

**FROM ASIA/India****A surprise encounter**

**by Nalini Nayak, a social activist working with fishworkers in India, and a member of ICSF**

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Meenakshi Manna is the first seagoing fisherwoman I have met in India. Spurred by the fact that her family's debt burden from purchase of fishing implements was increasing, seven years ago she decided to make her fishing boat her home. Operated till then only by her husband, Meenakshi sold her small plot of land and started fishing with her husband and two sons. Today she navigates the 25 HP motorized 35-foot plank boat, uses a variety of nets and directly sells the catch in the wholesale market.

At 37 years of age, Meenakshi looks so small and frail—just a little over four feet tall—but she is full of energy, bubbling with life, and she enjoys her life on the boat. The little, open-deck vessel has a bare minimum of facilities but is used for three- to four-day voyages on the open sea.

Since Meenakshi started fishing seven years ago, her family has been able to repay the loan on their fishing equipment and has bought a small plot of land. For the last three years, they have been growing a winter crop of vegetables on the land. Meenakshi hopes that eventually they will have enough savings to build a house. One of her three sons goes to school and lives with relatives.

Meenakshi was made a member of the national committee of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF). This 22-member committee, elected in December 1998, has eight women on it.