

GAF 9

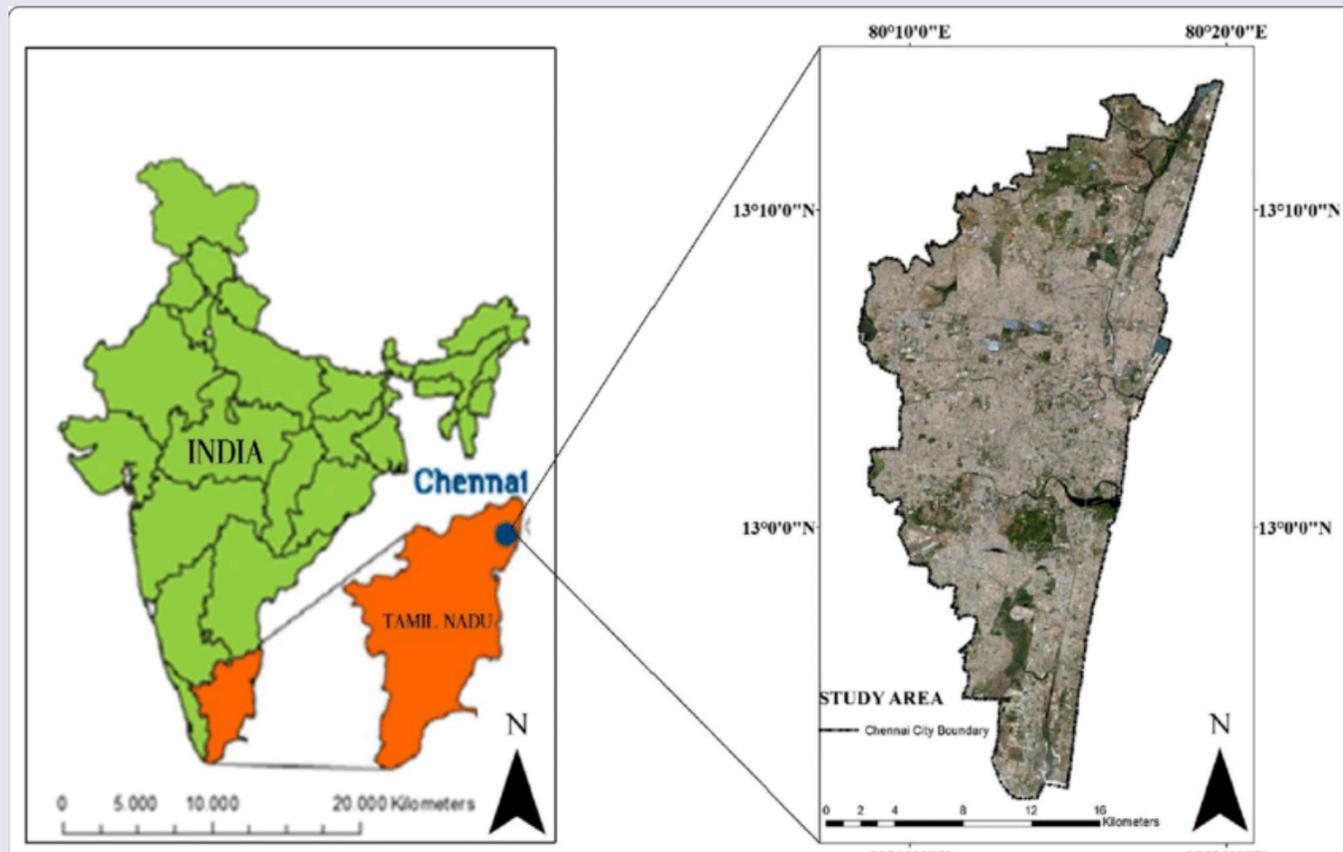
Who is a Fisherwoman?

Caste, Gender, and Migration in
South Indian Fish Markets

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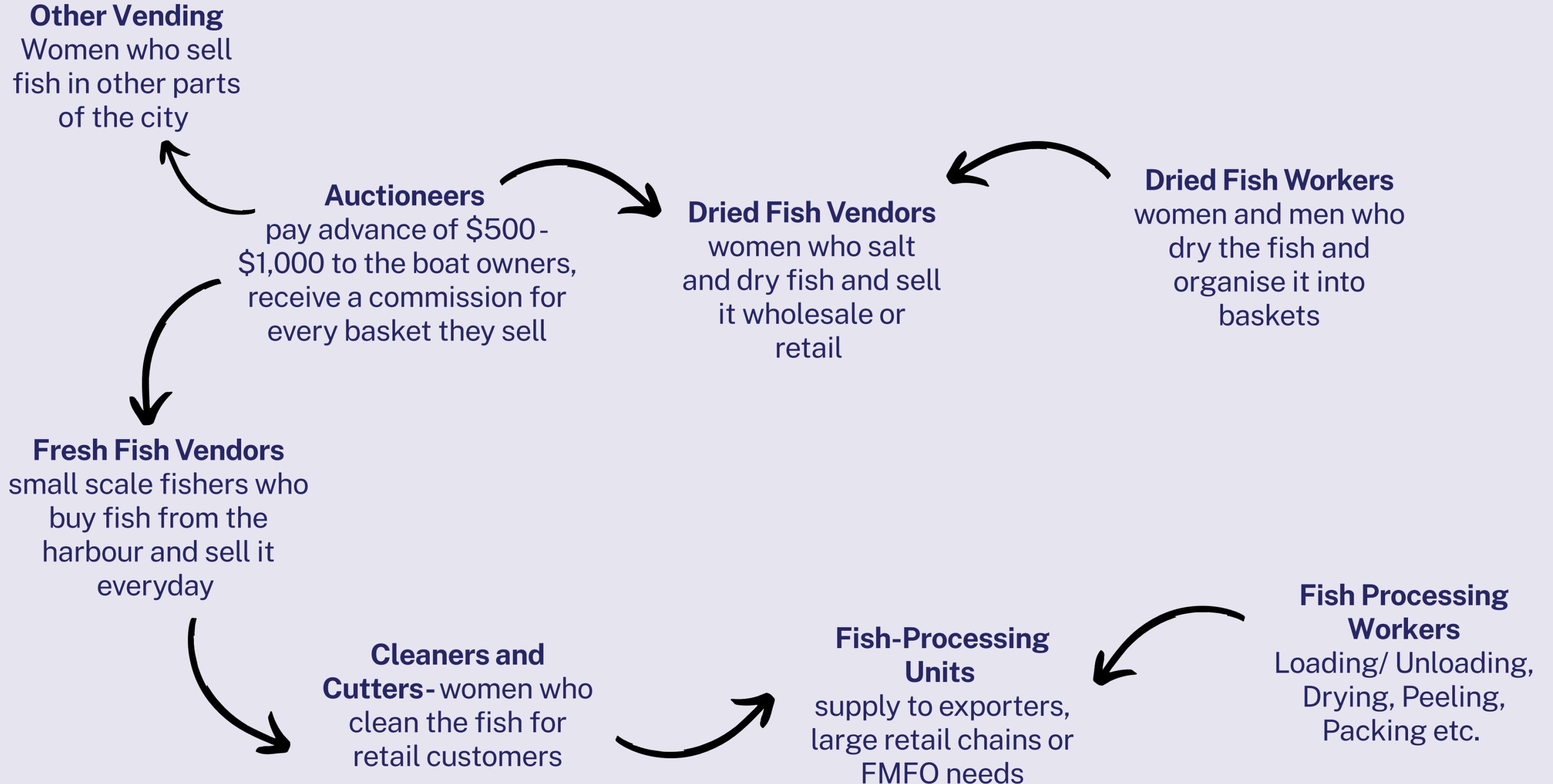


About Kasimedu



- 15 fishing villages
- Export of fish and fish products weighing 51,539 MT in 2019-20, worth \$29.3 million (Handbook of Fisheries Statistics, 2020) - 4.4% of total share of India
- Both FRP and mechanised fishing
- Migration hotspot- districts within Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh
- Multiple fish markets along the coastline in different areas.
- Kasimedu fish market is right next to th harbour
- Located right next to the Chennai Port

Women in the Value Chain



Caste and Migration in India

- Temporary labour migration rates are higher at the national level among the most disadvantaged social groups, namely the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the Scheduled Castes (SCs) (45 and 24 per 1000 respectively) compared to Other Backward Classes (19 per 1000) and Others (12 per 1000). (Rajan et. al., 2023)
- When migrants move away from their hometowns, they can no longer access the benefits of state-specific schemes such as the public distribution system. This impacts the poorest and food-insecure the most.
- Migration is strongly represented as a means of breaking away from traditional hierarchies; however is not independent of these identities; rather they are reinforced and reconstituted in varied ways (Kunduri, 2008)

Exploratory Study: Focus Areas

01

Cleaning of Fish

- Payment is often bargained down, tips only from regular customers.
- Earn \$5- 10 on good business days, just \$2 on others
- Daily token fees go to the society for space and cleaning which is comprised of men

02

Drying and Salting of Fish

- Payment per basket \$0.3 per basket and around 8 -10 baskets a day
- Typically work for multiple businesses based on time availability
- Both temporary and regular employment

03

Drying of Fish Meal

- Currently stopped due to stench, moved to fish drying
- Influx of North Indian migrants employed by companies
- Value chain from 'waste'-rise in reduction fisheries

Cleaning of Fish



- Performed by both local and migrant women
- Strongly preferred among younger women - flexible schedule allows for care work
- Many cite lack of skill and capital as a barrier to fish vending - need to invest in only small tools (knives, tubs, aruvamanai) \$50–\$120 annually).
- No explicit mention of discrimination

“We are all people doing fishing, we solve all conflicts within ourselves”

- Deeper questions on ‘claim’ to spaces - Insider Outsider Binary

Who are the outsiders here? - Many people from SC Communities

- “Clean this and give, why are you talking so much after coming from another place”
- Back and leg pain, nerve pulls, headaches from heat, throat strain, and skin allergies from fish.

Drying of Fish

- Only migrant labour- both men and women
 - Low-wage employee status despite skill
- one woman said “I do not know to do any of this, these people only do everything”
- Highly labourious work (literally backbreaking)
 - Hired through networks - Seasonal migration when there is no work in agriculture, word of mouth referrals
 - Some people chance upon this work too - during port construction etc.
 - Precarity in both cases - no social security
 - Paid less than local labourers





Is the Gender Lens enough?

- There is no singular category of the fisherwoman
- Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989)

“ Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. “

- Class and the New International Division of Labour (Bhattacharya, 2017; Federici, 2012)
- Dalit Women Talk Differently (Guru, 1995)

Difference in Dalit women’s way of talking and living due to a long history of their deprived socio-economic-political status.

Parallels to Sanitation Work - the probability/ share of workers from marginalised backgrounds

- Age and Mobility
- Migration - Insider vs Outsider

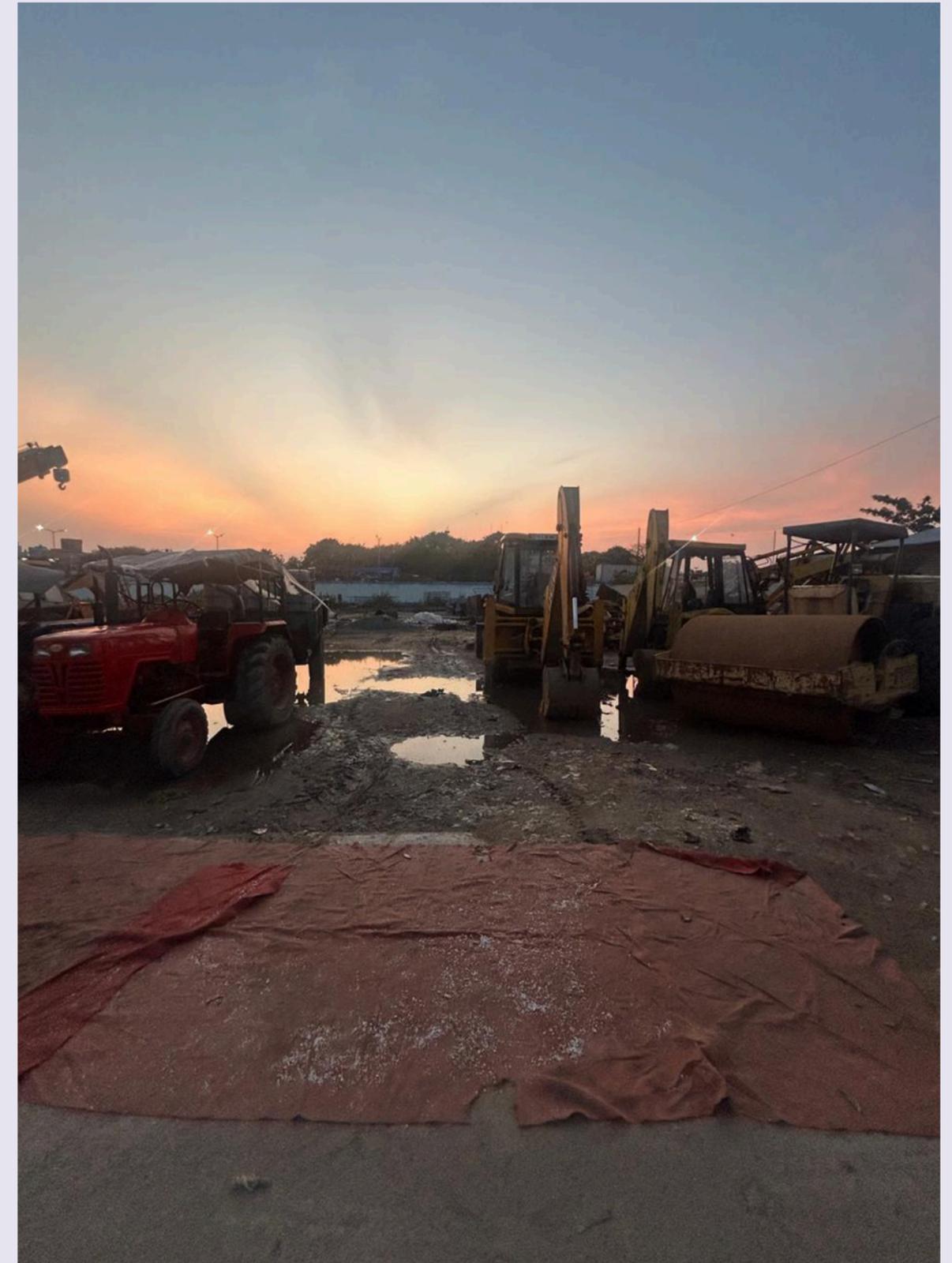
Exclusive market rights to women from the local fishing community (Gopakumar, Hapke, & Jyotishi, 2019)

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Development Discourse

- Popular imaginations of the coast - focus on infrastructure at the cost of displacement
 - Women's access to space - livelihoods, safety, and leisure
- Forced to move to alternate sources of income, like domestic work (Kowshik, 2025)
- Valuation in the GDP - visibility to earmark thought and funds into policies for women (basic amenities like bathroom and shade, access to credit, higher bargaining power in markets, etc.)
 - Inevitability of migration given global value chain
 - Devp (Neoliberalism) as a Double Edged Sword

Women's role as auctioneers and entrepreneurs v/s women employees - *Is this equitable employment?*





Embeddedness

- Document women's responses - understanding how they navigate and negotiate within institutions can help co-create solutions
- Concept of the material being 'embedded in the social' (Polanyi, 1944; Granovetter, 1985)
- Martin Hess (2004): societal, network, and territorial dimensions of embeddedness
 1. Social: the importance of an actor's origin, reflecting the cultural, political, and historical background
 2. Network: the structure of relationships among a set of actors (persons or organizations)
 3. Territorial: Economic actors become embedded when they absorb, and in some cases become constrained by, the economic activities and social dynamics that already exist in those places

Conclusion

- A very small sample- much left to understand caste in fisheries
 1. Language and Othering - “not from our village” - Eg, Post-Tsunami rehabilitation
 2. Contested ideas of indigeneity - who is a historical/ customary fisher?
 3. Cost of progress/ development - invisible forms of marginalisation
- Multiple identities within the fisherwomen themselves
 1. Place of Origin - insider and outsider / Caste
 2. Notions of skill
 3. Age and Mobility

Different women are affected differently

- Invisible to Research → Invisible to Policy (Weeratunge & Synder, 2023)

Lack of documentation - lack of social security and basic facilities among women, especially migrants

What Next?

Research

- As researchers, how do we 'categorise' fishers? What can make it more inclusive and intersectional, even within a gendered lens?
- What are the demands and aspirations of women? How can we facilitate spaces for the sharing of different lived experiences?

Policy

- Do existing policies account for these differences? What are the primary goals of policies?

Policy instruments predominately consider gender as an accelerant to instrumental goals, rather than of inherent value (Lawless et. al., 2021)

Draft Blue Economy Policy- highly export driven, Sagarmala Project - Large scale of displacement, 30 by 30 - right to fish

- Can we reimagine coastal policies and planning from a gender-sensitive lens? What would they look like in practice?