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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FISHING FATHERS, VENDING MOTHERS AND EDUCATED YOUTH (A MARITIME COMMUNITY ON EAST COAST OF INDIA IN TRANSITION)

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ABSTRACT

In Indian social research, village is considered as one of the units for understanding networks of socio-cultural and economic organization. Such studies are paramount in conceptualizing the social processes such as sanscritization, dominant caste (Srinivas 1955), caste hierarchies (Dube 1960, Dumont and Pocock 1957), jajmani system (Wiser 1969), etc., in Indian context. The Census of India in its survey operations of 1950-51 periods had produced a few monographs on village ethnographies emphasizing the socio-economic and cultural mosaic. Of late, these village studies are contextualized in evaluating the change and continuity of the village profile. Among such monographs, Mufuzbandar a fishermen village in Srikakulam district on the coast of Bay of Bengal has been used as benchmark for the present study to assess the status of fishermen.

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INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists have taken the village as a unit of study to give a better understanding of the total Culture of which it is a part. Further, they thought of a village as a self-sufficient isolated unit which is functionally integrated and representative of the region which was being studied. However, this idea has been questioned and it is now a well recognized fact that the village is far from being an independent isolate but has ties of an extensive nature Bailey (1957:26-32) shows how a village is a sociological reality, and that this is myth as Dumont and Peacock (1957: 26-32) have argued. Caste is the main institution of Indian villages. In "Homo Hierarchicus" (1980), Dumont (1980) mentions that Castes are arranged in a hierarchy based on the principles of purity and impurity "The Caste occupying the highest position is ritually the priest and one gives down the hierarchy, purity decreases while impurity increases. Those placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, the people who at one time were called 'Untouchables' or are now called Harijans or Dalits, are regarded within the idiom of caste system as the "permanent carriers of impurity" (Srivastava, 2005, 331-32). There are a few monographs published by the Census of India on the socio-economic and cultural life of the marine fisher folk.

There are two important monographs on the coastal fishers of Southern and Western India. Moses (1929) has studied on the Valayars of Palmban, Madras and Punekar (1959) has studied at Son Kolis of Bombay. Another two monographs of the fisher folk villages of Orissa and Kerala have been studied by Ahmed (1966) and Trivedi (1967). The Census of India (1961) published a monograph on Mofuzbandar, a fishermen village in Srikakulam District, Andhra Pradesh. These monographs present a vivid picture of the fishermen village life, which includes, people and their material equipment, social customs, economy, cultural life and village organization. Two detailed accounts on the way of life of the fisher folk living on the east coast of India are available.

They are, "Marine Fisher Folk of North-East Coastal Andhra Pradesh" by Suryanarayana (1977) and "The Moon and the Net" by Roychaudhuri (1980), both are the publications of the Anthropological Survey of India. In these books detailed description with illustrations of fishing technology, economy, social and political organizations, supernaturalism, rituals, and knowledge on local marine environment of Jalari, Palli and Vada Balija fisher communities in the former, and a transient fishing community of Jambudwip in the latter, provide glimpses into the east coastal environment and culture. A critical analysis of kinship among Jalari fishing community by Kodanada Rao (1975) has provided not only the critical nature of kinship ties in sustaining fishing culture and

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economy on the east coast, but also provided a database for understanding the south Indian kinship usage. The economic aspects in terms of capital investment, earning and expenditure of marine fishers was brought out by Subba Rao (1986) provides a preliminary understanding of fishing economy of the present study area. His further works on pattern of income distribution, consumption, employment opportunities and living standards of fisher folk of the region against the State Fisheries Corporation initiatives in developing fisheries on one hand and welfare of the fishing communities on the other presents the empirical details on fishing communities. An impact study on 'mechanization of a traditional economic activity' undertaken by Rao and Yathiraj Kumar (1984) has brought out two important factors, which have crept into the fishing economy. Mechanization brought breakdown of social solidarity and economic cooperation hitherto on socio-cultural networks, has become clustered economic isolates. Rajesh Patnaik (2007) identified the reasons of food taboos among fishers of Visakhapatnam coast. He opined that the food restrictions in practice are to overcome/check the resource depletion and ecological crisis in order to have long range advantages. Mathur (1977) brought out the interrelationships between habitat, technology, kinship structures, socio-religious institutions, rituals and belief systems of fishermen living on the west coast of India (Kerala state).

In "Village Life in North India," Lewis (1958) describes the social system of the village under headings, Caste and Jajimani system, marriage, festivals, concepts of religion and ethics. According to Lewis (1958), there are extensions of the village for various purposes, for example, marriage and marketing, as a result, showing that the village is not a self-sufficient cohesive community "His main contribution to an understanding of the social structure of systems of human relationship within which the residents of Rampur Village live and work, is the clear delineation of two dimensions of social structure, other than the village as a whole 'factions' which have ever a smaller than caste social dimension.

Studies on women's roles have shown that there is an analytical distinction between the productive and reproductive aspects of society. This distinction is related to the division of social life into public and private/domestic spheres. Earlier social scientists, including anthropologists once believed that men engaged in the public sphere and women in reproductive roles in the domestic sphere. But, contemporary research has shown that women play a vital role in the production as well as the material and cultural goods of the society than was previously recognized. Further, the responsibility of the family is not their exclusive domain, as in some societies men spend a significant amount of their care for their children. In some societies, women care for their children as they engage in productive activities such as gathering, agriculture and horticulture (Moore 1988). Davis and Nadel-Klein (1997) have edited a book "To work and To Weep: Women in fishing economies" covering a review of the literature on women in fishing. They have identified three main approaches to studying gender issues which are 'the land-sea division', the production and reproduction' and 'multiple roles'. According to Davis and Nadel (1988) men are involved in sea-based activities while women in land based activities. Davis and Nadel-Klein (1992) commented with regard to women, that

'while their men are at sea, women must become reluctant matriarchies', when their men are at home, women must throw into dutiful wives'.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the present study a fishermen village in Srikakulam district on the coast of Bay of Bengal has been used as benchmark for the present study to assess the status of fishermen and it is located about 20 km East of Srikakulam. The geo-coordinates of the village are 18°31'25" Northern Latitude and 83°56'42" Eastern Longitude at an elevation of 9 meters at a distance of 735 meters from the coast of Bay of Bengal. The village is a part of Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC), and belongs to Gajuwaka revenue mandal. This village can be approached by road (NH5). Since the village spread over an area of about one square km area a small part of 'Patavuru' (old village) consisting of about 546 households has been selected for the study. Out of 546 households 262 households are selected at random. A purposive sample method is used for the study. These households are organized into 2 groups on caste lines. They are Vadabaliya, Jalari out of which BC category, Backward Castes. The each and every group of households and people were classified based on their activities like employment and other livelihood activities and pattern of economic activity were tabulated and discussed in detail. i.e., Age group and occupational sex, Traditional occupation, Occupational mobility, Nature of occupational aspiration, Population by age group, Sex and education, Combination of occupations, Economic activities and households

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study has identified a perceptible change but the change is not uniform. The change in material culture in terms of housing, household gadgets, electronic devices on one hand, and the educated youth in terms of employment shift on the other are clearly visible. In economic pursuits and hygienic conditions the change is not in commensuration with the identified changes. Sluggishness in the former case is due to the nature of the economy (unhygienic streets and water holes, and fish drying within the settlements), which has been in the traditional peasant mode with little modifications in boats, (no. of boats table past and present) fishing gear and vending, while spatial congestion in later cases as their habitations is sandwiched between the sea and the private lands.

The economic gender divide, 'the men at sea' in fish harvest and 'women on land' in vending are still in the age old pattern (street hawking, street side vending, market vending), while the educated youth have taken up marine related operations elsewhere (Goa, Gujarat, Chennai, kalasi, mechanic etc.), either in public (Official Ports) or private (Trawlers) sectors, adapted to their bodily endurance. The economic gains of the parents coupled with the educated youth are reinvested in school education of the upcoming children (no of schools around Mofuzbandar). The study has revealed that during the last 60 years the Mofuzbander economy remained unchanged but its reinvestment in education and training sporadically gained returns, which in turn propelled the process of empowerment of the youth. Now the fishermen gained

confidence in viewing education as the engine of change, consequently most of the children are being sent to both public and private schools. The each and every group of households and people were classified based on their activities like employment and other livelihood activities and pattern of economic activity were tabulated and discussed in detail.

Workers by Age Group Occupation and Sex

As the scope of the survey was confined to fishermen hamlets, the economy of fisher-folk as found in Pukkallapeta, Pedaganagallapeta, Chinaganagallapeta, Gandhinager, Narsipeta, Kazipeta, and Jalaripeta hamlets are described in this paper.

Different kinds of nets owned by the fishermen are described below

The nets described here in the present study are advanced and highly technically modified in terms of design and size, so that it is comfortable for their use and getting good fish catch. In the old days and present days the terminology was changed because of their consistent use and technical advancement. i.e., in 1961 the nets were usually called it as *Katlola*, *Thopala*, *etturoola*, *Kuntola*, *Peddola*, *Visuroola* etc. But in recent days they were usually called it as *Discovala*, *Kattol*, *Tivvola*, *Marola*, *Konamvala*, *Soravala* etc. The development in fishing is also taken into consideration and the mechanisation of boats is advanced, and technically developed. In the previous days the only boats called *teppalu* were only used as boats. Whereas in the present days depending on the type of fish and catch volume, the boats were divided into *Teppalu*, *Karrateppalu* and *Fiber* boats of technically developed boats are available.

Livelihood classes and pattern of economic activity

The residents of both the hamlets derive their livelihood by pursuing fishing. In the local usage, several telugu terms are used to designate fisherman occupational activity i.e., *Chepalapattu pani*, *vala pani* and *chepalu ammatam*. In the hamlets under survey fishing is the sole economic activity. Poultry keeping is taken up only by a very few household and that too only for home consumption. Apart from these works the fishermen of this village are also participating in below works, i.e., daily wise labour, mason work and welding work. The some other people are going to Metro cities to get trained up in fishing vessels, these people are also moving from their villages to other cities like Madras, Mumbai, Gujarat and other international countries like Dubai and Singapore also they are going for employment.

Traditional occupation & Occupational mobility

In the present situation all fishermen communities have been involved in fishing activity, Daily wise labour. It is evident from the present observations the mobility of occupation has been very common among the Vadabaliyas and Jalaris. Both Vadabaliya and Jalari are combinely going for fishing, if the fishing activity was nil then they are moving to mason work and daily labour works.

Nature of occupational aspiration

In Pukkallapeta out of 104 of household, in fishing there is 86 persons were actively involved, 11 members are working as

fish traders, and 28 are the agricultural labour as the main occupation. 6 members are daily wise labour. Out of the 163 households of Vada-balija caste inhabiting Pedaganagallapeta 102 are continuing their traditional work as fishing, 23 members working as fish traders, Agricultural labour are 16 in number, 3 members are like to work in welding, 3 members are like to work in shops of their nearest areas and remaining 27 working as casual labour and 1 person were working as Teacher in private school.

From the above analysis, it is clear that still a good majority of them wanted to continue their main occupation of fishing, while it is encouraging to find some of them with really appreciable ambitious career planning in education such as B.ed, Engineering, MBA and MCA. This means they are also slowly realising the importance of education and occupational diversification.

- In Chinaganagallapeta out of 100 households, in fishing 74 members are working as active fisher men, 3 persons are working as fish traders, 13 members are working as Agricultural labours, 14 members working as daily casual labours, 1 working as own shop owner.
- In Gandhinager out of 27 households, in fishing 24 members are working as active fisher men, 1 person working as fish trader, 9 members working as agricultural labour and the remaining 2 working as daily wise casual labour.
- In Narsipeta out of 52 households, in fishing 50 members are working as active fishermen and 2 members working as fish traders, 17 members are working as agricultural labour and the remaining 3 working as daily casual labour.
- In Kazipeta out of 50 households of hamlet 42 members working as fisherman, 9 members are working as fish traders, 17 workers working as agricultural labour, 4 persons only working as casual labour. Some of them are wanted to work in other cities like Madras and Gujarat.
- In Jalaripeta out of 50 households, in fishing 50 members are working as active fishermens, 8 members working as fish traders, 10 members were working as agricultural labour, 8 members were working as casual labours. Here some of them are moving to Madras and other metro cities to work as masons.

Population by age group, sex and education

In the age group of 0-14 out of 462 people, 252 are male and 210 are female. The out 301 illiterate persons, 158 are male and 143 are female. Out of 161 literates 94 male and 67 are female. Similarly In the age group of 15-24 out of 482 people, 274 are male and 208 are female. The out 218 illiterate persons, 102 are male and 216 are female. Out of 131 literates 85 male and 48 are female. Out of 48 junior basic 27 are male 21 are female. And also in the age group of 25-59 out of 881 people, 452 are male and 429 are female. The out 395 illiterate persons, 188 are male and 207 are female. Out of 374 literates 191 male and 183 are female. Out of 112 junior basic 73 are male 39 are female. Similarly, in the age group of 60 & above, out of 109 people, 36 are male and 73 are female. The out 89 illiterate persons, 25 are male and 64 are female. Out of 15 literates 7 male and 8 are female. Out of 5 junior basic 4 are male 1 are female.

Main occupation

Out of 546 households in Mofusbunder village, 446 were vadabalija, 100 were Jalari, in these families 254 households vadabalija where as 92 households are jalaris engaged in fishing, 152 households of vadabalija working as fish traders, agricultural labour and casual daily wise labour, whereas 8 households of Jalari working in fish traders, agricultural labour and casual daily wise labour.

Combination of occupations

In Kazipeta hamlet 50 fishermen members are actively participating, 9 members subsidiary occupation is dry fish selling, 14 members are working as agricultural labour and 7 members are working as net weavers. Similarly in pedaganagallapeta 163 fishermen members are actively participating, 23 members subsidiary occupation is dry fish selling, 16 members are working as agricultural labour and 10 members are working as net weavers.

Economic activities and households

Out of 205 fishermen households, 35 households are engaged in self help groups (Dwakra) in Pukkallapeta, 55 households engaged in dwakra at Pedaganagallapeta, 35 households are actively participated in dwakra at Chinagangallapeta, 15 households are actively participated in dwakra at Gandhinager, 25 households are actively participated in dwakra at Narsipeta, 15 households are actively participated in dwakra at kazipeta and finally in Jalari peta 25 households are actively participated in dwakra. In Pedaganagallapeta 2 Anvadi teachers are working and remaining all above mentioned villages having one Anganvadi Teacher and one Aaya for each.

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