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ISLANDERS

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**An Andaman Islander shooting fish with bow and arrow  
on the reefs at Port Blair**

*Frontispiece*

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THE ANDAMAN  
ISLANDERS

by

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TO  
DR A. C. HADDON, F.R.S.  
AND  
DR W. H. R. RIVERS, F.R.S.

TO WHOSE INSTRUCTION AND KIND ENCOURAGEMENT  
IS DUE WHATEVER VALUE IT MAY POSSESS, THIS  
WORK OF APPRENTICESHIP IS DEDICATED.

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## PREFACE

THIS book is based on research carried out in the Andaman Islands in the years 1906 to 1908 as Anthony Wilkin Student in Ethnology of the University of Cambridge. In its original form the monograph was presented as a fellowship thesis at Trinity College. The work of rewriting it was interrupted by a period of field research in Western Australia and was only completed in 1914. In recent years I have been hoping to find leisure to rewrite and condense the whole book, but this is not possible at the present time, so that it is here reprinted without change save for the addition of a few pages on the Andaman languages.

In 1908–9, when the writing of this book was undertaken, anthropologists and ethnologists were concerned either with formulating hypotheses as to the origins of institutions or with attempts to provide hypothetical reconstructions of the details of culture history. In both types of enquiry the historical point of view was dominant. It was largely from this point of view that I approached the study of the Andaman Islanders and attempted, by an investigation of physical characters, language and culture, to make a hypothetical reconstruction of the history of the Andamans and of the Negritos in general. The appendix on technology in this book is an example of what was intended. During the course of my work a systematic examination of the methods available for such reconstructions of the unknown past convinced me that it is only in extremely rare instances that we can ever approach demonstrable conclusions and that speculative history cannot give us results of any real importance for the understanding of human life and culture. The work of the historical ethnologists of the last twenty-two years has only served to confirm me in that opinion.

While ethnologists were mostly thinking in terms of origins and history, as indeed many still are, there was developing out

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of the work of the French sociologists a different conception of the utilization of ethnological data for the understanding of human life. Perhaps the best brief definition of that approach is contained in the following passage written by the late Henri Hubert in 1904. “Nous disons donc que toute explication des phénomènes religieux doit être cherchée dans la série même des phénomènes. Il faudra considérer, s’il s’agit d’un mythe, non pas l’idée problématique qui suggéra les images qui le composent à leur premier assembleur, mais, entre autres choses, les conditions de temps et de lieu, les circonstances qui le rappellent régulièrement, rituellement à la mémoire d’un groupe d’hommes associés et les gestes que leur commande cette pensée présente. S’il s’agit d’un rite, on considérera non pas l’intention de celui qui l’exécute, mais les effets, quels qu’ils soient, images suggérées, modifications de rapports et de qualités, qui le suivent nécessairement. Le premier résultat de pareilles observations sera de faire rattacher les faits particuliers à des faits plus généraux...Mécanisme d’une part, effets produits ou fonction de l’autre, telles seront les bases de l’explication des faits religieux....Il ne s’agit en somme que de retrouver dans les faits particuliers des formes très générales d’activité. On ne sort pas du connaissable<sup>1</sup>.”

It was the method thus defined by Hubert that I attempted to apply to the beliefs and customs of the Andaman Islanders in the fifth and sixth chapters of this book. These chapters deal with what I have called the “meaning” and the “function” of rites and myths, but no definitions of those terms are given. It seems desirable to supply them.

Just in the sense that words have meanings, so do some other things in culture—customary gestures, ritual actions and abstinctions, symbolic objects, myths—they are expressive signs. The meaning of a word, a gesture, a rite, lies in what it expresses, and this is determined by its associations within a system of ideas, sentiments and mental attitudes. Ethnological field-workers have often been content to record myths and describe ceremonies

<sup>1</sup> Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Manuel d’Histoire des Religions*, Paris, 1904, p. xxxviii.



without concerning themselves with the meanings, with what these things express. The excuse for this procedure is that meanings are difficult to discover and that there is no standardized technique for their discovery. There is a danger that the ethnologist may interpret the beliefs of a native people not by a reference to *their* mental life but by reference to his own. My investigations led me to the conclusion that this was what Mr Man had done in his interpretation of some of the Andamanese myths. I did not question his records of what the natives told him but only the meanings that he attached to their statements. It therefore seemed to me necessary for ethnology to provide itself with a method of determining meanings as effective and free from “personal equation” as the methods by which a linguist determines the meanings of words or morphemes in a newly studied language. Ethnology is faced with the dilemma that it must either give up for ever all hope of understanding such things as myth or ritual, or it must develop proper methods for determining as accurately as can be what meanings they have for the people to whose culture they belong.

The notion of function in ethnology rests on the conception of culture as an adaptive mechanism by which a certain number of human beings are enabled to live a social life as an ordered community in a given environment. Adaptation has two aspects, external and internal. The external aspect is seen in the relation of the society to its geographical environment. The internal aspect is seen in the controlled relations of individuals within the social unity. It is convenient to use the term “social integration” to cover all the phenomena of internal adaptation. One of the fundamental problems of a science of culture or of human society is therefore the problem of the nature of social integration. This problem can only be approached by the study of a number of different cultures from this specific point of view, by an intensive investigation of each culture as an adaptive and integrative mechanism and a comparison one with another of as many variant types as possible.

The discovery of the integrative function of an institution, usage, or belief is to be made through the observation of its effects, and these are obviously in the first place effects on individuals, or their life, their thoughts, their emotions. Not all such effects are significant, or at least equally so. Nor is it the immediate effects with which we are finally concerned, but the more remote effects upon the social cohesion and continuity.

Thus “meaning” and “function” are two different but related things. We cannot discuss the social function of mythology or ritual without an understanding of the meanings of particular myths and ritual actions. In the two theoretical chapters of this book the discussion of meanings and the discussion of function are carried on together. Perhaps it would have been an advantage to separate them.

Strictly speaking the solution of any important functional problem requires the use of a comparative method, not however the juxtaposition of superficially similar particular usages or beliefs from two or more different cultures which is often spoken of as the comparative method. We formulate a hypothesis as to the nature and function of ritual or of myth. This requires to be tested, and may ultimately be proved, by a sufficient series of studies of cultures of different type, in each of which the whole system of ritual or of myth has to be considered in its relation to the culture as a whole. In this work I sought to formulate some hypotheses and test them by the simple culture of the Andamans. Later work in other culture regions would lead me to restate in somewhat different terms what is here written, particularly in the sixth chapter on myth. But I have found sufficient verification for the main hypothesis to encourage me to continue with the work of testing and developing it.

A. R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
1932

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