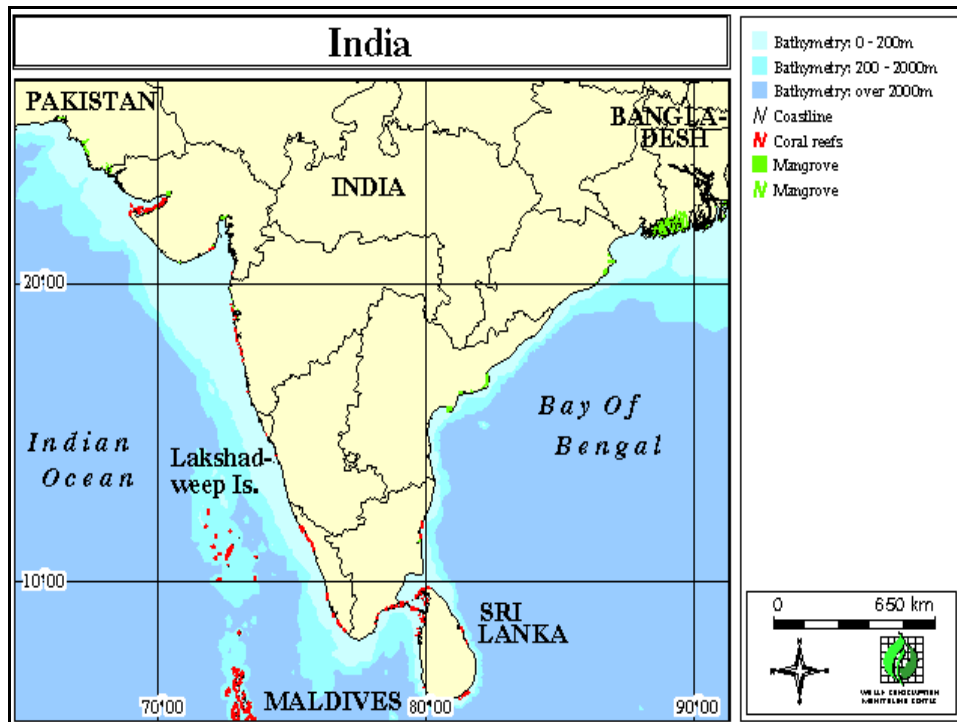


From the Margins to Centre Stage

Consequences of Tsunami 2004
for the fisher folk of Tamil Nadu

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Tsunami 2004 and India

- Hit a 1000 km of coast and took a toll of 20,000 lives
- 3 States and 2 Union Territories (UTs)
- States: Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh
- UTs: Andamans and Nicobar Islands & The UT of Pondicherry
- Andamans & Nicobar Islands worst affected
- Tamil Nadu worst affected on mainland with damages across 700 km out of 1000 km coast
- The worst affected district was Nagapattinam with 6000 out of the 8000 deaths

Fisheries of Tamil Nadu

- 1000 km coastline with 3 different seas/eco systems
- Bay of Bengal coast, Palk Bay, Gulf of Mannar and the Arabian Sea
- Three dominant castes, each occupying a distinct ecosystem
- Pattinavars(Hindu)—Bay of Bengal coast; Paravas(Christian)—Gulf of Mannar; Mukkuvas(Christian)—Arabian Sea; Assorted castes occupying Palk Bay
- Narrow continental shelf 20-40 km wide; edge of shelf can be reached in day trips
- Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Mannar and Arabian Sea: surf beaten coast; Palk Bay: Protected shallow sea

Fisheries Development in Tamil Nadu

- Only small boats, manually or wind powered, operating from beaches till late 60s
- Introduction of mechanised trawl boats operating from harbours to catch shrimp for export
- Development of dual system: a large artisanal fleet based on livelihood and traditions, a modern mechanised sector based on capitalist logic
- Unlike Kerala, mech boats of Tamil Nadu owners are from fishing communities (except Rameswaram)
- Competition and constant conflict between both sectors







Fisheries Development—Contd.

- Artisanal fishermen adopt new technologies to increase range to tackle declining catches
- Introduction of Out Board Motors: in 80s on the Arabian Sea coast and 90s on the Bay of Bengal and Palk Bay coasts
- Initially motorisation of kattumaram; introduction of small FRP boat, rapid growth of FRP boats in last 5 years.
- Marine fish catch growing steadily over the years; last five year stagnant around 350,000 tonnes per annum
- Increasing capacity and investment not translated into increasing catches

Fisheries (Mis)Management

- Late 70s: conflicts between trawlers and traditional boats in many parts of India
- Fishermen unrest and demonstrations lead to States asked to legislate—Marine Fishing Regulation Acts come up in 80s
- TN Act in 1983: 3 mile zone for artisanal sector; registration and licensing system introduced
- 1990s: Introduction of 6 week fishing holiday on mechanised boats per annum
- Largely an unregulated fishery with no entry barriers or quotas

Fisheries mis-management—contd.

- Controls and regulation based on local conflict resolution mechanisms
- Govt. happy to mediate between conflicting parties and sanction any consensus reached
- Tamil Nadu has largest trawl fleet in India
- 10,000 trawl boats survive by poaching in waters of neighbouring states Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and neighbouring country, Sri Lanka
- Trawler were in trouble pre-tsunami

The fishing community

- Marginal to mainstream society; low caste status in Hindu society, though not “untouchable”
- However, independent and autonomous group with links with rest of society only through exchange relations
- Social marginalisation, low political clout
- However, Tamil Nadu fishermen have high “nuisance value” and state has seen them largely as a “welfare category”
- Gender division of labour; women play important role in fish processing and fish vending; significant role in economy; management of family finances
- Villages largely homogeneous despite economic differences; however mech boat concentration in villages near harbours; tensions between villages on this count

Internal Governance

- Traditional system of “panchayat” among Pattinavars, parish councils among parava and mukkuvas
- A system of internal governance that has declined in most communities of India due to the modern state systems—gradually during colonial period and rapidly after independence
- However, remains strong in fishing communities of Tamil Nadu, indication continuing marginalisation of autonomy of fishing communities
- Panchayat system is part of multi tier community governance system
- 16 village clusters, 64 village federation, etc. among Pattinavars; Diocesan level integration among Paravas and Mukkuvas
- Horizontal and vertical links weakened due to mech boat vs. artisanal boat conflicts and class formation; much weaker near Madras City with many persons into non fishing occupations and higher levels of education
- Women excluded from traditional Panchayat system

Post Tsunami developments

- Government caught napping for first three days or so; negative media coverage
- Responded with massive relief effort involving significant financial and administrative resources
- Unprecedented civil society response: NGOs of every hue, INGOs, Corporates, etc.
- Large NGO contingent from different parts of India; Tamil Nadu one of the states with large NGO presence

Progress of Relief & rehab so far

- Extra-ordinary relief effort in first 2-3 weeks
- Fishermen shifted to temporary shelters within first to second months
- However temp shelter as case of "build in haste, repent at leisure"
- Govt. anxious to build fast and NGOs in competition with each other and with Govt.
- Inappropriate materials, low lying sites and poor construction
- 20,000 temp shelters

Progress so far

- Government has provided cash compensation for deaths, loss of livelihoods, etc.
- Debris clearance and infrastructure restoration within first month
- NGOs have started distribution of boats, motors and nets on a significant scale
- Fishing started only from 4th month gradually and now progressed to significant extent
- Permanent shelter work starting only now after 6 months; 25,000 new houses to be built, mostly by NGOs with land provided by Government.

Government interventions in fisheries

- Problem of damage estimation in the absence of the proper registration and records of fishing equipment
- Absence of management regime meant that admin initially saw supply of boats as an opportunity to help the poor fishermen
- Expectation rose among the fishing community; wild lists were prepared
- Every fisherman from Madras to Kanyakumari claimed loss of a motor boat!
- Subsequently Government woke up and decided to be strict with numbers

- Government packages generous but administrative nightmare to implement
- 50% subsidy to replace equipment of artisanal sector; 35% subsidy for mechanised sector
- Admin measures to avoid diversion of funds
- Large funds still in banks

NGO response

- Predominantly non fishery NGOs in rehab
- An agrarian understanding that is inappropriate
- Focus on “poor” fishermen who were crew
- Groups of four given motor boats—owners ignored
- Upgradation of Kattumaram fishermen
- Generally trawl sector ignored

Community response

- Community level “conspiracy” to milk the aid system
- Fishermen panchayat system gives them great ability to negotiate with external world
- Redistribution of aid and relief as per own notions of equity
- Interesting contrast with agricultural communities

Internal dynamics

- Large scale recall and re-election of panchayats
- Tensions on class lines in trawl villages
- Shelter policy also dividing some villages on class lines
- Trawl owners under great stress

Fisheries consequences

- Replacement kattumarams weak
- Over supply of FRP motor boats
- Supply of 10 times the replacement needs of FRP boats in progress
- Poor quality of boats
- Owners struggling to replace and to get crew
- Trawl sector still limping back; opportunity to restructure fishing lost?

Some positive elements

- Greater awareness in Govt. circle about oversupply of boats and consequences
- Open discussion on issue among fishermen
- Crisis that is round the corner will give boost to resource management issues
- Organisations capable of taking forward the management agenda are gearing up

Frameworks to understand response fishing community

- Legal pluralism
- Social capital

Broader issues

- State—Civil society responsibilities
- Management of Civil society response
- Over supply of aid and need to control or divert it
- Most funds are yet to reach and get spent, what will happen then?
- When will the fishermen get out of NGO clutches and start normal life?