

samudra

DOSSIER

**Women in Fisheries Series
No. 2**

Women First

**Report of the Women in Fisheries
Programme of ICSF in India**

Volume I



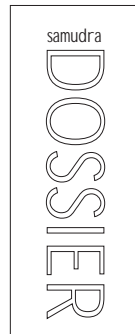
**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
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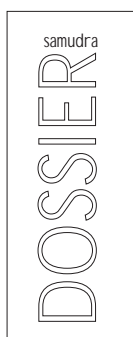
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Preface

This SAMUDRA Dossier is devoted to Women in Fisheries in India. It comprises two parts. The first contains factual information on women's involvement in fisheries in each of the nine maritime States of India. The second part is a series of articles related to women in fisheries which will give a more analytical understanding of the problems of women and their efforts to organize.

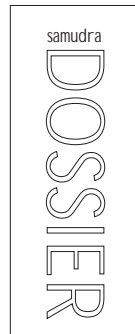
This Dossier is an acknowledgement of the role women have played in sustaining coastal communities through thick and thin. It is an effort to make the work and the problems of women more visible. It hopes to reach policymakers who, though far removed from the lives and problems of these women, may realize that women in fisheries are an integral part of our economy and, therefore, need to be included in development plans.

It is also hoped that this Dossier will be a means of informing the larger mainstream workers' movement, and women's and ecological movements, of the existence and struggles of women in fisheries, so that these women may be drawn in to the broader movement for change.

This Dossier is being published in two volumes. This, Volume I, contains details of Women in Fisheries in the different States of India. Volume II contains tabulated data relating to women's involvement in different aspects of fisheries and fish-related activity. Most of the material for this Dossier was gathered between 1993 and 1995, as part of ICSF's international Women in Fisheries programme.

Aleyamma Vijayan
and Nalini Nayak

Trivandrum, India
October 1996



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Acknowledgements

Collecting firsthand information on women in fisheries in India is not an easy task. The coastline itself is over 6,000 km long and much of it is away from any trunk and motorable roads. The data collection has not been exhaustive. Yet, what is recorded here is an honest estimate and can provide the basis for further work. The islands of Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar have not been included in this study.

A large group of people made this work possible. Our thanks are due, first, to the members of the National Fishworkers' Forum, particularly those in the state units, who facilitated contact wherever possible. A large number of NGOs also assisted in the process—their names are acknowledged alongside the data they helped furnish. Some of the case studies were also written by other colleagues who were involved and interested in this effort. Special mention must be made of Mercy Alexander and Sr. Alphonsa who enthused us with their unending energy and desire to reach out to women. This work, therefore, is the result of a collective effort and would not have been possible otherwise.

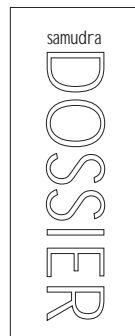
Despite the fact that the names of only a few women are mentioned in the case studies, many more spent time talking with us and sharing their experiences. This work is dedicated to all these women who remain invisible in our fast changing society.

A special thanks to Vijayalakshmi, who transcribed handwritten notes into the computer, Prema, who patiently made editorial corrections, and Mary Mathai, who tabulated the data from the numerous data sheets that came in an assortment of handwritings.

We ourselves have learnt a great deal during these travels and contact with coastal communities. Besides always being astonished at the way poor women carry their burdens, we acknowledge the inner strength these women have to transcend the harshness of daily existence and to affirm life. We have been inspired by them and desire to be in solidarity with them.

These travels have also exposed us to the ecologically diverse and rich coastal zone of our country. The ongoing destruction of this sensitive area is visible everywhere. Wisdom and courage will be required to alter this course. We firmly believe that this will be possible if and when those who nurture life are included in the decision-making process of our country.

Nalini Nayak and Aleyamma Vijayan



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Part I

Introduction

Over the last few years, the importance of fisheries and women in fisheries has gradually entered the mainstream of analysis and discussion. This has happened because fishworkers, especially those in the artisanal sector, have brought their struggle for survival to the open, unwilling to be trampled on by the money-making powers that be.

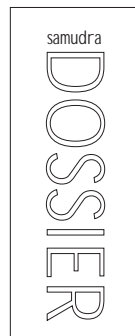
For the government, fisheries is one component of the agricultural sector. It is considered an area that has income-earning potential. The data that exists on fisheries relates mainly to the catch figures. There is some gross data that is collected on the craft and gear as part of the census data. More recently, census data may have gross estimates of the fishing households and the number of active fishermen. Rarely are fisherwomen ever mentioned. Such data collection, of course, fails to regard fishing as a way of life with its own traditions and culture, and the integrated division of labour which makes the fishery sustainable.

With the decline in marine fish production, the new emphasis on coastal aquaculture to meet the growing demand for fish heralded the blue revolution. It did not take long before coastal communities reacted against the destruction of coastal lands and disruption of their lives. Aquaculture tore into the very fabric of village life, contaminating potable water, blocking access to the sea and the interior, privatizing common lands earlier used by village people, and introducing a money-minded high-tech culture into rural areas.

India, not including the Union Territories of the Andaman and Nicobar, and Lakshadweep islands, has a coastline of around 6,000 km. India also has numerous rivers, many of which are significantly large, offering a source of livelihood to inland people. There are around 6 million actual fishermen in this country (Ministry of Agriculture, 1994), which translates into a population of around 36 million who depend directly on fishing for a livelihood.

Sustaining these communities has been the task of women, who not only play the role of wife and mother, but who contribute substantially in many ways to the income of the family. As is true in other sectors, the contribution of women in the fisheries sector is not taken seriously by the State. Not only does the State not have any data on women but rarely, if at all, are any budget allocations made to support the work of women in fisheries.

Today, women are still involved in fish-related activities, although their tasks have become more difficult. Tasks performed by women in marine and inland fisheries, by stage of harvest, is given overleaf:



Pre-harvest

- Marine sector
 - making and mending nets
 - preparing hooks with bait
- Inland sector
 - pond preparation
 - seed collection
 - feeding

Harvest

- Marine sector
 - netting in the estuaries
 - clam and mussel picking
 - collecting seaweed
 - pearl diving

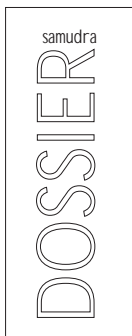
Post-harvest

- Marine and inland sectors
 - fish vending
 - processing, i.e. salting and drying
 - oil extraction
 - as cheap labour in the processing plants

In fishing communities, it is the women who exchange fish for money and food. Often this means transporting fish over a long distance in difficult circumstances. Women have to cope not only with the uncertainties of the market but also with a perishable commodity that can easily spoil. Owing largely to the courage and ingenious minds of these women, fish, which is a source of protein, has been accessible to inland communities. In this way, whatever is sold comes back as income for the family.

Before the coming of ice, not much fish was sold fresh. Even now, the only fish available to many people is dry fish. For example, hundreds of people in upland Kerala and in the high ranges of the northeast have access only to dry fish. In fact, the trade routes for dry fish are extremely ancient as, earlier, drying was the only way in which fish could be transported and preserved. Drying fish was one of the main activities of the coastal communities and this was an integral part of family life. All the catch that could not be immediately sold was dried.

Fish was dried in a variety of ways, namely, direct sun-drying of small varieties of fish, cleaning, filleting, salting and drying of larger varieties. In times of bulk landing of ribbon fish, the fish were buried in the earth in deep pits, interspersed with salt, left to lie for a couple of weeks, and then taken out and dried. There are not many areas where fish has been smoked or fermented on a large scale, although some pockets do exist.



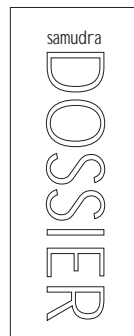
The level of hygiene in drying practices varied from place to place, depending on, for example, whether the fish is dried directly on the sea sand or spread on coconut leaf mats and then dried. Later, coir matting was introduced and is used extensively in Maharashtra even today. Another common sight in Maharashtra and West Bengal is the fish 'hanging lines', used mainly to dry the delicious 'Bombay duck' and also ribbon fish.

As in all sectors, there have been great changes in the dry fish sector also. It has moved from being an activity of the fishing household, which initially dried the excess catch, to becoming a mini-industry. Large merchants buy fish in bulk and hire women to dry them. Earlier, these women came from the coastal communities themselves, but now the wage labour supply is a spillover from the agricultural sector, and includes hundreds of tribal women who seek some means of earning a livelihood as they become progressively marginalized from their forests and lands. This does not mean that women from the community are not engaged in fish drying on a self-employed basis. There are many women who continue to do this as well, but the practice now is to travel away from the home village to landing centres, buy fish, transport it home and then dry and store it for sale.

Another big change is in the quality of fish that is dried and the purpose for which it is used. Large sections of people at all the trawler fish landing centres are engaged in the drying of trawler by-catch. This is the so-called 'trash' fish, i.e otherwise consumable varieties caught undersized by the trawl nets. Even the way this fish is handled has changed considerably. There are now large transport carriers which transport fish to drying sites where the fish is spread on the sand and turned over periodically with rakes. The workers walk on the spread fish to rake it up and, when dried, it is raked into big heaps and stored in sacks for transportation. This dried fish no longer goes for human consumption. It goes to feed the fishmeal plants.

Finally, machines are being introduced to dry the fish. In areas like Junput in West Bengal, where thousands of coastal people crave for employment, a large fish dryer has been introduced by the Department of Fisheries with an investment of Rs30 lakhs (one lakh = 100,000; one crore = 100 lakhs or 10 million) and a capacity of 20 tonnes per day.

Today, despite marine fish becoming more and more scarce, fisheries, with its open access, provides employment for people losing their work in the agricultural sector. It is a mere existence for survival—these communities do not even have access to education, health facilities and proper housing.



Internationally, as well, fisheries is in a crisis. Certain fisheries have been closed indefinitely while others are closely managed and monitored. Excessive harvesting with over-efficient technology has been the reason for overfishing. In the Northern world, women were long ago marginalized in direct fish-related activities. Some of them found work as wage labourers in the fish processing plants. But with the fish processing plants moving to the Southern world in search of cheaper labour, women workers in the North have been made redundant. Based on the concept of the welfare state, the workers in the North look at industrialisation as a natural course. The State acted as a buffer to the social dislocation caused as a result. Today, with the international rules of trade gradually changing and with the colonized States coming into their own, the logic of the welfare State has been called into question and the first to feel the effects are women. Women in fisheries have now woken up and taken to the streets, demanding protection and the right to work.

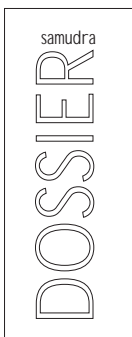
Despite the fact that the struggles of the women from the Northern hemisphere and those from the South are based on a different perception of the fisheries crisis, they are all struggling for the right to work and to life as traditional fisher people. The women from the South and those from artisanal communities in eastern Canada see the need to reorient fisheries development so that women will find their rightful place in the sector and so that the fisheries itself may be sustainable. The role of women, both in the development process, and in decision making, is paramount in the conservation of natural resources, the sustainability of the sector and the broader perspective of food security.

The Invisible Women in Fisheries

It is almost no wonder that women in fisheries are a non-existent category for policymakers. As you read the pages that follow, you will get some idea of the numerous tasks women are involved in—and that too under hard and almost inhuman conditions. To our policymakers, who want to take India into the 21st Century through the high-tech global market, the existence of these women workers is immaterial. Blocking them out of consciousness seems easier than taking them seriously.

The following pages take you through the marine fisheries of the coastal States of India, not exhaustively, but highlighting the salient features. More detailed attention is centred on the role women play in the fisheries of each State. The case studies highlight the specific areas where women, particularly, are involved in each State. The data on women may not cover the whole State but, as the information is village-wise, the pockets not covered are obvious.

In a densely populated country like India, where work for millions of people is scarce, it is important that the existing livelihood of these thousands of women be safeguarded.



GUJARAT

Aleyamma Vijayan and Nalini Nayak

Gujarat is one of the major maritime States of India, possessing the longest coastline and widest continental shelf area. Its coastline is about 1,600 km long and there are about 220 fishing villages in 10 maritime districts. There are about 47,650 active fishermen in the State in the districts of Kutch, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad, Kheda, Bharuch, Surat and Valsad.

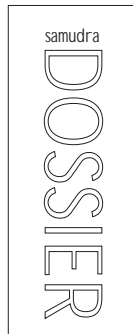
Two extensive gulfs—the Gulf of Kutch and the Gulf of Khambat—particularly characterize the Gujarat coast. The coastal region is marked by salt marshes, sand belts and grass patches. The southern coast of the Gulf of Kutch is characterized by innumerable coral reefs and islands and mangrove vegetation. The Rann of Kutch is a vast expanse of tidal mud flats flaked with saline efflorescence.

The introduction of mechanized boats with inboard engines started in 1956 at Veravel. In the beginning of the 1970s, mechanized trawlers, *dole*-netters and gill-netters started operating. At present 82 per cent of the total catch is from the mechanized sector.

Gujarat has 40 ports of which only the Kandla Port is a major one. Eleven ports are of intermediate size and 28 are minor ones. Despite the fact that the population of Gujarat itself consumes very little fish, tremendous development has taken place in the fisheries sector since the 1960s and, today, Gujarat ranks first in marine fish production in India. The marine catch, which was around 79,000 tonnes in 1960, reached 619,835 tonnes in 1994. Moreover, inland fisheries, which was practically unknown in the region prior to 1960, resulted in a yield of 65,000 tonnes in 1994. This development has certainly been State-sponsored with plan allocations and, in addition, due to specific projects from the World Bank.

Fish is landed in about 211 landing centres in the State. Around 300 species of fin fish and shellfish have been recorded to be available around the Gujarat coast, the main commercial varieties being bombay duck, pomfret, jelly fish, prawn and hilsa. Freezing plants originated in Gujarat in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a result of the introduction of demersal trawling and the resultant increase in shrimp landing. All of these facilities are in the private sector, except for one in the public sector that is now not functioning.

There were over 433 fisheries co-operatives in 1994—of which 185 were in the marine sector and 248 in the inland sector—handling the marketing of over 30 per cent of the fish and dry fish caught in the marine sector. All the co-operatives come under the Gujarat Fisheries



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Central Co-operative Association Ltd. which is a State-level apex co-operative institution established as early as 1956. There is also the Gujarat Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd., which is a company incorporated in the public sector under the Indian Companies Act and is concerned with commercial activities in the fisheries sector.

Unlike most other maritime States, the Department of Fisheries in Gujarat maintains a detailed census of its fishing population (collected as part of the livestock census process). In 1992, the marine and inland fishing population totalled 360,000 as against 225,400 in 1981. The average household size is 6.23 persons and the sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) is 959. About 37 per cent of the fishing population are active fishermen. The literacy rate among males is only 17 per cent while amongst females it is less than 10 per cent. The census data reveals that a significant number of women are involved in fish vending, fish drying and net making. Yet not a single mention of this is made in the Fisheries Status paper in Gujarat. In fact, Gujarat is the only State that prefers to ignore the role of women in fisheries, in this way ensuring that no provisions are made for them in any budget allocations.

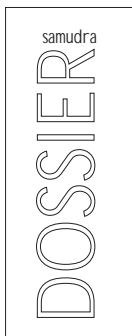
Women in the Gujarat Fishery

Whereas women are found everywhere in the fishing scene in Gujarat, it is a fact that their role is undergoing significant change. Firstly, as Gujarat is not a State where much fish is consumed, local fish consumption is restricted to the narrow coastal regions. Traditionally, therefore, although women have always sold fish, there is not a very intricate and well-developed marketing network. This is also one reason why women are then side-tracked by larger merchants who take the fish out of the State.

Traditionally, the wives of the fishermen take charge of the catch once it is landed. Where the traditional and motorized craft still exist, the wives of the fishermen sort the catch. The good varieties go directly to the merchants who have advanced loans to the fishermen for gear and motors. This fish is taken by weight at the sheds of the merchants on shore. The women then carry the remaining fish on their heads to the local market where they sell it to local consumers. Specific mention must be made here about areas like Jaleshwar in Veraval.

Jaleshwar

Fifteen years ago, Jaleshwar was buzzing with activity. In fact, it was the show-piece of the Gujarat Government. The traditional fishermen had taken to outboard motors (OBMs). Catches were good, and men and women were involved in great activity. Today, Jaleshwar looks deserted. It is not that the population or the number of fishing boats have decreased. They are all there but the catches have fallen dramatically. During this period, the big trawler landing



centre was built and expanded in the port area and in Bedia in Veraval—about 5 km down the coast. All activity has shifted there now. Some fishermen from Jaleshwar work on the trawlers or in the port, but, being Muslim, the women have not ventured out. They have seen their fishery destroyed. In fact, it was Aamina, a woman from the village, who spoke out openly about the problem caused by the trawlers. She said her village lacks leadership and that, therefore, they do nothing to make their plight public. She said that they had recently gone on strike against the deep-sea fishing vessels but wondered whether they would benefit in any event.

It was very striking to realize that these voices would never be heard. The Gujarat Government or the fisheries officers seem to have no concern for these problems. In fact, for them, these people do not exist.

Porbandar

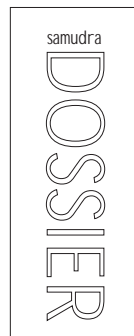
In the larger harbours where more fish is landed, women come from far and near to bid for fish which they take to the local markets to sell. In port areas like Porbandar and Jamnagar, fairly large groups of women come to bid at the merchant auctions. In fact, many of these women had once sold the fish from their own husbands' boats. Now, their husbands work as salaried crew on the trawlers. These women too have been forced to join the traders market.

Deviben in Porbandar is one such woman. She buys fish now every morning for about Rs500 to Rs1,000. She retails it in the market, where she sits from 8 a.m. to 12 noon and again from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. She has been doing this for the last 15 years to meet the needs of her family. She has three children and they go to school. Deviben usually buys fish on credit and pays back by noon or the evening. She buys both from men and women merchants.

The Porbandar retail fish market is a small market meant only for the women vendors. There are small stalls constructed with roof shelters. Around 150 women sit in the stalls or along the narrow paths. There is a large variety of fresh fish, shellfish and dried fish. For women in Porbandar, the wholesale and retail outlets are within walking distance of each other and, hence, there are no major transport problems. A large number of women work as wage workers in the primary processing of fish for export as well as for distant markets in Delhi and Assam. These women are all migrants from the Valsad district of Gujarat or from the interior of the State.

Jamnagar

In Jamnagar, the situation is different. The retail fish markets are along the narrow streets where the Muslim population live. All these vendors are also Muslim—most of them coming traditionally from the fishing community. Women, like Fareeda, have to go to the fish landing centre about 8 km away every morning to buy fish. They



come back in autorickshaws to sell it in the market. These little markets look very poor and unhygienic. There are around 60 women vendors in one area and about 150 women in another. In this market, both marine and freshwater fish are sold. The same woman will have a variety of fish in small numbers, which is a different practice from other markets. The women in Jamnagar say the number of women fish vendors has increased over the last three years. More women from non-fishing castes are now vending fish.

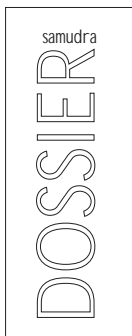
Mangrol

About 40 km north of Veraval is Mangrol, a landing centre, where trawlers and small motorized craft operate on either side of the landing centre. The sales and auction centre for the small craft is a bit removed from the landing site and is totally dominated by women—about 200 of them, the majority being Muslim. The wives of the fishermen carry the fish on their heads for about one km from the landing centre to the sales hall, where a variety of activities take place simultaneously, overlooked by the male agents who record sales proceeds as a means of loan recovery—money they have lent for fishing operations. This was where we also met Neenaben, a woman agent. She sits in a separate shed with her weighing balance and money bag hanging on her arm. She purchases shrimp and pomfret for export. She is a large sub-agent of an exporter. There are not many of her kind. A number of women work as wage labour shelling shrimp. Big groups of women vendors arrive on motorcycle carriers to purchase fish and take it away to neighbouring areas.

Veraval

An interesting group of women that one meets around Veraval are the wives of the trawler owners'. They originally sold the fish their husbands brought back on the plank canoes. Now, with the ability to avail of State subsidies for trawlers, traditional fishermen from these areas, which were transformed into modern landing centres, shifted to trawl fishing. Some of them own two to five boats. Most of them own more than one trawler. Subsequently, the wives have also grown to manage the disposal of the catch from these boats. If they own more than one boat that land at different times, the women are there to take charge of the sale. Most of them hire other female labour paying them from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 a month. These women dispose the export varieties of fish to the merchants who have advanced the working capital. Their big job is the drying of the by-catch. This they organize along the landing area itself where they have put up their shacks and demarcated areas for drying. Most of this by-catch is dried and sold to the fishmeal plants for prices ranging from Rs7 to Rs20 per kg.

Besides these owner-wives who manage their own businesses, the by-catch of other trawlers belonging to absentee owners is sold to other groups of dryers. These can be local people or even men from Kerala. These men hire women labour and one sees a number of tribal



women who walk 3 to 5 km each day to come to work. They too are paid around Rs 1,000 a month. There are around 2,000 women working on this by-catch for about eight months a year.

The Extreme West

Gujarat also produces large quantities of high-quality dry fish, caught in large gill-nets and *dole* (bag)-nets, in centres around the Gulf of Khambat and the Gulf of Kutch, even as far as lakhao in the west. Ribbon fish and Bombay duck are the main varieties of fish, but there are also a lot of shark, tuna and smaller varieties, which are dried too. Around the Gulf of Khambat, it is mainly the wives of boat-owners who manage the catches, employing both male and female labour. Around the Gulf of Kutch, it appears to be more male merchants—many from Kerala and Karnataka—who handle the catches and send them back by lorry to Mangalore. These, again, are large enterprises and here, too, there are significant points of interest.

Around the Gulf of Kutch, in many of the landing centres from Dwaraka westwards, the fishery is dominated by migrant fishworkers who come from as far as Valsad on the southeast coast of Gujarat. For the most part, these are transient villages which have come up on revenue land or on land belonging to port authorities. Although all these areas are accessible by road, because large chemical and other polluting industries are also located in the neighbourhood, the settlements of the fishworkers have absolutely no infrastructure, be these water, lighting or sanitation facilities. They are all considered illegal settlements but continue to supply the companies with export varieties of fish and dry fish for the southern and northeastern States of the country.

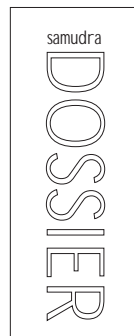
All the dry fish merchants complain that fish procurement has fallen in the last two years because the varieties are now being exported fresh to Hong Kong and China.


To the East

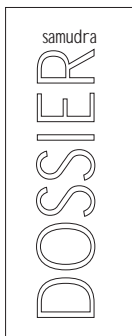
In areas like Jaffrabad and Navbandar in Bhavnagar District, women are also engaged in net making. This is a supplementary activity and normally takes place only for 4 to 5 months a year.

What we do not mention here in our account of women in Gujarat fisheries are the women who are engaged in the fish processing plants. Suffice it to say that although all these women in the processing plants came initially from Kerala or southern Tamil Nadu, more and more local women are now engaged in the work of shrimp peeling at the landing centres, some even inside the plants.

Thus, women do play an important role in post-harvest work in fisheries in Gujarat. While the Gujarat Department of Fisheries is the only State that has some data on women, Gujarat has absolutely no programme to support the activity of women. Gujarat has no marine



regulation and, although the Government has done a great deal to augment production, it is less conscious both of the welfare needs of the fishworkers and the need to safeguard the environment, which is the basic reason for the rich fish resources of the area. Although total fish catches have been on the increase, the catch per unit effort has been falling. All eyes are now turned towards the possibility of developing coastal aquaculture. 



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MAHARASHTRA

Aleyamma Vijayan and Nalini Nayak

Maharashtra has a coastline of 720 km, with five maritime districts. There are a total of 387 villages in these districts, distributed as follows:

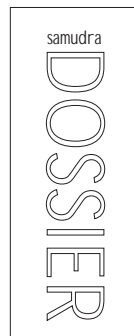
District	No. of Villages
Thane	82
Greater Bombay	23
Raigadh	104
Ratnagiri	99
Sindhudurg	79

About 232,000 people depend on fisheries and of these, 47,328 are active fishermen. According to the 1987 census, there are about 8,437 mechanized crafts (trawlers, gill-netters, liners, purse-seiners, and bag-netters), 286 motorized craft and 11,495 non-motorized artisanal craft. The marine gears used are trawl nets, gill-nets, drag-nets, bag-nets, and cast-nets. The average production is approximately 315 lakh tonnes per year.

Over 80 per cent of the adult female population—around 50,000 women—are estimated to be engaged in fishery-related activities.

In the traditional Koli fishing community of Maharashtra, fishing is a family-based occupation, where men and women play significant roles. In addition to their domestic duties, i.e. caring for children, purchasing and preparing food, cleaning and collecting water and fuel, the coastal fisherwomen usually perform all the post-harvest handling, icing, washing, sorting, drying and marketing of fish in the rural as well as the urban fishing areas in Maharashtra. After the fish has landed, it is the women who take charge of the catch. The only shore-based activities in which men are involved are the making and mending of gear.

Marine fish production in Maharashtra is a seasonal activity. Active fishing takes place for about nine months in the year, from September to May. Most of the fisherwomen—about 60 per cent—are engaged for a period of eight months in fisheries activities, and the rest are involved throughout the year. The fish is processed by the



fisherwomen before marketing. Most of the processing is carried out at the landing centre itself.

Ice is an important and commonly used means of fish preservation. The ice procured is crushed, mixed with salt and put into baskets on which layers of fish are kept. The fisherwomen buy ice either from co-operative ice factories or from the local ice factory.

Salting of fish was a common means of fish preservation in earlier days. However, now less than two per cent of fisherwomen use salt for preserving fish. This method of preservation is practised only in rural areas. The decline in demand for salted fish and the increased demand for fresh fish are probable reasons for this trend.

Another activity in both urban and rural areas is fish drying. The fish is dried for consumption, either for immediate sale or for sale during the monsoon. Bombay duck is dried on specially erected platforms, while smaller fish are spread on the landing centre or on roadsides. Bamboo platforms are also erected in the courtyards of fisherfolk in the area.

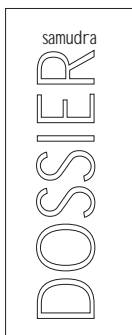
The marketing of fish is done in the morning as well in the evening, but most of the fisherwomen market fish in the morning. The time of marketing depends on when vessels land their catches. The gill-netters land their catches in the morning and trawlers in the evening. Catches from the trawlers are generally kept in cold storage for sale the next day, although a few women market them in the evening itself. Another reason for the difference in time of the marketing of fish is the hours of operation of the markets where the women sell the fish. The women who sell fish in the morning are generally those who go to fish markets where the timings are fixed, whereas those selling in makeshift stalls generally sell in the evening. Similar findings have been reported by Drewes (1982) and Templeman (1987).

The majority of fisherwomen sell fish outside their area of residence. In the rural areas, some of the fisherwomen were selling in the surrounding villages or in Bombay. About a fourth of the fisherwomen sell fish locally. The selling of dried fish from homes was a phenomenon observed only in the rural areas. Only about six per cent of fisherwomen do this.

Women in Sindhudurg

Sindhudurg is one of the five coastal districts of Maharashtra. There are three *taluks* in Sindhudurg comprising 79 villages. One of the main *taluks* is Malwan in which the Shramike Machimar Sangh is a fairly active fishworkers' organization.

Malwan is a very beautiful and ecologically rich coastal area. An interlocking of creeks, sandy bays, rocks and a natural harbour make



it an ideal fishing ground as well. The existing mangrove vegetation certainly adds to the regeneration of fish life. The coastal population lives in small traditional villages where the low population density provides space and a fair level of facility for all. Malwan has gained prominence because of the existence of an old fort at Sindhudurg built by Shivaji on a little island off the coast.

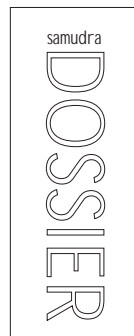
Walking along the beach, along the natural harbour of Ouver, one sees the dilapidated storehouses of the fisheries department—infrastructure that was once well organized but is now in disuse. In fact, in the 1960s and even 1970s, much of the catch of the area was sorted and dried. Today, the thrust is towards export of fresh fish caught by the trawlers that fill the harbour and, therefore, this set-up has been abandoned.

All around the sheds, nevertheless, women still continue to dry then-fish. There are about 40 women who do this on a full-time basis in six to eight groups. They buy fish in bulk and, depending on the species, salt and dry it in a variety of ways. They store it and take it by private vehicles to very distant markets for sale. Some of the groups sell certain varieties to merchants who come to procure fish in bulk. The groups are well organized and the drying is done very hygienically. The groups consist of both Christian and Hindu women who relate well with one another. Their major problem is the availability of salt for drying fish.

There are a large number of women who come to the harbour to buy fresh fish for direct sale. They come from the surrounding areas, walking a few kilometers, or by bus, and sell fish in the local market. This is probably one of the cleanest fish markets in the country. The women fish vendors, too, are proud to be clean and decently dressed while they sell their fish.

Devbhag is a coastal village on a narrow slip of land locked between the sea and a lake. Slightly more isolated than Ouver, it has its own school and temple, and all the women in this village are literate. This is a traditional village where the traditional fishing craft are fitted with OBMs and where the fishermen use gill-nets. Most of the women in this village also buy fish in groups and they transport it by autorickshaw to the town market. In this village, women buy the fish on credit and pay up on their return.

Sargicode is another coastal village. It is rich in mangrove vegetation. It is also a very active fishing area where all kinds of fishing is practised—traditional shore-seines operating from the shore, small gill-nets, hook-and-line fishermen with their motorized crafts, and a few trawlers. The trawlers were introduced only in the early 1990s, but have now forced all the other fishermen to follow suit, as competition in the same fishing grounds makes small crafts unviable.



Entire groups of shore-seine fishermen pool their resources to buy one trawler. There are now 20 trawlers in this village.

Women in Sargicode too buy fish, both to sell fresh and for drying, though primarily for the former purpose. As is the case everywhere in Maharashtra, women are organized locally into *Mahila Mandals* (women's groups). Unfortunately, all these *mandals* concentrate only on singing religious songs together and organizing cultural programmes. Some of them are trying to organize alternative employment for the young women. None of them take up the problems of women at work. All the women in this area have problems related to post-harvest fisheries work. They do not have access to credit and they often do not have salt readily available. They have to hire private transport to go to the market. Some of them go as far as Goa to sell dry fish—a distance of 200 km.

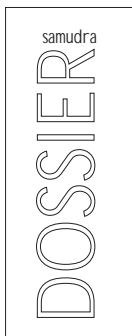
Satpati

Satpati in Palghar Taluk of Thana District is one of the biggest fishing areas north of Bombay. Located along the coast, it is situated around a natural harbour. Satpati is a densely populated fishing village, with a population of around 25,000. Although it is some distance from the main nerve-centres of Maharashtra, the village is proud of its revolutionary tradition, being the home of many freedom-fighters and a place where many sacrificed their lives during the freedom struggle. In fact, it is this revolutionary spirit that was the foundation of one of the oldest fishing co-operatives in Maharashtra, initiated in this village by one freedom fighter, Narayanan Dandekar, as early as 1944, and registered in 1948. This was an effort to help the fishermen to break out of the bondage of the traders.

As in other food production sectors in Maharashtra, co-operatives abound in the fisheries sector as well. In fact, the co-operatives in the fisheries sector are rather strong organizations and provide an organizational infrastructure for the fishing communities along the coast.

The Satpati co-operative has gone a long way since it was created. Supported by subsidies from the government, it has now quite an imposing structure and a membership of around 2,000 with, as the President proudly declares, even two women members on its board.

Ratan Dandekar was the first woman member. She became a member of the board in 1977. It is not clear as to how many women are actually members of the co-operative. The Secretary states that all the wives of the members are also members of the co-operative and have the right to vote. But women were included on the board only after a directive from the department of co-operatives regarding the inclusion of women.



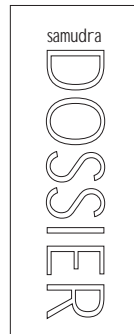
Ratan Dandekar, now 68, is not an ordinary woman. She became involved in social activities through the encouragement of her husband. She herself had only primary education but, after her marriage in 1948, she got involved in the post-independence adult education programme and she worked closely with women throughout the 1950s. She was elected to the panchayat in the late 1950s, supported by the Socialist party, and was a panchayat member for ten years. During these years, she says she took up many problems that affected women, such as providing drinking water, street lights and sanitation. She recalls that women in the fishing community were actively involved in the freedom struggle and in other local struggles for their rights. They fought along with their men. As she viewed all this as one struggle, she had not thought of the need for women to have their own grass-roots organization. Moreover, besides her activities outside the home, she had all her household duties as well. With four children of her own, along with the job of attending to all the friends that her politically-active husband always brought home, she had very little time for herself.

Looking back on her role as an active member of the board of the co-operative, she says that the co-operative serves only the interests of the 250 or so boatowners. All the discussions revolve around their problems and the decisions are mostly in their favour. It is only they who benefit from the subsidies that the co-operative gets and it is because of their insistence on having an ice plant and on selling the ice virtually below cost that the co-operative has incurred losses.

On the question of the rights of women, Ratanbai's first response is that women do not verbalize their real problems. She adds that they do not seem to know what their rights and privileges are. She goes on to explain the changing scenario regarding women in the fishery.

Ratanbai says that Satpati was initially only a *dole* -net fishery and women were involved only in the drying of fish. In this *caru* system, the fish was shared—half went to the owner of the craft and gear, and half to the crew. So women dried their share of fish, mainly Bombay duck, and sold it locally or to traders. But in the 1960s, gill-nets were introduced and the *dalda* or wage system evolved. With the coming of this system, fresh fish began to be auctioned and the role of women changed. Women could buy in the auctions and then sell the fresh fish. They bought fish on credit and, over the years, developed an extensive network of distribution. The only time these women protest is when they do not get the ice from the co-operative ice plant. They are entitled to 10 kg each, but often the first preference is given to the boatowners and the women come last. Ratanbai has often intervened, but she realizes that there are many more things that can be done if women want and if they organize themselves.

The women fish vendors in and around Satpati are as enterprising as their counterparts anywhere else in the country. There are around



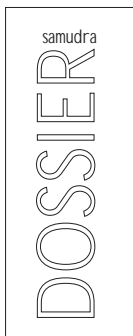
500 of them, over half of whom have been selling fish to keep the home fires burning. These women's husbands do not own boats. Some men work as labourers on the trawlers, others as wage workers in construction. Some of the men are disabled. There are many female-headed houses as well.

A large number of these women are from the fishing community itself, but a good number are of tribal origin who have been integrated into the community over the last two decades as their means of livelihood in the forest areas have gradually disappeared. These women, who have been selling fish for many years, say that the number of women in the trade has increased greatly in the last decade. First, many more women from the community, i.e. wives of the boatowners, have also begun to sell fish. This is because the boatowners also find it difficult to make ends meet, due to the increasing cost of inputs, on the one hand, and diminishing catches, on the other. To add to this, there are women who come to Satpati from neighbouring villages to buy fish and they say there could be around 500 to 1,000 women during the season.

Among the women of Satpati, about 20 are big merchants who hire vehicles on their own and carry fish to very distant markets. There is a big group that goes to different weekly markets within a radius of 50 to 60 km. They share vehicles. But, for all these women, it means waking up around 4 a.m. to leave their villages by 5.30 or 6 a.m. For those who catch the early morning train to take the export variety of fish to Sasoan dock in Bombay, it is also a long day, and a hard one as well, because of the scramble on the crowded train and the competition for space in the goods wagon where all kinds of vendors store their wares. Some of them sleep at the Palghar station at night as there is no other way for them to get the 5.30 a.m. train, given that Satpati is 12 km from Palghar. Moreover, they are always beaten to it by the male merchants who purchase the best quality of the export varieties and transport it in their own wagons. All these women have the facility of storage in the cold storage run by the co-operative. Hence, they are able to keep their baskets for a rate of Rs3 to Rs5 per day in safe custody.

Other women take dry fish to distant tribal areas or fresh fish to the industrial area at Tharapur. Then there are the women who sell fresh fish at the Satpati market itself. These are generally old women or wives of boatowners who do not venture very far.

It is strange, even distressing, to note that the oldest co-operative in Maharashtra located in this very active fishing area is not conscious of the role of women in fish-related activity and has, therefore, not done anything to assist them in their labour.



Kolim Fishery of Maharashtra—a Women’s Fishery

A stroll along the fish markets of Palghar and Satpati reveals the fisherwomen sitting with small, conical shaped mounds of a mustard coloured paste. This is the processed form of a minute shrimp locally known as *kolim*.

Kolim fishery is a particular fishery which exists in the Thane District of Maharashtra. It is a seasonal fishery where women and children use simple nets in the nearshore areas to catch a tiny mysid shrimp, *Mysopodosis orientalis*, which is a rather uncommon crustacean resource. Its maximum size is around one cm. The total catch per season is about 200 metric tonnes valued at around Rs20 lakhs.

The *kolim* season is from March to May in Dativare, Vadrai, Shirgaon and Satpati, and from October to December in Alewadi, Nandgaon, Navapur and Ucheli. Fishing is normally conducted during low tide when there is a mild current and a good wind.

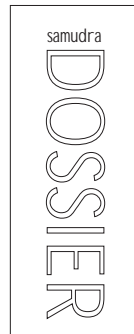
The women from the fishing villages use *kolim sadi*, a simple long piece of fine mosquito net which acts as a fishing net. Earlier, women used their sarees—hence the name *sadi*. The fine mosquito net is attached on either side to a bamboo or twig and towed at a slant just along the bottom either in a straight line parallel to the bank or in a slightly zig-zag manner.

kolim-generally have a migratory and swarming behaviour, with large swarms appearing periodically in restricted areas of nearshore waters and creeks. When these are disturbed, they tend to jump or leap out from the bottom floor. It is this behaviour pattern which helps fishers exploit this resource.

The net is operated in waist-deep waters by fishers whose feet generally disturb the bottom. The *kolim* get collected in the central, sagging part of the net created by towing against the mild current. The net is slowly closed by bringing the bamboos close together. Each operation takes an average of two hours. In Satpati, women and children from about 500 families are engaged in this work during these three months. The average catch per net each season is about 400 kg resulting in earnings of about Rs400 a season.

The fishery of the village of Alewadi has modified the *sadi* into *dole*. Instead of manual towing, small mechanized crafts are used by men who use their spare time from the lobster fishery to catch *kolim*. Women are slowly being pushed out of a simple and decentralized fishery

Kolim is a favourite seafood of the local population of Thane and Bombay. Only a limited part of the catch is sold fresh. The major part is processed and sold in nearby weekly markets like Palghar. One kg of fresh *kolim* fetches around Rs3 to Rs4.



The processing of *kolim* is very simple. Freshly harvested shrimps are collected in bamboo baskets and brought to the shore. Mats, prepared out of date palm leaves, are spread on the beach directly in the open sun. Heaps of *kolim* are spread on the mat. Large crystal common salt is sprinkled over the catch and both are mixed thoroughly, three times a day. This is repeated for two to three days. The product is then ready for the market.

The processed *kolim* can be stored up to a year in bamboo baskets lined with dry leaves of *Butea frondosa*, locally known as the *palas* tree. Local housewives reprocess it, flavouring it with green chillies, turmeric powder, garlic, etc. It is then stored in glass or china jars lined with dry *palas* leaves.

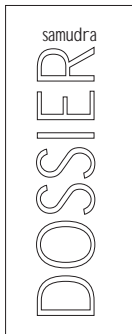
The *kolim* fishery requires only simple technology and is easily managed by women. It fetches a good income in the off-season for women.

Women in the Ratnagiri Co-operative

In the busy harbour area of Ratnagiri, between small makeshift huts of merchants, sits the lonely figure of Fatima. She has a forlorn look, is thin and emaciated. Although belonging to the Muslim community, Fatima and her counterparts in the area do not observe *pardah* and they are fish vendors. She belongs to the Mirkirwada Mahila Machi Vyavasayakauchi Seva Sahakari Saustha Mariadith, one of the oldest fisherwomen's co-operatives in the country. It has been functioning since 1950, but was registered only in 1965. About 500 women are members of the co-operative.

Fatima is about 50 years old. She has been a fish vendor since she was 14. In her younger days, there were plenty of fish but it was very difficult to sell it as there were no good roads. So no merchants came. Most of the fish was dried and taken to the weekly markets. The means of transport were either bullock carts or trucks. One day, one of the trucks carrying the women home from the market overturned and all the five women in the vehicle died. The son of one of the deceased, Alimia Thandel, was so affected by the tragedy that he decided to do something to improve the transportation facility to markets. On demands by women, two transport buses were allowed for women to take fish. This was insufficient, as women had to go to different markets in different locations, depending on the market day. Later, with a 50 per cent subsidy loan granted by the Fisheries Department, the co-operative society was formed.

Ratnagiri is a developing harbour in Maharashtra and lies south of Raigadh and north of Sindhudurg. Although part of the harbour is now silted, the number of boats operating from here (1,500 trawlers and 100 purse-seiners) has increased. The harbour is one of the largest shrimp landing centres of Maharashtra. Women, like Fatima,



can get sardines, mackerels, seerfish and ribbon fish for drying and for selling as fresh fish.

The co-operative mainly assists women to transport the fish to the interior areas. The women attend 30 bazaars around Ratnagiri. The co-operative, which now owns three trucks and two buses, arranges the vehicles five days a week. The markets function thrice a week in a particular area and twice in another area.

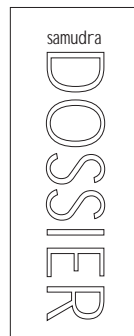
Since Fatima and her friends buy fish from fishermen of their village at the harbour, they are considered creditworthy. While agents of merchants buy shrimp and other export varieties of fish, Fatima buys the locally consumed varieties. The fish is then packed with ice in boxes which bear her name and that of the market where she sells fish.

The boxes are loaded on to the trucks in the evening and are dropped off at the market. The co-operative has appointed persons in each market who unload the boxes and keep them in safe custody until the women come and take charge of them. Next morning, the women travel by bus to the markets. Fatima pays Rs20 for bus fare, as her market is quite far, and Rs30 for the transportation of the fish boxes. The permitted load for each woman is a maximum of 120 kg of fish, 25 per cent of which should be dry fish.

For women like Fatima, it is difficult now to procure much fish. Aided by government subsidies and advances from private money lenders, the number of trawlers is increasing every day. Agents of merchants also advance money for the daily operations of boats and they have the right over the landings. They are present on the beach with their weighing balances and plastic cartons to buy prawns and other export varieties and take them to the processing factories. Women fish vendors can only get what is not needed, i.e. trash fish. Earlier only prawns and cuttlefish were bought by exporters. Now, seerfish, ribbon fish and other cheaper varieties are also purchased to be exported to countries such as Hong Kong and China.

The consequence is that women are being slowly marginalized from the marketing process. There are times when Fatima can only get a few fish which she sells in a local market. The trash fish is sorted and dried on the beach and is used for fishmeal and manure. Migrant women labourers from Karnataka do this work. They are also involved in transporting fish from the landing sites to the sheds of the merchants.

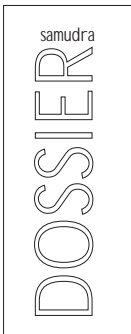
The women's co-operative now has a membership of 500. This includes women from non-fishing communities as well. The major services provided by the co-operative are in transporting fish and acting as caretakers of baskets in the market. Credit is not a felt need, as women get the fish on credit and pay the merchants or boatowners



only the next day. But the fact that the infrastructure is provided by the co-operative is a great support to women and it gives them legitimacy, freedom and dignity.

Yet, it is to be noted that women are seen more as beneficiaries than as active participants in the process of managing the affairs of the co-operative. Half the women members actively participate in the General Body meetings of the co-operative. These women are aware that annual reports and accounts are presented at the meetings. Since the co-operative is part of the District Fisheries Co-operative Federation, its administrator is appointed by the government and, as usual, is a man. The General Manager at present is Mr. S. Puranik, who has long years of experience in the co-operative sector.

In Ratnagiri District, two more fisherwomen's co-operatives are functioning. One is at Harni (200 members) and the other is at Sakinada (250 members). The District Federation has two women on the board of directors. In the neighbouring district of Raigadh, the District Federation of Co-operatives is headed by a woman. Despite the fact that the co-operatives in Maharashtra are male-dominated, efforts have been made by the government to provide women with infrastructure. Women are proud to be fish vendors and do not seem to suffer from a stigma as a result of their occupation.



GOA

Aleyamma Vijayan

Goa and its fisheries reveal a different picture from the rest of India. Based initially on the *rampon* (a type of shore-seine) fishery and with a population of 12,000 fishermen, the people of Goa have attached great cultural significance to their beaches and to fish as food.

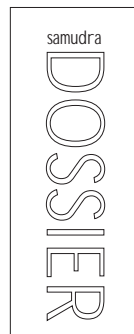
Goa has a coastline of 105 km, with many natural bays and mangrove vegetation bordering the mouths of the river basins. This State is naturally rich and picturesque. In 1971, the daily per capita availability of fish was 200 gm. By 1984, this dropped to 84 gm, even though the number of trawlers increased to 653 during this period. So, over the last decade, Goa has witnessed a drastic drop in catch, and spiralling prices which caused not only the fisherpeople but all Goans to rise up in revolt.

Goa was home to the first organized revolt against the trawlers in 1978, under the banner of the Goencha Ramponkarancha Ekvott. The Goans were the first to raise a demand for a protected zone for the artisanal fishermen. In 1981, the Government of Goa passed a bill allocating 5 km as the protected zone for the artisanal fishermen. But very soon, when the trawler boatowners protested, this was reduced to 2 km. Although the fishermen's association was rather active, they too neglected the women who worked in fisheries.

The women fish vendors of Goa present a completely different picture from their counterparts in other States. They are clean, well-dressed and display a significant amount of gold ornaments. Many of them are involved in sale of fish—either at wholesale or retail markets.

The Goan fishery consists of the traditional *rampon* fishery and the modern trawl fishery. *Rampon* is a type of shore-seine net, which is owned and operated by 10 to 15 households. While the men operate the nets, it is their wives who take the fish to the market. The normal pattern is to hire trucks jointly and take the catch to the wholesale market. Two or three women go along. After the sale, the cash is divided. The expenses, like truck charges, loading and unloading charges (Rs1 per basket), market entry tax, etc., are reduced from the total earnings.

In the wholesale market of Margao, about 1000 women buy and sell fish. In the local retail market, about 100 women are engaged in vending. This market is owned by a matronly woman, who has absolute control over the market and the women who vend there.




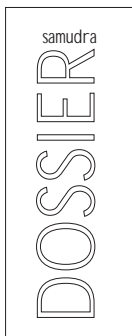
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In many of the markets, one can see very costly varieties like prawns, shrimp, pomfret, etc. Goan people are fond of fish and even costly varieties are in high demand. Trawler catches also come to the market.

Another feature noticed is the absence of younger women from fishing communities in marketing activities. At the same time, women from inland villages—from the *kudumbi* community—are also getting more involved in fish vending, sorting and drying of trawler by-catch.

Some of the problems faced are travel difficulties, lack of hygienic markets, and harassment from civil authorities to shift markets from prime areas, in the name of city beautification.

The coastal communities are being increasingly threatened by modern developments such as tourism, mining and industrial pollution. The excessive use of water by the tourism industry has left the community wells dry. The industry is said to consume over 4,700 million litres of water a day and that too with a five per cent subsidy from the State. Poverty and prostitution have grown because of this, eating into the social and cultural fabric of the coastal communities. Moreover, Goa lies along the tanker routes from the Arabian Gulf to the Far East and Japan. Ships sailing along these routes are said to discharge oily ballasts and bilge water. It is estimated that around 40 tonnes of tar balls are deposited on the coast annually. The implications of this for fish life are serious. 



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KARNATAKA

M. Gracy

Karnataka, situated on the west coast of India, has a coastline of 270 km and a continental shelf area of 25,000 sq km. The coastal districts are Dakshin Kannada and Uttar Kannada. Many rivers, such as Nethravathi, Saravatti and Kali, flow into the Arabian sea and render the inshore area rich in nutrients.

There are 147 fishing villages along the coast. According to estimates of 1987, there are 15,600 fishing households with a population of 1.13 lakh.

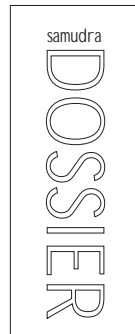
The fishing craft here comprise mechanized and non-mechanized boats. There are about 2,000 mechanized boats in the State, consisting of trawlers, gill-netters and others. Among the non-mechanized craft, dugout canoes dominate. There are also plank-built canoes. There are drift-nets, gill-nets, shore-seines, hook-and-lines, fixed bag-nets, etc.

Mechanization of the traditional fishery has been a development of the early 1960s. Bottom trawling for the 'golden prawn' was the main activity. In 1975, purse-seiners were introduced. This overefficient gear almost wiped out the traditional *rampon* fisheries in Karnataka and Goa.

There continue to be a fair number of traditional boats in Karnataka in which people from the local fishing community are involved. The mechanized sector is dominated by owners from non-fishing castes. With the development of landing centres, fish landings are more centralized and fish marketing has been gradually taken over by male merchants. Yet, some women do still find a livelihood through fish vending and the women fish vendors in the town markets are known to be good managers and business women.

Malpe Fisherwomen's Co-operative Society

The celebration of International Women's Year in 1977 inspired the fisherwomen of Malpe to start something serious for the economic empowerment and development of women in Malpe. The idea was encouraged by the men, especially members of the fishermen's co-operative society in Malpe. This gave the women courage and confidence, and led them to take a decision to make the International Women's Year a memorable one. The earnest desire of women gave birth to the Malpe Fisherwomen's Co-operative Society. These women, who generally dried fish, could now get institutional support from their co-operative.



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Series
No. 2

The co-operative society started to function in 1978 with a share capital of Rs35,000 from the Government of Karnataka and Rs 17,000 from the women. In the beginning, the co-operative operated in a small room rented from the Karnataka State Fisheries Department at the rate of Rs6 per month. Now, it has its own building, though the land is on lease for 15 years at Rs 100 per year.

Membership

At the start, the co-operative had 276 members. Now, the number of members has increased to 800. According to the Secretary, Vidyavathi, about 95 per cent of the fisherwomen of Malpe are members of the co-operative. The membership fee is Rs100 per member.

The co-operative has a nine-member committee, of which seven are elected and two are official representatives from the Government Fisheries Department. The term of office of the committee is three years. The board meets once a month and a General Body meeting is held once a year.

All the activities of the co-operative are income-generating. The society earns more than Rs50,000 as net profit per year. In 1993, the profit was about Rs100,000.

Activities

The main activities of the co-operative are (i) salt business; (ii) transportation; (iii) deposit mobilization; and (iv) credit scheme.

1. Salt business

Salt is bought from Mangalore at Rs42 per bag of 50 kg, and sold to the women at Rs50 per bag. The price includes all costs, including transportation, loading, unloading and godown rent, and a minimum profit of Rs2.50 per bag. Salt is given on credit during season to the members and the money is recovered during the off-season. This is a great relief for the women. Over 14,000 bags of salt are sold every year. However, the government is now encouraging iodised salt production and the women feel that this will affect their work in future.

2. Transportation

In Malpe, women are mostly involved in fish-related activities, which is their main source of income. Women sell fresh fish and salt and dry fish on a large scale. They manage the salt fish business on their own. They themselves buy the fish from the harbour in bulk at auctions and dry it on rented port land. During the off-season, women manage to get fish from distant places, even from other States, such as Maharashtra, through their business partners.

As the co-operative was started for the development of fisherwomen, one of the objectives was to provide better transportation facilities at

reasonable rates for the women. Thus the society acquired two vans, one from the National Co-operative Development Corporation (NCDC) and the other from the Central Social Welfare Board. Both the vans were bought with a 50 per cent subsidy. But the NCDC van was not very profitable because it required frequent repair. The co-operative, therefore, sold it and repaid the full loan, i.e. Rs26,600 at an interest rate of 9.3 per cent. The other van is in good condition, although it is old now. It takes women to various markets, carries fish from the fish landing area to fish drying areas and helps them carry salt. It also runs on hire for the general public. The transport rate varies according to the quantity carried and distance travelled.

3. *Saving schemes or deposit mobilization*

The co-operative receives deposits from its members. The aim is to encourage the saving habit among women. But this is not a very successful programme. As most women are involved in fish-related activities, there is very little cash to save. Some women use the money as working capital and others use it for their daily expenditure. Nevertheless, the co-operative society mobilizes around Rs20,000 every year.

4. *Loan or credit scheme*

Loans are given for fish-related activities for a period of one year. The borrowers have to be approved by a committee. Usually, loans are granted to all those who apply. The maximum amount per person is Rs5,000. The annual rate of interest is 18 per cent. Loans amounting to nearly Rs 100,000 have been extended to members. Loan repayment is by monthly instalments. The instalment amount depends on the loan taken.

Other Activities

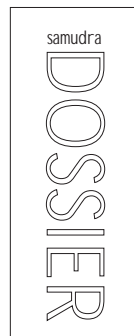
Since 1992, the co-operative has leased a plot of four acres from the port authorities for the period August to May. The lease amount is Rs8,000 for this period. This area is then leased out to the members at Rs 1.50 per sq m. They use it for drying fish. In this way, the co-operative makes sure that its members are not ousted from their drying places.

Management of the Co-operative

There are four staff members in the co-operative—a secretary, who is a woman, a male driver, a female sales assistant and a male helper. The final decision-making authority is the committee. Committee members are given an honorarium of Rs500 per year and the other official representatives are given a sitting fee of Rs50 per person for each meeting that they attend.

The net profit is divided as follows:

Reserve fund	25 per cent
Honorarium to hoard members	12 per cent



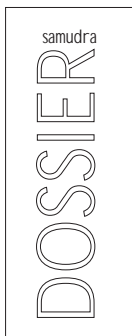
Dividend to members	6-9 per cent
Building fund	20 per cent
Common fund	5 per cent
Gratuity fund	3 per cent
Sinking fund	10 per cent
Share capital reduction	10 per cent

(The reserve fund is given to the co-operative union. The sinking fund is to meet losses in business. The share capital reduction fund is to repay the share capital from the government. According to a recent amendment, the share capital need not be repaid. But the co-operative has already paid back Rs25,000 of the government share capital of Rs.35,000.)

Achievements

The co-operative started functioning in a small rented room. Now, it has its own building which was built at a cost of Rs1.45 lakh. The society won two national and one State award for its good work. The first national award was from the National Federation of Fishermen's Co-operative Ltd., New Delhi, in 1986. The second National award was for its high productivity. The third award was from the State Government in 1994, for the good work of the co-operative.

The co-operative has helped the women to empower themselves not only economically, but managerially as well. They are now confident and proud of their capabilities.



KERALA

Aleyamma Vijayan, M. Gracy
Mercy Alexander and Nalini Nayak

In the fisheries map of India, Kerala occupies a unique place. Although it has a coastline of only 560 km., which is almost 10 per cent of the country's coastline, the State contributes to a third of the nation's marine fish production. The contribution of Kerala's fisheries to the foreign exchange earnings of the country is over 38 per cent.

The 222 fishing villages in Kerala fall into nine districts along the coast and are inhabited by about 6.5 lakh fishworkers, of whom 1.5 lakh are actively engaged in fish harvesting. Major changes in the traditional fishing methods began in the late 1960s. Government policies emphasized large-scale development of the fisheries sector in view of its export potential and the focus shifted to quick profits. The very process of planned development led to greater marginalization of the artisanal sector.

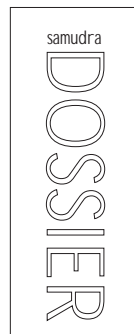
The total fish production in Kerala in 1992-93 was 4.96 lakh tonnes. The share of the artisanal sector was about 60 per cent and it sustained about 90 per cent of the fishworkers. During this period, there were about 20,500 unmotorized units, 11,000 motorized units and around 4,000 trawlers.

The fisheries sector in Kerala is not only alive as an industry, but also politically alive with long-standing conflicts between the small trawl sector and the motorized and artisanal sectors. Despite the fact that fisheries is a prime foreign exchange earner for the State, the government has not made active attempts to manage the fishery.

In the 1980s, when the State realized that the co-operatives in fisheries had totally collapsed, it took an active role in organizing Matsyafed, an apex of local co-operatives. Registered now as a corporation, Matsyafed tries to reach out to fishworkers with supportive activity.

In addition, the Fishermen's Welfare Corporation was created in the 1980s in response to demands from fishworkers. This corporation has welfare measures for fishermen and women in fish-related activities, subsidizing housing and providing facilities such as accident insurance, grants for education and pensions, all at very sub-standard levels.

Women have long been very involved in fisheries in Kerala. With 40 rivers flowing into the sea and an intricate backwater system, fish and fisheries are an integral part of the lives of many communities along the coast. In fact, in the predominantly Hindu areas in north



Kerala—Kasaragod, for instance—women inherited fishing gear by marriage. They were the ones who decided what to do with the catches. In the 1970s, when the government made bank loans available to fishermen, thereby recognizing men as owners of the equipment, women lost their space in the control of fishing operations. Today, while many women still go fish vending in Kasaragod, most of them purchase the fish they sell. We record here some of the areas in which women are still actively involved and fighting for their spaces of survival.

Women Fish Vendors of Trivandrum District

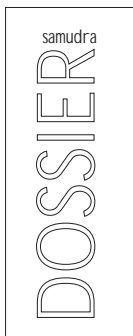
The people of Kerala are avid fish eaters and the women who supply this protein-rich food are a welcome sight to the fish consumers. Although they are physically visible at the markets, bylanes, roadside vending places and doorsteps of houses, the lives and struggles of these women are little known. Nor are they visible to the planners and policymakers of the State.

Trivandrum District, the southernmost district of Kerala, is one of the districts where large numbers of women still go fish vending. This is also because the district is still one where the artisanal fishery predominates—though motorized—and where landings are still largely decentralized. Trivandrum, has a coastline of 60 km. It has 42 fishing villages, with 22,070 fishing families. While men are engaged in fishing, women get involved in related activities like net making, fish drying, fresh fish vending, etc. It is estimated that about 7000 women are engaged in the task of selling fresh fish to consumers in the district.

The day of a fisherwoman starts very early. Usually, men leave before dawn to catch fish. In the areas where women can get fish from the beach, such as Anjengo, Marianad and Vizhinjam, the women wait on the beach for the return of the craft. They participate in the auction. In the major landing areas, male merchants with cycles and tempos (vans) also compete with ready cash to buy fish. Earlier, when most men had catamarans, the landings were small and women could easily buy the fish.

With technological changes came large crafts fitted with OBMs and the landings were much more than a single woman could handle. With fish resources becoming scarce, competition also became stronger. For example, at the Vizhinjam landing centre, one can see women waiting anxiously with their aluminium vessels—which have replaced bamboo baskets—for smaller crafts and catamarans to land. The women complain that even their own men or the co-operative society salespersons prefer to give the fish to big merchants who have cash at hand.

The competition is of a different nature in the big wholesale markets, like Pangode in the city, or Balaramapuram, or Alamcode. Many



women from villages close to the city, like Veli, Vettucaud, Valiathura and Poonthura, go to the wholesale market to buy fish and then take it to sell at retail markets. Here, there is no question of credit and private money lenders do a thriving business, charging 360 per cent interest, lending on a daily repayment basis.

How do women cope with the situation and survive in vending? Women form themselves into groups of five to eight, pool their resources and buy fish. Depending on the specific situation, they either divide the fish and sell it individually and take the profit, or pool the profits together and divide it equally. It is interesting to see the women in the evening at bus stops or under the shade of a tree settling the accounts. There are no account books or computers—their business is based on memory and trust.

In the ever-increasing competition for scarce fish resources, it requires extraordinary skill and shrewdness to remain in the trade. For many women, theirs is the only 'stable' income in the family, and hence, they are willing to undertake any risk to procure fish. If fish is not available in Trivandrum, they travel to neighbouring districts. They pool their resources together, hire small trucks and travel to Quilon or Alleppey. These journeys in the mini-trucks, sitting precariously on wooden planks in the open rear compartment, are dangerous, and accidents are not rare. Some women fought for a special bogey in the passenger train to Quilon and now proudly travel to and fro to bring fish from Neendakara to Trivandrum.

The vending pattern also varies. Some women sell in big markets, some in strategic roadside markets which they have created for themselves and some engage in house-to-house vending. The markets may be 10 to 20 km away from their own villages. Many women from Pulluvila and Pozhiyoor usually walk one to two hours to reach the interior markets, as there is no possibility to travel in regular transport buses. Those who go to distant markets hire a mini-truck and it takes 45 minutes to reach. The women of Vizhinjam walk seven to 10 km on an average. In Marianad, 10 per cent of the women go walking or by private vehicles. Fifty women use the train to go to Quilon. The market timings vary from place to place, yet there are morning and evening markets. On an average, women spend eight to 10 hours outside the home, travelling and vending.

Most of the markets are owned by local bodies, such as Corporations, Municipalities or Panchayats, which auction the right to collect the taxes to individuals. They, in turn, exploit the women fish vendors and force them to pay more than triple the permitted amount, which is published on a Notice Board. This market tax is often a cause for conflicts between women and tax collectors or their thugs.

Those who choose to vend at roadside markets are often harassed by police and civil authorities. The women who sell from house to house

cover about 15 to 20 houses a day—their regular customers. No one else dares infringe on the territory of another woman vendor. Usually, these women have very cordial relationships with families. Women fish vendors who go from house to house clean the fish before delivering it. Some families make payments only bi-weekly or monthly, but since women get other benefits, such as clothes and food, they are happy with the arrangement.

Fish vending is a difficult occupation. The women who choose this occupation do so because of extreme poverty. Most fishermen drink alcohol regularly. This means that less than half the income reaches the home—the rest is spent on drinking. In the fishing villages, there are virtually no other viable occupations. Most of the women are in their 40s or older, and have been selling fish since their teens. There are very few younger women among them. Educated girls prefer other occupations, such as tailoring or migrating for work in the prawn peeling sheds.

Women fish vendors of Trivandrum identify the following as their main problems: scarcity of fish; escalating prices; lack of capital and high rates of interest charged by moneylenders; entry of big (male) merchants with ready capital and own vehicles; iced fish from other States; and stiff competition. In the process, small vendors are marginalized or ousted, especially from harbours.

The problems of the women do not end there. On their way home, they have to do the day's shopping. Since their income is on a day-to-day basis, purchases are also on a daily basis. So, on the journey home, their vessels are again laden with provisions and snacks for the children, and even firewood.

Since life in the fishing villages is very precarious and basic amenities are few, the time spent at home is not one of relaxation or rest for the women. They have to fetch water, do all the household chores and attend to the needs of their children and husbands.

In the Latin Catholic community to which the majority of women in Trivandrum district belong, property rights are inherited by the daughters. Women have some economic power. But that in itself does not lead to the empowerment of women, as is clear from the increasing incidents of wife-beating and atrocities on women.

Efforts at Organizing

Work of organizing the fishing community of the district started in the late 1960s and early 1970s through the intervention of an NGO called the Programme for Community Organization (PCO). The earlier efforts were geared towards forming local women's organizations (*Mahila Samajams*) and, through them, responding to health and childcare needs. This process enabled women to come together to discuss their problems and act jointly. They took up issues

relating to the public distribution system, local schools, etc. The women's organizations also ran pre-schools and clinics. In addition, they came together in a district forum to analyze common problems. These latter efforts continue.

In the late 1970s, the problem of transport facilities for women fish vendors was brought to the fore. A district-wise action committee was formed, which took up the issue, studied it, used various audiovisual methods to sharpen women's awareness and then launched an agitation which lasted two years. Since the law did not permit fish to be carried in public transport vehicles, women asked for special buses, run by the Fishermen's Corporation (now Matsyafed), a government-owned body. This demand was met in 1981 and now in the villages close to the city, as well as in Vizhinjam and Anjengo, women have special buses which take them to the market and to the interior villages. Ongoing struggles were necessary to force the government to continue operating the services.

This initial success gave a big boost to the self-confidence of the women and their faith in collective action. Now, there are women's groups in about 22 villages. Diverse issues and problems, from credit needs to alcoholism and wife-beating, are discussed and action initiated. When there are problems in markets, women are able to organize and fight back. Two such incidents are worth discussing here.

The Chirayinkil market in the north of Trivandrum District is frequented by women fish vendors of the Anjengo area. Every year, the local body (*panchayat*) auctions the right to collect market taxes to individuals who then appoint their thugs to collect more than the stipulated amount. Fed up with this harassment, the women decided to oppose auctioning of the collection of market tax. They wanted the panchayat to directly collect the tax. On the day of auction, women blocked the panchayat building and did not allow the auction to take place. This happened on three consecutive days and the authorities were forced to give up the idea of auctioning the right and had to start collecting the tax directly. The following year, without any publicity, the authorities decided to conduct the auction again. Women then decided to move the court.

The second incident is related to their right to vend in a roadside market. Over 20 women from coastal villages close to the city had occupied a roadside pavement near the Kesavadasapuram junction in Trivandrum where they had been selling fish for over 30 years. There were also vegetable and fruit vendors in the same place. There was no other market in that thickly populated area. One day, women found two police vans near the market, forcing the women to vacate the area and even confiscating vessels of those who refused to move. Women jointly defended their right to make a living. The road is very broad and they were not disrupting any traffic. The fish vendors took

the lend to collect the signatures of all the vendors, met the Corporation Commissioner, Collector and Police Commissioner. Due to constant pressure from the women, they were allowed to operate from the same place, until a suitable alternative site was identified and a market built for them.

Women in the Dry Fish Trade in North Kerala

Chaliyam is one of the areas in north Kerala where fish drying has been a large business. In fact, in north Kerala, with the bulk landings of demersal fish, the trade in dry fish has been a big business for many decades, and fish has been shipped to as far off as the Andaman Islands and Burma. The dry fish merchants of Calicut and Malappuram Districts have been very successful businessmen and, to a large extent, have made use of cheap female labour to enhance their businesses.

The merchants are organized in that they have a control over the fishermen and the workers. It is they who advance working capital to the fishermen, which gives them a right to the catches at prices they determine. In this way, they are assured access to the product at cheap rates. Hundreds of poor women, often the wives of the fishermen, work for these merchants to sort and dry the fish. Earlier, these women also fermented, smoked and dried tuna. This was a speciality of this region, which found its way into food delicacies in many Indian and Asian regions.

For the most part, women work as piece-rate wage labourers. The regular workers get a daily wage which just about covers one meal per person. The rest of the earnings are on the basis of the amount of fish dried. They are paid per sack of dried fish, which means payment once in three days, as this is the minimum period required to dry fish. Sun drying takes place in the periods August to November and March to May. Some varieties of fish are salted and buried in the ground, as a kind of preservation, and then sold. This is done generally between December and March.

Occasionally, one finds women merchants or some groups of women who procure fish on their own and dry and sell it. Yeshoda is one such woman who has been involved in such work for the past 40 years. She learnt this trade from her father and when her marriage began breaking up, she started off on her own. She has her own shed and has been able to provide work for five other women on a regular basis, as well as temporary work for a few other men and women.

Yeshoda says that the quantum of business has dropped over the years, as fish is more scarce and the price is high because of demand. She has not been able to expand her business because all her earnings have gone into maintaining her family and marrying off her three daughters. Now, as she is old, she does not want to stop work but buys only enough fish to keep herself going. She still lives in a little

mud house, with a thatched roof, and thanks God she still has the energy to work. She hopes one of her three daughters will care for her when she is old and unable to work.

Women at Neendakara

Quilon is one of the southern districts of Kerala, north of Trivandrum. It has a short marine coast of about 37 km. Most of the traditional fishing community live around the bay in a very congested environment. Nearly 2,000 families are packed into an area of about one sq km in the Wady area.

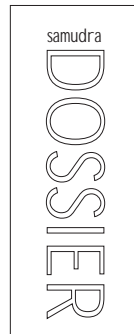
In 1953, a technoeconomic aid project was started, with the help of the Norwegian Government, in Shaktikulangara and Neendakara, six miles north of the town. The project area embraced the two villages on both sides of the river which connects the sea with the lagoon behind the backwaters. Within this area, the population is mainly Christian, with Hindus living on the northern side, in a settlement called Puthenthura. The aims of the project were the following:

- to increase returns to fishermen;
- to efficiently distribute fresh fish and improve fish products; and
- in general, to aim for a higher standard of living for the community.

Today, Neendakara is a fishing harbour from where the trawl boats operate. Some traditional craft also land their fish at this landing centre. Contrary to the prediction of the Norwegians, after an initial spurt in the mid-1970s, the returns to the fishermen have decreased. But the harbour remains a centralized landing place, to which hundreds of women flock to make their livelihood.

Women are engaged in all kinds of fish-related activity in the harbour. Some of them arrive there on foot with empty containers on their heads. These women are from the adjacent marine fishing villages. Others get off the public transport buses and walk to the harbour. They come from the interior inland fishing villages. Still others arrive in autorickshaws—they would have arrived at the Quilon railway station by train from places as far as Trivandrum, 60 km away. Then there are the special blue buses that drive right into the harbour as well as the buses of the Fishermen's Welfare Corporation that bring, and take back, women vendors from Trivandrum.

Even as women arrive, others leave with their loads. The most spectacular sight is the women climbing into the open trucks with their headloads. About 20 to 25 women stand in these open trucks which, for a charge, drop them off at the railway station, about 15 km



away. Not only are they tired, burdened and unsure about whether or not they will make a profit, they are constantly at the mercy of the truck drivers who harass them for payments. When they reach the railway station, they have to face the railway guards who are rough with the 'smelly fish vendors.' Fortunately, because of their own long struggles led by the women's wing of the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Union (the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation, KSMTF), there is now a separate rail wagon for the fish vendors, where no freight charges are levied.

Similarly, the buses of the Fishermen's Welfare Corporation were also started as a result of the demands of this group of the union. Nevertheless, the women feel they are badly exploited by this service. They have to buy a monthly pass, costing Rs400 for 15 trips to and from the harbour, a journey of about 60 km. The advantage is that the bus fetches the women from their villages and drops them at the market in Trivandrum. They have to find their own way back home, often after 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. There are over 60 women who regularly use this facility.

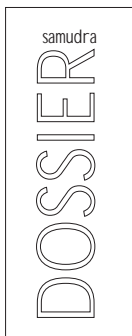
At the landing site itself, all the women look alike and, unless one asks them specifically, it is difficult to ascertain what role they actually play in the post-harvest activity.

Observing them, one sees that some squat in groups of five to six around heaps of mixed fish, sorting them. These groups are generally units of women who have put their resources together and bought the catch of one trawler in the auction. They then sort it together, sell the export varieties (mainly shrimp) immediately, and then decide what they will do with the rest of the fish. A couple of them take the fish back to sell in the local market and of the others may take some for drying. They have ingenious ways of determining the price for each variety themselves and of sharing the profits. Some of these groups have been functioning for many years.

Wherever there are large groups of women around heaps of fish, they are generally sorting the product on a wage basis for a bigger merchant. These women receive Rs30 a day.

The most striking are the few women entrepreneurs who come alone from as far away as 40 to 50 km, purchase good fish in bulk, hire a tempo (van) and ride back to their homes with their goods. Agnes is one of these women, from Anjengo. Mary Theresa is another, from Poonthura. They have been doing this once a week for the past 15 years. Each time, they purchase Rs15,000 to Rs20,000 worth of fish. They have a small capital of their own, which they keep rolling but, when needed, they borrow the rest on a daily interest.

Besides the women's groups that buy directly from the trawlers in bulk, most other women buy on 'second sale'. This is after sorting



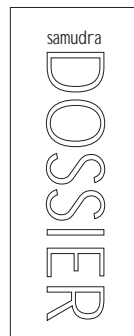
has been done. Here again, they generally bid for each crate of fish either individually or in twos. They purchase fish for themselves to sell in retail markets. There are some (about 20 in Neendakara) who buy fish in larger quantities, transport it in small autorickshaws, and sell it wholesale in their local markets.

There are also women who buy only shrimp. They buy a basket, sit and clean it, and sell it right away to the export companies. They leave the harbour with their earnings and empty baskets. The value they add is by cleaning the shrimp. There are over 100 women who do this regularly at Neendakara, according to Celine. She takes a bus for which she pays Rs1.80, comes to the harbour around 11 a.m. and goes back at about 5 p.m. She has to pay only Rs2 to enter the harbour premises. At the end of the day, she could earn between Rs30 and Rs70, depending on the catches.

Then there is the group of poorer looking older women who live near and around the harbour. They procure the trawler 'waste' for drying. From this 'waste', they sort out the fish, dry it and take it for home consumption. The rest is roughly dried and sold for fishmeal. These women say that there is less and less fish for them too. They do not seem to know why. Because of the high demand for fish as food in this area, unlike in other harbours in north Kerala or outside Kerala, there are few big merchants, male or female, who buy this 'waste' on a large scale and organize large groups of labour to dry it. What generally happens, at times when the quantity of 'waste' is huge, is that people from the neighbouring areas procure it in lorry loads to use as manure in their coconut plantations.

Omana, on the other hand, is a bigger merchant. She has been coming to the harbour ever since it started. At that time (the early 1960s), there were only about eight women purchasing for the wholesale trade at the harbour. "Gradually," she says, "the male merchants came, and then the companies, and then we couldn't compete with them. Prices went up and they came in their lorries. When I couldn't compete, eight years ago, I turned to shells. I noticed that lots of shells were being thrown away as the by-catch of the trawlers. I guessed that these too would begin to have a price. At first, I just began to collect the discarded heaps and, later, the owners began to ask for a price. We were only four women at that time (in the mid-1980s) who bought all the shells. Now there are ten men who also do the same. So now prices are up and we have to share the products."

Omana employs three women on a daily-wage basis to clean and sort the shells. The present three—Laila, Rathnam and Susheela—have been working for her for the last five years. Initially, they earned Rs15, plus food. Now, they get Rs30 in all. They feel satisfied, claiming that Omana is a nice and very hardworking woman herself and can not afford more.



As the sale of the shells is seasonal, Omana requires large capital. She started initially with a loan of Rs7,000 from the hank. Now, she makes purchases for around Rs 1,500-2,000. She has to find her own buyers. Now, with the help of her two sons, she packs the shells in jute sacks and each variety has a different price per kg.

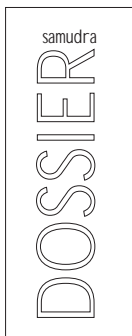
For both Omana and the women who work for her, it is a hard life. She has to participate in auctions and then carry the loads on her head to the sorting site. At the sorting site, about 500 yards away, the sorters sit on their haunches with just a temporary makeshift plastic sunshade out in the open—sun or rain or storm. They now live in fear that the harbour authorities will evict them, as this is part of the harbour area.

The construction of the harbour has taken into consideration the needs of merchants. The basic facilities that exist are the big auction halls where the auctioning and sorting are done. There are some rooms available for rent that merchants can avail of. There is a public toilet and bathing space that women can use by paying 75 paise.

While women have physical access to the harbour, they are alone against male merchants who have more money and facilities to purchase fish in bulk. Therefore, basically, life has not improved for women around the harbour. From what they understand of mechanization, some of the women feel that the harbour has 'improved the fishing.' They certainly feel that mechanization has lessened the burden of labour, and helped the fishermen go further in search of fish. What they see around the harbour is also development—the ice plants, the company vehicles that come around and the higher prices for fish. But they also clearly see that fish catches have fallen, especially that of the traditional fishermen at the other end of the bay. They also feel that many more women get fish now at this landing place: "After all, women come from all around to buy fish here."

What do all these changes mean for people who have traditionally lived here—the working fisherpeople? Has their life really improved? In one sentence, the women say, "There is no future here. We hope our children can get work somewhere else so that they will not suffer the way we have."

We have not made a detailed study of the original population of this area and the changes brought about by the harbour in order to find out who has really benefited from this 'development'. What is evident from the women's point of view is that the harbour has centralized landings. This, in fact, attracts women from near and far. Procuring fish from Neendakara is cheaper than procuring it at their own villages, if one buys in large quantities. But this is only after the big male merchants have taken what they want. Most women who still keep coming to the harbour are those who have succeeded in



fighting all other odds and have survived in the trade. To do this, they have had to develop their own survival strategies, mainly by grouping informally together. They all speak about the problems of harassment on journeys, the fatigue and the insecurity of whether they will make a profit or not. But all said and done, for them, it is a way of life. They can see no other means of survival. They will be at it until they can literally walk no mure.

The Clam Pickers around the Vembanad Lake

The islands that make up Cochin District and their location, either in the large lake or along the sea front, make this district a picturesque sight. Not only is there a natural beauty, there is also a variety of occupations that people are engaged in for a livelihood, which add to the diversified beauty of life in this district. Nevertheless, today the diversity of occupations is more an indication of a struggle for existence, as people try to extract from nature what they do not get as dignified human beings and members of the larger social structure. One example of these struggling groups is the women who pick clams. This is a hard and unrewarding existence.

When the cock crows at the break of dawn, Lakshmi wakes up, rushes through her morning ablution, makes herself a quick cup of black coffee and awakens her daughter and husband. While she bids them goodbye, she picks up her sack and pot, and sets out towards the lake. It is a long hour's walk, during which she is joined by other clam pickers heading in the same direction.

She reaches the lake even before the sun has risen and with a prayer on her lips, "O God, help me." She folds up her skirt and immerses herself in the water. She commences *thappu* or searching with the fingers for clams. When her breath fails her, she surfaces to the top and drops whatever she has in her hands into her pot, hoping that there are more clams than sand. She does this repeatedly, unaware of the number of times she dives, hoping that by the time her strength fails her, she will have a sufficient amount of clams to sell in order to buy rice for the day's meal.

Lakshmi has done this work for the last 25 years, ever since she was married. Her mother-in-law introduced her to this work, telling her a story: "These shells are God's blessing. Wherever he sees faithful believers, he walks over the water, scattering this seed. If there are no clams, it is because God is angry with us. We must pray and make our offerings, and we will find favour with him again." All the clam pickers once believed this. But now times have changed.

Lakshmi often asks herself, "O God, when will I be able to stop this work and rest?" The answer? "Never." How will the family survive? Ramu, her husband, earlier had a daily income in agricultural work or repairing people's fences. Today, with brick walls and more houses occupying agricultural land, Ramu rarely gets a day's work.

Venu, her son, has become a fisherman, but his catches have been diminishing. "O God," she says, "give me the strength to go on."

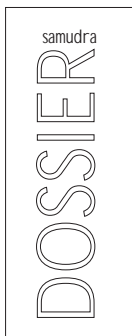
Like Lakshmi, there are about 60 women who have picked clams in this area for a fairly long time. Most of them come from the *kudumbi* caste. There are a few Christian women who are also engaged in this work, mainly from the island of Kuthirakurkari. The majority of the women are illiterate.

The young boys also help in loading the shells and transporting them for sale. In this area, the shell and the flesh are sold separately. Twenty per cent of the flesh is sold to neighbours, about 10 per cent taken to the market and the remainder sold to those who come regularly to buy it from women's homes. The other members of the family, including the men, help in marketing.

The husbands of *kudumbi* women are not fishermen. They are mainly agricultural workers. Most of these women are 40 to 50 years of age. They are forced to continue this work as their husbands increasingly have less work. The younger generation is not inclined to get involved in this work as it is very difficult and the rewards are frugal. But they do help their mothers as and when necessary. As soon as the mothers reach home with their catch, the younger women take over, washing the clams, boiling them and removing the flesh from the shells.

The work location of the women is not always fixed. It changes from season to season. Normally, it is the fishermen who indicate where the matured clams can be found. Women have to calculate on walking long distances to reach their workplaces, as only two of all the clam pickers have their own little boats. Otherwise, women hire boats—but this means Rs30 per day in hire charges. Three to four women may hire a boat together. The working time in the lake itself is between four to six hours. Most of the clam season is during the very hot months of the year. Some of the women go twice a day to pick the clams. And what are the returns from such hard work? In good seasons, around Rs20 per day but, generally, even much less. Often, it is the only earning of the day for the family.

Although most of these women engage in this as a traditional work, none of them know much about the life of the clams as such, although they can distinguish between the male and female. For the rest, i.e. the growth and reproduction, "It is God's work." Spending long hours in the water, which is also polluted, is a health hazard for the women. Most of them complain about early rheumatism and backache. It is only the need to find the next meal for the family that forces them to pursue this hard life.



TAMIL NADU

Nalini Nayak and Sr. Alphonsa

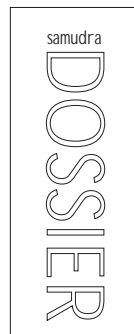
There are about 4.63 lakh people depending on marine fishing in Tamil Nadu, scattered in 401 villages along the 1,000 km coast of the State. The fishing fleet of the State consists of 43,000 craft, of which 89 per cent are traditional, and the rest, mechanized. In 1994, about 3.62 lakh units of fishing gear were deployed in catching fish.

With the Pulicat Lake at its northernmost point and Kanyakumari at the south, the Tamil Nadu coast skirts the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay with their rich sea beds of corals, seaweed, mangroves and wetlands. Pearl oysters were also numerous in this area. The two old ports of Tuticorin and Madras lie on this coast, but many more have been constructed after the country's independence, with the development of mechanized trawl fishing. Today, this sensitive coastal zone is being threatened by the construction of a massive coastal highway. It is also being devastated by the gold rush of shrimp culture. With the discovery of chemicals in the sea sands, mining is also taking place in the northern regions, leading to erosion and related consequences.

The total marine production during 1990-91 was 2.91 lakh tonnes, while the inland sector contributed 0.80 lakh tonnes. About 60 per cent of the landings are consumed in fresh form, 30 per cent is cured, and 8 per cent is frozen for export. The remainder goes for fishmeal, manure, etc

India's most skilled artisanal fishermen are from Kanyakumari District. They use hook-and-line and longlines, and are capable of going to the deep sea for shark fishing. Competition for resources has been on the increase over the last decade and the government banks on the development of the mechanized sector and the new promises of coastal aquaculture.

Tamil Nadu is the only State in India where the Department of Fisheries has given significant importance to women's work in fisheries. These efforts started as early as 1979, when a Fisherwomen Extension Service of the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department was created. This was the result of the joint efforts made by the FAO and the Government of Tamil Nadu through the Bay of Bengal Programme. This programme commenced with the organization and awareness-raising of women at the village level through what came to be known as the link-worker's programme. Subsequently, a chain of women's co-operatives was created and, by 1986, there were about 36 women's co-operatives in the State, with around 4,500 women members. In order to carry these efforts forward, provisions were made to appoint a woman Deputy Director of Fisheries.



Women in
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Tamil Nadu's fisheries display an assortment of fishing techniques and women too engage in a variety of fish-related tasks. In the Districts of Ramnad, Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari and Tanjavor, they are more engaged in drying, curing and vending, whereas the dominant activity in the northern Districts of Madras, Chingelput and South Arcot is marketing, including auctioning and purchasing at big fish landing centres. In the northern districts, the women had earlier auctioned the fish their husbands brought back. Today, they have been completely marginalized in this work.

The braiding of nets was a feature of Kanyakumari District until 1979. Thousands of women were displaced from this source of employment with the coming of the net-making machine. Despite a long and forceful struggle by the women to prevent the machine from being commissioned, the faith in 'modernization' prevailed.

The fisherwomen of Tamil Nadu have engaged in many struggles to sustain their livelihood. After the struggle of the net weavers, there have been consistent battles for transport facilities to the market. Here again, it is only in Tamil Nadu (in the districts where women mobilized) that space and facilities were provided for women fish vendors on public transport buses. More recently, there has been a massive uprising of women against the proposed Kudankulam nuclear power plant and, subsequently, against the invasion of modern shrimp culture along the coast. Most of this mobilization was spearheaded by NGOs on the coast—whether to provide drinking water facilities in coastal areas or to experiment with appropriate containers for fish vending.

With the government seemingly taking an interest in the welfare of fisherwomen, Tamil Nadu provides an ideal case study of the impact of welfare programmes on women of the coastal area. Until 1995, nothing significant emerged from the loan programme undertaken through the co-operatives or the various training programmes established to train women in fish preservation techniques or to develop a model fish market. Nothing significant has evolved along the coast in terms of conserving women's spaces in fisheries. In fact, as gathered from the Status Report on Welfare Programmes for Fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu, a 'Quick Transport Scheme' was introduced for *fishermen* as early as 1950. This scheme provided vans to the fishermen's co-operative societies to transport fish to the market. Nine vans were initially purchased and new additions were made in subsequent years. The scheme was wound up in 1979 on the pretext that it was incurring a loss. It is more likely that the scheme was stopped because the marketing vans were in the control of the men, while the actual marketing was the role of women.

There are many reasons why government programmes have had little impact on women. The most significant reason is probably that women have been seen more as objects and beneficiaries rather than

as an integral part of the fishery. Today, hundreds of young women and girls from the fishing villages are migrating for work as wage labour in the fish processing plants. Earlier, young woman worked in the salt pans. Today, these are being displaced by the shrimp farms.

Fish Vendors

Unlike their counterparts in the neighbouring States of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, the vendors of Tamil Nadu operate on a smaller scale, in general. Yet, there are no districts where women are not involved in fish-related activity. In most places, women borrow money at high rates of interest to carry on their vending activities. In many areas, the lack of transport to the interior forces them to dry the fish, which they then sell to merchants at very low rates.

In many areas, women are controlled by community regulations instituted by the village headmen—the *thalaivar*—or the church leaders in Catholic areas. In Arokiapuram, for instance, women fish vendors were not allowed to enter the village except on foot, while male vendors used bicycles. Once they became organized, the women fought this regulation.

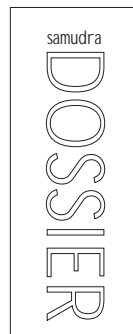
In Tamil Nadu, there are a large number of women from the interior villages who also engage in fish vending. This is especially so in Kanyakumari District.

Women in the Shell Industry

With the development of tourism linked with the age-old tradition of pilgrimages, the shell handicraft industry has also grown. One of the noted seasons is from October to January, when the pilgrims who go to Sabarimala in Kerala drive down another 150 km to take a dip at the confluence of the three oceans at Kanvakumari. These pilgrims are the largest buyers of the shell products that have been creatively developed in Kanyakumari District.

Typical is the case of a woman who worked in this industry for ten years and earned around Rs 15,000. She saved all this money for her wedding, as her father was a fisherman and her mother was disabled. All her three sisters worked in this industry as well. This is the only employment women can find in this area and so they do it for the little money they are paid. The maximum the women can earn is around Rs5 to Rs7 per day.

Now, some women have begun to do the work on their own. With some of their savings, they manage to buy the shells. But again, they have problems with marketing. The local shops accept their goods only in the months between October and January. They would need their own agents to market their products in other areas. This is the



reason why many women prefer to work for the wholesale merchants and manage with the small returns they receive.

The Seaweed Gatherers of Mandapam

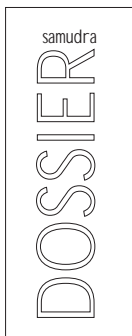
The 2.5 km-long Pamban Bridge that links the Indian mainland to the island of Rameshwaram carries hundreds of tourists to the famous Shiva temple on the island. The bridge strides over what is called the Gulf of Mannar on the southern side and the Palk Bay on the northern side. The land formation that borders the Gulf of Mannar creates a well-protected bay bordering which many coastal communities live. Here can be found Chinnapalam which has about 104 fishing families.

Living in little thatched huts, all these families have been long engaged in fishing using plank boats, both small and large (22- to 28-footers), using both the sail and inboard motors. What is particularly interesting about Chinnapalam is that one sees large groups of women boarding the little boats before the break of dawn and putting out to sea. Getting closer to the scene, one sees these women, carrying little bundles, wading through the low tide for about half a km, and getting into little boats in groups. Some get into little boats with their husbands, and a few rare ones get in alone with a younger child and row themselves out. After a while, they have all disappeared behind the little islands that dot the Gulf. Where have they gone?

The story goes that women who have grown up in Chinnapalam refuse to follow their husbands to live in other fishing villages. Since very young they have grown to understand, appreciate and find a living in the rich resources of this bay. As children, they have accompanied their parents to gather seaweed or catch crabs. Now, in days when fish is more scarce and life becomes a greater struggle, large groups of them depend on the seaweed to sustain their families.

It is indeed a tough life. Depending on the time of sunrise, they set out at the break of dawn. In their little bundles, they carry their diving glasses and their tin of rice gruel. They wade in low tide until they can reach their little boats, generally owned by a man who lets them use it for Rs3 per head. They row themselves across, and, depending on the wind, it takes them from between 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half to reach the island shore. They anchor their little boats and wade again through another low tide area until they reach the bank of the next island around which the seaweed beds lie. This entire area is a bed of coral reefs and different sea grasses. Where the larger rocks exist, at a depth of 1-2 m, the women dive down to pluck the seaweed.

At this point, the sea enters the bay, so the women have to battle with the waves as they dive down. They have to be careful about where they tread and what they lay their hands on. The seabed is rich with



life. Moreover, they have to be sure they take only the mature weeds or the merchants will not buy it from them.

The experts among them remain underwater for a whole minute and even a few seconds longer. They may gather around 8-15 kg a day. Leaving home at the break of dawn, they return around 2 p.m. They then have to scatter the seaweed out to dry, by which time the 10 kg is reduced to 7 kg, for which the merchant will pay them Rs6 a kg the next day. They would have earned around Rs35 to Rs40 for the seven or eight hours of hard and risky work.

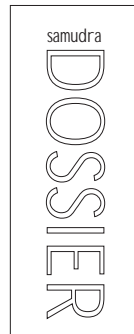
Muthammal is one of these women who is now 40 years old. She stretches out her hands and legs to show how they have been hardened and scarred by the work she does. She looks older than her age, as her hair has whitened as a result of the salt water, she says. She has been doing this work to support her family of three children, as her husband does not earn much when he goes out to sea in his little boat.

She earns around Rs45 when she goes seaweed gathering but, of course, this is not for the whole month. The women can only go into the sea for around 12 days a month. They do not venture out around the full moon and new moon days because the tides are too strong. They also realize that they can not and should not pluck the seaweed endlessly because it will not grow again. They also say that they have to pluck it with their hands and can not use any instruments to cut it off. Much of what they do manage to pluck also gets washed away from the surface of the slippery rock, if they are not quick enough to grab it. It is thus a constant battle.

Yet, while at the task, the women continue to be lively and joking. As they go into the water in groups, they keep chatting and joking or even swearing at each other when they surface to breathe. They say they have a feeling of great freedom while in the water although they are aware of the dangers and the hardships too. It is not uncommon that one of them gets carried away when she ventures too far.

This activity is mainly seen in the villages of Chinnapalam, Thopekadu and Vadakade. As mentioned earlier, it is again only in these villages that women also put out to catch crabs, setting the nets in the evenings and going out the next morning to gather the catch.

Although these women are skilled at their work and are skilled navigators in the bay too, none of them uses a motorized craft. The men who live off the hard work of these women scorn at the idea. Despite the fact that they thus have to put in more labour, their rudimentary technology is more appropriate to conserve this rich bay, which is probably one of the few such live areas around India today.



ANDHRA PRADESH

Nalini Nayak and Navta

Andhra Pradesh, situated on the east coast of India, has a coastline of about 980 km, with a continental shelf area of 31,000 sq km. The mighty discharge of two great rivers, the Godavari and Krishna, and other small rivers greatly enriches the flora and fauna of the coast.

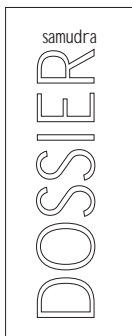
Andhra Pradesh has 453 marine fishing villages and 280 landing centres, distributed among nine coastal districts, namely Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore. According to a 1987 study, there are nearly 74,000 fishing families, with a total population of 3.30 lakhs. There are about 84,000 active fishermen and approximately 36,000 craft are engaged in marine fishery.

The fishermen use all kinds of craft from the four-log *theppa* to plank canoes, some of them motorized with an inboard engine and others fitted with an outboard motor. They use a variety of gear like drift-nets, gill-nets, bag-nets, hook-and-line, and boat-seines. Over the years, the artisanal fishermen have also started owning trawlers and they operate from harbours like Nellore, Machilipatnam and Kakinada. Visakhapatnam has been developed as the deep-sea fishing harbour from where the industrial trawlers and purse-seiners operate. There are also part-time inland fishermen along the Krishna and Godavari rivers.

The fishing villages are, to a large extent, geographically isolated from the rest of the State. Adequate infrastructural facilities, proper roads and sufficient fresh water supplies are lacking. Housing is very poor and this situation is aggravated by frequent fires and cyclones. Today, the very existence of these coastal communities is being threatened by the fast expansion of shrimp farms.

In Andhra Pradesh, women have been involved in fish vending and other post-harvest work, as in other States. Women generally have been drying fish. Earlier, even good quality fish was dried and sold in distant markets. Women initially bought fish on their own shores. The wives of the fishermen would then sell the fish to other women in the smaller villages. In the larger villages, the merchants who advanced loans to the fishermen would take the better quality fish, and the rest would be available to local women for drying.

In villages which were nearer towns or markets, women handled both fresh and dry fish for retail sale. But, since the coming of the fishing harbour, the situation has changed. Many women spend four to six months a year at a harbour to purchase fish caught by the



trawlers. "The small trawlers generally sort their fish during the voyage. They partially dry the edible by-catch caught in the early days of the voyage. 'Towards the end of the nearly 10-day voyage, they collect the rest of the by-catch and sell it fresh. Women buy edible by-catch which they re-dry and sell in different interior markets, packing it in jute sacks and hiring vehicles in groups to transport the fish. Some women, like those in Thimmapuram, even buy the undried by-catch which is a collection of semi-decayed 'trash fish.' They dry this and sell it to the fishmeal plants.

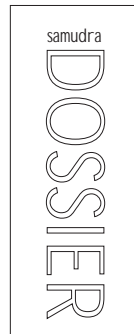
The Vishakhapatnam Town Fisheries Women's Dry Fish Welfare Society

Running north along the beach road from Vishakhapatnam (Vizag) town towards Beemunipatinam, one comes across a large expanse of area where fish is dried. This area, about 14 km outside the Vizag Corporation, is a recently created village called Thimmapuram, where the people who were displaced from the beach when the Vizag outer harbour was being created, were relocated in the early 1980s. One can not miss seeing a big signboard outside a little meeting shed which reads 'Vishakapatnam Town Fisher Women's Dry Fish Welfare Society.' As one enters the shed, women immediately gather in welcome and then begin to narrate their problems.

Kondamma, their former President, says that she has hardly held the post of President for a year, but she seems to be the leader and does most of the talking. She says they were part of a group of 160 families who were sanctioned 10 acres of land in this area. But only 100 of them have got their house plots sanctioned. They got this following years of struggle with the authorities after they were displaced from their original land sites in the early 1970s. When the people were displaced, they were promised 10 acres for housing and five acres for drying fish. They were also told that they would have five buses that would help them carry their fish from the harbour to the new village which would be supplied with drinking water and other infrastructure.

The actual facts are difficult to ascertain but some reliable sources say that the Collector at that time had suggested that women be helped to organize and that they be assisted to pursue their work in more hygienic conditions, once displaced from the overcrowded city beach. The welfare society was then registered with the Collector's assistance.

These 160 women have all received loans of up to Rs3,000 from the Union Bank of India but many of them did not repay their loans in full. They also have one truck which is now in a state of disuse. These women together employ another 150 women who help with drying. Strangely enough, there is no system of daily wages. The trend is to



give the women a share of the earnings when a consignment is sold and to give a piece-rate wage for packing.

One wonders why this group has not been able to organize collectively and stand up for their rights. In fact, they have a common activity and sufficient work area. They prefer to do all their work individually—even the purchase and transport of salt. More could have been achieved collectively, for example, the maintenance of their vehicle, storage sheds, etc. The pity is that the government probably made them a one-time grant without the assistance to organize or maintain their infrastructure—another example of poor planning. The women became displaced with massive promises and have since been left to fend for themselves. In comparison, crores of money have been spent by the government on developing the harbour and subsidizing the activity of the fishermen.

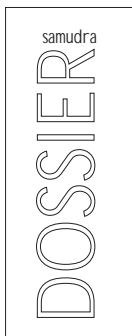
Women at the Vishakhapatnam Harbour

At one end of the beautiful 'Marine Drive' of Vizag is the fishing harbour. As one drives south past the palatial buildings on the Marine Drive, one enters what resembles a slum area, up the hill on the western side. This area called Jalaripetta, which literally means 'fishing village', is packed with small leaf huts and some semi-permanent structures and houses, and has a population of around 10,000 people.

What is now the fishing harbour was the traditional fishing ground of these people until 1956, when the outer harbour was constructed at the Vizag port. This outer harbour was created for the export of iron ore with a loan of Rs56 crores from the Japanese government. After the outer harbour was created, one quarter of it was converted into a fishing harbour in the late 1960s. This move was encouraged by the growing shrimp trade of Kerala and by the fact that companies like Union Carbide were interested in trawl fishing for shrimp.

With this, the local fishing community lost its traditional access to the sea and its free access to the shore for drying the fish. As soon as the Marine Drive was developed in the early 1970s, the people of the fishing community were seen as outcasts and many of them moved further north to continue their fishing operations. Today, while some of the men still pursue their gill-net fishing using the traditional *theppas* and fibreglass beach-landing craft, the majority of the people in Jalaripetta work in the fishing harbour.

The harbour is buzzing with activity from 5 a.m. until 8 p.m., for about eight to nine months of the year. The harbour is closed from March until the end of May. It is not very clear as to why it is closed at this time. Although closed seasons are a necessity in relation to the fishery, it does not appear as if this regulation was made on ecological grounds. The story goes that this was the demand of the workers on the trawl boats who initially came from Kerala. These three months



were the poor season for fish and this demand was made by their unions so that they could be paid and go home on leave. Gradually, the young men from Andhra Pradesh themselves got to work on the small trawlers. By this time, the closed seasons for trawl fishing had become a demand of the artisanal fishworkers all over the country and so this regulation was retained, despite the fact that the spawning season is a few months later.

Vizag is one of the biggest fishing harbours in the country. All the Indian deep-sea fishing vessels harbour at Vizag. Although India's deep-sea fishing has been a tragedy—in that only about 14 to 20 of the 148 vessels have been able to break even—the small trawlers (32- to 40-footers) seem to be more active. Most of them are now owned by local people, some of whom are wealthy and others who manage to survive by taking fishing advances from local women fish merchants.

Ramulamma is one of the big wholesale fish merchants at the harbour. She has been in the business for the past 20 years. She inherited it from her grandmother and her mother. Ramulamma works as part of a trio comprising her mother and married daughter. A large part of the advance for the boats also came from her inheritance, along with a loan of Rs 10,000 she took from the Union Bank about 10 years ago. Ramulamma has now advanced Rs5,000 each to 20 mechanized small trawlers and during the Dussera season, she also gives the trawlers a 'gift' of Rs800 to Rs1,000 each. She does this to make sure she has access to the fish.

Ramulamma spends her whole day at the harbour where two or three of her boats enter each day. On the days that her boats do not dock, she buys fish in the open auction. From her trawlers she gets all the fish, except shrimp and squid, which are sold directly to the export company agents. During a good season, she gets other high-value fish as well, which she either sells directly to consumers at the local market or auctions to retailers if they are too large in quantity. The major part of what she regularly gets is the mixed by-catch which would have already been salted and even partially dried by the trawler workers. Ramulamma packs all the by-catch into jute sacks and awaits a van that women hire jointly to return to their village. She comes from Thimmapuram where there is drying ground available. Depending on the season, the fish can be either the more edible varieties, or just trash fish, which is finally dried for fishmeal.

Each day, Ramulamma buys fish for around Rs6,000 to Rs 15,000. In fact, she had purchased Rs7,000 worth of fish one October day, despite the fact that this is considered to be a lean fishing time. Ramulamma hires labour for the packing and transporting of fish, but this is only on a piece-rate basis. As hers is a family business, they are personally able to supervise the important jobs, such as being

present during the unloading, retailing high-value fish, auctioning excess fish, transporting dry fish, and supervising the drying and sale of the dried fish.

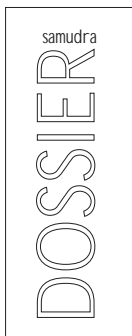
Ramulamma is one of the women merchants who was displaced when the outer harbour was being constructed. She, therefore, has a house site in Timmapuram which, she feels, is better for drying fish. The space available at Timmapuram facilitates the handling of large quantities of fish. However, the people did not get all of the facilities that the government and the Fisheries Corporation had promised. They do not have the time to fight for more facilities.

Besides the money lent to the boats, Ramulamma has no other investment in her business. She is illiterate and so does all her calculations in her head. Ramulamma is not able to say whether she gains or loses money overall. But she does admit that she has been able to buy some gold for her daughters and her granddaughter and manage the daily expenses. Is this equivalent to the interest that Ramulamma would have obtained if she had simply invested the Rs 100,000 in the bank? The fact is that because of women like Ramulamma, hundreds of other people have found work and can eke out a livelihood, including all the men who help in transporting and packing, all the small retailers who buy from the merchants and all those who work for wages at the drying area.

Of course, conditions have changed from the time of Ramulamma's grandmother. She realizes that the quality of fish now is very poor and that the bulk of the profits are being taken away by the shrimp and squid companies. All her operations are on a ready cash basis, which means she always has to have liquid money. Ramulamma says that she sometimes has a reserve of funds but she also has to borrow on a daily interest basis when she needs more. Moreover, some money is always blocked in the dry trash fish awaiting the fishmeal plant buyers. So Ramulamma is really never aware of her exact financial position—the money keeps rolling and she struggles on under the same stressful conditions.

There are ten other women like Ramulamma, who have each made cash advances to 20 boats. These are the largest of the group and their operations are similar to hers. On the whole, there are around 200 women who give advances to boats. About 100 of these are from adjacent Jalarietta or from neighbouring villages in Vizag District. The remaining women come from as far away as Kakinada, Bhilai and interior areas. These women, all said to be of the same caste, belong to families which migrated to other areas for work. They continue to buy and dry fish and re-transport it to Bhilai for sale.

On the western side of the port, the situation is different. Large groups of women can be seen sorting, re-drying and packing dry fish. A large number of them, estimated between 50 to 100, are local



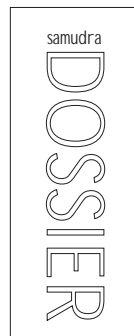
women. They buy fish daily for Rs500 to Rs1,000 and then either re-sell to other women merchants or take it to nearby rural *shandis* (markets). Oletisatamma comes from a different group. She is one of about 40 to 50 women who come from Kakinada, over 30 km south of Vizag. She has been coming here for the past eight years, during which period the catches have begun to decline. Oletisatamma sold fresh and dry fish in Kakinada earlier. But, when her children had to get married and she required more money, she decided to come to Vizag and buy the trawler by-catch.

This by-catch—small ribbon fish, anchovies, some mackerel and spoilt shrimp—is auctioned by the merchants who have advanced money to the trawlers. Oletisatamma buys anywhere from Rs2,000 to Rs5,000 worth of dried fish a week. She then re-dries it and packs it in jute bags and, along with 8 to 10 other women, hires a truck to take it back to Kakinada. She brings 8 to 12 jute bags of fish twice a week to the Kakinada *shandi*, where she sells to retailers.

The plight of these women from Kakinada is indeed pitiable. There is no space allotted at the harbour for them. In fact, they are regularly harassed, sometimes physically manhandled by men who extract bribes from them. So, each day the women pay the authorities Rs15 to Rs20. They literally live around their bags and baskets, exposed to the sun and rain. They cook their food, and some of them even bring their little children with them. Oletisatamma fortunately has her husband who is now old and helps her with the packing. Some other women also have their husbands who work as labour on the trawl boats. The others manage alone, as they have come all this distance because they are the sole breadwinners in the family.

The few *theppas* and fibreglass boats that still land near the harbour bring back a high-value catch. Using large-mesh gill-nets, these fishermen catch fish like seer, pomfret and lobster. All this high-value catch is purchased by four women merchants from Jalanpette. They are all from the same family. Kokkiri Nokalamma, who works jointly with her sister Bulamma, is one of these women. Now 28 years old—although she looks older—she has been in the business for about 10 years. She started with a capital of around Rs20,000, part of which she got from her sister and the rest from her father's retirement fund. With this, Nokalamma gave advances to 10 fibreglass boat fishermen in return for their high-value fish.

These four women, in fact, sit together around their little sheds constructed in the premises of an ice plant just outside the port. They pay Rs150 per month as a group as rent to the authorities. Nokalamma, like the others, sits in her shed from about 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. She employs four men on a permanent basis. They bring her the fish from her creditors on tricycles. It is weighed immediately and the price is fixed. This fixing of the price is difficult to understand because she says she pays the fishermen two or three rupees less than



the market rate. But who determines the market rate? What probably happens is that there is a generally known rate which may increase or decrease depending on the size of the catch. The fisherman has no real say in the matter. Nokalamma fixes the rate and pays per kg of fish.

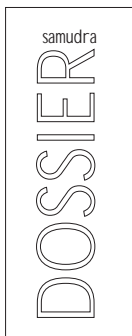
It is interesting to see Nokalamma operating. She supervises the weighing, controls the cash and makes the payment. For the rest of the time, she orders her men workers around. They bring in the crushed ice and, when sufficient quantities have been brought, they pack the fish in order to reach the railway station in time to catch the train either to Madras or Bombay.

Nokalamma sells to four merchants in Madras, who buy fish, and two merchants in Bombay, who take lobster. From what she says, these merchants supply the big hotels. She got to know them when they visited Vizag. Her sister had gone to Madras and Bombay to verify their credentials. Now, all communication is done by phone. Nokalamma sends fish daily to Madras. She notes the quantities and the merchants send her a demand draft depending on the rate in the Madras market. Again, she adds, she may even lose on these sales.

Nokalamma and her sister handle from 500 kg to about two tonnes of fish a day. They buy the packing material—baskets and jute bags—in bulk, and have about 15 days to three weeks of this material on hand at any time. They pay the men Rs15 for each sack of fish packed, together with a little extra for transporting the fish. A small auto-carrier comes to take the parcels to the station. The labourer gets Rs10 per package loaded. He does the work in the booking office. Nokalamma says she has not really made any major gains. She now has an autorickshaw which she purchased with a loan from the bank. It cost her Rs46,000. She hires a driver for Rs800 a month, plus Rs5 for daily expenses. He makes a run along the northern coast to pick up lobster that other traditional fishermen may have caught. She also uses the autorickshaw to make sales to hotels in Vizag which take up to 150 kg to 200 kg of good fish and some lobster.

Nokalamma is still unmarried. She has studied up to the 4th Standard and can keep accounts. She needs real managerial skills. One can not really gauge the profit she actually makes. In fact, her accounts are not consolidated. Nokalamma lent her money to the fishermen some years ago as guarantee that she will get fish for sale. She says it costs her Rs300 as packaging and freight charges for every 100 kg that she transports. So, she has to make this up from the rates she gets in Madras.

With the money that Nokalamma gets from the merchants, she makes daily payments. She pays for food for her home. She has also bought some gold. The gold and her autorickshaw are her assets. Nokalamma has one thin gold chain, some ear-rings and a ring. She



said she had also pawned another chain because she sometimes needs to borrow money from moneylenders when she is short of cash. She has a bank account which she operates but there are hardly any savings in the account.

It is indeed a hard life from Monday to Sunday. There are no holidays. There is also no closed season for Nokalamma as the small craft, the *theppas* and beach-landing fibreglass craft operate the year round. There is only a lean season in the months November to February.

Nokalamma says that catches have fallen a bit for the *theppas* but that the fibreglass mechanized boats have done well and she has had no problem with procurement. In fact, she has not felt threatened by male merchants and exporters. They are generally after the trawler catch.

These four women, because of their experience access to capital and business acumen, control all the high-value fish of the country craft and the beach-landing fibreglass craft. Their fish is fresh and it probably goes to the tables of the rich in Bombay and Madras.

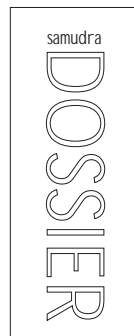
Yet, Nokalamma does not really seem to have amassed any wealth. She commands power but she has not been able to buy herself a decent plot of land and still lives with her family in grubby surroundings.

Women in Prakasam District Attempt to Organize

Prakasam District has about 100 km of coastline. Many areas are naturally protected bays along which the fishing community lives in approximately 65 villages, ranging in size from 20 to 500 households. About a fourth of these villages are not directly accessible by bus routes. In some areas people may have to walk upto 4 km to reach a bus-stop. This implies that many of these communities are physically marginalized from the mainstream. They are unable to send children to school or to avail of medical services and they have very difficult access to markets.

The total marine fishing population in the district is approximately 28,000, with 8,000 active fishermen, all using the traditional *theppas* (catamarans) or *vallams* which are mostly fitted with OBMS or IBMS.

The women in the area have all traditionally sold fresh fish or salted and dried the catches. Fish, they complain, has been on the decline over the last seven to eight years. In 1993-94, many of the fishermen and women were driven to abandon fishing and engage in the collection of shrimp seed. This seemed to be more lucrative than the returns from fishing as shrimp farming was beginning to enter the area. But, by October 1994, large groups of women from the fishing community started coming together to impose sanctions on

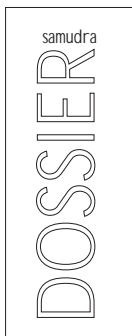


shrimp seed collection. Women leaders were very vocal about the fact that this kind of work led to depletion of the resources, thereby jeopardizing their own livelihood. Although they were fully aware that this meant more money in the short term, they were also not oblivious to the fact that prices for seed had dropped over the year and that they were at the mercy of the shrimp farmers who came from the monied and ruling classes.

Moreover, the women realized how some communities were already suffering from the ill-effects of the shrimp farms. Those villagers had initially sold their lands to the shrimp farmers who were offering very lucrative prices to the fishermen. They had not realized what shrimp farming meant. Only after the ponds were constructed did they realize that the farmers were beginning to pump in saline water from the sea, thereby salinating the soil, and then pumping out the polluted water into the canals or just into the open. Within a year's time, all the water in the wells in those areas was no longer fit for drinking, and people were forced to migrate to other areas where clean water was available. In September 1994, a cholera epidemic broke out again because all the wells were contaminated, and emergency services had to be organized.

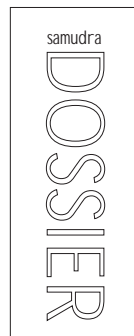
These women—around 300 in number—got together to take a stand against both the catching of shrimp seed and working in the shrimp farms. They were all representing their village *mahila mandals*, which are small, local women's groups registered in the entire area. This network of women's organizations had emerged in the period 1991-94 as a result of an awareness campaign undertaken by a local NGO called SNIRD. Many of the women were extremely vocal and able to articulate the points related to the issue. They were able to pressure the less convinced women to take the same stand. Less than one per cent of these women were literate, yet those who took leadership during the meeting were able to refer to various problems that received newspaper coverage. They felt convinced that, if united, they could make an impact.

This courage had obviously grown out of the successes that women had already experienced at the local level. Through their village organization, all of them had begun to organize savings and loan schemes to ward off the dependence on moneylenders. All of them had begun to confront the local authorities in order to get access to roads, street lights, wells and house *pattas* (title deeds). In fact, in one area, Rajupalam Chinnapatterpalam, the women had obtained the house sites in their names. One of them, Jamma, had single-handedly driven away the businessmen who had come to buy land for prawn culture in this area. Subsequently, the whole village got together to safeguard their lands. Together with their men folk, these women had managed to pressure the authorities to redistribute over 1,000 acres of land to the poor that had recently been allotted to the rich.



The women are obviously on the move. Though the pressures on daily life become harder, 50 per cent of them dry fish in the village and 30 per cent sell fresh fish, walking to nearby markets or taking a bus to the district headquarters. But fish is becoming more scarce and the women wonder what other source of livelihood they will soon have. Quite a few of them are still beaten by their husbands when under the influence of liquor. In fact, these women had taken part in the anti-arrack movement that had shaken Andhra Pradesh and closed all the arrack shops. But liquor is still available. In the place of arrack, cheap 'foreign liquor'—coloured arrack in brandy bottles—is now sold.

Women again pledged to stop liquor sales in the village. To do this, they decided to create a district-level Women's Federation. Although they took the decision, some of the women said they would confirm it officially only after they had informed their village leaders, the *kapoos*. Many of these areas, where the communities have Tamilian roots, have strict village-level controls. All decisions are made and disputes settled by the reigning *kapoos* in village assemblies. The women still do not have a voice in these bodies and, in fact, they are not accepted as part of the District Fishermen's Federation either. Although women are now empowered to organize for their rights, gender awareness is still low, and only time will prove whether or not it will grow.



ORISSA

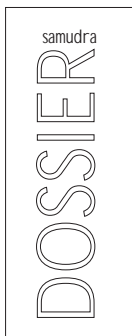
Nalini Nayak

Orissa has a coastline of 480 km and four maritime districts—Balasore, Cuttak, Puri and Ganjam. Bordering the upper part of the Bay of Bengal, the State has an extended continental shelf in the northern part, with rivers and estuaries, and a narrow shelf area in the south. Just as the marine environment of the north differs from the south, so do the fisherfolk and the technology practised. While the major artisanal fisheries in the south relate to sardines, anchovies, mackerels and prawns, the major fisheries in the north are for hilsa and pomfret.

In the extended shallow shelf areas off Balasore coast, encircling nets and inshore seines are operated. The river mouths and estuaries of Cuttak and Balasore Districts are used for the operation of set bag-nets. Beach and boat-seines are used in Pun and Ganjam Districts. Gill-nets and lines are used all along the coast, but have different specifications in the north and south.

Similarly, the craft vary in the north and south. Plank boats are used in the north, whereas the raft type *kattumarams* (*theppas*) and bar boats (*podhuas*) are common in the south. While the tradition of marine fishing in the south is as old as in the other southern States, it is relatively new in the northern part of Orissa. This also brings about a clear division in the fishing community—the people of the south are of Telugu origin (*noliyas*) and in the north, of Oriya origin. The latter are generally agriculturists-cum-fisherfolk. This makes the habitation patterns of the north and south very different too. The fisher people in the north live amidst their agricultural lands, whereas the fishing villages in the south are densely populated areas along the sandy beaches. Prior to independence, Gopalpur was a flourishing port town and the base of the sea-going artisanal fishermen. The creation of the Paradeep port and the Balasore fishing harbours has encouraged the mechanization of fishing craft and the inflow of non-fisherfolk into the fishery.

The famous brackish water Chilika Lake covers about 1,165 sq km, spread over two districts of Puri and Ganjam. It is an ecological marvel as it turns into a sweet water lake on the landward side, fed by the two rivers, Daya and Bhargari. Around this lake are over 122 villages, where the coastal people engage both in fishing and agriculture. The 96 or so islands that dot the lake are homes of wild animals and the Nalabana Sanctuary is the seasonal home of many migratory birds. In order to conserve this ecological marvel, to protect biodiversity and to assert their right to livelihood in this common water body, the people of this area stopped the privatization of the lake, when the government entered into a pact



with the Tata group of companies to lease out Chilika Lake for aquaculture.

The Orissa coast is also the home of some of the most beautiful temples in the country. The 40-km stretch of coastline, featuring the famous Jaganath temple in Puri and the Sun temple at Konark, has been acquired for tourism and other development activities. This has affected the life of over 40,000 marine fisherpeople.

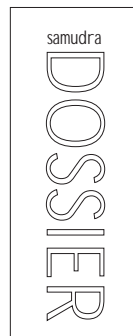
Tucked away in this coast is also the famous Bhitara Kanika Sanctuary covered by the Ramsar Convention. This is the breeding ground of the Olive Ridley sea turtle and has a lush mangrove ecosystem. This sensitive coastal strip has also attracted military attention. In the mid-1980s, the Central Government announced its intentions to set up a missile testing and launching base at Baliapal in Balasore District. This would have directly affected 30,000 fisherpeople. People rebelled and succeeded in stalling this initiative. At the southernmost point is the Golabandha missile testing range, bordering an area where over 600 fishing families reside. These developments have caused the displacement of fisherpeople.

Women from Coastal Communities Fight Displacement

In the area now called New Bauxipalli, the voice of Kondamme still cries out in misery: “Earlier, I lived near the Gopalpur lighthouse. We were over 600 families fishing and living there from childhood, and one fine day, some army people came and told us we have to move. We were angry and decided to fight. We realized they were going to create a resettlement village called New Bauxipalli. We did not want to go there because it was already a crowded place, and we knew we would not be able to get much fish there. We asked for the resettlement site to be located in Argipalli, but they did not agree. They were influenced by the powerful moneylenders and liquor merchants.”

“Today,” she continues, “in New Bauxipalli, we are constantly harassed by the military. They have blocked off our access to the interior villages, which means we have to walk longer distances to the market or even hire transport. What is more, they harass us and our daughters, and there have been numerous cases of molestation and even rape. Who will listen to our cries? They are the military, after all. They are supposed to protect our nation but we have never felt greater insecurity as we have experienced after they came here.”

The women in Sondikud village, 4 km north of the Paradeep harbour, tell the same story. Many of them in this area have been evicted twice in a lifetime—first for the construction of the harbour, and then for the creation of the University. The coming of the harbour affected them drastically because it not only displaced them but, with the



advent of trawlers, they lost access to good quality fresh fish that they sold earlier. Now, merchants advance money to the trawler owners and take away the good quality fish. What is left is the poor quality trash fish. This the women buy in bulk, paying between Rs2,000 and Rs4,000 and transport them to drying grounds. Here they hire labour at Rs30 to Rs35 a day to sort and dry the fish. Each lot takes around four days to dry. The dry fish merchants then come and purchase the fish for sale.

Of all the coastal areas visited, the women of Sondikud were the most non-cooperative and suspicious. This is probably due to their struggle for daily survival and the utter disregard shown to them by the powers that be. They wonder when they will be ousted from the existing habitation areas, as they still do not have any *pattas* (title deeds). Where will they be driven to next?

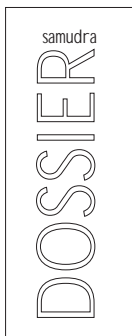
The Chandrabhaga Womens' Welfare Society

As a result of the literacy and organizational work of various NGOs, women's organizations are springing up all along the Orissa coast. Chandrabhaga, a Telegu settlement in an Oriya area on the outskirts of Konark, is one such area, where women have come together. Kondamma, the President of the Welfare Society, is an active and vocal woman. She is also the Ward Councillor, as the women decided to vote for her rather than a person from outside. In this way, Kondamma can work for the rights of the settlers.

And what are their problems? Kondamma and the other women are bitter about their fate: "They (the Government) have taken everything away from us and given us rations one day a week. This is so *katy* (solid) that it is supposed to last a whole week in our stomachs. Once we lived honourably, our men fishing and we selling the fish. Today, our men function like coolies, buying the trash from the trawlers and bringing it back to us to dry. What is more, this government wants to see all the money we earn through our hard work get siphoned away by the liquor merchants, and gives permits for liquor shops in every nook and corner. So we have decided to fight. We want land *pattas* and ration cards for all. We want a school for our children and we will see that the arrack shop is not allowed to reopen here."

All this discussion took place in a little hut outside which is a large board, on which is written "Chandrabhaga Women's Welfare Society." A strange but welcome sight in this desolate settlement of little huts, where over 3,000 families live. This hut is the little school for children as well as the night school for adults, run by the women's group.

The striking paradox is that the government has acquired over 2,000 acres in the surrounding area to develop a large tourist complex around the famous Konark Sun Temple. Whatever is already created

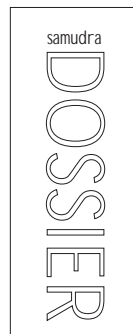


of the complex is well equipped with water, electricity and the like. None of this is extended to the fishing settlement of displaced people who have been resettled only a kilometre away—not even transport facilities, which stop about a kilometre away from the settlement. The fisherwomen have to hire autorickshaws to transport their goods to and from the public transport stop.

Similarly, the fisherwomen of Gopalpur in the south have a strong and vibrant organization fighting for their rights. These women have been the backbone of the Kalinga Fishworkers' Union, which has been spearheading the struggles of the artisanal fishworkers against the encroachment of the mechanized trawlers.

As stated earlier, most of these women are Telegu and they feel the government does not recognize them as citizens with rights.

As in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Orissa is another Indian State which has a significant number of NGOs working among coastal communities. This has provided an impetus for people and generally women to create their own local organizations. These, in turn, have helped women voice their demands and create their own support infrastructure. Unfortunately, these organizational efforts do not transcend the geographical confines of the NGOs' area of operation, and hence have not evolved into a larger movement at the State level. In the absence of this, these women's demands will not have an impact on State policy.



WEST BENGAL

Nalini Nayak and Members of
the West Bengal Fishworkers' Union

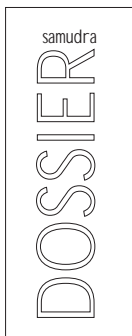
West Bengal has a coastline of 650 km, with a marine fishing population of approximately 84,000, of which about 20,000 are active fishermen. The majority of them fish in the river Ganga and its tributaries. The marine fishing community that lives mainly around the inlets of Kakdwip is a migrant community from Bangladesh. Both men and women are involved in inland fishing, as many of them use cast-nets and traps. A large number of them also eke out a living by harvesting the fingerlings which are later used in culture.

The two coastal districts of the State are Midnapur and 24 Parganas. By tradition, fish is an important part of the diet of the population of the State and the consumer preference is for freshwater fish. There are a total of 303 fishing villages, 148 in Midnapur District, 58 in the 24 Parganas and 79 in Howrah, which are inland.

The total number of mechanized boats operating in West Bengal in 1987 were 1,054, of which about 75 per cent were gill-netters and the rest, small trawlers. The traditional craft, which were later mechanized, were large 32-foot plank boats equipped for nine-day voyages in the Bay of Bengal. There are about 4,100 non-mechanized craft, almost all of which are plank-built canoes. The different gears used are drift-nets, gill-nets, fixed bag-nets, hook-and-line, shore-seine, scoop-nets and traps.

According to 1993 figures, the total fish production from the State was 1.45 lakh tonnes. The fish landings of these fishermen are large and are transported in bulk directly to Calcutta wholesale markets, 100 km away. The major part of the freshwater fish catch is marketed by women and consumed locally.

The fishery has provided work to the inland people who have no other means of employment. In fact, almost nowhere in West Bengal do the women of the actual sea-going fishermen, the fishing caste, work directly in the post-harvest work. This may be because most fish-landing centres are away from the fishing villages. The particular geographical features of the area are such that numerous rivers enter the sea and the intermittent land mass is marshy. The stable fishing villages are generally upstream. This could be one reason why wives of the fishermen traditionally did not participate in fish-related activity and why today they would even consider it improper. At the busy fish landing centre at Shankarpur, women are



**Women in
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totally absent. Yet, there are thousands of women involved in the fishery. Who are these women?

The Net Weavers of Kakdwip

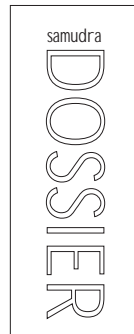
Walking through the slushy fields bordering the various landing points in Kakdwip, one would come across several groups of women mending, joining and stretching large gill-nets. They certainly draw-attention, as women are not generally found engaged in these tasks in other parts of the country. In other parts, besides weaving the nets, joining and stretching them are usually done by men. These gill-nets are made of nylon yarn, with large meshes, and can weigh between 50 kg and 100 kg.

How is it that women are engaged in these activities in Kakdwip? Has it been an age-old tradition? In fact, no. It is a skill women acquired and took to as a means of survival. The majority of them are refugees or Stateless people who became so as a result of Indian independence. They fell into the territory of East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, and crossed over illegally to India, fearing domination by the majority Muslim population there. Many of them fled their homes, productive lands and assets, and came to India for security. But little does India offer them and not being recognized as citizens, disqualifies them from any social and other rights.

Many of them came from some fishing background, having lived in the delta areas in Bangladesh. As a result, their men got involved in the open-access fishery in West Bengal. A few of them succeeded to build up some assets, but the majority remain landless, homeless and jobless. This seasonal weaving, mending and joining of nylon nets were skills they could easily learn. Some of the women work in groups, but most work individually. All of them get the yarn from traders and are paid on a piece-rate.

Alo Rani Das, who is 32 years old, is a typical net-weaver who tells this story: "I am the eldest of two daughters. We are from the fishing caste. I lost my father at the age of six. I heard from my mother that my father had four or five *behundi* (bag) nets and a set of gill-nets, and two boats. My grandfather was alive. After the death of my father, my mother was turned out of the house, and she returned to her parents with her children."

"We were brought up at my maternal uncle's house, while my mother worked as a domestic maid in other people's houses. I did not go to school. At the age of 15, I was married. My husband was the youngest of four brothers. My husband and his immediate elder brother were together in a joint family. At that time, we had two *behundi* nets and two boats. During the monsoon, they would fish in the Sundari rivulet very near our house. The rest of the year, they would go to the estuarine fishing grounds off Dhalchar, Char Kulkri-mukri, Char Fakir, etc., about 10 to 15 km from our village."



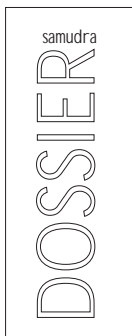
“In 1981-82, many Muslims took to the profession of fishing all of a sudden, which was a new trend. Many boats and nets of the traditional fisherfolk of the Hindu community were looted and the owners beaten. My husband and his elder brother fell victim to this vandalism in 1982 and lost both the boats and all fishing gear and implements. Both of them were severely beaten. We had a little more than half a hectare of cultivable land, which was sold to buy a new boat and net. Again, in the winter of 1984, both the brothers were seriously beaten by some known Muslim goondas at the Dhalchar fishing grounds and were robbed of the boat, nets and other belongings. These Muslims very often used to threaten us with dire consequence if we did not quit Bangladesh. Police often declined to register complaints of such atrocities. On the other hand, they relished harassing the compliant Hindus.”

“In 1985, we left Bangladesh and came to Kakdwip in West Bengal. My husband found a job in a fishing boat at Kakdwip and I took up net making. I have four children, namely, three sons, Lakshman Das, Sujan Das, 10, and Suman Das, 2, and a daughter, Mina Das, 6. My husband bought a small piece of land at Maity Chawk, where we are living now in a thatched hut. This is a new habitat established by 500 refugee families on purchased lands.”

“After prolonged suffering, my husband died, probably from cancer, on 21 October 1992. The children are still too young to earn. I am the only one to support them. But what do I earn from net making? Hardly Rs5 a day and that too for four to five months a year. Net making alone does not sustain us. Hence, very often, I go out to different villages for work. We do not get help from any government sources, as our names are not included in the voters’ list and we have no ration card.”

The West Bengal Fishermen’s Union was totally oblivious of these women. Interestingly, all fishermen used the hand-woven gill-nets made by the women, at a time when fishermen in the rest of the country had shifted to machine-made nets. Hand-made nets were cheaper than the machine-made nets, as they were also made from inferior quality yarn. How, therefore, could the union safeguard the employment of women and help enhance their earnings? Not all the fishermen in the committee were convinced that they should take up such issues, but some of them were willing to give it a try. With the help of some young women, they began to meet groups of net weavers.

Once together, the net weavers spoke of their numerous problems—lack of status as Indians, although coming from the same stock, and, as a consequence, no rights to the public distribution system, water and electricity facilities, and no work. Most of them were illiterate.



The union decided to take up some of their issues, start literacy classes and make a detailed survey of these women. In a short while, many of these women took to the streets under the banner of the Paschim Bengal Matsyajibi Forum (West Bengal Fishworkers' Forum) demanding water and ration cards. They managed to get water and a few got ration cards. Literacy classes began in some small groups and, a few months later, women were writing their names and reading their children's school books.

The survey, which took a few months, revealed that there were 4,071 net weavers in the Kakdwip area and their average daily income was Rs2.56 per head.

Age-wise, 18 per cent were below 15, 72 per cent were between 16 and 45, 8 per cent were between 46 and 60, and 2 per cent were above 60. About 71 per cent of them lived with their husbands. Eight per cent were widows, 20 per cent were unmarried, and 1 per cent were deserted.

Of the women, 89 per cent were refugees, while 11 per cent were local. Fifty-five per cent had more than 10 years experience in net weaving, 20 per cent between six and 10 years experience, and about 25 per cent had up to five years experience. Of the women, 70 per cent were landless, and 75 per cent illiterate. The average size of each family was seven. Net weaving is supplementary income engaging them for about 4 to 5 hours each day.

Struck by the findings of this study, the union decided to organize some net weavers. They wanted to help them get out of the clutches of the merchants, those that gave them the twine to weave the nets. A group of 30 women got together and, with an investment from the union, procured the twine themselves and wove nets. They immediately got around Rs3.50 per day and this forced the merchants to increase the wages they paid to other women. The women worked together for a whole season and made the nets ready in time for the fishing season, only to realize two major hurdles: fishermen procured nets on credit from the merchants and were therefore expecting credit sales from the women as well; and, the previous fishing season had been extremely bad. Fishermen were perplexed. Many of them did not propose to launch their crafts this season and some others were toying with the idea of transforming their gill-nets into trawl-nets.

Even the members of the union were not in a position to come to the rescue. It was a very hard situation to face, until two union members decided to purchase the entire production, paying for only half the quantity, on the assurance that the other half would be paid for as the season advanced. With not enough money to reinvest, the women could not proceed to purchase yarn for weaving during the next season.

Subsequently, the next year, the fishery began to change. Many fishermen sold their emits in desperation. Some widened their gill-nets and attached heavy sinkers so that the gill-nets would set at the bottom. Some others transformed their cratt into trawl boats. All these were ecologically unsound moves. But, as the union was caught up in a national struggle against the foreign vessels fishing in the deep sea, it could not pay attention to a more ecological diversification of the fishery.

Nevertheless, the women of Kakdwip have maintained their membership and interest in the union. The union, in return, has realized that women are a potential in the struggle and that their livelihood issues have to be addressed, if the men are to understand why their fishery has to evolve in a more ecological and sustainable manner.

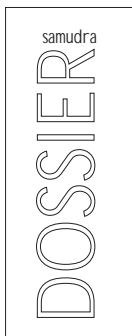
Women in the Transient Fishing Villages

The transient fishing villages are a special phenomena in West Bengal. They spring up around November each year and disappear in March the following year. This is both a natural and sociological phenomenon. It is natural because it is a result of water flowing down the Ganges, which submerges certain land areas in some seasons and leaves land dry in other seasons. Areas which are inundated in the rainy months are habitable in the drier months. This phenomenon also brings in different varieties of fish, which require different capture technology. The gill-nets are pulled in and the large fixed bag-nets come into operation.

The transient villages are a sociological phenomenon because massive villages come up over night, called *kunthis*. Fishing crew move to these areas with all their equipment. The crew are all male. But the transient villages are made up of a large number of families from the inland who move there with their bag and baggage to dry the fish for wages or for payment in kind. This process has been going on for over a century, and the entire process is very organized.

A transient village is a fishing camp made up of a number of *kunthis* or fishing units. There is always one owner of a unit, which may be made up of one to 10 fishing boats. The owner engages fishing crew and workers for each fishing season, paying either a salary or a share of the catch. The owner sets up a *kunthi*, which consists of a temporary dormitory for the crew, a kitchen and a godown to store the dry fish.

The net used during this season is the fixed bag-net, and each owner may fix from four to 20 nets. For every four nets, there is one boat and crew which stays permanently at sea, making two hauls each day. Then there are carrier boats which bring back the catch and take food to the crew. Once the fish is brought ashore, it is sorted and then dried.



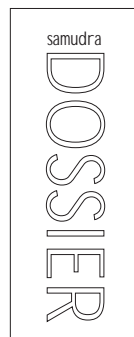
Bengalis normally can not eat a meal without fish, especially *hilsa*. Yet, very few know that large quantities of Bombay duck are caught by the marine fishermen of West Bengal, from November to February every year. In fact, most middle and upper class Bengalis would scorn at the smell of dry fish. Little do they know that about 100,000 people make their living from catching and drying Bombay duck and some other varieties of ribbon and cat fish. These species, which are all dried, are caught by fishermen who migrate and settle in the transient villages.

Jaldha is one such village, located about 15 km east of Contai, with no direct road access. One has to get off the bus, walk along a mud road and then through the salt pans for about 2 km, take a ferry across the canal and then enter the *kinthi*, which spreads over an area of about 3 sq km, right up to the sea. From a distance, the area looks like a toy village—long rows of reed huts, like matchboxes, surrounded by bamboo stakes, which mark the boundary of one homestead and delineate the area for drying fish. Each *kinthi* varies in size and is an indication of the number of fishing crew each *kinthi* owner is able to employ.

The Jaldha camp normally has between 10,000 to 12,000 people. These numbers have been increasing over the years. They include fishermen, who come as fishing crews with their boat owners, normally totally male groups. Then there are families which include around 2,000 women and working children. There are also a large number of merchants, big and small.

Sita Rani and Mulika Patra are two such women who come from a little potters' village about 15 km away. They have been coming here for the past 15 years, when life in the village became more difficult. Sita Rani has a 10 cent plot of land on which she grows some vegetables. Over 100 families from her village come to Jaldha every year, with bag and baggage, and each of them works for a fishing unit. Each family gets a quantity of fresh fish to sort, clean, salt and dry. They are paid in kind, generally two per cent of the total quantity dried. This they store and even sell to meet their other needs.

Families who go to camps normally prepare for their travel during the *puja* time, in late October. By November, the fishing season commences and work starts. Once work begins, there is almost no time to rest and, the women say, it is a dog's life day in and day out. As the fish quantities increase, the surroundings get dirtier and life becomes really hard. Coming to Jaldha is not only a physical strain, people also have to borrow from moneylenders to meet the needs of the initial days. Sita Rani borrowed Rs1,500, in November 1994, paying Rs.10 per Rs1,000 per month as interest. She says that after the last season, she had around Rs3,000 profit after paying her debt, buying new clothes and paying all the camp expenses. She comes with her husband and three children, while one daughter remains at



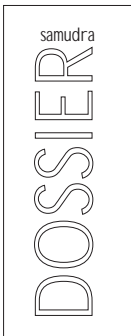
home. Rani says that she goes through all this burden because there is no other means of livelihood in the interior. She can not bargain for a greater return because each year larger groups of workers are coming and the catches are dwindling. So people have to be satisfied with what they receive. Moreover, much of the fish has to be sold at throwaway prices. It is all a gamble. Rani's husband helps with the work and Rani, in addition, cooks for the whole family.

Kohinoor Begum is another woman at the *kunthi*. She has been doing this work since she was a child. In fact, her family was poor and came here every year. When she got married, her husband did not have a homestead site. So, over the years, she reclaimed a plot of land in the salt pan area and now has a permanent house there. Kohinoor Begum works in the salt pans during the other months of the year.

None of these women or their children have been to school. They feel they are really neglected by the government and have no future. They know the general situation is deteriorating because each year the number of workers swells, while the size of the catches decreases. What future have they to look forward to? Yet, in 1993, this camp sold Rs3 crores worth of dried fish.

At the *kunthi* at Dadompathrabai, the situation is slightly different. This place is more easily accessible but it is an open sea area. The number of fishermen who migrate here are not that numerous—altogether 5,000 people at the camp. As the camp is nearer the inland villages, women come to work to dry fish daily.

Ashalatha Rout, now 37 years old, has been doing this work for the last 22 years. For her, it is just one among several kinds of daily wage jobs that she undertakes for a living. But this is the most paying, as it is paid per task. Ashalatha earns up to Rs30 per day in the good season. It is hard work, but then what other choice is there? She has three children and all have completed primary school. Her daughter, now 15 years old, also comes to work with her and so does her husband.



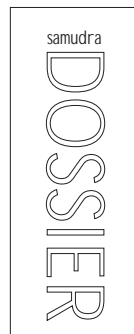
By Way of Conclusion

Part I of Volume 1 of this Dossier has been, for the most part, descriptive, as it documents the various kinds of fish-related activity that women are still involved in. Together with the data contained in the forthcoming Volume 2, the actual involvement of women in fisheries in India is quantitatively indicated. This documentation dispels the official notion that women are not involved in fish-related activity and, therefore, need not be taken seriously in the planning process.

The fact, however, is that this involvement of women has not only made the survival of the coastal communities possible but has also helped preserve the way of life of the artisanal communities, in the wake of their marginalization by the modern sector. We are not idealizing the survival of life at a level of subsistence. What we are trying to highlight is that, in the context of countries like India, where industrial development is not able to engage the large army of surplus labour, and where over half the population is forced to live below the poverty line, the numerous outlets for employment in the artisanal sector should be noted and creatively integrated into the economy.

Unfortunately, neither is there any real appreciation of the numerous tasks that women are involved in nor is any value attached to these tasks. Consequently, no efforts have been made by the authorities to help women sustain these roles. As most of these tasks occur within the context of the coastal fishery, there is ample scope and reason to sustain and even subsidize the coastal fishery so that it could continue to exist along with the development of the offshore fishery.

The documentation presented in this Dossier is an attempt to make these tasks visible and the following section, Part II, shows ways in which most of these tasks can be sustained. We need to employ a creative approach to planning, which will be based more on the nature of the resources and artisanal skills of the local population, rather than on macro-plans made at a centralized level. An integrated development plan, which demarcates the areas of operation of the artisanal and modern sectors, needs also to make budget allocations accordingly. This implies that the State should make a conscious attempt to sustain the artisanal sector, while, at the same time, elevating the quality of life of the artisanal sector.



Part II

Health and Reproductive Rights of Women in Fishing Communities of Kerala

Aleyamma Vijayan
Country Coordinator
Women in Fisheries Programme, ICSF

All over India, and probably all over the world, the fishing community is marginal to mainstream development. Even in the small State of Kerala in South India, which is otherwise acclaimed for its high level of 'development'—the 'Kerala model', as it is often referred to—the development of the fishing community is far below the average situation prevailing in the State at large. In the following pages, I will try to highlight the reality in the field of health, mainly from a feminist perspective.

In feminist circles, generally, women's health is portrayed as a problem of reproductive rights and related difficulties. But in societies living in extreme poverty, health issues of women are additionally compounded by lack of nutritious food and of basic facilities, such as drinking water, sanitation and environmental hygiene, double work burden, etc.

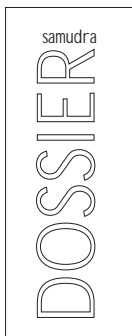
What do we mean by health? The tendency is to regard health issues as pertaining to disuse and malfunctioning of the body and mind. Conventional health practices concentrate on the individual and illness, with no reference to the social milieu. Moreover, gender aspects are not given any importance.

In any society, the health of the population is related to the socioeconomic and political structure of that society. The inequalities of our social system and unjust gender approaches will definitely reflect on the health situation as well.

Women of Fishing Communities

The marine fishing population in Kerala is around 10 lakhs. The only source of livelihood of these coastal people is marine resources. Although modern technology has entered the fishery, large sections of this community still remain illiterate and poor.

As in all poor communities, fisherwomen also bear a double burden of work. Besides household and child-rearing responsibilities,



fisherwomen are engaged in fish-related occupations such as net making, fish vending and fish processing. These are all time-consuming and labour-intensive tasks. From childhood, girls are forced to help in these tasks and so the literacy rate of women in the coastal area is less than 35 per cent. Unhygienic living environment, extreme poverty, lack of pure water and overwork put the fisherwoman at a disadvantage.

The growth indices which Kerala claims to have achieved as a result of development do not apply to the fishing community. The infant mortality rate (IMR) and the maternal mortality rate (MMR) are very high. There is no study comparing the life expectancy in the fishing communities to that of the general population. It is extremely unlikely that this is anywhere near the life expectancy of the average Keralite.

Important Indices

Index	Kerala	Fishing Villages
Population growth rate	1.9%	2.3%
Sex ratio (women per 1,000 men)	1,032	972
IMR/1,000 live births	40	129*
Life Exepectancy	67	Not Available

Source: Kerala Government, 1988

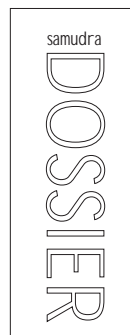
* T.K.Vimalakumari, 1991

Female-headed households in fishing communities are also numerous, as in other poor communities. In short, the atmosphere and conditions of the fishing villages are not conducive to proper development of the physical, emotional and mental well-being of the population.

Adverse Sex Ratio

The sex ratio in any given society is an important indicator of the social position of women in that society. Of all Indian States, only Kerala has a positive sex ratio for women. There are 1,043 women for 1,000 men. But, in fishing villages, the number of women decreases sharply and is less than the number of men, i.e. 972 per 1,000.

A study of the infants of the fishing community reveals that, as in every other society, the death rate of male infants is higher here too.



during infancy and later (T. K. Vimalakumari, 1991). The prevalent social attitudes, which favour male children, result in girl children getting less attention and care. One may assume that discrimination exists in the availability of nutritious food, care during illness, etc.

Malnutrition among girls leads to problems during pregnancy. In most fishing villages, girls are married off before they are 18. Insufficient calcium and iron intake result in inadequate pelvic bone growth and anaemia, leading to a high maternal mortality rate.

Poverty and Food Availability

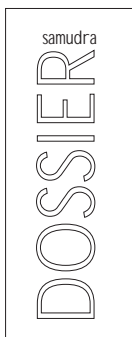
The fisheries policies being pursued in the State have only accentuated the pauperization of artisanal fishworkers. The fishing industry is geared towards exports and use of destructive fishing methods, which lead to depletion of resources. Increased competition forces more capital investment which, in turn, results in a decrease in per capita income.

In agriculture, the shift to cash crops resulted in lack of food for consumption. A similar trend is seen in fisheries where more cash is required to invest in outboard engines and nets. The fishworkers are forced to sell whatever they catch to earn cash income to clear debts. Fish and cash income for own consumption are drastically reduced, affecting the nutritional standards of the family.

In these circumstances, women have to shoulder the responsibility of sustaining the family. Presently, there are no support structures for women to pursue fish-related activities. Women borrow at high rates of interest and walk long distances, travelling to and from distant markets or harbours, to buy and sell fish. They have to compete with men in order to earn and sustain their families. It is this meagre income, earned by hard labour, that meets the survival needs of the family.

The fluctuation in income affects the availability and quality of food. The normal diet of rice or tapioca with fish is supposed to be nutritionally adequate. Yet, due to the poor availability of fish or the high prices, women prefer to sell whatever their husbands catch. This can lead to severe nutritional problems. Usually, the leftover rice is used for breakfast. The custom is that men, boys and young children eat from teashops. The quantity and nutritional quality of food consumed by women and girls are seriously affected. The consumption of food like eggs, vegetables and milk is generally low.

Studies conducted in Indian villages reveal that during pregnancy and lactation, women do not get the additional energy and nutrition (an additional 500 to 600 calories) that are required (S. Batliwala, 1982). In addition, in the fishing communities, pregnant and lactating mothers do not get any special consideration. Overwork, lack of



nutritious food, worm infestation and continual deliveries affect women's health, and they age prematurely.

Misconceptions and superstitions regarding the food habits of pregnant and lactating mothers are another problem. For instance, there are misconceptions that if good food is consumed, the baby will become big and delivery will be difficult and that if eggs are eaten, it will result in boils on the newborn's body. On an average, 60 to 80 per cent of pregnant women in India are said to be anaemic. The percentage in fishing villages is likely to be higher.

Infant Mortality Rate

The reduction in the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and the decrease in population growth rate are cited as indicators of the rise in quality of life in Kerala. The State has been able to achieve an IMR equal to that of any developed country. However, high IMR persists in the coastal villages. In the study of IMR in Vizhinjam by T. K. Vimalakumari in 1991, the IMR was found to be 120 per 1,000 live births.

The causes for this high IMR are said to be the following: marriages before adulthood; lack of spacing between births; lack of proper care during and after delivery; and unhealthy living conditions. According to the study, 75 per cent of infant mortality occurs in deliveries of women below 20 years of age. In overcrowded villages, parents find it safer to marry girls soon after the onset of puberty. Because of the high IMR, women think it necessary to have more deliveries. Frequent deliveries affect women's health. It is a vicious circle.

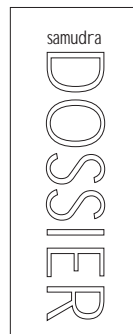
Morbidity

There is a high level of morbidity in the fishing communities. Fever and different intestinal diseases, such as diarrhoea and skin diseases, are common. In the monsoon months, in one village, Vizhinjam, about 2,700 people come to the Primary Health Centre for treatment of gastroenteritis. Many more would have gone to private hospitals. Defecation in the open is the principal cause of this disease.

In the overcrowded villages, diseases, such as leprosy and tuberculosis, are a significant presence. Asthma, diabetes, kidney infections, cancer and heart-related diseases are also seen.

Accidents during fishing result in physical disabilities and death. Women fish vendors suffer from problems of eyesight, headache and back pain. Women inhale a great deal of smoke while cooking in dingy kitchens using firewood, and this leads to health problems.

The high morbidity rate has a further impact on the economic status of the family, and the vicious circle of poverty persists.



Reasons for Poor Health Conditions

1. Population density

Occupational convenience forces fishworkers to live in the narrow stretch of coastal land. The warmth and privacy of family life is integral to mental and physical well-being, but the overcrowded housing situation does not provide this atmosphere.

Kerala has the highest population density in relation to other Indian States—655 per sq km. In the coastal belt, the population density is more than thrice that of the State of Kerala and nearly 10 times that of the country as a whole (2,113 for coastal villages, compared to 221 for India as a whole). In some of the coastal villages in Trivandrum District, for example, Vizhinjam, Poonthura and Anjengo, the population density is 5,000 to 7,000 persons per sq km.

2. Living conditions

About 50 per cent of fishworkers have land holdings of two cents or less. Nearly 16 per cent of families are landless. Of these, more than half live in huts and the rest in thatched houses. The housing situation is the worst in Trivandrum. There is no electricity in 75 per cent of the houses. Basic infrastructure is grossly inadequate.

The use of firewood for cooking leads to the inhalation of smoke, and the use of kerosene lamps in the thatched huts along the wind-blown coast leads to a number of accidents. In recent times, there were fire threats in the villages of Valiathura and Anjengo. Sea erosion also leads to the destruction of houses and fishing implements.

The high population density easily spreads contagious diseases. Quarrels are also frequent. As men often spend time at the seashore after their work at sea, either mending nets or playing cards, these problems affect women more. The atmosphere is not conducive to healthy male-female relationships or the upbringing of children, and this constant tension also affects the mental well-being of the people.

3. Lack of pure drinking water

The problems created by the lack of water in this crowded situation can be easily imagined. More than 50 per cent of families do not have access to piped water supply in fishing villages. Even in villages where taps are provided, water is available for only one or two hours a day—in some areas even less frequently. In areas where well water is used, it is found to be extremely contaminated.

Since fetching water is a task left entirely to women, this again increases their burden. For example, in one fishing village, women travel by bus to a stream, each person paying Rs3 to collect clean water. Therefore, if a family of five has to live hygienically, they have to spend Rs450 per month for water alone. The consequences of this can be easily surmised.

4. Sanitation facilities

One problem which affects women very severely is the lack of facilities for meeting their primary needs. In the overcrowded villages, individual latrines are not practical. Men use the seashore. Women have to wake up very early if they want to use the beach. During the daytime, they are forced to defecate in plastic covers or old newspapers in the house and throw this bundle into the rivers or streams.

I would like to emphasize here that this is not a question of lack of awareness. Sheer necessity compels these practices. In one fishing village, where a common latrine was built and a 'pay-and-use' system maintained, 400 women used it daily. Therefore, it is the lack of facilities that is the basis of many of the problems.

Defecation in the open creates various sorts of health problems. Since there is no privacy for maintaining personal hygiene, urinary tract and vaginal infections are common

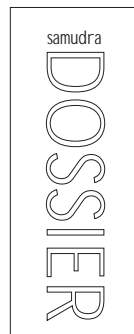
5. Environmental problems

Another important factor leading to ill health is the living environment. Since houses are close together and there is no drainage, waste and waste water stagnate around the houses, especially behind the kitchen, attracting houseflies and mosquitoes. Worm infestations, leading to diarrhoea and dysentery, are common in these areas. Since there is no facility for garbage collection by the local bodies, waste is scattered around the dwellings. Fish and fishing implements are also kept in the houses, again attracting flies.

6. Reproductive health of women

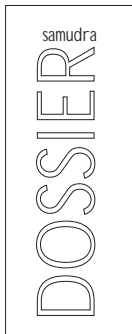
The awareness and ability of a woman to control her own body and reproductive process are closely linked to her general health and social position.

Fisherwomen who are disabled by poverty, illiteracy and ill health, also have no control over their time and body. The myths about sexuality prevalent in our society also affect them. It is generally believed that men have uncontrolled sexual needs and, since a woman is a man's property, she should yield whenever a man demands sexual intercourse. If she expresses unwillingness, he may term her as immoral or accuse her of having other relationships—or he may go after other women. Due to these fears, even if women have difficulties, they agree to sexual intercourse. Women say that even after delivery, they are not given sufficient rest by men. Many women also suffer from conditions such as fearing of the vaginal opening and prolapsed uterus due to aggressive sexual intercourse. Due to the general mystification surrounding women's sexuality, poor women are unable to talk about such problems or find solutions and take control over their bodies.



In fishing communities, where a large majority of women are illiterate, many misconceptions prevail regarding menstruation, pregnancy and delivery. Women will not talk about, or seek treatment for, vaginal tract infections, pelvic inflammatory infections and menstrual disorders. They suffer silently.

The mystification and unhealthy approach to sexuality make healthy debate on these topics difficult. Unfortunately, it is only with regard to women's sexuality that such double standards and veiling take place.



**Women in
Fisheries
Series
No. 2**

People's Participation in Meeting Sanitation Needs: an Initiative of the *Mukthi Mahila Samajam* at Pulluvila, Trivandrum District, Kerala

Leenamma Jose

Community Organizer

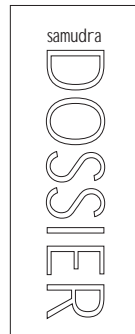
Programme for Community Organization, Trivandrum, India

Among Indian States, Kerala ranks first in the general health index. Nevertheless, the fishing community of Kerala happens to be an outlier in this regard. Coastal fishing villages lack basic infrastructure, such as water and sanitation. This has a serious impact, particularly on the lives of women and children. Whereas men have access to the expansive beaches to meet their primary needs, women have to find isolated spaces amidst crowded housing. Not only are they losing access to these spaces as land prices soar and land becomes scarce, but where they do exist, they have to be used clandestinely in the dark hours of the day. There is also often no water for women to wash themselves.

As a result of unhygienic conditions, the already malnourished women and children become hosts to worms, which drain them further of all nutrients. The lack of potable water is another serious problem and the frequent occurrence of disease makes women prey to private medical practitioners who not only exploit them economically but also inflict on them dangerous quantities of allopathic drugs which have other side effects in the long run.

The *Mukthi Mahila Samajam* (a women's group) in Pulluvila decided to address these questions seriously and requested the assistance of the Community Organizer of the Programme for Community Organization (PCO) to help them do so. The initial discussions centred around the lack of public space and the problem of adolescent girls who needed privacy. Pulluvila is an extremely crowded village and it would have been extremely difficult for each family to have a separate toilet, even if money is available. Moreover, it is a waterlogged area and sewage disposal is problematic.

Yet, the women were earnest about finding alternatives and, encouraged by their enthusiasm, we made a proposal for a community latrine that could be managed by women. Convinced that this could be a viable proposition, the *Samajam* undertook to negotiate a piece of land for the purpose, and PCO offered to find the means to construct the toilet.



Women in
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One of the areas hitherto used by women was a piece of land that belonged to the church. The women, therefore, decided to ask for the use of this land, but emphasized that the control of the latrines should be in their hands. In discussions with the parish priest and the church committee, they realized that the committee was supportive of the project as such, but that it was not inclined to let the *Samajam* have control. The *Samajam* members were not willing to accept this position and so they withdrew.

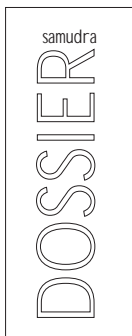
A year later, taking advantage of the transfer of the parish priest and the election of a new committee, the women presented their demand once more. They received a favourable reply this time and there was an agreement, signed by the priest, for the use of the land by the *Samajam*. Nevertheless, it was not until another whole year had passed that the agreement was finalized. The parish priest changed again and the committee kept the women waiting. It was only because of the perseverance of the women and the tactical approach adopted that an agreement was finally arrived at.

We, the Community Organizers, started a mass awareness campaign so that the women's position would be supported in the parish general body meeting. In the meantime, there were elements in the village opposed to the community latrine, who tried to influence the priest. The people living around the area selected for the latrine also objected and, with the issue turning into a public debate in the village, the process was indeed a tedious one.

While the debate was going on in the village, discussions were also taking place in PCO. Could the toilet waste also be used to produce gas which the women could use to run a tea stall? The answer was a resounding 'No.' People would not want to use the gas from night-soil which for them was taboo compared to cow dung. Finally, when the land and permissions were granted, PCO designed a conventional community toilet, with septic tanks and a well with a pump so that women would have sufficient water to wash and flush out.

Although there were different opinions about this from the beginning, those supporting conventional toilets won and 10 toilets were constructed, leading into three septic tanks, with plenty of water available for use. The community latrines were inaugurated ceremoniously and went into immediate use, with around 300 to 400 women and girls using it on a daily basis, paying 20 paise for use. This money was collected by representatives of the *Samajam*, who used the earnings to pay for the maintenance of the toilets, detergents, electricity and wages for members who cleaned and supervised the latrines.

Very soon, the success of this community latrine spread to the neighbouring villages. Discussions for the construction of other



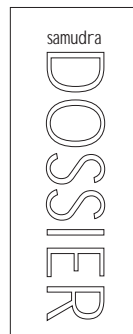
community latrines started in these areas, and they were built with the help of other NGOs.

But within seven months of their use, the latrines developed serious problems. The septic tanks were full. The water in the well began to smell and it was contaminated. This was a danger signal indicating that the sewage from the septic tanks had contaminated the groundwater. The entire village could be affected. The latrines were immediately closed. Officials from the Groundwater Department were called in and immediate testing of the water in all the wells in the villages started. Following the test results, the latrine had to be shut down.

PCO took the responsibility to see that the groundwater stream was not contaminated. This was a big job in which the Groundwater Department assisted. Subsequently, alternatives had to be found. How could this quantity of sewage be disposed without contaminating the high groundwater table? We began talking about sewage treatment and were encouraged to learn about biological treatment systems. A couple of women from the women's group, two men from the church committee and some of us community organizers went to visit water treatment plants in Auroville. Although we did not really see night-soil being treated, we saw grey water, i.e. kitchen and bath water, being successfully treated, and we felt encouraged. But such treatment plants required space and technical monitoring skills that we did not possess. Fortunately, we found an engineer from the Intermediate Technology (formerly, ITDG, UK) who was interested in the concept and inclined to assist us.

What followed was a long process that took almost a year. First, we had to get the church to agree to give us the use of more land. Secondly, we had to work out the best treatment system, as it was hard to find a model to adapt or follow. No one else was treating such a heavy load of sewage. With the help and encouragement of the IT engineer, we decided that we would launch this experiment, making it a model through which people would learn to be responsible for their waste. It took a lot of learning and even more convincing that this would be a living system which would need continuous care and nurture. This would have to be accompanied by improvements in hygiene in the village. A four-pronged strategy was required:

- a commitment not to pollute the water table in low-lying areas;
- treatment of stagnant water;
- creation of a local team capable of handling problems related to water contamination; and
- people's participation in improving local health and sanitation



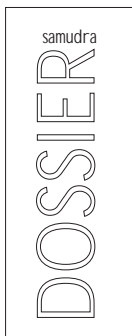
So, while the engineering team went ahead with the construction of the treatment plant, we began a mapping of the water and sanitation resources in the village. We were astonished at what we found. Out of the 250 wells in Pulluvila, 240 were privately owned. Of these, 217 were used by 240 houses, all of which had toilets with septic tanks. In most of the wells, water tests showed the existence of 1,500 to 2,400 coliform bacteria per 100 ml water. In the low-lying areas, people accepted the fact that the toilet closets overflowed in the monsoon months. We, therefore, launched an extensive awareness programme for the youth, nursery school teachers, women's groups, and some men.

This was by no means a waste of time. It turned into a live debate in the entire village. People were ready to make changes and learn. And when the treatment plant was ready, with bathing rooms for women attached to further dilute the sewage, the women used the latrines more carefully, paying attention to water and detergent use. Moreover, they went behind to see what was happening to the sewage.

There was a lot of curiosity and some scepticism. There were also a few complaints from neighbours who found it abhorrent that sewage was exposed to the sun, although there was a green cover of plants. A couple of neighbours vehemently complained about the smell when, in fact, there was no more than what emanates from the open defecation area. The system did work, but not without difficulties. We will not mention all the technical difficulties here. Suffice to say that despite the fact that this sewage did not contaminate the earth, the purification did not reach zero levels of bacterial content. In addition, it was expensive in terms of land area required and construction and maintenance costs.

It became imperative that we try other systems of treatment, if we wanted to make sanitation accessible to all. We realized that using water and creating water-borne sewage in such areas aggravate the problem of the water table. Were there other means of handling excreta? We were reminded of the compost toilets suggested by Mahatma Gandhi. Again, although there are written theories on such toilets, we did not have any models to learn from. Could toilets be constructed in such a way that faecal matter and urine and water would be collected in different chambers? They did not exist. But our IT colleague was so convinced that this could be a viable alternative that we were all encouraged to try. We would be saving water, on the one hand, and producing good compost, on the other.

We decided to experiment with compost toilets and there were 10 women willing to use only these in the future. Four compost toilets were constructed near the earlier community latrine. They were used regularly. We monitored their use, and after three months, diverted the flows to the adjoining chamber. After another three months, the




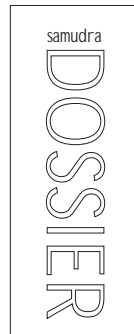
faecal matter in the first chamber was well composted, and people were thoroughly surprised.

Enthused with the success of this experiment, the people decided that we should construct such toilets in the village for private use. Subsequently, six such toilets were built. We are in the process of building them also for the nursery school children, so that children will be accustomed to using them from a voting age.

Although the entire programme continues to be an experiment, it has had numerous spillover effects:

1. Over 300 women have a more hygienic and private space to meet their sanitary needs.
2. The local women's group has steadfastly stood by the experiment and has been willing to learn more about water and sanitation problems in general.
3. There are other villages that have organized community latrines on this model (these, however, have not gone into treatment experiments).
4. A general awareness, and, hopefully, better hygiene practices will result which will reduce morbidity and mortality in the fishing village.

The entire experiment proves that though alternatives are not easy, they are possible with a lot of hard work and conviction. 



Government Housing for Fisherpeople

Nalini Nayak

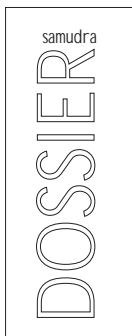
Programme Co-ordinator
Women in Fisheries Project, ICSF

Housing is one of the basic human needs of people. Yet in many areas of our coast, fisherpeople are devoid of this basic need. Living as they do at the very margins of the land, they tend, in most areas, to live almost one over the other so that they can be as close as possible to the sea. Over the years their numbers have swelled, causing the house sites and even the houses to be divided and sub divided, making fishing village look very much like an urban slum, especially in areas where the fishery is rich. Often houses can be so close to the sea that many of them get washed away in the rough season. Migration to rich fishing grounds is a regular phenomenon and, over the years migrants begin to settle, most often on *peramboke* ('revenue' land, or village commons) land, while the more able ones may even buy a small plot and erect a little hut. Large numbers of fishing villages have absolutely no infrastructure facilities, i.e, potable water, drainage and sanitation facilities and electricity. In addition, although many of them are accessible by road, paths inside the villages may be very narrow and may often serve both, as drainage and garbage dumps and as communication passages.

Nearly two-thirds of the fishing villages in the country fall into the revenue list which means that they come under the Administration. Ownership of land is recognised and people pay taxes. Given this fact, and the fact that each State in the country has a large Fisheries Department and local administration, one really wonders what the responsibility of these Departments are *vis-à-vis* the general health of the village and the fishery.

Government authorities can supply lists of houses they have provided in the fishing community—'housing colonies', as they are finally called. Each State has different schemes under which some housing needs are met. In areas where the community falls into the Schedule Caste (SC) category, the entire house is given free. These houses generally tend to be little matchboxes with no kitchens or toilets. In other areas, the Fisheries Department may have sporadic schemes where land is made available, the stipulation being that 30 houses will be constructed in one acre of land. Again, no provisions are made for toilets, and the houses are little larger than the former ones.

Under these schemes, there has, in addition, been a lot of corruption. The contractors who build the houses use substandard material and there have been occasions when the roofs of a whole series of houses have caved in alter a couple of years (for example, Periaivilla in



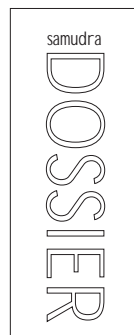
Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu). Besides the ill-willed contractors, it must be conceded that most often the nature of budgeting of the Government is such that no decent house can be built with the funds available. It is generally a question, therefore, of spending the allotted funds just before the close of the financial year and, once the houses have been inaugurated ceremoniously by the Minister and the event splashed in the press, it is the poor people allotted the houses who have to bear the consequences.

There are quite a few housing colonies that have never been occupied such as the housing colony in Vizhinjam in Trivandrum District. These houses were built away from the shore, making it difficult for people to move to and from the shore with nets and other equipment. Therefore, people never occupied them. These houses were built as part of a rehabilitation programme when the Government intended to evacuate people in order to construct a fishing harbour. For more than 20 years the harbour was not completed and, instead of people being evacuated, more and more migrants have moved to the area, making the village obnoxiously dirty and overcrowded.

Mention must be made here also of the fishing communities that are forcefully evacuated in the name of modern development programmes. Some people are evacuated two or three times in the life span of one generation. Sondikud, a village in Orissa, is one case in point, but there is no State in the country that can be absolved of this sin. Today, Indian beaches are being invaded by tourism infrastructure. While one's first reaction would be that such development will bring an improvement for coastal villages also the fact remains that there are no real spillover effects. Sitting adjacent to attractive tourist complexes, the fishing villages still remain without potable drinking water, electricity and sanitation facilities.

Why do we speak about housing in a document about women? First, it is because government housing, like many other schemes, is always a 'fishermen's' programme. Only where there is a man as head of the household, is the family entitled to a house. This has happened even in communities where it has traditionally been the women who inherited the landed property from parents.

Secondly, it is the women who are expected to make the house a home. In most cases, it has been the women who have mobilised to demand the basic facilities to make the colonies habitable. It is they who have to cook and who need access to firewood and food supplies. It is they who have to fetch water and they who need the toilets as they are not permitted to use the open beaches as their toilets and as their other common spaces decrease over time. It can be quite categorically stated that there is no single Government scheme in the country where the 'beneficiaries' have in any way participated in the making of the housing colony they will finally inhabit. The plans are made at the Centre and all specifications and

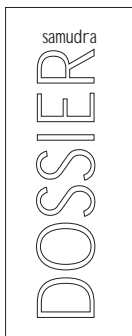


allotments are made to the States to be executed in a particular financial year.

Meeting the housing needs of coastal communities will continue to be a major problem in India both from the point of view of availability of land and construction material. Hence, very creative and well thought out policies have to be devised so as to optimise use of land and material while at the same time meeting the needs of the people. A series of demands and guidelines have been put forward by the National Campaign for Housing Rights. In fishing communities, more specifically, Government should ensure that:

- i. a land policy is in place whereby the coastal communities are guaranteed free access to the sea;
- ii. habitation is regularized and evictions in the name of development stopped;
- iii. title deeds are distributed to prevent overcrowding for the future and to facilitate families building their own houses;
- iv. government housing schemes do not, at any point, exclude the beneficiaries in the planning and implementation stages as this is also the only way to check corrupt contractors; and
- v. no housing scheme be considered complete without facilities such as water, sanitation and improved *choolas* for cooking.

Finally, it must be stated that more innovative planning processes and use of land and material must be devised. For this, the people who staff the Fisheries Departments should be more open to ideas and to people's needs, and learn from some of the initiatives undertaken by small NGOs.



Fish Vendors Meeting their Own Credit Needs

J. Lucas

Santhidan, Nagercoil, India

In India, thousands of women are engaged in work which helps them support their families. Much of this work is of a self-employed nature, which requires some initial capital. While women's organizations have been campaigning for institutional support to meet women's credit needs, there are very few areas in which this has been made possible. As a result, some NGOs have begun to help women organize themselves to take care of their own credit needs. 'Santhidan' is one such successful initiative, where women fish vendors, at the end of 1994, had a total savings of approximately Rs35 lakhs, on the basis of which they were able to secure an equal amount of loan to meet their credit needs.

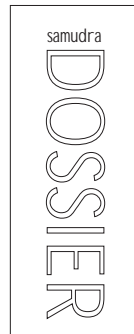
Santhidan, literally meaning 'gift of peace', is a social action and credit programme for fish vending women. It is located at the southernmost tip of India in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Founded in 1983, Santhidan has now been functioning for more than ten years.

Background

Kanyakumari District in south Tamil Nadu has one of the largest concentration of fishing communities in the country, with around 200,000 people living in 40 villages along the west coast and at the tail-end of the Coromandel coast. Fishermen in this region have fished for generations in cattamarans and country boats. Income from the fishery fluctuates seasonally, making for economic instability and extreme vulnerability to exploitation by moneylenders and middlemen. Over the last ten years, the incomes of the fishermen have been reduced because of declining fish catches, increased competition amongst themselves, competition from mechanized trawling fleets and the rising cost of living. Although the use of outboard motors and other innovations like the multi-hook lines have increased the potential catch for some, it has also raised their operational costs. The work remains arduous and living standards in the villages are still poor. Housing, sanitation and drinking water facilities are inadequate, morbidity rates are high and literacy rates low.

Condition of Women

This situation is compounded in the case of women and especially in the case of those who lack male support. Women in the fishing communities have traditionally been economically active. Their roles include net making, and the processing, storage and vending of fish.



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The advent of machine-made nets eliminated an important source of income for them, even as declining real incomes for the men forced the women to seek work outside the home. Many more women have, therefore, taken up fish vending. The largest number among these are widows, women whose husbands have deserted them, and those who have been unable to marry because of the dowry system. These women are economically and socially marginalized and are powerless within the community.

The lot of women fish vendors is hard. Their earnings are usually just enough to provide for the household for the day, meaning that they have to buy fish on credit. This ties them into a cycle of indebtedness to moneylenders. Increasingly, they are travelling long distances just to procure fish.

Until very recently, it was a constant battle for them to carry the fish to the market by bus, as other passengers objected to the smell of the fish, and unsympathetic bus conductors evicted them. Life in the village is not easy either, faced as they are with the 'double day' of household work after the day at the market, drunken and physically abusive husbands, ill health and poor living conditions.

Santhidan's Origins and Objectives

Santhidan has its origins in the recognition that women are the poorest and most oppressed section in fishing communities. Its aim has been to promote the organization of self-employed rural women and enable them to gain social and economic empowerment. Towards this objective, a twin-pronged strategy of social awareness and education, along with financial assistance for self-reliance, has been adopted. More specifically, the project aims at:

- mobilizing and organizing women;
- promoting their long-term security through savings;
- providing credit to expand their trade;
- liberating them from indebtedness and exploitation;
- evolving an appropriate credit co-operative structure;
- involving the women in a continuous process of education to raise their social awareness and to enhance their literacy and other skills;
- helping the women find ways of raising their living standards;
- assisting in shared social action for the betterment of their lives and the community;

- helping them discover their own leadership capacities; and
- providing some formal education for their children.

Programmes and Activities

Savings and Credit Scheme

In 1983, the first savings *sangam* was set up by a woman social worker in her village of Eraumanthurai. The women invited to join were mainly widows, women with a large number of daughters (which implies a huge dowry burden on the family), and others in difficult situations.

As other *sangams* came up, an informal credit delivery system linked to thrift-and-savings societies was developed. The delivery system has a few simple procedures, disburses quickly and repeatedly, and allows for flexible repayment schedules. Loans are given for a variety of reasons such as marriage expenses, house building, net buying and especially, credit for the purchase of fish to sell. Repayment rates are high. The aim of the system has been to help each group of women develop the skills to manage their own affairs and manage matters such as the admission of members, selection of beneficiaries for the loans and repayment mechanisms.

Self-help Groups and the Rural Women Development Trust

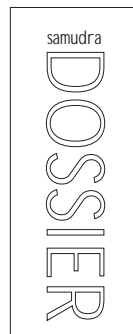
From mid-1993 onwards, there has been an emphasis on transforming the *sangams* into self-help groups, which would be responsible for the entire decision-making process at the village level. A district-level trust has been formed to facilitate inter-group lending. It is hoped that the formation of self-help groups at the village level will increase the participation of women and strengthen their self-reliance.

Social Action

Santhidan members have taken up a variety of social action campaigns. Issues campaigned for include the right of fish vendors to use public transport, drinking water facilities, street lights, the use of correct measures in the fair price shops, and the cleaning of wells and drains. They are invoked in an ongoing campaign against the brewing and sale of illicit liquor. The campaigns have been militant, using methods such as street demonstrations and, in the case of arrack shops, the smashing of containers. In most cases, the campaigns have met with success.

Mahalir Mandrams

Young unmarried women and others who wish to be socially involved have been formed into groups at the village level, where they learn about and discuss social, political and health issues of interest to them. The women have had seminars on topics such as the



Indian economy, unemployment, marriage laws, the Christian Marriage Act, dowry, divorce and the Indian Penal Code.

Seminars and training sessions are also conducted for other groups of women such as mothers, *sangam* members and Santhidan animators and volunteers.

Management Training and Skills Development

Animators and community organizers receive training in management and community building. Recently, many of them have also been trained in areas such as first aid, preventive health care, post-harvest fish handling and processing and *panchayati raj* (village self-rule).


Programme for School-going Children

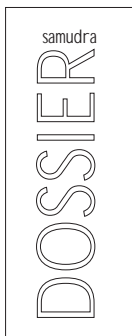
School-going children are given tuition to enable them to do better in their examinations. The classes are given by members of the young women's association in the village and are supervised by a team of Santhidan volunteers. Educational and cultural activities for the children, such as leadership camps, are also part of the programme.

Achievements

From three *sangams*, 94 members and a total savings of approximately Rs9,000 in 1983, Santhidan has grown to 52 *sangams*, 3,625 members, and a total savings of Rs34.5 lakh in 1994.

Social action by the women has won them a number of benefits. A May 1990 survey showed that while in the previous five-year period, only 10 per cent of women vendors used public transport, by 1990, over 50 per cent of them did so. More importantly, women have become aware of their rights and can no longer be pushed off buses. They can stand their ground against men who challenge them in their anti-arrack campaign and, at home, they are now better able to stand up to drunken husbands.

A major achievement is the visibility Santhidan has achieved with the public and the government. This is the outcome of its involvement with other like-minded groups on public issues such as bride-burning incidents in the district. A mark of public recognition is the repeated requests Santhidan has received to set up *sangams* in the fishing villages of Chengelpet District in north Tamil Nadu. Accordingly, a team of organizers was sent to help set up *sangams* in five villages. Santhidan oversees the functioning of these *sangams*, although eventually they will become independent. 



The Impact of Introducing Post-harvest Technologies for Women

A. Kamila
WID Officer
ODA, Chennai, India

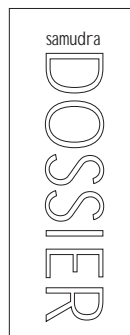
The Overseas Development Administration (ODA) Post-Harvest Fisheries Project has been involved in implementing a programme of support to fisherwomen in South India. The marketing and distribution of low-value fish by women fish vendors give employment to a large number of women. This report provides a picture of the various efforts made by ODA, in collaboration with selected NGOs, the Department of Fisheries and various local government institutions and research institutions in the States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. It also analyzes the impact of simple technical innovations developed and introduced among the fisherwomen *vis-à-vis* their role in the post-harvest fisheries sector.

The Role and Status of Fisherwomen in Fisheries

Women in the fisheries sector in this region are mainly involved in shore-based post-harvest activities such as fish handling, sorting, grading, gutting, drying, processing and marketing. Fisherwomen work as agents, auctioneers, retail street vendors and vendors in market places. In common with all small-scale fisherfolk these women suffer from low returns for their labour. In the case of Tamil Nadu, women are found to be auctioneers only in some parts of the northern region, whereas in Andhra Pradesh (e.g. Vizag) women auctioneers play a role in terms of controlling the prices at landing centres.

The women fish vendors are engaged in either fresh fish marketing or dried fish marketing, or both. The fresh fish vendors can be classified into three categories, depending on the type and level of marketing practices:

- those women who deal in less than 10-15 kg of low-value fish, who transport fish in baskets on their heads and sell at street markets and in agricultural and rural villages;
- women who deal in 35-60 kg of fish, transporting it in locally available vehicles and selling in neighbouring towns; and
- women who deal in large quantities of fish and who operate as wholesale dealers, catering to the needs of fish traders at marketplaces.



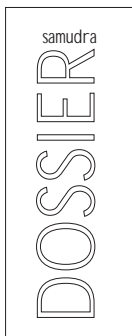
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The women in this last category migrate from one place to another during certain seasons of the year. They are involved both in fresh fish marketing and processing. In the case of Tamil Nadu, women from Pudukottai and Tanjore Districts migrate to Ramnad District, and women from Kanyakumari District migrate to Kerala. These women, who trade in certain varieties of fresh fish, migrate in small groups. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, the women leave their homes along with their men folk, who migrate to fish in other fishing zones/States such as Orissa.

In general, women are engaged in fish marketing and related activities outside their home areas only when their economic conditions oblige them to do so. We find that women, mostly from poorer sections of the community, especially widows and destitute and those women who are engaged in fish marketing, play a more dominant role in the family in terms of decision making and control of the family income. There are research studies which show that women fish vendors are found to control and manage the income and expenditure of the family and provide pocket money to the male members in the family.

There are women within the fishing communities who are the wives or daughters of fishermen owning boats/craft which are mechanized. These women, hailing from 'better off' families, are thus not involved in fish marketing. However, these women are involved in fish processing and the pooling of fish for sale through fish traders organized by the male family members. These women do not enjoy a better status within their families in terms of decision making. At the most, they take part in discussions with the male family members, but enjoy a better status within their community because of their husband's or son's economic position. This situation is similar to that found in agrarian and other sectors.

Women play a vital role in the productive and reproductive functions of the family. Irrespective of whether women are engaged in direct economic activities or not, women play a significant role in making efforts for the food security of the family. Besides this, whether women earn an independent income or not, they make efforts solely or jointly to mobilize the funds required to meet the reproductive functions, i.e. survival needs, of the family. The responsibility of arranging for loans and their repayment is undertaken by women from a wide range of informal sources of credit, such as pawnbrokers, *thandal*, friends and relatives, and from credit schemes operated by NGOs. The rate of interest varies from 36-120 per cent per annum. The small-scale fish marketing women buy fish on credit on a daily basis at 5-10 per cent per day from the auctioneer at the landing sites. The loans are repaid either on the same day or the next morning. The loans for mending nets and for the repair and purchase of craft are usually borrowed by men from fish traders and national interest rates are paid which are high. The



men are found to have relatively better access to institutional finance because of the ownership of fixed and immovable assets, and most of them are covered under the organized sector of co-operatives, within the mandate of the State Department of Fisheries.

As far as women are concerned, the growth of organized co-operatives is a recent phenomenon that has taken place since the 1980s. The proportion of women in co-operatives in comparison to the total population is less than ten per cent in the case of Tamil Nadu. In Andhra Pradesh, there are only about ten co-operatives and, in Orissa, even fewer in 1995.

The Post-harvest Fisheries Project's Interventions

Several activities have been undertaken in support of fisherwomen. These are described below:

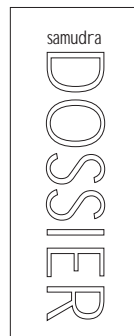
Women's Control over Resources

The project felt the need for better utilization of the by-catch from deep-sea trawlers during the year 1989. It estimated that the quantum of fish thrown back into the trawlers was about 100,000 tonnes per year. Therefore, the project conducted a pilot activity in 1991 involving local fisherwomen groups in Vizag to utilize the fish procured from trawlers, both in dried and fresh conditions. The pilot activity did not prove its economic viability and, hence, better control over resource availability with the help of the project still remains a dream.

Better Fish Marketing Containers

As a technology-led project, ODA looked into the possibility of introducing a better fish marketing container for women traders in 1990. There were many problems associated with the use of traditional baskets for transporting fish in public buses by women. The usual mode of transport of fish in baskets and in aluminium vessels was such that the containers were of different sizes occupying much space in the buses, and these containers were often covered with old gunny sacks and cloth to cover the fish. The smell of the fish and leakage of water from the traditional containers caused problems for women by inviting unsavoury remarks from bus conductors and the general public travelling during peak hours. Fish marketing at the marketplace starts at 10 a.m. and the women fish vendors have to board the buses every day between 7.30 a.m. and 8.30 a.m., when the school-going children and office-goers start their day. Very often, the women were not permitted inside the buses with their fish baskets.

ODA, at the request of a women's NGO at Nagercoil, designed a suitable fish container in a participatory way, after discussions with fisherwomen's group. The newly designed container seemed to address their problems because its specific features, such as height and width, meant that it was suitable for storage under the seats of



buses and did not have to occupy the space between seats. Monitoring the use of the container revealed that it was perceived as a compromise, as it provided an additional option to the existing vessels, besides obtaining a better status for the women in terms of evolving a specific tool for their trade. The promotion of the container paved the way for fisherwomen in Tamil Nadu to acquire a better status within the fisheries sector by inviting the attention of the State Department of Fisheries and the Social Welfare Board to cater to the needs of vulnerable sections of the community. The women have gained access to State subsidies and, currently, the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department is looking at the possibility of organizing suitable credit schemes for women for marketing purposes.

The project actively interacted with women's groups across coastal Tamil Nadu during the process of assessing the impact of better fish marketing containers. It concluded that the provision of a better container was one among several needs of fisherwomen and did not necessarily reflect their primary need. A series of workshops conducted among selected fisherwomen's groups revealed that there were other needs, such as access to institutional credit, basic infrastructure facilities, training on post-harvest issues and social empowerment. This has led the project to evolve an integrated community development approach, rather than the mere technology input approach employed previously.

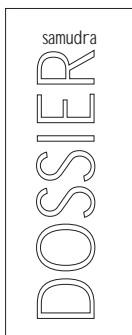
NGO Support Programme

During the last couple of years, the project has started addressing the numerous needs of fisherwomen in a joint programme of support with NGOs. Their needs include access to credit, training, and simple fish processing techniques, such as better fish handling and processing, enhanced drying methods, use of ice, preparation of value-added products, and transportation.

Linkages to Institutional Finance

The Project has played a catalytic role in providing institutional support and has thus assisted a few women's groups in Chengelpet, MGR and Nagapattinam Quid-e-Milleth Districts through local NGOs, namely COPDANET (Coastal Poor Development Action Network) and ROSA, to enable women to have access to local banks to obtain small credit. In two of the places, self help groups have been formed and in the others women received working capital assistance in the form of cash and kind (in the form of a better fish marketing container).

Besides this, women's groups have undertaken to form informal 'chit funds', where the contributions of women are pooled and auctioned to be used by women in need. These schemes have neither replaced nor altered the existing credit schemes but they have provided women with an additional option to avail themselves of small credit amounts with lower interest rates compared to the informal credit sources. To some extent, these schemes were the entry points for the



NGOs to organize women's groups, and facilitated their ability to address their needs in a collective way. So far, there are no instances of these schemes being looked upon as instruments which would oppress women in terms of placing additional burden on them to repay the loans. However, caution will have to be exercised to ensure that women's credit schemes are not appropriated by men, and some allowance will need to be made for the women to use and control the credit money obtained, without placing undue pressure on them.

Towards this end, the project has also undertaken to monitor the progress of these schemes, besides studying the feasibility of introducing any technical inputs at the community level. The access to institutional credit by women has resulted in greater confidence among women, both at the individual and at the *sangam* level. It is also essential to monitor the use of this credit so that simultaneous efforts can be made to create suitable avenues which would generate additional incomes, rather than spending the loans on consumption requirements of the family. It is also important to know how much of this money is invested in the productive assets which are ultimately owned and controlled by men.

Simple Techniques for Value Addition

The project has made two specific interventions in Andhra Pradesh, namely, ice boxes onboard for fishermen, and the development of a better smoking bin for women fish processors.

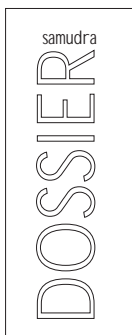
During the period 1988-90, the project worked closely with large *nava* fishermen of the Kakinada area, devising a suitable insulated fish container for carrying onboard the *navas* and keeping the fish in ice soon after capture. With the box, it was found that spoilage had come down significantly, and income gain was a minimum of 20 per cent. The Department of Fisheries took over the activity, getting the boxes constructed in bulk and providing them at subsidized prices to the fishermen. It took nearly five years for the fishermen to gain confidence in this activity.

With the introduction of ice onboard for fishermen, there are possibilities that fish which have traditionally been dried or salted or both (like clupeids, small croakers, sardines, mackerels, anchovies, smaller shrimp and even ribbon fish) will enter the cold chain, depriving thousands of women of a chance to dry and market them. In economic terms, the loss of this income is more than compensated for by the very lucrative prices these varieties get, but in social terms this is a serious loss of space for women in mainstream activities. The project understands this negative impact of introducing ice onboard and efforts are currently being made to encourage women to use ice storage for the sale of ice to traders and craft owners, as well as for storing fish so that better access to fish resources could be achieved in the long run.


In June 1994, the project started a pre-pilot study in BCV Palem village to make a product called *masmeen*, using tuna which was landed in good quantities in Kakinada, but fetched a low price in local markets. Women processors were closely involved in the activity and were left to do it on their own, after the initial demonstration phase. It was decided that *masmeen* was technically a very complicated product and was not quite as attractive economically to make as originally envisaged. Thus, the scope of the pre-pilot study was enlarged to include not only a few more varieties of smoked products, but also to look at the very process of traditional smoking in the area. A new prototype bin was designed and, based on the feedback from the women's groups, it was standardized within four months, after repeated modifications. A commercial-size version was designed using the experiences from the pre-pilot phase and it was at once taken over by the women processors. The women were convinced about the usefulness of the bin and, before the pre-pilot phase could end, they had started demanding the bins. The project supported the women to have linkages with government schemes to avail of credit whereby the women themselves represented their genuine need and obtained credit towards the purchase of bins.

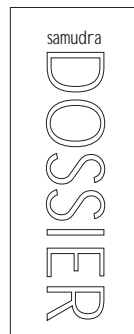
The project's experiences show that women are willing to change their practices once they are convinced of a technology which brings in social or economic benefits. However, the approaches made in terms of involving the women to adopt post-harvest technologies have created certain pressures within the communities. For example, the approach to women's development in the area had been to organize the women around their occupation so as to enable them to solve their issues, needs and problems in a collective way. It often happens that men interfere in women's weekly meetings with the question, "What do women know?" This is not a cliché but a regular question hurled at the field-level workers in the project area. It, therefore, becomes necessary to provide appropriate training on gender sensitivity to men, also so that they can become partners in the process of development.

The project has demonstrated the use of drying racks constructed with locally available materials such as wooden poles and old fishing nets to dry the fish sand-free. So far, demonstrations of the rack drying method have been held as part of the training on better fish handling methods by NGOs. Santhidan has thought of initiating an additional income-generating activity through drying of anchovies in season in selected villages. In the absence of landings of this particular species of fish, other varieties of fish have been processed using salt and racks. Income per 100 pieces of rainbow sardines increased to Rs30-40 from Rs7-10. Currently, efforts are being made to introduce fish pickle for value addition and to establish cold chains through the use of portable ice boxes among women, to cut down on fish spoilage.



In order to disseminate information, awareness programmes, coupled with practical hands-on training to fisherwomen, have been organized. When the new techniques were made known through awareness programmes, the field-level workers were often faced with several questions from the women who have vast experience in the fish business. A constant motivation, coupled with adequate market support to realize better value for the products, helps in the adoption of new techniques.

It is expected that, through training local women grass-roots workers, the skills imparted will remain with the communities and will result in sustainable development. 



**Women in
Fisheries
Series
No. 2**

Women in Movements

Nalini Nayak

Programme Coordinator

Women in Fisheries Project, ICSF

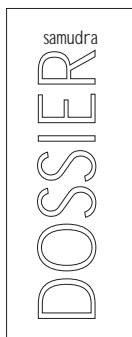
From time immemorial, women have been involved in social movements of all kinds. They have always been known to exhibit not only acts of courage but great persistence and commitment towards the cause of the struggle. In fact, certain movements concentrated on the mobilization of women because they realized that any ideological change would become a reality only if and when women were convinced of it.

I will not go into the history of the role of women in movements. I will also not go into explaining the various facets of the women's movement, which is a subject in itself. I will concentrate on different aspects movements have to keep in mind if they genuinely intend to integrate women's concerns. I will focus particularly on the fishworkers' movement, with which I am most familiar. This implies that I am reflecting on a sector that is unorganized and depends on a common pool of natural resources for a livelihood. As these groups did not fall into the category of the working class in conservative theory, they have been left by the wayside by mainstream trade unions.

The Unorganized Sector: the Predicament

Around 80 per cent of the Indian toiling people fall into the unorganized sector. Of these, the largest section are agricultural labourers, whose ranks, though, are decreasing and they are increasingly moving into construction, quarrying, and contract work of various kinds, thus swelling the ranks of the urban poor. In addition, there are large sections of tribals who have lived on forest resources, fishworkers who have lived on river and marine resources, and millions of people in other traditional trades, be they toddy tappers and salt pan workers, among others. Women comprise 50 per cent of all these groups.

Over the years, and increasingly so today, these toiling people's access to common pool resources is being restricted. This is either because of excessive exploitation, which leads to depletion, or the new policies of government which seek to privatize resources in order to modernize industry, depending heavily on renewable resources. The rate at which the resources are exploited, with no concern for replenishing them, leads to environmental pollution and degradation. All this is justified in the context of liberalization and 'higher productivity', oriented towards export.



I will not try to highlight here the ill effects of the present development paradigm. Suffice to say that ongoing development, while bringing a few more people into the affluent groups and creating new opportunities for a small section of people, by and large, excludes large sections of people who can not be absorbed into mainstream development. These new development processes are also increasingly ecologically destructive and unsustainable, and place added pressure on women.

Having said this, it is encouraging to see that these larger sections of marginalized people have begun to fight for their right to life, and right to work and survival. While they challenge the 'economism' of the mainstream trade unions, they are experimenting with new forms of organization and demanding a complete change in social policy and development objectives.

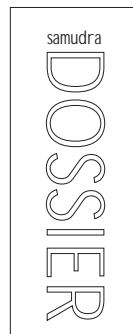
Women in the Fishworkers' Movement

In the National Fishworkers' Forum, the main struggle has been to protect the marine resources and to protect the seas for those who live on its resources. Although women are not directly involved in the catching of fish, they are dependent on fish for their livelihood. They sell the fish and bring money to the family. There are many issues that affect them in this field of activity.

First, the depletion of the fish resource itself means that less fish is available for sale, and that whatever is available is at higher prices. With modernization and the creation of landing centres, the landings have become more centralized and so women have to travel far to get to these centres. Competition is often fierce, with male merchants having a distinct advantage as they have more cash for purchase and are better organized, with transport facilities. Women's access to whatever is landed, therefore, has become a struggle. Today, with growing exports of fish, even the cheaper varieties that women purchased for sale or for processing are more difficult to find.

Then, for the stronger and more enterprising women who can fight their way to getting fish for sale, the next hurdle is the harassment they face at markets. Both at the purchasing and selling points, male loaders and other goondas lose no opportunity to harass women in numerous ways. If women have to travel from the point of procurement to the point of sale—often, a distance of 10-15 km—moving with their heavy loads is another ordeal. They are not permitted on public transport and are exploited when they use private transport.

Besides these problems at work, women have all the burdens of nurturing the family as well. Life in fishing villages is no paradise. With no running water, no proper sanitation facilities and very poor housing, women again have to bear the entire burden of meeting the family's survival needs under these poor conditions. So women as



wives, mothers and workers confront a number of issues that affect their lives and which have to be addressed by the broader movement.

The fishworkers' movement has tried to address some of these issues both within the movement and *vis-à-vis* the State. There have been struggles within the fishworker movement to even include women within the definition of a fishworker. In some districts, even if women are involved directly in fish-related activities, such as fish vending or net making, they are not members on par with men. They have no chance of being elected to committees. If it is a problem to even accept women as members of the union, when will their issues be taken up?

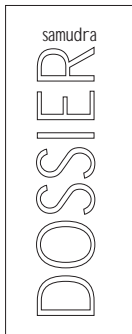
In districts where women's issues were taken up, it was a battle to make their struggles a concern of the whole union. The attitude of men was that women's issues, or, for that matter, all survival issues, such as water, sanitation, health facilities, educational facilities, alcoholism, and wife beating were issues of women and, therefore, should be fought by them alone.

In areas where women are not directly involved in fish-related activities but where they perform all the duties of nurture and support, in themselves full-time activities, they are not considered to be involved in any 'productive work'. With this kind of dichotomization between productive and non-productive work, the risk is that, gradually, fewer women will be able to participate in any 'public' activity other than as mere appendages of their husbands.

The Role of Movements in Advancing Gender Justice

Looking at the role of movements in the Indian context, where women's work both within and outside the family is still crucial to the survival of the family, we need to re-define the role and scope of movements, if they have to play a determining role in society.

We, therefore, have to look at the dual role that women play in society as well as their role in movements. The first relates to the role that women play in the sector of *production of commodities*, be it in agriculture, fisheries, or the like. How do the movements protect these spaces for women in a just and equitable way? The second role has to do with the role that women play in the sector of *production of life*. Sustaining life has always been the job of women. As it is considered 'natural', it has never been considered as work and no costs have been assigned to it. How do the movements see that all the exploitation that goes on in terms of unpaid labour is, first, justly remunerated and, second, does not become the burden of women alone? Viewed in such a way, the issue is not to look at 'the role of women in movements', but to evolve an understanding towards the role of movements in advancing gender justice.



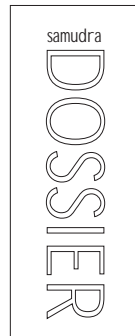
Looking at the role of the movement specifically from the point of view of the fisheries sector, I am convinced that the struggle for sustainability and right to livelihood—which is the main focus of the struggle in fisheries today—has to be based on, or has to take seriously, the role of women in fisheries as well as the importance of the ‘unpaid labour’ of women in sustaining the fishing unit.

If the artisanal fishery is sustainable, it is also because of the role that women play in sustaining it. This implies that the sustainability of fisheries has also to do with aspects that have no immediate returns, what can also be called ‘nurture.’ While ‘nurture’ has traditionally fallen on the backs of women, I am arguing here that both ‘unpaid labour’ and ‘nurture’ are not ‘natural’ to women and should not, therefore, be the burden of women alone.

Today, the whole focus in production is to maximize returns on investment in the shortest time span. While maximizing returns has always been the main calculation in production, the time frame for productive activity has been shrinking with advances in technology and globalization of the market. Large shoals of fish are caught using highly effective nets by fewer boats, and fish is now airlifted from the landing places to overseas consumer markets. A commodity that is of seasonal nature has become perennially available to people who have the money to pay for it because of the possibilities opened up by the global market.

Fishing technologies have advanced so much that even the last fish in the ocean can be sought out and caught. No regard is given to reproduction time and to safeguarding the environment, both of which are necessary for the process of reproduction and growth. On the shore, distribution patterns also change, depending on how the fish is landed. When it is landed in bulk, it has to be handled with an equally large distribution capacity, i.e. high purchasing power and a wider distribution network. A process of centralization creeps in and men take over. This generally means that the fish will also be taken to places of highest demand, preferably cities, and now even to foreign markets where currency exchange rates allow for a higher price.

All this is a completely new logic, compared to the one with which the small-scale producers operated. For these producers, technology is only one aspect in profit maximization. An equally large input is also the inherent skill of the fishermen. Decentralization is the crux of the operation: specific gear for specific varieties of fish; decentralized landings; accessibility of small distributors, the bulk of whom are women; and an intricate network of distribution, where human energy is the agent of transport. As a result, the product is extensively distributed and the maximum returns come back to the producer and distributor.

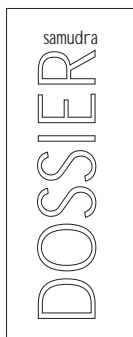


In fisheries, and in all production based on renewable natural resources, regeneration of habitats, or ecological balances, are primary considerations, if the resource is to be sustained. When movements in these sectors struggle for their rights of access to resources, then, I believe, only a gender consciousness will help safeguard the struggle. For instance, there is no point in fishermen demanding a trawl ban if they themselves are going to introduce ring-seine nets and mini-trawls, where the effect on the resource and on women are one and the same, i.e. there is no selective fishing, and landings, if any, are also in bulk or catches are very often undersized and have to be disposed in bulk as well. Women thus lose their access to fish for post-harvest work.

In the western world, the processes of centralization gradually not only ousted women from post-harvest work but also necessitated men staying out longer at sea fishing, while all shore-based activity, i.e. child raising, housework, etc., became the sole preoccupation of women. A clear division developed between the so-called 'productive' and 'reproductive' work, underlining the deeper division between the 'public' and the 'private' spheres. This phenomenon is occurring more and more in all fields of the economy where men are either travelling a great deal because of their work or where men migrate for work, forcing their wives and children to manage on their own. This causes several other social problems, and society has to then create new institutions to deal with these.

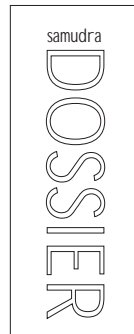
With the narrowing definition of 'worker' and the 'working class', the organized trade union movements are not only male-dominated but male-biased. The problem of 'economism' has, therefore, also narrowed the consciousness of the working class, who have not been able to challenge the forces that have degraded the quality of life and the material base on which large sections of the toiling masses survive. Paradoxically, such issues are taken up by mass organizations in the unorganized sector, where the militant participants are women who are willing to stake everything to fight for their survival needs. It is no wonder, then, that the term 'feminization of poverty' has evolved to explain the manner in which the forces of capitalism affect women and the environment.

In a country like India, with a population of 900 million people striving, on the one hand, towards full employment, and, on the other, for sustainable development, we are called to make specific choices. We either have to keep up with the rat race of the global market or opt for a standard of life and lifestyles that are more distributive and seemingly 'less modern.' My experience convinces me that we have to choose the latter and come up with innovative alternatives that make work more creative and human energy more productive.



It is my firm conviction that only a greater gender awareness within movements and in all social processes can ensure this. In the fish workers' movement, it is a question not only of a choice of fishing technology, but also of the people to whom the fishermen choose to sell their fish, which is important. If women have the right to the fish before the export merchants, we can be sure that it will not only reach the rural consumer but that the money also returns to the household, rather than the major share of it going to pay back loans for high-powered, imported engines and large nets. None of this will happen automatically and it is, therefore, imperative that institutions for the management of common resources also evolve as part of the process of evolution of social movements. If such institutions are to evolve, then not only must the physical participation of women be ensured, but the development of a gender and ecological consciousness must arise as well.

Today, as always, there are certainly seemingly larger contradictions than the gender contradiction that preoccupy the movements. In the fishworkers' movement, the struggle against trawl fishing—and now against the entry of foreign vessels in the deep sea—are large enough issues to preoccupy the leaders full time. But, at the same time, the problems within the community, such as the lack of fish for sale locally, the lack of drinking water, the rise in levels of ill health and prostitution, and the production and consumption of illicit liquor, are all issues that must also receive attention. To deal with all these issues simultaneously requires a total paradigm shift both in the perspective of development and in the understanding of the role and scope of mass movements.



**Women in
Fisheries
Series
No. 2**

Campaign against Shrimp Industries

Jesurethinam

Convenor

Joint Action Council against the Shrimp Industry

Nagapattinam, India

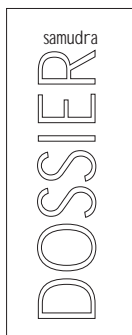
In the last couple of years, multinationals have cast their eyes on our coastal areas to start industrial production of shrimp through aquaculture. Taking advantage of the insatiable demand in the affluent nations and the high price commanded by shrimp, these big business houses are imposing their viewpoint through high-pressure propaganda and lobbying. In this wave, the voices of the small-scale fishworkers, agriculturists, rural folk and environmentalists are brushed aside. Even scientists and bureaucrats do not want to heed the cries of caution.

The Global Situation

The shrimp lobby in India has drawn on the experience and expertise of Taiwan and Thailand in promoting industrial shrimp production in this country. These experts, after ruining the industry and environment in those countries, have turned their attention to India. The industrialized nations consider India to be a dumping ground for outdated technology and pollution. China produced 145,000 tonnes of cultured shrimp in 1987, a figure which plummeted to 43,887 tonnes the next year. Indonesia cultured 140,000 tonnes of shrimp from 200,000 hectares (ha) of ponds in 1991, but production dropped to 80,000 tonnes in 1993.

The US, which has a coastline many times longer than India, produced only 3,000 tonnes of cultured shrimp, while India produced 68,000 tonnes that year. But the US imports shrimp instead of culturing it in its own coast. The US possesses 'Galveston' technology for shrimp seed production, and exports it to Third World countries, instead of using this expertise to develop their own shrimp culture. The US does not want to degrade its own coastal land nor does it want the environmental damage caused by industrial production of shrimp.

Similarly, the EU nations and Japan have desisted from industrial shrimp production, and prefer to import the shrimp from Asian countries. Significantly, Japan produces shrimp seed to be released into the sea to improve the marine shrimp catches (sea ranching).



The Indian Situation

India has an estimated area of 1.19 million ha of brackish water, of which 82,500 ha are now under culture, 52,000 ha under traditional culture and 30,500 ha under intensive culture. Global production of shrimp was approximately 2.9125 million tonnes in 1995, of which 0.7 million was farmed. In the same period, India produced 63,300 tonnes of cultured shrimp, of a total of 280,100 tonnes.

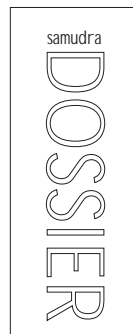
Tamil Nadu and Karaikal

The Tamil Nadu coast, on the east of India, has a total length of 1,000 km. In the last few years, several shrimp industries have sprung up along the coast, leading to grave human rights infringements and ecological imbalances, threatening the livelihood of 75 lakhs people from various sectors. This shrimp farming is intensively carried out along 110 km of the coast of Nagai Quiad-E-Milleth District of Tamil Nadu and the Karaikal region of Pondicherry. About 300 investors have bought land for shrimp farms.

Nagai Quiad-E-Milleth District forms part of the old Tanjore District, which is referred to as the 'granary' of Tamil Nadu, due to the fertility of the soil. This is the delta region of the Cauvery river. Wetland cultivation is followed on all the cultivable lands here, due to the availability of water from the Cauvery and its distributaries as well as the well-planned irrigation system. The Karaikal region of Pondicherry State also has wealthy water resources and fertile soil. The area has a coastal length of 110 km, with a population of 80,000 people living on the sea fishery. A number of canals flow into the sea here. The estuaries are the nursery ground of the sea fish and they account for the rich sea resources of this area. Unlike the west coast—Orissa and West Bengal—there was no traditional shrimp culture in Nagai Quiad-E-Milleth and Karaikal Districts.

There are about 30 fishing villages along this coastal strip. Over the years, except for some pockets, the artisanal fishery has felt the impacts of modernization, assisted by subsidies from the government. Mechanized trawlers entered the district in the early 1970s and, in an attempt to compete with them, the poorer fishermen went in for outboard motors. As a result, the sea resources have been, and continue to be, overexploited, causing degradation of the fish resources and the extinction of some species. This has resulted in a fall in the catch per unit effort and a greater daily life struggle for the majority of the fisherpeople.

Fisherpeople along the coast have been locked in conflict over a share of the diminishing resources. At the same time, modern shrimp culture has been promoted as a means of boosting production and cashing in on the global market to earn foreign exchange. The idea was sold to large and small industrialists, and land was bought for a pittance, both clandestinely and openly, with the support of local



politicians. Both cultivated land and other fallow land were converted into large ponds for intensive shrimp culture, making use of the intricate river canals that are a special geographical feature of this delta region.

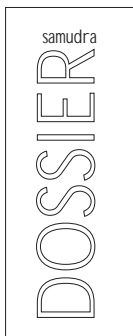
The large ponds are fenced off, thereby obstructing the passage of local coastal people to the interior. Huge pumps are used to exchange water in the ponds, and where the ponds are away from the canals, large pipelines are constructed, even at a distance of 1-1.5 km from the coast. This construction not only obstructs the free passage of the fishermen, but also interferes with the ecosystem, as, first, polluted water from the farms is pumped out into the canals and, second, groundwater is tapped to balance the salinity.

The shrimp farms have had far-reaching effects on the coastal communities. The seashore has been fenced off, thereby depriving fishermen of access to their traditional rights to the sea and denying a common coastal pathway to fish vendors and head load workers. Drinking water has become saline, as huge quantities of fresh groundwater have been pumped out. Furthermore, women have to now walk nearly 3 km to obtain potable water. Besides, discharge of untreated effluent into the irrigation canals and the sea has caused severe pollution of soil and water. Sudden appearances of skin diseases and eye infections have also been noted. Women from the coastal villages are being harassed by newcomers who drive around in their jeeps flaunting their wealth. In some areas, even the multipurpose palmyra trees have begun to dry and tamarind trees have withered away.

Large-scale purchase and conversion of fertile agricultural land, as well as the illegal conversion of *peramboke* (revenue) land and coastal lands for shrimp industries, has resulted in the unemployment of landless labourers and the alienation of the lands of small and marginal farmers. Most of these industries felled the trees in the coastal belt, leading to deforestation. Thus, forests—the natural defence barrier against cyclones—have been lost. This area, which has been declared a cyclone-prone area, has become more vulnerable to the effects of cyclonic winds. Deforestation has also led to soil erosion.

Brooder shrimps and shrimp seeds are being collected from the sea, estuaries and other water bodies, thus radically affecting the natural breeding and regeneration of marine life. The lands on the seashore have been traditionally owned and used by the traditional fishing communities for their fishing activities, such as landing of craft, fish distribution and drying, mending of nets, and transportation of fish. These lands are now being usurped by the prawn farm owners.

During the peak season, the fisherpeople go far into the sea in traditional boats. They remain there for three to four days and return



with their catch. Usually, they land somewhere other than in their own villages and bring their boats back to their respective villages along the coastal line. This is not possible now because of the huge pipelines. The traditional fishing of anchovy, a commercially viable species, with shore-seine nets needs a lengthy seashore, along which about 60 people engage in fishing. The shrimp industries, with their artificial *bunds* and pipelines, affect this traditional fishing activity in some areas.

The canals, estuaries, creeks and inland waterways are the breeding grounds of fish. They are a vital part of the ecosystem. These estuaries are, and will be, polluted by the shrimp industries. The pollution will, in turn, destroy the breeding grounds, resulting in the depletion of fish resources. The fish resources in these water bodies form the livelihood of some local communities during the off-season.

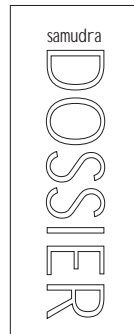
Huge pipelines installed into the sea by shrimp industries to suck in sea water into tanks damage the nets of traditional fishermen. Loss of employment and income to local communities has led to large-scale migration of the local people. It is estimated that, at the current rate of growth of prawn farming, nearly 200,000 fisherfolk and farm workers will be displaced and uprooted from their homes, their culture and their sources of livelihood. In Nagai Quaid-E-Milleth District alone, more than 20,000 acres of cultivable land have been acquired.

Intervention by Women

The massive ecological destruction and conversion of land by shrimp industries demanded immediate intervention. Initially, the issue came up for discussion in the Karaikal District Fisherwomen's Federation in 1993. The discussion focused on the purchase of land along the coast for the shrimp industries. At the same meeting, an article in a Tamil journal, *Nakeeran*, highlighting the impacts of shrimp industries in Pattinamarudur village, VOC District, was shared, and the women decided to call for a meeting with the (all-male) village *panchayat* leaders to facilitate a discussion on this particular issue. So, a joint meeting of the Women's Federation and the *panchayat* leaders was organized, in which the joint forum called 'Karaikal District Fishworkers' Forum' evolved to lead the struggle against the shrimp industries. This forum formulated its demands and planned their future action together with a similar group in Nagai District, called the Nagai District Fishworkers' Forum.

At this meeting, the women detailed their suffering. A sample of their stories is given below:

"Our drinking water has turned salty. We have to walk 3 km to get drinking water. The water from the water tank at Neydavasal is also diverted to Amalgam Aqua Farm," says Manimakalai of Pudukuppam, Secretary of a *sangam*.



“When I carried fish to Poompuhar along the coast, I fell into the drainage canal and all my fish was lost,” says Kannagi, a fish vendor of Pudukuppam and a *sangam* member.

“Look at my daughter’s body—she is having some skin problem now,” says Pachaimuthu of Pudukuppam, *sangam* President.

“The men working in the farm teased me with filthy words when I was going to Poompuhar along the coast and I shouted at them,” says Govindammal of Pudukuppam, *sangam* member.

“We are living here for hundreds of years, but the prawn farms bulldozed all our huts. We made complaints and the Collector came, but what has he done for us?” asks Poikalai of Neyakkarkuppam, *sangam* President.

“Our Member of Parliament is the reason for all these prawn farms to come. He will not get our votes in the next election,” says Parameswari of Nayakkarkuppam, *sangam* member.

“Our men’s nets are torn by the pipes of the prawn farms,” says Shakunthalai of Nayakkarkuppam, *sangam* member.

“The men of our villages teased us and challenged us, saying that we are women and we can not win the struggle. DCM Shriram Aqua Farms belongs to a very rich person and our local politician Nalamaharaja will attack us with goondas,” says Vedavalli from Karaikalmedu, Secretary, Karaikal Women’s Federation.

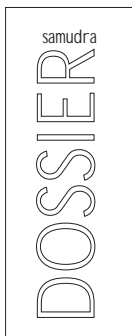
“But we went on struggling and the Ministry of Environment and Forest has not given clearance,” says Saraswathi of Karaikalmedu, member of the Federation.

“When the Coastal Enterprise Ltd. started construction, we women objected. But the men leaders then supported the farm. Now, after our water has turned saline and our huts have been washed away, they are supporting our struggle,” says Kalvikarasi of Pudupettai, Tranqubar Taluk.

“We had free firewood everywhere. Our cattle had free grazing grounds. But now, the shrimp industries have taken everything. We don’t even have a place to ease ourselves. All the trees are cut everywhere,” says Sivakami of Mandapathoor, *sangam* Secretary.

“We don’t have any pathway to walk to the nearby villages. They are blocked by the farm. Our graveyard is also lost,” says Sivakami of Chinnoorpettai, *sangam* Secretary.

“The company people threatened us, saying that they will evict us. They filed false police complaints. But we were not afraid. What is



the use of government laws and Supreme Court orders. The officials here are so corrupt and near Tranqubar and along the way to Nagapattinam, there are many farms coming up, in spite of the stay order," says Ankalammal of Chinnoorpettai.

"The canal near our village is so polluted by the Bask Aqua Farms that we don't get any fish in the canal in the rough season. This is the only source of livelihood during three months of the year. Even the freshwater resources are affected to a great extent, as many of these shrimp industries do not treat their effluent and let them out directly into the river. So, adequate measures should be taken by the government to maintain the ecological balance in this region. Government should allocate community lands up to a distance of 1 km from the coast to the fisherpeople." says Parvathi of Savadikuppam *Sangam* President.

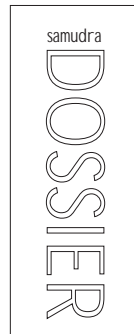
The Struggle against the Shrimp Farms

The initial mass protests in the area were led by the Gandhians who, in the 1950s and 1960s, had helped agricultural workers acquire cultivable land. Later, fisherpeople joined the struggles and, subsequently, a State Committee was launched called the 'Campaign Against the Shrimp Industry' to pressure the government to intervene. In November 1994, a State-level convention was held in Madras, demanding the total ban of the shrimp industry. In January 1995, a comprehensive writ petition, highlighting the various problems of the fisherpeople, was filed in the Supreme Court of India.

Simultaneously, mobilization and protests at various levels took place, including mass rallies, newspaper campaigns, lobbying of MLAs. and getting various organizations, such as the National Human Rights Commission and the National Women's Commission, involved. A national-level pressure group called the People's Alliance Against the Shrimp Industry' was also formed in 1995, as other districts on the Past Coast were facing similar problems.

Due to this continuous pressure from various levels, the Tamil Nadu Government enacted a Bill to provide for the Regulation of Coastal Aquaculture, with effect from 3 May 1995. Subsequently, the Supreme Court, in response to the writ petition, issued an interim stay order against construction of any new farms. Later, a Supreme Court verdict on the protection of the coastal zone demanded that all shrimp farms that violate the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification should be closed by 31 March and, later, 30 July 1997. This has caused an upheaval among shrimp producers, who are lobbying the government to withdraw the entire CRZ Notification.

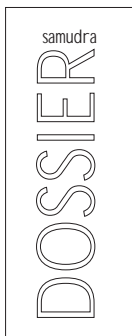
In spite of the protests, the industrialists have been going ahead with construction of new farms. The district authorities, who are



empowered to implement the order of the Supreme Court, were highly inactive and did not take any action against the incoming farms. Earlier, as a protest against this, Jaganathan of the Grama Swaraj Movement and Y. David of the East Coast Movement, observed a continuous fast from 22 May 1995 onwards, demanding the enforcement of the Supreme Court order. They were supported by other local leaders. The protests continued until 23 June 1995, and the District Collector intervened and gave instructions to all new farms to stop work immediately.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court appointed the National Economic and Environmental Research Institute (NEERI) to look into the impact of shrimp industries. NEERI submitted a report, based on which the Supreme Court gave its interim stay order. Simultaneously, the shrimp farm investors went on the defensive, hiring well-known lawyers to defend their cases. They also sparked off a debate in the media, despite the fact that as far back as 1994, shrimp farms were hit by disease, causing losses to investors.

This is a struggle of the people for the right to livelihood, as opposed to modern development and the earning of foreign exchange. As in all livelihood struggles, it is women who have been most affected, and it is they who have decided to fight this onslaught.



Creating Gender Awareness in Fishworker Organizations

Nalini Nayak

Programme Co-ordinator

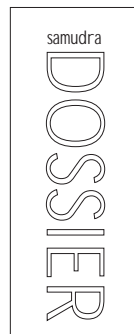
Women in Fisheries Programme, ICSF

Much has been written, and even been done, about increasing women's participation at various levels of decision making in the country. In fact, the new policy requirements regarding representation of women on various decision-making bodies and the measures taken by governments to meet the demands and needs of women are all a result of the growing consciousness that this half of humankind has some right towards equity, if not equality. One may wonder whether these trends actually indicate real changes regarding the status of women in society. Personally, I do not think they do, but, undoubtedly, these are necessary first steps towards change.

As feminists, we are often found defending ourselves when men say, "Women do not make use of the opportunities they get." This is not surprising. When all socialization takes place through centuries of patriarchal domination, it takes time for us women to shed the social behaviour that has been ingrained in us. It is even more challenging to evolve new patterns of behaviour that are unlike those of our male counterparts. Most women who are conscious that change is necessary are sure that they do not want to become like men, and so it is clear that both men and women have to change, and create new ways of being, a more equitable division of labour, and more just and human social relationships.

Working towards gender equality, therefore, is a process, and it is made up of a number of components. First, as mentioned above, it needs a consciousness among women themselves, a consciousness that we are, in essence, equal to men and, as a result, have a right to equal participation in the home, socially, economically and politically. This consciousness entails understanding how and why we have been made to believe that we are less than men and to consciously realize how patriarchy—or systematic male domination—continues to 'try to keep women in their place.'

This first step can be painful and liberating at the same time. It can work both positively and negatively—negatively when women become men-haters or even when women strive to imitate men in the struggle for power and dominance. It can be positive when this consciousness makes women realize that we also have creative roles in society, that real emancipation means a change in relationships between men and women, that the entire socialization process itself



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has to change and, furthermore, that the entire development paradigm as it exists today has to change.

The second and third components in the process of working towards gender equality are the changed consciousness in what it means to be male or female, on the one hand, and what development is all about, on the other. Just as women can begin to play new roles, men have to realize their roles can change as well. This gender sensitivity, i.e. the awareness of both men and women that they have to re-learn social behaviour, is the cornerstone for change

We have to accept new roles in the sexual division of labour and to be assured that, in the process, both women and men have to gain. While women have contributions to make in decision making at all levels, men need to get in touch with themselves through the nurturing aspects of life and, in this process, to work towards new social relations and certainly a different image of what it means to be a man. But this organization of society can only happen, or it must go hand in hand, with a new concept of progress and development—a concept that challenges consumerism and the conventional emphasis on economic growth, and which strives for sustainable development and a living relationship with the environment.

Working on gender awareness in the fishworkers' movement has meant that we have tried to work on all these components simultaneously. What follows is a sharing of such an effort made within the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) in India, during the period 1993-96. The NFF is a national trade union of artisanal fishworkers. It is national in scope because its membership is made up of independent fishworkers' associations from different States in India. It is not representative of the entire country, however, since some pockets remain unrepresented. It is important to note this because the local associations all have their own independent structure and priorities and are only affiliated to the NFF.

The objectives of ICSF's Women in Fisheries programme, at the outset, were as follows:

- to make women's work and role in fisheries more visible;
- to create a gender awareness within the different associations and to then see how women's issues could be integrated into the agenda of the fishworkers' movement;
- to create a core group of more conscious women who could continue to carry the gender debate further;
- to make some local experiments in exploring how women's spaces in the fishery could be safeguarded; and
- to arrive at a more gender-based analysis of the fishery, or to see how patriarchy operates in fisheries, and to work towards sustainable development, i.e. development based

on non-hierarchical, non-exploitative relations between women and men and nature.

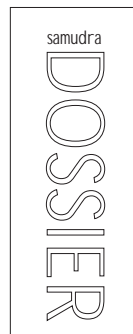
The Process

There was no real problem in gaining access to the NFF, as a few of us women had already been working at the grass roots for several years, mainly in the State of Kerala. We had also been present at national meetings and had interacted more closely in some other States, prior to 1993. Having worked in the field of fisheries for long years, our knowledge of the fishery all over the country was fairly wide, and this gave us an entry point and credibility among fishermen. Moreover, a good part of the leadership in the NFF came from Kerala itself, where beginnings on the gender debate had been made and where women were already active in the movement, at least in south Kerala.

The actual opening at the national level came through the national training programmes that the NFF organized in the years 1990-92. These 10-day programmes related basically to fisheries issues and the struggles of the fishworkers, but with a critical analysis of development and ongoing social processes. More than a day was devoted to the issue of gender awareness *per se* in the programme.

In 1990, of the 40-odd participants, there were only eight women. But the sessions were very alive, not only because all the illustrations were taken from the fishing context but also because the participants came from various States, where the status of women was different. Therefore, in moments when the discussion was blocked by the more chauvinist types, there were other men, and even women, to take the discussion ahead. On the whole, there was an attitude of openness and learning and, although there were some men who would make sly jokes at the women in their delegations, for the most part, there was an atmosphere of give and take, and even keen interest on the part of many, to know more.

As a result, when a proposal was made at the NFF General Body Meeting in 1992 to launch a specific Women in Fisheries programme, the general body wholeheartedly accepted it. Each association was asked to recommend a woman who would be part of the national women's core group and all, except two, spontaneously came up with their nominations. Of the two associations, one, after much insistence, proposed the name of a woman. The other eventually did propose a person but was certainly not serious about it. So, in this State, the men made it clear, right from the beginning, that they did not appreciate the fact that a woman would now receive special inputs and exposure and thus be given encouragement to take initiatives in the grass-roots organizing work. In fact, in this State, the union leaders had made life so difficult for a former woman worker that she had to move out and work in another area. This was only because we had earlier spotted some potential in this woman



worker and thought she could develop her skills with wider exposure. We had taken her on an exposure programme to Thailand and this infuriated the men, although the programme had been undertaken with the support of the NGO chief who was their co-ordinator. So, the first lesson we learned was to be wary of treading on the egos of male colleagues in any process of this kind.

Specific Examples

West Bengal

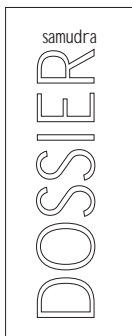
I will now get into specifics and explain the experience in one or two States, so that the process becomes more transparent. One of the more positive experiences has been in the State of West Bengal. Several factors helped to facilitate the process in this State. First, the general sociocultural conditions are such that men and women relate more naturally and on more equal terms in their local communities. Second, the State union had a very open and enlightened male leadership. Third, there was no real power struggle within the union itself, as the political clout of the union in 1992 was rather insignificant. Finally, fishing and fish-related activity were largely male-dominated.

Identifying the Women Workers in West Bengal

In 1992, there were no women either as members of the union or in the organizing team. In fact, what we were always told was that women were not involved in fisheries in the marine sector. The members of the union were sea-going fishermen operating large mechanized gill-net boats, financed by big male fish merchants who took over the marketing of their catches. On visiting the area, we realized that large numbers of women were involved in making large gill-nets which they wove, set and even repaired in teams. "Who are these women and are not they fishworkers too?" we asked. "Not really," the men replied, "because they are refugees from Bangladesh who may or may not come from fishing communities, whose husbands may or may not be working on the fishing boats and who make nets only to make a living."

The initial step, therefore, was to help the union leadership realize that these women were also fishworkers, that the union must interact with them and understand their contribution to the local fishery, and then decide whether or not they should be integrated into the union. What came out of this initiative is the story of the net weavers of Kakdwip—over 40,000 women supplementing their income by weaving large gill-nets.

Once the men had opened their eyes in this way, they were more alert when they made contacts in the Midnapore coastal district. In this district, the fishery is dominated by local Bengalis who also use both mechanized trawl and gill-nets. But the speciality of the area is the winter fishery, which involves thousands of women from both



coastal and interior communities. The union began to interact with these women too and to take up their local issues.

In 1993, as part of the Women in Fisheries programme, we organized a training for women organizers in Calcutta. We invited a group of some more experienced organizers from Kerala and some less experienced ones from Tamil Nadu and Orissa. The content of this seven-day session related to a gender perspective on fisheries, but we had to proceed at a very slow pace, as the majority had not participated in any such sessions before. So, this was only a beginning, and we could predict that out of the nine women who participated from West Bengal, only two or three would finally get involved in organizational work.

In fact, on returning to West Bengal in 1994, two of these women did a fairly interesting survey of the net weavers of Kakdwip and organized local discussion groups, where they took up some local issues. In the process, they formed a women's wing of the West Bengal Fishworkers' Forum. A group of net weavers had participated regularly in literacy classes and were now able to read and write. In the following year, these women became involved in a collective net weaving effort organized by the union

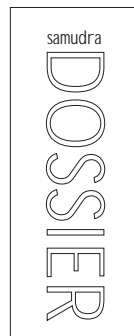
That year, aware that there were hundreds of women involved in the winter dry fishery, the union began to make contact with these women. The women are extremely poor and in very poor health. In some areas, they do not possess house site *pattas* and ration cards. Through women workers, the union began to organize discussions with these women and to mobilize them to demand their rights from local authorities. Community issues, both in Kakdwip and Midnapore, found a place on the agenda of the union.

Inputs and Formation

In 1995, the West Bengal union requested that we organize a training for their leaders—not in the old style we used for the national training in the NFF, but in the form of a local live-in training. They planned that all the leaders would come as couples, be they men or women. From many points of view, it was an extremely interesting session. Only the salient points of the session will be mentioned here.

Of the 20 participants, two women had participated in the 1993 women's training and four men in earlier NFF national training programmes. One of the old leaders from Maharashtra was also present with his wife who was coming for the first time to such a programme but who was an active fish vendor.

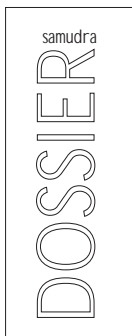
The level of discussion we were able to have during this 10-day session was indeed amazing. First, the participation of the women in the discussions was quite significant. They repeatedly wanted to draw the discussion towards the women's point of view. They easily



spoke about their feelings and their own experiences, something they did not spontaneously do earlier. We had a day-long personal experience-sharing session, started by our male friend from Maharashtra who, again, surprisingly, spoke very personally, explaining the problems in his marriage and expressing his appreciation for the role played by his wife in supporting the family as he was given to activism in the community. This level of sharing helped each one in the group to get a closer and truer understanding of the other, to appreciate what a commitment to the movement implied and to see how male-female relationships can be changed and become less burdensome and more creative and equitable.

Unlike other training sessions, where the group concentrated only on the sessions, this group also took charge of the daily sustenance needs, preparing food, cleaning the surroundings, etc. The men seemed to undertake their chores quite naturally, without dumping the dirty work on women. At the evaluation, when we remarked on this, many of the men said they had done this kind of work for the first time and that they had now realized what a thankless job it was. They said that the motivation to do it came from the spirit of the entire group and the fact that the national leaders were all involved as well. The men felt that the chores were an important part of the session and that doing them had brought them closer to reality and to each other.

Towards the end of the session, group members had to decide on the future work plan and prioritize the issues they would take up from a broad spectrum. There were many issues that they had been unaware of earlier, such as the establishment of a fish drying plant in their area, which would displace women workers, a shipbreaking yard that would pollute the water, modern shrimp farms, and the follow-up of the cases of migrant women workers in processing plants.



Women Make Themselves Visible

As a result of the consciousness in the union and the fact that women's concerns had become integrated into it, the women were able to represent their problems to the Parliamentary Committee when it went to West Bengal for a Public Hearing. This was much to the surprise of the local fisheries authorities, who wondered why a mass of women had come all the way to the hearing. They had to accept that thousands of women had entered the fishery as wage workers. Although women are thoroughly exploited in this work, the spaces that the fishery provides are the only means of earning something and, therefore, have to be safeguarded.

Having said this, it can not be claimed that the concept of patriarchy has entered the analytical framework of the West Bengal union. Right now, these problems are seen as problems that women face in the existing fishery. There is still no real serious discussion on the need

to manage the fishery in a sustainable manner. In fact, as a result of the diminishing resources, over the last two years, many of the gill-netters switched over to trawl nets—a gear that the union advocates banning. The efforts made in West Bengal prove that integrating women’s issues into the union agenda is possible under certain conditions, but that this does not necessarily mean that patriarchy is challenged in any particular way. The wives of the big fishermen are not invoked in direct fish-related activity, as the landing centres are far removed from the habitation areas. The women who are involved in this activity are more at the receiving end as the fishery provides an open entry for labour that is displaced from the farming sector.

Kerala

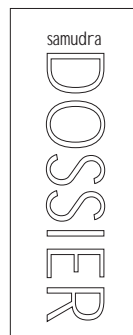
Among all the States in India, Kerala is the only State where the union has a very elaborate and participatory structure. Each district has its elected district committee, whose presidents and secretaries form the State committee. These are all elected posts. The union is alive, but is ridden with internal problems as well.

Problems of Accepting Women as Members

Earlier, only Trivandrum District had included women fish vendors as members of the union. These women have been very active at all levels, despite the demands made on them by their families. Quilon and Alleppey Districts had separate women’s wings which, however, have been *under* the men. One or two women from these wings are *nominated* to the district committees.

In Ernakulam, there are hundreds of women settled around the estuary, who are involved in fish-related activity. As the base of the union is the sea-going fishermen, whose wives are not involved in direct, fish-related activity, Ernakulam District did not have women members before 1990. Badly hit by the decline in fish resources, these fishermen asked that some employment-generation activities be created for their women. We responded by saying that this would be done only for women members of the union. Disregarding the norm of the union that only women directly engaged in fish-related activity be included as members, the Ernakulam union opened its membership to the women of the fishing community. It was only at this point that these women realized that they had not been considered members earlier, although they participated in all the struggles and contributed financially as well. In this way, the women became an integral part of the union also and we helped them to organize alternative employment for themselves. Today, it is this employment scheme that also generates money for the local running of the district union.

We subsequently discovered hundreds of other women engaged in clam picking, fish drying and vending, working in processing plants, and loading fish in the same district. The local union did not feel



ready to take up the problems of these women. Hence, the State union, through Mercy Alexander, helped these women create their own forum, called the Ernakulam Coastal Women's Forum, in 1995. This group of women is very enthusiastic and feels the need to stand together to fight for their demands. How they will integrate into the larger union structure remains to be seen.

In the northern districts, the base of the union is not very strong. Although there are hundreds of women involved in fish vending, mobilizing them is proceeding at a much slower pace. In the inland districts, women are an integral part of the union and have been very involved in its struggles.

Standing up to the Boycott by Men

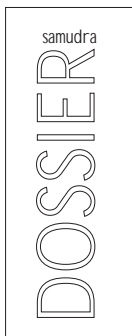
The interesting fact is that there is still strong resistance to women taking up any initiative throughout the State, except in Trivandrum. Initially, in 1992, when it was decided at the State Committee that there would be a series of district-level seminars to discuss the history and theoretical framework of gender inequality, there was outright refusal from men in some districts. It was then proposed that we discuss an ecological perspective in fisheries and this was agreed upon. When some of the leaders understood that the ecological perspective included an understanding of patriarchy and technology, they boycotted the sessions.

It has also been quite a fight to get women included in decision-making bodies. There were protests about this by women at the State convention, when the new State committee was elected. Subsequently, more women have been 'nominated' to the committees. But, here again, there have been regions where the nominated women members have been restrained by the other male members from attending State-level meetings.

Positive Response in Trivandrum

The Trivandrum District union elected Bridgit, an extremely active and militant woman, as its president in 1994. Unfortunately, she had to withdraw, when her 20-year old son took ill. Having a husband who was irresponsible and drunk most of the time, Bridgit chose to opt out of the union and attend to her son. Accepting Bridgit as the President of the District Union was not a problem in Trivandrum, but this certainly would be unheard of in any other district of Kerala.

The Trivandrum District union has taken up many problems faced by women, even amidst its other large struggles. The most significant issue was the exclusion of women from famine relief benefit, a contributory relief fund with shares from the Central and State governments. While this issue has not yet been rectified by the Central government, the State government decided to give its contribution to women.



The district union has constantly taken up the problems women fish vendors face in the markets. There have also been local village struggles for better health and sanitation facilities. Besides these collective demands, there are numerous other personal demands, the most important being access to credit, a proper house site or a decent house. The union makes its own attempts to help women with these demands as well.

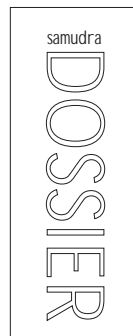
An attempt was even made to supply women vendors with dry fish from other States. With the decline in catches in Kerala and the fact that many varieties are being overexploited, women vendors' access to fish is also affected. The union's intervention was successful in early 1995, but, by 1996, dry fish prices went up so high—even in Gujarat—that women in Kerala felt it would not be a viable proposition. Women have demanded a ban on the export of locally consumed varieties. But will men accept this? Does export really mean more money? These questions are up for debate. In Trivandrum District, there has been a formation of active women leaders. These women have been meeting every quarter to learn how to study issues and to take them up for action. This has been an interesting process by which women have raised their own skills of debating on issues, public speaking and organizing.

At the National Level

At the national level, the core group was able to focus attention on the problems of migrant female workers in processing plants. In fact, the women staged a walk-out at the 1994 NFF General Body Meeting, angry that the former year's annual report paid only lip-service to the efforts of women within the organization. This process finally resulted in the leadership taking time to understand some of the problems women workers are facing. A decision was taken to hold a Public Hearing on Problems of Women in Fisheries, focusing on the problems of migrant workers in fish processing plants (published as an earlier SAMUDRA Dossier). Here too, while the Public Hearing was in many ways a significant achievement and was supported by the national leadership, the local leaders left the entire organizing of the event to the women. Nevertheless, as this event was organized through the NFF, it made the State unions aware of this problem, forcing them to get involved in times of need. It also widened the outreach of the NFF.

Evolution of a Women's Core Group

Attempts at creating a women's core group within the NFF have not really been very effective. This is also because of the nature of functioning of the local State unions, which seem to have been mainly involved in national struggles, while neglecting the organization at the base. This means that the base organizations are very fragile; as a result of the substantial weakening of the artisanal fishery itself. Nevertheless, there has evolved a core group of women in fisheries. Not all these women are part of the NFF structure. While we do not



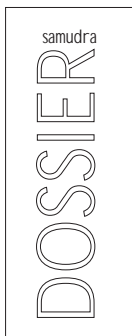
advocate working with women on an autonomous basis, i.e. outside the framework of a fish workers' organization, we can see that this is an inevitable step. We are more inclined to support women's organizations to fight for their rights to the resource, access to credit, vending space, transport to market, social security, health and educational infrastructure, while simultaneously standing up to the growing violence and atrocities on women in the community itself.

At the State level in Kerala, a fairly active core group of women has developed within the KSMTF, the Kerala Independent Fisworkers Union. These women come both from the inland and marine sectors, and have met fairly regularly to understand how women can be organized and how their demands can be integrated into the local unions. This coming together has also helped these women to feel supported in their local activity. A few of these women work in NGOs, and some of them directly in the union. This process of interaction has helped them shift from an approach of 'welfare' to a more political understanding of women's demands.

Making Women's Participation in Fisheries More Visible

We have tried, in various ways, to make women's participation in fisheries more visible:

1. We have made a serious attempt to document the different kinds of work women do in fisheries. Together with this, we have made a firsthand village-wise data collection of women's work in fisheries. We have been able to cover some States in the country exhaustively, while in others, we have only been able to cover some pockets. The data collection was done through the NFF base in some areas and through NGOs in others. This is the first such data collection effort on women in marine fisheries in the country. Except for Gujarat, no other State officially maintains such data. The next volume of this SAMUDRA Dossier is the result of this effort.
2. We have also made a special attempt to highlight the problems of migrant women workers in the processing plants. Following up this issue with the Labour Commissioner has also forced the Department of Labour to look at this problem seriously. Hopefully, this will culminate in labour contractors having to take licences, in which case these women will receive some social security and wage benefits as well.
3. We organized a public hearing on the problems of women in fisheries in June 1995. This, again, was the first of its kind in the country and it succeeded in getting some media coverage.



4. At many forums or workshops, the subject of Women in Fisheries is now being placed on the agenda. There is more interest in this subject now. Just as fisheries has found a place on the world agenda too, attention is now given to women in fisheries.
5. When the Parliamentary Committee conducted hearings on the problems of deep-sea fishing, women in West Bengal and Kerala made specific demands to the Committee. This came as a surprise to the Committee, as they were unaware of the impact of the deep-sea policy on women. As a result, the rights and welfare of women figured in the final report of the Committee.

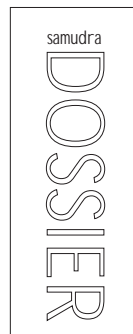
Awareness-building and Workshops

We feel that the first important step in working towards a gender perspective is to build awareness on the subject itself. We have realized that many organizers tend to look at the 'women's question' as problems of women. The emphasis has to be on understanding gender as a social construct and patriarchy as a power relation that impacts on the sexual division of labour. This, then, has to be linked with ongoing development strategies and the evolution of technology in the particular sector itself.


We have been trying to integrate this analysis in different training sessions. If the subject of a gender perspective on fisheries is to be taken seriously, we feel that an entire workshop should be devoted to it. In such a workshop, spanning a minimum period of six days, the following topics can be integrated:

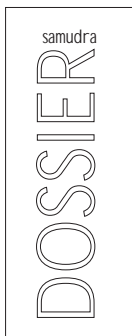
1. a basic framework of societal analysis into which the "production of life" is integrated;
2. an introduction to the historical evolution of the sexual division of labour and some conceptual clarifications, especially of patriarchy, the social construct of gender, etc.;
3. the development debate
4. the sexual division of labour in fisheries—how women's spaces are lost in the evolution from artisanal to modern fisheries;
5. sustainable fisheries development where women, men and nature matter; and
6. movement-building and how gender issues can be integrated into the movement.

In closing, we must state that at the end of this three-year period, which commenced with great enthusiasm, we can not say we have



achieved a great deal. On the one hand, we feel we have arrived at much greater clarity regarding a gender perspective in fisheries. Moreover, there are a number of potential women who could take up leadership. However, the backlash from men in some places has been extremely discouraging. This has been one of the main reasons why we have finally come to the conclusion that in such places, it is more fruitful to organize women separately and, then, to affiliate to the State or national structure.

On the other hand, these years have been very special years in the life of the NFF. It was a time when the NFF's involvement in the national struggle against the deep-sea fishing policy of the government not only absorbed all its energy, but also caused the NFF to plunge into hitherto unknown areas, such as joint fronts with the mechanized and trawl sectors and merchant lobbies as well as with political party unions. These issues were certainly 'more important' than the gender debate within the NFF. If the experience of a successful joint front on the deep-sea issue permits a larger debate on the environmental, gender and management questions, it may turn out favourable in the long run. Only time will tell. 



**Women in
Fisheries
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Women in Fisheries

The Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) was initiated in 1993. Broadly, it aims to strengthen the participation of women in fishworkers' organizations and in decision-making processes at various levels.

Among the programme's specific objectives are attempts to study the history of women's roles in fisheries (the sexual division of labour and the role of patriarchy), and to record accounts of their struggles against social, political and economic marginalization.

As a part of this documentation process, ICSF is in the process of publishing a SAMUDRA Dossier series on Women in Fisheries. This, the second in the series, contains details of women's involvement in fisheries in each of the nine maritime States of India.

ICSF is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO'S Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. Registered in Geneva, ICSF has offices in Chennai, India and Brussels, Belgium. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.