

**Women in Fisheries:  
Navigating Spaces, Challenging Norms, Shaping the Future**

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## Women in Fisheries – Navigating Spaces, Challenging Norms, Shaping the Future

Women in Fisheries play a significant and multi-dimensional role that include livelihood, household, reproductive, and the community which is associated with different spaces – the home, the sea, the shore, coastal waters, and the markets. They especially dominate the Fisheries and their supply and value chain. Their engagement is mostly in pre-fishlanding activities such as net mending, preparing fishers for fishing to post-fish landing work such as auctioning, sorting, drying, smoking, salting, transporting, marketing and other fishing allied activities. They are also involved in industrial seafood processing activities which spreads presence at all levels of supply and value chain. Hence, women fishworkers are connected from catching the fish, to the global seafood trade market. In addition, in certain coastal regions women are also involved in fishing, collecting, as well as harvesting fishes, shellfishes, molluscs, crustaceans, and, moreover as traditional women divers (who fish with primitive fishing and collecting methods) they dive in near-shore and intertidal zones coastal waters. These are also the spaces where women fishworkers have developed a historical relevance to their way of life.

The fisheries and the spaces of fish production have been nurtured by the labour and knowledge of women fishers. But this remains unacknowledged by the state who misrepresents and misrecognizes women fishers to be contributing only to sustaining household nutritional and income security of their families. This battle for recognition by women fishers and fisherwomen is multi-fold. Inside the home and outside it, she has to battle against multiple facets of patriarchy where her participation is often constrained by strong cultural rules and societal conventions. In the space of the fisheries such as post landing work and marketing, women are often downgraded to the poor market spaces, face harassment by corporations and jostle with other players in the market. In the markets, women fishworkers occupy the lowest rung of workers in seafood factories and their work comes under the unskilled category which results in lower pay structures when compared to male workers.

Her work and contribution is invisible in the State's definition of 'fishing' which uses a male fisher/fishworker as its lens to address the space of the fisheries and hence, she is excluded in government fisheries policies, programmes and schemes.

Through our lens, we invite you to join us in recognizing, celebrating, and advocating for the empowerment of women in fisheries.



Carmel benedict , a 72 year old fisher woman from veli waits for an auto rickshaw to go to mariyanad harbor to collect fish . Carmel is a pioneer character who was one of the first members who stood in front when the program for community organization ( PCO) came to veli shore to organize fishermen and formed kerala malsyathozhilali union ( now known as kerala independent fishermen federation ) . She got a lot of stories about resistance and strikes she has been a part of .She along with the union and fellow members worked hard to get transportation and pension benefits for fishing women .She is now retired , but still collects fish and serves to pre booked buyers.

Fisher women collecting fishes from auctions and dividing fish among themselves at marianad shore.

These women start their day by managing the busy auction scene, which is called "lalam" in the area. The busy auction (lalam) is like a battlefield for these women, who have to bargain, argue, and sometimes even fight with the tough fishermen to get their valuable catch. They search the fishing boats with steady strength, picking out a wide range of fish. Then they start the difficult job of sharing the spoils among themselves. Each person takes a portion to get ready for the trip to the busy market

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Fisher women sitting on their fish collecting utensils at mariyanad shore , on a day when there was no fish . these women come to know about non availability of fish only when the boat comes to shore and their day gets wasted losing money for traveling to the shore from their shore



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Fisher women collecting fish from auctions happening at muthalapozhi harbour. The utensils they use have their names to avoid the baskets getting mixed among themselves.



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## Fisher women selling fish at fish market

The market doesn't offer any comfort. It's a stark reminder of how hard things are for these women every day. Open drains and dirty conditions in the market make it easy for insects and parasites to get into the bodies of these brave women, causing painful diseases. The bathrooms are mostly broken, which makes it hard to stay alive. In the middle of the madness of the market, they go about their morning business, reading newspapers, eating food, and chitchatting with other fisherwomen. During the pandemic, fisherwomen have become more technologically proficient. They use QR codes to get payment, which eases the relation between customer and them

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Fisher women selling fresh and dry fish at station kadavu local market at evening using traditional kerosine lamp to source light for the marketing



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Inland fisher women engaged in cleaning of fish at thanneermukkom market

Condition of basic facilities in Fish Market



Condition of basic facilities in Fish Market



Lesiure time of Veli shore's fisherwomen

Retired fisher women amidst their chit chat leisure time in front of their houses in veli shore, playing local games. majority of these fisher women in trivandrum district belong to latin christianity. When they have free time, they usually do prayer meetups with fellow believers from the religious group



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## Prawn Processing

Omana, a fisher woman, along with her fellow co workers engaged in the prawn processing industry in Vayalar .

There is a lot going on in the prawn cleaning industry. Here, the owners of the company buy a lot of prawns and give them to these skilled women to work on. Every day, they do the same things, like packing and unloading, and they clean very carefully. They get tokens as tangible representation for their work, which is a physical sign of what they've done for the business. These tokens are a way to keep track of how many prawns they've peeled, a silent testament to their unwavering commitment. Even though they are busy preparing prawns, these women still have to deal with a lot of problems. They often get hurt by the crabs and other bugs that lurk in the prawn piles . Factory owners take advantage of their hard work by paying them very little and not giving them health insurance or a raise. They work more than 10 hours a week, and there isn't a social security scheme to protect them. It is clear that this is bad for their health; many of them have problems with their uteruses, their fingers have scars from infections, and their legs swell and hurt from standing all day. Replacements like stones used as standing mats don't really help. There isn't enough infrastructure at work is still far away. The women who work in the prawn-peeling industry seem to be up against an impossible obstacle.

# Prawn Processing



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Sushama helping her husband raju in chinese net fishing, at vayalar

Women fishers engaged in clam collection from backwaters at Thaikattusseri

There are women fishers collecting clams in the middle of the backwater village of Taikkattusseri. They also spend time each day gathering clam shells (kakka varal). They dive into water up to three feet deep from 8 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon to collect clams that will then be cleaned very carefully. Shells cover the ground around them, a reminder of how hard they worked.

Women fishers engaged in clam collection from backwaters



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Fisher women from kumbalangi engaged in thappu meenpidutham, and its sales

In the quaint village of Kumbalangi, a different group of women called "thappu meenpidithakar" are very good at catching fish. They catch fish that get caught in nets that are set up across rivers and fields with their bare hands. These strong women, who are often neglected, sell their catch at roadside shops from 4 am to 9 am every morning. They often hurt themselves while fishing because of the way they do it, especially their legs. The harsh weather makes their health even worse, but they are still not recognized or organized.



Fisher women from kumbalangi engaged in 'thappu meenpidutham' and its sales



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## Nighttime Fisherwomen: Catching Fish with Nets

In this field of fishing using nets that are mostly men's jobs , savitri stands out as an example. She catches fish with a fishnet from night till dawn, embodying resilience and defying societal gender norms with her remarkable dedication and perseverance.

Nighttime Fisherwomen: Catching Fish with Nets



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A fisher women selling fish carrying her fish basket on head, in a residential area of trivandrum