Kerala
In Kerala fisherfolk castes are found in all three major religious communities. The fishing community belongs to the social categories of Mukkuva & Anjootty (Latin Catholic), Dheevara (Hindu) and Pooislan (Muslim). According to George and Domi (2002), the fishing community among Muslims is known as Kadappurathukar (beachmen). The southern districts are predominantly Latin Catholic Christians with small pockets of Hindus and Muslims, while central Kerala has a concentration of arayar or dheevarq of Hindus. The northern districts are dominated by mapila of the Muslim community. There are sub-castes such as mukkuvar, mugayira, ezhava and vellava of Hindu communities as well. Although there are various other castes among the religious groups in fishing communities, they are mainly among the inland fishers. While there are clear distinctions among fishing communities in Kerala particularly in the kind of craft and gear they use, there are community institutions that deal with local governance and in the establishment of equal fishing rights that are unique to some fishing communities in the state.

Community institutions
Kadakkodi or the ‘sea court’ is an age-old community institution among the Hindu fishing communities in the northern part of Kerala State, India. The sea ‘court’ consists of village ‘elders’ and a certain number of functionaries who implement its decisions. It meets on the open beach. All the fishermen of the village gather to participate in the discussions on issues relating to access, conservation, and conflict resolution. The elders make the decisions and these are considered final. Monitoring their implementation is the responsibility of the whole community. The elders can impose sanctions against offenders, ranging from a mere warning to total social ostracism. Conflict resolution is handled cost effectively and amicably, thanks to open, systematic procedures, quick decisions, and effective implementation.

The kadakkodi institution has been subjected to considerable pressure from the early 1980s due to introduction of new large scale gear, new government-promoted organizational forms such as cooperatives, and new political divisions among fishing communities. These gave rise to new leadership that questioned the authority of the elders. Yet the basic scaffolding of the kadakkodi is still in place. In many villages it continues to play an important role in solving the socio-economic conflicts that followed the new technological and organizational changes.

The Government of Kerala (1997) is placing a new emphasis on panchayat (village) level resource management and governance with full participation of the people. In this context, communities with a history of traditional institutions have an important edge in any new stewardship contract between state and community.

Padu System
Lobe and Berkes (2004) carried out a study with the people of Vivekananda Chandrika Dheevara Sabha (henceforth VCDS), belonging to a community of Hindu fishers in the northern end of Vallarpadam Island. The residents of VCDS are members of the vala fishing caste, a sub caste of the Dheevara. Similar to the padu system followed by the pattinavars in the Pulicat lake area, one of the key elements of the vala padu system is to redistribute the catch fairly among the fishers by rotating access to fishing locations.

Key elements of the padu system in Vallardam Island
- Padu defines the group of rights holders - Sanghams (society or association) allocate access to fishing grounds. All the sanghams instituted a lottery system that rotates access to fishing locations to ensure equal opportunity to prime fishing locations. The sanghams

1 http://keralafishworkers.org/history.htm

Downloaded from http://indianfisheries.icsf.net
have three basic functions: facilitating equitable access, providing collective social
responsibility, and providing mechanisms for conflict resolution and rule-making
- *Padu* is caste specific where all fishers are Hindu and members of the same caste—
  Dheevara
- *Padu* specifies institutional basis of rights holders - Each fishing ground operates
  independently; no coordinating institution. Lottery system run by individual *sanghams*
- *Padu* defines the geographical boundaries which is this Cochin Estuary in this study;
  Fishing grounds are located near the estuary; The three fishing grounds were divided into
  78 sites which accommodated 78 stake nets
- *Padu* is gear specific - Ooni Vala (stake net)
- *Padu* is species specific - Shrimp—*Metapenaeus dobsoni*, *M. monoceros* and
  *Paeneus indicus*.
- *Padu* uses a lottery for site allocation - The *sanghams* organize lotteries for allocation of
  access; lottery takes place once per year at the annual meeting

The *sanghams* studied are not formally recognized by the state fisheries department, but they are
registered with the State Registrars office at the High Court of Kerala. They are well organized
and include a president, vice president, treasurer and a secretary who are elected annually by the
*sangham* members. The *sanghams* are registered with the State Registrar’s office at the High
Court, and have a set of rules governing their operation. Formal meetings are held several times
each year, during which issues related to the *sangham* are discussed, fishing locations assigned
and rules made.

**Headmanship among the Arayars**

Fisherfolk in Dharmadam panchayat located in the Kannur District of Kerala belong to the
arayan caste. Traditional property rights here are customary in nature. The institution of
‘headmanship’ amongst the *arayans* regulated fishing, harvesting of timber and other byproducts
by the individual members of the community. The *arayan* community viewed the sea as their
Goddess from whom they derived their resources. They also viewed the sea as belonging their
community. Community property rights over land were deemed to be a sine qua non for access to
sea and the marine resources afforded by the sea. Traditionally, the institution of hereditary
‘headmanship’ regulated fishing and exploitation of natural resources both on land and in sea.
However, traditional property rights of local communities in Dharmadam were not legal in
nature.

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