

CHAPTER I

Introduction

by U. Tietze

A well-known travel guide to India says : if you know Orissa, you can say that you know India. In a capsule form Orissa contains all the major features of the sub-continent, 'from industrialized India, through the India of the splendid Hindu temple architecture, to ancient India as the cradle of Hinduism and Buddhism, back to the India of the tribes, still living in the hunting stage of civilization.

Similarly, the traditional sea-fishing communities of Orissa, living for ages on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, reflect in miniature the lifestyle and material culture of the fisherfolk of the entire east coast of India.

Orissa's southern coastline has wide sandy beaches and surf-beaten shores which are also typical of South India. Its northern coast is characterized by rivers and creeks as well as extended tidal areas which are typical of the northern part of the Bay of Bengal with the extensive delta formed by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.

The continental shelf off the southern coast is narrow, similar to the shelf off the coast of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, while the continental shelf in North Orissa is wide, forming a part of the shallow continental shelf off Bengal. The marine environment of North Orissa differs from that of South Orissa and so do the fisherfolk and the technology they practise.

The artisanal fisheries sector in India plays an important economic role with regard to supply of protein, employment and even earning of foreign exchange. The present significance of artisanal fisheries in India is known by the fact that 59 % of the total marine catch of the East Coast States/Territories of Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa (CMFRI 1982) is contributed by the artisanal marine fisherfolk.

Therefore, much developmental effort is directed towards this community by national as well as international agencies.

The study presented in this book was conducted as part of the developmental activities undertaken by the Project for the Development of Small-Scale Fisheries in the Bay of Bengal Project (BOBP) which is executed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and funded by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). Since 1977 the Bay of Bengal Project has been demonstrating new technologies and methodologies in the fields of fishing methods, craft and gear, coastal aquaculture, extension services and community development to artisanal and other small-scale fisherfolk in the countries bordering the Bay of Bengal. One of the activities of the project is an in-service training scheme for officers of a newly established marine extension service for small-scale fisheries.

The in-service training was confined to three pilot projects: improvement of the traditional craft and gear, the introduction of credit schemes by coastal banks for artisanal marine fisheries and the development of a non-formal primary school curriculum for fishermen's children.

While this work was being carried out, it was found that **very little** was known about the lifestyle, customs and attitudes of the fisherfolk. The literature on marine fisherfolk is not rich but a few studies have been published on fisherfolk in India and other Asian countries.

Studies carried out on fishing communities in the Asian countries were either ethnographic descriptions-Trobian Islanders

by Malinowski (1941) and Andaman Islanders by Ratcliff Brown (1948) or described fishing communities as part of peasant communities-Firth's study on Malay fisherfolk (1946), Ward on Chinese fisherfolk in Hong Kong (1965) and Fraser Junior's study on Malay fishing villages (1962).

The earliest study of the marine fishing communities of India was Moses's ethnographic report on the Valayans of Madras (1929). Later came Ahmed's census monograph on a marine fishing community in Orissa (1961). Ethnographic descriptions of the basic social and economic features of sea fishing communities followed. Trivedi wrote on the marine fisherfolk of Kerala (1967), Punekar on the Son Kolis of Bombay (1969) and Suryanarayana comparatively on three fishing communities of Andhra Pradesh (1977).

Other studies such as those by Blake (1972) and Norr (1972), which are both on the artisanal marine fisherfolk community of Pattinavars of Madras in Tamil Nadu, concentrate on more specific and limited research problems. Blake studies technological changes, while Norr compares traditional marine fisherfolk with peasant communities.

Of the recent studies, Mathur's study of the fishermen of Kerala (1978) and B. Raychaudhuri's study of Jambudweep of West Bengal (1980) are in-depth studies of marine fisherfolk. They analyse technology, economy, social organization, rituals, knowledge of the ecosystem and world views of the fisherfolk.

The study presented in this book covers to a certain extent aspects similar to those covered in the recent studies mentioned above. But its approach and emphasis differ. While earlier studies have been micro-level studies of single villages and **single** communities, the study presented here is a macro-level study, comparing different groups/strata of fisherfolk and thereby using quantitative-analytical methods to a larger extent than the earlier studies. It aims at throwing more light on habitation, traditional caste occupation, differences in occupational and economic status and their significance, family structure, socialization of children, religious culture and customs, views and perceptions of nature,

trade and future and last but not least on artisanal *fishing* methods, technologies and operational patterns.

Furthermore, the study examines what role traditional caste occupation plays with regard to present occupational and economic status and various aspects of social interaction and attitudes. This is done by comparing those who are fisherfolk by caste with those who are fisherfolk by occupation only to show the process of and problems related to occupational mobility in the case of small-scale marine fisheries. Next we shall analyse the influence of economic status on various aspects of life, such as standard of living and education of children. An answer to these questions, is in fact vital to developmental activities which are based on the assumption that a higher economic status in terms of ownership of fishing technology leads to improvement of the living conditions of the target group. We shall also analyse to what extent economic stratification has taken place and whether economic status has become a major criterion of social stratification in the traditional communities of artisanal marine fisherfolk.

Prior to the sociological study, two pilot surveys were carried out. One was a qualitative study of the various types of artisanal fishing craft and gear and was undertaken in 36 major landing sites (Mohapatra 1985). The other, a techno-demographic census of the entire artisanal marine fisheries of Orissa, was undertaken covering all 236 coastal fishing villages (Kalavathy/Tietze 1985).

The census shows that there are 16,886 households of artisanal marine fisherfolk in Orissa and 30,050 active seagoing fishermen. Balasore district bordering West Bengal in the north is exclusively inhabited by Oriya and immigrant Bengali fisherfolk and has by far the largest number of fishing villages (184) as well as the largest number of fisherfolk (9260). Ganjam district situated on the border of Andhra Pradesh in the South has 29 fishing villages and 4132 fisherfolk households, which are almost exclusively of Telugu origin. Puri and Cuttack districts

inhabited by both Oriya/Bengali and Telugu fisherfolk have 1808 and 1686 marine fisherfolk households living in 16 and 7 villages respectively.

For the sociological study 10 villages were selected. In selecting the villages, remoteness/proximity to a town has been considered a strong factor with regard to the areas under survey and was therefore taken into account. Half of the villages chosen were comparatively close to a town, while the other half had a remote location. Furthermore, ethnic background as well as regional aspects in terms of occupational, cultural and migration patterns were taken as criteria for selection of villages. Out of the ten villages selected for the sociological study, four were situated in Ganjam district and six in Balasore district, Balasore and Ganjam districts were selected for the study because they represent all the major oceanographic conditions prevailing in Orissa as well as the various ethnic groups involved in sea-fishing.

While the villages selected in Ganjam district are exclusively inhabited by fisherfolk of Tetugu origin, the villages in Balasore district are inhabited by both Oriya and Bengali fisherfolk.

Again in each village, households were selected as second stage sample units, considering all economic strata equally. In South Orissa, owners of several craft and gear, small owners and wage/share labourers have been distinguished : in North Orissa, boat owners/boat and net owners, net owners and wage/share labourers-because of differences in ownership and operational patterns,

villages as well as households were selected with the help of fisheries extension officers. Apart from the criteria mentioned above, the familiarity of the fisheries extension officer with villages and households was also taken into consideration in order to maximise the responsiveness/frankness of the villagers as well as the opportunities for counterchecks. In total, 248 households (approximately 25 per village) were selected, out of which 84 belonged to the labourer category, 82 to the 'small boat and net owner' category in the South or 'net owner' category in the North, and another 82 to the 'big boat and net owner' category in the South or 'boat owner' category in the North. Out of the 248

households, 86 were of Telugu origin while the other 162 were Oriya and Bengali fisherfolk.

A combination of interviews and observations was used to collect information on the village. With the help of a schedule, containing both structured and unstructured questions, the head of the family and his wife were interviewed separately, by a team consisting of a female and a male investigator in order to counter-check and to compare perceptions expressed by male and female respondents.

The interviews were carried out in each village for a week. During this time, observations were made to obtain general information about the village and secondary information with regard to the areas covered in the interviews.

Further enquiries and observations were made during subsequent visits to several villages. The field survey was carried out by three teams of investigators, of which two consisted of sociology **and** anthropology students of Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, and one was formed by social science students **from** Madras University.

Chapters 2 and 3 of this book, in a descriptive way, compare the Oriya and Bengali fisherfolk of North Orissa with the Telugu fisherfolk of South Orissa regarding their ethnographic background, culture, fishing technology, perceptions of nature, economic and social organisation. Chapters 4 and 5, in a more analytical way, discuss the role and significance of traditional caste occupation and economic status by comparing fisherfolk of different economic status and fisherfolk by caste with non-caste fisherfolk.

It **is** hoped that the study will help to bring about a better understanding of artisanal fisherfolk and thereby provide information to make developmental efforts more meaningful for a community which en-gages in a strenuous occupation to feed society, sometimes with little reward for itself.

A shortcoming of the study is that more time should have **been** allotted for observations in order to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and context of many of the aspects discussed in the following chapters. It is suggested that future studies take some of our findings **as** hypothesis or assumptions to be examined with the help of more thoroughly conducted observations and indepth interviews,