*Women in Fisheries news articles compilation*

*FROM MARCH 2020 to MARCH 2022*

***MAHARASHTRA:***

**1. Maharashtra: One cup of kadak chai: How Mumbai’s Koli women survived the coronavirus pandemic**

<https://scroll.in/article/989295/one-cup-of-kadak-chai-how-mumbais-koli-women-survived-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

One year ago, Hema Bhanji sat wearily outside her home, a makeshift two-story building in the crowded, twisting alleyways of the Versova Koliwada, Mumbai’s oldest fishing village. She was slicing deftly through the last of her fish, caught on the boat’s final trip before the Covid-19 pandemic arrived on India’s shores. By her side was a woman nearly 30 years younger, helping to clean the catch while hesitantly eyeing the chunks of surmai being tossed into a plate. Hema sighed and looked at her friend with exasperation. “Take the fish. Staring at it won’t fill you up.” Nearly in tears, the woman thanked Hema and hurried across the road to her family. She had to cook the fish before her husband woke up from his evening nap. As for herself, Hema went to bed hungry that night. “One empty stomach is better than five,” she said simply. If this were a few months ago, the two would have been flocking, along with hundreds of other Koli fisherwomen, to their open, women-run fish market nearby with kilos of fish, joyfully gossiping about their husbands, their work, and all the other daily dramas of the area. What followed was a tumultuous year where they had to hold on to every last rupee. India’s infamously strict lockdowns had halted all fishing activity, bringing Koli women’s livelihoods and social interactions to a complete standstill. By late June, many of them had begun to run out of money and food for themselves and their children. What was most remarkable about Hema’s act of generosity is that it was not born out of any singularly altruistic sentiment, nor was it an isolated example of friendship. A group doubly marginalised for their caste and their gender, Koli fisherwomen have had the odds stacked against them for decades. Their average income has declined by as much as 30% since 2010, yet the Indian state does not sufficiently acknowledge their economic vulnerability, according to research by Dr Samir Jale at Shivaji University. More than two-thirds of Mumbai’s Koli population of 200,000 is female, but their voices are seldom included in the city’s political processes. Despite these challenges, Koli women continue to be fiercely independent, financially, and domestically – a feat that is rare in a male-dominated country.

A network of solidarity

Legally classified as a “Backward Class,” Kolis are unofficially considered a lower-caste community since the British Raj, although their own definitions of the term are fluid. Widely considered Mumbai’s native inhabitants when the city was just a group of islands, Koli fishermen go out to sea – sometimes for months – while the fisherwomen take charge of collecting, cleaning, cutting, drying, and selling the catch across town. The traditional lifestyles of this small-scale fishing community have been under increasing threat since the late 1980s, owing to the rapid urban development of the city and climate change. Increasing levels of water pollution, changing marine ecosystems, and destruction of mangroves, among other factors, have forced fishermen to go out even longer and further in search of fish, shrinking the already-low levels of income for most households. Many young Kolis are increasingly moving out of fishing in search of more stable jobs as the fisheries get more uncertain by the day. With the men away and without any economic support as India’s economy liberalised at the turn of the century, this group of women began forming ties to solve small problems that arose in their daily lives. Sometimes this meant helping out with each others’ kids because childcare services were inaccessible to them. At other times it has meant sharing ingredients or cooking meals together when there wasn’t enough food. They gave money to women in need even if their own funds were tight. They spent time listening to each other’s anxieties, fears and dreams, particularly in fish markets that became their safe spaces. They shielded each other from abusive husbands or lent shoulders to cry on. Over time Koli women’s small acts of kindness developed into a complex network of solidarity, shaping a sense of collective identity. Describing them as “existing within the cracks and fragments of society,” Dr Niharika Banerjea, a sociologist at Ambedkar University, explained that the Kolis’ informal structures of care arise both as a result of the economic and gendered injustice they face, and in resistance to it. “This is a community that has been marginalised for so long,” Banerjea said. “To survive, they have had to create alternative forms of living that do not prescribe to the dominant narratives of how society should be – based on caste, class, race, gender, and so on – and they have thrived.”

Emotional bonds

Unlike most women elsewhere in this overwhelmingly patriarchal country, Koli fisherwomen hold the decision-making power in households and in business. But outside of the Koliwadas, they continue to be denied access to their fundamental rights. So they use their collective power and informal networks to lift each other up as the state beats them down, especially during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. “All of us, we have grown up together, spent all our lives around each other – and we have kind of been hidden from the rest of the world,” said Sheetal, Hema’s niece, who shifted from fishwork to a job at a local salon after getting married. “Sometimes we don’t get along, and some women certainly drive me crazy, but I can’t imagine a world where I would not stick up for anyone if they needed my help.” These bonds are cultivated as much by the women’s compassion for each other as the infrastructure of their surroundings. “The strong cohesion between Koli women has always been a feature of the community,” said D Parthasarathy, a professor of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Bombay. “It is continually nurtured by the activities of everyday life, like in the way Koliwadas are spatially organised. Their houses look right into each other, their doors are always open, kids run through them all the time, and they do most household and business work together.” As Koliwadas got increasingly encroached upon by developers, women began to combine the spaces between their homes into small courtyards, laying out all their fish to dry there instead of the big drying grounds they used to have. “We shared [physical] space for work and other things, but we also shared an emotional and fun space where we could just hang out,” said Hema, fondly recounting funny stories and encounters from the past few years. Even faith reinforces the solidarity. “Koli women’s strong belief in their goddesses – not gods – strengthens their political identity,” said Parthasarathy. Though there are some Christian Kolis and Muslim Kolis, the majority are Hindu Kolis who worship seven main goddesses – including Mumba Devi, from whom the city of Mumbai gets its name. These goddesses symbolise harmony and unity, an important aspect in understanding the relationalities among Koli women.

‘Someone stole my air’

Most of the Koliwada’s communal spaces, however, closed off abruptly when the Covid-19 lockdowns were announced on March 23, 2020. The mandatory curfews and strict restrictions on movement brought fishing and all related fishing activities to a complete halt, including a shutdown of fish markets. Koli fisherwomen went from earning around Rs 100-300 per day to absolutely nothing. When the lockdowns began to ease, the annual 61-day ban on monsoon fishing to protect marine life came into force. Fisherwomen were forced to stay indoors for more than five months. “The financial stress was one thing – at one point, we had no money even for buying vegetables,” remarked Bharati Chamar, a colorfully-dressed Koli fisherwomen in her 40s who sells fish in markets across Mumbai. “But being stuck with only my husband in our tiny house for half a year? I was bored. I missed the markets. It felt like someone stole my air.” Mucky and densely packed, saturated with the smell of raw fish and the cacophony of enthusiastic customers, the fish market was the beating heart of these women’s friendships. “It’s not just a place of work – it’s the place their mothers went to, and their mothers before that, a space deeply enmeshed in their sense of identity,” said Gayatri Nair, a sociologist at IIT whose research focuses on Koli communities. “It’s a social, familial, familiar space that is thick with these relationships flowing through them.”

Ignored by the state

In a country that rarely accords visibility to women, hundreds of Koli women trading freely and controlling the cash flow in large public spaces is extraordinary. They not only participate in the labor force but also contribute confidently to how it is shaped, with generations of expertise. “Koli women manage the entire economic system of fishing within the Koliwadas,” said Ketaki Bhadgaonkar, co-founder of the non-profit Bombay61. “With their enterprising nature they make all the decisions about rents, budgets, household expenses, how fish should be processed and distributed. This rarely happens with women in other sectors.” With less than 30% of the country’s women employed, a number steadily on the decline, India ranks 121st out of 131 in the Female Labor Force Participation Rate according to a World Bank report. Many Indian women stop working after marriage, largely because they are not allowed to by their husbands and in-laws. There are few labor protections or incentives for working women, in rural and urban sectors. Especially during the pandemic, more than 17 million women lost their jobs according to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a higher percentage than men. Although Koli women’s work lives are far more independent than other Indian women’s, they too saw their incomes vanish overnight, and received no support from the state. Two fishworker unions’ that advocated for relief were run by men. Their demands centered primarily around things like fuel subsidies, discounts on fishing nets, and compensation for hours lost on boats – things that are relevant for fishermen who go out to sea, but not so much the fisherwomen who work on land. The resulting government policies that passed applied nationally and, unsurprisingly, did little to aid fisherwomen. “There is general disregard in our country’s policies for the work that women do, whether that’s unpaid labor in the household or in the fisheries value chain. It’s just assumed women will come and do the drying once the fish has been caught,” said Siddharth Chakravarty, a consultant on fisheries and public policy. He added that even though women in Koli communities do at least 2-3 times the amount of fishwork as men, they are not able to take out loans or avail credit legally unless they have assets to put down as collateral. These assets, usually land holdings or other property, are generally drawn out under the man’s name.

Informal safety nets

For women in the Versova Koliwada, that has meant finding refuge in their friends’ generosity when institutions failed them. Jagruti, a smaller scale “distributor” who bought fish wholesale from other fisherwomen and then sold it door-to-door, had no way to make ends meet. Her husband Ashok, a dhol player for weddings, was also out of a job. They burned through their savings in the first month of the lockdown and were unable to take out any form of credit. The Maharashtra government had set up a ration stall which gave each Aadhaar card holder 5 kilos of rice and 5 kilos of lentils per month, but only Ashok had the identification card. Jagruti and their two young children have been waiting for their documents to process since 2013. “After weeks of not eating a single full meal, I called my friend Seema and asked if she could make me just one cup of chai. We were saving up whatever little we could during lockdown in that silver box up there, just so we could afford some tea leaves,” Jagruti said, pointing to a rusted box next to a pooja space full of her seven Koli deities. “But with the electricity company tripling the cost of power, our water supply running out, the bank denying our loan, the kids’ school – we didn’t have a chance.” She smiled abruptly. “I just wanted one cup of kadak chai to take my mind off things. The next thing I know, Seema shows up at my door with 10,000 rupees that the women have pooled together.” This sharing of money is possible because some women who own their own boats, like Hema, are relatively more cash-rich, while other secondary distributors like Jagruti frequently need to depend on others – usually their husbands – when their flow of income falters. “In an informal setting, these class differences matter less. Women with more means will gladly help women without,” said Nair. “But when you try to formalise these networks, the lines are blurrier. There’s a noted difference between women with trawlers, women with smaller boats, and women with no boats at all. This is especially visible when it comes to, for instance, an issue of voting and taking a trade union position on limiting the amount of trawler fishing.”

These conflicts have kept Koli women’s networks from being formalised, despite repeated attempts to form women’s cooperatives to leverage more political power. However, spontaneous forms of solidarity continue to thrive. “The relationships among Koli women and their informal networks are no less important or powerful than any formal ones,” said Shibhaji Bose, an independent consultant with the TAPESTRY research project. “The Koli people – especially the fisherwomen – have always been central to the popular imagination of Mumbai,” said Bose, referring to old Bollywood movies and the city’s culinary traditions. “But the city has not paid Koli women any dividends. They are natives of the land, but have not gotten their fair share from the country’s economic boom. With their existence at a crossroads, they say it’s only their goddesses and their bonds that keep them afloat.” The ways in which Koli women adapted their homegrown social structures to collectively survive the pandemic is indicative of their strength as much as it represents the deep failures of Indian society and state. Koli women opened up their homes, risked their lives and livelihoods for each other even as a deadly virus loomed, while many privileged communities instinctively turned inwards. “We are proud people,” said Hema. “And we are proud of asking each other for help, and proud to be able to give it to our sisters who need it most.”

**2. Maharashtra: How Jaljeevika is enhancing the income, livelihood, and productivity of inland aquapreneurs**

<https://yourstory.com/2022/01/jaljeevika-enhancing-income-livelihood-productivity-inland-aquapreneurs/amp>

Hailing from Maharashtra’s Yavatmal district, Prajakta, who once worked as a bank-sakhi, had to travel a great deal to reach the workplace. She gave it up to become a Financial Literacy CRP but found her true calling only when Jaljeevika entered her life. As a matsyasakhi, Prajakta took to her new vocation like a fish to water since she had prior knowledge of what the job entailed. She says that the new trend set by Jaljeevika for fisheries has helped several women farmers increase their income considerably and gain respect at home and outside.

Jaljeevika has empowered women to make their mark in a male-dominated industry. In 2014-15, the startup trained about 70 tribal women in Maharashtra in freshwater fish farming. The lessons on pond management and income through fish farming encouraged more than 4000 women and SHGs to engage in fish farming and fish sale-related microenterprises. Prajakta adds that before Jaljeevika’s arrival most aqua farmers had limited knowledge of the processes and incomes related to fish farming. The startup showed these small-scale farmers how to increase productivity in small spaces.

Founded in 2013 by Neelkanth Mishra, the startup has helped many aqua-farmers optimise their spawn-rearing techniques. It has enabled farmers with affordable and sustainable aquatic farming practices that bring together technology, innovation, and traditional knowledge systems. In 2020, Jaljeevika Infotech Private Limited started integrating data-based advisory support for fish farmers and strengthened the local market.

Challenges of fish farming

Although India boasts 7 million hectares of freshwater resources, less than 50 per cent of these are utilised for fishery production systems. Even though India ranks second in global freshwater fish production, there is still tremendous potential to boost food security, livelihood, and employment generation for millions of fish farmers.

However, there are some challenges to be addressed first, including lack of proper knowledge of locally suitable aquaculture technologies, absence of better management practices, private sector investments, poor extension services, unavailability of locally produced fish seed, and limited quality input supply. Lack of access to markets is another major issue impeding the creation of a robust supply chain. Organisations also grapple with a dearth of tech tools that bring efficiency into the fishing operations, provide weather predictions and ensure the safety of fishermen by assisting in search and rescue operations.

Empowering the farming community

Jaljeevika’s Women Extension Agent has helped women become matsyasakhis. According to Niraj Nakhare, District Mission Manager at National Rural Livelihood Mission at Yavatmal, “We can do scalable work under DAY NRLM – UMED livelihoods activity along with well-established fisheries that have technical support from Jaljeevika. In this regard, our community members are becoming more confident and empowered through fisheries-based activities promoted by Jaljeevika. The AquaSchool model is helping hundreds of women fish farmers bring livelihood and income generation.”

‘Empowering Farmers through the Power of Data’ is not merely a tagline for the startup, which has opened up an entirely new avenue of livelihood for communities dependent on the freshwater ecosystem. According to Neelkanth Mishra, all stakeholders in the community, including banks, traders, and insurance companies can leverage data analytics to obtain information related to production, processes and market.

Project AquaEco, envisaged by Jaljeevika, has slashed production costs by at least a third by improving feed utilisation and reducing wastage. Neelkanth shares that the model has helped in creating digital profiles of farmers and waterbodies using IoT sensors. The project ensures that the data assimilated by these devices is recorded and collected offline by people. AquaEco has also leveraged tools and digital infrastructure to build an ecosystem that facilitates value chain development, tech-enabled knowledge creation, and IoT-driven advisory services delivery. Another model called AquaSchool encourages entrepreneurship among community members and uses technology-linked solutions to integrate backward and forward linkages, and the simplicity and accessibility of the solutions give confidence to small and marginal farmers.

While ensuring a smooth production process through constant supervision, the technology also reduces the production costs, thus helping fish farmers increase their productivity by over 30 per cent. With the help of ?Social Alpha?, Jaljeevika has also roped in people who can help with the architecture and design of applications and web pages. Moving away from conventional means, the startup is helping fish farmers access specific pond-based advisories based on the water quality of ponds, which has helped such organisations step into the new age. Towards this, Jaljeevika uses a cluster-planning approach to bring together all ecosystem partners in a particular district and attract more investments to help smallholder farmers scale. “Siddharth Bharadwaj from Social Alpha says that while aquaculture is a relatively new space for livelihood generation, it has the potential to create both upstream and downstream supply chains required to make the process easier and efficient.”

Finding solutions

As a part of the Krishi Mangal program powered by Social Alpha and supported by Cisco India CSR, Jaljeevika is implementing a micro-entrepreneurship model with hundreds of small and marginal farmers. With nutrition, taste, varieties, availability and pricing taking centre stage, freshwater fisheries are beginning to see rising demand from the markets. The application of new data technologies in this sector has increased the efficiency of fisheries management processes. According to a study by the Centre for Strategy and Leadership, a better strategy for fishing could help improve marine resource management, while also increasing the profits of marine farmers significantly.

CISCO India CSR believes that only when these organisations scale up, will they achieve incremental growth through a combination of digital and on-ground innovations. Leveraging SaaS-based solutions alongside deep-tech to enhance and build product capabilities have helped these enterprises take on the demands of the market. It has also allowed them to adopt technological advancements like communications, cloud management, networking, and cybersecurity.

With fisheries and aquaculture being recognised as powerful income and employment generators, CISCO India CSR aims to ensure continuous monitoring of the production process through data collection by IoT devices coupled with analytics to gather intelligence proactively and provide fish farmers with insights that can help them optimise productivity and reduce risk.

Maintaining product quality is another key aspect of this value chain that requires continuous monitoring of the production process. Data collection conducted by IoT devices, when coupled with analytics, helps in gathering intelligence and insights that can boost productivity and improve decision-making. After looking at the enhancement of fish production through scientific service delivery, over 570 farmers have turned to the fishery livelihood in the Ralegaon Block of Yavatmal. These steps taken by Jaljeevika have helped them stay true to their value proposition of ‘Water-efficient farming as a business service’. It’s heartening to see how Jaljeevika has been acting as a change agent, leveraging digital tools and streamlining processes to make communities self-reliant. Its far-reaching impact is best evident in the increasing presence of empowered women in a male-dominated vocation.

**3. Maharashtra: In Satpati: No fish. So what will I sell now?**

<https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/articles/in-satpati-no-fish-so-what-will-i-sell-now/>

Meena Meher’s days are busy. At 4 a.m. she reaches the wholesale market in her village, Satpati, to auction fish for boat owners. Back home by around 9 a.m., she cures fish with salt and stores it for drying in thermocol boxes in her backyard, to be sold after a week or two. In the evenings, she takes a bus or shared autorickshaw to the retail market in Palghar, some 12 kilometres away, to sell dry fish. If any stock remains, she tries to sell it in the evening retail market in Satpati. But the boats she auctions for are becoming fewer, the quantity of fish she dries is reducing too. “No fish. So what will I sell now?” asks 58-year-old Meena, who belongs to the Koli community (listed as an OBC). So she has diversified – after the monsoon, she purchases fresh fish from boat owners or traders at the Satpati wholesale market, and sells that to try and earn enough. (She does not however tell us any details about her income.) To make up for the family’s income shortfall, her husband Ulhas Meher, 63, is working more too. He continues to occasionally go out on ONGC survey boats as a labourer and sample collector, but has extended his work on big fishing boats in Mumbai from around two months of the year to 4-6 months. Their coastal village, Satpati, in Maharashtra’s Palghar district, is in what’s been called a ‘Golden Belt’, its seabed recognised for fish breeding and for the famous bombil (Bombay duck). But the bombil catch is decreasing – from a record high of 40,065 tons in 1979 in the Satpati-Dahanu zone, the state produced only 16,576 tons in 2018.

The reasons are many – an increase in industrial pollution, overfishing by trawlers and purse seiners (large nets used to capture dense shoals, including smaller fish, which halts their growth). “Trawlers are not allowed to enter our ocean, but no one stops them,” Meena says. “Fishing was a community occupation, but now anyone can buy a boat. These big boats kill the eggs and small fish, leaving us with nothing.” For long, Meena and other auctioneers have been called by local boat owners whenever there is fish to sell – but now there is no guarantee like before that the boats will come back with a full load of bombil and silver pomfret, along with smaller fish like mushi, wam and others. Meena now auctions for only two boats – down from up to eight until around a decade ago. Many boat owners here have stopped fishing. “In the 1980s, there were 30-35 boats fishing in Satpati [for bombil], but this number reduced to 12 [by mid-2019],” confirms Narendra Patil, president of the National Fishworkers Forum and former chairman of the Satpati Fishermen Sarvodaya Cooperative Society. The entire fishing community in Satpati – the gram panchayat and cooperative societies estimate the population here is now 35,000 (up from the 17,032 listed in Census 2011) – is facing the impact of this decline. A fisheries primary school (with a regular academic curriculum) set up in 1950 by the state government and transferred to the zilla parishad in 2002, is in decline. Similarly, a marine fisheries training centre offering specialised course, set up in 1954, is no longer operational. Only two fisheries cooperative societies remain, and function as intermediaries between boat owners and fish exporters, and as a source of loans, subsidies on diesel and other services for fishermen and boat owners.

But Satpati’s fisherwomen say they have received no support from either the government or the cooperative societies – which offer them only ice and cold storage space at nominal rates. “The government should give every fisherwoman at least Rs. 10,000 for our business. We don’t have money to buy fish to sell,” says 50-year-old Anamika Patil. In the past, women here would usually sell fish caught by family members, but now many have to purchase it from traders – and that requires credit or capital which they don’t possess. Some have taken loans of Rs. 20,000-Rs. 30,000 from private lenders. Institutional borrowing is not an option “because we have to mortgage our jewellery or house or land,” says Anamika, who has taken a Rs. 50,000 loan from a boat owner. Other fisherwomen have moved out of the trade — wholly or for a portion of their work-day. “With the fish stock reducing, the women engaged in drying Bombay duck have had to adapt. They are now going to Palghar for jobs or for any work in the MIDC [Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation] complex,” says Ketan Patil, chairman of the Satpati Fishermen Sarvodaya Cooperative Society. “Satpati used to be filled with bombil, we would sleep outside because our houses were full of fish stock. Once the catch started decreasing, it became very difficult [to earn enough] and this is when we switched to other jobs,” says Smita Tare, who has been working at a pharmaceuticals company in Palghar for around 15 years, doing assembly line packaging tasks. For a 10-hour a day shift, six days a week, she earns roughly Rs. 8,000 a month. Her husband too does not fish anymore, but plays the drum in a band during weddings and other events in Palghar or other places. Palghar town is around 15 kilometres away. In the mornings now, a line of women stand at the local bus stop waiting to go to work.

Meena’s daughter-in-law Shubhangi, 32, too started working in a Palghar appliances unit in February 2020, where she packs coolers, mixers and other items, earning Rs. 240 for a 10-hour shift, or Rs. 320 for 12 hours, with a weekly off every Friday. (Shubhangi’s husband Prajyot, 34, helps Meena with the fish processing, and works at the fisheries cooperative society, though there are fears about losing this permanent job because the cooperatives too are struggling.) Meena herself now spends 2-3 hours every day with a plate of white beads, golden coloured metal string, a big circular sieve, a nail cutter and her spectacles. Her task is to pass the string through the beads and make a closed hook. She earns, from a woman in the village who gives out this work, Rs. 200-250 for 250 grams of finished beads – which can take a week to complete. From this amount, she spends Rs. 100 to buy the raw material again. For Bharati Meher, 43, whose family owns a boat, the decision to join a cosmetics company was made in mid-2019 after income in the fishing trade began falling. Until then, in addition to auctioning and selling fish, Bharati and her mother-in-law would, like Meena, make artificial jewellery. While many in Satpati have moved on to other livelihoods, a sense of a time gone by prevails in conversations. “After some years, we will have to draw and show our kids what a pomfret or bombil looks like – there will be none available here,” says Chandrakant Naik, a retired BEST driver who now goes fishing on a small boat owned by his nephew. Still, many others are sure that nostalgia cannot convince them to stay on in fishing. “I don’t let my kids enter the boat. Small [fishing-related] tasks are okay, but I don’t take them on the boat,” says 51-year-old Jitendra Tamore, who inherited a vessel from his father. The family also owns a fishing net shop in Satpati, which helps them stay afloat. “We were able to educate our sons [20 and 17 years old] only because of the net business,” adds his wife, 49-year-old Juhi Tamore. “But the way our life is going on, we don’t want them to enter the fishing business at any cost.”

**4. Maharashtra: Hook, line and sinker: Malwan’s fisherwomen**

<https://ruralindiaonline.org/articles/hook-line-and-sinker-women-in-fisheries/>

Every morning, Himanshi Kubal dons a pair of trousers and a t-shirt and, along with her husband, pushes their small rowboat on to the water. In the evenings, she’s in a colourful saree, often with an aboli (firecracker) flower in her hair, cutting and cleaning fish for customers. Himanshi, now in her 30s, has been fishing from a young age, first in rivers and estuaries in Malwan taluka with her family, and three years ago, after they bought the boat, out in the Arabian Sea with her husband. She is one of the few women working at Malwan’s Dandi beach who can swiftly cast a net, and is among the 10,635 residents of the taluka’s total population of 111,807, who are engaged in fishing “I used to work on other boats with my husband to sort fish, she says, but three years ago we had enough money to buy our own small [non-motorised gillnet] boat, and since then we’ve been fishing together.” Nearby, an auctioneer shouts Teenshe, teenshe daha, teenshe vees! [300, 310, 320 rupees] while several fishermen haul out crates of catch from their boats and stack them up on the beach for display. Traders and agents weave their way through the crowd and haggle for the best deals. Stray dogs, cats and birds dart in and steal their share of treats. “We usually fish every morning, Himanshi adds.

And when we don’t go because of bad weather or other reasons, we go to the morning market to cut and clean fish. And every evening we’re at the auction.” While fishing across much of India is usually done by men, it is typically women like Himanshi who are central to the other components of the trade, like the processing and selling of fish. They form around 66.7 per cent of the post-harvest workforce in fisheries across the country, and are integral to the industry. The last Marine Fisheries Census (2010) records about 4 lakh women in the post-harvest workforce (in all activities except the actual fishing process). In addition, nearly 40,000 women are involved in collecting fish seeds’ (or eggs) for aquaculture.

It’s exhausting work buying, transporting, icing and storing the fish, and finally cutting and selling it. And we do it all on our own, says Juanita (full name not recorded), a trader and widow, sitting in her one-room brick and asbestos house on Dandi beach, where several bills from her fish purchases at the auction are threaded through a metal wire hanging on a wall. The fish auction would not be complete without traders like Juanita, who purchase a wide variety of fish that they later sell either at the local market or in small towns nearby. Haggling with auctioneers is part of their daily routine, and each has her own strategy for getting the best price some agree to pay the final price at the end of the auction but convince the auctioneer to throw in a few extra fish. Others quietly push for a small discount (at times even as small as Rs. 5) once the auction process is over.

The long day of selling fish goes by with chatter and discussions about the diminishing catch and which fish to cook for dinner. Women here usually run the fish cleaning processes too. From washing and scaling to gutting and cutting, each fish is handled with surgical precision. I left school after the ninth standard, and have been working with fish drying ever since. I had to do something to fill my stomach, says 42-year-old Benny Fernandes, a labourer in Devbag village of Malwan taluka, who earns around Rs. 4,000 a month. She adroitly hoists a basket of dried fish in one arm while carrying her infant child in the other. Fish drying is also largely done by women across India, and involves long hours of labour under the scorching sun. “During the monsoon we have no fish drying work, so we take on odd jobs and survive, Benny adds. Women like Himanshi, Juanita and Benny are particularly vulnerable members of fishing communities, studies have shown, and are especially affected by the present state of fisheries hit by overfishing, the dominance of mechanised fisheries, declining catch, climate change and other problems faced by small-scale fisherfolk. And most of the women in this occupation don’t receive the same benefits and subsidies as men working in fishing, though they too are equally dependent on this work. For example, during the monsoon ban on fishing, the families of fishermen in some states receive a monthly compensation from the government. But the families of fisherwomen (without fishermen) are not given the same. Back on Dandi beach, by the time it is evening, the women start off on another set of tasks chasing their children, completing household chores and more. With the setting sun, their workplace moves from the shore to their homes.

**5. Maharashtra: Cops punish women for catching clamps on Satpati seashore**

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/palghar-cops-punish-women-for-catching-clamps-at-satpati/articleshow/75742473.cms>

A video of policemen punishing women for catching clamps on the seashore in Satpati in Palghar district of Maharashtra has gone viral. The central fisheries department has directed the Palghar police to investigate the matter. The video shot by Satpati coastal police shows the women from the village being made to do sit-ups for catching shellfish from the shore. The video shows the cops threatening to make the video viral. The video that was widely circulated among the fisher folks has led to unrest among the community. Fishermen said that despite the lockdown, there is no ban on fishing. While deep sea fishing has come to a halt, small and medium-sized boats are carrying out fishing in the shallow waters.

Fishing has reduced as fishermen are finding it difficult to stock the catch and transport it to the market. Fishermen said that it is a regular practice for women to go to the seashore in the morning (after high tide) to pick up shellfish. The women from the Satpati village were up in arms after the video of the punishment went viral on social media platforms. Satpati is one of the biggest fishing village in Maharashtra. Fishermen said that they are facing massive losses as stocking and transportation of fish during the lockdown has become a problem.

**6. Maharashtra: MNS clears ‘Illegal’ occupants from fish markets within 24 hours**

<https://www.mumbailive.com/en/politics/mns-chief-raj-thackeray-solve-problem-of-women-fish-seller-in-dongri-mumbai-56313>

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray was able to resolve the problems of fisherwomen from Koli community within 24 hours. Some fisherwomen earlier gathered outside Thackeray residence Krishna Kunj’ to demand solution regarding illegal fishing business being carried out. On Monday, fisherwomen from Koli community in Mumbai gathered outside Thackeray’s residence and raised the issue of people illegally encroaching their space in the fish markets in Dongri. They said that there was no space left for locals to resume their business on a daily basis. Thackeray stepped outside his house to meet the fisherwomen and listened to their problems.

The fisherwomen had come to meet Thackeray and local MNS chief Sanjay Naik. After the meeting, Thackeray instructed Naik to clear the area for fisherwomen from Koli community to carry out their business. The encroachment by outsiders in the fish market had affected the business of the Koli community. Therefore, a delegation had come to meet the MNS chief at his residence. With no business or source of income for many months, men and women from the fishing communities have resumed work. As many returned to their hometown for some months, other needy locals took advantage of the opportunity and started a retail business of selling fish, food and vegetables. However, MNS was able to clear the area of illegal occupants within 24 hours for fisherwomen from Koli community to carry out their business.