sheila to read the papers. At 4pm Victor came to collect some money they owed him, and then Pushparaj joined him and they talked with Lawrence for a while. Emilie came over at 4pm for a chat.

Flossy: Sheila came at 12, and they went to Agnes' house. At 3pm Mary, Thangamma, Sabi, Kochutracia and Benedicta all came over to ask her to help them write out an application to the cooperative society for loans (Rs 500 to sell fish). In the evening Andrew's friends came to get him to go for a film in Kadinamkulam.

Friday

Emilie: At 8am Raspar (MZS) came from Pulluvilla to ask for a loan. At 9am Suni (Z) came and they went together to Vettucaud Church for a celebration there (Ghandijayanth). At 6pm Biju (B) came to get the can to go and buy petrol for the boat. Tracia (neighbour) came to borrow a bucket. In the evening Agnes' daughter Asha, and Manu (BS), came and they ate there.

Agnes: At 8am Ouseph (the clerk at Matsyafed) came to discuss with Lawrence some affairs of the Church committee. At 9am Suni came to collect the children to take them to Vettucaud. At 1pm Christudacie came for a chat. Thelma and Flossy came at 3pm to read the papers, and then Rita came and they all talked. Suni and Emilie came back from Vettucaud and stayed a while. Rita took some extra money to pay the salesman the next day as she had had a bad day's sales.

Flossy: 8am, James (FB) came from Karimkulam. He had some business in Marianad and so visited them. At 1pm Matthias (elder brother) came to ask Flossy to write a letter for him. His boat needed some repairs and he had to send some people to see to it. Shailaja came to borrow some kitchen utensils. In the evening a friend of Rita's came to ask about her day at the market.

Saturday

Emilie: At 12am Gracie (MeZ) came for a chat. At 5pm Flossy came over and helped with watering the plants. Despite the soil being almost pure sand, Emilie has created a spectacular garden in the small area in front of the house, with lots of little shrubs and flowers, even more colourful than the one she left behind at the old house and which Flossy now tends. Mary came over, and asked for a flower, which Emilie gave her.

Agnes: At 9am Velvet came to get the accounts book of the Church committee, which Lawrence keeps. At 2pm Thelma and Emilie came to go for a film. At 6pm, Rita came over to talk.

Flossy: At 9am Thelma, Agnes, Teresa, Asha and Emilie all came over. Rita had purchased some pictures of Jesus at Karimkulam and they came to collect them. At 2.30, Agnes, Emilie, Thelma, Teresa and Jodie came over to collect Suni and Flossy to go to Kadinamkulam for a film. In the evening some friends of Andrews came.

Sunday

Emilie: After Church Raspar came from Pulluvilla to get the loan of Rs 2,000 they had agreed. They gave him lunch. In the afternoon Andrew and the other crew members came over to do some work on the engine and the nets. Emilie gave them tea. Rita came for a chat.

Agnes: At 11.30 Flossy, Teresa and Sheila came to read the papers. Marykunye came to borrow some tamarind. At 1pm the crew members came to get their shares for the week. At 4pm Thelma came for a chat. In the evening Flossy and Rita came over.

Flossy: At 10 am Marychechi, a friend of Suni's, came to ask for Rs100, but Flossy did not have enough to give it to her. At 2pm Thelma and Teresa came over. Thelma's friend's child was going to be baptised next week and she asked Flossy to buy a present for her. She gave her the money for it.

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