

Crab fattening sends her to S. Korea

Irula woman from Pulicat hamlet of Kulathumedu is part of exchange programme

B. Kolappan

PULICAT: From a small hamlet near Pulicat to South Korea, it is indeed a grand journey for K. Padmavathy.

A member of the Irula tribe in Kulathumedu, she will fly to Korea, in a fortnight, as part of an exchange programme in crab fattening, a process she and women belonging to Irular Self Help Groups (SHGs) excel in.

On Wednesday, Padmavathy, J. Nagajothi and K. Usha waded into a pond near Pulicat lake, effortlessly plucked out giant crabs and proudly displayed their catch.

"I used to stand on my husband's shoulders whenever he went into the water to catch a crab or fish. I would get off his shoulders every time he caught something and collect the catch in a bag," said Padmavathy, as she recalled the tough days she and her family spent in search of a livelihood.

Today, her husband Kannaiyan is the panchayat president of Kulathumedu, and



IMPROVED LIVELIHOOD *The women get live crabs from Chennai and other markets and fatten them by constantly feeding them fish. The fattened crabs are then sold at a higher rate — PHOTO: M. KARUNAKARAN*

her sons are doing well. She has sent her postgraduate daughter for training to prepare for the Civil Services. Padmavathy is headed for South Korea, thanks to the International Fund for Agri-

cultural Development, which sponsors the exchange programme.

The women gratefully acknowledge the role played by Central Institute of Brackish-water Aquaculture (CIBA)

and senior scientist B. Shanthi. "Of course we used to do crab fattening even before CIBA came into the picture. But we were not successful. The training provided by the institute changed the situation,

for us," said J. Nagajothi. They get live crabs from Chennai and other markets and fatten them by constantly feeding them fish.

Enthusied by their success and to provide alternative employment, CIBA on Wednesday introduced them to the rearing nurseries of the Asian seabass (*koduva*). They were supplied 10,000 fishlings that were released in a special cage. They can sell the fish to big farms after they attain growth.

"Today aquaculture is a business of the millionaires. But our objective is to ensure that technology benefits the poorest," said A.R. Thirunavukarasu, head of the fish culture division, CIBA, who first succeeded in breeding seabass in captivity in 1997.

Former chairman of Marine Products Export Development Authority, M. Sakthivel, said that there was great demand, across the world, for crabs.

India, with its extensive coastal belt, was a gold mine waiting to be tapped, he said.