

# VERSOVA : A WELL-ORGANISED FISHING VILLAGE

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*In this article the authors present a thought-provoking story of a well-organised fishing village.*

Versova is a coastal fishing village within the city limits of Greater Bombay. On its northern side is Versova creek and on the western side is the Madh island and the Arabian Sea. The present population of the village is 20,000, more than half of which are females. The total number of houses is 1200. Most of the inhabitants of the village derive their livelihood from fishing or related activities. Fishermen community of Versova is socio-economically quite sound due to adoption of modern technology and successful cooperativisation. Levels of education, health & hygiene, and financial security are of high standard and social evils are far lower than elsewhere. An outline of the activities in this village is given below so that fishery workers in other places can educate the fisher communities in their jurisdiction to emulate and adopt the ways of living and working of Versova fishermen.

## FISHING

The main varieties of fishes landed at Versova are Bombayduck, Pomfret, Ribbonfish, various species of prawns etc. These are mainly caught in dol net (bag net of fixed type), gill net and trawl net. Fishing is confined to shallow inshore waters upto 35m depth and 20 km away from shore. Most of the

fishing operations are conducted daily.

About 270 mechanised boats of 30-65 feet size operate from Versova. Of these, 190 are dol netters, 45 are trawlers and 35 are gill netters. The engines used have a HP of 5-95. Boats are made of teakwood and are built in the local boat building yards. All the boats are owned by the fishermen themselves. The dol net is fabricated with HDPE filament of 1.0 - 2.0 mm thickness. This net is about 50 meters in length. The trawl net is made of twine of 1.0 to 2.0 mm thickness. The gill net is made of monofilament of 0.5 - 1.0 mm. Generally, one boat operates 2 - 3 units of dol net, 60 - 80 units of gill net and 1 - 2 units of trawl net. The estimated fish landings of Versova 'A' and 'B' Zones were 17,000 and 55,000 tonnes respectively during 1984-85.

## FISH HANDLING AND PROCESSING

Crushed block ice is regularly taken on board and most boats have fish holds. Only quality fish is iced and kept in fish holds. The fish to ice ratio followed is 3:1. Low priced fish is kept on the deck in bamboo baskets. During the homeward journey after completing the fishing, the catch is washed with sea water. Cold room facilities of the

cooperative societies are available for keeping the fresh fish overnight before marketing. The rent charged is one rupee per basket of 50-60 kg.

Drying of fishes like ribbonfish, Bombayduck etc is done on raised bomboo platforms. Diagonal cuts are made on the ribbon fish for effective drying. Small fishes and prawns like *Acetes spp* (Jawala) are dried on mat, gunny sheet or open beach. Salting and curing of fish is not common in Versova. It is practised on a very limited scale. All the fish handling is done with bamboo baskets.

## TRANSPORTATION

In Versova, transportation system is very quick due to availability of trucks owned by cooperative societies. This mode of transport is cheap and the fish reaches the market in a fresh condition fetching good price. For carrying fish weighing upto 15 kg to Shivaji Market, Bombay (30km distance) a fee of Rs.3/- is charged. For fish up to 70 kg, the charge is Rs.5/- and for one accompanying person two rupees is charged. These charges are economical, compared to other modes of transport. There are about 16 trucks owned by various cooperative societies in Versova. Each truck can be loaded with 7 tonnes or 70 - 150 baskets of fish per trip.

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## FISH MARKETING

There are 4 wholesale and 60 retail markets for fresh and dry fish in Bombay. The Versova fishermen's cooperative society is having a fish stall at Shivaji wholesale fish market. One of the societies of Versova has sold fresh fish worth Rs.55 lakhs during 1985-86.

The members of a society who have taken advance/loan from it give part of their catch to that Society's stall for marketing in the wholesale market. Rest of the fish catch is sold by the members as they like. The marketing of the fish is done mainly by fishermen and they run their own stalls in wholesale and retail markets. Fish from their own boats or purchased at auction or from wholesale market are sold in retail stalls. Fishermen from Versova sell their catch at different wholesale and retail markets.

Andheri is the nearest major wholesale and retail market to Versova. Due to closeness to the landing centre and quick transport arranged by the society, the quality of the fish brought to the market is very good. Each fisherman transports 2-10 baskets of fresh fish, each containing 20-25 kg fish. Generally the fish is sold by numbers or in lots but not by weight.

At the Versova Fishermen's Co-operative Society's stall, each fisherman is provided with note books and slips to note down the particulars of the fish brought for auction, such as, the number of baskets, quantity, kind of fish etc. By this system, a record of daily arrivals is maintained by the society and individual fishermen are enabled to keep track of the quantities of fish sold by them. By this marketing arrangement, fishermen get a fair price for their catch and the

role of middle men is eliminated.

## COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The highlight of Versova fishermen's community is the high degree of mutual cooperation among themselves. They are running three successful cooperative societies. These are:

1) Versova Machhimar Vividh Karya Kari Sahkari Society Ltd.

2) Versova Koli Vahatuk Sangh Ltd. and

3) Versova Machhimar Motor Sangh Ltd.

The memberships of these societies are 1180, 1850 and 660 respectively. The main activities of the societies are:

1) supply of various fishery requisites (like rope, twine, float, paint etc.)

2) running of ice plant and cold storage

3) transport of fish and other materials

4) maintenance of fresh fish stalls

5) maintenance of diesel pump and spare parts shop and,

6) maintenance of ration and grocery shop.

The Vividh Machhimar Karya Kari Sahkari Society sold fishing requisites worth Rs.99 lakhs during 1985-86. The Society purchases the material in bulk from the manufacturer. The Society is having an ice plant of 35 tonne/day capacity and ice worth Rs.9.3 lakhs was sold last year. The cold room is of 60 tonne capacity and is fully utilised. Crushing of ice is also done here. The society advanced a loan of Rs.9.42 lakh to its members and its fresh market stall sold fish worth Rs.54.60 lakhs. The departmental stores and marine engine spare parts section also did very well. The

society received Rs.25 lakhs as advance and loan from NCDC under various schemes.

The Koli Vahatuk Sangh Ltd has five diesel trucks and two luxury buses. The fish stall at Andheri market had a turnover of Rs.9 lakhs last year. From the sale of ice, a sum of Rs.15 lakhs was received. The transportation facility provided by the society brought an earning of Rs.5.8 lakhs as transportation charges in 1986-87.

## PROBLEMS

It is evident from the above success story that the fishermen of Versova are well organised and financially sound. The future however looks bleak because, of late, fish catches have been coming down partly due to intensive fishing in inshore waters. Even big trawlers and deep sea vessels are fishing close to the shore. A high level of industrial pollution in and around Versova creek and discharge of domestic effluents have also affected the fishery to a greater degree. A protected fishing zone is a must to avoid a situation in which fishermen will be driven into penury. Liberal insurance may be extended against loss of life, boats, nets etc or natural calamity in this highly risky profession. Input from Government agencies for facilities like net making plant, extended processing facilities like ice, cold room, subsidised plastic boxes, drying platforms etc are needed.

## ERROR REGRETTED

Line 6, column 3, of page No.90 in July '87 issue should have been as follows:

"The prices at the jetty were Rs.110 for whites (small), browns Rs.75/kg and tigers Rs.210/kg."

The error is regretted.