

## BOOK

# Mukkuvar Women

*Gender, Hegemony and Capitalist Transformation in a South Indian Fishing Community* by Kalpana Ram. Premier volume in "Women in Asia Series", published on behalf of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, by Allen and Unwin; Zed Press, and by Kali Press for Women, New Delhi (1992)

This summary is based on information from the following website: [http://www.anth.mq.edu.au/staff/staff\\_kram\\_research.html](http://www.anth.mq.edu.au/staff/staff_kram_research.html)

Selected for Choice's annual list of Outstanding Academic Books in 1993, the book *Mukkuvar Women* was the product of Kalpana Ram's doctoral field work conducted among the Mukkuvars, a Catholic fishing community in the west coast of south India. It remains a landmark piece of scholarship on the question of development as a form of exclusion and inclusion in relation to women and minority groups in India.



Western scholarly writings on caste and Hinduism tend to assume that these frameworks have identical meanings for all social groups in India. This book questions such representations from the standpoint of one among the many groups excluded from the dominant perspective. Kalpana Ram explores the ambiguities and complexities of caste, religion, class and gender among the Mukkuvars.

These coastal villages have been shaped by distinctive elements: a history of colonization by Portuguese Jesuits, the work of fishing, and an unusual sexual division of labour. In addition, the micro-politics of power within the villages is being redefined by the new place of the fishing industry within the world economic order. Against this background, Ram traces the participation of Mukkuvar men and women in the construction of a culture that cannot be easily classified as Catholic or Hindu, peasant or proletarian.

The research documented the erosion of the capacity of women in the fishing community to negotiate a much stronger position for themselves than is the norm in caste society in India, even while men are included in wider forms of mobility and labour.

The broad scope of *Mukkuvar Women* covers questions of gender and migration, capitalist development, goddess worship, healing, and the consciousness of minorities. These issues are discussed through a variety of critical approaches. In her analysis the author draws on Marxist, feminist and anthropological methodologies, while evaluating blind spots in each canon. ■

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 "To write of the Mukkuvars of Kanyakumari is to write of difference."  
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