

DOCUMENTARY

# Chronicles of Oblivion

## A documentary film on women fishworkers of Odisha, India

Produced by Dakshin Foundation, Directed by Priyanjana Dutta, with the support of Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust  
Duration: 25 minutes, Language: English

By Ramya Rajagopalan  
(icsf@icsf.net),  
Consultant, ICSF

Odisha translates as the 'land of the people'. There are an estimated 35,304 full-time fishers in the Indian State of Odisha (formerly known as Orissa). Of them, 7,973 are women. Besides these full-time women fishers, there are 12,499 women who work as part-time fishers. The film 'Chronicles of Oblivion' documents the lives of Odisha's women fishworkers in different parts of the State.

Among the women shown in the film are the crab-catchers of the Bhitarkanika wildlife sanctuary. Since the entry of these women into the sanctuary area is completely restricted, they have to constantly fight the

fear of arrest by forest guards or of being attacked by crocodiles and other wild animals. Many feel that it would probably be better for them to learn some other trade. These illiterate women are often also cheated by fish sellers. Their lives typify the challenges that fisherwomen of Odisha face as they pursue their traditional livelihoods in the face of modern day restrictions from the government and the development process.

There is very little support for women fishworkers in government

policies and plans. The focus of existing policies has been on increasing fish production and modernizing the fisheries. They exclude the needs of traditional fishing and of women engaged in these activities. The women, over the years, have developed their own means of livelihood, fishing in creeks and rivers, using small nets to catch crabs and fish. The film tries to show how important it is that these women be included in government planning and decision-making process in the fisheries sector.

But what promise does this State hold for its forgotten people? Women from marine fisher communities have historically been a neglected lot. The stories of women living along diverse landscapes of Odisha's 480-km coastline are of struggles for survival.

The daily lives of fisherwomen hinge on numerous uncertainties. Confronting a situation of depleting fish catch and unsustainable fisheries, women located along biodiversity-rich habitats also have to contend with the fickleness of legal conservation restrictions, which have dealt a severe blow to their livelihoods and ways of life. The film reveals the insidious impact of sea turtle conservation as seen through the eyes of the women fishworkers of Odisha. These women and their families are losing access to their land and other resources and are frequently displaced in the name of conservation or development. Further, these fishers also face problems of identity as they are often regarded by government regulators as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

The stories of Odisha's women fishworkers guide the narrative of this 25-minute-long film, revealing the highly unequal and invisible world that they inhabit.

For copies, please email :  
marianne.manuel88@gmail.com



PUBLISHED BY  
Chandrika Sharma for  
International Collective  
in Support of Fishworkers  
27 College Road  
Chennai 600 006  
India  
Tel: (91) 44 2827 5303  
Fax: (91) 44 2825 4457  
E-mail: icsf@icsf.net  
Web site: www.icsf.net

EDITED BY  
Nilanjana Biswas  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
Sandesh  
(sandeshcartoonist@gmail.com)  
DESIGNED BY  
P. Sivasakthivel  
PRINTED AT  
NPT Offset Press Private  
Limited, Chennai

Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.  
  
Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.