



### **K. Alagaraja**

- Designation at retirement : Principal Scientist & Head, FRAD
- Period of service: 1956-62; 1976-94

## **Waves of happenings wafted with breeze**

*CMFRI has played a significant role in the fisheries development of India. Assessing fish stocks and fishers exploiting them is the major programme. Method for estimating exploited resources is universally acclaimed. Quinquennial census on fishers is a well appreciated hall mark.*

*To maintain quality of data, periodical surprise inspections were conducted in the field. Zonal meetings were held involving all the Field Staff (FS) to satisfy their technical, official, personal and emotional aspects. Technical doubts in the method of collection and reporting were discussed and clarified. Official problems from the Research Centres (RC) and Headquarters (HQs) were resolved on the spot. Personal problems like transfers were discussed and suitable changes made. Whether it shines or showers FS should be in remote areas without minimum facilities. Their emotional set back was offset by such meetings when all met and aired their views. In one such meeting a colleague expressed his anguish on the*

surprise inspection and said it was nothing but policing them. Appreciating his sentiments I enumerated the four aspects to assuage his feelings. Thanks to Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, through ICAR system of assessment for promotion, all sincere FS were given promotions. Those meetings were very educative to me that I ever treasure.

Two training programmes for research and technical staff of CMFRI and other organizations on fish stock assessment and sample surveys, remained as gateways for free exchange of information to improve the programmes. It is interesting to recall a question raised by a participant that when reports from western countries indicated on decline in their catches due to disappearance of heavily exploited stocks, such things are not heard in Indian fisheries in spite of intensive fishing here also. The less fluctuations in our waters, I replied, are due to the nature of major exploited fish stocks, namely their short life span, fast growth, high fecundity and multiple spawning.

During a meeting held in Mumbai, CMFRI and Maharashtra State Fisheries Officials discussed State Fisheries problems. Dignitaries like late Dr. C.V. Kulkarni graced the occasion. Secretary, State Agriculture Department presided. The Secretary listened to the problems and solutions. To improve fish landings, reduction in the intensity of fishing, mesh regulation and controlling trawling were put forth. Appreciating those suggestions the Secretary posed that when fishers did not observe them

what use was there for these suggestions. A moment of silence prompted me to answer as follows:

"When advanced countries such as Japan do not observe UNO's restricted whaling how can we expect indigent illiterate fishers to take up these suggestions? All over the world no Government insists on such regulations to avoid facing the displeasure of fishing communities. It is, however, better to create alternate sources of earning for fishers during fishing holidays." Dr. Kulkarni congratulated me for the timely reply. I cherish this incident even now.

During 1982 and 1986 FAO team for training in fish stock assessment visited CMFRI. It was a turning point in the annals of Indian fisheries when FAO experts were impressed on our contributions in fish stock assessment and included them in their training material.

In a meeting of experts from various institutions and fishers from mechanized sector, organized by the State Bank of India branch, Kollam, I mentioned about the negative impacts of intensive fishing and non observance of mesh regulations particularly in near-shore areas. Suddenly one mechanized boat owner got up and said that I would be shot down for such statements as my remarks would affect their chances of getting SBI loan facilities. Everybody was shocked. Clearing the silence smilingly I replied that "the duty of a scientist is to present the facts for the benefit of not only the present generation but also the generations to come. The

renewability of fishery resources should be respected by all fishers including indigenous ones. Now all fishing sectors feverishly compete with each other to exploit maximum, forgetting that by doing this they are killing the goose laying golden eggs. My suggestions are in the interest of all fishing sectors not aiming at the mechanized sector only". During the tea break that gentleman came forward and profusely offered his apologies to the great relief of all !

To cut short my account due to want of space I conclude with a repartee made on Fisheries Resources Assessment Division otherwise called FRAD. Dr. S.V. Bapat, the then Joint Director saw me coming, jokingly told FRAUD is coming. "Yes, it is true with you (U) Sir. But without you (U) it is not", I said.

It is very difficult to forget our beloved colleagues who enriched my life. God bless them all.