

FILM

# Fished! The Fisher Women of Mumbai

Directed by Daya Gupta; Duration 19 min 28 sec; Language: English

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This short video gives a bird's-eye view of the lives of Koliwomen. The Kolis are a traditional fishing community from Mumbai, India – one of the original inhabitants of this island city of mostly migrants.

The women form a formidable force in the fishing industry of Mumbai. Although they are not involved with the catch, most of the other aspects are handled by them, such as the sorting, cleaning, drying, packing and selling fish in the local markets. They are the fulcrum on which the livelihoods of the families turn; without them, the industry would come to a standstill. Brief interviews with some of them give glimpses of their back-breaking and relentless work. Some women accept it because they feel they have no other choice; some cherish hope in their hearts for a better tomorrow. The film also touches upon the issues of domestic violence and male alcoholism within families.

The film begins with the story of Mumbai as a city of migrants and then moves to the Kolis, but it does not explore the connections between the two. Structurally, it is repetitive. Women

work very hard; they have few choices, as this is the only work they know; they have very little money; some have to double up as domestic maids as well; they get no support from the government... these ideas are repeated by all the talking-heads.

There are many problems faced by this traditional community living on the fringes of their ancestral land. However, the only issue that is explored in any depth by the filmmakers is that of the emerging threat of e-commerce. What about the larger questions of survival such as displacement, restrictions on fishing practices because of urban construction projects, environmental problems diminishing the catch, and so on? The film turns a blind eye to the core issues faced by the community.

Another glaring omission is with regard to the business of fishing. Some of these questions are likely to pop up in the viewers' mind: Has the demand increased? Has the changing landscape of Mumbai affected business? How will the proposed infrastructural projects impact fisher livelihoods? What impact does environmental pollution have? What does the changing demand [of what?] say about the health of the fishing industry? The film talks of government apathy but fails to give details of the specific aspects where the fishing communities feel let down.

While the focus of the film, with its understandable limitations of time, is on women, by omitting the roles of the men and the community, a precious context is left out. The viewer does not get a sense of community life in the villages, the koliwadās, dotted all along the coastline of Mumbai. Similarly, the case against e-commerce or government apathy could have been more convincingly and thoroughly made through the use of argument and counter-argument.

Despite its shortcomings, the film holds a beacon to the women fishers who are the very essence of not just their families and communities, but of the artisanal fisheries of Mumbai.

The documentary may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQaDImryQA&feature=youtu.be>



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 1200 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women

and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.