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CCA-URM Rural Concerns

Series, No 2



*Listen :*

**This is the voice of  
the small fishermen**



CCA-URM Rural Concerns Series, No 2

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**This is the voice  
of the small fishermen**

*Prepared by*

**BANTORN ONDAM**

*and*

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Published by

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## Objectives of the Book

This is the second of a series of publications, planned under our CCA-URM Rural Concerns. Broadly speaking, the Rural Concerns series aims to publicise our experience of rural organization and training, people's forums, and stories of people's struggles. Of these features, the main thrusts of CCA-URM Rural Concerns are identified as rural training and people's forums.

This book specifically presents the report on the Small/Traditional Fisherman Workshop organized by CCA-URM Rural Concerns in Madras, India during November 13-24, 1981. The workshop is actually the people's forum for the small/traditional fishermen. Thus, the workshop is the first attempt of CCA-URM Rural Concerns to provide the forum for the fishermen and their supporters ---- the organizers and the researchers ---- from India, Sri Lanka and Philippines with the aim to enable them to share experiences and identify the needs and problem among the small fishermen at local, state, national and regional levels.

CCA-URM decides to publish this report in a book form as a humble contribution to the International Conference of Fishworkers and Their Supporters to be held in Rome during July 4-8, 1984.

*BANTORN ONDAM*

*Project Staff*





## PART ONE

# The Demands of The fishermen

In this part, the data has been derived and presented from two sources :

1. Small/Traditional Fisherman Workshop organized by CCA - URM Rural Concerns in Madras, India during November 13-24 1981. The demands were made by fishermen from India, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

2. Board of Education for Liberation (BEL)'s files. The document on the fishermen's demands was given to CCA-URM project staff in 1980. The demands were made by the fishing communities in some states of India.

# REPORT FROM THE WORKSHOP OF SMALL / TRADITIONAL FISHERMEN

Fishermen from three countries - India, Philippines and Sri Lanka - came together in India from 13th-24th November 1981. The workshop started with an exposure programme- visiting the coastal areas of Madras and fishing villages of Kerala, to identify the issues relating to small fishermen. We then convened in Madras to look more deeply at the specific problems of the small fishermen. The exposure programme enabled the participants to understand the living conditions of the fishermen and their problems-both economic and political. After reflecting upon the exposure programme we moved to reports from each national group which highlighted the particular conditions and problems within each country.

The demands from each national group were as follows:

### **INDIA**

1. The implementation of marine regulation bill.
2. The ban of trawling in 20 km zone and purseining in 200 mile zone (from the coast line)
3. Measures to be taken to preserve the ecology from destruction due to pollution.
4. To ban the extraction of sand from beaches.
5. The eviction of fishermen in the name of tourism, development, industrialisation, be opposed.
6. The nationalisation of deep sea fishing and export of prawns and other sea food.
7. Protection against the loss of fishing equipments and life.
8. Cancellation of outstanding loans.
9. To allow the use of government buses for the transportation of fish and fishing equipment.
10. The provision of basic amenities such as housing, land, education, health. etc.
11. The National Forum should be represented and have full participation in deciding making relating to the lives of the fishermen.

### **PHILIPPINES**

1. Nationalisation of the fishing industry.
2. Repeal of the treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation with Japan.
3. Revoke PD 704 (fisheries decree of 1975).
4. Prohibit all forms of illegal fishing in inland and marine areas (trawling, purseins, fishpens, dynamite, electro fishing etc.) water.
5. Stop pollution of the enviroment especially water resources.
6. Strictly implement the 200 mile exclusive economic zone.

7. Extend credit facilities to small fishermen and stop all usurious practices.
8. Stop the eviction of small fishermen.
9. Provide better technology for small fishermen.
10. Higher wages and better working conditions for fisherfolk.
11. Land to the fisherfolk.
12. Participation in decision making affecting fisheries.

### **SRI LANKA**

1. The grants given by Government should be effectively exercised to the small fishermen community.
2. The government has to provide the necessary fishing equipment to small fishermen.
3. The institutions which procure the fish should be established in the fishing villages.
4. Total utility of insurance policy be implemented.

The Workshop indentified the following demands as common demands affecting the lives of the fishermen in the three countries. Also it was felt that the implication of these demands needs to be studied in the context of each national situation.

1. Reserve a 50 km zone along the coast lines for the use of small fishermen and prohibit the use of trawlers in these waters.
2. Strict implementation of the 200 mile exclusive economic zone.
3. Purseining should be totally banned in the 200 mile EEZ.
4. Genuine representation of small fishermen in all levels of decision making and implementation of policies and programmes affecting the fishermen and the fish industry.

5. Abrogation of all unequal and unjust :
  - a) *treaties with foreign governments and companies which adversely affect the national economy and the lives of the small fishermen.*
  - b) *laws relating to the fishing industry.*
6. That effective and stringent measures be taken against environmental and ecological destruction of marine wealth, particularly due to the pollution of rivers seas and inland waters, by erecting effluent treatment plants in the existing factories and ensuring these plants be erected in any new factory.
7. Stop all eviction of small fishermen from their residential areas in the name of:
  - a) *Tourism*
  - b) *Development programmes*
  - c) *National security*
  - d) *Industrialisation*
8. Cancellation of all previous loans and creation of new credit schemes without onerous and usurious conditions.
9. Development and provision of intermediate and appropriate technology to small fishermen.
10. Higher wages for all workers in the fishing and allied industries.
11. Provision of agricultural lands to augment the income of small fishermen which is eroded by the depletion of the natural fish resources and destruction caused by trawling and purseining.
12. \* Nationalisation of the fishing industry.

On the basis of the twelve common demands it was felt by the participants that an Asian Forum should be set up. The aims of the Forum to be as follows.

1. To co-ordinate and expand the struggle of traditional fishermen in different Asian countries.

2. To unitedly press for the demands which were found to be common amongst the countries present. It was agreed that, as other countries join the Forum, new demands could be incorporated as long as any such demand does not go against the small/traditional fishermen.
3. To stabilise and strengthen the local struggle of the fishermen.
4. To build up an information network to facilitate a greater sharing of the experience of struggle amongst the small/traditional fishermen.
5. To contact other groups, working in Asian countries not represented in the workshop, to bring them into the fellowship.

*\* It should be noted that the term Nationalisation has different meanings in each national situation.*

To carry forward the proposal of establishing an Asian Forum for small/traditional fishermen it was agreed that a Working Committee be elected. The Committee would consist of both fishermen and organisers/researchers. The Committee would be responsible for:

- a) Working towards the establishing of an Asian Forum.*
- b) Keeping up communication between groups within each country and also between each country.*
- c) to advise on specific proposals for the groups.*
- d) to expand and make contact with groups in other countries in Asia.*

It was decided that the Committee would meet within 6 months to implement the decisions taken.

# DEMANDS FROM FISHERMEN COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

Available information on the census reveals that there are about 6.5 million fishermen in India. Of this about 3.0 million are living in the chain of fishing villages along the coast line extending to 6,500 k.m. India produces about 1.3 million tons of marine fish and 8.7 million tons inland fish. Catch per man per hour from marine sources in 1977 was calculated at 5.03 kg. Traditionally fishing activities are mainly confined within a narrow belt of 10 to 15 k.m. from the shore.

## **I. TRIVANDRUM DISTRICT FISHERMEN'S UNION DEMANDS**

1. Introduce small scale in-board and out-board engines and Gill net boats and distribute them on massive scale among the fishermen-workers on co-operative or group basis.
2. Ban Purseining and Bottom Trawling and all the money allocations for mechanised fishing should be spent for small scale fishing as suggested above.
3. Nationalise deep sea-fishing. Train and employ traditional fishermen in these deep-sea vessels.
4. Nationalise export of marine products.
5. Introduce loan availability and transport facilities for small scale self-employed fish distributors.
6. Give legal rights (Pattayas) of land to the fishermen who live along the coastal belt.
7. Erect purification plants and thus curb the pollution of Titanium Factory, which dump their effluents into the sea.
8. Introduce improved health and educational facilities for fishermen communities.
9. Begin small-scale fisheries Technical Education centres for the fishing community.

*Short term demands and issues which they have taken up and are fighting for:*

1. Implementation of housing schemes.
2. Compensation for fishermen affected by sea erosion, death in sea, damage of country crafts, etc.
3. Transport facilities for fish-selling women.

## **II. KERALA - DEMANDS**

1. Recognise the Fishermen community as 'coastal Tribes' and allow all the benefits including reserva-



- tion and educational concessions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These facilities should be allowed in the Central Services and State Service as well as in the public sector institutions.
2. Fishermen communities should be allowed special reservation in the State and Central Fishery Institutions.
  3. The Coastal constituencies are to be reserved for the traditional fishermen community for the purpose of election to the Parliament, State Legislature, District Councils, Corporations, Municipalities and Panchayaths.
  4. Separate Fishery Department is to be constituted in the Central Government, under a Cabinet Minister.
  5. An all India Fishermen Commission is to be constituted to study the problems of the fishermen. Fishermen representatives are to be included in this commission.
  6. A well drawn Fishery policy has to be evolved. A Marine bill demarcating separate fishing zones for different kinds of fishing crafts, among other things is to be prepared and presented in the Parliament for approval and give directions to the States as per bill.
  7. A Master Plan is to be prepared to get all the benefits of Mechanisation and modernisation for the traditional fishermen.
  8. An All India Fishery Act is to be prepared considering the peculiarities of various states.
  9. Fifty per cent of the foreign exchange earned from the export of the fish items is to be set apart for the social educational, economic and cultural progress of the traditional fishermen community.
  10. Immediate steps to be taken to study the cause and

effects of water pollution and prepare remedial measures are to be implemented, safeguarding the interests of fisher-folk.

### III. MAHARASHTRA

*They arrived at the following terms of compromise:*

- (1) The five km. area from the sea-shore was declared as "protected zone" for catamarans and country fishermen.
- (2) Police patrolling was started in the sea to watch the events of violation of Government orders.
- (3) Trawlers were allowed to leave the port after the sun-rise and if any loss incurred because of their wrong action they were made liable for compensation.
- (4) The Government was keen in observing the terms laid down in compromise but now and then mischief mongering of trawler walas was going on; Any how our long cherished ideal of imparting justice to the poor fishermen had materialised. Something has happened but still absolute justice is not imparted to us and as such we demand the following terms.

These demands should be formulated by making statutory provisions, passing a bill by parliament of India:

- (1) 20 km. area from sea-shore should be declared as "protected" area for country fishermen.
- (2) In the peak season thousands of trawlers rush to the port for catching prawns and these mechanised craftsmen disturb the whole field of fishing. They stir the bed of the sea and consequently the poor fishermen do not get catch for whole of the year as such we suggest that the fishing capacity of the port must be decided by the concerned authority

like port and director for fishing. Numerically suitable members of trawlers must be allowed to come in the port and passes should be issued accordingly.

- (3) As far as possible preference should be given to local trawler Walas and the trawlers coming from all - weather ports must be prevented to make fishing in several parts like Vengurla and Malvan which are exposed to sound wind.
- (4) For execution of all these terms request may be made to Government of India to create a new unit of Sea police for Patrolling the border of "Protected zone"

#### **IV. KARNATAKA - PROBLEMS IN BRIEF.**

- (1) Non-implementation of Government ordinances regarding demarcated zones and patrolling.
- (2) Non-inclusion in Conciliation Committee.
- (3) Absolutely no economic aids to our small-scale fishermen.

#### **V. NATIONAL FORUM FOR CATAMARAN AND COUNTRYBOAT FISHERMEN'S RIGHTS AND MARINE WEALTH--**

##### **DEMANDS: - (Press Statement)**

- (1) That the Central government immediately enact a central Marine Bill earmarking for a fool proof and exclusive 20 km. zone free from trawlers and purseiners; Implement the 20 km. zone by day and night patrolling and penalise the violating mechanised fishing vessels with stringent penalties.
- (2) Modernisation and mechanisation of existing coun

try-boats and catamarans of traditional fishermen on group basis.

- (3) Divert the entire allocation of crores of rupees now spent on irrelevant fishing trawlers and purseiners for the modernisation of traditional fishing gear and country-boats on a small scale and cheap basis-which should in no way disturb the ecological balance and deplete the marine resources.
- (4) Nationalisation of export of fish trade.
- (5) The Central Board of prevention and Control of water pollution should ruthlessly enforce National and International standards against pollution of rivers and sea by polluting industries, towns situated near the coast and backwaters; ships and tankers who discharge their wastes in the rivers and the sea.
- (6) Ban extraction of beach sand along the coastal beaches of India.
- (7) Stop issueing of licenses for mechanisation of net-weaving industry especially in K.K. District, Tamilnadu, in order to protect the labour-intensive, hand-woven net industries which exist throughout the entire coast.
- (8) Establish a separate Department of Fisheries under a Central cabinet minister.
- (9) The Forum also opposes tooth and nail the eviction of traditional fishermen communities living in fishing villages along the coast under the guise of so-called development, tourism and foreign exchange as Cape Commorin in Tamilnadu, Goa, Kerala, Karnataka and other states.

**Note:** *There are about 2,000 mechanised fishing boats, 33,000 catamarans and 7,000 other traditional fishing craft operating along the Coromandel coast. All these craft are engaged in inshore fishing - that is within 20 fathoms (1 fathom : 6 miles) of the coastline. Of these about 400-500 mechanised boats and countless other craft are based at Madras.*

## **VI Tamil Nadu - Demands**

### **Our 10 points Memorandum submitted to the Tamilnadu Govt. for consideration & Action.**

1. Like the existing farm insurance & compensation for the farmers, the Tamilnadu Catamaran Fishermen, who have no job security, should also be given due total compensation, equal to the amount of loss, whenever their catamaran, country-boats or nets are damaged.
2. Floods and storms relief centres should be built to protect the life and property of small fishermen in times of storm and flood. Again due compensation must be paid on all dates that they are prevented by the Govt. from going for fishing due to storm, floods or navy exercises. And every fishermen colony must be provided with radios to keep fisherman informed of dangers from storms and floods.
3. We demand the cancellation, by the Tamilnadu Government of all short and long term loans, like the one given to farmers and goldsmiths. Also arrangements must be made so that Banks provide long-term and short-term loans for buying nets, catamarans, country boats and other fishing equipment and to start fish fishing. We also request that Tamilnadu Government use the Central Govt. to re-start the Fishermen Development grants.
4. We demand that the majority of seats both for the Central Govt. Marine Research Institute courses be allotted to fishermen and that fishermen be given majority representation during recruitment of workers for the Madras Harbour and the newly constructed fishing port, adjacent to the harbour.
5. We demand that the Tamilnadu Govt. rule, dated

27.9.1980, that the mechanised boats do not come within the 3 miles from the area of the small fishermen near the shore, as assured in the central govt. ordinance, be immediately put into force. Again we demand that a law, restricting the working hours of mechanised boats from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., be passed immediately.

6. Tamilnadu Govt. should take immediate action to stop the flow into the sea, of waste-materials and harmful effluents ejected by the factories and research centres in the Tamilnadu Coastal areas. Such waste-materials have been drastically affecting the fishing wealth of ours.
7. We also demand that all fishermen living in the coasts of Tamilnadu be provided with fire proof houses (as already given to harijans and tribals) to protect them from floods and storms. They should also be given facilities of good roads, drinking water, medicine, education, post-office, transport etc.
8. We request that the fishermen now included in the backward class list, be included in the 'Depressed classes. This has been a long-standing demand of ours.  
Tamilnadu Govt should see that the fishermen living on private or govt. land on the coastal areas be given ownership rights and pattas must be provided.
9. The amount allotted to fishermen in the Tamilnadu Govt. budget is very meagre. We demand that this be substantially raised for the benefit of the fishing industry, the living standard as well as the educational and economic needs of the fishing community.
10. Old age pension must be given to fishermen who are unable to take up fishing due to old age or

other physical handicaps. We also demand that based on academic merit, at least one member per family be given employment opportunities.

We earnestly demand of the Tamilnadu Government that the new port being constructed in Royapuram be named M. Singaravelan Port, after the fishermen leader.





## PART TWO

# **The VOICES and the STRUGGLES of the fishermen**

Part two deals with the way in which the fishermen voice their concerns over their conditions and problems and tell the stories how they organize themselves to struggle to solve their own problems:

The data in this part has been drawn from the papers and documents presented and prepared by the small / traditional fishermen themselves during the discussion and exposure trip in the Small / Traditional Fisherman Workshop organized by CCA - URM Concerns in Madras, India during November 13 - 24, 1981.

# **PROBLEMS OF FISHERMEN COOPERATIVE SOCIETY (LTD.)**

## **Nalla ThanneerOdaikuppam, Thiruvotriyur, Madras - 19.**

**President: Mr.P.Radhakrishnan.**

*Ladies & Gentlemen:*

We present here the problems of our Kuppam on behalf of our people and the community as a whole.

We have been living in the above said Kuppam for years together with the total population of 1000. Our main work is fishing. In order to construct a harbour for the mechanised boats (trawlers) the Government was placing stones in the sea bed near the coast which resulted in terrible sea erosion in our area. Therefore, all the slums in our Kuppam were sunk in the sea and now we have no place to stay. We have been meeting the Fisheries Department, Ministers,

and other concerned officials to get rid of this problem and to seek remedy for the same. But no action has practically been taken so far against this issue by the Govt. while the sea erosion has been increasing day by day.

Fifty percent of the people affected by the sea erosion live in their relative's houses and the other fifty live in the National highways land for Road by putting up a small thatched roof and thus people lost the housing comfort and suffer even to go for work in the sea.

In addition to this we lack drinking water, lighting and other necessary facilities.

Another major problem we face here is the oppression by the mechanised boats. Since we live near by the Harbour and the mechanised boat owners are fishing regularly with out and time specification, we are not able to fish and thus suffer so much. We live in the midst of all these acute problems which do not permit our community even to exist on earth as human beings.

With thanks.

(Sd.) × × × × ×

1. P.Radhakrishnan
2. P.Govindaraj
3. R.Thangavelu
4. P.Raman
5. Karunanithy
6. K.Gandhi.

# URUR KUPPAM, BESANT NAQAR, MADRAS - 90

## MEMORANDUM

We the members of Tamil Nadu Catamaran (country boats) fishers beg to bring a few lines to the consideration of All India Catamaran (Country boats) Meenavar Association for favourable action.

Our Urur Kuppam is in South Madras City. It seems it is existing by name only. Tamilnadu government is invariable financing the Kuppam according to their will and pleasure and without considering the view the individual Kuppam.

We are living near the sea. Every year due to cyclone and fire accident, we are suffering to a lot of hardship. As a remedy, we have not been provided with pacca houses to live. There is no road and light facilities in our Kuppam. There is no arrangement to supply drinking water and basic amenities. As we are very backward in education, the government is not treating us as human beings. So we pray you to take proper action to help us from the hardships.

2. We earn our livelyhood by fishing. The fisheries department without taking proper survey of our Kuppam and without proper estimate about our needs and requirements, are spending the allotted funds according to their own decision wounding our hearts. Taking our inability and our backwardness and poverty, the Fisheries Department has not taken any action to protect us from these hardships. So once again we pray that our esteemed General body may take proper action to help us.

3. We like to point to you that, without considering the views of 90 % real fishermen's ambition and without assessing the natural situation of Bay of Bengal, they are taking action against the wishes of the people living in this Kuppam. By the introduction of steamboat system 90 % of the countryboat fishermen have lost their livelihoods and several have lost their lives and there were 10 % of damages to the properties. Then the government has announced three orders in 24.9.79 to protect the welfare of the catamaran fishers. Eventhough three years have passed no proper action was taken on the subject.

4. From the ancient times up to this date we are depending on Adyar river, for fishing. At present as the drainage water is connected to this river we cannot fish anything in it.

5. So we humbly request that the General body of Tamil Nadu Catamaran (country boat) fishers may take necessary action in the interest and the welfare of the depressed catamaran fishers.

*Yours faithfully,*  
(Sd.) × × × × × ×

1. A.chinna G.Chettiyar
2. S.Kabali
3. C.Sarangi
4. Ayyavu
5. R.Mohan
6. K.Shunmugam
7. E.Veerabathiran
8. R.Ramachandran.

# **Grievances of the Fishermen residing in Tamil Nadu.**

1. India is a peninsula. Three sides of the Indian borders are surrounded by Sea. As both central state Governments are concerned, NO importance is given to fishing industry.

2. In the Government of India, Ministry status is not given to Fisheries. The Deputy Minister of Agriculture is in charge of Fisheries.

3. In the Annual budgets of both the central and state governments, no separate fund is allotted to Fishing. Usually a very little amount of fund is to be spent from the fund allotted to Agriculture,

4. The Government neither cares about the fishermen nor fishing industry. In Tamil Nadu alone more than 20,000 thousand and thousand year old catamarans are used for fishing industry. No encouragement was given to the fishermen to adopt modern fishing equipments.

5. In Tamil Nadu, There is a separate Housing Board for Harijans people. No such Housing Board for Fishermen for the construction of houses for fishermen.

6. Recently Fishing ships from China and Taiwan came to Indian coastal areas for fishing. But the Indian Governments have no sufficient number of fishing ships for the use of deep sea fishing.

7. In India the mechanised boat used for fishing is unfit for deep sea fishing. As a result of which very often the encounter arose between the traditional catamaram owned by fishermen and mechanised Boat owned by fishermen.

8. In Tamil Nadu all the state owned Boat Building yards are closed down. No Price concession for diesel consumption is given to mechanised boats such concession is extended only for fishing ships hence running of the mechanised boats are not profitable in India.

9. No authority or departments are established for fisherman welfare. No preference is given for fishermen in the recruitment of navy, merchant navy, and jobs in harbours.

10. No reasonable price is given for prawn and fish exporting from India. Because no state owned industry for prawn freezing only private owner's fix the prices as they like.

11. Neither the governments nor the nationalised Banks easily offer loans for the purchase of fishing materials.

Secretary

*Devantra Fishermen co-operative Soci*

# VIZHINJAM FISHING VILLAGE

Vizhinjam is a small fishing village situated about 15 kms. south of Trivandrum. It is a proposed fishing harbour area. It has a total population of about 10,000 of whom 8,000 are fishermen. The fishermen belong to mainly two religious communities, viz. Christian and Muslim. These two religious groups are concentrated on two sides of the landing centre. In the northern side the Christians are concentrated, while in the southern side is occupied by the Muslims.

Both mechanised and non-mechanised boats are operated in this centre. Catamarans and Canoes are the non-mechanised crafts which are used here. More than 15 trawlers are owned by the fishermen of this area. Other trawlers (about 25) are owned by the migrated sons from the nearby villages. There are 6 cold storages and 4 freezing centres operating.

Vizhinjam has, to its credit, a marine survey station, and a mussel culture project both run by the department of fisheries. There is also one fishermen training centre which trains the fishermen in the theoretical and practical aspects of motorized fishing like navigation, handling and maintenance of engine, boat building, etc. For each course 40 fishermen are selected and the training lasts for 38 weeks.



A modern fishing harbour which is being constructed here has actually badly affected the small fishermen of the area. The corporation has of course initiated action to establish two townships in Vizhinjam for the rehabilitation of 2,000 fisherman families of the harbour area. But the houses which are being provided are nearly a kilometre away from the sea thereby practically creating a problem to easy accessibility. Also, since the best landing area of the non-mechanised crafts is near the harbour, the docking and landing of such crafts would face serious problems in the near future. It means that the place would end up as an area best suited only for the operation of mechanised boats and small fishing ships.

As to poverty, exploitation of middlemen, lack of credit and loan facilities, poor living conditions, unhealthy environment etc; the conditions of Vizhinjam are really backward from those of any other traditional village.

Presently, voluntary agencies have entered the scene to educate the fishermen and bring about new awareness. As a result, fishermen have started a people's co-operative society to take care of the marketing and credit side of fishing. This new endeavour is making steady progress.

# MARIANAD MALSYA ULPADAKA CO - OPERATIVE SOCIETY

*Ltd. No. F (T) 287*

*Puthencurichy P. O., Trivandrum - Dt. - 695  
303.*

## **Report of 10 years - A Summary**

Honourable Chief Minister of Kerala Shri. **E.K. Nayanar**, Minister of Fisheries Shri. *P. S. Sreenivasan*, Special Secretary for Fisheries Shri. *S. Krishnakumar*, Director of Fisheries Shri. *A. G. Vasavan* Shri. *M. M. Hassan M.L. A.*, dear fishermen, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

Fisheries has always been recongnised as a sector with potential for widespread employment generation; as a source of cheap and vitally required animal protein; and also as a big foreign exchange earner. Of the total fish produced in this country about 80% still come from the traditional sector. Yet the traditional fishermen are economically and socially in a very backward position. Despite development attempts from various quarters the tradtional fishermen have not benefitted out of all this. Most of the Government projects were geared towards export and foreign exchange accumulation.

Fishermen are usually labelled as illiterates and lacking organizational capacity. Co - operatives as we see today in Kerala were envisaged by the then Government of the State about 23 years back to be the main organizational plank from which all socio - economic programmes could be implemented. The approach to the organization of Co - operatives was primarily target - oriented and very little care was given to ensure that the requests coming from the village level were genuine. The Government authorities had undoubtedly failed in this initial step. The fact is that, in general the 'failure' of primary Co - operatives was not because of malfunctioning but rather because most of them were bogus - they were dead even before they were born. The stigma for the failure of the Co - operatives has been put on the fishermen, when in fact, in most villages the real fishermen workers never knew when and how these 'Paper Societies' came into existence.

### **A little History:-**

Marianad Malsya Ulpadaka Co - operative Society Ltd. No. F(T) 287 started in 1970 as an offshoot of the Marianad Community Development project which was initiated in 1961 by the late *Rt. Rev. Dr. Peter Bernard Pereira*, Bishop of Trivandrum. This Co - operative which was registered in 1967 was also a 'bogus' Society which was created by certain individuals to get the benefits from the Government. Then in 1970, the fishermen of Marianad who were the victims of exploitation of middlemen and merchant took over this Co - operative and reorganized it. The main objective of the Co - operative was to act as an agent to sell the fish of the members. So far the fish sale was the monopoly of the middlemen and merchants. When the Co - operative undertook this activity; these vested interests got together and

created trouble for the people. With the support of the religious and political powers, the middlemen and merchants, succeeded in prohibiting the fishermen of Marianad from fishing for weeks. From this you can imagine the difficulties the fishermen had to face in the beginning itself. Maybe it is because the fishermen had stood together and accepted the challenges then, that today we are able to celebrate this event.

### **Membership and Share Capital**

Initially the Co - operative had 50 members in its rolls and 30 active members and a share capital of Rs. 600/-. By the end of 1979 the membership rose to 327 and share capital to Rs: 21340/-. By December 1979, 327 families were members of the Co - operative. The Co - operative has decided that each member should take a share of Rs. 200/-.

The Co - operative receives many applications for membership. But since it has insufficient funds to give loans to fishermen (in order to free them from the middlemen) it is unable to comply with their requests. Besides this, some middlemen created trouble and confusion among members and as a result in 1975 - 76 under their influence 16 members left the Co - operative. The membership of some fishermen was terminated and they discontinued to sell their fish through the Co - operative.

### **Fish Marketing:**

All the members sell their fish through the Co - operative. The Co - operative has adopted different methods of fish marketing.

#### **(1) Auctioning**

The Co - operative appoints salesmen who auction the fish at the shore for the members. From the experiences so far, this seems to be successful. Marianad is known for the high prices that the fishermen get for their fish. So far the

Co - operative was able to auction fish worth Rs. 35,76,235/-. At times large amounts of credit gets held up with merchants creating obstacles for the smooth functioning of the Co operative.

### *(2) Marketing of Export Species*

This method is different from the first. The practice is to collect exportable species from the members and sell it to the companies which offer the highest price. To facilitate this process, a Fish Marketing Centre of the Co - operative also functions at Marianad. There are occasions when the fish from other villages also arrives at this Centre. In this manner the Co - operative is able to maintain a good price for these exportable varieties. By the end of 1979, the Co - operative was able to sell export products worth Rs. 1,815,870./-. But there are occasions when the companies had purchased the prawns and cuttlefish from the Co - operative but had delayed to pay the value, thus disturbing our activities to a great extent. Thus in 1978 - 79 Rupees 1 Lakh was outstanding for 7 months with an export company at Quilon. The members had to stage a demonstration to get the money back. During this period we had to curb many of our activities.

### *3. Price Slump Control.*

It is a common occurrence that the price falls during a good season when bumper catches are harvested. Although the Co - operative has no cold - storage or freezing plant to control this, we buy the fish to maintain the price and sell it to the interior villages. Similarly the dried fish of the members is purchased and sold for them.

### *4. Direct Sale*

With the intention of supplying fish directly from the producers to the consumers, the Co - operative had a programme of cleaning and packing the fish and selling it

Trivandrum city. This experiment started during 1974 – 75. It had a good response from the consumers and producers. Fish was sold from a mobile fish van at one location in the city. Since necessary permission was not obtained from the city corporation to start fish booths in different parts of the city, the Co – operative had to stop this activity.

### **Sale of Fishing Requisites**

Since 1971, the Co – operative has started the sale of necessary fishing requisites like nylon thread, hooks, plastic ropes, floats, etc. So far sales worth Rs. 389,758 have been effected.

### **LOANS**

Individual members receive loans for productive purposes to the tune of Rs.500/ – to Rs.1000/ – from the Co – operatives fund or through Banks. This facility is available only to those members who have sold their fish through the Co – operative for at least 6 months. Yet it is a sad fact that the Govt. contribution to our Co – operative was only Rs. 8000/ – so far and this has been paid back regularly. Initially the loan facility started as a pawning scheme. In this Rs. 35000/ – was available and by revolving the amount a sum of Rs. 2,50,000/ – was distributed to the members and all this amount was returned promptly. By the end of 1979 Rs. 281,395/ – had been given as unsecured loan to the members. Among the banks helped us in this scheme, Indian Bank – Puthenthope deserves special mention. When the members sell their fish through the Co – operative they pay 10% of the fish price towards loan repayment. In this manner 60 – 70% of loan repayments take place every year. Thus far Rs. 220,207/ – has been collected as loan repayment in this manner.

## **Fair Price Shop**

In order to make available consumer goods at a fair price to the members as well as the public, a fair price shop has been functioning under the auspicious of the Co-operative since 1974. Sugar, kerosene and Cereals are sold. Sales worth Rs. 841,075/- has been effected so far.

## **House Building Scheme**

The Co-operative was instrumental in starting a house building project in 1973 with the help of the state Fisheries Department and the Diocese of Trivandrum. Under this scheme 30 homeless fishermen received houses. The Co-operative is also taking steps to construct houses for the 22 families whose huts got burned in a fire accident in 1976. We also work in close collaboration with Marianad Housing Co-operative Society in an attempt to provide housing for all the fishermen families.

## **Some Experiments: -**

With the help of the Indo-German Social Service Society and People's Action for Development, India, an experiment to mechanise traditional fishing crafts was conducted in 1974-75. It gave hopeful signs but primarily due to the lack of co-operation from the company which gave the outboard engines we had to stop the experiment after one year.

In many of the General body meetings, the need to have an Ice-plant for the Co-operative was expressed, yet because lack of finances this need could not be met. In 1978-79 an Ice-plant cum cold storage at Attipra which belongs to the Department of Fisheries and not in use for the past ten years was taken on lease for one year for a lease

amount of Rs.20,300/-. The Co-operative had to spend Rs. 15,503/- on repair charges to make the Ice-plant function. This amount almost equalled the loss incurred by the Co-operative in running the Ice-plant. This loss is clearly reflected in the balance sheet of 1978-79. The officials of the Department of Fisheries unofficially agreed that such an expenditure on repairs is a big loss to the society and should on principle be refunded. So far there has been no positive response to our request for help.

### **Educational Programmes – Co-operation with other Co-operatives**

With the help of the Kerala State Co-operative Union and the Programme for Community Organisation, various classes on Co-operatives and related topics were conducted for fishermen. Yet time has to prove whether the education against exploitation and capitalism has brought about any lasting change in the consciousness of fishermen. Our Co-operative works in close collaboration with the Co-operatives of Vettukad, Thumba, Puthiathura and Pulluvilla which are genuine fishermen's organisations whose primary function is marketing of fish.

### **Persons and Institutions involved in our past**

Looking back over the past 10 years, the names of many individuals and institutions stand out clearly. First of all, the late Bishop of Trivandrum *Rt. Rev. Dr. Peter Bernard Pereira* was the person whose initiative and drive was mainly responsible for the existence of the village of Marianad. He helped the Co-operative from its inception till his death. We bow our head before his memory. There is another unforgettable figure – *Lauretta Chechy*. From 1961 – 1977, that is for 17 years, she worked courageously and selflessly among the



fishermen and helped us and our society to reach this stage. Similarly with gratitude we remember the 'selfless service rendered to Marianad by Ms. Claire Vailncourt, Ms. Lucille Latendresse, Ms. Gaetane Gascon and Ms. Nalini Nayak. We are grateful to Mr. John Kurien who helped us to organise the marketing system from 1973 - 76. Special mention must be made of the services rendered by Mr. V. Antony, Mr. Stan Gomez and Mr. S. Abilius who were the paid secretaries and marketing executive of the Co-operative.

Similarly there are organisations which extended their helping hands at the appropriate time. The International Pawning Society, Italy helped us with Rs. 35,000/- to start the Pawning scheme. During the initial years the Trivandrum Social Service Society helped to construct the Marketing Centre and the Programme for Community Organisation helped us with an insulated van in 1974. We are grateful to all of them.

We are happy to express our gratitude to the Mariana Mahila Samajam and the Housing Co-operative who have helped us in times of difficulties and gave us all possible support. Our sincere thanks are due to all the people of Mariana without whose Co-operation, the Co-operative would have been extinct already.

Before I conclude this report, let me bring to the kind attention of the concerned authorities, especially to those who are present here, a request. We understand that the Govt. is envisaging a new type of society for the fishermen. It is also understood that the style of functioning of this new society will be in certain ways, similar to that of the Mariana Co-operative. When the Govt. liquidates the existing fishermen Co-operatives and establish new societies, we request that the Govt. consider our Co-operative as the substitute for the new society envisaged. Moreover the new schemes intended for the traditional fishermen should be implemented without the influence of community and part

politics, with the support of necessary legislation and political will to bring about radical change. I present this report with the request that the new schemes may be implemented as early as possible to liberate fishermen from the bondage of injustice and exploitation.

Marianad

2-5-1980

**J. Philomena**

*(Secretary)*

# THE PROBLEMS OF TRADITIONAL BATTICOLOA FISHERMEN

On the North - Trincomalee, South - Pothuvil, East - Bay of Bengal, West - full of paddy fields and mountains. These are the borders of Batticoloa. In this Province in many places the famous river of the country, Mahaweli joins with the sea. On the west side we can see the Inginiyagala tank, lot of rural tanks and paddy fields. The Eastern Province consists of Trincomalee, Batticoloa and Amparai. Mattu Nagar is the capital of the Eastern Province. From 20 miles south of Batticoloa there is a small village called Kallar where the fishermen live.

In the Eastern Province, the fishermen are living on the banks of the sea which is 150 miles in length. They use their traditional apparatus. Some use modern apparatus and go for fishing in the deep sea. Some traditional fishermen go to rivers for fishing.

Only 25% of these fishermen have little educational knowledge. In their leisure time they do gardening, carpentry and masonry. 50% of the fishermen work independently and the other 50% work under Capitalists. Only the Capitalists (mudalalis) have the modern fishing apparatus. They invest their money in that and they help the fishermen also whenever they cannot go for fishing. So, the poor fishermen on the re-

quest of the capitalists have to sell the whole fish they catch to them. The Capitalists will decide the price and the fishermen have to accept it. They are very much backward in their standard of living because of caste differences, lack of education and lack of money. But in Kallar some people have good education. Unlike other places there are doctors, engineers, teachers, clerks, farmers, carpenters, masons, drivers and conductors. Because of this only the caste problem is little less in this area. Even the Paddiruppu Member for Parliament is from our society.

The Government gave 35% loan to the fishermen to buy glass boats, outer machines, inner machines and nylon threads.

The Eastern Province was badly affected by the cyclone in 1978. At that time the Government came forward to help the fishermen and gave fishing tools and is still taking necessary steps to protect them. But the Paddiruppu electorate badly needs a harbour to protect their lives and their boats and apparatus.

On the West of Kallar is the sea and a canal which is 3 miles in length,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile is width, and 23-28 ft in depth. Besides this canal on the west side there is the natural Batticoloa lagoon which is 45 miles in length. The place between the canal and the lagoon is only 60 yards. To construct a harbour in that place the Government has to spend only 6.5 million but in Kalmunai (4 miles from Kallar) to construct a harbour the Government spends 170 million and to build one in Valaichenai it spends 200 million. The reason the Government acts like this is that both the Kalmunai and Valaichenai M.Ps are the members of the ruling party and the Paddiruppu M.P. is in the Opposition.

In this state the Kallar fishermen were struggling to survive and consulted the fishing development board. At that time the President (leader) Rev. S.K. Kathirgamar contacted

the C.W.F. of which he is a member. After this the representatives from the C.W.F came to Kallar and they gave Rs 4,000/- for sea fishermen and Rs 2,500/- to the lagoon fishermen and also established a C.W.F. branch in our area. Not only that, we had lot of problems with defective machines. The C.W.F. launched a struggle with the local agents and got an assurance from the American Company that new parts would be supplied free of charge. Therefore, we are proud to say that the C.W.F. is helping us in our troubles in every possible way and it gives every assistance to improve our social, financial and cultural efforts.

*CHRISTIAN WORKERS FELLOWSHIP*

*Kallar Branch 12.11.81*

# VICTORY FOR FISHER MEN – STRUGGLE AGAINST LOCAL CAPITALIST

On the 23rd of November 1978, the fishing population and others of the Eastern Province were the victims of the vicious cyclone that devastated the whole of Batticaloa district. Their homes, the fishing gear and all that they had were destroyed on the fateful night, which had been the worst natural calamity of the country's history. These people were rendered destitutes overnight. At the time just as a person who was about to drown in the deep sea would cling on to a rafter to save his life, this Society was formed by us for the welfare of these victims.

In order to render what ever help they could the president of the Kallar Fishermens Welfare Society, The Revd.S.K.Kadirgamar and his committee took prompt action, and rushed to the aid of the victims. Not only the fisher folk of the area but others who were the victims too were enrolled in the society and their welfare was closely watched by the society; the Christian Church and the public too gave their whole hearted co – operation to the fishing society. At the stage brother Mr. Jeffrey Abayasekera came to Kallar with a group of C.W.F persons to assist our society. They took all action in consultation with the Fishermen's Society, and took necessary steps to make this scheme a success as early as possible.

The fishing folk were divided into two groups, the deep seas fishing group and the inland fishing group. The deep sea fishing group were granted aid to the tune of Rs 4,000 / – per family, and the other at Rs 2,500 / – per family. The necessary funds were collected by the Christian workers fellowship for the rehabilitation of the Fishermen's society, Kallar. The lands for a centre for the fishermens welfare society and the other expenses were granted by them. The fisherfolk were given training regarding modern methods of fishing. Our society were able to obtain fishing gear worth Rs 35,000 / – at a discount of 35 % from the state.

As a result of the offer of Rs 2,500 / – to purchase their fishing gear the people were very happy. They felt that their bleak future had turned bright as if the darkness had vanished on seeing the sun of daylight.

Yet it has been the same fate of the men who fell from the tree to be trampled by a bull for them it was just like being pushed down a steep hill

The engines of their boats are been operated with kerosene oil the make of which is "Mercury". Within two weeks of the purchase of these engines they started to give trouble. At first we thought that it was our fault hence it was not brought to the notice of the fishermens welfare society or the Christian Workers Fellowship that these engines had been guaranteed for a period of six months. The Agency for these engines were Jafferjee Brothers, Colombo. We took these engines to Colombo by ourselves incurring heavy expenses, it was observed that the Agency did not pay much attention to the repairs, they simply made adjustments for the moment. Thereby our earnings and our time were wasted for no apparent reason, as a result we were in a very pathetic plight undergoing untold hardships.

Finally we approached the Christian Workers Fellowship on 4th September, 1980 and placed our case before

them. They expressed their regret over our plight. On the 24th of September, 1981 the Christian Workers Fellowship requested the agent Jafferjee Brothers to have these engines converted to petrol. This request was turned down. On 12.10.81 the Agency were requested by the Christian Workers Fellowship to open a branch at Kallar for the purpose of repairing these engines. Although the Agency gave an assurance to open the said branch no positive action was taken in this regard.

It has now been revealed that these engines had been converted from petrol to kerosene oil by the agency itself prior to our purchasing the engines. It is due to this fact that we are today being subjected to this plight with heavy losses to us.

The Christian Workers Fellowship wrote to Jafferjee Brothers on 24.9.81 questioning the present situation of these delapidated engines but they failed to give a direct answer to the C.W.F.

The Rev. Kathirgamar who had helped us earlier in this connection was also informed and tried without success to get the local agents to act. The C.W.F. Plantations Service Committee at their monthly meeting took up this matter and represented matters to His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka, the bank that had granted the loan facilities to purchase these engines, the Minister of Fisheries and the member of Parliament of the area.

The Christian Workers Fellowship pursued this matter further. An appointment was made with the local agents and a C.W.F and Kallar Fishing Development Society delegation met the Management of Jafferjee Brothers and put pressure on them to come to a just settlement. The C.W.F's international connections were no doubt helpful. Mercury Marine Company in the U.S.A sent a representative to Sri Lanka who pointed out to Jafferjee Brothers that a faulty conversion had been made from petrol to kerosene engines. The American



Company has now agreed to supply new parts in order to repair these defective engines and these repairs will shortly be undertaken at Kallar with the co-operation of the local agents.

There is hope once more for the oppressed fishermen in Kallar on the East coast of Sri Lanka !

*THE CHRISTIAN WORKERS FELLOWSHIP PERIYA KALLAR EASTERN REGION SRI LANKA*

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# Fishermen Comrades, Awake!

The population of Sri Lanka is fifteen million. It has an area of twenty five thousand square miles. It consists of twenty four districts. It has twenty three thousand villages. Since politics plays a significant role in the economic problems, we would like to explain briefly about it.

Initially Sri Lanka was ruled by its kings and there after by the Portuguese, Dutch and the British. There after it gained independence in 1948. When the foreign rulers left the country they also left behind two problems, namely:

1) *A country with a subsistence agricultural economy was changed into a cash crop economy.*

2) *Self sufficiency was replaced by dependence on foreign Countries.*

The foreign rulers could not solve the fundamental human problems such as race, religion and language. On the contrary they tended to promote the growth of such problems. Today the same situation prevails.

Here the sinhalere, Tamils and Muslim races predominate. Their religions are Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

Today the United National Party, Sri Lanka Freedom Party, Lanka Samasamya Party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's liberation front), Tamil Congress, Federal Party, Tamil United liberation front, Estate Workers

Congress are the political parties in existence. The parties with socialist policies have been prevented from ruling the country by the other parties. When circumstances permitted they instigated racial disturbances. When they did not get chance for it, they pretended to be in sympathy with the workers.

When the May day is celebrated, the ministers who are the representatives of the Capitalists or they themselves in person participated and uttered meaningless speeches. Since Sri Lanka gained independence the workers have been trampled under the feet of the successive capitalist parties.

The Sri Lanka government came forward to grant loans on a thirty five percent subsidy. The fishermen becoming aware of it thought of enriching their life. Equipment were received on a loan basis. But their aspirations did not happen, and their hard earned money was sucked by the capitalist government brokers. Further the banks have noticed the repayment of the loans, failing which legal action would be instituted. In order to receive the insurance relief the officers concerned have stated that a fisherman is eligible for relief under conditions where he had lost all equipment, and lost his life.

In addition with regard to the needs of fishermen's harbour, house etc. racial difference are raised, and the unity of the worker is dismembered.

Although Sri Lanka is a small nation, as far as the political problem is concerned, a national workers Union consisting of the fishermen workers and the other workers should be created, and it should get involved in politics is essential.

In addition, as an interim measure, we should not forget to seek remedies to the problems of the fishermen.

# **PAPER SUBMITTED AT THE WORKSHOP HELD IN MADRAS FROM NOVEMBER 13 - 24 - 1981**

It's a great privilege to me to participate at this seminar as one of the representatives from Sri Lanka. First of all, I take this opportunity of thanking the Christian Conference of Asia Urban Rural Mission and the organiser in Hatton of the Christian Workers Fellowship of Sri Lanka for inviting me to participate at this workshop. Before coming to the subject matter I must say a few words about the Christian Workers Fellowship of Sri Lanka. This organisation has been functioning in our country for the past few decades. This movement has been rendering services to the downtrodden and backward areas of our country and we, the people of our village called Chempianpattu in the Jaffna district, approached this movement for rescue. We started our branch in 1979, with the needful assistance given by Jeffrey Abayasekera. He had visited our village many times and realised himself the hardships we undergo. We discussed our problems with him and in the interest of our village we thought of establishing a library building for which Mr. Jeffrey

Abayasekera and the C.W.F. Plantations Serv Committee gave their whole hearted support. A few weeks back the foundation stone has been laid and the rest of the work is to be carried out soon. A part of the expenditure has been promised by the C.W.F. of Sri Lanka and we hope to get the rest of the help from any voluntary organisation.

### **Mode of Life: -**

Our village is in the coastal area inhabiting about 2,000 people nearly 100% traditional small fishermen. The economic condition of our village is very poor, may be due to lack of education and fish traders racketeering. The fishermen are still sticking to the traditional ways of fishing due to lack of funds to purchase the modernised fishing gears. The ice facilities in the village are very poor. We don't have an ice factory in our village. In order to get ice facilities, we have to go about fifty miles away. Even there we can't be sure of getting it due to inadequate supply. Therefore we see the urgent need of erecting an ice - plant in our village.

### **Marketing: -**

The marketing facilities in disposing of our catch are very poor. We have to send our iced - fish and dry fish to Colombo and down South which are about 200 - 300 miles from our village. We send them through private transport agencies. We have no direct contact, whatsoever in selling our catch. So, we are left at the mercy of the fishermen in Colombo. These private transporting vehicles don't come to our village due to the poor conditions of the roads. So we have to arrange some other connecting transport means such as tractor or Bullock carts. This brings in additional difficulty and expenditure to our poor fisherman.

## **Education:-**

95% of our villagers had no secondary education. Even the 5% who had secondary education had no higher educational facilities. Out of the 2000 population we have only one graduate in our village. Only 3 are government employees. There is an elementary school which has classes from Grade 1 to Grade V. The number on roll is 125, and for these 125 students only two teachers are available. This poor condition of the staff of our school exists from the start of the school itself which has a history over 100 years. The teachers are unwilling to serve in our village due to the lack of transport facilities and poor living condition of the village. In order to get the secondary education our children have to travel to the towns which are nearly 20 to 30 miles away. In order to catch the bus they have to walk two miles to the main road. Even then they are not sure of the bus as the services are inadequate. The economic facilities of our villagers don't permit the parents to send their children to boardings in the towns.

## **Housing: -**

There are a good number of families in our village living in Kadjan thatched huts. They are unable to build a proper house of their own. Even though the Government of Sri Lanka is providing houses for the poor during the past few years, our village had been left out. There were a few houses built with the cyclone relief scheme in 1964. For the last 17 years our village didn't get any housing scheme.

## **Health: -**

The health conditions of the fishing villages in our country are generally very poor, so are ours. Not even 1% of

the population of our village have toilet facilities in their houses. They have to seek the mercy of the adjoining shrubs or the beach, thus polluting the environment. Though our government is providing a subsidy of Rs 250/ – for the construction of a single latrine this sum is hardly enough to meet the cost of one which is Rs 3500/ – . There are no hospitals or doctors available for the urgent needs of the ailing. There is a rural dispensary 5 miles away. Malnutrition is present to a greater degree particularly among children. A nutritional centre in our village seems to be a crying need in the context of a community health programme.

**(P.R.Mathuranayagam)**

*SECRETARY*





## PART THREE

# **National Reports — — — India, and Sri Lanka**

The objective of part three is to present the small/traditional fishermen's conditions and problems in the national contexts. The data have been taken from the papers presented in the Small/Traditional Fisherman Workshop organized by CCA-URM Rural Concerns in Madras, India during November 13-24, 1981.

The papers are prepared and presented by the so-called small/traditional fishermen's support groups -- organizers and researchers -- from India, and Sri Lanka. More relevant materials are also included.

# **THE SOCIO – ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS AND THE PEOPLE’S STRUGGLES IN THE FISHING SECTOR: A case of Tamil Nadu**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In India the traditional fishing community numbers approximately 6.5 million (the entire coastline measures 6500 Km) out of which nearly 2 million are directly involved in the traditional fishing sector. This community contributes about 70% of the total annual fish yield of the country.

The Tamil Nadu coastline runs for 997.47 Km and is made up of 8 coastal districts. There are 16,601 villages involved in fishing coming under 574 panchayat unions and 102 municipal councils, corporations and townships. The total fishing population being 416,471, which can be broken down into three different categories of fishing communities: inland, mechanised boats, and catamaran and country boats.

## SOCIO – ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITION

The traditional fishermen has been, and still is, totally dependent on fishing as their, soul source of income. As this sector of the fishing industry does not have any mechanical power their catch area is in the coastal waters i.e. within 5 km of the coastline. The traditional techniques of fishing are slow and gentle and therefore do not upset marine life. Whereas the trawling method (which has started in recent years) ploughs, as well as scrapes, the seabed with heavy metal chains and thereby destroys fish breeding grounds, larvae and other benthic life; purseining is over efficient and detroys the young fish. Therefore, both trawling and purse – seinin destroy the ecological balance. Because of this the traditional fishermen are seeing a decline in the fish catch which has led to tremendous suffering amongst the fishing community due to the consequent decline in the earning power and also the ruthless competition by mechanised boat – owners.

The usual social evils of drinking, gambling, prostitution, gangs of rough and disorderly people dominating the community through fear, are prevalent. The impact of political and other forms of corruption are felt at this level of society in a much harsher way. Therefore, to establish healthy and fruitful relationships with higher authorities is almost impossible. The honest are victimised whilst the guilty go free as lesser authorities fear the consequences of offending a petty partyman of a powerful arrack – seller (arrack is liquor distilled from molasses). Money – lending is, of course, common with the consquence that the fishermen loose most of their earnings to the payment of interest.

Most of the fishermen work and live along the coast with some now living in tenements. Health on the whole is very poor especially amongst women and children. This

mainly due to the lack of healthy living conditions. Only a few of the most recently built tenements have tapped water but for many, still, the access to a tap for clean drinking water means a long walk. Malnutrition and the diseases arising from it are prevalent and flourishing. According to a health survey conducted in a Balwadi (Children Centre), more than 33.3% of the children were found to require treatment for tuberculosis. It was also found that women are generally found to be anaemic giving them problems with child birth and the rearing of children.

## **ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES ORGANISATION**

For a long time only district and local level associations of fishermen existed, scattered all over Tamil Nadu. These associations operated and functioned independent of one another. The Board for Education for Liberation took notice of the difficulties which these associations were encountering in their organising efforts and, therefore, took the initiative to call them together in order to consolidate and strengthen the power of the people. Hence, five representatives from various districts were invited, who, in turn formed themselves into a General Body to form a state level organisation. A meeting was held on 12th July 1980 in Madras of the General Body members and the Tamil Nadu Catamaran Country Boat Fishermens Forum was set up.

The following are the demands on which the Tamil Nadu Catamaran Country Boat Fishermen Forum is based:

- 1) That the Marine Bill, 1980 – Preventing mechanised boats within 5 km. zone – be immediately passed and that the law restricting working hours of the Mechanised Boats from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. be passed.
- 2) That the trawling within 20 k.m. coastal water

zone: and purseseining in the Exclusive Economic Zone of 200 kms. be totally banned.

3) That effective and stringent measures be taken against environmental and ecological destruction of Marine wealth, particularly due to the pollution of rivers, seas and inland waters by erecting effluent treatment plants in existing factories.

4) That the extraction of beach sand along the coast be banned.

5) The forum opposes tooth and nail, the eviction of traditional fishermen communities living in fishing villages along the coast, under the guise of so called "development", "Tourism", "Industrialisation" and "Foreign exchange" taking place in Cape Camerine and Marina Beach in Madras City.

6) The allotment of seats to fishermen communities in Central Govt. courses and representation in recruitment of workers for harbour and fishing port. The allocation of funds in the Budget be raised substantially.

7) Writing off of all short and long – term loans as in the case of peasant workers in Tamil Nadu and provision of new Schemes for loans be introduced.

8) In view of the high risk and loss of life, as well as damage to fishing equipments, while fishing, a policy be enacted to protect the traditional fishermen by adequate insurance and compensation.

9) That the Fishermen Community be included in the list of "depressed class" instead of Backward Class and be provided all the benefits.

10) Old age pension, rehabilitation measures for handicapped at other educational facilities for the Fishermen Community be provided.

## **STRUGGLES OF FISHERMEN IN TAMIL NADU**

At the very outset the Madras – Chingleput fishermen had a one day token hunger strike, on 30th September 1980, in which about 136 Kuppams (fishermens village) participated, in order to stress the 10 demands. The forum sent telegrams to the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister and also received telegrams of support from the National Forum for Catamaran Country Boat Fishermen Rights and Marine Wealth.

The next issue which was taken up was the struggle of the Kanya Kumari fishermen, i.e. the dispute between Vivekananda Kendra and the fishermen in Kanya Kumari, which was intensified recently over the issue of the ferry service to the Vivekananda rock memorial. An agreement was reached on 1st July 1980 whereby it was agreed in the presence of the Hon. Minister of Transport, that Kendra should only use a stretch of beach 35 foot wide for the repair work on the ferries (this would mean repairing the ferries one at a time). N/P It was further suggested by the fishermen that the jetty for the ferries be moved to a new site altogether to avoid the constant soil erosion along the coast which is gradually washing away the huts of the fishermen. Another request was that the government take over the management of the ferry services with the hope that this would bring into the picture a neutral party and therefore reduce the tension. The Chief Minister visited the area and although sympathetic to the fishermen's problems gave his verdict in favour of Vivekandra Kendra.

Following this the President of Tamil Nadu Catamaran Fishermens Association and the Kanyakumari Catamaran Fishermen Workers Union published a joint press release in which they expressed their dissatisfaction with the Chief Minister's verdict. They insisted that the government

implement the agreement of 1st July 1980 which has so far been neglected. After this, several meetings and discussions took place in order to obtain the solidarity of the fishermen's leaders in the various districts so as to get a united strength at a state level on this issue. A closed door meeting was held in Madras on 10th January 1981 and an ad-hoc committee established to work out strategies and to act as an action committee. The committee met the Minister concerned on 12th January 1981. In support of this action the National Forum sent a letter to the Prime Minister with a copy to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu expressing support of the Kanya Kumari fishermen.

As the Kendra had failed to carry out the agreement of 1st July 1980 and no action had been taken by the government a mass rally was organised on 28th February 1981 in Kanya Kumari. This was attended by some 40 fishing villages in and around Kanya Kumari district. Representatives from other districts and the Tamil Nadu Catamaran Fishermen action committee also attended. As a result of this the fishermen's leaders were invited to have a dialogue with government officials on 25th March 1981. Following this the issue was discussed in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly.

– other issues taken up –

The Government of Sri Lanka is planning to establish a Naval exercise centre near Rameshwaram which will affect approximately 10 lakhs (100,000) of people. The Forum sent a memorandum to the Government condemning the issue, which led to a discussion being held in the Tamil Nadu Legislative.

The planned beautification of Marina beach in Madras City has created tremendous tension amongst the fishermen. A memorandum has been submitted to the concerned authorities condemning the scheme. As a result of the feeling amongst the fishing community on this issue the fisherwomen

joined together and formed a fisherwomen's Sangh (association).

## **ACHIEVEMENTS OF FISHERMENS STRUGGLE**

With the establishment of a state level people's organisation the following feats have been accomplished:

a) The Government of Tamil Nadu coming down to solve the problem of the Kanya Kumari fishermen was a historical event. The ferry services have since been taken over by the Government and the necessary seaerosion wall is being built to protect the homes of the fishermen.

b) The government of Sri Lanka has been prevented from establishing a Naval exercise base.

c) Compensation has been obtained for the families of some fishermen from the Kanya Kumari districh who were drowned whilst at sea fishing

d) Purchase of fishing equipment at very cheap rates for the fishing communities, through their associations.

e) The formation of a fisherwomen's Sangh in Madras City as a result of the action over the Marina Beach beautification plan. It is hoped that this Sangh may spread to become a State wide organisation.

## **THE TENTATIVE STRATEGY FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

The General Body members of Tamil Nadu Catamaran Country Boat fishermens forum met on 14th November 1981 and resolved that their aim should be to '...establish a society free from exploitation, poverty and of equal distribution of wealth and power...'. In order to acheive this the following plan of actions were devised:

1) Consolidate and strengthen the people's power at the village level

2) Co-ordinate and unite the district level organisation in order to wage struggles more effectively



3) Organise and unite state level organisation on common demands for joint action throughout the state

4) Try to link with national and international organisations for necessary support and co – ordination.

It is, therefore, hoped that more effective struggles can be carried through according to the specific conditions of each village, district and state and thus the power of the people and the organisation to win the rights and justice of the fishermen community as a whole will be fulfilled.

## **CONCLUSION**

We present this report in this workshop of small/traditional fishermen organised by CCA – URM in order to articulate the issues of traditional/small fishermen of Asia as a whole. This workshop, we believe, will find the road for waging a better co – ordinated and continued struggle for the rights and justice of the fishermen community, for establishing a just society, free from exploitation and poverty and of equal distribution of wealth and power.

We request the delegates and the fishermen who have come from various countries in Asia to leave with thorough knowledge of the issues and problems of Asian Traditional Fishermen and to evolve a people's organisation at an Asian level and devise a definite plan of action for the struggles to be carried out in the future.

# **THE ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES IN THE FISHING SECTOR: A Case of South Kerala**

The state of Kerala is a narrow strip situated at the South – west corner of the Indian Peninsula. It's borders touch the Arabian sea in the west, the State of Karnataka in the north and the State of Tamil Nadu in the east and south – east.

Kerala has many unique characteristics of its own as compared to other Indian states. It is the most densely populated state in India (547 persons per sq.km) with the highest rate of literary (69%), a high life expectancy (61 years) and a comparatively low birth – rate (2.6%).

Kerala is divided into eleven administrative districts of which eight are maritime. Kerala's 590 km long coastal line constitutes nearly 10% of the country's total coastal line. The continental shelf is about 40,000 sq.km in area. By making use of the 259 landing centres, she is now exploiting only 36% of the total potential available in the sea.

Kerala's fisherfolk live in 265 villages spread along the entire coastal line. There are about 1.19 lakhs (1,19,000) fisher

folk households with an average of 6–7 members. The total fisherfolk population amounts to 0.78 million, of which 1.6 lakhs (1,60,000) are engaged in fishing or related activities on the shore. The active fishermen constitute 15% of the fisherfolk population (1.14 lakhs). The fisherfolk belong to three different religious communities, viz. Hindu (40%) Christian (35%) and Muslim (25%).

The marine fish production, with 3.6 lakh tonnes of fish per year, represents almost 1/3 of the total marine productions of India; landed by a fishing fleet consisting of about 30,000 traditional non-mechanised boats and 3,000 mechanised boats. In spite of the large mechanisation programme of the last twenty years more than 2/3 of the total marine fish catch are produced by fishermen with non-mechanised fishing crafts. The export oriented prawn fisheries industry has made Kerala the leading State in India in the export of marine products, contributing 40% of the total marine export.

Even though the marine sector of Kerala has its own significant characteristics. as a leading state in India, most of the fishermen in this state are poor. 50% of the households have an annual cash income of less than Rs.1000. Only 4% earn more than Rs. 3,000 per annum. The low incomes and the high level of indebtedness among the fishermen implies that their saving capacity is very limited. More than 75% of the income is spent on food, 12–15% on clothing and housing and only less than 5% is spent for productive investments on fishing craft and gear.

There are many reasons why the fishermen are poor. Two reasons though, are considered to be the fundamental causes. Inequality in the asset holdings (fishing craft and gear) and the exploitation by those who are involved in the process of buying their produce.

All the developmental efforts in the recent past have

been confined to the mechanised sector for shrimp trawling and modernisation of processing facilities to suit the export trade. Consequently prawn catches and foreign exchange earnings from sea food export trade have gone up several fold. But the economy of the traditional fishermen who constitute about 90% of the fisherfolk continued to remain low and only very little has been done in the past to improve their plight.

The significant decline in the prawn catch in recent times has stressed the need for diversifying the effort of the motorized boats. (The prawn catch per unit effort was 82.6kg. per hr. in 1973, and it has declined to 4.2 kg. per hr. in 1979). The Govt. of Kerala has already launched programmes for the development of new, and the extension of existing, landing facilities to encourage diversification of the motorized fishing operations in the inshore belt, and exploiting of deep sea and oceanic resources.

To uplift the living standards of the traditional fishermen, the Kerala government implements various welfare programmes and a subsidy scheme for fishing craft and gear, through the 'fishermen welfare corporation' which was set up in 1978. Due to the inefficiency of the fishermen producer co-operatives to promote the socio-economic welfare of the fishermen, the govt. intends to introduce a new organisational set up at the village level with emphasis, on integrated development. It is in this context that the state govt. passed the 'Kerala Fishermen Welfare Societies Act-1980'. Programmes like the organisation of fisheries villages and constitution of fishermen welfare societies for such villages envisaged under the act are now under implementation.

Among the welfare activities taken up by the Kerala Fishermen Welfare Corporation (KFWC), mention may be made of the house construction programme to provide 10,000 houses which is nearing completion. An amount of Rs4.65

lakhs was distributed among 3462 fishermen families toward relief against calamities such as loss of life and disablement of fishermen as well as loss on damage of fishing craft and gear. A special bus service (3 buses), started in December 1980, operating between fishing centres in the coastal areas of Trivandrum city and different marketing centres, and is doing a useful service to vendors. The corporation has also initiated action to establish two townships in Vizhinjam for the rehabilitation of 2000 fishermen families in the Vizhinjam fishing harbour area.

In this connection it is important to see why most of the development programmes tried in the fishing sector for the last 20 years have failed. It is not because fisherfolk are against change, but the attitude of fisherfolk to change needs to be understood by development agencies. Fisherfolk resist change because it is expensive, too quick, it is socially or culturally inappropriate, it is imposed from above or planned from a far and also because agents of change have misled them in the past. They accept change when they see innovations work, when they think they will profit from it, when it is appropriate to their condition and their ethos, when it is gradual. Change should be effected by development agencies only with the fisherfolk's active co-operation, by demonstration of appropriate technology planned on an appropriate scale, using the right tools.

The workshop conducted in Sept. 1979 on "Socio-Economic Feasibility in Small Scale Fisheries Development" pointed out that the co-operatives could be powerful agents of change in fishing communities. A co-operative is first of all a people's organisation, and secondly a business organisation. The co-operatives tried in Kerala failed because they are imposed from above and not built from the base, because of exploitative leadership, unequal participation of members, infiltration by outsiders, corruption, political interference

complex and confusing legislation, and dependence on subsidies. Co – operatives have succeeded where there is mass participation, strong leadership, multipurpose character, homogeneity of interests. This is the reason why the co – operatives started by a non – governmental agency like “Programme for Community Organisation” (PCO) in Kerala demonstrates a marked qualitative difference from the ones which have been tried by the government.

The PCO is a society registered on 15th April 1977 under the Travancore – Cochin Literacy, Scientific and Charitable Societies Registration Act of 1955. It is an autonomous, voluntary organisation undertaking socio – economic, educational and cultural activities among the weaker sections of society. It has a three fold thrust in its activities, viz. village level development work, training and educational programmes and research.

The best example of the village level development work is the “Marianad Project”. Marianad is a created fishing village in Trivandrum district of Kerala, composed of fishermen families from seven different villages of Trivandrum. This experiment was started in 1961. Looking back over two decades one can clearly discern three phases in the work. The first task was to create a sense of community in the village. Far from being the creation of an intangible sense of togetherness, this task required grappling with the immediate needs. The only guiding sector for the team which lived with the people was to commense with the needs that the people felt and expressed; to involve the people as much as possible and to keep the methods of functioning as simple and as open as possible. In this way many programmes were initiated in the village, namely, a public health programme, clubs for boys and girls saving schemes, a nursery school and creche. Hence much time was spent in trying to make the people understand what was going on and encourage their involvement

and help them to take responsibility.

The second phase was to liberate the community from the exploitative institutional arrangements which form the economic infrastructure. The growing awareness among the fishermen about the injustice of the system caused them to fight against it which resulted in the formation of one of Kerala's first genuine fishermen's co-operatives which started in 1970.

The fishermen's co-operative is a central people's organisation of the village, since it deals with the aspects concerned with their source of livelihood. By category, this co-operative is in the lowest tier of the co-operative hierarchy that is initiated by the government. It is a primary village "fish production" co-operative. However, since the fishermen realised that their problem was not in the realm of production but more in the realm of marketing and credit, the co-operative performed a multi-purpose function. The credit-product-on-marketing-saving link established within it has been found to produce the desired results of increasing fish production (by providing more fishing equipment to each member) ensuring good prices (by the auctioning system), faster and higher repayment of loans (by linking credit to marketing through production), and the creation of a savings fund (by introducing an element of savings as a deferment of immediate consumption).

The co-operative has a managing committee of four active fishermen and three nominees of the government. For conducting the day to day affairs they have a paid secretary and a number of employees who run the various activities undertaken by it. All the employees are appointed and paid by the fishermen and are answerable directly to the committee.

The co-operative enjoys the position of being considered by the Department of Fisheries as a model co-operative for the artisan fishermen of Kerala. It is one of

the few fishing co-operatives in Kerala that takes an integrated approach to the needs of its members. Apart from providing credit and marketing the fish, the co-operative supplies its members (and non-members) with fair prices. It runs a net fabrication centre that aims at providing employment and fair wages to the women in the village. It also runs an essential commodities store which caters for the whole village.

It was found that most fishermen who have been members for 3-4 years have been able to make all the types of fishing equipment needed to fish throughout the year. The percapita income of such members has doubled and without doubt, the quality of their living standards and awareness of the world at large have markedly increased.

Taking the "Marianad Society" as an example, fishermen of the nearby villages have decided to start a society of this kind in their villages also. Thus more than ten societies were formed in different fishing villages of the Southern part of Kerala.

With the initial success of the co-operatives and the general atmosphere in the community began the third phase. The team was convinced that change could be initiated in other villages also. The best way to this is considered to be the training of young people from the villages. Leadership training camps were conducted for mixed groups of young, educated youth of the fishing villages with the objective of giving them a brief, over-all view of the situation in their village in relation to the socio-politico-economic realities of the Indian situation. These camps are held in the different fishing villages so that the participants can see in a critical new way. Many of the factors and forces also result in the creation of a certain feeling of unity and solidarity among the youth of the villages when they discover that they are not alone in their new discoveries and enthusiasm. The most important aspect



of the educational and training programmes is not the training itself but more the follow-up of the trainees after their training. The follow-up meetings take the form of discussions, seminars, study-circles and the like.

The third activity of the PCO is research. Research work undertaken by the PCO is to help comprehend and interpret the emerging socio-economic and political trends that influence the fisheries sector of the state, the country, and the world as a whole. It's objectives are two fold. Firstly to initiate 'movement oriented research' which will help those involved in community organisation to get a closer perception of the framework in which they work. Secondly to discriminate this information. It is considered that organisational work and attempts to 'transform' villages without a clear perception of the larger social trends that will affect such micro-level work in the long run could prove very futile. Moreover, a much broader framework of understanding was necessary for a sharper vision of the primary tasks that confront those involved in grassroots organisation. Together with this it was realised that inquiry and research into various crucial concerns should be conducted wherever possible, by the activists themselves rather than by "professional researchers" there was also the need to collect data on aspects of reality which we confront day to day - particularly those facets which are undergoing transformation and within which lies the "seeds of change"

The work of the P.C.O. which has the thrust of education through direct involvement has proved through the years to be an ideal way of ensuring that people participate in their own development. With its initial commitment to social justice and social change the P.C.O. sees its main role to be one of supporting such people's organisations to withstand the growing opposition from vested interests whose positions are threatened when people unite.

# **STRUGGLES OF THE OPPRESSED AND THE “CULTURAL FACTOR” A CASE OF CHRISTIAN FISHERMEN IN KERALA**

## **A. The Social Past: A brief history**

1. Until the middle of the 19th century the social structure of Kerala was almost stagnant and characterised by the strongest feudalistic hold. The ruling monarchy and the high caste Brahmins generally dominated the whole socio-economic scene although they were numerically a very small minority. The entire ideology was guided by a mechanism of caste hierarchy. The lower castes were most oppressed and the lowermost ones had to struggle hard even for an animal existence. All the ghastly practices of segregation like untouchability, unapproachability and even unseeability were in vogue, all in an atmosphere of so-called ‘peace’ with hardly any subjective deprivation felt by the oppressed sectors. The entire land was owned by the monarchy, the Brahmins, or was the property of the temple. Protest of any sort was unthinkable and so out of the point in a situation of this sort.

2. Interestingly, the initial champions of the oppressed happened to be the Christian missionaries, though the

motivation was obviously conversion of the susceptible sections into the Christian fold. But like the propagation of English education, it had both latent and manifest functions in the sense that it was the missionaries who also injected ideas of justice and dignity and the spirit of liberation among the oppressed in whatever diluted form it might have been. To cite just one example: it was the newly converted "Channar" community (an untouchable caste) who led the famous "Upper Garment" agitation which was the first struggle of the oppressed in the history of Kerala. The struggle was not for any economic demand at all but, quite interestingly, for the "simple" demand that they also be allowed to wear upper garments, since such basic human rights were also the exclusive prerogative of the upper caste.

3. With the spread of Western education liberal ideas started making deep inroads among those communities in Kerala who socially held a middle position in the caste hierarchy (e.g: Christian, Nairs). It was from these sections that the leaders agitating for social transformation actually emerged. Here too it was not through economic demands that they mobilized the weaker sections to fight against corrupt and unjust practices. In other words, all the earlier social movements in Kerala were social and reformistic in character. Thus by the first quarter of the 20th century Kerala witnessed a rush of caste movements and almost all castes, one after the other, organised themselves.

4. By the second quarter of the century, struggle for the national movement lead by the Indian National Congress began to cut across the caste organisation in a big way. It was the first political turn of social movements in Kerala. Also by this time the message of the socialist revolution in Russia made its singular impact among the different sections of the people. It was at this moment that a section of congressmen formed the Congress Socialist Party and its members later

formed the Communist Party by the end of the 30s. Its refreshing message was so appealing that slowly but steadily the oppressed section began rallying behind them enmasse, who even now forms its largest group supporters.

5. At this point "class" posed a challenge to "caste" as the decisive social category. Demands became more political and economic than social. There were furious clashes between the oppressed and the oppressors. Starting with the working class of the coir (Coconut fibre rope) industry it permeated also among the agricultural labourers. It was structural transformation and not simple reformation that the oppressed demanded. In the cultural scene the impact of all these were heavily felt. Most of the noted artists of the then Kerala was socialistic in spirit and for the first time novels and dramas began to have lower caste/class heroes. Pressure from the bottom also forced the ruling class to make legislation in land reforms which was nothing more than concessions to tame the weaker sections.

6. In the post independence period and especially in the 50s, the political climate was so fertile for the "left" it culminated in the formation of the first ever elected communist ministry. But in the course of time the parliamentary path actually led the party to a sad plight, with the class perspective slowly degenerating into simple economic struggles for sectional interests. The remaining part of the story is that of the contemporary scene. Bourgeoisie parties were also on the scene with the "rural bias" and "Socialist" slogans. "Structural transformation", at least among the main communist parties, are now more or less attractive slogans of mass appeal. It is not that the left parties do not differ at all from others but the point is that its revolutionary zeal is seriously questionable though even the largest majority of the oppressed are still behind them. Most alarming of all, the stranglehold of caste has not spared even the communist

parties and Kerala is no exception.

7. The fisherman was never in the main stream of the socio-political scene for many years. The reason for the delay of social reformers and political parties to seriously include this group in their agenda, was never accidental; nor was it the community's relative numerical insignificance. This is especially true of the South Kerala fishermen. Perhaps, the highly charged Christian culture of fishermen posed an impenetrable barrier against easy political conversion by the "left". As to the rightist parties, since the hold of established church over fishermen is proverbially unquestioned, they could get massive support even without hard politicising. Thus only between elections are the fishery villages blessed with the presence of their political leaders.

8. Tradition-bound communal politics is generally the characteristic political pattern of fishermen. The political structure at the community level is closely linked with the religious organisation and the priest usually performs many juridical functions, especially with regard to the usual inter-communal rivalries. The pulpit also never failed to do the necessary liaison work, directly or subtly, with politicians during elections.

a) But in recent years there have occurred some significant changes in the consciousness of the fishermen in Kerala. The part played by community organizers among these groups in the past few years has definitely contributed towards this welcome change. The input of socio-political education and the consequent new awareness of social dynamics have not only helped the fishermen to identify the problem but also to initiate appropriate action, needed to free them from their age-old predicament.

It is as a part of these that Kerala witnessed, for the first time in its history, an awakening among the fisherfolk. Within the last two years there were two massive struggles for their jus

demands. In the first struggle the whole of Kerala was mobilized. Though it was the Trivandrum group which had been conspicuous, tens of thousands of fishermen from all over Kerala enthusiastically participated in the massive rally and picketing to make it an epic event in the saga of the fishermen's struggle. The important demand was to ban the trawler fishing within waters 20 miles from the shore. There were also other issues like the need to increase the amount of compensation for those who lose their life at sea, compensation for damage and loss of craft and gear, widow - pension, old age pension, the demand to start bus services between coastal villages and city markets to facilitate fish vendors etc. Government actually conceded most of the demands.

The second struggle was equally significant and also had an all - Kerala character. Led by the Independent Fishermen Union of Kerala a few months ago (June, 1981) its main demand centered around burning of trawlers during the breeding season of fish. There were also issues of pollution of sea from industrial waste, infrastructural developments detrimentally affecting the fishermen community and also the government's wavering attitude and even failure to properly implement its earlier ban of trawler fishing within a 20k.m. limit. The agitation lasted for 15 days. The agitators resorted to stayagraha (non - cooperation) and hunger strike before the important govt. offices in Kerala. In each district this was done simultaneously. In the Trivandrum area where the action was vehement, the picketers did not even spare places like the aerodrome and railway stations. As a result of all this the government agreed to appoint a committee of experts to seriously look into the whole matter.

Although these emerging struggles are encouraging in itself, as a whole the fishermen community is still under the heavy cultural hold of religion.

b) *The Cultural Factor: Some reflections on the role of religion among the fisherfolk.*

9. Since the religious factor is supremely decisive in the life of fishermen, this superstructural aspect needs special mention. Most sociologists willingly admit the fact that particular material conditions produce corresponding similar cultural traits. But what is rejected as inadmissible is the idea that cultural traits can have any independent influence over material reality as such. It seems there are cultural traits which are deeply rooted among a people living in a particularly "fertile" situation. Consequently they reject social change in favour of a qualitatively different direction. Whether the religious element is a stumbling block to social transformation is eminently debateable. But it is not out of context to delve on this controversial issue here.

10. The concept of the "divine" among the fisherman is one such element in this issue. Religious sentiment actually reigns supreme in and influences all his other perceptions. The popular version of the "Insecurity Theory" of religion which maintains that marked deficiency of security is prejudicial to the development of strong religious belief need not be correct since the Eskimos, who too live a hazardous life for example, do not have any such heightened belief. With regard to them, life is so hard that they do not have time to think about God. Perhaps the conditions for religious belief lie somewhere between a material situation which is neither very secure nor hopelessly insecure.

11. Coming to the Christian fishermen, it was "five loaves and two fish" that the Lord gave to his disciples. So the fishermen feels privileged, his being a "divine" profession. Also the Lord walked on water and the winds and waves obeyed Him, the fishermen were His disciples. So a fisherman feels doubly sure that God is on his side. The typical fisherman feels that God has freely given him the whole expanse of the

sea, and such magnanimity is never to be doubted. These may be “irrationalities” but the point is that rational planning often falls pray to these powerful irrationalities and preconceptions. The fisherman has religion almost upto the brink of his heart. A paradox witnessed among the Christian fisherfolk of southern Kerala is that they do not seem to submit to religious rituals unlike Hindu fishermen, for example, difference may exist only in degree because in terms of strength of belief and the extent they would go for its sake, these two communities are not markedly different. At this juncture it is interesting to note that some research along the Kerala coast have shown Christian fishermen as more receptive to technological input then their Hindu counterpart. This would mean that the “Latin Christian ethic” is progressive in content. Generally speaking it seems that “Latin Christian ethic”, in essence, has not yet dethroned the native Gods of the fishermen. At times this whole approach to reality gives the impression that Lord Ayyappa on Goddess Kali (Hindu Gods) is only playing a “fancy dress show” of say, St. Andrew or St. Mary.

12. The objective material deprivation of fishermen and the contrast posed by their fabulous churches, show this height of faith, in actuality it also subtly cancels the possibility of subjective deprivation. Their aspiration for mobility and development itself is shackled by these seemingly unbridgable charms of contrast. Possibly the concept of “heaven and earth” also has only strengthened this “beautiful helplessness” in which they have been placed for generations. The priest have also made fatal success in making the pathetic huts of fishermen look shamelessly torn by the architectural contrast of the “heavenly” churches. The sad thing is one really feel that this much of humiliation and human degrada - - tion may not be necessary to stop a priest from attaining his entry to heaven. The only justification is the prerogative of



the poverty stricken to the kingdom of heaven. But at this point, the chain of mansions the “Persians” (fishermen who amass Gulf – money) might build (already the process has started) could play a “positive” role in the sense that some of these palacious houses would make even the massive churches look small !

13. As a whole, since the religious elements reign supreme in their heart, other models of thought have only a very insecure existence among the fishermen. As it is, a little shake would spill any “foreign” element away as it does not mix well with the voluminous one. Hence the so – called attempt to penetrate without “disturbing” the sentiments. One prevalent opinion is that the option seems to be whether the agent of change succeeds in bringing the community toward the corrupted “outside” or it just makes their source of income a bit more steady and secure. This is also not said in ignorance of the obvious theoretical stand that the downtrodden can only be mobilized through their needs and economic demands which should in turn, be guided towards development of consciousness.

# **SRI LANKA**

## **Organisation of Small Fishermen in Sri Lanka**

### **Background Information**

Fisheries is an important industry in the economy of Sri Lanka. In 1980, the total production of fish in Sri Lanka has been estimated at 183,291 metric tons which represents an increase of about 100 percent over the level in 1971. Among the major factors responsible for this increase is the large increase in the number of mechanized boats in the industry most of which are provided under a government subsidy scheme. Although the relative contribution of the fishing industry to the national production is still quite small (being about one percent), the population dependent on fisheries for their livelihood is relatively large – more than 275,000 (nearly 2 percent of the total population). There are more than 60,000 fishermen in the country.

The continental shelf which surrounds Sri Lanka provides a rich source of edible marine species. The potential productivity of the coastal fishery (extending 5 miles along the

arc of the continental shelf) has been estimated 270,000 tons a year while along the strip extending 20 miles off the coast the productivity is roughly in the region of 850,000 tons a year. Prospects for deep sea fishing beyond the continental shelf are quite promising. Besides there is considerable scope for inland fresh water fisheries. A comparison of these resources with the actual fish production (183,000 tons in 1980) reveals the unexploited potential of the Sri Lanka fishing industry. Of the total fish "catch" about 90 percent is consumed in the form of fresh fish, and the balance is used in the form of dried, salted and smoked fish. Sri Lanka is still not self sufficient in fish supplies. In 1980, Sri Lanka has imported about 18 million US. Dollars worth of fish and fish products (mainly tinned fish and dried fish). However, Sri Lanka also exports a small portion of her fish production; these are mainly lobsters, prawns and other shell fish. In 1980, Sri Lanka has exported about US. Dollars 15 million worth of fish. There are about 970 coastal fishing villages in the coastal region of Sri Lanka (located in the Southern and Western coastal belt and also in parts of Eastern and Northern coastal areas). Fishing methods range from those used traditionally (non – mechanised traditional crafts known as Oru, Vallem, Teppam, Kattamaran and rafts) there were an estimated 15,744 indigenous craft of different types (non – mechanised) in operation. There were about 2,500 indigenous craft fitted with outboard motors, another 2,500 fibre glass boats and nearly 2,200 larger (3½ ton) boats. In addition, there are 5 trawlers and 13 boats (10 – 11 ton capacity). Other relevant facts about the fishing industry are:

**THREE** *fishery harbours (Colombo, Galle and Trincomalee) Anchorage and shore facilities are available in six other places (Beruwala, Mirissa, Tangalle, Ambalangoda, Jaffna and Negombo)*

*Thirty ice plants are functioning at present of which 14 are maintained by the government agencies.*

## **Socio – economic conditions of the Small Fishermen**

Of the total of about 60,000 fishermen in the country, the large majority (over 80%, that is about 50,000) are small fishermen. Recent surveys have revealed that about 40 percent of the fishermen do not own any form of fishing gear while 20 percent have no fishing craft. There are also a considerable number of migratory fishermen (about 4,000 in number) who migrate from the west coast to the fishery centres along the eastern coast specially during April to October.

Poverty characterise the majority of the small fishermen. They live in temporary huts without basic amenities. Educational standards are quite low and there is high rate of school drop out (at a very early stage) among children. Indebtedness to traders and exploitation in the hands of traders and boat and gear owners are further important features. Government sponsored cooperatives have failed to benefit the small fishermen being dominated by big fishermen, traders and bureaucrats. Most government services to the fishery industry have by passed the small fishermen; the beneficiaries have invariably been the bigger fishermen.

## **Organising Small Fishermen at Mirissa Village**

(1) Mirissa is a relatively large fishing village situated in the Southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka between the two urban centres of Weligama and Matara. Mirissa has a population of over 3,100 in approximately 635 families and living in 535 houses. About 80 percent of the families are involved in the fishing industry in some form or other, as actual fishermen, owners of boats and gear, or fish traders. The

balance 20 percent is engaged in such activities as coir yarn spinning, trading and government employment. I lived with this community for more than two years, that is since June 1979, and attempted to organise the small fishermen to improve their social and economic status. My efforts were only partially successful as explained below. Mirissa is a well established traditional fishing village in Southern Sri Lanka where (2) the Government have provided a number of services and facilities. These include a small fisheries harbour, an ice plant and storage facilities, fuel (diesel) supply centre, a boat repair yard, a Fisheries Bank (located close to the village), two government sponsored fishermen's cooperative societies, and bank loans for the purchase of boats and fishing gear. The beneficiaries of these facilities are a handful of bigger fishermen, bureaucrats or traders, rather than the small fishermen. Cold storage facilities are monopolised by a few traders. Bank loans for the purchase of boats/gear have been taken by a handful of persons who have strong connections with the bureaucrats or politicians of the ruling government. Most small fisherman obtain their credit from traders at exorbitant rates of interest (20 percent *per month*) rather than from the Fisheries Bank which only serves the bigger fishermen and traders. Small fishermen purchase their fuel from private traders on credit rather than from the Government fuel supply centre which insists on immediate cash payment. Although 80 percent of the families in the village earn their livelihood from fishing, the ownership of fishing boats and gear is limited to a minority of families and others are dependent on them. (3) The pattern of fishing craft ownership is approximately as follows:

- *Mechanised boats: 85 owned by 35 families.*
- *Indigenous craft fitted with outboard motors: about 50*

– *Non – mechanised indigenous craft: about 150*

The above figures clearly indicate that of some 500 fishing families in the village, more than half (about 265 families) do not own any fishing equipment. To this figure must be added the 150 or so families who own traditional craft (non – mechanised) – that is a total of about 415 families – who may be considered the poor small fishermen. (4) The 35 families who own the mechanised boats virtually dominate the industry; they employ the majority of the fishermen without equipment, and pay them a small share of the daily fish “catch”. The division of the fish catch between the boat owner and the fishermen is as follows: The total daily fish catch is sold to a trader (with whom the boat owner has intimate connections) and out of the sale proceeds, the expenses are deducted (that is the cost of fuel, food etc.). Out of the balance, one – half goes to the boat owner and the other half is divided equally among the fishermen (usually four persons including the boat owner). Thus the boat owner obtains 62.5 percent of net income from a boat, (in addition to the fringe benefits that he gets through his connections with the fish trader). Thus the small fishermen (with no equipment) is a mere share cropper obtaining no more than about 12.5 percent of the daily fish “catch”. Moreover the small fishermen (often including the boat owner) is a victim of exploitation in the hands of a few traders. Fish trade is dominated by four traders, two of them are owners of several boats (each one owns six boats each) and the other two are outsiders. The cold storage facilities (provided by the government) are monopolised by these four traders. Using this monopoly, they determine the daily fish prices, and exploit the fishermen. The exploitation is more severe in respect of the night fish “catch” when buyers are few and the fishermen are hence compelled to sell to the few traders who have storage facilities. Prices

fetched for the night “catch” are always lower than the morning “catch”

In the first two months of my stay in this village, I studied the working of the fishing industry partly through direct observation and partly through discussions with various persons connected with the industry. Having understood the nature of the exploitation in the industry and the nature of the poverty of the small fishermen, I attempted to interact with the small fishermen to explore the possibility of organising them. However, this attempt was a failure. I found it extremely difficult to establish contacts with the fishermen given their daily routine of work. Most fishermen leave for fishing in the night and return to the land in the morning. They are then busy with unloading the fish, cleaning the nets etc. Having finished this work they return home around 9 or 10 in the morning, and sleep for the good part of the day. Late in the afternoon, many visit liquor bars or other places of entertainment away from their homes, and in the night they are back in the sea. Given this daily routine, I found it extremely difficult to meet them and talk to them freely either on the beach or in their homes.

In these circumstances, I thought that I would approach them indirectly, that is through a third party having close contacts with the fishermen. This was my entry point. At first I established contacts with a group of youth who were from fisher families (but were not directly involved in fishing). I discussed with them the problems of the fishing industry and they were quick to see the exploitative aspects of the industry. As a result of my interactions with them, they organised themselves to venture into marketing of fish and to break the fish trade monopoly in the village. This group took a part of the fish ‘catch’ to a nearby urban centre and

succeeded in obtaining a price far higher than the price paid by the village trader. But this activity benefitted the fishermen only marginally; most of the surplus earned was retained by the youth group and wasted it on liquor consumption and entertainment. This trading activity became a convenient method for them(the youth group) to earn money for their own requirements. They failed to operate as a catalytic group to bring the fishermen into a new organisational network for marketing of fish.

Having failed in this effort, I attempted to work through another third party, namely the wives of fishermen who had more spare time than the fishermen and who could also influence the fishermen. I organised a group of women and began to discuss the problems of the village in general, and the problems of the fisheries industry in particular. In these discussions, an important problem raised by many women is the absence of a pre-school for their children. Having identified this problem, they themselves took the necessary steps to organise a pre-school in the temple premises with a girl from the village as an instructor. Initially the attendance was high; about thirty children attended. However, within a matter of two months or so the number of children attending the school dropped sharply, and the project suffered a natural death. The women's group also dwindled in number and was more or less confined to the office-bearers. However, I continued my discussions with them and explored the possibility of undertaking an activity directly related to the fishing industry. They then began to focus on method of relieving their family indebtedness. During the lean season when the fish 'catch' is small, the income of the fishermen fall and they get into debt. They borrow from traders or money lenders at exorbitant interest rates. As a solution to this problem, the women's group decided to start



a savings scheme. Each week they would contribute a fixed sum into a group savings fund. With a view to introduce them to the banking habit, I invited a manager of a local bank to come to the village and to explain to the group the nature of banking facilities available to fishermen. I expected that a fishermen's organisation would eventually emerge out of these efforts. However, this effort also proved a failure. No sooner the 'lean season arrived (when fishermen's income fell) they withdrew all the money in the savings fund and the savings scheme ceased to operate thereafter.

These experiences were a learning process for me. I realized that using a third party as an entry method or promoting various other activities or projects as an entry point to the main issues of the fisheries industry cannot succeed. Indirect methods have failed, and hence there is no alternative but to interact directly with few selected fishermen however difficult this may prove to be. Having failed in the task of organising fishermen, I devoted more of my time to work in other villages, in particular to organise coir yarn producers which proved a success. Recently, I returned to Mirissa once more and began discussions with a few fishermen, a small group of eight fishermen (of whom one has come with me from this workshop). This group includes (a) two boat owners each owning one boat and (b) six other persons (fishermen without boats) who do the fishing in these two boats. Both these groups are victims of exploitation in the hands of the village fish traders, and hence they have a common interest namely to break their dependence of the traders. (5) They have now discussed the possibility of renting out a part of the cold storage facilities in the village (now monopolised by the village traders) by making representations to the Government authorities. The group has decided to meet regularly on full moon days (the day on which they do not go out). A search for alternative marketing outlets was begun. In this way, this

small group has made an important beginning.

It is difficult to organise (at least initially) the small fishermen (non – boat owners) separately for trade union type activity to improve their share of the fish catch. They are heavily dependent on the boat – owner and hence any attempt to organise them separately could lead to their eviction from the boats. Boat owners will remove them and employ others. Hence I feel that the first step should be to organise both groups together (boat – owner and non – boat owner fishermen) to break the trader monopoly and obtain an enhanced price for the fish. I am new at this stage now. The question is how do I proceed from this stage to my ultimate goal which is to build a community of self – reliant fishermen where the fishing equipment is collectively owned and the output is equally shared that is a community free of all forms of exploitation.

# SRI LANKAN FISHERIES

*Where is it Now ?*

*Where is it Going ?*

by V.L.C. PIETERSZ

credit : Sunday Time, November 29, 1981

**1 How significant is the role of marine fisheries in Sri Lanka as compared to inland fisheries ? How important is the small – scale traditional sector as compared to the large ?**

The Sri Lankan fishery was traditionally entirely a marine fishery which included, as it does today, fishing operations in the lagoons and estuaries. There was no inland fishery. The latter dates back only to the 1950s – when with the introduction of certain exotic species of freshwater fish, particularly *Tilapia mossambica* into the irrigation reservoirs an inland fishery gradually started developing.

Today, from the standpoint of fish landings, fishermen, fishing craft, fish trade, fish consumption and consumer preference, the marine fisheries continue to enjoy a predominant role. With the growth of population, the increase of pressure on the marine resources, and rising energy costs, however, the inland fishery is becoming more important than

inland fishery resources are being developed and their exploitation is being improved; there is increased consumption; and there seems to be potential for at least doubling the present catch (of about 20,000 tons or 11% of the country's total fish catch). Sri Lankan fisheries, both marine and inland, are almost entirely small-scale fisheries. Except for a very limited fishing effort in offshore waters by a few larger vessels belonging to state-sponsored agencies and private companies, the bulk of the fishing effort is confined to the coastal fishery (i.e. within about 20–30 miles from shore) and is exercised by individually owned or operated fishing craft of the small-scale sector. Within this sector, about 44% of the craft are motorized, traditional or introduced craft generally within the 32' size range : these account for about 68% of the marine catch. The inland catch is landed almost entirely by small non-motorized traditional craft.

## **2 What is Sri Lanka's marine fish production ? What are the main commercially important species of fish ?**

Sri Lanka's marine fish production in 1980 was estimated at 164,775 tons of which over 98% came from the coastal fishery.

The composition was roughly 26% large pelagics, 47% small pelagics and 27% demersal and semi-demersal species.

For the domestic market the high-value species are spanish mackerel, horse mackerel, trevally, tunas and tuna-like species, There is a heavy consumption of lower-value species such as shark, and small pelagics such as sardines, herrings, anchovies and Indian mackerel. Most varieties of demersal fish, commonly categorised as 'mullet' or 'rock fish' enjoy lower consumer preference, though they are regionally preferred to pelagic species e.g., in the northern districts. For the export market the important species are

prawns, beche de mer and shark (for shark fins) but the quantity exported is only about 2 to 3% of the total marine production.

### **3 What are the traditional craft in Sri Lanka ? What gear do they use ? Where do they operate ?**

Sri Lanka's traditional craft consist of dugouts with and without outriggers, log rafts and planked craft.

The dugouts with outriggers (called Oru, Kulla) come in a variety of sizes within a range of 12 – 40 ft. The smallest craft fish in lagoons or close inshore : rod and line or cast nets being the fishing method. Larger craft are regionally used for hand lining, drift gill netting, trolling, trawling, pole and line fishing and for beach seining and may – depending on size, season and fishing method – fish up to the edge of the continental shelf.

Dugouts without outriggers (called vallam or thoni) are mainly small craft used in lagoons or close inshore mainly for rod and line, cast net fishing and small mesh drift netting. In a few areas larger dugouts without outriggers are used for beach seining.

The log rafts (called teppam or kattumaram) are of various sizes : roughly 12 – 18' for the teppam and 14 – 30' for the kattumaram. They are generally used within 10 miles from shore and use small mesh drift gill nets.

The planked craft are paru, pathai, padahu and vallam. The first three are beamy flat bottomed stitched planked boats of 30 – 40' used for beach seining within a distance of about a mile from the shore. The planked vallam is a rather narrow craft constructed like a conventional boat with keel and frames. Sizes may range from 25' to 40'. They are used for hand lining and drift gill netting within about 10 miles from shore and also for stake net fishing.

**4 One hears much about Sri Lanka's master plan for fisheries development. What are its goals and main components ? How are these goals sought to be achieved ?**

Sri Lanka's master plan is an indicative plan for fisheries development during the period 1979–83. It is a comprehensive plan embracing all aspects of the fishing industry. It sets out clear objectives, enunciates the policies and strategies to be followed and the targets to be met and relates the objectives, strategies and targets to an investment programme.

The objectives of the fisheries development programme are to step up production of fish and to raise per capita consumption; to raise the income and standard of living of the fishermen; and to maximise employment opportunities in the fisheries sector.

The policies and strategies enunciated are the assignment of a major role in the future development of the fisheries sector to private enterprise; limitation of the role of the state sector to providing infrastructure and institutional support as well as incentives and subsidies to promote investment; allocation is the highest priority among the sub – sectors to the development of the coastal fishery and the reservation of this fishery for local fishermen with preference being given to small scale fishermen;

**5 How do agencies like the FAO and its programmes assist Sri Lankan fisheries ? What has been their contribution so far to fisheries development in the island ?**

The best way to answer this question is perhaps to give some specific examples.

In the later 1950s and the early '60s, during the initial stages of the government's mechanisation programme, the

FAO provided development support by making available the services of a naval architect and a marine engineer.

In the early 1970's, FAO undertook a survey project to identify live bait resources for the pole and line skipjack fishery, which later dovetailed into a general fishery development project which explored skipjack, tuna and small pelagic resources and among other things developed small boat purse seining for the latter. The FAO also, during this period, helped establish a SIDA – funded Fish Technology Institute in Colombo.

During the late 1970s, the Indian Ocean Programme of the FAO was responsible for several development support measures such as : assistance in identifying the policies and strategies to be adopted for the development of offshore and deep sea fisheries; drafting of legislation governing foreign fishing in the then newly proclaimed EEZ; drafting of a legislative framework for national fisheries exploitation and management; assessment of the requirements for local manufacture of synthetic fishing gear; and the preparation of the Northwest Coast Fishery Development project which is financed by the Abu Dhabi Fund.

## **6 What role does coastal aquaculture play in Sri Lankan fisheries ? What are the major efforts in this direction ?**

Sri Lanka does not have a tradition of coastal aquaculture or indeed of any form of aquaculture. Coastal aquaculture is not practised on a commercial scale in Sri Lanka. There are a couple of small private prawn farms which are yet experimental.

A government brackishwater fisheries station has been in existence since the 1960s at which experimental culture of *Chanos Chanos* was carried out with some degree of success and prawn culture was attempted but without much success

Another station has been recently set up. The development of coastal aquaculture is one of the functions of a newly established Inland Fisheries Division in the Ministry of Fisheries, which is presently training staff in coastal aquaculture and exploring the possibilities of obtaining foreign technical assistance for its development.

The existence of some 300,000 acres of brackish-waters-lagoons, swamps and estuaries-indicate a potential for development of coastal aquaculture ; but a great deal of basic work has to be done in identification of suitable areas, adaptive research, technical training, and the solution of techno – economic problems such as those arising from a very low tidal amplitude.

### **7 What are the major externally funded development projects in Sri Lanka ?**

Sri Lanka's first major externally funded development project in recent years was the Sri Lanka fisheries project which was completed a short time ago. The project was financed by a \$3.1 m loan from the Asian Development Bank : It was designed to augment the exploitation of the coastal and off – shore fish resources by the introduction of 200 boats of the existing 3½ ton type and thirty 38' gillnetters of a new type. These inputs were supplemented by facilities for boat repair/maintenance and fish marketing.

The Northwest Coast Fishery Development Project is an ongoing activity, which is financed by a loan of \$4.5 million from the Abu Dhabi Fund. This project seeks to increase fish production by introducing ninety 34' fishing vessels using different types of fishing gear with capability for exploiting the off – shore resources and to introduce two 50' vessels for exploratory fishing. It also provides for the establishment of shore facilities at a fishing centre of the northwest coast.



The East Coast Fishery Development Project is another ongoing development project financed by a \$2.5 m grant – cum – loan from the Netherlands. It seeks to increase fish production and employment in the Batticaloa district. The project provides for the construction of shore facilities at one of the main anchorages in the East Coast-Valaichenai – and also for the introduction of 100 24.5' boats of a new type specially designed for east coast operations.

A second Asian Development Bank financed project involving a loan of about \$14.5 m is currently in the pipeline. Its main objectives are to increase the efficiency of existing fishing vessels and to increase the exploitation of off – shore fishery resources. It envisages the introduction of 475 boats of 28' and 34' and the retrofitting of sails and propeller nozzles on existing boats. A shore facility component and personnel training are also included.



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Populations and Wetlands



*TRADITION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE  
COASTAL COMMUNITIES OF BRAZIL:  
A READER ON MARITIME ANTHROPOLOGY*

by Antonio Carlos Diegues (*editor*)

São Paulo

1997

NUPAUB - Research Center on Human Population and Wetlands  
University of São Paulo

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## INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, coastal issues have become a matter of concern both for academics and development practitioners. During this period, the Brazilian coast and adjacent waters, even in remote areas of the Northeast and of the Amazon, suffered from increasing pollution and degradation, due to a rapid industrialization, urbanization, deforestation and overfishing. Coastal communities, particularly those of artisanal fishermen, that were geographically and socially isolated in the past, also became important social actors in this process. In most cases, the beaches where they lived were expropriated by land speculators, for sale to tourists.

In the mid 1970's, some of these communities and small-scale fishermen organizations started reacting against land expropriation and overfishing by industrial fishing boats that threatened their livelihood. At the same time, increasing pollution of the rivers and estuaries, particularly in the Northeast threatened important ecosystems on which artisanal fishermen depend for their livelihood. Later, this social reaction was backed by progressive sectors of the Catholic Church and Unions, during the period of re-democratization of the country, following twenty years of military dictatorship. In some regions, these fishermen obtained a high social visibility and were able to create new democratic institutions to counteract those controlled by local oligarchies.

This process generated a growing interest by researchers to analyse these complex changes. It became clear that the methodology used by the social sciences to analyse social processes in rural areas was not appropriate to tackle the changing ecological and social relationships between society and the marine environment. Some of these researchers, particularly anthropologists, started claiming the need to establish a new and specific field or sub-discipline within Social Anthropology to deal with the complex relationships between man and marine ecosystems, called Marine Socio-Anthropology.

This Reader is an attempt to give an overall and interdisciplinary view of the research in different fields of the social sciences (such as History, Anthropology, Human Ecology, Linguistics, Sociology, Political Sciences and Psychology) undertaken by several Brazilian universities aiming to analyse the processes of social change in coastal communities, particularly those of artisanal fishermen. It is a result of papers presented at a series of national workshops called "Social Sciences and the Sea", organized by the NUPAUB-CEMAR research center of the University of São Paulo, from 1988 to 1991.

The first three articles of this Reader (*Tradition and Change in Brazilian Fishing Communities*, by A. Diegues; *Peasants and Fishermen: a contribution to the discussion of the concept of artisanal fishermen*, by Anamaria Beck and *Small-Scale Fishermen, Working for Capital* by Tânia Elias Magno) address some conceptual issues concerning the *definition of artisanal fishermen and their relationship* to other social groups as peasants and industrial-capitalist fishermen. Their main focus is the process of social change that coastal communities have experienced in recent decades.

*Preliminary Notes on Conceptual Aspects of the Analysis of Fishing in the Lower Amazon*, by Lourdes G. Furtado; *Contributions to a Theory of Fishing Conflicts in Brazil based on the Amazonian Case*, by Alex Fiúza de Mello and *Fishing Conflicts in Amazonian Inner Waters and Attempts at Solutions*, by Wolf Hartman aim at analysing the *conflicting relationships between artisanal and commercial/industrial fishing in the Amazonian Region* from a socio-anthropological and political point of view.

This region is critical due to the high biodiversity of riverine and coastal species and the rapid overfishing of fish stocks caused by the expansion of commercial fishing fleet.

In *Rethinking and Rebuilding Common Property Systems in Brazil* by A. Diegues; *Space and Territoriality in the World of Artisanal Fishing*, Lúcia Helena O. Cunha and *Traditional Sea Tenure and Coastal Fisheries Resources Management in Brazil*, by A. Diegues, the authors address issue of *traditional knowledge and know-how, sea territoriality* and the creation of *new commons* in coastal areas.

In *Social Mobilization of Fishermen in Northern and Northeast Brazil: tradition and change (1966-1988)*, by Luiz Geraldo Silva), author, using an historical approach, analyses the *social mobilization of artisanal fishermen* around protecting coastal ecosystems and their traditional livelihood.

In *Water, Life and Thinking: a study of the world view of fish workers*, by Glaucia Oliveira da Silva; in *Perception and Utilization of Space in Artisanal Fishing Communities*, by Simone Maldonado and in *The Classification of Living Beings among Fishermen of Piratininga-Rio de Janeiro*, by Glaucia Oliveira da Silva there is an attempt to study the *social representations of the sea and the fishermen's symbolic practices*.

In *Language, Knowledge and Social Change: some ecological aspects*, by Alpina Begossi; *Language and Social Dynamics*, by Silvia Brandão and *Fishing in the State of Rio de Janeiro: conservatism and innovation*, by Edila Vianna da Silva the authors analyse the relationships between *ecological patterns, traditional knowledge, language and social change* along the coastal area of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

In *The Natures of Fishermen* the psychologist Jacques Labeaud studies the *symbols and social representations* of the marine environment of Northeastern artisanal fishermen using an psychoanalytical approach.

These articles provided a global view of the most important social characteristics of the changing Brazilian coastal communities, trying to interrelate the various aspects of their social practices.





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# 1

## TRADITION AND CHANGE IN BRAZILIAN FISHING COMMUNITIES: TOWARDS A SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE SEA

Antonio Carlos Diegues<sup>1</sup> - *Sociologist*

Concepts and methods employed in the analysis of peasant societies are commonly used in the study of relationships between human communities and the sea. While some concepts, such as agricultural cycles, partnership, community work, and rural wage earning are helpful in the study of those human communities which combine agriculture with fishing in closed coastal environments such as estuaries and mangroves, they cannot adequately account for the complex relationships between fishing communities and the ocean. This is especially true for fishing communities with a long maritime tradition, with well-developed social, economic and cultural systems related to the sea which increasingly differentiates them from land communities. Although more evident in some European and Asian communities with a greater maritime tradition, this distinction is also noticeable in some Brazilian fishing villages. The analytical problem here results from the establishment of the social, ecological and cultural identity of the human communities which make

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<sup>1</sup> Coordinator of the Program of Research and Conservation of Wetlands in Brazil (University of São Paulo).

their livelihood from the sea, in contrast with those making their livelihood from the land.

In response to this problem, new disciplines such as maritime anthropology and sociology have recently appeared, which are attempting to define the specific features of maritime human communities that set them apart from land-based ones. Maritime anthropology/sociology centers have recently appeared in Canada, France, and the Netherlands. The department of Anthropology at Laval University in Quebec City is home to a group of anthropologists with a long tradition of research on fishing communities (For example, see Breton 1981). The Center of Ethnotechnology in Aquatic Environment, founded in Paris in 1970 by three researchers in the human sciences, and currently located at the National Museum of Natural History, brings together researchers studying the different features of fishermen's lives to collaborate on methods, guidelines and information. It assembles mainly anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists and historians engaged in on-going research. In Amsterdam, research in this area is being conducted at the Journal of Maritime Anthropological Studies (MAS), launched in 1988.

Brazilian studies on fishing communities have increased in number and seen some changes in the last few decades. This author has previously identified three distinct phases in an earlier review of social scientific studies of sea-based fishing communities (Diegues, 1988). The first phase, during the 1950s and 1960s, was characterized by studies on fishing folklore or includes research on socially homogeneous communities and their traditions. Since the early 1970s<sup>2</sup>, researchers have begun to consider fishing and fishing communities in the wider context of the nation and economic structures, and as related to the penetration of capitalist relations in this sector and the conflicts between traditional mode of fishing production and the capitalist one. In the early eighties, researchers had begun to develop a sociology and especially an

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<sup>2</sup> This shift in focus was largely prompted by a shift in government policies in the fisheries sector resulting from an attempt to 'modernize' the industry. This attempt had dramatic impacts on fishing communities. The traditional fisheries were marginalized and pushed aside, and received no financial or other assistance while industrial fishing was heavily subsidized.

anthropology of the political economy of maritime communities. The emerging fields examine the unique features of fishing communities and relationship between them and their particular habitat - the sea, as well as their values and ideology resulting from their relationship with nature, on one hand, and local and national societies, on the other.<sup>3</sup>

In their analysis of different ways that fishing communities interact with their environment, maritime sociologists and anthropologists have identified two "ideal types" of fishing communities. First of all, there are communities of "fisherman-peasants" or "fishermen-farmers" which, according to a complex calendar, both conduct land-based subsistence agriculture and exploit seashore resources, usually within estuaries and lagoons. This category of fishermen was extensively studied in earlier papers (Diegues, 1973; 1983) which showed their strict bond to land life, fishing being a complementary activity. They are peasants rather than fishermen, and lack a fishing culture or ideology, as pointed out by Mourão (1971). This does not mean that fishermen from those communities lack a deep knowledge of closed aquatic habitats such as those found in estuaries and lagoons, nor that they do not live almost exclusively from fishing, considering themselves professionals. Many of those fishermen exploit the lagoon, its resources, and also the open sea. In this paper, however, we emphasize a second type of community, which are referred to here as "maritime communities" in which economic, social, and symbolic practices are linked to the open sea, far from the seashore, and which acquire their livelihood from deep-sea resources. Fishing in these habitats is performed by fishermen engaged in traditional fishing as well as those engaged in capitalist enterprises. Maritime sociology and anthropology deal mainly with these communities.

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<sup>3</sup> For the first phase, see eg. Mussolini, G. (1945; 1946), França (1954), Bernardes (1955), Soeiro (1961); for the second phase, Mourão (1971), Forman (1970), Cordell (1974), Kotze (1966), Diegues (1973); and for the third, Maldonado (1986), Diegues (1983), Furtado (1983) and Duarte (1978).

## Specificity of Maritime Communities

Making a livelihood principally from the sea, rather than the land, is a basic feature of a "maritime culture" found world-wide in traditional maritime fishing communities. However, this feature alone does not guarantee the existence of a specifically maritime culture.

Geistdoerfer (1988) argues that concepts employed in the study of peasant societies, such as family, wages and ownership, are not adequate to the study of the social structure of maritime communities and the customs of their inhabitants. Maritime communities are characterized by the fact that fishermen live and work in an environment marked by danger, risk, mobility, and physical changes. Maritime communities are to a certain degree historically and culturally shaped by the fact that the open sea, as the place where artisanal fishermen (and more recently, those engaged in capitalist fishing enterprises) spend most of their life.

At the same time, not all "coastal communities" have become true maritime communities. This is especially the case for those combining fishing and agriculture, and those situated in closed environments such as bays, lagoons, and estuaries, which are coastal but not necessarily maritime (Mourão, 1971; Diegues, 1983). The unique character of maritime communities is linked to the physical environment of the sea, which suffers marked seasonal changes and is affected by atmospheric phenomena leading to rapid transformations in the marine conditions (thunderstorms, hurricanes, seaquakes), which in turn offer constant danger to those working there. Renewable natural resources in the open sea, especially the several species of fish, are mobile and often not visible, migrating from one environment to another and reproducing themselves according to complex patterns. These environmental phenomena are usually studied by the natural sciences, such as physical and biological oceanography, while social, economic, and symbolic