

Navigating Islandness: The Culture and Tradition of Kadmat Island

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Abstract

This article tries to bring out the socio economic background of the people of Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep and the role of history in assumption that in shaping the modern cultural scenario of Lakshadweep. Article brings out the culture and identity of this small island. It helps us to recollect the memories of old forgotten traditional history and culture of Lakshadweep islands.

Keywords: Islandness, Culture, Tradition

As culture is a word for people's way of life it can be seen in all aspects of peoples day to day life as it differs according to time, place and context. Culture is what makes countries unique. Each community has different cultural activities and cultural rituals. India is a country enriched with various cultural heritage. Culture lies in the minds of people and influence the beliefs and values of the people and even impacts on the way people think about and understand the world.

Although the term culture is used as a synonym for 'civilization' it is beyond the understating of it as it has to refer with wide array of human activities. Culture of a particular place or context if approach scientifically open up a wide variety of possibilities. Theorists tries to exhibit the way that humans interpret their biology and their environment through various theories. According to this point of view, culture become such an integral part of human existence that it is the human environment, and most cultural change can be attributed to human adaption to historical events. Culture is seen as the primary adaptive mechanism of humans and takes place much faster than human biological evolution, most cultural change can be viewed as culture adaption itself.

The Role of Culture and Identity in Society

Our own senses of identity, constructed by our familiar discourses, the physical environment and its embedded culture, and our individual differences differentiate each individual from and constructs the notion that we are not all the same under the skin. The Our sense of identity accounts for our perceptions of ourselves and how we are positioned

by others in terms of culture, tradition, rituals, race, family, religion and education (Allen, 2004). Our identities affect our life chances through our positions in society, the access we have to power, status, education, and wealth.

Culture and identity are absolutely central to all it is important to define the concept of culture and identity. Culture is part and parcel of that we do, all that we are, all that we can and might become. Culture and identity are frequently linked but they should not be seen exactly as the same concept. The role of culture in social life and law identity develops in social context.

Kadmat is one of the beautiful island in the archipelago of Lakshadweep islands. It was the last major island to be inhabited. Gold coins identified as belonging to the roman emperors of the first and second century AD has been discovered here. This island has been constantly bullied by its twin island Amini. Systematic habitation of this island began only in the 19th century, and it took even longer for this people to do away with the social and economic disabilities thrust upon them by the landlords of Amini. They were barred from building their own sailing vessels and thus, under compulsion, had to use the vessel of Amini. In their religious and social functions they were deprived the honor of inviting the *Kazi*. Overtime, however, the relationship changed into a friendly one and all is well between the two at present.

The lagoon on the east is narrow and even dries up during low tide but it enlarges itself on the western side giving way to a milky white sandy beach. In many books it has been mentioned that most of these islands are boat shaped. One has to see it from the helicopter to believe that of this island is exactly boat shaped. One of the best resorts of the country lies here. Now this island is also open for international tourists, and it also offers one of the best SCUBA Diving centres. Its main occupation being coir twisting, it remains as one of the poorest islands. The soil is not very fertile but it is rich in limestone which is chipped off to the other islands for building purpose.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Religious and believes same to the Minicoy Island. Lakshadweep islands are same religious beliefs and practices.

Festivals

Festivals have a good role in human mind. Mostly it shape a culture and sometime becomes a culture itself. It is during the festival that Kadmat Island puts on display the rich and long running culture of its people. Majority of the population residing at Kadmat Island follows Islam. So during the Muslim festival that Kadmat Island is at its most exuberant and colorful. Though many tribes' festivals are also celebrated here, their celebrations are not as visible as those of that are celebrated here. The best place to witness these festivals is the many mosques that are spread in almost all parts of the islands. Among all Eid-ul-fitr celebrated in the month of Ramadan is one festival that is celebrated by every soul on the island. This is on festival which is celebrated by every soul on the island. Even if you are just a tourist visiting Lakshadweep for quiet and clam vacations you will not be able to hold yourself from being a part of this existing and

exhilarating celebrations. The sudden and splendid change of a severe locality into loud vicinity will surely sweep you of your feet.

Eid-UI-Fitr is celebrated when the new moon appears after the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is known as the month of feasting when all Muslims her themselves from having anything during day time. Eid-UI-Fitr is the day when the days of fast end. *Bakreed* is considered to be the day when pious journey of Muslim pilgrims to Mecca comes to an end. The day celebrated to commemorate the day when Prophet Ibraheem sacrificed his son to show his devotion to the almighty. Milad-UI-Nabi also known as *Moulid* in Kadmat Island commemorates the birthday of Prophet Mohammed.

The festival falls on the 12th day of Rabi-UI-Awal month which is the third month according to Islamic calendar. Muharram that celebrates the martyrdom of *Hazrat* Imam Hussein is also observed by some people. The main tradition of the day is people earnestly chanting “Ya Hussein” while beating their chests and envisages the battle field of *Karbala*. The festival continues for the first ten days of the month of Muharram. On these days, people wear black cloths symbolizing their mourning.

The many festivals are the time when the colors of life truly match the innumerable hues filled in by nature. The small population of people with their energy and enthusiasm create an environment that is nothing less than the grandest celebrations in the heart of a metro city.

Arts Forms

Most of the Kadmat Island arts forms have evolved from the Islamic rituals and beliefs. Among the ethic art forms the most welcomed once are Kolkkali, Parichakkali, Duffmutt, Dolippattu and Oppana.

Kolkkali

A *Kolkkali* has 12-14 artists and a *Kurikkal*. In this art form each artist will have a stick in both hands. Basically the outfit is green or white colored *Dothi*. The song of *Kolkkali* is mappila songs.

Parichakkali

The art form includes 10-14 artists “*Paricha*” sword and *Ilathalam* are the basic looks for this art form. In this art form only “*Kurikkal*” will be using *Ilathalam* while all others show their talent using *paricha* and sword in hand. The background songs are classically *mappila* songs this art form in show cased on the occasion of marriages special days and as to offer welcome to important people.

Dolippattu

It is the song form in which 6-10 numbers of people can take part. Instrument is used in *Dolippattu*. It is performed using dol like a drum. The song of dolipattu is *Kessupattu*. The breathtaking performance of Dolippattu takes away the audience into an enchanted world with its rhythmical throbs.

Oppana

For *Oppana* the group includes 6-12 artists. *Oppana* songs are both satirical and traditional. This arts form is performed by rhythmic clapping of hands. A group of girls dancing with the songs sung by group members praising the beauty of the bride.

Marriage and Morals

Marriage was generally held between the ages of twelve and eighteen for girls and between sixteen and twenty two in the case of males. Child marriage nowadays not frequent as in earlier times. An interesting feature of child marriage is that it is contracted only after puberty. The proposals are made after the age of seven or eight for a girl and after twelve for a boy. A tentative agreement could be reached by the elders, mothers, maternal grand mothers or fathers of the two parties, but the final decision is subject to the approval of the *Karnavars* and fathers of both sides.

The proposal can come from both party and commences with an exchange of sweets between the two households. Members of two households visit each other frequently and generally get well acquainted from them on the final decision is taken at a feast arranged by the girl's *Karanavar*. Though the boy and the girl have a right to agree or disagree to the match, in the islands the consent of the boy's girl is not taken for alliance in the case of first marriage.

The marriage ceremony of *Nikkah* and the social ceremony is *Mangalam*, *Kalyanam* or *Vittikaudal* which is the preamble to the consummation of the marriage and may take place from a few weeks to even several years after the *Nikkah* in the case of child marriage. The *Nikkah* is simple Islamic ceremony which marks the formal conclusion of the marriage contact. The *Nikkah* could be held either at the mosque or at the bride's house. Unlike circumcision the Qazis presence is essential for this ceremony.

The *Mehar* in most cases is only a nominal amount. Immediately after the *Nikkah* the *Mehar* is handed over the bride's father. The *Mehar* once paid can never be claimed back. The Qazi utters a prayer which marks the conclusion of the *Nikkah* ceremony the *Nikkah* is then registered by the low.

Economy in Kadmat Island

Majority of the population depend on coconut and fish for their livelihood there is no any important economic enterprises in the territory. Most of the olden time village industries, such as coir twisting, production of jiggery and vinegar and copra; survive to this day though some of them have declined its importance. The marine based economics like provide considerable subsidiary income to the people have been relegated to the back ground.

They are generally caught during the months of November and December which is their breeding season. The turtle is also caught on moonlit nights when they come to the shore to lay eggs. The flesh is removed and the shell is buried in sand for some time. When the fleshy particles are completely decayed they are taken cleaned. The output slowly decreased as the price offered by the rajah was considerably less than the market value.

The British government who inherited the monopoly found the production on the ever increasing declaims and recommendations for its abolition were made for many years. But it was finally done only in 1909. The people used to make mats of tender coconut leaves being destructive to the trees, this industry was abandoned. Jaggery and

vinegar making out of sweet toddy especially for home consumption and in some cases for export is another traditional industry.

The people being Muslims are prohibited by their religion to drink fermented toddy and so the tapping is done only for sweet toddy. The sweet toddy is kept in large cans and allowed to ferment. When it is taken out after about 40 days, it gives an equal quality of natural vinegar which is useful for the preparation of fish and pickles. Since these products are consumed in the islands on a large scale, there is very little sale. The production is also limited because the income from a tree leased out for tapping is less than the cost of the coconuts that would have been yielded in the tree, had it been left out to bear nuts. Tapping profession has also ceased to be a profitable under taking and many of the tappers have now turned to other pursuits from the territory to Calicut, Cannanore or Mangalore.

Coir and Coir Production

Coir twisting is one of the oldest industries of the territory which has played a vital role in the political history of the islands. It is said that the Arab vessels used to come to the Island to collect “cordial” which was very essential for sailing in the Arabian Sea. The coir trade was one of the motivations which promoted the Portuguese to retain in a foothold upon the islands. The price paid to the people was just half of the market value and this was paid in rice at a commutation rate. Coir twisting is carried on the Islands only as a cottage industry. Methods of coir twisting the use of coir *charkas* and wearing of brush mats, chain mats etc, are slowly becoming popular.

The government fiber factory at Kadmat Island convert the entire husk available in the island to coconut fiber and to curled fiber is marketed the mainland as a raw material to a number of products such as coir rope, coir yarn, fiber foam matting’s, geo textile, carpets, door mats, fiber brushes etc. All these products from coir fiber are easy to manufacture and potentially employment generative. Kadmat has got sufficient landed area to start a set of units from coir twisting to mats. The units may be started on a co-operative basis with the finance assistance of administration and technical assistance of coir board. The advantage of Kadmat for a set of coir industries are many, such as availability of raw material, land, port and transport facility, manpower, surplus, power generation etc. the workers are to be trained on job in the mainland and wages to be fixed based on the productivity for the run profitably.

Copra Industry

Copra is produced by a large number of producers in the island. The producer of a few tenants used to be collected by their landlords and shipped in their name to the mainland markets in *Odams*. This island’s copra is generally exported to Calicut, Mangalore and Beypore. They are popularly known in market centers as “*DweeviCopra*”. It is sold after grading or as mixed. Grading is done in two varieties. The first variety consists of small copra’s of the size of a lemon the balance is the second quality which is used for crushing in to oil. The lightness of the small copra makes it amenable for retail selling as copra. The remaining copra is grouped with “*Madras*” variety common in the Malabar markets. Copra production is a seasonal activity limited

to 3-4 months during summer months. Copra can be produced during other periods by use of copra dryers. A unit with a capacity to process about 1000nuts per day can produce as much copra milling as demanded in the local market.

Coconut Oil

Edible the milky juice obtained from the scraped coconut kernels. The mill gathers *copra* locally the entire oil produced is sold through cooperative societies functioning in islands. Kadmat island produces large quantity of copra as being the forth largest producer of coconut among the UTL islands and its production is very low due to its seasonal and irregular functioning as the copra is not available for milling during the raining season. The local demand for coconut oil as cooking media is also low due to availability of cheaper substitute palm oil for cooking. The coast production and risk involved in handing Oil while transportation is a major constraint in developing the industry.

Agricultural System of Kadmat Island

The Islands were once fringed by a thick growth of *Tamara* (Ternforia boraginaceous), *Kanni* (scaevolakoenigil) *chonam* and *cheruthalam* (pemphisacidula), while inside large trees of *Punna* (calophylluminophyllum), *cheerani* (Thespesiapopulnea), wild almond and banyan were found. The ground flora, thick; and almost knee deep in certain places. The earliest settlers who came from the Malabar coast, brought with them the coconut tree, their *Kalpaviksha* (the beneficent tree of heaven). The high water table nearness to the sea, gentle breeze, abundant sunshine and pure soil contributed to the rich growth of the coconut tree maintains its supremacy is the domestic economy of the islands and even now it is the only crop of economic importance. The edible nut and the coconut husk proved the raw materials for the copra and coir in industries.

The agricultural department runs model agricultural farms in all islands and sells seeds and fertilizers at subsidized prices. They give valuable guidance for improved farming of coconut trees. The rat is one of the main pests in destroying coconuts. In olden days people used to hunt rats periodically collectively and the island administrative officers were empowered to call for this purpose and fine individuals who absented themselves. However nowadays rat hunts are agriculture department on the basis of monetary remuneration. The soil in island is fertile and suitable for beetles also taught to them. This is no way harms the yield of the coconut palms.

The main products of Lakshadweep agriculture that are transported from here to the other parts of the country are the medical plants like dried *Fenari*, *Dondhi* and *Thaluthama* planted coconut leaves, coconut plants, jiggery vinegar and cowries are also transported from the Lakshadweep group of island. Most of these agricultural products of Kadmat Island are sold in Mangalore of Karnataka and at Cannanore and Kozhikode of Kerala.

The islands are blessed with copious rainfall. Many crops like red gram, ground nut, maize and sweet potato, can be grown successfully in the coconut gardens as intercrops without irrigation during the south west monsoon period. Water supply in the

entire island is from small wells which do not go very far below the coral substratum. Fresh water is available in these wells throughout the year. For growing vegetables and fruits small pumps are used for irrigation. By and large coconut cultivation depends entirely on rainfall. It has been successfully demonstrated that by growing intercrops in the coconut gardens and with proper irrigation, coconut yield be increased considerably.

The formation of Kadmat island soil is from fragmentation of coral lime stones and sedimentary rocks. It is formed by sediments deposited by water and wind which are consolidated into rocks by the weight of the overlying deposits. Later by fragmentation of the lime stones sedimentary rocks fine soil is accumulated. The soil tract along the sea shore is white in color. The soil in the remnants of the plants and animals, inorganic and organic acids are formed which in turn bring about profound influence on rapid weathering and changes the white color of the soil. Calcite is chief constituent of lime stone and is the main source of calcium in soil.

Crops

Coconut

Coconut the only commercial crop in the union territory, it is cultivated even in island. It has been the wealth of the island for ages. The coconut tree thrives and yields well in black clayey soil and in pure sandy soil where there is supply of moisture in the sub soil. Coconut is the main crop cultivated in the islands of Lakshadweep.

Bread fruit

Bread fruit tree is the common tree which attracts attention. It has thick dark green foliage and beautiful silk green fruits at the tip of the branches. It grows in abundance in the island without much care. This tree is known to be a native of south sea island and is called as *Chakka* in Lakshadweep meaning jack fruit.

Papaya

Papaya is common tree cultivated in house compounds. This tree which is popular in every part of Malabar Coast is believed to have been introduced from America. This is the only common tree in Lakshadweep.

Banana

The common varieties of banana like *Mysore Poovan*, *Poovan*, *Kadali*, *Robussta* and grown on a small scale in Kadmat Island and all other islands. Banana suckers are planted low-lying areas and in house compounds, as this is a moisture loving plant.

Vegetables

Rice and fish are the staple food of the people and vegetables are not a normal dietary item for them. With the contact with the outsiders, vegetables such as Brinjal, Pumpkin, Cucumber etc.... have been introduced. Sweet potato and grains, cereals and millets is also the crops that also commonly seen in Lakshadweep. The tubers brought from mainland find good.

Animal Husbandry

Lakshadweep may perhaps be the only exception in India, where cattle are not used as a source of power, in the field of activities. The non-availability of pastures and forests has always been a compelling force on the people to neglect cattle rearing and

milk production. In some of the island cattle are conspicuous by their complete absence. They are brought from main land only for meat. The import is more between January and May every year which is the festival and marriage season. The number of cattle imported has a direct bearing on the prosperity of the people. A yield is seldom of maximum coconut production would show a corresponding increase in the import of cattle. Goats are reared for milking and are found in most of the households.

Since the cattle brought from the Malabar Coast for meat, milk yield is seldom assessed before purchase poor management and lack of fodder also make them the lowest milk produces. The cattle are maintained mostly on green leaves of coconut palm and water. Goat which are more popular in the island are also reared mainly for meat. They are not milked regularly and the kinds are free to suckle at any time. The sizes of the goats are much smaller than those found on the west coast and the milk yield is also comparative poor. For improving the breads of the local goats, quality bucks were stationed in island.

Fisheries

The islanders are classified as fisherman by nature and they vastly depended on fishing for their subsistence. Kadmat Island has got a large lagoon and the water attached to it is rich in marine wealthy. A good number of islanders depend largely on income from fishing activity. There are also some constraints in fishing, processing distribution and storage of fish product in these islands.

Commercial fishing activity is seasonal in nature. Due to the hauling of fishing boats on shore during monsoon from the month of May to October, no deep sea fishing is carried out during this season. Certain varieties of fish which are not used for dry processing if received in excessive quantity does not find market and hence sold at very low price or discarded as the facility storage is inadequate. This condition discourages fishermen in obtaining maximum catch. Among the varieties of fish available in Lakshadweep waters Tuna is most prominent shark, sail, sear etc... is also available in lesser quantities. Accordingly the share of Kadmat Island is only about 6%. The tuna variety landed during 3 years. Due to the low quantity of tuna catch the *Mas* produced in the island is also very low. Tuna catch and the cooked and smoked product of tuna is called *Mas*.

This article tries to bring out the socio economic background of the people of Kadmat Island, Lakshadweep and the role of history in assumption that in shaping the modern cultural scenario of Lakshadweep. Article brings out the culture and identity of a small island namely Kadmat. It helps us to recollect the memories of old forgotten traditional history and culture of Lakshadweep islands.

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