

**Governmentality:
Panacea From Chaos**
*Why the fisher folk of Kolavai Lake want the
Government to regulate them*

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"There is a trend in international fisheries science to seek the improvement of resource management by consolidating control efforts. This collaboration process, which involves the alignment of state and of fishermen's tenure system towards a common set of goals, is generally termed co-management"

- S. Jentoft¹

Introduction

While the concept of 'Lee Hypothesis'² finds support in many East Asian nations, it is the canon of 'Free Markets' that seems to have captured the imagination of a majority of mainstream public policy-makers. As a via-media, limited government support, with understandable regard to the basic civil and political liberties (also known as Social Democracy³) has been considered an effective and valuable method of governance (or co-management), as echoed by the fisher folk of the Kolavai Lake of the Chengalpattu district of Tamil Nadu, India.

Fishing as a common property

All over the world, fishing is under some form of property arrangement - some form of use-right materialized⁴ in the right of access to fishery resources in a particular area under certain conditions. The rights that are available to the fisher folk of the Kolavai Lake can be positioned as an evolution in the stage of rights for fishing:

Historical Rights (Territorial and resource rights)

↙
Sovereign Rights of the State Government

↘
Issue of Fishing Permits (Area and resource rights)

The Fisheries Department in Tamil Nadu

Fisheries are under individual state control in India, and there is a great deal of variation ranging from outright auctioning to almost free-fishing in the management practices followed by different states.

The Fisheries Department of Tamil Nadu, established in 1907 with research and development as its main objectives, extended its sphere of activities to exploration and exploitation of marine resources, culture of inland and brackishwater fish and extension of the technology among the fish farmers and entrepreneurs, with the ultimate objective to increase fish production and thereby to make protein rich fish available for public consumption at reasonable price.⁵

The commercial exploitation systems followed in different states can be summarized as:

- departmental fishing;
- lease by auction;
- issuance of licences for fishing; and
- fishing on royalty (crop sharing).⁶

¹ Quoted in Bavinck, Maarten. 1998 (Ph.D Dissertation). *One Sea, Three Contenders: Legal Pluralism in The Inshore Fisheries of The Coromandel Coast, India*. University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

² Sen, Amartya. 1997. Human Rights and Asian Values: What Lee Kuan Yew and Le Peng don't understand about Asia. *New Republic*. July 14.

³ Giddens, Anthony. 1997. *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁴ Accessed on 17 May 2004 at

http://www.oceansatlas.com/world_fisheries_and_aquaculture/html/govern/capture/rb_fi/default.htm

⁵ Accessed on 16 June 2004 at <http://www.tn.gov.in/per-budget-1999-2001/fish-pb-e.htm>

⁶ Accessed on 8 June 2004 at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/W7560E/W7560E03.htm>

The Inland Fishing Scenario in Tamil Nadu

The data released by the Department of Fisheries (TN), Chennai, place inland fish production at around 1/3rd of Tamil Nadu's marine fish production. Of the seven major classifications - major reservoirs, minor irrigation tanks, seasonal tanks and ponds, estuaries and backwaters, Fish Farmers Development Agencies, rivers streams canals & other water sources and Miscellaneous (rice fields, swamps, etc.) - the fish production from seasonal tanks and ponds account for around 40% of the total inland fish production in the year 2001-2002.⁷ In the Inland sector, there are about 3.70 lakh hectares of water spread comprising of reservoirs, lakes, tanks and ponds. The inland fishermen population is about 1.83 lakhs of which 0.56 lakh are active fishermen.⁸

The Kolavai Lake

The Kolavai Lake (Kolavai Eri), situated on the eastern side of the Chengalpattu town in the Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, is seen abutting the Chennai-Trichy railway line. The lake is a major seasonal lake (a natural one), supporting around 12 villages that girdle it. Fishing at this lake has been going on for years. The lake consists of both fish species natural to the lake and also new species introduced into the lake by the government. Some of the natural fish species include *rohu (Labeo rohita)*, *vral*, *mirigla (Cirrhinus mrigala)*, etc and the species introduced by the government include *silver fish*, *catla (Catla catla)*,⁹ *jelabi*, etc. The villages surrounding the lake are: Amanapakkam, Chengalpattu (town), Pulipakkam, Paranur, Malayampakkam, Hanumanthai, Terukkupattu, Esenkaranai, Kunnnavakkam, Pattaravakkam, Ilanthopu and Thenur.

Methodology

This section talks about the method or system followed to select and collect information of an inland fishing community in Tamil Nadu, and consists of two sub-sections:

Choice of the Area of Study

Selection of Kolavai Lake was done by consulting experts in the field of fisheries and looking up relevant literature. The choice of the area of study was narrowed down to those lakes situated in the Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu, for the following two reasons:

- It has an indigenous clan doing fishing, and
- Fishing activity is carried out currently (a great disadvantage of lakes in and around Chennai is that these dry up during summer season).

On further tapering the alternatives, the Kolavai Lake and the Madhuranthakam Lake were preferred. Due to the need for choice of only one lake and due to the physical and time constraints of the researcher, Kolavai Lake was chosen (which is closer than Madhuranthakam Lake), and also for investigation comfort as:

- Fishing at the Kolavai lake is done in a larger scale (i.e. daily basis), and
- It was nearer to the town of Chengalpattu, so that the government offices there will be able to provide one with more information.

Hence this lake was chosen.

Collection of Information

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and used for the study. Quantitative data were collected through informal and semi-structured interviews with the fishermen of

⁷ Tamil Nadu Economic Appraisal 2002-03.

⁸ Accessed on 31 May 2004 at <http://www.tn.gov.in/spc/annualplan/chapter9-7.htm>

⁹ Scientific names of fish species. Accessed on 21 June 2004 at http://www.worldfishcenter.org/demandsupply/inception_reportaug02/ir_aug02_profileofkatfp_india.asp

the villages of Pulipakkam and Amanapakkam. Informal discussions and consultations were held with the head priest of a temple, an advocate and a few youngsters (aged around 25 years and not into fishing).

Quantitative data were got from secondary sources like the Tamil Nadu Economic Appraisal, Year Book of the Department of Fisheries (TN), Resettlement Register, etc. A map of the Kolavai Lake was downloaded from the internet.

Historical Perspective

This section throws light on the ancient practices of the fisher folk around the Kolavai Lake.

(a) The Vetakaras: An indigenous group of people called the *Vetakaras*, belonging to the most backward class of Tamil Nadu, have a moral and social right over the lake. They inhabit all the 12 villages around the lake, and are by convention, fisher folk of the lake. It was they who fished in the lake, and since they were so few in number earlier, there was enough fish for all the families, without anyone being deprived of the haul. Moreover, there was collective ownership of the resources (fish in the lake) with no significant improvement in the character of productive forces.¹⁰

(b) Traditional Methods of Fishing: Even today, no sophisticated gadgets (like motor boats or motorized fishing gears) are used, but a diversity of fishing gears are used (that are often typical of small- scale fishing).¹¹ The reasons attributed by the fishermen for not using such sophisticated gadgets are:

- the water level in the lake is not deep enough to require motor boats
- The nets used by the fisher folk of the lake do not sink very deep. Hence they risk damage to the nets if other than catamarans are to be used.
- the fisher folk know oil slick from motor boats could damage the aquatic species of the lake (they came to know about this because the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation [TTDC] opened a leisure-boating at the lake some years ago, and the motor boats used for this purpose seem to have leakage of oil, which have affected the aquatic fauna)
- Even if the fisher folk wanted to buy sophisticated items for fishing, they are not given loans by the banks and co-op agencies. Since they have to depend on the indigenous bankers for the money, they put-off the idea.

An alarming situation has come-up, especially in the Kolavai Lake - fisher folk have started to converge on the use of one or two fishing gears. Diversity of fishing gears has lost their utilities in commercial fishing activities.¹²

In this regard, three types of traditional fishing methods were identified:

- i. Presently, catamarans are used for fishing and going into the deep parts of the lake. Earlier the fishermen used only a single wooden log for traveling into the lake and they used to swim by lying on it. This traditional fishing method has to be seen in the light of the context in which it was used to be able to appreciate the technique. Primarily, there were only a few families reengaged in this activity of fishing and it would be unsustainable for them to buy a boat for fishing, for two major reasons:

¹⁰ Ryndina, M.N, Chernikov, G.P., Khudokormov, G.N. 1980. *Fundamentals of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

¹¹ Lobe, Kenton, Berkes, Fikret. 2003. *The padu system of community0based fisheries management: change and local institutional innovation in south India*. Accessed on 4 June 2004 at [www. sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com).

¹² Accessed on 5 June 2004 at <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/AC467E/ac467e07.htm#bm07.2>

- a) it was not financially viable for every single fisherman to buy a boat (it must be remembered that there was no close-knit professional association)
 - b) The lake did not entail one to buy boats, because the haul they needed was not for sale, but principally for self-consumption, which they could have in plenty if they followed the method documented here.
- ii. In many cases, there were individual fishermen going in to the lake to fish by wading through the lake waters. This is done using *veesu valai* (cast nets).¹³ This method was used by fishermen who could not afford a log, or was done to capture the fish in the areas in between the bank and the centre of the lake. They used to go till the middle of the lake or waded in till their chest levels (to give room for the hands to throw the net). This is highly sound and tenable method of fishing followed by the ancient fishermen with two reasons to back up this technique:
- a) If the fisherman goes individually into the lake, then he cannot bring back much fish, on the ground that he would not be able to carry a lot. This method would save the lake from over-fishing.
 - b) This method is a tiring process, and hence the fisherman will not go back in to the lake again for fishing after some time.
- iii. There were members of the fisher folk who did not go into the lake for fishing, but engaged in what is called the capture of the *vra/* fish (a lengthy and angular one). For this purpose the fishermen used a special type of net called the *kanni kodi valai*. The process works as follows: the kanni kodi nets are tied to the water plants (hyacinth grows in large nos.) in the banks of the lake and left there for a few hours (usually the nets are placed in the evenings and they are collected in the mornings, with the belief that these fish come to the banks during the wee hours of night or morning). The kanni kodi nets are conical nets with a broad hollow in the broader end. They are tied with the broader end facing the lake. The fish (*vra/*) comes in to the net, and its fins get stuck in the net, and will not be able to return back. This process is useful on two counts:
- a) those who do not wish to go in to the lake (women, aged or sick/injured persons) can exploit the fish available in the lake banks,
 - b) placing the nets for a particular time in the water will avoid unnecessary movements in the lake, and allow the fish to grow as there are no artificial disturbances. (However, one need to be cautious about the nets being kept deep into the lake for more than a particular period of time[8-9 hours a day], as they will inhibit the growth space for the fish and may result in inhibited growth and procreation)

Subramanian, in an article talks about the prevalence of such traditional methods of fishery management in other places, and cites an example of ray fishing in Coleron estuaries.¹⁴

¹³ Asher, Pratima. 2002. Tradition, Fishing and Modernity. *Hindu Metro Plus Kochi*. July 18.

¹⁴ Subramanian, S. 1998. Fishing by turns. *Samudra*, May.

(c) Issues

The issues dealt with here refer to some areas that need a little more exposition, as some may appear to out of context or unjustifiable:

- It is generally accepted in this community of fisher folk that women help the fishermen in their day-to-day activities. Though evidence did not point out to their taking up any decision making power for the community as a whole, indicators reveal (status of women in marketing or choice of fish to be caught or their quality) that they are capable of guiding the individual men folk to enter into certain forms of fishing techniques, unlike the commonly accepted norm of them being marginalised.¹⁵ The women, on rare occasions, go into the lake with the men folk and help in capturing the fish. However, the work of the women in this community is mostly confined to the banks - to collect and classify the fishes caught, help it to be packed. In the case of the traders not coming to buy the haul (wholesale buyers), the women folk of the community carry the haul into the village for sale (organised markets being not within their reach in the ancient times). They engage fulltime in the leaning of the nets (sometimes frogs or plants get stuck in the nets).
- Due to a close-knit community, the fishers folk belong to the habitations girdling the lake know and recognise each other, and hence no elaborate and complex systems of identifying outsiders were evolved. Besides, during the ancient times, it was deemed a breach of moral and social contract, if fishing is done in the lake by outsiders. In rare cases such as these, the intruder was caught and the haul was seized along with the fishing gear. The penalty would depend on the pronouncement of the head of the fishing community, and in some cases, the head of the village (which in most occasions would be confiscation of the fishing gear, with a warning not to fish in the lake again).
- There was this practice called '*Matsya Mahasul*', which is an activity engaged upon with the consent of all the members of the villages around the lake. When the lake water recedes considerably, fishing would become very tough. It was during these trying times that the villagers would all decide to auction off the lake with the fishes to a third party, and use the money for any common purpose in these villages (like *thiruvizha* [temple festival]). This practice, however, happened only till the lake belonged to the villagers. After it was taken over by the Dept. Of Fisheries (TN), this practice was not followed - rather govt. help was sought during dry seasons. Yet, this practice is followed in the villages that have small ponds capable of nurturing fish. They are still common property.
- Being traditional is often coupled with being superstitious. Sometimes, it so happens that many rituals are misunderstood to be blind beliefs of the fisher folk. There is a ration behind them. A case in point would be the prohibition to engage in fishing during *amavasya* or *poornima* days. The reason for this was the lack of markets for fish during these days (as many did not partake of fish on these days). However, this is not the situation today. One must also understand that behind such rituals, stands a code of ethics for fishermen (to avoid over-fishing).

The Present Scenario

It was tacitly agreed that the Kolavai Lake belongs to the community called *Vetakaras*, who were the only persons engaging in fishing at the lake. There were also other community of people in each village, but they all followed the socially ordained vocation. Even by 1919¹⁶, no fishery passes were issued, implicitly remarking that the Kolavai Lake belong to the community of *Vetakaras*.

¹⁵ Sridhar, Laitha. 2002. Fishing in Troubled Waters: The Impact of Climate Change on Fishing Communities. Accessed on 26 May 2004 at <http://www.indiaresource.org/issues/energycc/2003/fishingintroubled.html>

¹⁶ Re-settlement Register.

(a) The Fishing Permits: It is commonly understood that it was during the reign of the Late Mr. Annaduria (1968-69) that fishing passes were introduced (they are called fishing permits by the dept.). It was as low as Re 1 or Rs 2 during those times. By 1993, individual fishing permits were Rs 30 per month. It is now Rs 75 per month for individual fishermen (no boats) and Rs 150 per month for fishermen with catamarans. One point that is worth noting is that the rates of fishing permits are raised without any benchmark or yardstick. So, how is the rate for the fishing permit fixed? Arbitrarily, yes, but public good such as the lake does not require the fisher folk to reveal their preferential amounts for financing the lake maintenance.¹⁷ During the early 1980s, a co-operative society was established (the Amanapakkam Inland Fishers Co-operative Society), and this society has seen to it that only people belonging to the *Vetakara* group got the permits to fish in the lake. If outsiders approached the fishing department for permit, their request was turned down.

(b) Features of Fishing Permits in the Kolavai Lake: The fishing permits for fishing in the Kolavai Lake are issued by the Inspector of Fishing at Poondi (outskirt of Chennai). The fishing permit has the name of the person, who fishes, with the duration of validity of the permit and the address of the permit applicant. Monthly fee for the permit is also mentioned. It is because of the fishing permits that many fishermen are comfortable fishing in the lake - there used to be clashes earlier, on who holds the right to fish in the lake. On closer scrutiny, three elements, distinct to the fishing permits of the Kolavai Lake, reveal themselves:

- Non-transferability of the fishing permit is the first one. It is very explicitly mentioned in the permit, that no transfer of the permits is recognised by law. However, this is not the case in all the nations,¹⁸ as non-transferability is not an obligatory or indispensable feature of fishing permits.
- It is because of owning fishing permits at the Kolavai Lake, the members of the fishing community are able to protect themselves from the dire consequences of sewage water supply into the lake. The fishing permit allows them to be the legal occupant of the lake, and they can represent to the concerned authorities to stop the sewage flow into the lake.¹⁹ It is in the interest of the Chengalpattu Municipality to discharge the sewage of the town into the Kolavai Lake, for they are not directly impaired by the act. Fishing permits allowed them carry out bio-remediation process for enabling fishing and also for safe drinking purposes.
- The presence of fishing permits in the Kolavai Lake has weighed down on the fishing department, the provision of fish seeds (juveniles) of commercially viable fish species. It is generally believed and accepted by the applicants and holders of the fishing permits at the Kolavai lake that they are required to pay a fee for fishing, not just for protection of the lake, but also, for sharing a part of the expenses for letting in fish juveniles into the lake. They consider the payment for fishing permits as user-charges for fish seed initiation into the lake.

(c) Methods of Fishing: Currently two methods of fishing are followed in the lake. One is the use of catamarans (bought from the sea shore towns of Kasimedu or Kalpakkam) for fishing deep into the lake. The other method followed is that which is done for ages - the practice of wading into the water of the lake and doing fishing with the aid of *visiri valai*. The only addition to both these methods of catching fish is the use of polythene sacks for storing the fish caught.

¹⁷ -----, 1988. *A Lexicon of Economics*. London: Routledge.

¹⁸ Accessed on 5 June 2004 at

http://www.oceansatlas.com/world_fisheries_and_aquaculture/html/govern/capture/rb_fi/default.htm#topofdocument

¹⁹ Accessed on 7 June 2004 at <http://www.tn.gov.in/policynotes/maws2003-04-14.htm>

(d) Nets Used: During the early stages of fishing, the nets used for fishing would be made from hick cotton threads, which did not last long. The variety of fishing nets used differ considerably from traditional fishing practices on the following counts:

- size of the net (the length of the net has increased)
- the distance between two knots in the net has expanded (ranging from one finger gap to two palms gap)
- The material used is now nylon.

The most commonly used nets are veesu valai (cast nets) and floating nets (with buoys made of thermacol)

(e) Marketing of Fish: There are many buyers who come from nearby towns (Chengalpattu, Tambaram, Vandavasi) to buy the haul. The greatest shift in the fishing activity is that of fishing moving from self-sufficiency to commercial operations. Selling them directly at the markets were rare occasions (as they had to pay nominal charges to the market committee). To elucidate how the haul is used, the following options of the fisher folk can be considered:

- sold to the buyers(wholesale) every morning
- sold by the women members of the community in the nearby towns of Chengalpattu and Tambaram, in the form of house-to-house vending or road side vending (hawkers)
- Used for self consumption or sold to same community members.

(f) System of Control: The system of licensing was brought in by the state government at the Kolavai Lake for two major reasons:

- to prevent over-fishing, and
- to ensure a decent livelihood for the *Vetakara* group

To ensure that such objectives are fulfilled, the state fishing department prompted the establishment of a dual-branched control exercise,²⁰ consisting of output controls (like preventing the fishing of juveniles) and input controls (like limited fishing permits [to the Vetakaras only]). This has resulted in limited access to the fishing ground (Kolavai Lake).

Why the Government is Needed?

The change in the mindset of the in-group people (the Vetakaras) from traditional fishing systems to acceptance of government control has several backdrop factors:

- there has been an increasing differences of opinion among the villagers regarding the time and the type of nets to be used - this is mainly due to increase in the population of the community and also due to commercialization of fishing in lake.
- even outsiders started to fish in this lake, and the community did not have the authority to stop these practices, as the out-group members were usually influential person.

These factors drove the fishermen of the lake to opt for the controlling mechanism of the government, as they believed in the effective leadership of the government in regulating fishing and also in safeguarding the interests of this community. Their mentality and attitude turned towards the benign role of the state: the beginning of Governmentality. They perceived that such a statutory body with infinite powers and capabilities could save the community from inter-community clashes (there was hardly any blood-clash) - it was simply reluctance to follow the convention.

²⁰ Accessed on 14 June 2004 at http://www.fisheries.nsw.gov.au/com/management_techniques.htm

Their justifications for the benevolent attitude and the concerned mind-set of the *Vetakaras* towards the government are:

- It was only after the introduction of fishing permits some form of inspection and scrutiny regarding the nets and the persons who use the lake, could be established. For example, closely knitted nets must not be used when juveniles are let in. The government explained the evil-effects of using such nets during the breeding period, and regulated the use of bigger nets during the season.
- Most of the fishes in the lake were natural to that lake. It is the contention of the fisher folk that these fishes are not in large numbers (as they do not have enough space for regeneration) for the growing population and increasing commercialization of fishing activity. Over this, the natural fish do not fetch an attractive price in the market. It was at this juncture that the government stepped in and let in many commercially exploitable varieties of fishes. Because of such gestures, the government has endeared itself to the fisher folk.
- There used to be drainage and sewage pipes let into this lake from the Chengalpattu town. This caused serious damage to the aquatic fauna. In the presence of the fishery department, the fisher folk were able to voice out their grievance, and they were able to divert the drainage and sewage waters, and has indirectly protected the fisher folk (by saving the fishes from destruction).
- A social security scheme for inland fisher folk allows the government to pay Rs 65,000 to a fisher folk's family, in the event of the death of the member of the family when engaging in fishing pursuit. In addition to this, an insurance scheme has also been started to protect the poor fisher folk (who have migrated to other jobs like casual labour or embroidery) against any contingency. "This is definitely a welcome step for us illiterate and unorganised group", exclaims the ex-leader of the Amanapakkam Inland Fishers Co-operative Society.

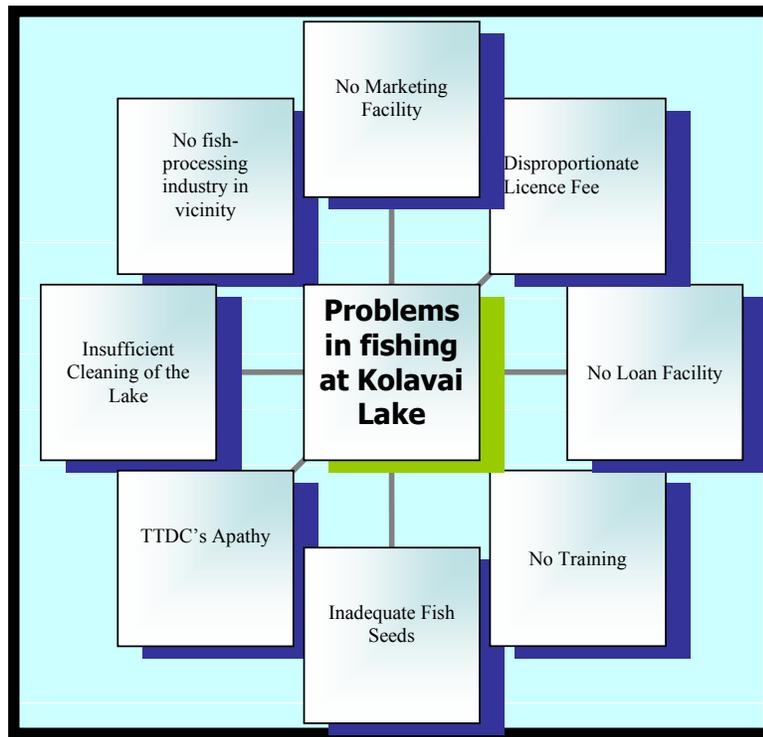
Identification of problems and probable solutions

The alternative of the government acting in a totally inconsiderate manner cannot be obliterated. In a democratic set-up, political ideologies and opportunism run high. These just cannot be wished away. Such skewed acts of the government often result in many problems for the fisher folk who are dependent entirely on the Kolavai Lake.

The problems mentioned here refer only to the fisher folk's hurdles in engaging in fishing activity at Kolavai Lake. In the same manner, the fishing department also registers its grouses like non-followance of the regulations given in the fishing permit or the illiterate members of the fishing community who are unable to understand their standardisations. These do not find place here, for the simple reason that it would be critical of the government's way of functioning, without deciphering what the truth is (the researcher has conducted in-depth interviews with the fisher folk alone).

The figure below depicts the hurdles faced by the *Vetakaras* in the Kolavai Lake fishing ground.

Fig 1. Identification of problems among the fisher folks in the Kolavai Lake.



One must understand that it is not just because of the total indifference of the government that there exist problems. The fisher folk, due to their resistance and their illiterate status, impede the government from initiating any programme for their development. Nevertheless, government's coldness and lack of concern cannot be left uncounted for their plight.

The table below expounds the problems identified (through in-depth interviews and non-participant observations), and endeavours to give feasible solutions (one must remember that the solutions referred to here, are to be considered not only in the light of the fisher folk's welfare, but also in the light of their viability from the government's point of view):

Table 1. Problem, Effect, Solution and Consequence at Kolavai Lake (Chengalpattu)

Problem	Effect	Solution	Consequence
Lack of marketing assistance for fish caught	The fisher folk are forced to sell the haul to a particular buyer, and at rates that are not always attractive.	Setting up a fish marketing agency at Chengalpattu would help the fisher folk - there are many lakes (small) nearby that require marketing facility, and they can also be sold directly to the retailers from these agencies, at acceptable rates.	The fisher folk can save on transport cost of taking the fish to the market. The government would also be in a position to keep track of the fish caught (it is not done so at present), thereby indicating, when over-fishing occurs.
Disproportionate Licence Fee	There is a high chance for unlicensed fishing to occur (mostly individual fishing)	The fee can be indexed to the catch of the previous year, thus forming a rational benchmark for fixing the rate.	This would make sense to the fisher folk, and enable them to account for the fee that is paid (as it is based on the catch of the previous year, for which they are responsible). This would also ensure flexibility in the rates.
No loan facility	There is high dependence on indigenous bankers, and there is a loss of faith on the government cooperatives. This also hinders them to modernise their gears.	The best way to help the fisher folks would be the establishment of an SHG, which can surface their repaying capacity, and hence recommend strongly for larger loans from the cooperative banks	Ensuring loan facility to the fisher folk of Kolavai Lake would benefit in two ways: aid them compete with the other fisher folk by opting for better fishing gears; would help them to embark upon subsidiary occupations like cattle rearing, dairy farming, etc, during dry seasons.
There is no training given to them	This ensure them to be traditionally bound, which has no scope for catching a huge haul	Educating the fisher folk on the need to modernise would be the first step towards creating awareness. Training in modern methods of fishing, compatible to the lake, can be undertaken by the local Fishing Department, to ensure a decent livelihood for the fisher folk (many days they come back without fish)	The first consequence of these programmes would be boosting of confidence. The next effect would be that many of the younger generations of fisher folk of Kolavai lake have migrated to the town (Chengalpattu). They can be brought back with assurances that fishing activity is a viable one at the Kolavai Lake.
Inadequate fish seeds (Juveniles)	Due to natural reason (dry season) and unnatural reasons (sewage water, oil spill), fish endemic to the lake have not multiplied enough for the fisher folk to catch. There is a need for commercially saleable fish species.	The fishing department, as per orders, must ensure that a specified quantity of fish juveniles is let in. This does not happen, and to make it happen, it is necessary to take fisher folk leaders for monitoring the harvesting of fish seeds.	On the one hand, there would be adequate fish for all, and on the other hand, the fisher folk can indicate their preference for any particular species, that would fetch them attractive species. Their traditional knowledge can be used to evaluate the survival of new species of fish at the lake.

Problem	Effect	Solution	Consequence
The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation's (TTDC) Apathy (They have a leisure boating facility at the lake)	The existence and usage of motorboats and pedal boats lead to the destruction of nets and the oil spill endangers the flora and aquifauna of the lake.	It is beneficial that the TTDC's leisure boating can be done in a part of the lake. This would ensure that no nets are cut. Furthermore, it is imperative that the TTDC do away with motor boats at the lake. Besides, the surplus money got from such activities, can be used for welfare of fisher folk or for dredging the lake.	The fisher folk will be saved of their expenses in replacing the nets, if they keep away from the secluded spot for leisure boating.
Insufficient cleaning of the lake.	The presence of Chengalpattu railways station on its bank is a cause for worry, as plastics and other garbage find their way into the lake. And bio-remediation is not done for helping the fisher folk directly, but for drinking water purposes.	It would not be inconvenient for the railway station to erect a tall fence to avoid garbage disposal into the lake. Regular checks to clean the lake of its superfluous growth of hyacinth (and other water plants) can be done for the benefit of TTDC and the fisher folk.	A clean water ensures healthy growth of fish, and also saves the fisher folk from many dermatological and constitutional disorders. This will make fishing in the lake a viable occupation for the Vetakaras.
No fish-processing plant near the lake.	The catch has to be taken to long distances for marketing them. This is often not a remunerative deed for the fisher folk.	Small-scale fish processing plants can be started around the villages. This would provide employment and also an attractive option for the fisher folk.	The plant, if situated on the main road to Chennai and Chengalpattu, can be ensured of a market. Besides, establishing a plant in the rural area, can dislodge the people from the overcrowded cities. The fisher folk would also be assured of a regular and instantaneous income.

Areas for Concern

These refer to the a few areas that are of vital concern and are capable of creating disquiet in the fishing villages around the Kolavai Lake, if they are allowed to perpetuate. They are:

- The policies of the officials, who remain to be unmindful of the frantic request of the people of the fishing communities. Such willful inattention to ground realities overrules the close-knit association between the people and the natural resource (in this case, the lake and the fish), eventually jeopardizing the livelihood options of the fishing communities.²¹
- It is well-known and common knowledge that the traditional (ancient) methods of fishing are no longer sought after. What is to be learnt from these systems of fishing is the traditional knowledge that goes with these systems, that is shrouded in the transition to modernity. The knowledge of the previous generations of fisher folk are neither documented nor used by the fishing officials in the region to understand the diversity and variety of these systems. This can strengthen fishworker's organisations and activities.²²
- In spite of propagation of threat to the natural resources, especially the over-exploitation of fishing grounds, it is not just resource erosion that is taking the toll on the Kolavai

²¹ Accessed on 9 June 2004 at <http://www.biol.tsukuba.ac.jp/~macer/india/bii86.html>

²² Accessed on 5 June 2004 at <http://www.unesco.org/csi/pub/papers2/map6.htm>

Lake; it is also the attrition of knowledge that is alarming.²³ Due to indiscriminate migration and relocation, local knowledge is vested with very few old people, who are not sought after for the knowledge they possess.

These are the concerns for the fisher folk of Kolavai Lake and also for the officials of the fishing department. In the place of insensitive and tactless policies, if policymakers endeavour to establish a system that would recognize the importance of local knowledge, coupled with the need to identify the communion of the fishing community with nature, then a smooth establishment can be set.

"We can't do without the Government, though they are sometimes thoughtless."

The statement above reflects the general attitude of the fisher folk and the stance of the *Vetakar*s habiting the villages around Kolavai Lake. The government, no doubt, indulges in certain activities that are detrimental to the progress of the community of fishers:

- Allowing less than the allotted fish juveniles, into the lake - this leads to unwarranted competition among the fisher folk, who rely on outside fishing for their livelihood.
- Failing to bear the cost of transport to bring in the juveniles (fish seeds).

Despite these unjustifiable misdeeds, the government officials are cordial with fisher folk and move with them in a smooth way. They are not very strict with license renewals, as they understand the often difficult and precarious life these fisher folk live. This does not suggest that there laxity in enforcing these provisions. One grievance articulated by many fisher folk is that there are no new fishes being introduced in the lake now-a-days, and even when introduced, they are so few that so many fisher folk could hardly depend on it.

Conclusion

The uncertainty of engaging in fishing in the Kolavai Lake, forces the fisher folk to depend on an external agency for solving their livelihood problems. It is no longer a small population that is dependent on the Lake for fishing. In due course, the government came along, and said it would better the conditions of the fisher folk. But, they will have to pay a fee. It was accepted, as people in distress are not choosers. Their conditions have definitely improved, albeit expectations of the fisher folk run high. In this bargain for freedom and rights, the fisher folk feel with utmost contentment that the government has stepped in to prevent the chaos and disorder galore. The government is a panacea for such pandemonium.

Though *laissez-faire* advocates may bring up arguments in favour of self-management of fishing resources, the counter-argument here is that it is too early for the fishing communities of Kolavai Lake to be let alone to manage. Two reasons substantiate this argument:

- India is on the verge of a globalised world, and it would be necessary for the fishing communities of Kolavai Lake to get help to align themselves competitively for the onslaught of globalisation.
- A free-trade regime will reduce the clout of the government, and this may affect the lake, whose over-exploitation for commercial needs, cannot be stopped.

It is time these fishing communities were made more competitive. This requires support and guidance, and it is only the government that can provide these social-welfare services. As **Susan Visvanathan** remarks with ubiquitous veracity, "*One of the greatest paradoxes for*

²³ Gupta, Anil. K. Getting Creative Individuals And Communities Their Due: Framework For Operationalizing Article 8 J And 10 C. Accessed on 26 June 2004 at <http://www.sristi.org/papers/B23.htm>

*the fishermen is how to juggle between thozhiuyil and varumanam, labour and income. If the catch is good they can make several thousands. If they catch nothing they slip into debt. It is this oscillation between hope and despair that we need to understand when looking at subsistence societies.*²⁴ The government is needed at the Kolavai Lake, till the fishing communities become competitive and spirited. Till such time, governmentality will continue to be a living presence at Kolavai Lake.

²⁴ Visvanathan, Susan. 2000. Workers of the sea. Accessed on 22 June 2004 at <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/485/485%20vishvanathan.htm>

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18. <http://www.unesco.org>
19. <http://www.worldfishcenter.org>

Box 1: Comparison between ancient & modern systems of fishing at Kolavai Lake

A Comparative Exercise: This is to provide a better insight into the workings of the fisher folk of the Kolavai Lake. An historical perspective is balanced against a modern backdrop:

Fishing Activity	Historical Situation	Modern Reaction
Conflict Resolution	This was done by the head of the fisher folk. In most cases, third party intervention was avoided, because understanding of the conflict is necessary. ²⁵	Arbitration by the village head exists, but, complaints against breach of contract are usually made to the Inspector of Fisheries, at Chengalpattu.
Social Security	These consisted of moral and traditional support of the fishing families. There was no explicit aid made to any of the members of the fisher folk, wither in kind or in cash.	The state government, in association with TN Department of Fisheries, provides a lot of social security measures ²⁶ like free housing, insurance, distribution of nets, etc.
Nature of Fishing	During the earlier days, it was predominantly for subsistence that fishing activities were engaged in. It was not fully a commercial enterprise.	Fishing, in the modern times, is undertaken with a view to gain profits. It is with such an aim that fishing permits are bought regularly.
Modernisation Rate	The rate of adapting to the changes in the fishing activities and demands made on them was lower.	Due to more exposure, and necessity to earn more, has made the modern day fisher folk of Kolavai, adopt modern techniques (like nylon nets or more catamarans) at a faster rate.

Fisheries Department of Tamil Nadu

Note: Majority of the initiatives taken by the State Government of Tamil Nadu for aiding the fisher folk of TN relate only to marine fisher folk. Inland fisher folk are yet to be given the benefit of all the social welfare schemes announced.

²⁵ Accessed on 6 June 2004 at <http://www.unesco.org/csi/pub/papers2/map6.htm>

²⁶ Accessed on 15 June 2004 at <http://www.tn.gov.in/tngov/policynotes/archives/policy/fish-e.htm>

Citizen's Charter:

Assistance & Subsidies Given By Government of Tamil Nadu to The Fisher Folk

No	Name of the scheme	Implementing Officer	Procedures/Eligibility
1	Fishermen Free Housing scheme	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The fishermen should be a member of the Fishermen cooperative society and have attained 18 years and not exceeding 60 years of age. b. Should be below poverty line. c. Not owning a house d. Owning land measuring 3 cents.
2	Issue of Identity cards to fishermen	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	The fishermen should be a member of a Fishermen Cooperative Society and engaged in full time fishing.
3	Fishermen Training Centre Courses offered are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Modern Fishing methods b) Junior Mechanic course 	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Extension and Training)and Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) Assistant Director of Fisheries (Extension and Training)and Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To join the course the candidate should have attained 18 years of age but not exceeding 35 years. b. Should be able to read and write in Tamil. c. Should have 5 years of sea fishing experience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. To join the course the candidate should have attained 18 years of age but not exceeding 35 years. b. Should have 5 years of sea fishing experience. c. Should passed 8th Standard.
4	Patrolling Boats	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the patrol boat is being used for rescuing the missing fishermen and catamaran/country boat and mechanised boats. b. To prevent the Tamil Nadu fishermen from crossing the International Boundary Line at sea. c. To prevent clashes between traditional and mechanised boat fishermen in the sea and also implement Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1983. d)At present these boats are functioning at Chennai, Mallipattinam, Rameswaram, Thoothukudi and Kanniyakumari as their base.
5	Subsidy for the HSD OIL	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Beneficiaries should be a owner of less than 20 metres length mechanised fishing boat. b. The boat should be registered with the department and possess the license for fishing. c. The details of fishing and the diesel utilised are to be written in log books. d. The diesel should be purchased on in the department approved bunks and to be used for fishing purpose only. e. e. The Central Excise duty on HSD Oil of 0.45 paise central 28 paise and State 17 paise per liter will be reimbursed to the owner of the fishing boat, after obtaining necessary funds from the Government.
6	Free Training to fishermen / Fisherwomen	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) and Assistant Director of Fisheries (Extension and Training)	The following Training programs are given to the fishermen / fisherwomen through various departments at free of cost. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooperative Management. 2. Awareness creation . 3. Leadership Development. 4. Hygienic handling of marine products. 5. Preparation of value added fishery bye-products.
7.	Subsidy for the purchase of IBM/OBM to traditional fishermen	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) and Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation Limited, Chennai-28 Assistant Director of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fishermen should register their fishing crafts with the Fisheries Department. b. Subsidy is given at 50% of the cost of engine the maximum ceiling of Rs. 12,000/- for IBM and Rs. 10,000/- for OBM.

	Subsidy for the purchase of nets	Fisheries (Marine) and Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation Limited, Chennai-28	Those who receive the subsidy for the purchase of engines are also eligible for 50% subsidy for the purchase of the fishing net with maximum ceiling of Rs.6,000/- per unit.
8	National Savings and Relief scheme	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The beneficiary should be within the age group of 18 to 60 years and must be a member of Fishermen Cooperative society. b. The fishermen's family embers should not be a permanent employee of a Government or a Private concerned. c. He should not possess mechanized fishing boat/ beach land crafts d. He should be below poverty line e. The beneficiary must pay Rs. 50/- as monthly installment for 8 months from January to August (Total Rs. 400/-) f. The State Government will pay the balance of Rs. 25.00 comes to Rs. 200/- for each beneficiary and the State Government contribution of Rs. 300/- per fishermen. Further the Central Government contribution comes to Rs. 300/- to each fishermen. Out of the total sum of Rs. 1200/- each fishermen will be given Rs. 300/- per month for 4 lean months
9	Fishermen / fisherwomen individual accident insurance scheme	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Premium must be paid by the beneficiary b. Beneficiary must be a member of a fishermen/fisherwomen cooperative society. c. Following two types of schemes are available.
A.	Premium for the fishermen	Premium for the fisherwomen	Relief amount for accidental death/partial disablement
B.	Rs. 24/- Rs. 60/-	Rs. 20/- Rs. 50/-	Rs. 1 lakh Rs. 2.50 lakh
10	Fishermen Group Accident Insurance scheme (Central / State scheme)	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) (Inland) and (Aquaculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Must be a member of a Fishermen cooperative society b. Central/State Government shares Rs. 7/- per fishermen at the rate of Rs. 14/- is paid as premium per annum. c. In case of death a sum of Rs. 50000/- is paid and in case of permanent disablement a sum of Rs. 25000/- is paid as insured amount.
11	Fishermen Group Accident Insurance scheme (State Government)	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine) (Inland) and (Aquaculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Must be a member of a fishermen cooperative society. the State Government contribute the annual premium of Rs. 4/- for each fishermen b. In case of death (or) total disablement, a sum of Rs. 15,000/- is paid and partial disablement a sum of Rs.7500/- given as relief amount.
12	Fisherwomen Group Accident Insurance scheme (State scheme)	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine), (Inland), (Aquaculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Must be a member of a fisherwomen cooperative society. The State Government contributes the annual premium of Rs. 3.95 for each fisherwoman. b. In case of death (or) total disablement a sum of Rs. 15,000/- is paid and partial disablement at Rs. 7500/- given as relief.
13	Registration of Fishing Crafts and issue of fishing licence	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine)	Fishing crafts registration and fishing license fee fixed as followed"
A.	Fishing Crafts Mechanised Fishing boats	Registration	Fishing Licence
B.	Country Crafts (Vallams)	Rs. 250/- Rs. 25/-	Rs. 250/- Rs. 25/-

C.	Cattamaram	Rs. 10/-	Rs.10/- (Should be renewed for every 3 years)
14	Fish culture and Fishermen Welfare schemes	Regional Assistant Director (Extension and Training)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Technical guidance regarding fish culture in Rural tanks b. Guide lines to receive relief regarding fishermen welfare scheme.
15	Assistance to Inland fish farmers through fish farmers development agency	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Inland) or (Aquaculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 20% subsidy to fish farmers those who construct fish pond in their own patta land. Maximum subsidy limited to Rs. 40,000/- per hectare. For scheduled caste / tribes 25% subsidy, Maximum subsidy limited to Rs. 50,000/- per hectare. b. 20% subsidy to renovation of tanks, maximum subsidy limited to Rs. 12,000/- per hectare, extended to fish farmers. For scheduled caste/Tribes 25% subsidy. Maximum subsidy limited to Rs. 15,000/- c. Fish culture input subsidy to (live fingerlings and fish feed etc.) of 20% maximum limited to Rs. 6,000/-. For Scheduled caste/Tribes 25% subsidy maximum limited to Rs. 7500/-. d. Fish culture Training: Ten days training to fish farmers in Inland Fish culture. Fish Farmers can avail allowance of Rs. 50/- per day and travelling allowance of Rs.100/- for entire training period. e. Aerators Subsidy at 25% with a maximum ceiling of Rs. 12,500/- for each set of Aerators for all categories of farmers. f. Fish Feed: 20% subsidy to erect fish feed meal at a total cost of Rs. 25.00 lakh and can avail subsidy to the maximum of Rs. 5 lakh. g. Integrated Fish culture: For those who undertake Integrated fish culture 20% subsidy maximum subsidy limited to Rs. 16,000/-. For scheduled caste/Tribes 25% subsidy maximum of Rs.20000/- h. Setting up of Integrated units including hatcheries for ornamental fish. For the hatchery of 5-10 million (fry) capacity, subsidy at 10% with a maximum ceiling at Rs.1.50 lakh to all categories of fish farmers.
16	Inland water fishery lease and fishing rights	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Inland) and (Aquaculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Inland Fishermen cooperative societies which are located very near to the provincialised water bodies are eligible to get fishery lease. b. To get fishery lease for other water bodies Inland Fishermen cooperative societies have to participate in the fishing lease auctions.
17	Integrated Coastal Aquaculture scheme (Central and State) Joint Sector scheme	Assistant Director of Fisheries (Aquaculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Subsidy of 25% towards the capital cost for the development of one hectare form including operational cost for the first crop subject to the maximum of Rs.30,000/- per hectare. b. Each beneficiary can avail maximum subsidy upto 10 hectare. c. To avail the benefits under this scheme the beneficiary should abide the judgment of Honourable Supreme Court of India dated 11.12.96 and the guidelines issued by the Aquaculture Authority and should get approval/authorisation from the Aquaculture Authority. To get approval from the Aquaculture authority the Shrimp farmers should apply to the State Level committee in the prescribed application along with the required processing fee. For those farms inside the CRZ and amount of Rs. 200/- per hectare will have to be paid as processing fee. The required processing fee has to be paid by taking a demand draft in favour of Secretary, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Department, Chennai. d. The district level committee inspects the farm and

			forward to the State level committee with recommendations. The State level committee scrutinize the application and forward to the Aquaculture authority. Based on the recommendation of District/State level Committee, the aquaculture authority issue approval/ authorisation for the shrimp aqua farm.
18	Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation	Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation Limited, Chennai-28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation was started in the year 1974 with the aim of doing commercial business activities related to Fisheries. b. The functions are fish seed production, sale of fish and Deep sea fishing etc. c. Distribution of diesel oil to Traditional Fishing crafts and mechanized fishing boats. d. Ornamental fishes are produced at Bhavanisagar, Alilyar and sold at Teynampet and other places. e. Through retail fish stalls, fishes are sold to the public. f. Fish nets are manufactured at the fish net making plant belonging to Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation Limited and sold g. Fish/Shrimp fishing done with deep sea trawlers. h. Fish seed production is carried out in reservoirs and sold to farmers i. Exploitation of fishery wealth in reservoirs and sold to public. j. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation procures OBM/IBE and distributes to needy fishermen and to help them to avail subsidy from Government.
19	Integrated fisheries Development Project	Managing Director, Tamil Nadu State Apex Fisheries Cooperative Federation, 1/53.M.Sripuram Colony, Ist street, St.Thomas Mount, Chennai-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Distributes 50% loan and 25% subsidy for procuring small sized boats/ vallams to traditional craft fishermen. b. The fishermen / fisherwomen cooperative society may become members of federation and benefited. c. The federation helps in creating infrastructure facilities such as fish landing centre, other facilities to fishermen villages. d. The Federation extends interest free loan facility upto Rs.40,000/- to fishermen cooperatives for undertaking marketing of fish. e. Distribution of Ice box to fisherwomen at 75% subsidy. f. Federation extends loan with 25% subsidy to the fishermen cooperative societies for the purchase of two wheeler and vehicle. g. Imparting free training to office bearers of fishermen / fisherwomen cooperative societies on the aspects of management practices. h. Training of fishermen in latest fishing methods and repairs and maintenance of engines. i. Extending loan facility with 25% subsidy for construction of fish drying platform and auction hall.

Source: <http://www.tn.gov.in/citizen/citizen-fish.htm>