

Draft Case Study: These case studies were commissioned by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), in preparation for the national workshop organized in February 2010, India

## **WOMEN IN FISHERIES**

### **CASE STUDIES: INDIA**

**By Dharmesh Shah**

#### **ANDHRA PRADESH**

##### **Kakinada Harbor**

The Kakinada harbour is located 10 kms from the Kakinada main town. There are two ports in Kakinada, the deep and the anchorage port. The new deep port is the second largest in the state of Andhra Pradesh after Visakhapatnam port. Before the deep water port was built, the anchorage port was the largest of the forty minor-ports operating in India. It is well connected to all major seaports in the country. The Kakinada Port comprises of Kakinada Anchorage Port, Kakinada Deep Water Port, Kakinada Fishing Harbour and the Ship-Breaking Unit. There are four fishing harbours in the state of Andhra Pradesh, Kakinada, Nizamapatman, Machilipatnam and Bhavanapadu.

The Kakinada fishing harbour was constructed in 1984 and was designed to handle 250 boats. However, it currently serves over 500 fishing boats<sup>1</sup>. The Department of Fisheries claims to have spent Rs.40 lakhs towards hygienic maintenance works in August 2005. However, the facilities at the harbour are still very basic and the conditions still unhygienic. There are no running water and bathroom facilities inside the harbour, the women vendors have to walk to their homes across the harbour or use an open space behind the harbour. An ice storage facility is provided by a private entrepreneur who is given place in one side of the shed, this is mostly used by traders who procure large quantities of fish.

The harbour is primarily a market for large and small dry fish processors but there are no drying facilities. Small quantities of fish were dried on open spaces at the entrance to the harbour and around the landing shed directly on the ground. The main drying was done in open spaces near the fisher settlement located across the harbour where most of the fisherwomen had temporary homes. The primary drying was done on the trawlers. Dry fish belonging to women processors was laid in several large heaps under a large shed. The main markets for this dry fish are Nakapalli and Tadepalligudam.

Volati Adilakshmi has been in the profession for 10 years. She is a large prawn processor. She deals with products worth Rs.10,000 almost every day selling them at the Bhadrachalam shandy every Tuesday. There are only two other traders like Adilakshmi at the harbour. Profits are good in the dry prawn trade, a single 50kg bag costs Rs.3000 and is sold for Rs.200 per kg in the market. Her major expenses are transportation of Rs.60-70 per bag and market taxes of Rs.20 per bag at the Bhadrachalam market and Rs.10 per bag at Nakapalli.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.andhrareports.com/fishingharbours.htm>

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A dry fish merchant, Palippu Kasubabu, belonging to Pallum village in Srikakulam says that the people moved into the settlement 20 years ago. The inhabitants of the settlement were mostly fisher folks displaced due to the construction of the deep sea port. The fishers now fear a second displacement due to government plans of port expansion and modernization. Volati Adilakshmi says that “we were displaced in 1984 from Etamuga to this harbour and now they want to remove us again from here to some other place. We are not going to leave this time.”

The fishers of Kakinada have a history of successful organizing. When a ship breaking yard was proposed at Kakinada a few years back there was a stiff resistance from the fisher folks and the proposal was dropped. There are no active womens’ unions/cooperatives at the Kakinada harbour but the threat to the livelihood of nearly 500 fisherwomen is enough reason to bring the women together.

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**ANDHRA PRADESH**  
**Uppada Panchayat**

Uppada is a beach town situated 5 kms from Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. Uppada is located on the coast adjoining Kakinada's main beach, known as the Kakinada-Uppada Road Beach. There are 9 villages in the Uppada panchayat of which three, Subbampetta, Soradapetta and Mayapatnam are fishing hamlets. A small public road leading to Soradapetta cuts between the sea and the lush coastal paddy fields. The most obvious feature about the coast is the severe erosion along the entire stretch. Over the last decade nearly 126.58 acres and 129.48 acres were lost in Uppada and Subbampetta alone<sup>2</sup>. Two public roads had gone under water in Subbampetta and Pattapatnam villages.

The fishing communities in Uppada belong to the Pali community. The fishing communities in Andhra have settled in the following fashion on the basis of caste – South of Kakinada up to Nellore is where the Pali caste fishermen inhabit and north of Kakinada up to Orissa is inhabited by the Vadabaliya caste.

There were previously many landing sites in and around Uppada but due to severe erosion only Soradapetta, Aminabad and Subampetta remain. Among the three Soradapetta is the main landing site as it has the largest beach space. At Soradapetta, around landing time, the women wait under small sheds for the fishermen to arrive with their catch. The beach front is clean but the entrance to the village is littered with waste. The breeze carries the garbage all over the fish processing areas located in open spaces between/behind the huts. These open spaces are used only by the small processors; the large processors usually faced a lot of problems due to space constrains. An open drain ran close to the huts and the processing sites. The lack of a proper drainage leads to water stagnation during the monsoons and cyclonic storms.

It is hard to estimate the number of women who come to Soradapetta, hundreds of women and cycle traders come everyday from surrounding villages like Mayapatnam, Kolarpetta, Jagrapetta etc. During glut catches the fishermen prefer to land their fish directly at the fishing harbour. The months of October and November are a lean when nearly 50% of the fishermen migrate to better fishing grounds like Antaravedi, Vadalreву, Gilakaladindi and Golapalam south of Andhra.

***Observations***

On the day of the visit the first 4 *theppas* arrived empty, the *theppas* that began arriving later brought small catches which soon led to a frenzy of activities. Women assembled in small crowds around the bags of fish and the auctions were over as soon as they began, the longest one lasted for a minute when a fisherman had a good catch of ribbon fish. The women were soon running from one site to another as more boats arrived. Several fights broke out during the auctioning between the fishermen and the women mostly over the pricing and sometimes over women picking a few extra fishes. Several children also arrive at the scene to pick on stray fishes that had fallen from the nets; these were exchanged for peanuts and fruits sold by old widows who would also arrive at the beach during the landing. The auctioning is top to bottom. Fishermen sell directly or through local middlemen who can make up to Rs.30 as commission per sale. The most

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<sup>2</sup> 600-acre land in Kakinada eroded by sea - Down to Earth 3.3.2008.

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common varieties are white fish, croakers, silver bellies, ribbon fish, crabs, green fish, flat fish, *selapottu*, *paravas*, cuttle fish etc.

Karya Nokalamma from Mayapatnam village, recalls earlier days when high value fishes earlier like sea perches, seer fish, Indian salmon and pomfrets were available in plenty, now these have disappeared and small pelagics like sardines, green fish and ribbon fish are available and that too 4 to 5 times costlier. In fact across Andhra most of the high value fishes like Pomfrets, Seer and now also oil sardines are iced on board and directly sent for export. In Uppada ring seine fishing is widely prevalent which has a direct impact on the catch of the traditional fishermen and hence on the women who depend on these fishermen.

### ***Dry and Salt Fish Processors***

Most of the women are dry/salt fish processors procuring small quantities of fish every day and selling at weekly markets like Nakkapalli and Peddaru. The fresh fish is sold everyday at local markets like Pattapuram, Patupalli etc. Women had formed partnerships and divided responsibilities based on their skills or abilities. Poleramma and Mylapalli Papa are partners who have shared investments. Mylapalli (60 years) is an experienced bargainer hence has chosen to procure fish and her younger partner Poleramma (40 years) puts in the labour required for processing and marketing. To salt a batch of fresh fish worth Rs.1000, 20kgs of salt costing around Rs.270 is needed.

Dry fish processors like Ganta Rajamma have comparatively fewer investments. She visits two dry fish market every week and deals with products worth Rs. 5000 to Rs.10,000 when the market is good. The procurement can go as low as Rs.1000 during lean season. Dry prawns have a good export market, processors like Choka Vajamma have exclusively diverted to prawn processing. In Amripada, most of the village men and women are engaged in prawn fishing and processing which they sell to a big trader in Boddu Chinna.

### ***Loans and Schemes***

Loans are usually needed to purchase salting vats, knives, drying mats etc. Older women like Thembala Yellamma were earlier dependent on money lenders and paying a lot of interest. Now loans up to Rs.60,000 are available from the government SHGs. Most women were part of local SHGs under which they saved Rs.30 every month and were eligible for loans. Yellamma had already repaid two loans and had applied for her third one. The loan money is mostly used to buy fish and processing equipment like salting vats, knives, packaging material, drying mats etc. Sometimes it is used for family expenses like weddings or festivals etc. Bhulokamma recalled a Red Cross initiative for fisher folks under which ice boxes were provided to big fishermen but the small fisherwomen like her were left out, she questioned the logic behind such schemes. She has been in the profession for more than 20 years.

Credit is available but usually availed by larger processors; smaller processors prefer to settle accounts on a daily basis. If procurements are large then credit is repaid with a little interest especially in the case of processors who need processing time before fish is ready for sale.

Mostly old women are engaged in the dry fish processing work, it is very difficult work. Some women are engaged in buying the fish and selling it to cycle traders for a small commission of Rs.10-20. Twice in a year once in November and once in March the women and some men go for

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work in the agricultural fields to supplement the family incomes. The agricultural work pays Rs.100 per day.

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## **ANDHRA PRADESH**

### **Traditional Fisherwomen Cooperative Society – Pudimaduka**

After the Tsunami in 1996 women from 6 villages in the Pudimaduka *taluk* came together to form the Traditional Fisherwomen's Cooperative Society. The District Fishermen's Welfare Association, an NGO based in Andhra Pradesh, facilitated the formation of the cooperative. Pudimaduka is a traditional marine fish landing centre 60 Km south of Visakhapatnam. The Pudimaduka taluk consists of 6 villages, Kondapalem, Kadapalem, Jolaripalem, Pudimadaka, Pallipetta and SC colony. It is a main market for fish brought by nearly 10,000 traditional fishermen.

Fish vending was earlier done in open areas in village centers like bus stops. In June 2009, with funds provided by the District Fishermen's Welfare Association, Fish Marketing Development Centres were constructed in 6 villages with an aim to provide facilities for hygienic fish marketing and basic amenities like drinking water, washing area etc., for the fish vendors. The organization also provided ice boxes and working capital of Rs.2000 to each member.

Around 25 women are part of the chapter in Kondapalem. The fish is procured from the local beach and sold to local and distant markets like Ankapalli, Atchutapuram etc. Most of the fisher vendors were widows who were forced to get into vending after the death of their husbands. The secretary, Gangallu Dhanamma began selling fish about 12 years ago after her husband died at sea. The cooperative society is headed and managed by the president Gangiri Nokaraju and the secretary Chodipalli Thottayya.

#### ***Threats to fishing***

Pudimaduka falls under an area that is slotted for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) by the government of Andhra Pradesh. Several SEZs dot the landscape on the way to the fishing villages. The Andhra Pradesh Special Economic Zone is the largest, covering an area of 9000 acres which contains a pharma city, a steel plant and a thermal power plant among others.

The rapid industrialization has had a direct impact on the marine environment due to effluents discharged from the factories everyday. The latest threat to the local fishing economy in Pudimaduka is due to the Brandix Apparel SEZ that has been dumping effluents into the sea. The SEZ was set up in 2005 on a 1000 acre plot taken from Parwada, Atchutapuram, Rambilli and S.Rayawaram *mandals*. The local community organiser of the District Fishermen Youth Welfare Association, P. Dhanaraju said "the effluent pipeline from the factories inside the SEZ goes into the sea, it is extremely toxic and we often spot dead fish and even turtles in that area."

C. Maseiamma, the president of the Kondapalem chapter feels that the flourishing local fishing economy will be completely destroyed by these industries. When fish stocks are diminishing rapidly in several places across Andhra Pradesh, fisher women in Pudimaduka still have access to a good stock including several high value varieties like Konam, Vanjaram and Sorra. However, there is also an increasing competition from big exporters and traders which is increasingly attracting fishermen to large commercial landing centers and ports.

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### ***Vizag Harbour***

Visakhapatnam also known as Vizag is the most protected natural harbour in Asia. The fishing harbour at Visakhapatnam Port Trust is one of the biggest in the Coast of Andhra Pradesh. The harbor was set up in 1976 spreading across 24 hectares of land. Visakhapatnam is also one of India's main fishing ports, has a dedicated harbour for the fishing industry and handles a large percentage of India's seafood exports.

Despite being one of the major ports in the country with an annual turn over of Rs.580 crores the fishing harbour at Visakhapatnam port is a different story. The entrance to the harbour is through a wide road which is carpeted on either sides and along the median with drying prawns/shrimp, leaving enough space for vehicles to pass. A quick tour around the harbour is enough to spot the many issues of hygiene, cleanliness and lack of facilities. There is a lot of stagnant water at various places in the harbour due to lack of proper drainage facilities. On the day of the visit the main sewer line was being cleaned in what looked like a monthly operation. Heaps of disposable plastics blocking the free flow of water were being scooped out of the drains by automated vehicles. Offices inside the harbour can often be seen dumping their waste into the water.

The water at the port was extremely polluted with floating debris and garbage at various locations. There were several oil slicks caused by waste oil dumped by the trawlers and boats. The landing jetties itself are extremely unhygienic with stagnant water and spoilt fish at various places.

There are nearly 15 ice factories and 10 freezing points in the harbour but meant only for large scale exporters and traders. The harbour has a total of 11 jetties with a capacity to hold over 750 boats, 50 trawlers and 40 mini-trawlers. On a typical day fish landings at these jetties happen 4 times, by the mechanized and fiber boats during the day and by the small/large trawlers in the afternoon. The fish is laid out directly on the ground and is immediately surrounded by several men, mostly large traders and exporters who are there to procure all the high value fish. Auctioning begins almost immediately. The women patiently wait for their turn to buy the left overs from the first auction. Some large fish like a 1 tonne sword fish caught by a fisherman Dorrapali sold for Rs.8000 is booked by large traders via phone.

### ***The harbour fresh fish market***

The Visakhapatnam harbour also houses a fresh fish market visited by nearly 150 women from Jolarpettai, Pudumaduka, Gajuwakka, Pendrutti, Indurpetta, Vijayanagaram etc. Working sheds provided by the government for the fish vendors are supplied with storage facilities and electrical connections. However, the number of women coming to the market has increased over the years and the existing sheds cannot accommodate them. Mylapalli Yelliamma has been coming to the market for the past 10 years, she is happy with the facilities provided by the government but is still waiting to see an improvement in the bathroom and water facilities. There are only two bathrooms in the east side of the harbour one of which has collapsed.

Recent entrants into the fish market like Surakala Kondamma deals with smaller quantities of fish everyday because of lack of storage space and a shed. During a good season she makes around Rs.200 everyday. A part of the open area which could be used for accommodating more women is used as a parking lot. There are two cooperatives inside the harbour, The Gangabhavani Fisherwomen Cooperative for dry fish vendors and The Durgabhavni Fisherwomens Cooperative for fresh fish vendors.

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***The Gangabhavani Fisherwomen Cooperative***

Several women dry fish processors run their business in and around the harbour. They have organized themselves under the banner of the Gangabhavani Fisherwomen Cooperative. The cooperative is 5 years old and it has around 80 permanent members. The women organized in order to oppose government plans to remove them from the harbour. The tussle with the port authorities has been ongoing for a few years now recalls Amoramma, a member of the cooperative. A part of the dock was allotted for the purpose of fish drying but soon the women were relocated to the east side of the harbour on the approach road outside the main gate. Now the processors use either sides of the approach road to store and dry their fish.

Unlike the fresh fish vendors the dry fish processors receive no help from the government. There are no storage sheds or drying sites for the dry fish processors. Bukalla Dantalli, a big dry fish processor had a stock of ribbon fish worth Rs.30,000 that she had procured recently. All her fish had to be stacked up against a wall where the 5 women she had hired to sort and load the fish worked in different corners. The fish is sold in lots at various markets like Nakkapalli, Sandolu (Nellore), Guntur and as far as Chennai.

In 2007 the port authorities wanted to vacate the market site and used water hoses to douse the stocks of fish but there was a stiff resistance by the members of the cooperative who mobilized nearly 500 fisherwomen from various areas to oppose the move. The women now live under a new threat of eviction especially after the visit of the EU team in early 2009 in which observations were made about the hygiene at the harbour with special references to the fish drying activities.

Pardeshamma Tolada is the president of the Gangabhavani Cooperative. It is her responsibility to keep the women out of trouble with the port authorities. It took 15 minutes to pull Pardeshamma out of a heated argument with another fisherwoman over stored fish that came onto the approach road, a possible reason for trouble from the port trust. In the past trawler owners have registered complaints against the women for blocking the access roads to the jetties and causing traffic snarls. Several complaints have also been made over the smell caused by the dry fish.

The women of Gangabhavani are standing strong in the face of several challenges thrown at them by the port authorities. It is a repeat of what happened in the early 1980s when dry fish processors like these were evicted during the construction of the Vizag outer harbour and relocated to Thimmapuram, 14 kms outside Vishakhapatnam. The women in Thimmapuram have today restructured their lives and businesses but the women of Gangabhavani are there to stay.

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### **The Vishakapatnam Town Fisher Women's Dry Fish Welfare Society – Thimmapuram Village.**

Sixty one year old Nacchuamma reflects on her fight against the displacement in 1980s against government plans to build the Vishakhapatnam outer harbour on the beach where they lived. They filed a case in the high court against the displacement and won. The court ordered the government to provide a fair rehabilitation for the women. The government promised all facilities that were available at the harbour at the new site including a 5 acre plot for fish drying on the sea front and 10 acres for housing.

Several developments since have had a direct impact on the future of the dry fish processors of Thimmapuram. The most prominent development is four lane highway that runs along the stretch. The highway was built to link an upcoming industrial area in Bheemunitinam with Vishakhapatnam but it has proved beneficial for the fishers of Thimmapuram who now have access to better transportation. However, the highway has made land on the road very valuable for real estate and property developers. Many resorts and housing projects are already operational and a few IT Special Economic Zones had ear marked plots.

The Vishakapatnam Town Fisher Women's Dry Fish Welfare Society was formed more than 20 years ago. The women were facing a lot of problems at the Vishakhapatnam harbour and registered their complaints with the AD of the port but the AD found it difficult to manage complaints from so many different women so he suggested that they form a cooperative or a union. The society was formed based on this advice. There are 164 members in the society today. Meetings happen on the third Thursday of every month to discuss issues of finance, space for drying etc., and sometimes some specific issues about the future of their children and education. Each member pays a lifetime membership fees of Rs.110. Elections take place once in 5 years. The accounting is done with help from young educated volunteers. The current president is Boddu Yellamma.

#### ***Transportation***

Fish is procured from the harbour everyday. The women spend the night at the harbour and wait for the fish. Landings begin at 6:00am everyday and go on throughout the day. A typical day ends at 10:00pm for each woman dry fish processor. A one way trip to the harbour and back costs Rs.30 in a share auto and the van charges Rs.30 to transport a 50kg sack of fish which includes the loading/un-loding charges. A van was provided by the government earlier but was returned because it had reached the end of its operational life after which a new van has not been provided. Finance is available from private moneylenders at the harbour at an interest rate of Rs.3 per Rs.100. The women use shared vans to bring fish from the harbour, a single purchase can be worth Rs.60,000 to 100,000. The main markets for the dry fish are Nakkapalli, Manapuram, Kakinada and Tuni.

#### ***Credit and loans***

All of the women in Thimmapuram are big processors dealing with products worth Rs.50,000 to Rs.100,000 every week. They are valuable customers for the fishermen at the harbour and hence entitled to a lot of credit. Pokalli Yellamma who has a current credit of Rs.55,000 from a

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fisherman, cannot imagine running her business without credit. Loans are also available from private financiers at competitive interest rates. The women could not ascertain the exact interest rates but could give a break up of the repay they made every month. Vasupalli paid Rs.500 to her money lender which included an interest of Rs.200.

The members invest Rs.50 a month in to a savings kitty which is used to provide small loans up to Rs.3000. The District Fisherman Youth Welfare Association, a local NGO had also provided a fund of Rs.50,000 which is used as a revolving fund to provide loans to members.

The women had access to high value fish like Sorra and Vanjaram which they could sell at the daily fish markets but now only small varieties like ribbon fish, anchovies, sardines etc., are available which are only fit for drying. All the high value fish is picked up by exporters.

Many women also sell poultry feed made from trash/spoilt fish procured from trawlers most of which brought back by the men of the family who work as helpers on board trawlers. The men have access to a lot of trash/spoilt fish which is usually discarded by the trawler owners. Poultry farmers come to the village to buy the feed, the prices are based on the demand in the market.

### ***Facilities***

There is no water scarcity at Thimmapuram village but there are inadequate number of bathroom and many sanitation problems. There are no adequate medical facilities in the area; people have to travel a long distance to reach the nearest hospital. There is also a lack of storage space for the dry fish; this is a real problem especially during the monsoons. A NABARD official named Mr.Krishnamurthy visited the place and promised to construct storage sheds but that has not happened yet. The government later had proposed to set up a solar fish drying plant in Thimmapuram to replace the traditional method but it was opposed by the women because it could provide jobs to only 10 people as opposed to the 160 that are self-employed now.

### ***Social issues***

The government had built 100 houses for the relocated families. The number of families is now 300 with an average size of 4-5 members. These new families live in huts on the other side of the hillock. All the community members belong to the Vadabalaji caste which is a sub caste within the Pali caste. Marriage alliances are sought within the community with a thriving custom of dowry. According to 50 year old Barri Sattamma, there was no custom of dowry earlier but it was introduced 30 years ago, now it is impossible to get girls married without a dowry.

Both boys and girls get education. The village has a primary school (grade 1-5), the higher school is 3 kms away. Most children drop out at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the village has only 3 graduates and all of them work in the city.

Thimmapuram lies at an extremely vulnerable location in the context of recent developments; the women of Thimmapuram face the threat of relocation yet again. However, the women of the society are not ready to go without a fight - "this place was a jungle earlier", says Vasupalli Yellamma, "we have been through a lot of problems to adjust our lives to this place now if the government wants to remove us again we will fight unto death."

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### **THE SHOE DHONIS OF ANDHRA PRADESH**

Andhra Pradesh, situated on the east coast of India, has a coastline of about 980 km, with a continental shelf area of 31,000 sq km. According to the 2005 NMFS census, Andhra Pradesh has 498 marine fishing villages and 271 landing centres, distributed among nine coastal districts – Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Nellore. Two big rivers, the Krishna and Godavari enter the sea in coastal Andhra which provides an ideal breeding ground for marine life. While the total population of the fishers has increased from 3,26,304 in 1980 to 5,09,991 in 2005, there has also been a simultaneous marine gentrification of traditional fisheries due to rapid modernization and commercialization.

The Shoe Dhonies are one such unique traditional fishing communities residing along the Chollangi Creek of in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. The word Shoe refers to the shape of the traditional wooden boat that resembles a shoe and *Dhoni* is a traditional boat in Andhra Pradesh. The Dhonis are traditionally shell collectors with fishing as a supplementary activity. Men, women and children spend several hours collecting shells from the creeks, shell collection is combined with an occasional harvest of crabs and fish for food and if in surplus for sale at the local fish markets. Very little documentation is available on their lives and livelihood, the most reliable literature is a few articles in journals and magazines. Mr.Venkatesh Salagrama, a researcher from Andhra Pradesh comprehensively profiled the Shoe Dhoni community in the Bay of Bengal journal of September 1990. Several things have changed for the worse since, with only 60 families remaining, the future is bleak for the Shoe Dhonis.

The Chollangi Creek is part of a larger creek called Tulayabhaga which was previously a river but has been reduced to a creek now. Dhoni fisher folks are natives of a village called Balusutippa 30 kms from Kakinada and belong to the Pali caste popularly known as the Agrikulakshtriyas.

They do not own any agricultural land but only huts in their village. The families return to their village during the Sankranti festival in January, during a traditional village festival called *jathra* in March and for yet another village festival in April; deaths, weddings and elections also are reasons to visit the village. This detachment from the land causes several problems especially regarding claims to their social and financial rights. For instance the Dhoni fisher folks lose out on benefits of specific government schemes/grants (for fisherfolks) or funds distributed during cyclone relief etc., because the village elders do not consider them as locals since they spend more time away from home. This has been an unresolved issue for the past 25 years. Dhoni families usually prefer digging into their own savings for unplanned expenses, if necessary loans are taken from friends for major expenses like weddings and deaths. These are interest free loans given on good will of individual Dhoni owners.

Dhonis are originally shell collectors, nearly 300-500 existed over a decade ago unfortunately several market and legal changes have led to their decline. As a result the Dhoni families spend more time fishing or wood harvesting. One main factor has been the advent of lime supplements (for white washing) that are now available in the market which has led to a drop in the demand for shells. Forest department prohibitions on shell harvesting have further impaired the trade. A large harvest of shells currently remains unsold on the river banks since several vehicles carrying shells from the creek have been impounded by the state hence traders refuse to take further risks. The fishermen are frequently victimized by the forest department which regularly targets them for “illegal” shell and mangrove wood collection. Due to a lack of knowledge on what is legal or

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which species are protected the forest department officials arbitrarily prosecute the Dhonis for their activities.

### **Fishing**

Nearly 50 Dhoni families go out to the sea for fishing, fishing has now replaced shell collection as the mainstay. The Dhonis are not designed to be at high sea so most of them congregate at the Kakinada Bay which is a shallow low lying area with a maximum depth of 2 fathoms, the bay is also their traditional shell harvesting grounds. The most common fishing gear is the Frannel nets locally called the Disco nets. Each boat carries 10 units of the net (one unit is around 27mts) and the most common catch is mullets, crabs and small prawns. Usually the fishing season starts every month ten days before new moon and ends on the seventh day after the new moon, three days during each phase (seventh, eighth and ninth day) are no fishing days when the young men and women visit the town for recreation and the elders relax. Each fishing trip lasts for about two days at a stretch after which the Dhonis return to their base in the Chollangi creek before the next visit. A typical fishing trip fetches Rs 300, Rs 100 is set aside as savings and the rest is spent for family expenses, a chunk of which includes alcohol for the male members of the families.

### **Wood Collection**

One of the lucrative diversification from shell harvesting has been the mangrove wood collection. 10 Dhoni fishers go to the mangrove forests adjoining the bay for wood collection, the mangrove forests are protected but it is legal to collect dead or fallen wood. The mangrove wood is sold in nearby villages like BCV Palem and Ramanapalem for fish smoking at the cost of Rs10 per bundle. These trips are usually coupled with fishing trips and the whole family participates in the activity.

### **Education**

Very few children in the community have access to education. Of the 60 families only 10 have admitted their children into residential schools in Amalapuram, the other children live with their parent on board. Several government and non-governmental educational schemes, including a school on boat, have failed due to bad planning and management. The school was managed by a volunteer and was attended by 20 students, the ruins of the school on boat now lie on the banks of the creek.

### **Life On Board**

Provisions are purchased once in 15 days and stocked on board in smartly designed storage spaces/shelves. The living conditions onboard the Dhoni were extremely hygienic. The boat was kept very clean and no one is allowed on the boat with shoes. However the water in the creek was highly discolored which could be due to the presence of sewage. This water is used for cleaning and washing purposes. The main drawback of living on shallow water is to deal with the mosquito menace on a daily basis. Malaria, Diarrhea and frequent common cold are the most common ailments among the Dhoni families.

Pregnant women continue life on the dhoni till the seventh month, cooking and shell picking too, and barely 10 days after delivery they return to the boat with the new born. The last two months of the pregnancy are either spent at the village home or at rented hut in a neighboring village.

Disputes redressal and decisions on communal issues is the responsibility of the council of elders. Issues like fixing a date for departure to Chollangi are decided by the elders. Violators of the council decisions are fined quite substantially.

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Marriages outside the community are quite common. However, customs of class come in to play, class is determined in the Pali community on the basis of gear ownership. An alliance of a Dhoni girl with a groom of a Nava (a fiber boat) family means a higher dowry.

Considering the unique history of the Shoe Dhonis it is important that they are recognized by the state of Andhra Pradesh and given special status as they represent the few remaining indigenous fishing communities.

*An interview with 40 year old Sangini Gangadhari, his wife Ramana and their 4 children live aboard a Dhoni. Sangini and Ramana have spent almost their entire lives on the boat.*

Q – Interviewer

M – Sangini Gangadhari

F – Ramana Sangini

F2 – Danprolu Dhanalakshmi

Mr.Sarma had a long conversation to one of the community elders named Volati Ramamurthi who have dispute redress powers. There are about 8 or 9 elders.

Q – How many years have you been in the profession?

M – We have been doing this for the past 20 years. Our native village is Ballistuppa and every week my family members visit the village after returning from a fishing voyage to sell their catch in the local markets.

Q – What about the children? Do they get into the same profession or do they prefer to do something else?

F – This is not a very lucrative profession. We work very hard for very little money. So I prefer to send my children to school and get into something more sustaining.

Q – Is there any school here?

M – There is no school here. A private organization constructed a school on boat, they were providing some education to the Dhoni children, but the boat is now lying defunct on the creek shore. Then another organization built a small school on the land (close to the Chollagi creek) but there are no teachers there. We were very keen on sending our children to this school but there are no teachers so the children stopped going.

Q – What is your major catch? What fetches the most money?

M – We mostly do gill net fishing and our most common catch is Mulletts and a few varieties of crabs. We make 2 day long voyages to the sea then return to the land with the catch sell it and then make the next trip. We make around Rs.500 to Rs.600 in each trip.

Q – Where do you sell the fish and who are your main customers?

F – The market is very close to the Tulyabhaga Creek, there is a landing center there where all fishermen bring their catch.

Q – Do women do all the marketing?

F – Both men and women go to the market.

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Q – The mainstay of Shoe Dhonis has been shell collection. This was sold to make white wash but there are a lot of artificial substances in the market that have replaced the lime, how has this affected your market?

M – The market was very good earlier but the traders are not interested in shell anymore because a lot of factories have started making artificial lime. The forest department has imposed a lot of restrictions on shell harvesting so a lot of cases are booked against our people. I would like to leave this profession if possible.

Q – What is the main source of income now?

M – Shell collection was the main source of income earlier, now it only forms a very small part of the income. Now fishing has become the mainstay, I cannot say anything about the future.

Q – How many people live on *Dhonis* now?

F – Earlier around 1996 there were 400 to 500 families nowadays there are only 60 families. The entire activity has rapidly vanished after the 1996 cyclone primarily because of forest department restrictions and falling demand for shells. So a lot of the families returned to their native villages and migrated to fishing or other professions.

Q – What is the main role of women on the *Dhoni*?

F – The women do the cooking and also help with the fishing operations at sea. Since we use disco nets (local name for gill nets) we need help with hauling on board which is done by the women. Women also harvest shells.

Q – What is the role of children?

F – Children also assist in the fishing activity. Very small children just accompany us on the boats.

Q – What are the main problems you faced during floods/cyclones?

M – During cyclones all the *dhonis* come back to the mangrove creeks, it is the safest place and close to the village where people can return to their homes. During the 1996 cyclones two of our children died. We had anchored near Bairyapalem creek and temporarily took shelter in the Bairyapalem village.

Q – Do you own any land?

M – No we don't own any agricultural land only a thatched house in Balustippa. If we had land why would we do this for a living? There is no alternative to this, now we exclusively do fishing because the forest department has made life very hard for us.

Q – How many times in a year do you visit land?

M – During major festivals like Sankranti and Shivratri the entire family spends 2 to 3 weeks on land. The women return to land during cyclones.

Q – Where do you fetch the drinking water from? Whose responsibility is it?

F2 – There is no drinking water facility in the area. We purchase one pot of water for Rs.10 from the private suppliers. There is one municipal tap here but the water only comes early in the morning between 6:00am and 7:00am which is when we go to sea. The tap has also been damaged by some local people and has not been fixed, so we are forced to buy water.

M – All *dhonis* have a barrel on board to store water. Each barrel can store 5 pots of water which lasts for 3 days, so we spend about Rs.80 per week. Women fetch the water.

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Q – How are disputes resolved in the community?

F – There is an informal group and there are the elders who head these groups. During disputes the elders intervene and try to resolve issues.

Q – Do the women have any groups?

F2 – Since we are natives of some other village we cannot participate or be part of any groups that are formed in this panchayat (referring to SHG). We have been in this place for the past 25 years but we have not rights to access any government schemes or be part of any groups. We do not have access to loans because we are not recognized as locals.

Q – What about their rights in the native village?

M – We have access to the PDS and old age pension in the native villages. We lose out on benefits of specific government schemes/grants (for fisherfolks) or funds distributed during cyclone relief etc., because the village elders do not consider us as locals since we spend more time away from home. This has been an issue for the past 25 years.

Q – Are there any women among the elders who participate in the decision making?

F – Women have formed their own groups in the villages in which there are women leaders but there are no women among the elders.

M – A lot of NGOs have come and gone. Politicians made several promises for our betterment but nothing has happened. An MLA recently promised us *pucca* houses but only the land based fisherfolks benefitted from it.

Q – What are the main problems they face living on a *dhoni*?

F2 – There are a lot of health problems like aches mainly because of the strenuous nature of the work. We visit the general hospital in Kakinada or private doctors in Paragalpetta.

F – There is also the problem of not having a proper house on land. We would also like to move on to *Nava* fishing and purchase better gear.

Q – There are a few boats with motors which also look like *Dhonis* and there are people cooking on board, what are those?

M – A on board motor is not suitable for a *dhoni*, it is only suitable for a *Nava*.

Q – But they are also cooking on board, do they belong to the same community?

M – They also belong to the same caste but they are engaged in coast, some estuarine fishing and voyage fishing. Since they spend a lot of time at sea they also live on the *Navas* and cook on them as well.

F – The only difference is that the entire crew is all men, there are no women on those boats.

Q – What do the women do during pregnancy?

F2 – Pregnant women stay on the boat upto the seventh month of their pregnancy after which they rent a house on land for the rest of the pregnancy and then they return to the boat after delivery.

Q – Many fishing communities have taboos associated with women going to sea for fishing, is it true among the *dhonis* too?

F – There are no such taboos. Women live on board so they also go to sea and help with the entire fishing activity. The women only help with hauling the net.

Q – What is a typical day for your family?

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M – We start fishing at 4:00 pm and we return at 6:00am the next day.

Q – What about the women, when does their start?

F – Our day also follows the same schedule but we are also responsible for other household duties like cooking, washing, cleaning etc. before we head out to sea. If we have daughters they lend a hand. We wake up at 6:00 am, make breakfast between 6:00am and 7:00am; make lunch from 9:00am to 12:00am and the evening dinner is at around 7:00pm.

M – We go to bed by 10:00pm.

Q – As a young person do you want to continue this profession? (question to Sangan Srinu S/o Gangadhari).

M2 – I want to move to other non-fishing activities. I have been on this boat since I was born, it does not earn enough and there are many associated health problems. I want to make more money.

Q – How much does a basket of shell fetch?

M – Rs.10 for 24kgs (each basket).

Q – What is the monthly income from fishing and shell collection?

M – We make about Rs.1000 per month about 50% of this comes from fishing and the rest from shell collection.

Q – What are the average family expenses?

M – Around Rs.4000 per month which includes water, food etc. We need 80kgs of rice per month.

F – A 25 kg bag costs Rs.600.

Q – So do you buy this from the PDS or the regular market?

M – We buy this from shops because we have to go to the village to buy the PDS rice. We have made arrangements with relatives who buy the rice for us from the PDS and we collect it from them.

Q – What about marriages? Are alliances sought in the same community?

M – We look for alliances in the same caste so it does not have to be a *dhoni* family, it could be a family that owns a *Nava* or a fiber boat. They are economically on the same range as us so there is no particular reason for that.

F – In fact children prefer to get married in a *dhoni* family.

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### **NAKKAPALLI WHOLESALE DRY FISH MARKET**

The Nakkapalli weekly wholesale dry fish market located 60kms from Vizag is one of the largest congregation of women dry fish vendors in Andhra Pradesh. Spread over an open area of 2 acres the market is visited by dry and salted fish traders from all over coastal Andhra Pradesh and some districts of Orissa. The market sits every Friday and is attended by nearly 3000 women and men. Women form nearly 75% of the total market population.

Nakkapalli is a night market, women travel great distances to Nakkapalli and it is early evening or late night by the time they arrive. The selling does not start until early hours of Friday but participants arrive as early as 5:00pm the previous day. During the visit the market looked sleepy until 2:00am. A lot of women had begun arriving from coastal areas like Uppada, Kakinada, Nellore etc. As the day progressed, into the wee hours of Friday the arrivals become more frequent, trucks, tempos and small autos arrived with large stocks packed in sacks and baskets. On an average over 5 vehicles arrived every hour.

Small processors prefer to travel with their products whereas the larger processors share-hire larger lorries and they themselves travel separately. The main actors of the market are traders (buyers), middlemen and the women vendors. The market contributes considerably to the local economy and provides several employment opportunities. About 100 manual loaders belonging to the Yadava community come to the market to make some quick money. Members of the Irakula community sell their cane baskets at Rs.70 a piece. A few local village residents provide sleeping cots at a rent of Rs.15 per night. The market begins to swell between 5:00 – 9:00am, women and traders frantically selling and buying, women shouting rates at open auctions and animatedly haggling with traders. There are several disputes over breaches of purchase commitment and payments which are, if unresolved, settled by the market fee collector. Fish is sold in heaps, lots and baskets. Traders and wholesalers come with their spring balance weighs scales and make an estimate of the quantity and size of the fish and decide on a purchase price. There is also a good demand for dried spoilt fish from poultry feed manufacturers. A price of about Rs. 10/kg is assured for dry spoilt fish.

Traders come from all over coastal Andhra, Nellore, Vizag, Srikakulam, Orissa etc. Mylapullu Raju a small trader from Srikakulam has been in the business for 20 years. The dry fish he purchases from Nakkapalli is sold to small head loaders and small fish vendors in Orissa. Mylapullu visits the market twice a month along with his partner and purchases fish worth Rs.10,000.

Women of the Nakkapalli market are in control of their lives. Many are the sole earners of their families supporting their husbands and children. Mylapalli Bangaramma from Pudimadaka village near Ankapalli has been in the profession for 30 years. She is a large scale processor and the sole bread winner of the family, she has no sons hence her husband had to sell his *theppa* because of high operating costs. She sells a particular variety of small shrimp and dry spoilt fish for poultry feed. On the day of the interview she had bought 86 sacks of dry shrimp, each sack was sold for Rs.900. Similarly 50 year old Koli Narayamma Bairyapalem lost her husband and three children in the 1990 cyclone after which she took to dry fish trade to make a living. Today she has established herself as a successful entrepreneur.

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### ***The infrastructure***

The market itself is very badly lit with just a few stray posts with tube lights strung onto them; a single street light meant for the highway throws some light on the entrance to the market. There are no toilets inside the market, women and men share an open space behind the storage sheds. The women feel that a few bathrooms could make things more convenient but at the same time they feel that building a bathroom is not an issue but maintaining it is. Nokamma began narrating horror stories of fish market bathrooms to her friends and concluded that the open bathrooms were better.

The only hand pump meant for drinking water is located at the entrance of the market but the groundwater is very hard and unfit for drinking. The pump water is only used for washing and cleaning. The market has 9 working sheds but they are not sufficient for all the women, most of them sit out in the open, during monsoons the market is reduced to half its size. Several fisherwomen depend exclusively on the income from processed fish during monsoons or cyclones when the fishing is banned; an important market like Nakkapalli becomes unusable in such times. The market has 2 storage sheds which were constructed for the women processors but is used by wholesalers and occasionally by large processors, the other women use plastic sheets to protect their goods during rains.

### ***Market taxes***

*Based on an interview with Devarapalli Dora – market tax fee collector.*

The process that leads to the fixing of the market fee each year is rather bureaucratic as explained by the authorized tax collector. A tender is floated by the *Mandal Parishad* every year and the highest bidder wins. The highest bid for the current year was Rs 14,00,000 quoted by Devarapalli Dora and his partners. This amount has to be recovered throughout the year through the fees collected from the cattle shandy which gathers every Wednesday and the dry fish shandy that gathers every Friday. The fee for 1 buffalo is Rs.10 and for one sack of fish is Rs.20-30 depending on the quantity and species of fish (high value fish even in a small basket is charged Rs.30). A fee was also charged from the traders until 5 years ago but it has stopped now because the traders began objecting and the *parishad* cancelled the trader's fee.

During the peak season there are nearly 3000 participants bringing in nearly 2000-2500 bags; this drops to 1000-1500 bags during the lean season. The market is more than 50 years old and the processors come from Puri, Paradeep, Uppada, East Godavari, Vizag, Kakinada, Madras etc. and the traders come from Nellore, Tadaipalligundam, Vizag, Srikakulam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Orissa etc. The market land belongs to the Nakkapalli *panchayat* the maintenance is done jointly by the *parishad* and the *panchayat*.

### ***Transportation***

The most commonly used vehicle was the small goods autos. A single goods auto can carry up to 20 bags. Fish is packed in 50kg sacks/baskets and prawns and *Estis* (a small shrimp) in 30 and 10 kg bags. Similarly a small van (Eicher or 507) can hold 35 bags of 50kgs each and accommodate 20 women. The vehicles also take the women back to their villages after the market. A round trip to the market at back from a place like Kakinada costs around Rs.1200 which includes fuel costs and police bribes at various points. On an average 5 women share a small auto and they prefer to travel with the goods. Smaller vehicles are more preferred as they pick and drop the women at the door step unlike a lorry that halts at a central point leading to extra loading/unloading expenses.

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However, several large processors continue to use large trucks/lorries. Shivaji a lorry driver caters to women from 3 places in Kakinada. Around 15 women share the cost of hiring one lorry which can carry about 150 sacks weighing 50kgs each. Women pay Rs.30 per sack/basket and they load their fish onto the lorry at the village and travel separately. Each sack is marked with identification initials/symbols unique to each processor. The operational costs are around Rs.1700 including the police bribes at different points. Sivaji owns 2 lorries, the big one carries goods to the market and the smaller one transports the women. When the market ends the small one takes the women back home and the big lorry is hired by the large traders to transport their purchased goods to various locations.

Bondo Nagaratnam and Chokka Bhulokamma are business partners and recent entrants into the dry fish trade. They have been coming to Nakkapalli for five years now. On the issue of safety they say “there are no harassment or safety issues in transit as most women travel in groups, the market is also very secure since there are a lot of people around.”

### ***Middlemen***

The market has about 70 middlemen mostly belonging to non-fishing Yadava community. These men have regular clientele of wholesalers and processors who use their services to buy and sell fish. Ladavada Surababu a local middle man makes his living through commissions from the wholesalers. He swears by the quality of the fish he finds and claims to have the best processors on his list. He receives Rs.10 per bag from the traders and an unfixed amount from the processors for bringing customers.

### ***Processors from Orissa***

Poleramma and her husband Koda Apparao come to Nakkapalli all the way from Shandkhud in Orissa. Around 50-80 women from coastal Orissa participate in the weekly market. Most of them are natives of Andhra who have moved to Orissa for better prospects in fishing. They return to their native villages only during *Ugadi* (harvest) festival. Poleramma deals with products worth Rs.25,000 to Rs.50,000 every week. Transportation is the main expense for Oriya women with an average trip to Nakkpalli costing around Rs.7000 plus miscellaneous expenses of Rs.2000 which includes toll, food and police bribes. The Orissa government also charges a sales tax of Rs.400 per lorry carrying fish outside the state. The other major expenses include transportation of fish from the Paradeep port to the village, which is around Rs.150.

A man from the community travels with the lorry and the women take the local train from Paradeep to Bhuvaneshwar, from Bhuvaneshwar to Tuni (via the Konkan or the East Coast Express). They reach Tuni by 1:00 am on Friday and take a bus to Nakapalli. Travelling is usually unreserved and is very strenuous, taking around 3 days. On arrival the Orissa processors can rest under their own thatch shed which is also used to store goods temporarily.

### ***Access to credit and loans***

Loans are usually available through self help groups in villages. Andhra is particularly well established network of self help groups. Several women who are not part of a group borrow money from village moneylender at a weekly interest of Rs.2 per Rs.100. Medium processors like Koli Narayanamma require loans of Rs.20,000 every month and pay a weekly interest of Rs.400.

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The Orissa processors face a tough challenge getting credit. Kondala Nokallamma, a 60 year old fish processor says “there is no credit available in Orissa for the Andhra fishers because they are not trusted in Orissa. So we borrow from financiers at the Nakapalli market who charge a weekly interest of Rs.50 per Rs.1000.”

### ***Conclusion***

As a non-participant observer Nakkapalli can be a really fascinating market especially for researchers who can see fisherwomen from almost the whole of Andhra Pradesh and get a glimpse into the diversity of the dry fish trade. The fisherwomen of Nakkapalli are self made women who have spent a fair share of their lives in the trade. Many women like Mylapalli Bangaramma and Koli Narayanamma are the sole bread winners of their families. The women have resolved most of their trade issues on their own and do not expect much from the government except for better facilities at the market, if not, at least a shed.

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## **ANDHRA PRADESH**

### **Fish smoking at Boddu Chinna Venkatayapalem (BCV Palem)**

Smoking is an effective way of curing fish for preservation traditionally used by coastal communities for centuries. In tropical countries, especially in West Africa, parts of north-western South America and the Indo-Pacific regions, fish smoking is an economic method of prolonging storage life while also imparting desirable flavours to the fish<sup>3</sup>. In India, the Laccadive Islands, some pockets in the west and east coast, the Godavari and Krishna deltas in Andhra Pradesh are traditional fish smoking centers<sup>4</sup>. There are nearly 52 villages in Andhra Pradesh where fish smoking or *Jatthaga* is practiced widely. BCV Palem and Ramanapalem are two villages where smoking has been traditionally practiced.

Smoking is primarily done by women in the community; the women are also responsible for processing and marketing. Men are responsible for fishing and wood collection from the mangroves. There is some help from the men during processing but it is not a common practice.

#### Traditional Smoking

Smoking is done in small traditional kilns which are rectangular huts, with mud plastered walls on a skeleton of mangrove wood and bamboo poles. Roofs are thatched reed grass and palm leaves and the floors are packed and paved with mud and cow dung. BCV palem has 25 such kilns as the majority of them use the traditional method of smoking.

Inside the kiln the semi-sun dried fish is laid on a bamboo mat spread on a raised platform. Two or three fire pits below the platform hold burning fire wood/coconut husk and slowly cook the fish at a temperature of around 45 to 50 degree Celsius. The fish is smoked in batches, the small varieties like mullets and prawns are spread on the mats while ribbon fish and eels are hung on metal loops under the mats. As the fish cooks it reduces in size and make space for the fresh batch, the first batch is allowed to cook further. A single batch of fish weighing around 50kgs could take between 18 and 24 hours to cook after being sun dried for 7 to 8 hours. Prawns are quicker to cook and in great demand hence many traders like Voleti Appayamma exclusively prefer prawns.

#### Improved Smoking Kilns

Modern kilns were introduced under DFID's Post-Harvest Fisheries Program in the mid 1990's to improve efficiency and production. The project was executed in two phases under which two different designs were introduced. The first smaller prototype was tried in BCV Palem and an improved larger version was introduced in Ramannapalem in phase two. That is the reason why traditional kilns are still preferred in BCV Palem because most of the women are large traders and the small kilns do not hold large quantities. The women are also not happy with the quality of smoking in the modern kilns. The women in Ramannapalem on the other hand prefer their larger kilns to the traditional method.

BCV Palem has a population of around 3000, fishing is the mainstay in the area. There are 10 large scale processors, 15 small scale and 50 to 60 head loaders selling fresh and smoked fish. Penpottulakshmi has been in the business for 30 years and owns a kiln. She is one of 10 large

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<sup>3</sup> Where is fish smoked in India? Come to BCV Palem, Andhra Pradesh by Venkatesh Salagrama, Bay of Bengal News – September 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Introduction of an Improved Fish Smoking Method in Andhra Pradesh – Post-Harvest Fisheries Project, DFID.

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scale processors in the village dealing with fish worth Rs 300,000 every month. The fish is sold at weekly markets like Nakapalli, Dowlaishwaram, Kakinada, Amalapuram, Malikipuram, Ambajipetta, Pithapuram and to smaller traders and vendors who sell in surrounding villages or local markets.

Ratsapadma, a door to door fish vendor, procures her fish from large kiln owners like Penpottulakshmi. She sells fish worth Rs 3000-Rs 4000 every week for which she also gets credit from the kiln owners. Prawns are mostly in high demand and hence are processed in large quantities in comparison to other fishes; the prawns from BCV Palem are sold as far as Hyderabad. Several fish smokers also add red food coloring to their prawns in order to give the a healthy red hue. Availability of high value species like Pomfrets and Seer fish has reduced drastically due to competition with exporters. The most common varieties of fish used for smoking are mullets, eels, mudskippers, ribbon fish, all varieties of jew fish, mackerels, Indian salmon, croakers etc. Some varieties of prawns especially a small white shrimp called Palaemon Tenopus is also in huge demand.

Transportation is not an issue for these women, they use small autos and tempos, which is quiet a luxury compared to bullock carts used earlier recalls Penpottulakshmi. The operational costs of a kiln and costs of fish procurement have increased several folds but the market has remained the same over the past 30 years.

Several kinds of materials are used as fuel for smoking, mangrove wood, cow dung cakes, coconut husk, dry palm leaves etc. A van load of coconut husk costs Rs 5000. Mangrove wood is most commonly used but it is scarce now due to several restrictions on mangrove wood harvesting. The men in the community are generally responsible for wood collection; wood is also purchased from the Shoe Dhoni community living along the mangrove creeks. A Dhoni load of mangrove wood which approximately weighs 250kgs costs Rs 800-1000.

Gangamma another large trader buys and sells products worth Rs.3 to 4 lakhs a month during peak season out of which she makes Rs.20,000 if the market is good and loses between 5000 to 10,000 during bad landings. She makes an investment of Rs.5000 to Rs.10000 every year in the way of loans to Nava fishermen and gains exclusive rights to their catch. An average of Rs 2000 to Rs 4000 is spent on transportations and Rs 40 to Rs 50 per day is paid to processing assistants who do peeling and gutting. The other expenses include market fees and packaging material (baskets, jute sacks, ropes etc.).

All the accounts were managed in the head as long as the operations were small but since the operations have expanded Gangamma has had to introduced a book keeping system. She gets some help from one of her sons studying in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Self Help Groups*

There are 130-140 Self Help Groups (SHGs) in the village operating monthly savings schemes. An amount of Rs 30 is deposited by the members every month and after 6 to 12 months of savings the women are entitled to loans of up to Rs 1,50,000 through government banks. The loans are only sanctioned to groups of 10 – 15 women. The SHGs have been formed under the DRDA and for convenience the government has grouped SHGs into Gram Samaikya Sanga (GSS), each GSS has 10-15 SHGs under it. The members of these Sangas can benefit from food security programs, employment programs and retirement pension programs like the YSR Abhaya Hastam Scheme.

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### **Ramannapalem**

Ramannapalem is situated about 15kms from Kakinada and 5kms from BCV Palem. The total population of the village is 2000. Around 18 families are involved in fish smoking of which 6 use the traditional kilns and the rest use the modern improvised kilns. The fish is procured everyday from the local landing center, Kakinada, Chollangi, Kumapjakam and surrounding villages.

Ramannapalem and BCV Palem were chosen by the DFID for its improved smoking kilns project. While BCV Palem has rejected the modern kilns the women in Ramannapalem find the kilns very useful. In traditional smoking kilns the women suffered from several burns in the hands and feet. Spending a long time in smoke filled rooms causes breathing and eye problems. The heat emanating from fuel pits directly impacts the abdomen of the standing women resulting in several gynecological complications.

According to Malla Satyamma one of the many smoked fish traders in Ramannapalem “the new kilns are more efficient as the heat is all captured inside the closed doors and the smoke escapes through the high chimneys. The women in BCV Palem deal with larger quantities compared to women in Ramannapalem hence the new kilns are sufficient for our production”. An average small trader like Malla deals with fish worth Rs 10,000 per week.

Women in Ramannapalem prefer settling their accounts in cash on a daily basis which spares them the complication of credit accounting and repayment during sale. Small amounts of money ranging from Rs 500 to 1000 are paid as advance to Nava fishermen who repay it in fish catch. There is more emphasis on fish processing than prawns unlike BCV Palem.

Balsadi Mahalakshmi has been in the profession for around 40 years she says, “smoking is primarily a womens’ activity, men assist with preparing the fish and arranging the fish in the trays in addition to fishing”. Sometimes help is hired for processing at the rate of Rs 2 per kg. Fish landings earlier were sufficient for local demand but now the landings have reduced and the women have to travel to other areas to procure fish. This has increased their operational costs of transportation to these villages and ice for preservation of fish.

While fish smoking is still widely practiced in more than 50 villages in Andhra Pradesh the trade itself has not seen much improvement in comparison to salted and dry fish trades. The market for smoked fish is restricted to the Godavari area and has failed to expand. Given the unique flavour that smoking renders to the fish there is a good potential for exports.

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## **KARNATAKA**

### **Malpe Meenugara Mahileyara Sahakari Sangha**

Malpe is an important port and fishing harbor in Udupi district on the Karnataka coast, it is situated at the mouth of the [Udyavara](#) river, also known as the Malpe River. Fisheries is the primary occupation in Udupi district. It has the second largest fisher population after Dakshin Kannada—of the 156 marine fishing villages across Karnataka, Udupi alone has 59<sup>5</sup>. The other main occupations are tile-manufacturing and the coconut industry.

### **Introduction**

The *Malpe Meenugara Mahileyara Sahakari Sangha* (Malpe Fisherwomens Cooperative Society) is considered one of the most successful women's co-operative in Karnataka. However, its success pales in comparison to the success of the fishermen co-operatives in the state

The celebration of International Women's Year in 1977 inspired the fisherwomen of Malpe to start something serious for the economic empowerment and development of women in Malpe. The idea was encouraged by the men, especially members of the fishermen's co-operative society in Malpe. This gave the women courage and confidence and led them to take a decision to make the International Women's Year a memorable one. The Malpe Fisherwomen's Co-operative Society was thus registered, enabling them to access institutional support. The co-operative society started to function in 1978 with a share capital of Rs 35,000 from the Government of Karnataka and Rs 17,000 from the women.

### **Membership**

Today the total membership of the society has increased to over 1200 from 800 in 1997. This includes 900 dry fish vendors and 300 fresh fish vendors. The dry fish vendors sell at weekly markets at Udupi, Adi and Kalyanpur and the fresh fish vendors sell at Udupi daily fish market, the harbour and door-to-door. The members mostly belong to areas surrounding Malpe, like Kodavur, Ambaladi, Thenkanidiyur, Badanidiyur and Kadaikadu. Several daily wage labourers from the harbour like Sangamitra, who make an average of Rs 200 per day for loading 1000 kgs of fish, also feel secure with a membership in the co-operative.

The co-operative has a nine-member committee, of which seven are elected and two are official representatives from the Government Fisheries Department. The term of office of the committee has been increased to five from three years. The board meets once a month and a General Body meeting is held once a year. During elections the women vote by show of hands in favour of candidates they support. Radha Suvarna who has been part of the society since 1982 is the current president serving her consecutive second term.

There are currently two staff members in the co-operative — a female secretary and a female sales assistant. The final decision-making authority lies with the committee. Committee members are given an honorarium of Rs1200 per year and the other official representatives are given a sitting fee of Rs100 for each meeting that they attend.

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<sup>5</sup> CMFRI Census 2005

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The society owns an office building which is located amidst two fishmeal processing plants, less than 2km from the Malpe harbour. The co-operative was managed by the secretary Vidyavathy for almost 20 years until she retired in 2009 to be replaced by Ms.Nisha, a young woman from the fisher community who took charge in early 2009.

A piece of land was leased to the society in 1992 for the purposes of fish drying for a period of 15 years. The lease has now been extended to 25 years. The plot size of approximately 21,600 sq.ft now costs the society Rs5.50 per sq.ft, a five fold increase since 1997. The women are now battling the plans of the port authority to charge them an additional service tax of Rs31,000 per year. An additional expense of this nature could further eat into the profits of the members.

**Activities** – The main activities of the co-operative are to supply salt to its members and help them access credit and other government schemes. The society also has a few income generating schemes like the salt supply business. The total profit of the co-operative in 2006-07 was Rs.1,08,668 and in 2007-08 it was 20,488 (\*the reason behind the decline in profits could not be ascertained).

*Salt Business:* The society purchases a bag of salt at Rs 135 from Mangalore and sells at Rs 165 to the members. The profit of Rs 30 covers all expenses of transportation, storage and labour. The total income from the sale of salt in 2007-08 was Rs4,80,635.

*Schemes:* The society helps its members to access several state and central government schemes available for fish vendors. Women seek loans mostly for working capital or to meet daily expenses. Women also seek loans for wedding/festival expenses for which the society encourages women to invest in savings or deposit schemes. The most successful have been –

The *Meenugarika Uppanirdeshakam* scheme offered by the *Matsya Swalambana* under which a group of 4 to 20 women are eligible for a loan up to Rs100,000 (not exceeding Rs5000 per individual). The loan is to be repaid on a monthly basis at the rate of Rs 500 per month. The government subsidy on form of a partial waiver of Rs2500 on this loan makes it a very attractive option for the women.

- The *Dakshinakannada and Udipi Jila Sahakari Meenumarata Federation*, the federation of fish co-operatives, offers an interest free loan up to Rs5000 per individual to a group of 10 women. The women have to repay an amount of Rs520 per month, which includes a service charge of Rs20.
- The society itself offers loans of up to Rs15,000 at the rate of 14% p.a.

In addition members also subscribe to the Central Group Insurance scheme for occupational accidents under which the members pay a premium of Rs600 per annum and an equal amount is contributed by the state and the central government.

One of the society's main objectives at inception was to provide transportation to members at reasonable rates. For this the society received two second-hand trucks from the National Co-operative Development Corporation and the Central Social Welfare Board. The high operational costs and lack of proper assistance led to several losses and eventually the trucks had to be sold. The committee's members have decided to drop transportation assistance from the society's agenda since the women now prefer using shared tempos which provide better service and more independence.

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### **The Udipi Fish Market**

The nearest market to Malpe is in Udipi where the fresh fish vendors congregate everyday. The market is also shared by dry fish vendors once a week on Wednesdays. Around 200 women use the market every day between 7:00am and 9:00pm. On an average a single fisherwoman deals with fish worth Rs 5000 to Rs 8000 per week. The fish is procured from the Malpe harbour or from one of the several local landing sites in the fishing villages in Udipi. Unlike the dry fish processors most of the fresh fish vendors are small traders procuring the fish directly from the fishermen. The major expenses include transportation which is an average of Rs 40 per head and ice at Rs 10 per slab of 10 kgs. A market fee of Rs 3 per crate is charged by the Udipi municipality.

Members of the society are also present at the market and they intervene during disputes within market users or with authorities. The women face several problems due to lack of water, hygiene and bathrooms. Water has to be drawn from an under ground borewell because the taps are broken. Several customers complain about the hygiene conditions in the market, the market space is also shared by several chicken and mutton stalls which causes further nuisance due to the lack of proper disposal facilities.

The nearest ice plant is in Malpe and there are no adequate storage facilities for ice at the market so the women face a lot of problems with storage of ice. Most of them use an old rubber tube to line the top of their baskets, the rubber tube is used as a shallow container to hold the ice and fish is laid on top. However, within a few hours the ice melts and forms puddles of colored water within the basket, diminishing the quality of fish. The lack of security at the market also discourages women from leaving their belongings behind for storage. These issues have been raised but not in an organized fashion so the government has failed to act upon it.

Api Bangera and Baby Bangera are the proposed president and vice president of the Udipi Taluk Fresh Fish Vendors Society, which is due for registration in February 2010. The society plans to take up these issues with the government. They are currently organizing to fight the plans of the Karnataka Fisheries Development Corporations (KFDC) to open fish kiosks in Udipi. The KFDC proposes to invest over 2.5 crores in setting up a chain of hygienic air conditioned fish kiosks across Karnataka. The fish vendors in Mangalore and Udipi fear a loss of their livelihoods because these fish stores divert their existing customers.

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## **GOA**

### **The Madgaon Fishmarket**

Goa saw its first organized fisher rights movement in the 1970s under the Goencha Ramponkaranchi Ekvott (GRE). The fishers of Goa were the first to demand a protected zone for the traditional fishermen. However, the GRE and many others that followed this historical movement have overlooked the needs of the fisher women of Goa.

Each fisher woman of Goa has fought her independent battle to achieve economic and social independence. The remarkable transition in the status of these women from foot vendors to successful business women is a fascinating case in itself. The women from the Madgaon fish market are well known for their feisty spirit and they also command the attention of their government that has built with one of the best planned fish markets in Madgaon. It is spread over three large sheds of nearly 10,000 sqft each. The sheds are identical and are designed to accommodate the wet fish and the dry fish vendors separately. Square platforms on a height of three feet are allotted to each vendor at a one time payment of a Rs10,000 and a daily rent of Rs5 per day. A part of the third shed is used for fish cutting but the excess space in this shed remains unused.

The Madgaon market is often cited as a model for fish market designs in other parts of India. The credit for which would also perhaps go to its women because when they moved into the new market they found it to be very badly designed with very little aisle space. Strong objections were raised to this and the municipal corporation altered the design immediately. The market is now spacious with adequate ventilation, water supply, good sanitation and drainage facilities. Adjoining the fish market are two similar sheds one for a vegetable market and one for provision/general stores.

The retail market also housed the daily wholesale market until 1990. The wholesale market, also known as the Madgaon FDC, is now shifted to an open ground 1km away from the retail market. Most of the 500 fish vendors from the retail market in Madgaon and other markets across Goa procure their fish from the whole sale market. The splitting of the markets might have eased the problems of management for the municipality but it has increased the hardships of the women who now have to worry about transporting the fish. This costs the women an additional Rs.10-Rs15 per crate to travel by bus. Ice costs Rs40 per slab at the wholesale market and Rs60 at the retail market so women also prefer buying ice along with the fish at the wholesale market.

According to a Kaitan Dias has been selling fish for 35 years says that informal credit is available for vendors as high as Rs50,000 which has to be repaid within 8 days. Several money lenders from Kerala also offer loans at an interest of Rs250 for every Rs1000 which is repayable everyday. Many agents are also present at the wholesale market who commission deals between wholesalers and vendors for a small commission per crate. Several head loader like Lakshmi also visit the market to make their daily purchases. Lakshmi prefers selling door to door because she finds the various costs at the retail market unaffordable and also to avoid the severe competition that she feels eats into each others profits.

The dry fish market at Madgaon is mainly dominated by women but the large stockists/wholesalers are men. These wholesalers deal with dry fish and a whole range of fish products like pickles, papads, condiments, fish powder, tastemakers, oil etc. The most noticeable

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was the practice of fish packaging (in transparent plastic bags) which is probably adopted by the women in response to customer demand. The packed fish is more presentable and perhaps fetches a better price in comparison to fish sold openly.

A major problem the women faced was due to the vendors who sell fish at the wholesale market ground and outside the old market at the Kadamba bus stop where these women used to sell fish earlier. This eats into their profits and they blame the bad regulation for this. It was however not ascertained why these vendors do not use excess space in the Madgaon market.

### **The Mapusa Municipal Market**

The Mapusa municipal market in north Goa is the second largest fish market in Goa after Madgaon. Over 300 women vendors visit the market everyday. The market is currently at a temporary location at the Mapusa wholesale market adjoining the old retail market building. The old market structure was severely dilapidated for the past 8 years and has been ignored by the authorities. The old market was finally shut down 5 months back after a lot of protests by the women due to roof collapses in several places. The women finally decided to confront the authorities when a piece of the roof fell and injured an 80 year old woman 6 months ago. The women were then shifted to an open ground behind the old market structure. The proposed market will have bathrooms, several water taps, a wide underground drainage system and a canteen among other facilities.

Sashikala Govekar is the biggest merchant in the Mapusa market and she holds a huge stock which she sells to other smaller head loaders and smaller vendors at the market. Sashikala is the leader of the market vendors association and in the forefront of the women's agitation she says that "the temporary market was an open ground meant for the wholesale market and it did not have a roof or flooring. This caused several health and hygiene problems for the women. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May we took out a rally to demand better facilities following which the municipal corporation put a roof and stone flooring". There are still several problems with temporary site for instance due to a lack of space, some women are forced to sit out in the sun. A woman vendor from Maharashtra died of a heat stroke recently, following which the women put up plastic sheets to cover the exposed areas. The newly laid floor is too slippery which causes several accidents. There is also a lack of sanitation and keeping the place clean is the responsibility of the vendors. The place is also not secure, there have been two thefts at the market where women lost several thousand worth of stocks. Now a watchman has been hired at a salary of Rs.5000 per month. The daily market fee is Rs.10 per basket and Rs.40 per vehicle for parking.

The women are targeted by the municipality on various occasions. Recently the authorities targeted the women for using plastic bags after a new law was passed against the use of plastic bags. Mary (75), the oldest and most respected fisher woman in the market said that it was not easy to challenge the fisher women of Mapusa because they have been through much in their professional life already. The market itself has been shifted to several times – the initial municipal market was at Kadamba from there it was shifted to Joggerly Market to the Mapusa Vegetable Market (what is now the vegetable market) to the Mapusa Mutton sellers market and finally to the market which is now under construction.

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## MAHARASHTRA

### Crawford Market/Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Mandi

Mumbai has nearly 160 large and small fish markets, of which the Crawford, Malad, Andheri and Colaba are the biggest ones. The *Maharaj Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Mandi*, also known as the Crawford Fish Market, is the largest fish market in Mumbai, spread over an area of more than 20,000 sqft on two levels. During the fishing season nearly 25,000 people visit the market according to the Maharashtra Fishermen Cooperative Federation at the Shivaji Market. The ground floor is occupied by retail fish vendors sitting on platforms along the walls and pillars. The first floor and the open spaces around the market are occupied by wholesale merchants. According to one of the agents at the market there are over 150 wholesale merchants operate in Shivaji Market of which only 85 are officially registered. The market has one of the widest variety of fish on sale. The most common are Bombay duck, anchovies, prawns, sardines, pomfrets and several other high-value species. Most of the high-value catch comes from Gujarat and other parts of Maharashtra.

Like any other fish market the Shivaji Market also supports a lot of allied trades and businesses, such as ice crushers/loaders, labourers, knife sellers, knife sharpeners, fish cutters, basket weavers, cleaners etc. The market is also a source of livelihood for hundreds of manual labourers of various kinds. The market starts at 3 am in the morning and gets busier as the day progresses.

Fishermen come directly to the market to sell their catch. They deal with wholesale merchants either directly or through a co-operative society. The wholesalers of Shivaji Market are notorious for their malpractices, such as meddling with weighing scales, which discourages several fishers from dealing with them directly.

Surekha is from a fishing family. Her father and three brothers go fishing on the family-owned boat and she has recently taken over the charge of bringing the fish to Shivaji market from her mother. A fluent English-speaker, she has passed her high school, and has been engaged as a baby sitter. She said that she preferred her job as a baby sitter—she has been forced to come into fish vending because of her family problems. She leaves home at midnight to arrive at the market by 3:00 am, and heads back home by 9:00am.

Surekha's family has always preferred doing business through the co-operative to avoid being duped by the wholesale merchants. The *Maharashtra Rajya Machhimar Sahakari Sangh* is one of the several co-operatives working inside the market which buys and sells fish on a commission basis. The society charges Rs6 on every Rs100 of sales. There are several such government and private co-operatives in the market offering competitive commission rates but most fishermen prefer to go to the government-run cooperatives for better security.

On the day of the interview Surekha sold fish worth Rs11,000 to the co-operative but she says sales usually range from Rs5000 to Rs60,000. She brings her catch once a week through a tempo truck that she shares with 7 other women at the cost of Rs30 per basket/crate. The other major expenses include the loading charges of Rs14 per box and ice at Rs300 for a 50kg slab.

Several women vendors visit the market to buy fish for sale at other smaller markets across Mumbai. Some women also bring locally abundant varieties and take back rare varieties to be

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sold at their local markets. Some women were also seen buying fish heads of certain large fish for sale in distant markets.

Hordes of men with blue and orange boxes on their heads move in and out of the market. These men are either fish vendors from Uttar Pradesh or daily labourers. A large community of nearly 250 men from Uttar Pradesh make a living by selling fish. The women vendors spoke with a lot of anger about the *bhaiyas* from Uttar Pradesh for spoiling their market. The *bhaiyas* are headloaders who procure their fish from the Shivaji Market and sell it door-to-door in various residential localities in Mumbai. Sumitra explained the impact of the *bhaiyas* on the market, “these men are very hard working and strong, they go from door-to-door, Mumbai is full of multistoried flats and fisherwomen do not have so much stamina to reach all these homes. The *bhaiyas* cater to a large area around the market where most of our customers reside.” The men vendors are informally organized and engage in collective purchasing to increase their bargaining power, which is something that the women don’t do. The women also pay a rent of Rs1200 every year to the BMC for the platform space they use. However, local activists believe that the controversy over the UP fish vendors is manufactured for political gains by local parties.

Despite the crowd the market users seemed to have introduced a system of movement to ease the congestion; it was similar to the movement of traffic on a two-way road. Serpentine queues made their way through the market floor. The market has poor ventilation and inadequate drainage. Maintenance of proper hygiene is a challenge at such a large market. Most vendors lay out their fish directly on the floor without plastic sheets. Spoilt fish is discarded in the aisles along the platforms where the women sit with their fish. There are two large paid toilets/bathrooms in the market maintained by the Bombay Municipal Corporation. Running water is available for limited hours so water is stored in large drums. One of the toilets was hijacked by the men who use it for bathing. The women complained about it but seem to have evolved their own way of dealing with it—they did not seem to facing much trouble if they needed to use the bathroom. One of the bathrooms, with a board reading *Koli Mahila Society* (Koli women’s Society), is a reserved bathroom for women vendors. The bathroom is maintained by the society but a few men were seen using it too.

Several well-dressed men with large account books also strut up and down the crowded aisles; these are accountants working with one of the 150 wholesale fish marketing firms operating in the market. There are six large ice crushing units at various locations within the market. These provide ice almost around the clock to the fish vendors and wholesalers.

### **The Koli Mahila Society**

The Koli Mahila Society, a women vendor’s society belonging to Koli community of Maharashtra, has its office inside the Shivaji market. There are 11 members on the board of the society. The chairperson of the society is Maya Rajan Thanekar. The society has at least 150 members. Women come to Shivaji Market from many different places like Colaba, Govandi, Guranwale, More, Vadala etc. The society’s main activity is a monthly saving scheme of Rs20 for a loan kitty, which the women can avail after one year of membership. Rekha Dinkar Khade, the Treasurer of the society, has been selling fish for 18 years. Women vendors like Rekha either bring their fish from harbours like *Bhav Ka Dhakka* or buy it from the wholesale merchants at the Shivaji market. A typical day for a vendor like Rekha begins at 5:00 am and ends at noon. She deals with fish worth Rs4000-5000 everyday. A box of crushed ice costs Rs60 at the market, and Rekha needs around three boxes everyday. Most women share transportation costs, with a small van costing around Rs80 per head.

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The women are well aware of the various government schemes and avail several loans from the government to support their business. The *Maharashtra Macchimar Kirti Samiti* also helps the women with loans and relief during natural calamities like floods. The women vendors have been receiving loans up to Rs2000 from the co-operative every year since 2008.

Women vendors do not procure high-value fish normally—most of the high value fish can be found at the wholesale market and it is all procured by the big exporting firms. Rekha says that there are no harassment issues with the police, the corporation or the men at the market. The Shivaji Market is fascinating in a lot of aspects like the city of Mumbai which lends it a unique character. The sheer enormity of the operations at the market is overwhelming. Unfortunately neglect and apathy robs it of its true charisma but the dynamic fisherwomen of Mumbai fill in for it.

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## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **The Satpati Fishermens Sarvodaya Sahakari Society Limited**

The history of the Indian fishermen co-operative movement would be incomplete without the mention of the Satpati Fishermens' Sarvodaya Sahakari Society. Satpati is in the Palghar Taluk of Thane District and one of the biggest fishing grounds in Maharashtra. It's location around a natural harbour makes fishing a lucrative business hence more than half the population of the village is involved in fishing and allied activities. The village is home to several freedom fighters and has a revolutionary history which is also the spirit behind the foundation of the Satpati co-operative. Founded by a well known freedom fighter Narayanan Dandekar in 1944, it is one of the oldest co-operatives in Maharashtra. India was still under the British rule during those days and it was prohibited to start a co-operative society in the presence of another one in the region. Mumbai already had a society but *Thane* district had a dissolved consumer welfare society which created a vacancy for another society. The license from the consumer society was acquired to start the Fisheries Welfare Society in 1948.

Several issues plagued the fishermen of Maharashtra at the time. For instance the unit of measurement before the co-operatives began working was a *Kodi* (*1Kodi is equal to 22 pieces of fish*), it fetched only around Rs.5 per *Kodi* irrespective of the size/weight of the fish. The fish merchants in Mumbai were informally unionized and were known to collude among themselves to arrest market prices which led to a lot of losses. In addition the fishermen were also charged Rs.1 as market taxes and Rs.1 as commission by middlemen and then they also had to spend on transportation. This left the fishermen with very little money for themselves.

In the initial years the main activity of the society was to transport the fish from the landing sites to the markets in Mumbai, but the issue of middlemen and traders was still prevalent. The fishers from *Thane* district started the *Mumbai Koli Bandhu Pedi* which is today known as the Maharashtra Rajya Fishermen Co-operative Federation. The *Pedi* assumed the role of brokerage and soon took control of the market rating/auctioning system which assured the fishermen fair prices for their catch. The society also set up its own ice factory and salt pan in 1950. In 1958 it was renamed The Satpati Fishermen Sarvodaya Sahakari Society after the *Sarvodaya* Movement of Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

Today the society has a membership of 3200 fishermen and 450 fisherwomen from the Satpati area. With a large male membership, the services offered to the women members are limited to subsidized ice and cold storage. Each woman is entitled to nearly 10kgs of ice but during scarcity the boat owners get the priority. The society's current role as an agent between the fishermen and the exporters is also its primary income-generating activity.

According to Nandharam Patil, a member of the managing committee, "the Satpati society is the only one in the region to follow the practice of price fixing. The board of directors holds negotiations with exporters every 3 months to fix prices for the fish." This system ensures a fair price to the fishermen and eliminates price speculation. The system of procurement is fairly simple assuring the fishermen a fair price and an immediate payment. All the export quality fish lands at the society where it is graded and weighed in the presence of the exporters and sold. Details of the sale are retained by the society and the amount due is deposited into the account of the fishermen on the same day, after deducting relevant dues. The fishermen can also avail diesel, fishing gear and ice on a credit basis which is later recovered from the sale proceeds of their fish. Even if the sale is made on credit the society advances the payment to the fishermen.

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While the society has been very effective on several counts, the lack of initiative to address women's issues due to their weaker representation, is acknowledged. Just like all the co-operatives, two positions on the board are reserved for women due to government directives, but these women have not been able to initiate change. One of the women members, Vimla, says that, "being part of the society has not helped us much; we deal with most of our issues ourselves." The women vendors do not even procure fish from the society because of higher costs. They prefer procuring it directly from the landing site and spending money on transporting it to the society themselves. A lot of women vendors sell at local markets in and around Satpati but they face a unique situation. More than 90 per cent of the fish in Satpati goes through the society which maintains a standard quality and procurement price, usually higher than the market price. This situation leads to a higher procurement price even at the landing site hence hiking fish prices. Jaywanti Patil, a local head loader says, "most of our customers are from the low income group and they do not buy our fish because the fish from the surrounding areas like Palghar and Vasai is cheaper."

Many women also sell their fish at markets like Shivaji and Sason Dock in Mumbai. Jaywanti had been taking fish to the city until 2008 but she has downsized her operations now because of her old age. Though profits are much higher in Mumbai, most women opt out of long-distance travel as they grow older. An active leader in the struggle for fisherwomen's right to travel by the Mumbai local trains, Jaywanti says that most women have stopped using trains now because tempos/autos are much more convenient. Most of the women vendors use shared transport and prefer small vehicles like share autos. Vimla has been in the profession for 40 years now. She procures her fish from the Satpati harbour every alternate day. She sells some of the fresh fish at the local markets and leaves some for drying. The dry fish is sold in distant tribal areas around Satpati. Transportation is not as challenging as the *Tonga* days recalls Vimla—now a rickshaw drops her to the edge of the jungles from where she travels by foot to the villages inside the jungle.

As a fishermen's co-operative, Satpati has only been able to avail government schemes for fishermen. The society has received loans for 40 boats from National Credit Development Corporation in the last year alone. Occasionally a scheme for fisherwomen is also availed like the Marine Products Export Development Authority scheme under which ice boxes were provided to fish vendors. These schemes usually fall short of their projected expectation; in Satpati only 200 of the 2000 women that applied received the boxes.

Meetings take place at least once every month or at shorter intervals based on the need and urgency of the issues. Fish prices are fixed in consultation with committee members at these meetings. Other fishing-related issues are brought to the notice of the society by the members and decisions are taken at the monthly meetings. Lobbying on policy issues is done by the elected board members at the national or state level. The society also work with other societies on common issues, like the recent restrictions imposed on fishing operations near the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation oil platforms in 2008, due to security concerns. The Satpati society itself is part of a federation of societies like the Thane Zilla Macchimar Co-operative Sangh, Maharashtra Macchimar Sahakari Sangh and the Maharashtra Macchimar Kruti Samiti. The latter is an organization formed to fight for the rights of fishers and mobilize fishers at the grassroot level to oppose unfavorable government policies.

According to the members of the managing committee of the society, a lot of educated youngsters in Satpati prefer getting into fishing because of better prospects. This is especially true for

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Satpati, unlike other regions, because of the strong fisher's movement which has ensured better security for fishers. The women vendors of Satpati, however, are still looking for greater support and protection from the co-operative. Several fishermen, like Moreshwar Tare, ex-chairman of the society, have managed to establish several successful businesses, including an Emu farm, with the initial help from the society for their fishing ventures but single women vendors like Jaywanti and Vimla might have to wait for better times.

### **Versova Koli Sahakari Sarvodaya Society Limited**

The Versova Koli Sahakari Sarvodaya Society (VKSSS) was started in 1951 to facilitate the availability of diesel and ice to fishermen from Versova. VKSSS is primarily a fishermen society but there are no restrictions on women's membership. Women form nearly 40 per cent of the total membership of 2317. Two positions in the 13 member managing committee are reserved for women as a requirement under the co-operatives act. Tulsi Shilpe, a wholesale merchant, is one of the committee members of the society.

Tulsi deals with fish worth Rs15,000 to Rs20,000 everyday which she sells at the Crawford/Shivaji Market. Her family owns three boats so there are no problems at the level of procurement. Most women share transportation costs unless the quantities are large. Most of the women are small fish vendors selling at local markets; a few large women traders like Tulsi visit the Shivaji market in Mumbai. There are several challenges in managing a large fish trade but Tulsi has learnt to deal with them. For instance the wholesalers at Shivaji market are unscrupulous businessmen who are notorious for cheating fishermen and vendors while buying and selling fish. Tulsi has a system where she weighs and packs her fish from the society and then takes it to the market thus avoiding any confusion during the final sale. Women fish vendors and traders, like Tulsi, fear the growing competition from supermarkets, which are increasingly being preferred by customers because they are seen as very hygienic and parking places are available. Government fish markets, on the other hand, are unhygienic, deterring many people.

The most prevalent challenge for fishermen and fish vendors has remained the middlemen, who are present at each level in this business. The docks in Mumbai, for example, have a very strong union of middlemen. Between 1992 and 1997, when prawn catches were at a record high, the middlemen colluded to fix market prices and made huge profits. While they got Rs97 for each basket from the companies, they paid the fishermen only Rs82 per basket. There have been several initiatives to eliminate the middlemen to improve the collective bargaining power of fish producers and vendors but they have not been very effective.

In 1971 the society got its own a cold storage-cum-ice plant. The current capacity of the ice plant is 125 tonnes and it costs Rs800 to produce one ton of ice. The ice is then sold to the members at cost, on a no-profit no-loss basis. The society also owns two vehicles which were earlier used for transporting the women to markets but have now been diverted for transporting diesel and ice. The society employs nearly 65 people who manage the four main activities of the society— ice plant, fishing gear shop, transportation and diesel selling. The diesel business and the fishing gear shop are the main income-generating activities. Diesel is procured at a subsidized rate from the Bharat Petroleum Company and sold at a commission of ps15 to ps20 per liter to the 80 boat owning members of the society. Similarly fishing equipment and gear are sold to members for a small profit.

Elections in the co-operative take place once every five years. There are 13 members on the committee; the committee meets every month to discuss operational issues. The policy

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decisions/discussions happen during the AGM. The society has been able to access several government loans but loan recovery has been a challenge. A recent loan of 54 lakhs received from NCDC in 2007-2008 has not yet been recovered from the members. This makes the society ineligible for future loans.

The co-operative has a long history of remarkable work for the welfare of fishermen under the leadership of its ex-chairman, Motiram Bhawe. The co-operative has also been acknowledged in the past for its efforts in improving transportation for women vendors and in increasing their access to ice for storage. Other benefits enjoyed by women members, addressing the problems they face, remain unclear.

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## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Co-operatives of Ratnagiri**

Ratnagiri had over 83 fisher's co-operatives at one time but now only 36 co-operatives remain operational. Among these, just seven are women's co-operatives. Though women contribute significantly to fishing family incomes in Ratnagiri, they have yet to become economically independent, like their counterparts in Mumbai. Most women are illiterate, hence all the co-operatives are either led or guided by men who take on the leadership as secretaries or advisors, but are soon at the helm of affairs. The oldest women's co-operative is the Mirkarwada Mahila Macchiviyavasaikanchi Sewa Sahakari Sanstha Maryadith. Most of the women's co-operatives formed later were inspired by the Mirkarwada Co-operative and followed the structure and working style of this co-operative. There is a general lack of awareness among women about government schemes they were entitled to, and they remain dependent on the men for the information. Most of the fishermen in Ratnagiri district are Muslims, belonging to the *Daldi* community, though a few areas inhabited by the *Koli and Kharvi* community.

All the co-operatives, with the exception of Rajiwada, have limited their activities to providing transportation facilities to their members. It is a commendable to note that some of these societies like the Mirkarwada cooperative have established and sustained an effective system of transportation. There is a general reluctance among the cooperatives to diversify from their current activities. Several initiatives for value addition and diversification supported by the institutes like the college of fisheries have been unsuccessful. There are a few active *mandals* in the Ratnagiri area which work towards improving the income of fisher families. Several women in the coastal areas are non-productive and these *mandals* work towards involving them in income generating activities. A few women from these *mandals* have shown interest in preparing fish products and marketing them but in general the women are complacent with their current activities.

Young girls are kept out of fish vending due to the extreme hardships associated with the profession but the young boys generally take to fishing after their fathers. Dr.Swapnaja from the College of Fisheries says that "I have been in Ratnagiri for 17 years and not a single fisher woman has introduced me to their daughter, the other female family members like the daughter in laws, are drawn into the profession but daughters are kept out." The level of education in the community is also generally low; most youngsters drop out from school at an average age of 15. The college of fisheries has been in Ratnagiri for 25 years, there are reservations for students from the Konkan coast and for fishermen but just two students from the fisher community have graduated so far.

The women also face a host of health problems due to their occupation. The college of fisheries has tried to intervene on issues of occupational health and hygiene but it was not successful. However, one medical camp was conducted and several cases of anemia and heart diseases were reported among women apart from general problems like backaches and skin ailments. But in the absence of any regular monitoring it is difficult to substantiate the case for occupational health.

### **Mirkrarwada Mahila Machhi Vyavasayachi Sewa Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit**

The Mirkarwada cooperative was founded in 1975 by Ali Mohammed Tandel to address issues of transportation faced by the women vendors of Mirkarwada. It was set up with a share capital of Rs79000 at the rate of Rs10 per share. Mirkarwada is a major fish landing site of Ratnagiri,

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supporting nearly 500 to 1000 families. A scheme for boat mechanization in 1967, which was availed of by 10-15 fishermen, led to a boost in fish catches in the area. As a result the women had more fish to sell, requiring them to travel to distant markets. In 1979 the society purchased a second-hand tempo and hired another one to meet their transportation needs.

The society was on the verge of liquidation in 2007 due to a financial crisis that led to several losses, and the society's only tempo had to be sold. Rabiya and Rasheeda have been members of the society since 1975. They approached the Mirkarwada fishermen's society located across the road from them for help. However, the offer for help was conditional on a complete merger with the fishermen's society. As women did not consider this as a good option, they hired Noruddin Sorkar as secretary, for his skills and educational qualifications. Under his guidance the society is slowly reviving. A new truck was purchased in 2008; a second truck loan application is pending. The society now owns one mini van and hires a second van for transportation.

The society's primary source of income is the transportation charges paid by members based on the distance to the markets. Transportation is mainly needed to transport fish to the 12 weekly markets that take place within a 100km radius—four on Sunday, four on Tuesday and four on Wednesday. The women are divided into Bazaar groups based on where they sell on each of these days. On Sunday the Bazaar 1 goes to Aravalli, Bawa Nadi and Sawarde markets and Bazaar 2 goes to Devrukh market. On Tuesday Bazaar 1 visits Wandri, Kadwai and Wahal markets and Bazaar 2 visits Lanjha market. On Wednesday Bazaar 1 visits Sangameshwar and Nairi markets and Bazaar 2 visits Pali and Pachal markets.

Women procure the fish at the landing site and bring it to the society compound for sorting and icing. The society does not have its own ice plant but has plans to get a loan for installing one in the future. From there it is loaded on the tempo and taken to the various markets. They pay anywhere between Rs45 to Rs100 depending on the size of the crates and the distance to the market. The other costs include loading charges from the landing site to the society and the market fees of Rs10 to Rs15. An additional charge of Rs3 per crate is incurred to load the fish on the tempos which is paid by the society.

The women usually deal with their marketing problems themselves. The co-operative intervenes in cases of space disputes at the market where matters need to be discussed with the panchayat leaders. The members are mainly from Sakrinate, Mirkarwada and Rajiwada and they meet every month to discuss finance and other issues.

While the society has played an important role in addressing transportation problems of women members, it has failed to diversify to address other issues faced by its members. Some efforts were made by the College of Fisheries, Ratnagiri, to train women in making-value added products like jowra chutney, fish papads, pickles etc., but the project was not successful because there was no assistance on the marketing level and the women soon lost interest. The women propose to include male members in the future to avail loans for boats. The society's office is located very close to the fishing harbour. An application for transfer of ownership has been sent to the government, if approved, the society will have its own office building soon.

#### ***Mirkarwada Muslim Mahila Mandal (Dalidi)***

The society has lent the extra room in its premises to the Mirkarwada Muslim Mahila Mandal (Dalidi), which was originally a women's savings group started in 2006. This group of 450 women was formed to initiate certain saving schemes for women vendors. It also runs a stitching

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center to train young girls from the community who do not want to get into the fishing profession. The group owns eight sewing machines which were given by a local MLA. The members meet every week to discuss finances and issues faced during fish marketing.

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## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Sakrinate Mahila Machhivayasayik Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit**

Sakrinate is a small hilly village located at a distance of 60 km from Ratnagiri town. Its current population is around 6000. Majority of the population is engaged in fishing and allied activities. There are two co-operatives in Sakrinate; the largest one is Sahkari Nate Matsyamarg Co-operative Fisheries Society, a fishermen's society.

The women's society of Sakrinate was started in February 1987 to address the transportation issues of women vendors. The society has around 100 members who sell dry and fresh fish at various markets around Ratnagiri. Like Mirkarwada, most women visit weekly markets like Watul on Sundays, Lanjha on Tuesdays, Satovali on Wednesdays and Kharepatane on Saturdays. A lot of the women are head loaders, selling at local tribal villages. High value fish is usually not procured for sale in the area because most of the customers are poor. The high value fish is usually picked up by the exporters directly.

The society does not own any fixed assets. The vehicles to transport the women are hired at the cost of Rs3000 per day, shared by the women at the rate of Rs50 to Rs80 per head. When the catch is low a smaller tempo is hired. All fish is procured from the local landing site. The other costs incurred are ice at the rate of Rs150 per slab, including transportation, and loading charges of roughly around Rs5 per basket.

The main income-generating activity of the society is the commission earned from the sale of its assigned quota of diesel to the boats. The society's monthly quota of diesel is 24,000 liters from which the boat owning members consume around 12,000 liters; the rest is sold to non-members for a commission.

All the accounting and co-ordination of the diesel quota and subsidy reclamation is the responsibility of the secretary, Tazim Ibrahim, who has been hired at a salary of Rs.2500 per month. Just like the other societies in Ratnagiri, there have been no attempts to diversify the activities of the society. One application for a vehicle loan was not approved following which no serious initiatives have been made to acquire any permanent assets. The women remain unaware about any of the government schemes that they can access for their benefit.

### **Shramik Mahila Macchimar Sahakari Society, Tulsunde**

Tulsunde is another fishing village at a distance of 60 km by road from Sakrinate. However, the shortest route to Tulsunde is by a boat across the Jaithapur creek. The residents of Tulsunde are awaiting the construction of a bridge across the creek which will bring down their transportation costs tremendously. Tulsunde is a small Hindu-dominated village with a population of 1500 people. People belong mostly to the *Kharvi* community.

The Tulsunde co-operative society was started in 1995 by Bhagwan Balkrishan Khadpe to improve the financial situation of fisher women in Tulsunde. The current chairperson of the society is Vaishali Bhagwan Khadpe, the wife of the founder. There are 250 members, including 40 men, in the society. The lifetime membership fees is Rs101.

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The society does not own or hire vehicles. The women use state transport buses and pay Rs45 per basket. The main markets are Padwa, Rajapur and Kombe which assemble on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays respectively. On Hindu religious festivals, when fish consumption is prohibited, the women visit only one market a week. The women use various means of transportation based on their requirements; head loaders take the bus upto Rajapur and then go door-to-door while the market vendors hire a local auto to the market place. Samidha Khadpe, a vendor who uses the state transport says, “the buses sometimes do not let us board if they are crowded.”

The main income-generation activity is the commission earned on sale of diesel to its boat-owning members. It is a known practice for small women’s societies like Tulsunde to include independent boat owners as members to avail diesel subsidies. It is a mutually beneficial arrangement for both the parties. The society also makes a small commission from selling fish to its members. In 2007-2008 the society purchased fish for Rs.1.5 lakhs and made a commission of Rs.25,000. The society procures the fish from the fishermen and sells it to the members for a higher price, fetching the society a commission. It is not clear why women did not procure the fish directly from the landing sites, which is the general practice. The commission of the society is fixed and the women bear the losses that may arise due price fluctuations in the market.

The main benefit of being part of the society is that the society stands as guarantor against loans taken by members. The women get an off-season loan of Rs5000 called *khauti*, from the Ratnagiri Co-operative Bank at an interest of 9 per cent per annum, repayable within a year. Other loans from the NCDC have also been received in the past. The members are largely unaware about other government schemes though they recall availing of certain schemes for fish processors and vendors for purchase of equipment.

In the coming period the society plans to purchase a boat to secure their access to fish. The society would also like to diversify into fish products like fish papads, pickles, chutneys etc., but they foresee problems with the marketing and require assistance.

### **Rajiwade Mahila Society**

The Rajiwada society was registered in 1999 with the help of a municipal corporator named Bijli Khan who is now the advisor of the society. The society is perhaps the most active among all the co-operatives in Ratnagiri. Since its inception it has managed to get loans for four boats from the NCDC and apply for an additional five boats which will join the fleet in 2010. The existing boats are stationed at Dhabol, Ratnagiri and Jaighar. The NCDC loans to buy boats are given to women societies only if there is a 10 per cent male membership. Currently there are 588 women and 98 male members. The loans are given to groups of 7 to 8 members, and each boat has a leader and a crew. Each group is responsible for the repayment of the loan and the society acts as the guarantor. The women committee members are responsible for bringing together these groups of men who can apply for boat loans.

The women of the society have the first right over the fish caught using the boats. The women are small or large fish vendors who sell at weekly markets at Sangameshwar, Sawarda, Pani and Lanjha. The surplus is sold to exporters on a commission of 2 per cent. The women usually pick up all the low-value fish, and the high-value fish is sent for export so the society can earn an extra commission. The income from the commission is used for all expenses including the honorarium of Rs70 paid to all committee members for attending each meeting.

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The society now needs a truck/tempo for transportation. An application was made four years back but was not approved. Jamila has been selling the fish for 25 years. The main expenses for the members are the truck rental of Rs50 to Rs150 per head and labour to load ice and fish which of Rs150 and Rs100 respectively. Rosina's Khan's monthly income is between Rs10,000 and 15,000 and she gives credit to the society for this. She is, however, unhappy with the kind of assistance provided by the government to women's societies. "There is a mandatory women's reservation in co-operative societies but women's co-operative societies are being blatantly ignored from government planning and schemes. Most of the co-operative welfare schemes are designed for fishermen societies" she says.

Fatima Nazir who goes to the sea to pick clams says, "there are several women in this society who would like to own boats and go fishing; we may not have the strength to operate gill nets or purse seines but I am confident about hook-and-line."

While women seem to be enjoying certain benefits by being part of co-operative societies, their role in the decision-making process in the society is difficult to ascertain. It is also hard to say if all the women had benefitted equally.