By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA

# Fullu Fustar Formalin (Formalin at Fullu's cost)

The breaking news in July 2018 where the Goa Government's Directorate of Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) found, on spot testing , that there was formalin in the 20 fish samples, drawn from trucks that had brought fish to the Margao and Panjim markets from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, needs to be turned into an opportunity. An opportunity to reflect on the kind of export-import led, fast and furious, nature- and people-disrespecting development that India is poised to further bolster. An opportunity to see how this development takes advantage of the existing invisibilisation of the unpaid work of women to ignore the same in computing the costs and implications of this development model. Reflecting on both of these issues would set us on the path to articulating developmental models that are eco as well as people friendly.

Formalin is usually associated in Goa with the preservation of dead bodies, special when a relative who is abroad is awaited, to prevent their decomposition and the emanation of foul smells till the funeral concludes. And here it was, being used on fish for human consumption. What could the implications of this be? Was it also being used in vegetables, fruits, milk, chicken being imported not only from other states but also from abroad? Or maybe some formalin-like preservative?

What is going to be the effect on our health? What might this have meant for those who have been regularly consuming imported fish specially in the monsoons? For how long has this malpractice been going on? What could be the implications for women's work including the unpaid invisible housework?  Already Goa has had the dubious reputation of being called the cancer capital of India by its own leading oncologist, even if he attributed it to alcoholism and lack of exercise. Could formalin in fish, and maybe something formalin like in fruits, vegetables, also be the source of this cancer?

Predictably, there was a public outcry. It led Goa's Chief Minister, who is, himself, reportedly suffering from an advanced stage of pancreatic cancer, to announce a ban on importing fish until July end, and for Goa's consumers to await the resumption of fishing after the usual regulatory fishing ban in law expires.

There is indeed wisdom in the saying that there is a time, a place, and a season for everything. In earlier times, we respected the cycles of nature and limited our exploitation of resources. But in our race to conquer nature and imagine that we have everything at our command, we are losing it. In the years gone by, it was common practice for fisherwomen to dry fish in summer by the natural drying process so we could consume fish in the monsoons. It was a practice in the monsoons not to go fishing, so that the fish could breed and there could be sustainable fishing. The advent of trawlers and their technological ability as well as brazen disregard for sustainability also brought its own adversity to our fish stock. This took care of both ecological and consequently intergenerational considerations with respect to the livelihood of the fishing community, as also the food security for Goans for most of whom fish was a staple diet. One is speaking of ecological and consequently intergenerational concerns, because with the practice of fish drying, the local people could still have fish, albeit dry fish, in their diet during the period when there was no fishing, and the fish resource was also ensured for future generations by not fishing during the fish breeding season.

But with fish being imported throughout the year, and being infused or laced with preservatives to last till it reaches Goa, demand for dry fish lessened. This again had consequences for the livelihoods of the traditional fishing community and particularly the fisherwomen.  As it is, the use of the shore as a fish drying space has not been duly recognized by law–so it is being usurped. This space use was at best recognized in an oblique adverse way in the now ousted Miramar Beach Management Project, 2002, where the smell that accompanies fish drying was being seen as an obstacle to tourism development. With this vilification of local artisanal trade and local artisanal trades people, the stage was set for unsustainable ways of development. There is no value for fish drying activities of the fisherwomen either. That work is not only invisibilised, but has been even sought to be made redundant with formalin fish.

We have now to guard against a similar Miramar Beach Development this time apparently in the guise of securing a Blue Flag certification. This certification is offered by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) affirming that a beach, marina, or sustainable boating tourism operator meets its stringent standards. The Velsao Pale residents have already vetoed the Blue Flag certification for their beach. Knowing very well that such unsolicited certification is usually the first step towards the setting up of a marina or boating tourism, a decision that they have not been involved with in the first place! *Not to speak* of the market

based criteria that follow when the certification is issued for a particular kind of commerce. The criteria do not stem from ecological visions and therefore set questionable standards in such certification for sanitized beaches. Also*, not to speak* of the inevitable consequence of excessive tourist footfalls that result from such certification.



*Because* imported fish has been cheaper given the large scale corporate character of the fishing, local fish and dry fish lost out to that consumption of cheaper imported fish.  But that very corporate induced import export led development, has long term disastrous consequences. Because health issues follow on account of the foreign introduction of fish and consequent foreign introduction (by way of formalin) in fish to preserve it. The burden of health care on account of health implications falls disproportionately, if not totally in some families, on women.

Also fish resources are depleting because of the unsustainable mass fishing practices, for export driven fishing, and this means where traditional fisherwomen had their stock of fish from their coastal belt itself, they are forced to trudge/travel to the jetties, where fish is imported, in the wee hours of the morning to catch the large stock of cheap fish to take for sale to the market.

Thus, the enlargement of a woman's work day with more unpaid invisible work, occurs, both on account of added health care responsibilities, and the travel to a distant place to get the stock of fish for sale. Also money and indebtedness become part of the equation. Before, they didn't have to 'buy' fish to sell it. Therefore, we see that formalin fish is only part of a larger corporate-induced development package, where there is no recognition of, and therefore, no cost assigned, to the invisible, oftentimes unpaid, work that women do, be it in terms of sustainable fishing practices or in terms of health care. The large corporates prey on this invisibilisation to cut costs, maximize profits and amass resources.

This fast and furious production through acquaculture and harvesting of fish is in fact a continuum of the same pattern of development, sought to be introduced by Zuari Agro Chemicals in the 70's. The production of such chemicals was then welcomed  by the State ostensibly to push fast production in agriculture, irrespective of irresponsible discharges of

effluents and their cost to entire populations. In this development model, it doesn't matter what reversal this means of sustainable agriculture and sustainable fishing lifestyles. The battle then against Zuari Agro Chemicals was, if we will recall, the battle that late Matanhy Saldanha and the fishing community, from particularly Velsao and Cortalim, fought very hard. That battle in fact was the precursor to the Environment Protection Act and the fishworkers' struggles that are being waged today.

There are clearly some telling concerns about the import and export of fish, where these import export policies benefit investors in each of these countries/states, no matter that it is on the backs of local people, and particularly its women and its traditional communities, such as fishing communities.

*Note: Fullu is a typical nickname for a female in Goa.*

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