Socio-Economic Status Of Fisherfolk Women In Pillaichavady Village, Puducherry

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Abstract: Fishing is a traditional occupation wherein the role of women was immense and their issues were also myriad. The women who retail fish in streets encountered various problems. The socio-economic of these women were same universally. Illiteracy, lack of livelihood avenues, occupational health hazards, issues from life partners were further intricate their positions. Five unique case studies from Pillaichavady, a fishing village of Puducherry were presented here to understand status of fisher folk women. To support their family financially they opted this calling in spite of their health issues.

Keywords: Women Fish Mongers, Auction, Negotiation, Poverty, Health Issues.

1.INTRODUCTION

Women constitute around half of the total world population. So is in India also. They are therefore, regarded as the better half of the society and confined to the four walls of houses performing house hold activities. In modern society they have come out of the four walls to participate in all sorts of activities (Aritra Ghosh & Mahavidyalaya 2014). Women contribute significantly to the fishery sector of the Indian economy. Out of the 5.4 million active fisher’s in India, 3.8 million (70.4%) are fishermen and 1.6 million (29.6%) are fisherwomen. Women constituted an estimated 25% of the labour force in pre harvest activities of fish; 60% in export marketing; and 40% in internal marketing (P.S. Choo, S.J. Hall & M.J.Williams 2004). However, there is a sizeable difference in the income earned between males and females with the former being paid the higher benefits even in the lean season (Esteban Ortiz-Ospina 2018). Fishing is culturally perceived to be the domain of men. Lack of other job avenues in the village, women who want some sort of employment are necessarily forced into either fish processing or marketing. Fish trade is a traditional occupation that has been a livelihood for majority of fisherwomen in India. Fish vending by women involves hours of hard labour, with head loads being carried to long distances (International Collective in Support of Fish workers 2010). The role of women fish workers in India, as in other parts of the world, play critical roles within the fisheries and fishing communities, roles that are often not recognized or supported. Women’s role in post-harvest operations such as fish processing and marketing has been a traditional one; in marine fishing in India, for example, women comprise about 75 per cent of those engaged in fish marketing (Swathi Lekshmi 2016). They contribute in significant ways to the food security needs of a diverse range of consumers. However, it must be noted that women have always remained small players in the entire fisheries economy, in that their scale of operation and market have been limited, usually consisting of areas no further than nearby towns and cities (Manimegalai 2015). With the increasing centralization of coastal fisheries, women have been marginalized, resorting to selling fish to supplement the family income. In these circumstances, women have to shoulder the responsibility of sustaining the family. Presently, there are no support structures for women to pursue fish-related activities. Women borrow at high rates of interest and walk long distances, travelling to and from distant markets or harbours, to buy and sell fish. They have to compete with men in order to earn and sustain their families (Mahesh et al, 2016).

Role of fisherwomen

Fishing is carried out by men folk, while washing processing and even marketing of fish are mostly done by the women folk. The involvement of fisher women starts as soon as the boats reach the fishing harbour landing points afterwards fish women engage in subsequent activities which include categorization, washing, icing and transporting to storage units to sale points. The act of preservation as salting, curing, drying and getting of fish are all also carried out by fisher women (Vetrivel 2019).

Puducherry and Fishery

The Union Territory of Puducherry comprises of four regions, viz., Puducherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. The Union Territory’s capital is the city of Puducherry. The Union Territory of Puducherry has total fishermen population around 95,467 (Department of Fisheries Statistics, Puducherry) of which 29,383 fishermen are actively engaged in fishing from 29 marine fishing village and 23 inland fishing villages/hamlets scattered across the region (2011 Census Fisheries Department).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mary Thomas et.al (1996) analysed 135 fisherwomen who were drawn from two districts viz. Eranakulam and Alleppey for their study. Role performance of fisherwomen and the associated variable in Kerala. The average role performance score of fisherwomen were found to be 53 percent and 48 percent for two samples studied from Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The result has shown that the role performance differs significantly from village to village in both samples. The major role performed by fisherwomen and the average time spent on these roles were analysed. While pre-processing and fresh fish marketing were the major role performed by fisherwomen in Kerala, fresh fish marketing and fishing net fabrication were major roles for fisherwomen from Tamil Nadu village. Joseph Durai & Dhanalakshmi (2015) in their article inspects the “Role of...
Women in Fishery sector in Tamil Nadu”. The study evidenced that the major role played by fisher women are fish marketing, dried fish marketing, fishing, net making and related activities are the major role for fisherwomen of the Tamil Nadu. Subramanian & Karuppusamy (2015) through their article “Women Fish Vendors in Puducherry Region-Problems and Prospects” analysed the respondent’s problems and prospects through the simple statistics tools such as percentage and rank analysis. In the study financial assistance secured 226 points and placed number one in the rank. Old age pension secured 177 points and placed member two in the rank. Transport coast problem secured 211 points and number one in the rank. Finally, the poor storage facilities and placed number two in the rank. Gunakar & Ramachandra Bhatta (2016), ‘Socioeconomic Status of Fisher-Women in Segmented Fish Markets of Coastal Karnataka Characterization of retail market segments with women fish sellers’, conducting a comprehensive analysis of socio demographic and economic profile of the fisher women retailers and identification of contributions of fisher women retailers and threats to their sustainable livelihood. The present study is based on the data collected from the primary survey of 268 respondents of small fish retailers. It was observed during the process of pre-market survey that the fish retailers were not a homogeneous group and they could be classified into four broad groups, viz. fresh fish-retailers, dry fish retailers, head loaders, and two-wheeler retailers. In small-scale fisheries, women receive and contribute a substantial part of the family income. The study has also found that, mobile counterparts spend less time on marketing and are able to earn 30-40 per cent higher income. The low educational level suggests that these fisher women get less opportunity to move out of their business and hence, the state policy to support modernization of fish marketing through the entry of modern retail stores should consider the social impact of such measures on these women groups. Premapriya & Jeyaseelan (2018) studied the socioeconomic conditions and problem faced by women fishmonger in Puducherry. It was identified that most of the fish mongers are illiterate and lack of infrastructure and proper transportation are their prime problems. They are exploited by the middle men or money lenders; all the respondents have some health issues which are related to their fishing activity.

3. METHOD
This study opted case study analysis method to describe the socio-economic status of fisher folk women. Though number of cases collected, five unique cases were presented here to understand the issues being confronted by the fisher folk women who involved in fish selling in villages on foot. A case analysis furnishes a full glimpse of the issue taken for the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Women are generally marginalized and vulnerable segment. Women with economic deprivation, double the burden of these gentle sexes. Women in the fishery sector also not spared. All the respondents who are in marketing fish commence their activities in the very dawn of the day. Any how they managed to reach the market to buy a fish varieties. Once again they commute to the nearby villages where they market it. They have to roam in and around the streets with head load of fish. Superficially it may looks very easy but very tedious since it involved physical, mental and economic aspects. While you carry the head load of fish, the respondents said, mentally you will think the debt and the means to repay it. Physical and mental exhaustion were experienced, the respondents reiterated. Physical stamina was essentially needed to sell the fish on foot. According to respondents, knee and neck pains were interwoven in their daily walks of life. Mostly they preferred private clinics for the consultation and they administer self-medication also. They simply approach the nearby pharmacy and got medicine for the syndrome. With the pain when they back to their respective homes, the household tasks frighten them especially those who have school going children. In the evening, for the school returned children they have to prepare any kind of food items. When they fail to do, junk foods were the ultimate resort for the children. The respondents opined that though they aware about junk foods, it was inevitable. They hardly paid attention on educational affairs of their wards. They informed that there were negligence attentions on the part of their men folk. Lack of supervision over their wards resulted in possible derail or drop out of education. It was complex when it was in the case girl children, they highlighted. The informants acknowledged that their counterparts were having the habits of having alcohol. So alteration and verbal uses were common features of their life. The ROI (Return on investment) was very skimpy that not helped the fisher folk women to empower financially. The social empowerment of these women also very bleak, the study found. The source of credit and transport facility would ameliorate the condition of women.

CASE STUDIES
For sake of analysis, the names of the respondents were changed in order to maintain the privacy of the respondents.

Case1
Mrs. Geetha, 45, a illiterate and Hindu fishmonger is hailing from Tsunami Quarters of Pillaichavady, a small village in the Union territory of Pondicherry. She didn’t have any asset on her won and earned nearly rupees six thousand per month. Her routine starts around 3.30 am to visit fish market for buy a fish. In the wee hours of morning public transport was not usually available at her disposal. So, she hired auto to reach market along with co-worker. The cash in hand decides the fish verities to purchase. Sometimes, she availed credit from the seller and repay it in the day itself. From market she went to kottakupam to market the fish products. She roamed in all streets with head load of fish which was a very tiresome activity. Health complications were the result of such marketing. Under scorching sun she moved in and around the village. On her part, allergy was the most frequently confronting health issues and preferred private hospital due to non-availability of medicos in public sectors. Some time she practiced self-medication also. The daily domestic chores also made her most tired but she managed. Education of her wards was the most sought-after area where she wants to focus in spite of her occupation but she hardly found time. The
The repayment of loan also disturbing feature for her. But managed all these odds with the support of her husband.

Case 2
Govinthammal, 58, was surviving with husband, son and daughter and hailing from tsunami quarters Pillaiachavady, Pondicherry. She got married at her early teens and she had one daughter and two sons. But unfortunately, she lost her first son for the flood. Remaining son and daughter were married and the respondent was living as joint family. She was able to earn around rupees seven thousand per month. For this earning she had to start her day around 03 am to visit harbour to procure and carry fish varieties to Andippalayayam villages. In the early years she reached out the customers and poor health prevented her to reach the door steps of customers. Now she had a permanent place where she sells fish. Knee pain was here most disturbing health issues which prevented here to roam here and there to sell fishes. She often preferred to government hospital for health complications. The care and support from family was significant one which made her to fell a good life. One the other hand, she felt uneasy with customers who negotiate always. More often she experienced verbal abuses form her husband. But the support of daughter-in-law relieved here from house hold chores.

Case 3
For Malliga (40), selling fish is not a habitual work. She was surviving with two sons and daughter in a tsunami quarters. Since her earning was secondary to her family, she focused on family affairs. She felt better health and occupational health issues were loss. For minor issues she always forced to government hospital. Through this work she is able to earn Rs 4000 per month, her husband is a fisherman, whose monthly income is nearly 10000 Rupees per month, she stated that she is giving a first preference to her family and family. During the free time she is involving in the fishing work, so the respondent not facing much health related problem like other respondents, she does not have any Health related problem but occasionally she is facing some health related problems like knee pain, foot pain, during her ill Healt time she is getting treatment from the government hospital, she is also well aware about health condition she is having strong belief in the home medicine, so she is also have the habit of taking nutritional food on occasionally, the respondent is getting fishes from the fisherman, the respondent never have the habit of giving a fish to a lend, she is also doing a dual rule in the form of domestic work and financial support. The respondent is able to support from her husband for her work, the respondent never faced any abuse from her husband, but the respondent occasionally facing some cruel with her husband because of the work nature, the respondent occasionally facing some problems from the customers in the form of bargaining.

Case 4
Mrs. Jayakanthi 38 a widow, surviving with son and daughter in Tsunami quarters. Her words pursued school education. The demise of her husband pushed her to choose this fisher work. The state of illiteracy also compiled her to pursue this work. The very dawn itself her routine starts. She hired tempo van to reach fish market to purchase fish along with her assistant who usually cuts the fishes. She usually bought two varieties of fish and wandering in the streets to sell the same. Regarding health issues she encountered ‘Asthuma’ breathing issues. For treatment she preferred to private hospital. She believed that private hospital were better than government hospital. For her, the bargaining customers were always a problem. She felt uneasy to look after family owning to professions hardships. The respondent is facing some problems in doing the dual roles because she has to act as the as the sole care taker to her children because of her work nature sometimes she is not able to act as the care taker, she is regularly facing a indebtedness problem, she also stated that during ban period time her work is affecting that is also one of the reason for indebtedness problem. And she also stated that she does not have interest to do any other job.

Case 5
Mrs. Meera 32, was from kalapet tsunami quarters who had two children, who pursuing 5 standard and 3rd standard respectively. The respondent lives in Nuclear family, her husband also a fisher man but her husband regularly having the habit of taking alcohol and the respondent stated that he never give preference to a family especially in the financial aspects through the work her husband earning more than 10000 rupees per month but his contribution to the family is 2000-3000 rupees only, she also stated that that money is insufficient to run a family, so she is forced to give a financial support to a family. She was having the habit of wakes up at 4 am to purchase a fish from the harbor, she is using tempo to carries the goods. Through this work the respondent is occasionally facing arthrosis problem during her ill health time she is getting treatment from the private hospital she is also having the habit of taking traditional medicine. The respondent is frequently facing some problems in carrying the children because the work nature, she is regularly facing verbal and sexual abuse from her husband. She said that she is regularly facing indebtedness problem most she is getting money from the moneylenders especially during the ban period she is not able to repay the amount.

CONCLUSION
Women are always vulnerable and fisher folk women are also not spared. The work nature and socio-economic condition warrants their life. The tedious work nature made their health as worsen. The study found that the all the fisher women’s socio-economic condition were invariable equal. Health vulnerability was more among the respondents, the study reiterated. Being women, they were in the position to look after their respective family. But the study indicated that they failed to spend a quality time with their family members, which leads to other serious social problems like school drop outs and low attention on adolescent girls. For improving their life standards, capacity building programmes through NGOs may be given to these target Women. Mobile health centres may be pressed in to service for these fisher folk women.

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