Paravars
The paravars inhabit the coastal belt from Kanyakumari to Rameswaram. They were believed to be the chiefs of this coastal region where they ruled their areas as subordinates of the Pandyas of the Sangam age. The paravars adopted the Christian faith when it was offered as protection by the to avoid harassment by Arab fleets and the Nayaka armies. The Christian paravar community is the biggest in Rameswaram and they are pioneers in their occupation. The community engaged in marine fishing, pearl diving, trading and even piracy. The paravars have strong sense of group identity based on their occupation, caste polity, kinship and even exclusive settlements that distinguished them from other contiguous people. The paravar community functioned under a caste head, jathithalaivan, who essentially controlled the pearl fishing activities and revenues from their occupation or jathi-tholil, which was confined to the parava caste polity (namba rajyam). Over the years, the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British influences, subsequently followed by the country’s independence, brought about demographic changes and disintegration of solidarity in the internal structure of this community, and more significantly the devolution of power from the caste heads.

Although fishing was historically the Christian paravar communities’ domain, the advent of mechanized boats, made fishing a lucrative occupation bringing with it large Hindu migrations into the region. Today the Rameshwaram demographic is composed of a jumble of fishermen from various religions and caste backgrounds.

For further reading:


Scholtens, J. 2006. Fishermen in a Dire Strait – A study on the pressures faced by Rameshwaram trawler fishermen and the diverse scope of implications for the continuation of their livelihood. Institute for Interdisciplinary studies and C.M.Kan Institute, University of Amsterdam, October, 2006.


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