

# Ramponkars in Goa

## Between Modernisation, Government and the Deep Blue Sea

*This paper attempts to study the lifestyle of the ramponkars, a traditional fishing community of Goa, and the effect of modernisation on their socio-economic position. The ramponkars' agitation is a classic case of a conflict against marginalisation and exploitation of marine resources. The exploitation itself was a collective design wherein the state was aligned with the mechanised trawler owners, and displayed a lackadaisical approach towards the ramponkars' problems. The ramponkars have, after a long battle, succeeded in getting their demands on implementing an exclusion zone for trawlers and on monsoon fishing. However, the recent technological changes adopted by the traditional fisherfolk themselves are unsustainable and will ultimately result in the intensification of the 'tragedy of the commons'.*

SHARON D'CRUZ, AVINASH V RAIKAR

The logic behind sustainable development is a systematic and persistent effort to maintain ecological balance. Marine life is a part of nature, and like other natural resources it is renewable but exhaustible if exploited ruthlessly. Historically, the traditional, community-based practices had an in-built system of conservation. The sea was the common property resource<sup>1</sup> of the 'kharvis', who had free access to marine resources. During the last two decades of the 20th century, fishing in Goa witnessed a process of modernisation. This led to the intensification of fishing activities through mechanisation of indigenous fishing canoes that recklessly exploited the natural resources. Subsequently, non-kharvis infiltrated into the fishing sector and marginalised the traditional communities. The process of mechanisation was an exogenous one, driven by a drastic change in the lifestyle patterns of the people and demand for fish in the export market. The motive for profits reversed the traditional system. The ramponkars' agitation, which started in the 1980s, is a classic case of a conflict against modernisation, marginalisation and exploitation of marine resources. It was also a struggle to preserve the traditional eco-friendly values that were cherished by fishermen over the centuries.

In this paper, an attempt is made to study the lifestyle of the ramponkars and the effect of modernisation on their socio-economic position. The very concept of a 'people's movement' has become a saleable idea in the post-liberation literature and has its origin in the socio-economic reality of the area studied. A meaningful leadership is generally oriented towards mobilising a sub-group within a group towards a specific goal. Here, we have tried to assess the nature and orientation of the leadership that enabled the traditional fishermen to institutionalise themselves against the other two contenders on the sea. The nexus between the political and economic powers was largely responsible in hindering the coordinated and collective efforts of the traditional classes. This patterned nexus was buttressed by the global changes that threatened the very existence of a localised set-up and the segmented structure of Goan society.

It was obvious that the ramponkars would be sidelined in the process, as they were unable to realise the stark reality that the craze for over-exploitation and profits that predominated modernisation and privatisation would undoubtedly result in the 'tragedy of the commons' [Hardin 1968]. This work is a micro-level study related to the prime fishing villages located along the coast of Goa.

### The Coast: A Delimited Area

Marine fishing activity is carried out along the coastline of Goa, which stretches for over 105 km. The coast accounts for about 22 per cent of the total area. The fishing zone extends over 15,000 sq km. Goa has an offshore fishing area of 2,500 km. This is nearly 200 fathoms deep and is a habitus for pelagic and demersal resources.<sup>2</sup>

Fishing is one of the major industries in Goa, and nearly 30,225 fishermen inhabit 71 fishing villages in eight fishing talukas. The ramponkars live along the coasts of Bardez, Salcette and Tiswadi, where there is heavy siltation and promontories with flat, sandy beaches. Recent statistics indicate that in 2001-02, around 73,135 tonnes of marine fish worth Rs 165.44 crore was netted. Of this, fish worth Rs 35 crore was exported [Barbosa 2003].<sup>3</sup>

### Ramponkars: An Ethnographic Survey

The occupational composition of castes is largely dependent upon the geographical bifurcation of the land. The coastline of Goa is dotted by a string of isolated fishing villages that are inhabited by different communities of traditional kharvis like ramponkar, magkar, kantaikar, pagelkar and arrikar. Each of these groups monopolised different zones of the sea and used different types of nets like koble, mag, kanttai, pagel and rapon that were used to catch different types of fish. This reflects the complexity and diversity within the occupational group. In this

article, we have concentrated on the ramponkars, one subgroup within the kharvi community.

The kharvis claim to be autochthones of Goa. The ramponkars were a relatively discreet community whose members shared certain commonalities. They had a patrilocal residence and lived in vertically extended families. They generally inhabited one 'vaddo' within a village. The surnames were the criterion for identifying their lineage. The ramponkars derive their name from a particular type of set-up, called 'rampon'. These are homogenous collectives whose members can be physically counted. They also maintain a distinct identity. Most of them marry within the same sub-group. There were certain status symbols entrenched in their cultural ethos. The males wore half pants or 'casti' while the women wore saris and blouses in a distinctive style. The latter also wore heavy gold jewellery, which was a source of investment for them. This was occasionally pawned when they were in dire need of money. It is interesting to note that most of the ramponkars were converts who patronised a particular saint. The ramponkars still practise their age-old practices and popular cults. The Catholic kharvis still offer coconuts to the sea on the full moon day of 'shraavan' and perform animal sacrifices to appease the evil spirit with the help of the 'ghadi' [Singh 2002; de Souza 1989].

The ramponkars functioned as homogenous collectives whose members can be physically counted. Pushed to the fringes of the mainstream and limited by the sea, they have inhabited the compact area between the land and the sea.

### **An Early Cooperative Endeavour**

It is not possible to trace the origins of the cooperative endeavour called the rampon, nor is there a satisfactory answer as to why this institution operated in the old conquests. Several community-based initiatives were adopted to manage the CPRs that took the form of a local institution which was caste-based and governed by collectively formulated norms and concepts of social cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

The ramponkars were small-scale, artisanal fishermen. They operated in a group of 20-25 male members called a band. Each band had its own name like Pequeno Barao, Dumgale, Chadiyale, Chadenkar, Marale, and Kodibaiyale. This band was called rampon and the members were called ramponkars. Each band had a big shed on the seashore called a 'khomp', where the nets and boats were housed during the off-season. Licence for fishing was obtained in the name of the band. Membership of the band was neither hereditary nor permanent. All those who invested in the equipment and those who helped in the manual work were co-sharers in the catch. The thrust of their activity was the net and wooden boat, which was owned by the 'bhatkar' (landlord) who was entitled to a share of the fish ('vantte'). In recent times, individuals or groups of 5-6 members own the equipment. The ramponkars fished in shallow waters within a distance of 2 km of the shore. They cast their twine net at any time of the day after observing the low tide or the colour of the water. Pieces of lead ('chin') kept the net in place. As the fish moved inshore with the high tide, it was trapped in the net. The net was cast before daybreak and pulled on-shore before noon. The same process was repeated in the evening and the net pulled to the shore before sunset. If they were not successful in pulling the net on the shore before dusk or if the catch was too large, then both

the ends of the net were tied to wooden poles, or 'khutti', and the net was pulled ashore early in the morning.

### **Colonial Intervention**

The Portuguese did not interfere with the coastal maritime communities because they defended their seaborne possessions, guarded their trade and commerce from local rivals and facilitated their inland trade. Moreover, Portuguese officials and others relished fish and ensured that they received a regular supply. In 1555, Dom Pedro de Mascarhenas placed Salcette under the spiritual care of the Jesuits.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, the latter converted several communities along the coast. There is a reference to the padres who received a regular supply of fish from the ramponkars in Colva.

In 1897, the Portuguese government passed an act that prohibited trawling or purseining within five fathoms from the shore.<sup>6</sup> This was supposedly done to keep a check on their coastal enemies who infiltrated inshore on small fishing boats. The extensive coastline had made official surveillance very difficult. Apart from this, there was no other regulation in this regard.

### **Post-Liberation Reforms**

The occupational affinity is largely related to a common geographical niche. The ramponkars lived on the fringes of an agrarian society and shared a common history that did not change even after the colonial regime was overthrown.

In India, the process of mechanisation in the fishing sector was introduced with the Indo-Norwegian joint project in Kerala. In the pre-liberation period, fisheries in Goa were controlled by the Board of External Trade and office of Captain of Ports. Fishing was monopolised by traditional fishermen. In 1963, the ministry of food and agriculture of the government of India appointed a team of three fisheries experts to examine the potential of fishing activities in Goa [Gune 1979; Alvares 1998]. The department of fisheries of the government of Goa was established vide order no DF-372-FYP-62-27 dated January 22, 1963. In same year, the department introduced several schemes under the five-year plans. These were mainly aimed at developing the infrastructure and providing financial assistance to enable traditional fishermen to mechanise country crafts. The department provided loans to traditional fishermen that were repayable in 21 quarterly instalments over seven years, and constructed 22 mechanised boats for them. In 1961, there were only four trawlers and 4,125 traditional fishing boats. The annual fish catch never exceeded 17,000 tonnes and the varieties included mackerels, sardines, hilsa tirhis, naked perchets, rainbow sardines, round-bellied sardines, and common penny fishes. The peak season was from September to May [D'Souza 2003].

During 1964-65, the administrators encouraged the ramponkars to go in for trawlers, which would enable them to venture farther with less strain. The next year, the department, in collaboration with the registrar of cooperatives, motivated the fishermen to organise fisheries cooperatives. During 1963-65, eight cooperatives were formed, each with a membership of 70-500 persons. These cooperatives were intended to provide financial aid and subsidies to the traditional fishermen. The government even contributed to the share capital of these societies [Gune 1979:312-16].<sup>7</sup> However, these were mere provisional supply-cum-marketing

cooperatives rather than producer-based cooperatives. To improve the socio-economic conditions of the ramponkars, it was essential to convert the primitive form of cooperatives into modern organised structures by granting them loans and subsidies on large scale.

Interestingly most of the ramponkars were not interested in these state-sponsored ventures as fish were available in plenty. Being illiterate, they could not understand the schemes that were being floated by the government. Taking advantage of this, the non-kharvis availed of these benefits. Since 1975 onwards, 500 mechanised vessels were financed by public sector banks. By 1980, there were about 1,128 mechanised boats fishing on the coast of Goa.<sup>8</sup>

As mechanisation set in, the ramponkars had several woes. There were sporadic complaints about the type and girth of the boats, their capacity to fish, the size of the mesh (net), and fishing zones, among others. A whole flotilla of trawlers would leave the jetty at the same time and sweep off the fish from the waters using a mosquito mesh at the same time. Many of them ventured in shallow waters even during the breeding season and did not spare the ova-bearing and juvenile fish. It was estimated that every trawler dumped 60 per cent of the trash fish on to the jetty as it did not have a market value and increased the market cost [Mhambre 2001]. This resulted in intense biological degeneration. There were many isolated complaints about trawlers destroying their nets.

### **Mechanisation and Tradition:<sup>9</sup> Bitter Tussle**

The transition from traditional to mechanised fishing was far from smooth, as it was driven by the blind craze for 'progress'. In such a situation, the interests of the ramponkars did not matter and their complaints remained unheard. Nevertheless, some people decided to institutionalise themselves, organise the ramponkars and fight an ecological battle to save marine life. They had a common desire to respond to the needs and problems of the traditional fishermen and restore to them their rights and control over marine resources. In December 1975, the Goemchea Ramponkarancha Ekvott (GRE)<sup>10</sup> was formally founded at the Institute Menezes Braganza. In 1976, the GRE forwarded the first memorandum to the chief minister. But the state government did not respond favourably and accused the GRE of misleading the traditional fishermen.

Around this time, the central government began to sponsor several schemes to develop the fishing industry. These were supplemented with state aid that allegedly tried to develop the fisheries sector by providing assistance to build modern fishing crafts. The fishermen were encouraged to take loans from banks. Big trawler owners began to invest in large-scale fishing for huge profits. The ramponkars complained, but their woes were washed off by the surf of the trawlers.

In 1976, the post-emergency political scenario was characterised by social discontent and political agitations. The Janata Party overthrew the Congress. In Goa, the ramponkars went on a chain hunger strike for 380 days. A citizens committee was formed, and for the first time the issue was debated in the legislative assembly. But no constitutional action could be taken, as the central government had declared an emergency.

In Goa, the movement continued unabated in Caranzalem, Calangute and Dona Paula. The ramponkars held a 40-day dharna at the chief minister's residence and a demonstration in Panaji.

But the GRE was voiceless "to those who did not want to hear their voices" [Mhambre 2001]. Some trawlers fished just 500 meters from the shore with police protection. In 1978, the second general body meeting of the GRE was held.

The GRE undertook several local agitations against the use of mechanised trawlers. It held a morcha in Panaji demanding a 5 km zone that would be free from the trawlers and purseiners and a ban on monsoon fishing. By now, the fishing sector in Goa was highly mechanised and most trawler owners had political connections. They tried their best to maximise their profits and even embarked upon a legal battle. In May 1978, they challenged the Portuguese Act of 1897 in the judicial commissioners court. In his ruling, the president, justice Tito Menezes, said the act was bad as the state government could not follow an ambivalent policy. He opined that night trawling and fishing during monsoon should be stopped. Following this, there were sporadic protests, agitation, morchas and court arrests but these were of no avail. The state government condemned the movement as being anti-national. The trawlers continued to dredge the bed of the shore as it was 'legal' from their point of view.

The trawlers were interested in fishing within a 2 km zone primarily because this zone was the breeding ground and habitat of most of the species that were in demand in the export market. The technology that was used in trawlers was capital-intensive and the owners were interested in maximising profits. The GRE joined hands with the PDF and put forth 18 demands.<sup>11</sup>

The leaders of the GRE realised that a local struggle would not yield the desired results. They now decided to associate with national leaders. In a meeting that was held in Bangalore, the leaders decided to send a joint representation to Delhi in favour of a national law that would protect the 6.5 million traditional fishermen who lived along the Indian coastline. In 1978, they formed the National Forum for Catamaran and Country Boat Fishermen Rights and Marine Life (NFF). The GRE was affiliated to it.<sup>12</sup> The state government patronised the trawlers. It developed fish landing jetties in the well-sheltered river estuaries and also made attempts to improve facilities to preserve fish [Newman 1991].

In July 1978, Mathany Saldanha was appointed chairman of the NFF. A meeting was held in Delhi and a memorandum was submitted to the prime minister, the union minister for fisheries and to all members of parliament. For the first time, the issue was debated in parliament and the representative of the GRE went to New Delhi to demand a central marine bill. In September 1978, a delegation of the NFF was informed that a model bill would be circulated in all the fishing states to introduce a legislation in their respective assemblies. At that time, there were 24,051 traditional fishermen in Goa, of whom 5,258 were active.<sup>13</sup>

In 1979, Mathany Saldanha, the general secretary of GRE, was jailed on false charges and was later acquitted by the additional sessions judge. By 1980, the ramponkars renewed their agitation against non-fishing vessels and mechanised trawlers that caught juvenile mackerels and sardines against order no 21-8-81-FSH/6. This was one of the provisions in the Marine Fishing Registration Act of Goa, Daman and Diu, 1980. These fishes accounted for 70 per cent of the catch.

In 1980, the prime minister sent a draft of the marine regulation bill that had to be passed in the state legislatures. Meanwhile, the clashes between the ramponkars and the trawler owners worsened as the latter demanded the implementation of the bill.

But the trawler owners became hostile. In Velsao, Cansaulim, Benaulim and Betalbatim six rampons were burnt and the leaders were jailed. A police force was stationed in Velsao and there was police patrolling along the coast. The people approached the police for justice but the latter turned a deaf ear to their pleas. The issue discredited the MGP, which lost the elections.<sup>14</sup>

In 1980, there was a change in the Goa political scenario. Members of the UGDP shifted to the Congress(U), which won the general assembly elections. Thereafter, the latter defected to the Congress(I). The ramponkars forced the fisheries minister to introduce the marine regulation bill in the legislative assembly. In 1980, they sent a second notice to the government of Goa and published a leaflet. The Congress(I) had to form a house committee to discuss the issue. The government acceded to the bill, but modified it to fool the fishermen. The trawler owners appealed to the Supreme Court.<sup>15</sup>

Under the insinuation of the state fisheries minister, the GRE intervened and appointed Govind Makhute to represent the ramponkars. The court passed an interim order that banned trawlers from infiltrating into within two-and-a-half km from the shore. Only 250 trawlers were allowed to fish in that zone. A total ban was imposed on night fishing. The trawler owners were instructed to give their details to the Supreme Court through the directorate of fisheries.<sup>16</sup> It must be noted here that the trawler owners did not have to renew their licences. Hence, reliable data on the operational trawling vessels and their catch is not available.

The trawler owners did not comply with the Supreme Court order. The unabated fishing resulted in a 'fish famine'. The years 1980-82 were officially declared as a fish famine period in the government gazettee.<sup>17</sup> The catch of sardines and mackerels dropped drastically because their bio-productivity was disturbed.

### Fishing in Troubled Waters

During 1981-83, the Supreme Court refused to pass a verdict and the case remained unheard. The trawlers crossed the debated zone while the ramponkars awaited justice. The bulk of the fish that was netted by the trawlers was exported for profits. The day's catch was directly loaded into waiting trucks that transported the fish to the processing plants in Karnataka and Maharashtra. Of the 73,000 tonnes of fish that was caught each year, hardly 10 per cent entered the Goan markets [Barbosa 2003:67].

In 1983, the Supreme Court finally passed its order. Since fishing was a local issue, the state government was instructed to make a thorough study of the case within one year with the help of scientists and fishermen to prove the accusations of the GRE. The findings were to be sent to the court. However, the Congress did not implement the order and the GRE president issued statement against it.

In January 1983, some ramponkars were arrested at midnight under preventive detention. The traditional fishermen retaliated and even joined a national democratic agitation demanding the implementation of the Marine Regulatory Act. Several researches that were conducted during this time favoured the ramponkars. Parulekar and Dalal estimated that the maximum sustainable yield of marine fish off the coast of Goa was 70,295 tonnes per year. The FAO recommended 30 trawlers for every 10 km of the coastline. Hence, 315 trawlers for 105 km were ideal for Goa. But, Goa had 1,128 registered trawlers [ibid].

In 1985, the ramponkars presented their third memorandum to the fisheries minister. The president of the GRE made a public declaration against trawler owners for destroying the ova-bearing fish during the monsoon to manipulate the prices of fish. The GRE wanted the authorities to regulate the fishing season, maintain a stock of catch made in all the seasons and ban trawling in a particular area as it would disrupt the natural growth of fish. There were periodic insurgencies in favour of aquarian reforms like returning undersized fish to the sea, conservation and management of marine resources through a proper assessment of inshore resources, combination of mechanised and non-mechanised country crafts, fixing the optimum number of craft gears, limiting the number of trawling boats in coastal rivers up to 10 fathoms, promoting the quota system for boat fishermen and limiting trawling to an exclusive economic zone. The nets of the ramponkars were periodically destroyed.<sup>18</sup>

In January 1986, a major trawler owner took over as fisheries minister. He condemned the traditional fishermen for preventing trawlers from fishing within 2.5 km from the shore. But the PDF government, which came to power by defections, soon fell.

Meanwhile, local leaders established contact with the environmentalists and fishing groups from other countries and participated in seminars at Hamburg and Rome. During the same period, an international collective was formed to support the fish workers in Thiruvananthapuram. The national leaders decided to hold a parallel conference to the FAO in Rome on the status of world fisheries.

In 1987, the GRE members were condemned by some quarters. In next five years, the average catch in the major fishing areas was 40,000 tonnes [D'Souza 2003].

### The Tussle Continues

The ramponkars as a community were volatile and aggressive. Since moderate action had failed, they reacted in a hostile manner. In January 1989, some trawlers were grounded at Velsao. A protest march was held in Goa to 'protect waters, protect life'. This was followed by a meeting of the NFF at Pilar which was attended by several noted environmentalists. In this meeting, it was decided to form local-level committees of environmentalists.

In 1991, the government floated a package of pro-elitist and capitalist oriented economic reforms, thus losing its status of being an honest broker.<sup>19</sup> Being a trawler owner himself, the fisheries minister was not interested in the welfare of the ramponkars. In fact, he tried to write off the loans taken by the trawler owners from the fisheries federation, amounting to Rs 2.45 crore, on the grounds of a 'fish famine'. It is interesting to note that during this period the fish catch was maximum. But the trawler lobby succeeded in getting these years declared as fish famine years.

In 1994, the ramponkars' movement received a shot-in-the-arm when the Supreme Court passed an order that banned mechanised fishing within 5 km from the shore. The states were empowered to make their own rules to conserve marine ecology. To implement the court order, the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) was assigned the task of determining the high-tide line along the Goa coast, which it never completed. The GRE demanded the implementation of the court order, which was vehemently opposed by trawler owners. Their argument was that a ban on fishing during monsoon would lead to monetary losses

as large quantities of solar prawns are available during that season. Also that if they were not allowed to fish, the trawlers of the neighbouring states would utilise the opportunity. Under the influence of powerful trawler owners, the government did nothing to implement the ban. The ramponkars decided to intensify their agitation and caught 19 trawlers that were fishing within the 5-km. zone. The trawler owners then agreed to discussions with the GRE to sort out the problem. A meeting was held but no concrete solutions could be worked out. The violation of fishing regulations continued and there were sporadic upsurges along the coast.

The encroachment of foreign fishing vessels in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) became yet another problem. The EEZ was an international demarcation line that separated the international fishing grounds [Baktha 1985; Johnson 2000, Kamat 1994]. Most trawler owners had taken advance contracts to supply fish to the processing units and exporters. The international fishing trawlers could be better defined as 'marine factories'. They operated on the sea for six months and had in-built storage facilities.

In March 1995, the ramponkars caught four trawlers fishing within 5-km from the shore. The trawler owners filed cases against five fishermen and levelled false accusations against them. By now, it was clear to the ramponkars that the government was not interested in implementing the Supreme Court order, and they decided to take drastic action against the violators. This created a bitter tussle between the ramponkars and trawler owners and the government was forced to intervene by calling a meeting of the two sides. The minister of fisheries was very sympathetic towards the ramponkars. He agreed to impose the Supreme Court order banning fishing from mid-June to the end of August. In the meeting that was convened, representatives of the Fishermen's Cooperative Societies agreed to ban night fishing and stop wastage. But violations continued, especially in the zone stretching from Vasco to Siridao, and the government was unable to take appropriate action.

On June 14, 1995, the GRE held a meeting with the fisheries minister, in which the latter assured traditional fishermen that mechanised boats would not be allowed to encroach upon the 'illegal zone'. However, 20 days later, the GRE said that the trawlers in Vasco and Siridao fished in the zuari river even during the ban. The ramponkars aimed to build up confidence among the traditional fishermen. They requested the minister to settle the disputes, failing which they would demand an extension of the zone of conservation to 10-km from the coast. They warned the trawler owners of strict action if they operated within the 5-km zone.

The increase in exports and sale of fish to non-consumers pushed up prices of fish in the local market. In the assembly session, the fisheries minister gave an assurance that the fishermen would be asked to sell the fish at a reasonable rate by weight instead of 'vattes'. He also decided to raise the fees of the trawling companies. The government proposed to shift the fish market to a new complex. But this evoked protests from the traditional fisherwomen, who preferred "to sit on the parapet along the banks of the river for a few hours instead of doing business near the human excreta".

In July 1996, the minister favoured the ramponkars. A fishing ramp was built at Hollant and Velsao. The concept of jetties was a major threat to the traditional fishermen as they implied an infiltration by trawlers. The fisheries minister also said that the

government may consider an extension in the official ban period beyond July 25, 1997.

A meeting of the representatives of coastal states was scheduled to be held, to discuss the urgent need for a uniform ban in the country. They also felt the need to discuss the renewal of licences for vessels that ventured deep into the sea. In Goa, the department of fisheries was thinking in terms of setting up mini-markets, jetties and anchorages. In July 1999, the wholesale fish traders association was sporadically objecting against the import of fish from outside the state. The GRE flayed the fisheries minister against the violation of the 5-km zone. Being a major trawler owner himself, he was criticised as 'the godfather of the trawler owners and purseiners'. The GRE now demanded that the government should extend the ban to August 15, and to punish those who sold the roe bearing fish during the ban. In 2000, the state legislature passed a bill that reduced the fishing ban from August 15 to July 21. As a gesture of goodwill, the legislators were given 2 kg of solar prawns. The GRE immediately reacted against this move and the Panjim branch of the Bombay High Court had to restore the ban, much to the dismay of trawler owners.

The ban was beneficial to the trawler owners in the long run. As the ban lapsed on August 12, 2003, 100 tonnes of solar prawns were netted at Cutbona. Each trawler managed to catch 900 kg to 3 tonnes of solar prawns.<sup>20</sup> Yet the industry is unable to attract locals.

The fall in production and low realisation of export earnings have intensified the struggle between trawler owners and traditional fishermen. Though the ban existed, it was not adequately implemented due to lack of political will. The powerful trawler lobby that dominated the Congress Party did everything possible to either reduce the ban period or to not enforce the ban. For the first time, though, the trawler lobby is now out of power and the leader of the ramponkars, Mathany Saldanha, has been elected as the MLA from the Cortalim constituency. As he is one of the important supporters of the BJP-led government, it remains to be seen whether the ban is implemented and enforced with genuine intention of conserving natural resources and protecting traditional fishers, or due to pressure from the party to which Saldanha belongs.

### Counter-Reaction of Ramponkars to Mechanisation

Over the years the fishing fleet has been increasing. As per guidelines recommended by the FAO, the ideal size of trawlers in Goa would be 350. But many experts opine that 500 trawlers would be an ideal size for the exploitation of marine resources on a sustainable basis. The growth of fishing fleet is shown in Table. From the table, it is clear that the mechanised fleet has been continuously increasing, resulting in the reckless exploitation of

**Table: Fishing Fleet in Goa**

Year	Mechanised	Country Crafts	Total
1960-61	4(0.10)	4125(99.90)	4129(100.00)
1970-71	110(2.96)	3600(97.04)	3710(100.00)
1980-81	189(6.14)	2887(93.86)	3085(100.00)
1985-86	600(19.67)	2450(74.36)	3050(100.00)
1990-91	707(25.64)	2050(74.36)	2757(100.00)
1995-96	880(30.77)	1980(69.23)	2860(100.00)
1997-98	1056(36.46)	1840(63.54)	2896(100.00)
1998-99	1092(36.42)	1890(63.38)	2982(100.00)
1999-00	1092(33.23)	2194(66.77)	3286(100.00)
2000-01	1128(36.49)	1963(63.51)	3091(100.00)

marine resources. Consequently, the marine catch has declined significantly. The number of mechanised trawlers has increased from four in 1960-61 to 189 in 1980-81. In 2001-02, their number stood at 1,128 which is about 36.49 per cent of the total fishing fleet operating on the coastline of Goa.

In recent years, more and more traditional fishermen have shifted over to motorised canoes. This trend is accentuated by the growth of 'disco rampons'.<sup>21</sup> Here, the traditional wooden crafts are fitted with an outboard motor which is used to power the craft so that it is able to venture deep into the sea. The rise in 'disco rampons' is fostered by the high rate of unemployment and poor skills among the traditional fishing community. This process has been encouraged by the strict implementation of the 5-km fishing ban imposed on mechanised fishing during monsoon.

### Conclusion

The intensification of fishing activities through the mechanisation of indigenous fishing canoes or trawlers can be largely attributed to the drastic changes in the lifestyle patterns of the people. This in turn has increased the per capita consumption of fish and exports especially to developed countries. Fisheries have become a highly profitable venture and several companies have invested in this sector.<sup>22</sup> The exploitation of the ramponkars was a collective design wherein the state was favourably allied with the modern trawler owners. As such, there was a conscious attempt to exploit the non-owned and openly accessible resources.

In Goa, the major malaise in the fishing industry was the lackadaisical approach of the government towards the ramponkars. The failure of the government to support the local, traditional institution has become an open access problem that has involved the other fishermen as well. There are several agitations, some of which are violent. Despite this, the rampon has continued to function as a typical pre-cooperative venture that neither has a formal hierarchy nor a formal organisation. It is still based on voluntary membership with an in-built system of co-sharing. Recently, the state government decided not to promote new trawlers and has stopped registering them. Since 2001, only replacements were allowed and five new licences are issued per annum.<sup>23</sup>

The ultimate effect of the long struggle of the ramponkars is that they have appropriated the right to use the 5-km zone. Further, they have ensured that the monsoon fishing ban is not applicable to them. The recent technological changes that have been adopted by the traditional community under the pressure of modernisation and survival are unsustainable, environmentally unfriendly and ethically illegal. Such techniques will ultimately result in the intensification of the 'tragedy of commons'.

The regional plan for Goa, 2001 aimed at developing deep-sea fishing with medium-sized mechanised vessels and appropriate technology. The NIO has suggested a two-fold increase in the exploitation of demersal resources. The current potential of the coast of Goa is 332 kg/hectare against the current rate of exploitation of 77 kg/hectare. The sustainable yield is projected to be 41,000 and 29,000 tonnes of pelagic and demersal resources respectively. The plan also proposed to develop infrastructure by providing all-weather roads, linkages with settlements, industries, markets and processing units apart from providing storage, berthing, curing, and drying yards. But the question is, are all these facilities wanted by the traditional fishermen? Will they

benefit from them? The events till date have proved that the plan was not so tradition friendly. **EW**

Address for correspondence:

Dr Sharon D'Cruz,  
H No 95/8, Chinchant Vaddo,  
Tivim, Bardez, Goa

### Notes

- 1 With reference to CPRs, we have restricted ourselves to S V Ciriacy Wantarup (1975): 'Common Property – A Concept in Natural Resource Policy', *Natural Resource Journal*, Vol 15 (Oct), and Jodha N S (1990): 'Rural Common Property Resource: Contribution and Crisis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, A 65-79.
- 2 Dhawan, R M (1998): 'Scope for Development of Fisheries in Goa', paper presented at the local History Seminar; of da Costa, B C (1923): *Geografica Fisical e Politica: A India Portuguesa*, Imprensa Nacional, Nova Goa, Vol I, p 9-11; 'Report of the Task Force on the Eco-Development Plan for Goa', Planning Commission, Government of India, 1983, p 82; Oertel G (1958): 'A Geologia do distrito de Goa: Comunicacoes dos servicos geologicos de Portugal', tomo, 40; Kamat, P K (1989): 'Historical Geography and Natural Resources' in de Souza T R (ed) *Goa Through the Ages*, Concept, New Delhi, Vol I, p 88; 'Techno Economic Survey of Goa, Daman and Diu', National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi, 1964, p 360.
- 3 These figures have been provided by the directorate of fisheries, government of Goa.
- 4 A case study of the working of the informal or pre-cooperatives in Katar Singh (1984): 'Marine Fisheries Cooperative in Kerala' in S Giriappa (ed) *Role of Fisheries in Rural Development*, Daya Publishing House, New Delhi, p 1-6. The use of social capital in management is studied by Serra, Reneta (2001): 'Social Capital: Meaningful and Measurable at the State level', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 24, pp 693-703.
- 5 The Jesuit order was sent to Goa as a strong arm of 'counter-reformation'. For details on the division of the old conquest among the three religious orders refer to Antonio da Silva Rego, *Documentacao para a historia do Padroado na India Oriental*, Agencia Real das Colonias, Vol III, pp 583-89.
- 6 Some of the regulations related to the sea are founded in HAG *Livro de Termos, Codice 7836 fls 227-228, e pasim*.
- 7 *The Fisheries Cooperatives in Goa*, department of fisheries report on the status of fisheries development in Goa, pp 5-6.
- 8 These statistics are drawn from the directorate of fisheries, government of Goa.
- 9 Mechanisation versus tradition has been the topic of interest to many. Chandran, C (1992): 'Kerala Fisheries: Traditional Sector v/s Mechanised Sector', *National Workshop on the Development of Marine Fisheries for Increase in Productivity*, Kochi, pp 275-77; Goodwin, James R 'Culturally Based Conflicts in the Use of Living Marine Resources and Suggestions Resolving or Mitigating Such Conflicts', Summary of the papers presented at the Kyoto Conference are on <http://www.fao.org>.
- 10 The GRE was founded in 1975 as an association of paelkars, ramponkars, magkars, kantaikars, and arrikars. It was registered under the Indian Societies Act. Pascoal Dias in the Souvenir of the organisation dated August 12, 1995 provides a history of the Goenchea Ramponkaracho Ekvvot, till 1995.
- 11 The bulk of the material is derived from local dailies *The Navhind Times*, *Herald and Gomantak Times*. Newman (1991): refers to the intricacies related to the blue revolution, pp 45-46. However, he continues only till 1991.
- 12 The references to these attempts to form a national link are available in the *Souvenir* of the GRE, op cit, (note 10).
- 13 The statistics for 2002 are provided by the directorate of fisheries, government of Goa.
- 14 The local dailies carried periodic reports on these occurrences.
- 15 The draft bill was published in the *Official Gazette*, government of Goa.
- 16 Hitherto, the trawlers were registered in perpetua. Hence, they rarely approached the directorate as they did not have to renew licences. The Supreme Court now made it obligatory for them at least to report to directorate.
- 17 *Official Gazettes* between 1980-82. D'souza (2003): pp 16-17; Latha Jishnu '...in troubled waters,' *Business World*, June 14-17, 1995, p 53 and Samar Halankar, 'Casting Nets in Troubled Waters,' *Business World*, March 17-30, 1995, p 81. There are several cases of over-fishing and the disappearance of some of the species. The statistics provided by directorate of fisheries, government of Goa are suspect as they are largely approximates of the estimates. As such, there are large discrepancies between the projected and actual catches; Rubinoff, Janet (2001): 'Pink Gold: Transformation of Backwater Aquaculture on Goa's Khazan Lands' *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 31, 2001, pp 1108-16; The export

figures are compiled by MPEDA, an organisation that deals with the promotion of marine exports.

- 18 This question was raised in an editorial in *The Navhind Times* of August 12, 2003.
- 19 A critique of structural adjustment programme and new economic policies and their impact on the poor and deprived is discussed by Panchamukhi, P R (1993): 'Social Impact of Economic Reforms in India – A Critical Appraisal,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 13, p 279-85.
- 20 In a study undertaken by the FAO, it was estimated that 1,64,000 tonnes could be harvested beyond coastal waters. The mechanised boats net 60 per cent of the catch, *Aquaworld*, Department of Science, Technology and Environment, government of Goa, 1997, pp 62-63; The Arabian Sea has become a soak-pit for anthropogenic chemicals and turbid sewage; R Sengupta and Qasim S Z (ed) (2001): *Health of the Indian Ocean: A Perspective*, Oxford, Vol I.
- 21 The disco rampon is the new phenomenon on the coast of Goa that is a threat to the traditional community. This has happened because though "the collection is at a standstill, the commercial value of the catch has not depleted", Vernekar, S C in Barbosa, (2003).
- 22 The potential and development of the fishing sector has been studied by R Repetto (ed) (1990): *The Global Possible: Resources, Development and The New Century*, East West Press, New Delhi; 'World Fisheries and Law of the Sea', FAO, <http://www.fao.org>, Shrivastava, U K and M Dharma Reddy (1983): *Fisheries Development in India: Some Aspect of Policy Management*, Concept, New Delhi, It was observed that the traditional fishermen generally have a conflict with decision-makers mainly because the latter see (1985): as homogeneous and irrational. The case of Goa has been dealt, them with by Pant et al (1985): *The Changing Landscape of Goa—Need for Environmental Planning and Management*, Geological Survey of India, Hyderabad, p 614; Rao, P P, Raju P V and M M Nair, 'Geomorphology of Goa', in Pant et al (ed) op cit, p 583. The possibility of a 'blue revolution' without adversely affecting the environment is cited by a special report on blue revolution, *The Economist*, 2003, pp 19-21.
- 23 Dholakia, R H, B H Dholakia and Ganesh Kumar (1992): 'Issues in Strategy for Export Promotion: An Inter Industry Analysis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November, M-149. Fish is a perishable commodity. Hence, the

marketing and distribution is restricted to the nature of processing and preservation. The fish industry parri passu supplied fish to the local market and to the exporters. Johnson Derek (2000): op cit, p 1095. In 1989, 30 per cent of the reported catch was used for non-food purposes. This information is available on the website <http://www.fao.org>, U K Srivastava et al, *Fisheries Sector in India*, Oxford and IBH, p 15.

## References

- Alvares, Claude (ed) (1998): 'In Search of New Trial' in *Fish Currey and Rice*, Goa Foundation, pp 173-75.
- Baktha, N P (1985): 'Development of Infrastructure Facilities for the Optimal Exploitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone' in U K Srivastava and M D Reddy (ed), *Highlights of the Discussion on EEZ and New Opportunities in Fisheries Development in India: Some Aspects of the Policy Management*, Concept, New Delhi.
- Barbosa, Alexander (2003): 'Fishing for a Higher Living', *Goa Today*, Vol XXXVII, No 4, p 11.
- D'Souza, Joe (2003): 'Fishing Woes to the Fore', *Goa Today*, Vol XXXVII, No 4, November, p 17.
- de Souza, T R (1989): 'Rural Economy and Life' in T R de Souza (ed), *Goa Through the Age*, Concept, New Delhi, Vol I, p 88.
- Gune, V T (1979): *Gazetteer of the Union Territories of Goa, Daman and Diu*, Part I, pp 312-13.
- Hardin, Garret (1968): 'The Tragedy of Commons', *Science*, Vol 162.
- Johnson, Derek (2000): 'Wealth and the Waste: Contrasting Legacies of Fisheries Development in Gujarat since 1950s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 31.
- Kamat, K G (1994): 'Plunder of the Depths: Foreign Trawlers', *Business World*, August 12-28.
- Mhambre, Umesh (2001): 'Interview with Mathany Saldana', *Navhind Times*, June 17.
- Newman, Robert (1991): *Of Umbrellas, Goddesses and Dreams*, Other Indian Press.
- Singh, K S (ed) (2002): *The People of India*, Anthropological Survey of India, Delhi, p 30-31.

## 46<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE INDIAN SOCIETY OF LABOUR ECONOMICS

### *Invitation to Contribute Papers*

The 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Labour Economics (ISLE) will be held during December 16-18, 2004 in Jaipur under the auspices of the Institute of Development Studies. **Dr. D. Narsimha Reddy, Professor of Economics and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad will preside over the Conference.**

The topics selected for the Conference are : 1. *Human Capital Base in Indian Labour Market*; 2. *Labour Processes and Productivity in Micro Enterprises*; and 3. *Collective Bargaining: Status and Prospects*. Those who desire to contribute papers may send them in triplicate to the Hon. Secretary, the Indian Society of Labour Economics, IAMR Building, I.P. Estate, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110 002 latest by August 31, 2004. The paper should not exceed 6000 words including tables, appendices, etc., and should necessarily include a summary not exceeding 500 words. The best paper writer below the age of 40 years will be awarded **Sanjay Thakur Young Labour Economist Award** of Rs. 10,000. The authors should strictly follow the pattern and style of writing as is being followed in the current issues of *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics*. For details of the Conference themes and guidelines for contributors, contact the Hon. Secretary of the ISLE.

Persons who would like to participate in the Conference are requested to contact the Local Organising Secretary of the Conference, Prof. Surjit Singh, for registration, reservation of accommodation, travel arrangements and other details at the following address: Prof. Surjit Singh, Institute of Development Studies, 8B Jhalana Institutional Area, Jaipur-302 004, Rajasthan(India); Phone: 91-141-2705726 Ext. 2003; Fax: 91-141-2705348; E-mail: [surjit@idsj.org](mailto:surjit@idsj.org); Mobile: 98290-64480. The membership fee of the Society (Rs. 200 Annual and Rs. 2,000 Life) should be sent through DD in favour of the *Indian Society of Labour Economics*, Old IAMR Building, I.P. Estate, M.G. Marg, New Delhi-110 002 (Phones: 011-23358166, 23321610; Fax: 23765410; E-mail: [isleindia@now-india.net.in](mailto:isleindia@now-india.net.in).)