



**Preliminary Report on the Fact finding Mission
Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement**

KOLATHUR AQUA FARM

Shrimp Culture has been inundating the coastal belt of Tamil Nadu displacing people who have been thriving on agricultural activities. This has become off late a phenomenon disrupting the normal life of fisher folks and agriculture labourers who have been living on the coastal area for their economic activities. A small village called Kolathur situated on the banks of Buckingham canal of Chithambur Panchayat of Cheiyur Block of Kancheepuram District have suffered the worst due to a private shrimp culture activity in the name of Chinnu-Aqua Tech Private Limited. People have been complaining to the authorities about their sufferings due to the effluents erupted from the aqua tech have resulted in vain.

Having known the situation, to find out the factual position, a eleven number team comprising Environmentalist, Child welfare activists, Human rights activists, Advocates, Professor, representatives of Tamil Nadu Women's Forum and Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement visited the village on September 6th, 2006.

The team members were :-

1. Ms. Saraswathy (Prof.), Chennai.
2. Ms. Ajeetha (Advocate), Chennai.
3. Mr. Krishnamurthy, CRY, Chennai.
4. Mr. ThenPandiyan, Tamil Nadu Human Rights Organisation, Chennai.
5. Mr. Charles, TRUST Help, Chennai.
6. Ms. Jeyarani, Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement, Tirunelveli.
7. Mr.Charles, Tamil Nadu Theological College, Madurai.
8. Ms. Komala, Dalit Women's Movement, Kottaikadu.
9. Ms. Magimai, Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement, Chennai.
10. Ms. Vimala, Tamil Nadu Women's Forum, Chennai.
11. Ms. Premela, Tamil Nadu Dalit Women's Movement, Chennai.

Objective of the fact-finding team:

The objective of the team was to find out the facts relating to the effect of the effluents of the shrimp farm on soil fertility and ground water.

The Village:

Kolathur Village is situated on banks of Buckingham canal in the Chithambur Panchayat, of Cheiyur Block, of Kancheepuram District. The village is just 100 meters away from the popular East Coast Road connecting Chennai and Pondicherry. The village has 510 families comprising 4000 people predominantly of Dalit families.

Details about the shrimp farm:

Name of the firm:

Chinnu Aqua Tech Private Limited,
20 G-1, Abdulla shahib Street,
ChoolaiMedu , Chennai- 600 094.

Managing Director: F. Parthaloum

Director: A. Nirmala Chinna Rani

Area of the shrimp farm: 10.41 acre

Situation: No.57, on the banks of Bucking cam Canal

The fact-finding team to begin their mission has first met the Dalit women who have been traditionally harvesting prawns and fishes in the backwaters. The team members have met some of these women and elaborate discussion to get the facts from them.

Ms. Umapathy, aged 55 years w/o Mr. Kesavan is regularly catching the fish and prawns from the backwater. Her

husband is engaged in tapping the toddy from the palm tree. She said her family is the sixth generations living in the same village and before involving themselves in the shrimp harvest they were agricultural coolies working in the farms of Reddiyars and Chettiyars belong to the clan of upper caste. The traditional agriculture economy was depending on the cultivation of paddy, ragi and groundnuts. She further said they do not have land in their name and have been living on the land of the upper caste. They have been looking after a small farm surrounded by her house with the mango, jackfruit and coconut trees. The farm is belong to the upper caste man without his permission she cannot touch any produce of the trees.

Ms. Umapathy has pointed out that few of the upper caste men have sold their cultivable land to the shrimp farm owner. We have been protesting against the conversion of farmland to shrimp culture from the beginning. But we have been tortured and police cases were registered against us, she told. Due to the effluents mixing with the backwater, we have developed different types of skin diseases because we have been toiling in the polluted backwater to catch fish and prawns hours together. Due to continue exposure in the polluted backwater she developed eye problems and urinary infections. Even the drinking water is spoiled. This could be visible while using the water for cooking. If the situation continues she fear that people in the village will not live for long.

Ms. Amutha, w/o Subburayan lives in the village also depends on the backwater for her survival. Her husband died recently, out of two children she had already lost one. She told that due to continue exposure to the chemicals in the water she is losing her eyesight gradually. She feels that her limbs are shaking and she need someone's assistance to move out. She is receiving the old age pension of Rs.200/- from the government with the help of purchasing rice from the government ration shop she survives, she added.

Ms. Chellamal, w/o Elumalai is having three girl children. Due to poverty she could not educate them. Her husband died recently and said she was unable to pay the educational fee of Rs.60/- per month for her children education. She has complained that the government had already stopped educational assistance to the children after the tsunami incident. Only from the private organization she continues to receive certain help and survives. She has already developed skin problem and suffering with white discharge, urinary infection and so on. She said that gradually she is losing her eyesight.

Ms. Kaliyammal, aged 50 is also involved in the fishing activities in the backwater and her children are employed in salt marsh. She is also suffering with the skin diseases and stopped fishing activities.

Ms. Shanthi, w/o Marimuthu having four children she said, before the shrimp farm was formed they were catching sufficient quantity of prawns from the backwater and earning their decent livelihood. After the shrimp farm they found many living organisms in the backwater were dying due to the chemical pollution.

The fact-finding team made a visit to the local primary school to secure first hand information from the schoolteachers. Ms. Selvi, a schoolteacher told that she was recently transferred to the school. There are 48 girl children and 64 boys. A few children suffer with fever and stomach disorder and only one child were suffering with skin diseases. Another teacher called Ms. Sarala, said that mid day meal was given to children every day and drinking water was found in good quality. She is unaware of the health condition of the children in the village since she was recently joined duty at Kolathur, she disclosed.

Ms. Chithra, Local Panchayat President, w/o Mr. Ravi with three children are living in Kolathur said that before the shrimp farm was constructed the owner of the farm approached her with five lakh rupees trying to woo her with flimsy promises of providing a flat in Chennai, good education for the children and so on. But her husband did not agree to them and driven them away. After two days she said the same people approached her and appeasing her to get the permission of her husband for constructing a

shrimp farm in the village but she did not respond, she added.

Further she said she was aware that the people have been suffering of shrimp culture effluents in the neighboring villages of Thenpakkam and Kottaikadu. As a President, she has laid water lines to four villages and arranged distribution of water from the bore wells. She said people were against the cultivation of shrimp culture in their villages. But the owner of the farm procured land from the upper caste people and started their work. They have also taken away the small pond which was earlier utilized by the villagers for drinking water and bathing.

Ms. Chithra informed the fact-finding team that the ground water being pumped near the shrimp farm is found in yellow colour. As a President, she found out that the upper caste people for cultivating fruit bearing trees took 75 acres of wasteland away. Further another 7 acres of wasteland, which was utilized by the upper caste people, have been retrieved from the occupants and was distributed to 75 families. When we were against the introduction of shrimp farm in the village, the owners in connivance with police authorities started tormenting the villagers. They have filed false case against her husband. They have also bribed the Pollution Control Board for having permission to install the shrimp farm in the village. The villagers have represented more than 7 times to the District Collector but the efforts resulted in

vain. Even in the village Panchayat meeting a resolution was passed against the setting up of shrimp farm in the village. The owners of shrimp farms have purchased land at the higher rates of Rs. 1500 to Rs. 2000 per cent otherwise the land cost would remain Rs. 700/- per cent. They have purchased about 21 acres of land out of which 11 acre has been utilized for the construction of shrimp farm. We have cultivated paddy in our land but the crop failed further we have shifted to ground nut cultivation even that could not result in good return, because the fertility of the land have been spoiled by the effluents of shrimp farm.

Ms. Chithra said that the women of the village have been earning Rs.100/- to Rs. 150/- per day by selling the catch from the backwater before the coming up of shrimp farm. Today due to pollution in the backwater and disappearance of living organisms they earn only Rs.30/- to Rs. 40/-.

Mr. Paramanathan school headmaster of Panchayat union Primary school has informed the fact-finding team that with the support of village youth he was protesting against the introduction of shrimp farm in the village. But the village elders were against the youth. He said he was informing the people about the destruction that would unleash the land and the water by the shrimp culture went on deaf ear. The farms that were earlier started by the owners have resulted in loss. Hence, the farms were

later closed. But in 2003, the farms were again revitalized. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) opposed the shrimp culture. There was a case filed against the owners. The issue was taken up to the apex body that is the Supreme Court but no results have been reaped in favour of the villagers. There was a stiff resistance against the farms in the Kottaikadu village. The people of Kolathur village who have been surviving on fishing from the backwaters are suffering now. The colour of the water in the village pond in Kolathur has since been changed. The palm trees around the farm have dried up. In connivance with police authorities and political bigwigs the farm owners remain successful in implementing their schemes.

Recently, due to the intervention of the Dalit Panthers of India a political party, the owners of shrimp farms were coming forward to have discussion with the local people. In spite of that they have not stopped their full-fledged activities. **Mr. Paramanantham** believes that approaching court, law and advocate would lead to a long drawn battle with lot of money to be spent. If 10 people are ready we may destroy the farms. Unfortunately, people have fear towards aftermaths. People belong to Kolathur, Thenpakkam and Pallampakkam have direct impact of the shrimp farms. People belong to 15 villages including Kaipanikuppam, Alankaraikuppam, Muttukadukuppam are depending on the Buckingham canal for their fishing activities.

Ms. Saraswathy, has questioned; what way would be an appropriate solution to this issue? She said, since 1975 onwards many NGO's approached us promising with the solution, but later on they withdrew from the situation because of the pressure from the government as well as from the political parties. The Member of Parliament Mr. Aron echoed even this issue in the parliament. But the solution still remains a distant dream. She has also informed that some families remain as bonded labourers and have habitation on the lands belong to upper caste community.

Mr. Ravi of Kolathur is the husband of Village Panchayat Women Leader and informed the fact-finding team that there are four cases still pending in the court awaiting for judgment. The local Panchayat have already passed five resolution but in vain. The shrimp farms have unauthorized electrical supply from the village and they have not taken any official sanction from the village for the construction of the farms. Even the District Collector is keeping himself quite in this issue. On the 'petition day' (which is being organized regularly at the District Collectorate to listen to common public and to receive petition if any) Mr.Ravi said 'I went with the people and submitted a memorandum to the Collector but no action was initiated so far. The land was purchased for the construction of the farm in 2002 at this juncture itself we have opposed the move.

The watercolour has changed in the area. Many palm trees have dried up. Due to people's protest the shrimp farm was totally removed from the Thenpakkam village in the year 2002. After that the owners have approached us five times but we have not replied to them. We have even been threatened with the help of political parties. We have filed Public Interest Litigation in the court. Police forces have been used against us to get rid of this situation. False cases were booked against me, with allegation of extortion of five lakh from the owner. I have also threatened by the police that I would be booked under Goondas Act' he added.

Mr. Ravi has further narrated that the village people even approached the State Ministers of the earlier Cabinet for necessary

action against the farm owners. But no solution was in the vicinity. Today he said, the village is continuing its struggle for the fundamental rights of the people in democratic society. Continues struggle and protest by the poor people without any organizational support made them lackadaisical in their attitude.

Finally, the fact finding team after having a detailed interaction with the village people have visited the place where the waste effluents getting mixed with the backwater. The team found that the land surrounding the area have lost its fertility and turned to be in brown colour from where the poor women of the near by villages were sitting in knee-deep water to eke-out for a better catch.

TAMIL NADU DALIT WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, Chennai.

For Further Information, please contact to the Secretariat of Tamil Nadu Women's Forum.

**Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF)
தமிழக பண்கள் எழுச்சி அமைப்பு**

76/37, G-1, 9th Street,
"Z" Block, Anna Nagar West,
Chennai,
600 040, Tamil Nadu, INDIA

Tel: +91-(0)44-421-70702 or 70703,
Fax: +91-(0)44-421-70702
E-mail: burnad [at] md3.vsnl.net.in
URL: <http://in.geocities.com/tnwforum>

Join Hands With Us To Achieve Gender Justice!

பாலீயல் வேறுபாடற்ற சமூக நீதியை அடைய ஏம்மோடு இணைந்து செயல்பட வாரீர்!