



Role of Women in Fisheries Sector of Saurashtra, Gujarat

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The Marine fishing activities of Gujarat are largely confined to the Gulf of Kutch and the coasts of Saurashtra and South Gujarat. Even so, the State tops in the production of marine fish, among all maritime States of India. One feature of the production pattern, however, is that most of the marine fish produced in the State is of low value.

In Gujarat, coastal communities are primarily engaged in fishing and related activities. the important communities among them being *Kharva, Moila (Koli*

moila and Kharva moila), Machiara [Muslims], Vadi and Madrasis. [fishermen who migrated from Tamil nadu Kerala and Andhra pradesh, now settled in Gujarat]. Among the migrants from south involved in fisheries activities in Gujarat, Keralites form a sizeable group. In addition, a small percentage of people from the socially and economically backward communities are also involved in fishing and other activities. Most of these communities are located at major fish landing centres like Veraval, Mangrol and

and within Gujarat is shown in Fig. 1

Women in Fisheries

Women form an integral part of the work force in fisheries sector of Gujarat. They play a major role in Post harvest activities, marketing and also as processing plant workers. They work in peeling sheds, freezing plants and drying yards. They are engaged either in a single activity like processing or in more than one activity during fishing seasons.

A cluster diagram depicting various

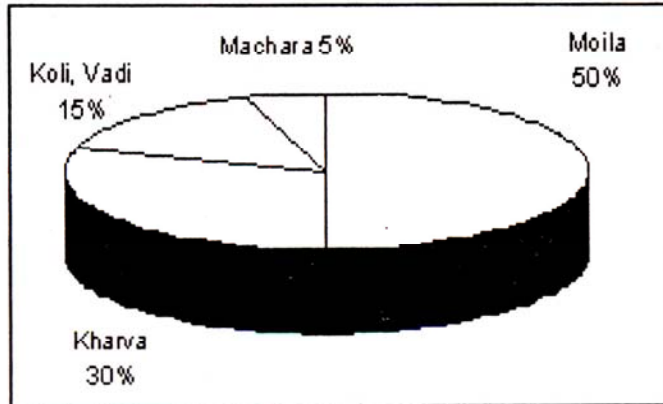


Fig 1 : Location of fisher communities at major fish landing centres

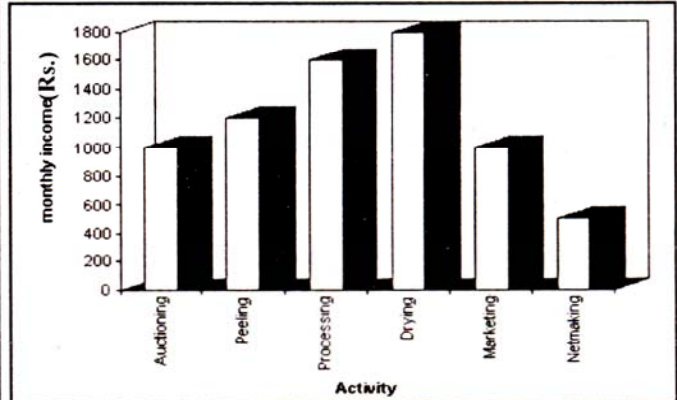


Fig 2 : Average monthly incomes of fisher women

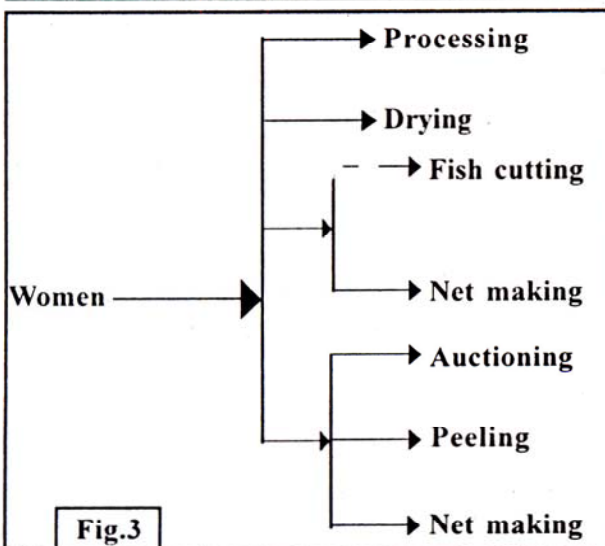


Fig.3

Porbander. The migrated and settled fishermen in Gujarat (other than those from South) are known as *Motabhai*. These fishermen are mostly of south Gujarat origin. In addition, there are those who belong to backward classes and other communities who are also involved in fishing and related activities.

A pictorial representation of major fishing communities of Gujarat

activities in which women are engaged is shown in Fig 3.

A brief description of the post-harvest activities carried out by fisherwomen in Gujarat is given here under:

Auctioning : Women take part in the unloading of fish catches from fishing boats, in sorting them out, and subsequently in their auctioning. Most of the boat owners in the State, on an average, possess six boats. They usually engage women in unloading and auctioning of the catches. Remuneration usually consists of a fixed monthly salary in addition to small quantity of fish which is given to them as an incentive. There also ex-



Women engaged in retail sale of whole fish and cut pieces



Women engaged in auctioning of fish in the wholesale market of Veraval

ists a practice of borrowing some amount of money as advance from the boat owners during off season which is later deducted from the salary. This practice also involves a certain amount of bonding. Women labourers/workers get lesser amount as wages compared to the existing rates for men. Entrapment in this cycle of debt is usually of a permanent nature and is carried over from one fishing season to the other. The average monthly remuneration earned by a woman labourer is nearly Rs.1000/- per month.

Peeling : Peeling of prawn, squid, cuttle fish etc., are part of post-harvest activities along Gujarat coast. Most of the peeling work is carried out in temporary sheds having minimal infrastructure facilities. A large number of women and minor girls are engaged for peeling work. The remuneration is related to the quantity of material processed in a given time. The working time depends on availability of raw material and export demand. Due to very poor hygiene and sanitation at the peeling sheds, the women employed are often exposed to a variety of health hazards. For the women workers, the income from this activity is usually supplementary in nature i.e., women involved in peeling activities are also involved in some other related activities. Employment in this sector is not consistent as it is related to the quantum of catches diverted and available for peeling. The remuneration is approximately Rs. 30-40/25 kg and on an average a woman can earn about Rs.60/- a day.

Fish processing plants : In Gujarat migrant women workers form a significant portion of the skilled/semi-skilled work force in processing plants. The women workers are usually recruited and employed by labour contractors, on pre-decided terms and conditions. The working hours generally comprise two shifts of six hours duration i.e., coming to twelve hours per day. The average remuneration ranges from Rs.1200 to Rs. 1800 per month. Of the total remuneration, a portion is given to the contractor as commission. Living conditions, recreational facilities and health care facilities need to be improved upon. The employment depends on the extent of fish landings during a particular fishing season. Over the past few years it has been observed that retrenchment of workers has been taking place on a mid-seasonal basis due to inadequate returns to the fish processing industry. Very little is known about the socio-economic aspects and working conditions of the women workers. Usually the workers are provided with dormitory grade accommodation within the plant premises with boarding facilities.

Most of the women belong to the economically backward families of central and southern districts of Kerala. They are employed in the peeling, grading, filleting and packaging sections of the processing plants. Some of the women also work as supervisors in some of the plants. The women are usually paid one month's salary as bonus in addition to travel expenses (fares) to and fro to their native

places once a year

Drying : Fish drying is a very important subsidiary activity along the coast of Gujarat, particularly Saurashtra coast. There are a number of small and medium sized fish drying yards located near the landing centres. Majority of the work force in the fish curing yards is dominated by women. Most of the drying activity depends on the availability of raw material and concomitant export demand. There are also several temporary drying yards which are moved from place to place according to shifting fish landing centres. The labour force engaged in drying comprises mostly workers who could not be/ are not engaged in peeling. There are many migrant male labourers engaged in drying activities. Drying activity includes splitting of the fish, salting and immersing them in brine tank washing after curing and spreading them for sun drying. Remuneration paid to women workers varies from Rs. 1500 to 2200/- per month. There is no fixed working time in the yards, since most of the activities depend on the time of raw material availability. There is a need to improve the infrastructure and incorporate hygiene into various aspects of this activity. Dermatitis and Dermatomycosis are usually encountered among women involved in the practice of drying. Certain areas like Navabandar and Jaffrabad have exclusive drying yards for Bombay duck, which is regarded as a major activity. Landing of Bombay duck is also very high. Women are the dominant work

force in this activity as well.

Marketing : As per the study carried out in Veraval, it was seen that women play an integral role in marketing practices at various stages and levels in the local seafood trade. Most of the fish auctioning is done by women, the buyers being retail vendors who are also women. These retail vendors are engaged in selling fish in the local markets. There are also women and girls involved in activities like cutting of fish, cleaning fish and transportation of fish and retailing the fish chunks. On an average the income from fish cutting is Rs 50/- day. The economics of local fish marketing are complicated and involve a great deal of bargaining. There are several instances wherein fisherwomen have to resort to distress selling of fish of high value due to inadequate storage facilities and due to failure in realising the price of high value of fish. The local market is largely guided by local consumer preferences and catch composition at any particular point of time. The local market is also influenced by non-availability of fish during festival days or other days of non-fishing.

Women involved in other allied activities

Net making : While this activity is predominantly undertaken by fishermen i.e., the male members of the fisher community, it has been observed that, women, belonging to the *Kharva* and *Moila* communities fabricate some parts of nets, especially cod ends of trawl nets. This activity is mainly carried out in the off season. According to women workers, nearly 10-15 days are required for completing one cod end. The twine required for the fabrication is provided by the boat owners. Usually a group of them earn Rs. 200-250/- per cod end and for the other parts they earn nearly half that of cod end. This particular activity is carried out during the lean season and is a supplementary source of income.

Rope making : This activity is usually undertaken through the participation of most of the members of a family. Old and discarded trawl nets, gill nets etc., are

used for rope making. Nets are cut into long thin strips and twisted with the help of a hand operated wheel. These ropes are used for hauling trawl nets and for mooring the boats in the jetty. This activity is mainly artisanal and done by members of fisher families.

Stone sinker making : Women are generally deployed in collecting stones from river beds and adjacent areas for making gill net sinkers. Only very few fisher families are engaged in sinker making in Gujarat. Drilling of the stones to make holes and grading of drilled stones are also done by fisherwomen. They earn approximately Rs. 30-40/- per 100 stones.

The average monthly earnings by fisherwomen from the various activities of significance shown in Fig.2.

Conclusion

Fisher communities of Gujarat are either illiterate or have education upto lower primary levels. Fishermen are thus mostly uneducated and are not aware of the importance of literacy or education. Further, the large scale availability of informal jobs is the main reason for the decreasing trend of literacy among women. Approximately 30% of fisherwomen working in the private/Govt sector are from States other than Gujarat. Poverty is not the main reason for their educational backwardness. Their interest is oriented more towards earning money and less towards education either for themselves or for their children. Awareness regarding importance of education is conspicuous by its absence. Along with this problem, several other problems exist. These are aspects such as lack of awareness pertaining to hygiene and sanitation, and poor living conditions. Another aspect which needs to be mentioned is in respect of child labour. It is generally a common practice for children to accompany their elders, especially women, to their workplace. The children casually pick up work skills by emulating the elders and eventually turn into earning members of the family. This is a tradition which is age old and is generally followed by the fisherchildren.

In the fisher community, the eldest

women of the family usually handles the finances. All the revenue generated by members of the family is given to the woman-in-charge, who spends the money as per the requirements of the family. The status of women in the family is quite high and is of a responsible nature. During the off season, women from poor families work as casual labourers or as domestic help in nearby houses.

Fisherwomen in Gujarat constitute a major force in the post-harvest fisheries sector. They work very hard to earn money for the family, in addition to their normal household work. Due to illiteracy and other social barriers, they are often exploited, underpaid and suppressed.

Hence, the most important aspect which needs to be seriously considered is the issue of imparting education to fishers. Awareness programmes, regular education schedule, adult literacy programmes need to be taken up. There is an urgent need for the government, NGO's and the co-operative sector to take up this challenge and improve the status of fisherwomen of Gujarat coast.

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Thousands of fishes endangered by Toxic effluents

Mass mortality of fishes has been reported as having occurred in Sarsa river, Solan district, Himachal Pradesh recently. The toxic effluents discharged by adjoining industrial units seem to have caused the incident, according to a report.

Most of the dead fishes, seen to be juveniles, were found along half a kilometre of Kanduwala stretch near the confluence of Baddi and Sarsa river. Mr. Rajeev Bindal, Chairman, State Environment Protection and Pollution control Board is reported to have said that samples taken from some industrial units and the river revealed the presence of death inducing substances. ☺☺☺