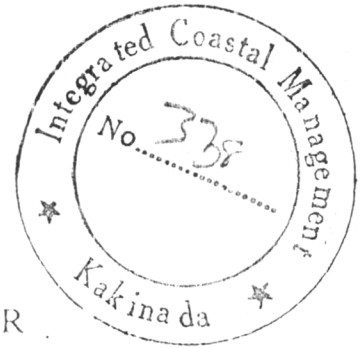




DIE VĀDABALIJA IN ANDHRA PRADESH UND IN ORISSA

ASPEKTE DER WIRTSCHAFTLICHEN UND SOZIALEN
ORGANISATION EINER MARITIMEN GESELLSCHAFT



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SUMMARY

The object of this study is to describe and analyze different aspects of the social organization of the Vāḍabaliḷa. In particular, we identify the general requirements of an adaptation to a maritime environment and how these might lead to specific forms and institutions in the social organization of the Vāḍabaliḷa and coastal fishermen in general.

The Vāḍabaliḷa are a fishing caste on the coast of Andhra Pradesh. Many of them migrate seasonally from their villages in the Visakhapatnam District to various places on the coast of Orissa. Whereas in Andhra Pradesh they fish mainly for a peasant market selling dried fish, in Orissa they engage in highly commercialized fishing. Having a well-developed infrastructure, which permits the packing of fish and prawns in ice, the Vāḍabaliḷa in Orissa are able to sell fresh fish. In the 1970-ies however, the commercially important seasonal prawns fishing was declining rapidly due to overfishing with mechanized boats.

As a low caste group, living in a remote thinly populated coastal area in largely homogeneous villages, and with a specific economy that requires the men to live even more apart from the rest of the society for most of the day, the Vāḍabaliḷa seem to be isolated from the surrounding society. A closer look however reveals relationships with surrounding castes on different levels. Boats and nets are manufactured by the Vāḍabaliḷa themselves. No outside specialist is needed. However the raw materials have to be bought on the regional market. Fish is sold either to merchants or on the weekly market by Vāḍabaliḷa-women, where they get rice and a few vegetables. Besides market relations the Vāḍabaliḷa depend on certain service castes (washerman, barber), who take their impurity from them. Traditionally the Vāḍabaliḷa don't depend on Brahman priests for religious services, but they are coming into action recently. Besides that, the Vāḍabaliḷa try to go on pilgrimage to one of the big temples (i.e. Tirupati) at least once in their life.

But even though there is an economic as well as a ritual interdependence (and of course an administrative integration) between the Vāḍabaliḷa and different other castes, the Vāḍabaliḷa form a distinct society, which is expressed mainly by their largely homogeneous village composition, with

the Vāḍabaliḷa determining the social order of the village. The most salient feature distinguishing the Vāḍabaliḷa from the surrounding agrarian society is their specific mode of production. Fishing is looked upon by anthropologists as 'a kind of hunting activity' or even as 'another pre-agricultural alternative' and it is argued here that fishing has certain characteristics resulting in a work organization different from an agrarian mode of production. The following characteristics can be observed among the Vāḍabaliḷa:

- absence of ownership of the resource
- labor cannot be embodied in the resource
- fishermen don't share the same environment with their prey
- uncertainty, the prey is mobile and difficult to locate
- fish is a perishable product and requires immediate processing.

Egalitarian and flexible structures to be found on different levels of the social organization of the Vāḍabaliḷa can be attributed to these characteristics. There is no notion of private property in the ocean. Even during wintertime, when almost 10 000 people gather in one place, they believe that Gangamma, the goddess of the sea is looking equally well after all of them, as long as they don't neglect her. This and the fact that no labor can be embodied in the resource remove the opportunity for accumulation of wealth. It is not possible to sell or inherit the sea or rent access to it. However, since the Vāḍabaliḷa don't share the same environment with their prey, they need a specific technology. As in other peasant fishing societies who fish in the open sea, the technology of the Vāḍabaliḷa is relatively complex. They use three kinds of boats and a number of different nets. We can distinguish between shore seine fishing and inshore fishing with sailboats. Most important is the teppa, a catamaran, made of logs of wood, which are tied together with ropes. The teppa is used with a sail and with this catamaran the fishermen are able to cross the heavy surf throughout the year. Together with a nylon gill net a teppa constitutes the basic equipment of a fishing unit. Fishing with the teppa requires about 3 to 5 persons. Boat and net are owned by groups of close agnates (father and sons, brothers) or individually.

In general each fishing unit (including the other boat types) consists of persons who own the means of production (saraṅgu) and persons who are non-owners (rayitu). Etymologically the term rayitu (engl. 'ryot') is derived from arabic ra'ā and the original meaning of rayitu is 'protected person' or 'subordinate'. In this sense a saraṅgu-rayitu-relation would be a patron-client-relation, which is by definition hierarchical and unequal and would

not be agreeable with egalitarian structures in the social organization of the Vāḍabaliḷa, which were mentioned above.

In fact there is a status difference between saraṅgu and rayitu, which is however limited by certain factors. A saraṅgu-rayitu-relationship among the Vāḍabaliḷa doesn't comprise different castes, but is confined to caste members or even family members or relatives. Moreover, the term saraṅgu is not equally used for all owners. It is used for the father, when he and his sons own the equipment, and for individual owners. It is not used after the father's death, when a group of brothers owns the equipment (there is no status difference among brothers). A saraṅgu's status grows with his age. It is highest, when he has enough grown-up sons to be able to sit at home and doesn't have to go out into the sea anymore. But although we find a status difference between saraṅgu and rayitu, there are no strong authority structures in the fishing unit. In fact, the status difference on land is contrary to equality at sea. At sea, all the members of the fishing unit are equal (even if the saraṅgu is with them). There is no expert and decisions about casting the net and locating fish are carried out by all members together.

One important feature that counteracts a hierarchical saraṅgu-rayitu-relationship, in terms of authority or economic dependence, is the complex distribution system that balances differences in income. The yield of the catch is distributed according to a basic pattern in which every member of the fishing unit gets one share and two shares go to the boat and net. This means a considerable surplus income for owners which gives them a basically greater security especially during the off-season. But the surplus income has to be taken for upkeeping and repairing the means of production and, more important, it is further redistributed to the rayitu. On each New Year's Day, which coincides with the end of the main fishing season, each rayitu gets a loan (Rs 300-500) from his saraṅgu through which he is obliged to work in this fishing unit for the coming year. Although this is called 'loan' or 'debt' by the Vāḍabaliḷa themselves, it has to be seen rather as a 'lost subsidy' on the part of the saraṅgu and as another share on the part of the rayitu, because after a year, this loan expires and the rayitu gets a new one.

Thus the higher income of the main fishing season is redistributed to enable the rayitu to survive the off-season. But this kind of redistribu-

also enables the saraṅgu to establish his superior status and to commit the rayitu to work in his netgroup. But on the other hand it is the system of immediate distribution that doesn't lead to a permanent interdependence among the Vāḍabaliḷa, but enables the members of a fishing unit to terminate their relationship easily and join another net group (in which case they take the yearly share from the new owner to repay the old debt). This kind of flexibility in fishing units is partly necessary because the fishing techniques vary seasonally and require different types of nets and boats, but it is also an important way of solving conflicts among the fishermen. Any social relationship, be it in a fishing unit, family or a marriage, is terminated in a conflict rather than looking for some kind of compromise or reconciliation.

Uncertainty in fishing is another feature characterizing the work organization in a fishing society in the sense that it prevents owner-non-owner relations from becoming permanent and in the sense that it allows these relations to be more flexible. The yield of the daily catch varies considerably, from nothing at all to a spectacularly large amount. Apparently, luck plays an important role - besides the skill of locating fish and casting the net and a precise knowledge of the maritime environment. But even though knowledge and skill can't guarantee the success of a net group, their hope, on the other hand, can't be destroyed for good, but is just postponed to the next day. This is in contrast to an agrarian mode of production, where labor can be embodied in the resource and so the yield can be increased, but where, on the other hand, the whole crop can be destroyed completely through a failing monsoon or too much rain.

Together with the absence of private property in the resource, uncertainty in fishing results in a considerable degree of upward and downward social mobility. A boat might be 'unlucky' for a longer period of time and so the boat owner has to give up his crew and the members join other boats which are more lucky. Or, if a boat is old, the owner might not be able to save enough money to buy a new one. On the other hand, a rayitu is able to save enough money due to a series of good catches that allows him to buy second hand equipment and become a saraṅgu himself. Thus we find two levels of flexibility in the economic organization of the Vāḍabaliḷa: fluctuation in the composition of net groups and upward and downward social mobility.

The basic structures of equality that are obtained through factors such as absence of private property in the sea, distribution and uncertainty in fishing, as described above, are limited in Orissa. Due to the commercialization of fishing, the Vāḍabaliḷa have become dependent on outside merchants and entrepreneurs who invest in fishing as money lenders. For an advance sum of money paid to a boat owner (and redistributed to the rayitu), a fishing crew commits itself to sell the entire prawn catch to this merchant at a lower price. Furthermore, the commercialization of fishing has led to an upward mobility on different levels and to the consolidation of income differences that couldn't be evened out anymore. Due to the high yields of prawns between 1965 and 1975, a class of rich fishermen emerged and took an intermediate position between merchants and the majority of boat owners. Now, after the decline of prawn yields, differences in wealth are beginning to even out again.

The last feature characterizing fishing as a mode of production is the perishableness of fish. Fish had either to be sold immediately after landing (and then the responsibility is with somebody else) or it has to be processed immediately (dried) by the fishing community. This leads in most peasant fishing societies to a marked sexual division of labor, with men catching the fish and women taking control of it after its landing. On the arrival of the fishermen, the women gather on the seashore and in Andhra Pradesh the catch is given over to either the mother or the wife of the owner(s), and she is responsible for further procedures and for the price she obtains. In Orissa the situation is different. Fish is sold on the beach by the fishermen directly to the merchants or more often to their intermediaries. The Vāḍabaliḷa-women act as such intermediaries in Orissa, their income being the profit they make from buying fish from the fishermen and selling it to the merchants. These two complementary spheres in the economic organization (production vs trading) has led to a high degree of economic independence among women. They are able to care for themselves and their children and we find a considerable number of matrifocal families where a widowed or divorced woman lives in a household together with her unmarried children.

Until now we have argued that there are certain ecological and economic constraints in fishing that lead to specific relations of production among the Vāḍabaliḷa. Despite uneven distribution of fishing equipment and status differences of owners and non-owners, we find a basically egalitarian form

of organization with no elaborate hierarchical or authoritarian structures in fishing units and with little continuous dependence between non-owners and owners.

An outline of kinship organization shows structures which are similarly based on principles of flexibility and lack of authority. The Vāḍabaliḷa are divided into named patrilineal clans, which have to be regarded as 'dispersed clans' whose members don't recognize a common ancestor. Membership in exogamous clans solely serves the purpose of structuring affinal relationships, whereas the lineage is a patrilineal descent group, whose members recognize their relationship to a common ancestor over 3 to 4 generations. In Andhra Pradesh, the lineage has to be seen as a corporate group with economic, political and ritual functions. The lineage members act at least nominally as an economic group with the lineage elder organizing shore seine fishing. Moreover, he acts as political representative of his lineage in the village council and he is responsible for the worship of the lineage goddess and the lineage ancestors.

In Orissa, the lineage is getting replaced by 'minimal lineages', consisting of all the members of a lineage who came from Andhra Pradesh. They function as social units to a limited extent. Since there is no shore seine fishing among the Vāḍabaliḷa in Orissa, minimal lineages do not act as economic units. Besides that, there is no elaborate co-locality in the settlement pattern among members of the same minimal lineage. Moreover, due to the mobility, there is a constant fluctuation in the composition of minimal lineages. The present members however worship their lineage and village goddesses during the year, for which they erect bamboo poles (jaṇḍā) on the seashore, symbolizing the goddess.

A certain cohesion can only be attributed to the nuclear family, whereas extended families are of temporary character. Married sons tend to live together in a linear extended family as long as their parents are alive and if they are joint owners of boat and net, but they will definitely split after the death of their parents. Since there is no economic necessity to form strong corporate groups beyond the nuclear family, authority structures between different generations are not as marked as they are in agrarian Indian castes. A father, even if he owns a boat, still has only limited authority over his sons who can easily join another net group after a family dispute. During the migration period, many linear extended

families split up temporarily and their members join other net groups, the reason being not only an economic advantage or economic necessities, but it has also to be seen as opportunity to solve underlying dissents among family members and such a separation is sometimes extended beyond the fishing season in Orissa.

Like most South Indian castes, the Vādabaliya practice preferential bilinear cross-cousin-marriage and elder sister's daughter-marriage. As a symmetrical exchange system, it fundamentally results in equality of status among both exchange parties. Wife givers and consequently women in general are of equal status to wife takers, i. e. men. This is shown in the gifts that are exchanged at a marriage and in the women's participation in the marriage procedure. The bride price given by the groom's party equals approximately the gifts and dowry given by the bride's party. The organization of the marriage procedure and the formal gift exchanging are carried out by women. The importance of women in marriage transactions can also be seen in the expressions 'amma illu' (mother's house) and 'atta illu' (mother-in-law's house), which denote the consanguineal and affinal households respectively.

Thus the complementary status of women and men that has been shown in the economic organization also exists in the social organization. Whereas mainly women decide about affinal relationships and through their market relations keep up bonds with the 'outside world', it is mainly the men who take 'internal' political decisions, concerning village affairs, disputes, etc. The village council as a political institution is formed in Andhra Pradesh by lineage elders. It has mainly normative and organizational functions (divorce, religious festivals) and only a limited importance in conflict solving. Very often disputes are not settled by the village council. Flexibility in different social and economic units allows relationships to be broken off rather than looking for compromise. Besides that, the political organization in the settlements in Orissa has even less integrative functions. The settlement in Puri is politically organized into 16 barph, each barph having a representative. This organization goes back to 1952, when the first Vādabaliya settled in Puri. The fishermen committed themselves to 3 merchants, who bought and retailed their catch. The groups which formed around each merchant were called barph ('ice'). The barph of today are loosely formed according to this pattern, although membership in a barph follows different criteria (kin-

ship ties, belonging to the same village), and is not confined to a commitment with a certain merchant. The leaders of the barph as a political body have only organizational functions concerning all the Vāḍabaliḷa living there permanently or temporarily. As individuals they might be called to settle a dispute depending on their personal integrity and reputation. But any other person with these qualities and not in the position of a leader might be called as well. Thus in Orissa we find a society which is marked by economic stratification due to commercial factors, but, on the other hand, is marked by little political cohesion.

Another sphere with a wide range of different specialists showing the different fields of responsibility of both men and women is the worship of deities. Besides the dāsuḍu (priest), who is a Vāḍabaliḷa by caste, there is the lineage elder who takes part in preparing and performing the worship for the lineage and the village goddesses. Gangamma, the goddess of the sea, is worshipped through weekly offerings by the boat owner and his wife and sometimes with the help of the dāsuḍu. Besides these rather technical ritual specialists whose task is mainly to worship the goddess through offerings, there is another kind of ritual specialist, the pātaralu, a woman who gets possessed by the goddess. On a specific day every week, a pātaralu can get possessed by the goddess, if so requested by the villagers, and, while in trance, answer their questions and give advice. Her advice is felt necessary rather often and on a regular basis, usually once every week, so that this has to be seen as another form of worshipping the goddess with women as ritual specialists in a specific sense.

We have argued that the maritime society of the Vāḍabaliḷa is characterized by fundamentally egalitarian structures in the sense that economic and social relations are subject to fluctuation which prevents existing differences in wealth and status from becoming permanent and from being perpetuated over generations. In addition, family and kinship relations are lacking authority structures since family members are able to break off relations rather easily. In the course of seasonal migration, political institutions of the Vāḍabaliḷa have lost their legal importance. Flexibility and fluctuation in social groups are encouraged by spatial mobility. Among the Vāḍabaliḷa spatial mobility occurred first of all due to economic reasons, but besides that, it is used as a highly effective

social mechanism and the fission and fusion of social groups does not always follow economic reasons. Secondly, like in hunter and gatherer societies, spatial mobility in maritime societies is made possible by environmental conditions, i. e. access to the sea is guaranteed in Orissa as well.

Fishing as an extractive mode of production is one of the general features in maritime societies distinguishing fishermen from 'landmen', i.e. people who live and work in a terrestrial environment. As long as every member of a maritime society has equal access to resources, we find fundamentally egalitarian structures in fishing societies. This is supported by the fact that fishing is a highly unpredictable enterprise which results in potential upward and downward social mobility. However, these fundamentally egalitarian structures are vulnerable and subject to change due to a more complex and capital intensive technology, which leads to higher income differences, formation of experts and consequently hierarchical structures. The perishableness of fish and the necessity for immediate processing have led to a marked sexual division of labor in all maritime societies. Women take care of processing and marketing the catch. Due to commercialization, the position of market women can be transferred either into a position as entrepreneurs with a significant amount of money at their disposal, or their position gets reduced into mere intermediaries between fishermen and merchants. In any case, the sexual division of labor correlates with a marked geographical separation of women and men for most of the day which leads to complementary spheres of responsibility and social relations between men and women.

Another feature distinguishing fishermen from 'landmen' are the extreme working conditions at sea. In the literature of Maritime Anthropology, it is stated frequently that the risk of working in an unpredictable sea, the uncertainty about the daily catch, the limited space available on the boats result in a distinct 'ethos disposition' or 'maritime ethos' among fishermen. Fishermen are said to be aggressive, boisterous, erratic, ambivalent and independent - all expressions of their extreme working conditions. Besides that, they are of 'fundamental joyfulness', because there is always confidence in tomorrow, even if there is no catch today. The risk and uncertainty in their working conditions might be overstressed from a terrestrial point of view; nevertheless, being independent and ambivalent is also an expression of flexibility and fluctuation, features which are essential necessities of a maritime economy.

Verwandtschaftstermini

aḍaboḍuchu	HeZ
aḷuḍu	DH, 'der, der webt'
amma	Mutter
peddamma	MeZ
cinnamma	MyZ
ammamma	MM
anna	eB
appa	eZ
ayya	F
peddayya	FeB
cinnayya	FyB
ayyamma	FM
bandhuvu	affinale Verwandte
bāva	eMBS, eFZS
cellelu / celli	yZ
kōḍalu	SW
koḍuku	S
kūturu	D
māma	HF, WF, MB
mammā	MM, MFM, FM, FFM
manumaḍu	SS, DS, SSS, DSS
manumarālu	SD, DD, SDD, DDD
maradalu	yBW, WyZ, yMBD, yFZD
maridi	yMBS, yFZS
mēnatta	FZ, MBW
mēnamāma	MB, FZH
mēnalluḍu	ZS
mēnakōḍalu	ZD
tammuḍu	yB
tāta	FF, FFF, MF, MFF
vadine	eMBD, eFZD, eBW

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