

# beyond the shore-



My name is Sugandhi and I come from a marine fishing community in Vellapallam, a coastal village in Nagapattinam district, Tamil Nadu.

All my life, I have lived among fishing women who start their day before sunrise, literally carry the day's burden on their heads and return home only after the village has become quiet again. When I first began learning photography as part of the fellowship, I did not imagine that my own community would become the centre of my lens. But, the more I learned, the more the everyday labour of the women around me came into focus. With every photograph, I began to feel even more connected to my own people.

These photographs follow **Thangammal**, a fisherwoman who represents hundreds of women I have grown up with. She starts her day at 8 a.m. at the fish landing centre, where she buys fish on credit. Whatever she earns must first go back to the boat owner; only what remains is hers. On many days this is Rs 200 - Rs 250. On some days, there is nothing at all.

She walks nearly 20 kilometres through scattered villages - Kothan Kaadu, Sembodai, Naluvethapathi Akkarai, Naluvethapathi Ikkarai, and many small hamlets, selling fish door to door. She walks in the harsh sun, without proper food or drinking water, sometimes missing the only bus that connects these villages. When the fish doesn't sell, she brings it home, salts it, dries it, and prepares karuvaadu (dry fish).

Even after returning home, her day doesn't end.

She continues with housework, cares for her husband, who was unwell and unable to work, and looks after her children, managing everything on her own as the sole breadwinner of the family.

Through my lens, I wanted to show not only her routine but the weight of that routine; the labour that is invisible even within our own community. When I photographed her, I understood how deeply fisher women carry the family's survival on their shoulders. The sea is spoken of as a man's domain, but everything that happens after the catch like the selling, walking, bargaining, drying, preserving is held entirely by women.

***These images are not staged. They are moments I have walked with.*** I want whoever reading this to witness the strength of women like Thangammal. I also want you to recognise that this labour deserves dignity, support and visibility.

Fisher women contribute immensely to the economy and to sustaining coastal life, yet many of them lack basic facilities, safe market spaces, storage tools, transport and recognition of their work. My hope is that these photographs honour their resilience and bring their challenges into the public eye

This work is my small tribute to the many women who continue walking through villages, across decades, through hardship; so their families can stand.

– Sugandhi Manickavel

*Sugandhi was mentored by Dakshin Foundation's Coastal Grassroots Fellowship (2021–22), jointly organised with Social Need Education and Human Awareness (SNEHA), and received photography training by Palanikumar (@chempkumar). Through this Dakshin Foundation fellowship, she, along with other women from India's marine fishing communities, began documenting and sharing intimate narratives of migration, conflict and climate that shape the lives of the small-scale fisher communities.*





























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