

**JUSTICE K. SUKUMARAN**  
Former Judge, Kerala - Bombay High Courts

'JYOTIS'  
Market Road, Kochi-682018  
Phone : 0484-2390625, 2392625  
Mobile : 09947665444  
E-mail : justicesukumaran@yahoo.co.uk

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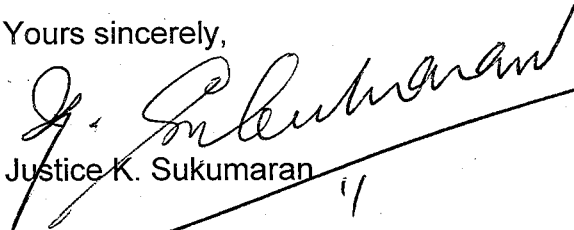
Dear Director,

I am enclosing herewith a modified draft of my inaugural speech delivered at CMFRI Hall on 28.04.2019, when the scientists congregated, to make a memorable event, (accompanied by a delicacy dinner).

'A poor thing, yet my own' is not justification to enough <sup>to trouble</sup> a busy intellectual. My main object is to receive your valuable comments.

With warm regards,

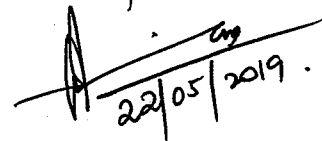
Yours sincerely,

  
Justice K. Sukumaran

Director,  
CMRFI, Ernakulam

Inaugural Speech delivered by  
Hon. Justice K. Sukumaran during the  
Silver Jubilee function of the Association  
of Retired Fisheries Personnel, in CMFRI, Kochi.

Discussed with the Hon. Justice  
Sukumaran Sir. Permission was  
given to upload the speech in  
eprints@cmfri

  
22/05/2019

## **Eminent Fish Scientist**

(Inaugural speech of Justice K. Sukumaran at RFRA meeting held on 27.04.2019 at CMFRI, Ernakulam)

I am happy to be among the scientists. Those who specialise in exploring the deep seas and oceans.

Who will not be?

I have one caveat to the reference to the Association in the invitation - "Retired". Scientists never retire.

I was lucky to have been associated with your tribe when I was Legal Counsel of the Agricultural university and Kaleeswaran and Celas were Vice-Chancellors. Fisheries was then under the Agricultural University.

The fisheries scientists were very generous to me. As a judge of the High Court, I was invited to inaugurate a National Seminar.

The connection continued. I was honoured to be in a function held in the Fisheries University, organised by Pandit Karuppan Chair of that University. There I could meet, besides Vice Chancellor and Registrar and young students and teachers, many eminent fisheries scientists like Dr. U. K. Gopalan and Dr. K.S. Purushan.

Inauguration of a function is comparatively a light engagement. There have been occasions where the invited personality merely states:

"I inaugurate the function".

That is perhaps the reflection of an old saying: "Speech is silver; silence is golden".

To tell you about the history and working of fisheries is an exercise in futility. It is no use carrying 'coal to New Castle' – as the old saying in English reminds one.

The Indian concept of life is to trace its evolution to FISH. 'Matsya, Koorma, Varaha and so on. Matsya purana is an important epic in India. The Matsya purana is made mention of in books on poets (like sage poets of India by Sreekumari Ramachandran and spiritual treatises like Rajan Perumana's book 'How Far from Buddha').

There are very many pleasing descriptions of fish in the world literature. One need not go beyond waters close to the Kerala coast. Asan describes the agile eyes of beautiful Vasavadatta and employs the simile, "like a shining fish deposit in a glass bottle (sphadika kuppiyilitta Paral meen pole). Even those who fly along the high and distance sky, find out the fresh fish playing along the surface of the sea (Pacha meen kand parunthu pole). The ice of the fisher woman are compared to the bright

blue lotus springing from under the muddy bottom of the stream or pond. ( Chelotha valathi than neela neeradha nayana thumbinte vamballayo ). The term fish eyed is taken as synonymous as a beautiful girl with eyes resembling the fish.

Matsya purana is a renowned epic. Vallathole dealt with it, for the benefit of all those who are not proficient in the glorious language – Sanskrit.

The most meaningful romantic poem in the World, SAKUNTALA, presents a fish and a fisherman as facilitators of the unveiling of a great truth crucial for a king-Dushyantha – and his neglected wife (Sakuntala). The ring presented by the King as an identification mark for confirming that the girl entering the Palace his own wife) was lost while bathing in the river, was swallowed by a FISH and preserved in its stomach was taken out by the FISHERMAN who was a successful angler. That salvaged a hermit –girl and led to the discovery of Bharatha, the Founder-ruler of India that is Bharath).

The eyes of the fish become red with the fleeting of the minutes after the catch. That is the picture deftly described in a poem K.Radhakrishnan Edapally a meaningful picture of a Sardine fish and of a fisher monger. It has a moral behind.

All religions have fascination for the azure sea, and its unfathomable depth. Poets have imagined above being half woman and half fish , the merman William Morris has composed a fine poem, vividly describing the forsaken Merman surface of the ocean in which he lives with his children but without the wife, as

The sea is a place where

“Wild, white, horses play,

Champ and chafe and toss in the spray”.

The ocean has “a ceiling of amber”

A pavement of pearl.

One should survey not merely the surface but must go to the incalculable depth of the ocean. That was a message Jesus gave to the fishermen who looked upto him for guidance and light. Going deep has its significance even beyond the fishing operation. When you desire to have knowledge, the same guidance is helpful. That was why poet Pope, warned:

“A little knowledge is dangerous thing

Dive deep....”

That ‘unfathomable depth’ has received the pride of place in an international prayer poem ‘Daivadasakam’, composed by the great sage-poet Sree Narayana Guru. The

God – not any named God – is the ultimate destination. He is referred to the very deep ocean and the prayer is, St. Augustine put, that the praying person shall totally submerge in his place.

Eminent poets of Malayalam and lyricists like P.Bhaskaran and Vayalar Ramavarma have presented the sea shore and the stream sides with glittering beauty. "The Arabian sea is a bridegroom and the waves are beauteous brides".

The film Chemmeen refer to the fisherman who plunge and pen their little boat to the distant waters. They affectionately addressed as adventurous one sailing across the sea, and collecting the unseen gold in its bottom.

Vayalar Rama Varma paid attention to the chaste and pure water of Aluva river. She is portrayed as one with thousand anklets, and flowing with beauteous sound.

The sea shore is presented as the land like of boundless distance.

Oceans have attracted the lawmen and judges as well. It was a description of river Thamraparni that helped the Madras High Court judge who was, as well a scholar in Sanskrit. To decide a dispute between India and Ceylon regarding the pearl fisheries in the Mannar straits.

"Thamraparni samethasya mukthakaram Sagara sangamaha".

The stanza assisted in the precise location of the pearl fisheries, " the pearl fisheries at the confluence of the river Thamrapani". It was a sacred river flowing alone the southern part of India.

It is said that the islanders even based their Laws on occupational connections with the boundless sea. When the father has as his sole asset a fishing boat, a partition by metes and bounds was well nigh impossible, when there were more than one son. The law of primogeniture is stated to be based on he necessity of a sensible partition of a paternal asset. The eldest son gets it in full was a sensible and practical solution. (A section of Kerala Brahmins, the Namboothiris, too adopted the practice: only the eldest son can have religiously recognised marriage. The younger sons can have only a loose connection with damsels of other denominations lower in the social ender.

All civilizations respected the holy rivers.

The Egyptians used to take a solemn oath before their bath, that they will not pollute the river, by having a dip in it.

When the British Engineers attempted to introduce water supply system in the Ganges, there was resistance in the religion fanatic who lamented that it was " the rape of Mother Ganges".

The woman who carried a their heads, the bright but heavy bronze vessels water filled on their head, overruled the decision of their husbands. As is usual and universal, the wives ultimately emerged successful. Banaras and very many cities on the banks of long Ganges switched over to water supply system, with main pipes, house connection and water taps, and comfortable closets.

Western world too gave prominence to Fish and fisheries.

Recently, I read a short book. 'The Most Interesting stories on Fish'--

I was surprised to learn that books on fish and fisheries, now number more than ten thousand!

Great writers like Ernest Hemingway have a reputation for their literary relation, with sea and fish. "The Old Man and the Sea" is not merely a story.

Even in Malayalam literature, there are many books dealing with fish as the theme. Some like 'Chemmen' of Thakazhy have connection with the sea and ocean. The romance is between a beautiful fish girl, Karuthamma with a handsome fish vendor, Pareekkutty. The real fisherman Palani has a tragic end in an unmanageable whirlpool in the furious ocean.

A beautiful fish girl has enticed a serious sage. The fruitful result was the birth of Vyasa the author of the greatest epic in the world – Mahabharatha.

Despite this beauty presentation, fisher women earned a pejorative reference, in glorious books. Macaulay alluded to the fisherwoman's tongue, in his History of England. Possibly, the stress and strain of the occupation made them foul in the language. That feature was noted by the eminent poet and social reformer Pandit Karuppan, born in the fishermen community, but more learned in Sanskrit than many Brahmin scholars. He rendered yeomen service in erasing the objectionable habit altogether from the community.

Many writers have extolled the virtues of the fishing rod.

Is it possible for a person to hold in his hands a pound of butter for an hour? Difficult, if not impossible. But then, the angler carries in his hands the fishing rod, the line, and the bait, for more hours, with intense concentration. The brain function is riveted to a single point – the movement of a fish towards the bait. Even Prime Ministers of England have waited for hours on the bank of a stream or a river for the rare luck of baiting a fish. It gives a moral. The glory of patience, and the value of concentration.

Possibly, such affinity for concentration, must have led to the appreciation of yoga, fishermen. Stephen Callahan's book, a New York times best seller, "Adrift" detailing seventy six days lost at sea contains four references to 'YOGA'. It is surprising but true that at page 190, the book gives the details of the steps to be performed perfectly for that exercise of body and of mind.

That book enumerates a large number of fish varieties, sharks and orcas, dorados, and propoises. Some sharks are as long as 25 feet and weigh four tonnes. The Flying Fish has a head like an upside down triangle. It has a tasty flesh – soft and pinkish white. The Trigerfish floats in the sea like an island. Dorados move fast. Dorados are like some good humans, they travel in male and female pairs.

In short there is an unimaginable variety in the vast wilderness of the ocean.

A fine fiction, made in the background of the world famous Athirappilly water falls, had a curious title, 'Manjakkuri' (the Golden Catfish), the affectionate addressing of affection by the experiences of a lover to his fiancée.

Some secrets on handling the fish are also available from the books. You have to press the eyes to paralyse the fish. In the end there is good reference to man's insatiable appetite and exploitation of the sea. Law had stepped in to avert a resultant calamity of indiscriminate fishing. In Kerala, laws were made in early days to salvage the little fish by restrictions on the size of the meshes of the net. Though challenged on constitutional grounds, the law was upheld by the High Court.

There was intervention by the High Court, when the backwaters and rivers were fully choked with unauthorised Chinese nets. There were imaginative officials in the Fisheries department at one time, (like Parameswaran, Deputy Director) who struggled hard to stop the virtual disappearance of the fishing population. It requires strong political will, to stop the exploitation, which will kill the hen that lays the golden egg.

Many unauthorised projections in rivers and channels were removed by the angry Nature in the recent floods. It is for you, scientists, to plead, and if need be to pressurise erring elements from bringing about a catastrophe not merely to the tasty fish, but also the consuming humans.

There are complaints about destructive fishing by foreign travellers although there is a seasonal ban on fishing on Indian fishermen.

The danger of industrial pollution of water was indicated early by the fishing population around Japan. The lesson was learned very soon by the English people. The people there were careful to notice the smallest danger to the fishing population. This is reflected in a pithy passage in an environmental classic. "A few dead fish will result in many letters to the Times and many cases in the Courts" – It was so observed.

Lord Lawton, appreciatively noted in one of his judgements, how Thames which looked like a treacle later had crystal clear waters in which shoals of fish were seen.

There are complaints about destructive fishing by foreign trawlers, although there is seasonal ban on fishing on Indian shores by Indian fishermen.

It is for the scientific community to continue its educational endeavours in a community where some are guided not merely by the need but even by the greed.

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