

Kerala Maritime Communities Project
SPARC, IUCSSRE, Mahatma Gandhi University
Call for Papers and Concept Note
for an Edited Book and Workshop

Scope: Each Chapter will be based on Field Study/investigations as well as status of current knowledge, research problems, issues and theoretical perspective

Each author will have to present the paper in the workshop and send a draft paper by 25th October 2024.

Workshop: The Draft Paper will be discussed in the workshop at Mahatma Gandhi University on **29 to 31 October 2024**

Title of the Book and Workshop:

Maritime Communities of the Kerala Coast: Historical, Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives

A workshop organized by the Kerala Maritime Communities Project, **hosted by Mahatma Gandhi University, Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension (IUCSSRE), at Kottayam**, and supported by a grant from the **Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)**, Government of India.

Workshop Dates: October 29-30-31, 2024

Location: Kottayam, Kerala.

Concept Note

I. Introduction

The proposed workshop and edited book seek to bring out a comprehensive volume on the Maritime Communities of the Kerala Coast from Historical, Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives. It seeks chapters on various themes related to the maritime communities of Kerala. The workshop focuses on two major themes. A) historical b) ethnographic and environmental Issues

II. Historical Perspectives

The seacoast of Kerala, in Southwest extremity of India has been one of the important hubs of maritime activities in South Asia. From prehistoric times, maritime communities have thrived in the coastal region. Already in the Mesolithic period, communities that used microlithic implements inhabited the coastal and hinterland regions of Kerala and perhaps experimented with watercraft construction. These early hunter-gatherer settlements are found in the open-air camps and sometimes found in the cave shelters. Gradually, some of the early hunter-gatherer communities transformed into communities of fisherfolk, sailors and traders. The early communities had camped along the backwaters, river mouths and along the coast, besides the hinterland regions. From the early period such communities were involved in the exchange of marine produce such as fish and shell with the hinterland communities.

In terms of the climatic factors, the Kerala coast has been very dynamic because of the steep gradient of the mountainous terrain and the monsoon and other climatic factors. Because of the constant reworking of the coastal region, the amount of archaeological material that has come to light is very limited. Hence coastal dynamics and geoarchaeological studies are important to understand human adaptations along the coasts of Kerala.

In the Iron Age (ca. 1000–300 BCE), megalithic monuments are dotted across the Kerala coast. Mangadu, Engandiyur and several other coastal settlements indicate active iron-using communities creating rural settlements and camp sites.

In the early historic period (ca. 3rd century BCE to 5th Century CE), we are in a better position to understand the maritime communities and trade activities thanks to early Tamil literature and Greco-Roman sources. A few centres of trade such as Muchiri (Muziris), Thondi (Tyndis) and Blinca had emerged. These settlements witnessed the activities of foreign traders and sailors, apart from the fisherfolk of the local area who offered navigational support. Several varieties of watercraft emerged in this period. The activities of the maritime communities are recorded in the textual sources.

In the Medieval and Late Medieval and modern periods, the coastal region of Kerala was the centre for political struggles, and several urban centres emerged with the presence of foreign merchants and sailors. The ports of Kerala provide evidence for maritime activities across the Indian Ocean region.

In historical times, Kerala's coast witnessed many episodes of continuity and change under the influence of domestic and foreign powers, as new maritime communities emerged over time. While major political and economic powers were carving out their domains of influence, the fisherfolk communities continued to be active along the coast. Apart from fishing and exploiting marine and backwater resources, they played an active role in the historical developments of the coastal region.

In the historical perspectives of the maritime communities of Kerala, we seek to focus on boat-building and navigation, urban centres and rural settlements (mainly addressing the maritime communities) and the signature of the maritime communities such as fisherfolk, traders, navigators, ship builders and port workers (Khalasis).

III. Ethnographic and Environmental Perspectives

Ethnography of small maritime communities is very crucial for understanding their social and economic changes in the *longue durée* and *histoire événementielle* (short term). Giving an entry into their everyday social world, ethnography can illuminate the challenges facing the community and how they overcome these challenges. Contemporary challenges have become multi-dimensional emerging from – technology, state, capital and market—demanding a fresh look at even the familiar problems. Considering the particularities of the fishing communities, we also need to look closely at other institutions and agencies that people create and interact with. Dynamic actors as they are, an ethnographic perspective would enable us to reach closer to the intimate realm of their lifeworld.

The ethnographic and environmental perspective theme focuses on the contemporary conditions of the fisherfolk communities, their settlements, society, economy and culture, boat-building and materiality from narrative ethnographic approaches and policies and their impact. The workshop also focuses on multi-sensory ethnography, digital ethnography, autoethnography, visual ethnography, ethnography, post-human ethnography, decolonization and other relevant themes.

Environmental Perspectives

environmental perspectives the focus is on conservation, coastline change and impact of climate change related perspectives.

IV. Nature of the Workshop

This multidisciplinary workshop brings together historical, archaeological and ethnographic perspectives on the maritime communities of Kerala from the Early historical to modern periods. Over three days, experts representing diverse approaches will present their work and engage in discussion across these disciplines on certain key topics. The aim of the workshop is to explore ways that scholars and advanced students can profitably draw upon historical documents, material culture, and ethnographic data in their representations and reconstructions of Kerala's maritime communities, past and present.

The workshop will be international in scope, with a hybrid in-person/Zoom format. The contributions will be published as chapters in an edited volume reflecting the topics and discussions of the workshop.

Abstracts Submission

Abstracts are invited from early career researchers and doctoral students based on the above concepts and themes. Ten abstracts of students will be selected and they will be communicated by 10th October 2024.

Abstract should be within 300 words, with title, affiliation, phone, email id and five keywords

Email: kmcperkerala@gmail.com

The abstracts should be submitted by 5st October 2024. Selection will be communicated through email by 10th October 2024. The selected candidates should submit their draft papers on or before 25th October 2024.

For the selected abstracts, local hospitality will be offered by the organisers. They have to take care of the travel expenses.

For the invited speakers travel and hospitality support will be offered.

Contact Person

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