

Endangered fishermen

Once, the innocent school going children started to ask tirelessly their mother, "When would our father come here?" With curiosity, the nosy neighbors enquired her "Where is your husband?" Relatives and friends assembled one by one in front of the home with troubled faces and heavy minds. The shocked woman became helpless and voiceless because her beloved husband, father of four daughters, went to the sea with other six relatives a month ago for a two-week fishing. Days moved forwards and hope went backwards, the whole village sank into a deep sea sorrows, weeping and crying was heard from the houses of the missing fishermen throughout the day and night. Unfortunately, the boat has not yet returned. Where are those poor bread winner fishermen? Were they killed by the cruel Sri Lankan navy, the heartless Pakistan based terrorist group, a blind Italian ship or a horrible natural disaster like cyclone? This is not a new incident or accident but a common reoccurrence in along the sea coast almost every year due to dangerous and safe less deep sea fishing. Is it the fate or a part of the lives of economically the most backward workaholic fisher folk?



FISHERMEN KILLED BY SRILANKAN NAVY

Why, Fishing is important;- Fishing is the main occupation and an identity of fishermen community. Apart from that It is considered as a major industry in its coastal states, as it provides employment for 14.5 million people in India at the various levels. Also it is a promising sector for food security to the world because marine products from our nation are well received by almost half of world's countries and earning over \$2.84 billion. Moreover, sea food is known as a healthy food in terms of cheap protein and is packed with vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids. Therefore, fish can help to protect against a range of diseases, from cancer to heart disease, depression to arthritis. The British Heart Foundation says eating oily fish can help to reduce the risk of heart disease and improve the chances of survival following a heart attack.

Why, Fish catch is decreasing;- The UN-food and agriculture organization (FAO) has estimated that 70% of the fish population is fully used, overused or in crisis. Therefore, in 2006 the total marine fish catch in the world, 80.2million tonnes was depleted to 78.9 million tonnes in 2011. Like that, the Indian subcontinent is also not exceptional for the reduction of fish catch due to over fishing by using unfriendly fishing methods such as trawl net, purse seine; etc, marine pollution through mercilessly dumping garbage and industrial waste into the sea, dredging fish habitat while constructing harbor, lack of awareness on conserving marine resources, environmental change like global warming and so on. Besides, Menino Afonso, director of Mandovi Fisheries in Goa says that, the drastic decline in the catch of fish over the last two years can be attributed to excess fishing operations(*courtesy Times of India*). From Visakhapatnam - CIFT, a marine scientist, M.M. Pradesh states that "Nowadays, fishermen are facing a drop in catch and are thus changing the nets so that they can catch whatever is available," Apart from that 70 year old-fisherman Andrew Ambrose from kollam (kerala) cries that "The days of good catch are just a memory now, We eagerly wait for some boatman with a great catch shouting. He claims there's been considerable decline in several fish species and blames it on local greed. Another shock news that the journal *Science* published a four-year study in November 2006, which predicted that, at prevailing trends, the world would run out of fish catch in 2048.

How, Fishermen are suffering;- Due to the decreasing fish catch and heavy economic commitments, the poor seamen are forced to go for off shore or deep sea(beyond EEZ) fishing with a objective of bumper fish catch but without a dream on even tomorrow. Several times, regrettably, they happen to be struggled in the rough sea during monsoons due to unexpected cyclone or engine failures; this fatal situation, at times, can be a cause for mass death of fisher folk. Likewise, as there is no external boarder line at the sea, once a shoal of boarder-senseless fish is targeted to catch, the anxious fishermen usually tend to chase it and eventually become trapped or strayed with water currents in the territory of other host maritime countries like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Iran; etc. Later, unfortunately these illiterate victims might be treated like war prisoners as per their own legal system and sometimes they would be killed at the sea itself on mistaken. "Indian prisoners are given a very bad treatment in Pakistani jails. We were even forced to clean the toilets," a fisherman told on ZEE news. Mr.Vasudv (secretary of national fish worker forum) reported that, fishermen are suffering from the harassment of various kinds by the Sri Lankan Navy. They are beaten, their nets and boats damaged and their catches are being regularly seized (courtesy CNN-IBN). However, this could not be a tragedy for fishermen from India only but for others too.

With the reference to Bible, around 2000 years ago, son of Lord, *Jesus Christ*, chose His the most faithful disciples from fishermen community to spread Christianity on the earth; because they are basically loyal, committed and hard workers. Therefore, later, St. Peter got the nick name, known as a Big fisherman (*Valiya Mukkuvan* in Malayalam). However, now, that god chosen community is in danger of extinction or disappear gradually, because many fishermen hesitate for sending their own children to venture into the sea for livelihood.



Consequently, the number of fishermen is decreasing year by year, meantime, unemployment, struggling and sufferings are increasing rapidly in the coastal belt. Is it because of either mismanagement of fishing industry, uncontrolled natural calamities, indifferent policy makers, apathetic politicians, lack of sufficient number of selfless representatives from the community in state assemblies, Indian parliament and world fishermen forum, illiteracy of fishermen or scarcity of fish production?

**LET US ALL THINK THESE QUESTIONS SINCERELY
AND FIND THE ANSWERS SERIOUSLY.....**

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[This article is dedicated to the poor fishermen killed by Sri Lankan Navy]