
ROLE OF WOMEN FISHER FOLK IN FISHERY ACTIVITIES IN TUTICORIN DISTRICT OF TAMILNADU

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INTRODUCTION

India is endowed with a wide diversity of water resources, which sustains a large fisheries sector in the country. With a coastline of 8,118 km, the country ranks third in total world fish production and second in inland aquaculture. India contributes nearly five percent towards global fish production. Marine fisheries sector in India provides a gainful source of employment, income and livelihood to the million of fisherfolk, who support the fishery economy of the country. The socioeconomic profile and livelihood status of these fishermen assumes paramount importance in designing fishery developmental programmes for augmenting the fisheries production and raising the economic status of people involved in this sector.

Women play a key role in the development of fisheries sector in addition to their role of sole household managers in most fisher families. The contribution of the fisherwomen penetrate every aspect of post-harvest handling, preservation, processing and marketing of seafood products and provide an integral link between producers and consumers. Women, who constitute approximately half of India's population, play vital role in the operation of the fisheries and their continuing growth as a component of the agriculture sector of the economy. The irregularities in the earnings pattern of their man counterparts, coupled with need for livelihood sustainability forces most of the women to earn from a variety of fisheries activities. According to Marine Fisheries Census 2010, nearly 81.8 percent of the fisher folks engaged in marketing of fish were women. About 88.1 percent of the fisher folks engaged in curing and processing were women. About 89.6 percent of the fisher folks engaged in peeling were women. Empowerment of fisher women and gender equality are the significant issues in the globalized economy.

REVIEW OF EARLIER STUDIES

Krishna Srinath (1987) observed that, women in general are hopeful of improving their lives through the development of fisheries activities in the inland and show readiness to acquire new skills and undergo training for the same. But poverty and to certain extent, ignorance have hampered their progress. Ashalatha et.al (2002) analysed the changing role of fisherwomen of India and pointed out that women in value addition sector indicated low price for products and lack of

assured markets as main constraints. Swathilakshmi (2011) found that the variables like annual income, scientific orientation, annual expenditure, annual debt and annual savings were found to have a positive and highly significant relationship with the livelihood index of fisherwomen. Vijaya Khader and Sathiadhas found that about 60 percent of fisherwomen carried out post-harvest activities to earn income. Food expenditure comprised 60.68 percent of the earned income contributing to the major share of the spending.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Much of India's national food security rests on the shoulders of its fisherwomen. Affording comprehensive care for these women is correct in principle and a practical necessity of India's fishery sector is to be satisfactorily sustained and the fisher women empowered both socially and economically. India is an agrarian economy and women are playing a significant and crucial role in it. In agriculture, their contributions are at least quantified and are found to be about 50 percent, where as in the case of fishers on their role is not recognized and quantified. This study aims at bring out the role of the her women in fishery activities. as in fisheries, their picture is not visible and their cry is not louder enough to catch the attention of the outer world. Debt servicing is a serious problem faced by the women fisher folk. They got loan mostly from the non-institutional sources .They are exploited by the exorbitant interest rate of money lenders. The fisher women are often denied credit from public sector institutions due to lack of ownership of assets.

Increased competition, declining resources and difficult working conditions make their work as challenging. The seasonal nature of the employment in the fisheries sector displays a distorted picture about the percapita earnings of fisher folk and this is quite correlative with their poverty status. The problem is more acute for the women stakeholders mainly due to the prevalence of wage disparities favouring man. Although women contribute in all spheres of development both at micro and macro level, it is approximately quantified or recognised. So it is essential to analyse the role of women in fishery activities. Empowerment of fisher women will lead to socio-economic development of fishermen society. assumes its-significance.

OBEJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study has the following objectives.

- To analyse the role of women fisher folk in fishery activities.
- To find out the problems faced by the women fisherfolk.
- To provide solutions on the basis of findings

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Tuticorin is one of the maritime districts in Tamil Nadu. Tuticorin disstrict enjoys a unique position along the Gulf of Mannar in the east coast of India in view of the facilities available for the development and exploitation of the marine fisheries of the nation. Tuticorin is traditionally known for its pearl fishing and shipping industries. In Tuticorin District, there are 21 fishing villages. Out

of these 21 villages, 5 villages were selected on the basis of random sampling method.. 150 fisherwomen were selected on the basis of simple random sampling method, from the selected villages. Field survey method was adopted for data collection. Field survey was administered through well structured interview schedule.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 : Socio-economic status of fisherwomen

Parameters	No. of fish fisherwomen	Percentage
Age		
Below 30	20	13.33
31-40	60	40.00
41-50	45	30.00
Above 50	25	16.67
Total	150	100.00
Education		
Illiterates	55	36.671
Primary Education	45	30.00
Higher Education	30	20.00
Higher Secondary	20	13.33
Degree and above	NIL	NIL
Total	150	100.00
Type of Family		
Nuclear	140	93.33
Joint Family	10	6.67
Total	150	100
Size of Family		
Less than Four	71	47.33
More than Four	79	52.67
Total	150	100

Source : Primary Data

From the analysis of socio-economic status of fisherwomen, it is revealed that illiteracy prevails among the fisherwomen.

Majority of the fisherwomen are in the middle age group and majority of them are earning below Rs.4000 .This shows the poor earnings of the fisher women. 93.33 percentage of the sample fisherwomen are living in nuclear family.Joint family system is tend to decrease,

ROLE OF WOMEN IN FISHERY ACTIVITIES

The present study identified the role of women fisherfolk in fishery activities. Prawn peeling, fish curing, drying, marketing and net making and repairing are the major areas of women's participation in fishery activities.

PRAWN PEELING

Peeled prawn is an important item of foreign exchange. Prawn peeling is. a seasonal activity, related with prawn fishery season . Prawn yields a sizeble amoout of foreign exchange. Peeling does not require any special skill. Peeling is carried out under the supervision of the agents who distribute weighed quantity of prawn among the women. In the sample selected 23.33 per cent of the women are found to be participated in prawn peeling.

CURING DRYING AND TRADING OF FISH

Curing, drying and trading of fish are the other activities carried out by women... Curing of fish is practiced on the seashore with the help of a few women. Drying of fishes is done in seashore or nearby the houses of the fisher women. Marine fisher women are also engaged in trading of fresh fish and dry fish as vendors. The participation of women in curing, and drying and in trading is 20 and 30 per cent respectively.

NET MAKING AND REPAIRING

Net making is a leisure time activity. Net mending is done by men during their leisure. The cotton and silk threads have been replaced by nylon yarn and braiding of nylon net for boats is the most important activity. The net making by women is reported to be decreasing with the introduction of nylon net factories. Women are also indulging in repairing the net. 6.67 per cent of women are engaged in this activity.

PROCESSING PLANT WORKERS

Another area, in which the fisher folk are working, is processing plant. In the processing plants fishes are processed and tinned. Fishes are exported from these processing, plants to various countries. In this activity, 20 per cent of fisher women are engaged.

Table 2 : Fishery Activities of women fisherfolk

Activities	No. of fish fisherwomen	Percentage
Prawn Peeling	35	23.33
Drying and curing	30	20.00
Fish Trading	45	30.00
Net making and repairing	10	6.67
Processing Plant workers	30	20
Total	150	100

Source: Primary Data

PROBLEMS FACED BY FISHER WOMEN

- Since most of the fishes marketed by women fish vendors are low value fishes, the intrinsic problems like lack of infrastructure, and basic amenities invariably affect the marketing of low value fishes.
- Low Value fishes are mainly preferred by a narrow spectrum of low and middle income consumers and the demand often fluctuated with season and availability. So the women fish traders are facing problems in selling of fishes.
- The fish trading women face severe competition not only from the men folk who use two-wheelers in domestic marketing but also from the agents of export companies resulting in the non-availability of quality fishes which commands high demand and price.

- Heavy expenses involved in storing of fishing and bringing the fishes to local market is an important problem faced by women fish vendors.
- Women fish traders are facing financial problems. They are exploited by the exorbitant rate of money lenders.
- Increasing cost of ice is also a problem faced by the fisherwomen.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The analysis of data leads to the following findings.

- The socio-economic status of the women fisherfolk is found to be very poor. The monthly earnings of the fisherwomen are found to be very poor.
- Prawn peeling, fish trading, drying of fish, marketing of fresh fish and dried fish and net making and repairing are important areas in which the fisher women are actively playing their role.
- Poor infrastructure, stiff competition, heavy trading expenses, increasing cost of ice, financial stringency and exorbitant rate of interest are the major problems faced by the fisherwomen.
- House-based ventures are more preferred by fisherwomen and find suitable to their present social fabric.

SUGGESTIONS

- Fisher women co-operative society can provide credit to fisher women at reasonable rate of interest.
- Micro finance can be provided through fisherwomen SHG's.
- Infrastructure and transport facilities may be improved.
- Empowerment of fisher folk should be assured through education and gender equality, which gains significance in the context of ever changing technological options in marine fisheries.

- Several Mariculture technologies provide enough scope for accommodating women in large numbers women empowerment and the community development through combined effort of men and women folk require a holistic approach.
- Tamilnadu Govt can implement special welfare schemes, for the upliftment of the downtrodden fisherwomen.

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