Orissa
The southern coast of Orissa differs from the northern coast not only with regard to oceanographical features, marine resources and fishing technology but also with regard to the cultural and ethnical origins of the people who have settled along the seashore and make a living from fishing in the sea. While the tradition of sea-fishing in the southern district of Ganjam is as old as that in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, seafishing started much later in the northern districts of Orissa. Marine fisheries in the state is carried out by people of non-Oriyan origin. Northern Orissa is dominated by people of Bengali origin--both migrants from West Bengal involved in mechanized sector, and refugees from Bangladesh involved in subsistence-oriented, non-motorized, estuarine fishing. Southern Orissa is dominated by Telugu fishing communities - migrants in Paradeep-Puri coastal belt involved in motorized fishing, and indigenous Telugu- speaking fishers involved in motorized and non-motorised fishing (in Chilika lake area and Ganjam district) (Salagramma 2006).

Fishing communities in Southern Orissa
Vast majority of the artisanal marine fisherfolk of Ganjam, Puri and parts of Cuttack district, in South Orissa, locally referred to as Noliyas, are of Telugu origin. The fisherfolk referred to as Noliyas belong to two different castes, namely Jalaris and Vadabalijas.

Jalaris
The name jalaris relates to the word jala which means net. In Orissa, jalaris are concentrated in the Ganjam district. The Jalaris also reside along the coastline of Andhra Pradesh, particularly in the districts of Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam. Among the jalaris, there are two distinct groups, viz. the edu ratla group and the pardrevdu ratla group. They do not intermarry but they do interdine, and they do not differ much in their habits and customs. Jalari men are exclusively engaged in marine fishing while the women are involved in the marketing of fish. The jalaris have a caste council which consists of eight members. The head of the council is called Paddhanau. The membership of the caste council is hereditary. The council controls all the social and economic affairs of the village (including decisions on fishing holidays, ban on certain gear, supervision of social and religious functions within the community, local law enforcement and justice, and liaisoning with outside institutions during calamities and disasters).

Vadabalijas
vadabalijas, the second Telugu speaking fisherfolk caste, reside in South Orissa. They are also found in great numbers in the Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam districts of Andhra Pradesh, and along the coastline of Puri and the southern part of Cuttack district. Vadabalija men are exclusively engaged in fishing while the women are involved in fish marketing. In recent years, fishers in southern Orissa, have been buying trash fish from Andhra Pradesh trawlers fishing in Orissa, that is currently banned by the fishworker union. The peddalus are involved in monitoring the implementation of this ban.
Fishing communities in Northern Orissa

Traditional riverine and estuarine fisherfolk castes of North Orissa are Kaibarta, Gokha and Rajbansi while the non-traditional fisherfolk castes which now practice sea-fishing comprise Harayans, Khandayat, Radhi, Teli, Ganda, Barik and Kumar. Kaibartas are the most dominant Oriya fishing caste, distinct from the Bengali Kaibartas. Khandayats are the largest non-traditional Oriya fishing caste in the state; they entered sea fishing mainly by investing surplus money from agriculture in fishing boats and nets. The fishing villages in the northern zone of the state appear to have less organised traditional systems of management, probably because marine fishing itself is a relatively new activity in the area. Still, it is possible to see rules governing access and extraction of resources from the creeks and backwaters, as well as for operating nets such as Behundi nets.

Kaibartas

Kaibarta is the largest traditional Oriya fisherfolk caste found mainly in Balasore district. There are also Bengali kaibartas. Some migrated to Orissa and practise marine fishing in Balasore district. The name Kaibarta is synonymous with Kewat or Keota. Kaibartas are divided into two subcastes: Chasi Kaibarta and Jalia Kaibarta or Adi Kaibarta. Kaibartas are usually net or boat owners. They are often described as the most enterprising of the Oriya and Bengali fisherfolk groups, who adopted new fishing methods, ventured into new fishing grounds, and arranged for better marketing of their fish.

Rajbansis

Another traditional fisherfolk caste that practises sea-fishing in North Orissa is rajbansi also referred to as Jiyar. The number of rajbansis engaged in marine fishing is much smaller than the number of kaibartas and Gokhas. There are Oriya rajbansis and Bengali rajbansis1, the latter migrated from East Bengal, at the time of the partition of Bengal to the 24 Parganas in West Bengal and from there to Orissa. Rajbansis are also involved in agriculture besides fishing, where they either work as labourers or own the land. Their women are not involved in any activity related to fishing.

Khandayats

Khandayat is the largest among those communities that follow other traditional occupations and which at present practice seafishing in Orissa. Traditionally khandayats are peasants. They began sea-fishing by investing in fishing boats and nets with the surplus money they accumulated in agriculture. In some areas khandayats own boats and nets without actively participating in fishing operations themselves, while in other areas they venture out into the sea to fish, sometimes even as labourers on other boats. A possible explanation is that khandayats rank higher in the caste hierarchy than kaibartas and Gokhas and fishing is considered an inferior occupation compared to land cultivation.

Other Oriya and Bengali groups that are traditional agriculturist who have taken up sea fishing are Radhi, Teli and Gauda. Recently, groups who are traditionally village

1 A description of the fisherfolk Of West Bengal is attempted in Men in India, 1969, Vol. 49, NO. 3, pp 241-248.
Artisans such as Kumar (blacksmith), Tanti (weaver) and Barik (barber) have also taken up sea fishing given its increasing economic returns.

For further reading:
