

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE THREE VILLAGES

3.1 Geographic location and infrastructure

The fishing villages Perianeelankarai, Chemmencheri and Pattipulam are situated near the main road between Madras and Mahabalipuram within a distance of 10 to 50 km from Madras city. See Appendix 2 for an idea of the location of the villages.

3.1.1 Transport

The fisherfolk do not own any means of transport, not even bicycles, but there are frequent buses at places 10 minutes away on foot. Despite being close to the city and having such ready access, the communities of the three villages have little contact with other nearby communities except for marketing of fish. There are no roads to the nearest agricultural villages.

3.1.2 Electricity

Electricity has been brought to the villages and the government has installed street lamps, but only one works. This is apparently because of lack of maintenance. Very few of the houses have electricity, and then only for lighting.

3.1.3 Water

Water is obtained from wells, boreholes and ponds. There is an acute shortage, especially during summer months, and the water is very saline.

3.1.4 Land

Houses are situated relatively close together, Each house in its own small plot of land of an average size of 0.05 acres. The land belongs to the government; each family has been given a 'patta', a certificate which gives the right to occupy a plot within the village. Plans of the villages are in Appendices 3 to 5.

Pattipulam is surrounded by casuarina plantations, whereas Chemmencheri is bordered by waste land on one side and a privately owned coconut plantation on the other side. Perianeelankarai is bordered by waste land; at a distance of approximately 300 metres, there is a small casuarina plantation. To have casuarina trees within walking distance is of great financial importance to fisherfolk as they are a source of free fuel for their kitchen fires. Although the plantations are well looked after by the private owners or by the government, the women and children are able to collect the fallen twigs and needles.

3.1.5 Shops

All the three villages have a shop where small amounts of vegetables, household goods and sweets can be bought. None of these shops sells toddy; it is available in nearby villages.

3.1.6 Schools

Educational opportunities for children are relatively poor, but the existing school facilities in all the three villages are well within 'walking distance' for the children. Perianeelankarai shares a primary school (classes I-V), run by the Parangimalai Panchayat Union, with another village. Pattipulam has a middle school (classes I-VIII) which is run by the Harijan Welfare Department of Tamil Nadu.

Chemmencheri has two schools nearby: the Thirupoor Panchayat Union Primary School (classes I-V) ; and a middle school (I-VIII) run by the Franciscan Missionaries and aided by the Panchayat Union, located in Kovalam, a neighbouring village.

3.1.7 *Medical services*

There are hospitals within 15 to 30 km of the villages, with frequent bus services passing near them. Chemmencheri receives more or less regular visits from a health inspector whose principal task is carrying out preventive measures such as anti-malarial campaigns. The Health Department issues medicines (tablets) to the headman in Pattipulam for distribution to the villagers as may be indicated.

3.1.8 *Local industry*

At the entrance to Perianeelankarai a processing, freezing and storage plant for prawns and frog legs was set up in 1975 by a private owner (Maharaja Sea Foods). Prawns from Neelankarai are not delivered to this plant which is said to operate at well below maximum capacity. A few fisherwomen from Perianeelankarai have sometimes found temporary employment here during the peak fishing season.

Two other prawn factories have been established at a distance of approximately 5 km from Perianeelankarai Liberty Cold Storage in Chinnadhikuppam and Asian Marine Products in Injambakkam.

3.2 Structure of population, housing, cultural-religious background, political leadership and employment

3.2.1 *Population*

The populations of the villages are:

Perianeelankarai : 64 houses, 390 people including 87 adult women

Chemmencheri : 78 houses, 423 people including 121 adult women

Pattipulam : 62 houses, 385 people including 92 adult women.

3.2.2 *Religious and cultural background*

All the villagers are Hindus. In fact all of them are Chettiers—belonging to the Periapettinathavar sub-caste. Each village has its own temple maintained by the villagers.

3.2.3 *Housing*

Most of the houses are of the single-room mud-thatched type, some of concrete or brick with tiled roofs; a few have flat concrete roofs.

3.2.4 *Employment*

Most of the men are exclusively fishermen without side-income from any other business or employment. The exceptions are that in Perianeelankarai one man functions as a bicycle trader besides going fishing; another man has a irregular side income of Rs. 350 per month from renting out his house to wage labourers from Kerala working in a nearby prawn factory. The shops are run by women and children.

There is hardly any migration. Two of the better-educated men from Pattipulam found jobs in the city but there has been no instance of a whole family migrating either to another village or to Madras. Fishermen in general do not seem to add to the urbanisation problems of Madras city. Nor is there much seasonal migration, except that during the lean season, some women and children move to their parents or grandparents who may be comparatively better off financially. The men, and sometimes their mothers, stay behind in the villages even though fishing is poor.

3.2.5 *Political leadership*

All the three villages still have a traditional village council. The number of members differs from village to village: the council of Perianeelankarai has nine members, that of Chemmencheri 10 members; Pattipulam four—all are selected on a hereditary basis. The village headman is elected by the village people from among themselves. At village meetings, village and private affairs are

discussed and settled, such as conflicts with other villages and between individuals; personal problems arising from the presence or activities of outsiders, outcasts and the deprived; and economic and financial concerns of the village. Such meetings must be attended by all council members and at least half of the adult males.

Only men can become council members; women are not allowed to participate in or attend and listen to council meetings, or to participate in the election of the headman.

3.3 Assets and distribution of assets

3.3.1 Fishing craft

In each village there are two different types of fishing craft in use, the masula boat for beach seining and the kattumaram. Occasionally poorer fishermen fish with a hand-line from the shore, which requires no equipment except a hook-and-line and a small bag to keep the catch. The kattumarams are used for line fishing and gill netting. There are 4-6 masulas in each village.

In most cases boats are owned by one man, though there are some instances of joint ownership by close relatives. The number of kattumarams operating differs from village to village. In Pattipulam most families own at least one kattumaram, and there are 150 in all, whereas in Chemmencheri there are only 50 kattumarams and about half the families do not possess one at all. The situation is similar in Perianeelankarai.

3.3.2 Fishing gear

The nets in use are made of cotton or nylon. The nylon nets commonly used for gill netting are Kavalavalai, Araivalal and Thatakavalai. Most fishermen have nets but the distribution is unequal; most nets are in the hands of only a few families. In Perianeelankarai, 13 out of 64 families do not own any nets, in Chemmencheri 5 out of 80; in Pattipulam, 9 out of 62 families do not own a net. See also 4.8.3 below.

3.3.3 Sharing of catch

Gill nets are generally operated from a single kattumaram by two or three fishermen. The catches are divided on the basis of half a share for the net owner and kattumaram owner and half a share for the crew members.

For the operation of the big nets (bag seines) like Madhavalai, Edavalai and Paindavalai, four kattumarams and 10-20 fishermen are needed. The sharing of catch differs from village to village. In Chemmencheri, one-third goes to the net owner, the remaining two-thirds are divided into 25 equal shares: 20 shares for the fishermen, 4 shares for the 4 kattumarams and 1 share for the temple. In Pattipulam there are three equal shares: 1/3 for the net owner, 1/3 for the 4 kattumaram owners and 1/3 for the 16 men.

Example:

Catch worth Rs. 300/-

1. Chemmencheri (20 men per net)	Net owner	Rs. 100
	Kattumaram owner	Rs. 32
	One man	Rs. 8
	Temple	As. 8
2. Perianeelankarai (10 men per net)	Net owner	Rs. 67
	Kattumaram owner	Rs. 67
	One man	Rs. 6.70
	Qlai ¹	Rs. 30
3. Pattipulam (16 men per net)	Net owner	Rs. 100
	Kattumaram owner	As. 100
	One man	Rs. 6.25

¹Olai is a palm leaf and used as a construction material for houses, etc. It is convenient and cheap to buy it in bulk for the group as a whole.



Going out to sea on a kattumaram.

THREE FISHING VILLAGES IN TAMIL NADU

Glimpses into daily life in the three fishing villages south of Madras — Perianee/ankaral, Chemmencheri and Pattipu/am— where the socio-economic survey described in this paper was carried out early 1981.

Investigator with Chemmencheri fisherwoman



An old widow in one of the villages.





Pattipulam village: Investigator interviews fisherwoman. Three hundred adult women from the three villages were interviewed for the socio-economic survey.

Investigators engage in a group discussion with village women.



Women in the three villages are deeply involved in the marketing of fish. Fish is often carried by headload to neighbouring non-fishing villages.



Bicycle trader — also a supplier of credit for the fisherfolk.





Woman spreads out fish for drying. The drying place is usually close to the house.



Chemmencheri fisherwomen selling fish at Kelampakkam, an agricultural village.