

Migration of Fishermen: A Study at Gopalpur-On-Sea, Dist-Ganjam (Odisha)

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Abstract

Increasing populations along the coast are thought to be resulting in added pressure on limited and increasingly vulnerable coastal resources. While many of the coastal poor fishermen depend on the natural environment to sustain their livelihoods, they are unable to derive an adequate livelihood and continue to remain in acute poverty. Alternative livelihoods in this situation are seen as a solution to combat poverty by providing alternative means of deriving an income. The present study was conducted during 2016 taking 100 respondents from five villages namely, Gopalpur, Deegipur, Venkentraipur, New Buxipalli and Old Buxipalli along Gopalpur coast of Odisha for their preference towards alternative livelihood. Among the 23 alternative livelihood options, 7 numbers of alternative livelihood options were identified as perceived by the respondents of five coastal villages of different category household. They were dry fish preparing, dry fish marketing, poultry rearing, goat / sheep/ pig rearing, vegetable marketing, establishment of grocery shop and vegetable farming. Out of these 7 important alternative livelihood options, dry fish preparation and dry fish marketing were fishery based activities; poultry and goat / sheep /pig rearing were livestock based activities and vegetable marketing and farming were agriculture based activities and establishment of grocery shops are income generating activities. Looking to the different household livelihood system, all categories were interested to take up dry fish preparation and dry fish marketing. However, 42.5 per cent respondents including the entire low income group and only 15.85 per cent of middle income group household respondents took interest for poultry rearing as well as goat / sheep / pig rearing as alternative livelihood option. Besides, 19.16 per cent respondents took interest in vegetable marketing as alternative livelihood option. Besides, among the income generation activities as alternative livelihood option, establishment of grocery shop was the choice of 16.66 per cent respondents.

Keywords: Fishermen Migration, Acute Poverty, Alternative Livelihood Options.

Introduction

Fishing in India is a major industry in its coastal states, employing over 14 million people. Fish production in India has increased more than tenfold since its independence in 1947. The rights of the traditional fishing communities have been in focus in the recent years in the wake of increasing commercialization and consequent unsustainability of marine fisheries. World fisheries have become a market-driven dynamically developing sector representing technological dualism in the fish economy (Choudhury, 2004). Along with the highly organized sector using massive capital inputs, the subsistence and decentralized forms of economic organisation in fisheries remain resilient and dynamic particularly in the developing economies of Asia (Yap, 1980). Orissa is one of the states of India. Artisanal fisheries provide approximately 25% of the global fish catch and about 40% of the fish used for human consumption (Warrior, 1998). The fisher women of Orissa are Telugu speaking fishing community. Their main occupation is catching fish in the sea (Bay of Bengal). Though in course of time many of them have learnt speaking Oriya¹, their affinity with Telugu² culture has remained largely unchanged. They are yet to be integrated into the main stream of Oriya culture of Orissa (Patnaik and Sengupta, 1980). In recent years the marine fish economy has gained importance because of substantial foreign exchange earned through export of prawn and other variety of fishes. In spite of this, the fisher women complain, that their contribution to the economy of this country/state has not been duly recognized (Baral, 1996). The fisher women are gripped by a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. They are caught between two cultures

and they are uncertain about their status in future in Orissa in which they have settled for a long time (Baral, 1996). As in all subsistent economies, women play an active role in the fishing communities of Ganjam district in Orissa, which is the study region of this paper. In fact, fisherwomen have made the survival of the coastal communities possible (Nandeeshha; 1991). Though they have very limited control over the conditions and products of their labour, women have almost exclusive responsibility of running the household and caring for the children (Sahu, 2000). Despite the fact that they play an important role in fisheries, they remain invisible. Their contribution to the sector and their struggle for survival remain unnoticed. The consequences of the damage done to the traditional fisheries and their ecology through the commercial sectors, hurdles and imperfections in fishing and marketing activities, the increasing hardships faced by the fisherwomen in fish vending, alienation and marginalisation of the fisher folk in Orissa are the major problems of the economy of the fisherwomen in the region (Nirmal and Baral, 2001). After India's independence a number of steps have been taken by the government of India as well as state government for the development of weaker section of the society. In the last two decades both government and voluntary organizations have paid special attention to the problems of Fisher women, who have suffered from several kinds of inequality and deprivation. Fisher women, being victims of both backwardness and gender discrimination, are struggling to find out a space for them (Gulati, 1984).

Meaning & Concept

A fisherman or fisher is someone who captures fish and other animals from a body of water, or gathers shellfish. Worldwide, there are about 38 million commercial and subsistence fishermen and fish farmers. The term can also be applied to recreational fishermen and may be used to describe both men and women. Fishing has existed as a means of obtaining food since the Mesolithic period. Fishing has existed as a means of obtaining food since the Mesolithic period. During the time of the Ancient Egyptians, fishermen provided the majority of food for Egyptians. Fishing had become a major means of survival as well as a business venture. Fishing and the fisherman have also influenced Ancient Egyptian religion; mullets were worshiped as a sign of the arriving flood season. Bastet was often manifested in the form of a catfish. In ancient Egyptian literature, the method that Amun used to create the world is associated with the tilapia's method of mouth-brooding. According to the FAO, there were about 39 million fishers in countries producing more than 200,000 tonnes in 2012, which is nearly 140% the number in 1995. The total fishery production of 66 million tonnes equated to an average productivity of 3.5 tonnes per person.

Review of Literature

A survey conducted in Kanyakumari district to find the basic needs of 39 coastal fishing communities, which inhabit the 68 km stretch of the coast. Over the years, the intensity of fishing has increased partly on account of the increase in the

active fishing population, partly due to the lack of alternative income generating opportunities and partly due to motorisation and mechanisation of fishing crafts. The resource has not kept up with the increase of effort, which results in a sharp reduction in catch per unit effort. Since the usage of mechanisation in 1958, artisanal fishers have with dismay compared the landings of the mechanised crafts with their own meagre catches. Besides, the artisanal fishers have often seen their nets destroyed by mechanised boats. With this background, the survey points out that the major problem as given by respondents is the non-availability of safe drinking water followed by sanitation and health care. (Verduijin, 2001)

A study compared the economic status of fishermen in two marine fishing villages of Orissa State viz., Pentakota and Belinoliasahi. They measured the economic status and the mean scores of respondents in the two villages, which differed significantly at one per cent level. The results also revealed that the fishermen had a favorable attitude towards the motorization of fishing crafts in both the villages. (Balasubramanian, 2001)

The objective of the study was examined the threat to the substantially of the fisheries in India and in particular in the Gulf of Mannar region. It is widely quoted that the depletion is due to the introduction of trawler fishing techniques, which scrape the bottom of the sea and end up catching juvenile fish. In viewing this problem of over fishing (by the trawlers) as a negative externality to the traditional fishing community, the best way to internalize the social cost inflicted by the people who over fish is the question that this study attempts to seek the answer for. One of the most commonly practiced techniques to sustain the fisheries resource is the blanket ban on fishing during specific months of the year like the one practiced in the coastal regions in India. The researcher has attempted to critically evaluate the effectiveness of this method of resource conservation. The researcher has also proposed an alternative model for sustaining the resources, which would be an effective solution for the problem. (Venkatachalam, 2005)

The study has been conducted in all the major coastal states and some selected inland states to understand the domestic marketing of fish in India. The total marketing costs of auctioneer, wholesaler, retailer, vendor, marine fishermen cooperative society and contractor/freshwater fishermen cooperative society have been found to be `0.98, `8.89, `6.61, `4.50, `6.00 and `3.51, respectively. The marketing efficiencies for Indian major carps (IMC), sardine and seer fish have been found to vary from 34 per cent to 74 per cent depending on the length of market channel. The marketing efficiency has been found more in the case of marine species than freshwater species, since the latter travel longer distances from the point of production to consumption centre, passing many intermediaries as compared to the former. The fisherman's share in consumer's rupee has shown variations across species, marketing channels and markets. The infrastructure facilities at most of the surveyed landing centres, fishing harbours and

wholesale and retail markets have been found grossly inadequate and poorly maintained. The study has highlighted the need for formulating a uniform market policy for fishes for easy operation and regulation, so that the country's fish production is efficiently managed and delivered to the consuming population, ensuring at the same time remunerative prices to the fishers. (Ganesh kumar, 2008)

The study remarked that the fisherwomen of Gopalpur have a vibrant organisation called 'Kalinga Fish Workers Union' that fights for their rights. The women also assert their rights through selfhelp groups (SHGs) and through participation in the Panchayat. The girl children are now sent to school. Women in the area with the help of the local NGOs began to protest against child marriages and child labour. They have also fought against illegal taxes. The economic contribution of fisherwomen to their families is quite significant. The income of the fisherwomen is mainly determined by the amount of time allocated to collection, processing and marketing of fish. The age, body weight, marital, maternity status and education do not significantly influence their income. They spend bulk of their time on fishery and household activities. There is no scope for leisure and pleasure. They are being exploited by the middlemen and traders belonging to their own community and others. The fisherwomen are aware of the conditions of sustainability such as diversity, alternative sources of income, community harmony and familial equilibrium. Their traditional ecological knowledge (tek) needs documentation, recognition and appreciation. The natural fishery capital stock in the sea and land resources in the coast needs protection. The fisher people's council should be recognised as a socio-political institution. (Kumar, 2009)

Duration & Period of Study

We have conducted the study at the revenue villages like Deegipur, venkentraipur, New Buxipalli and Old Buxipalli in the coastal areas of Gopalpur for a period of Three Months i.e. from first week of January 2018 to last week of March 2018.

Objective of The Study

The primary objective of the paper is in line with demand side or else you can say conditions necessitate towards forced migration of fisherman to

various places in search of employment. The socio-economic status of such migrant labour before and its impact on afterwards. Whether such migration resulted into physical, mental abuses or in any form of exploitation? If such measures are readily available is being taken care by the Govt. of Odisha? Does it really effective or alternative measures which are supposed to be taken? Are they widely known about the provisions made in connection with protection and promotion of interest of themselves?

Brief Profile of Gopalpur on Sea, Ganjam (Odisha)

Gopalpur is a town and a Notified Area Council on the Bay of Bengal coast in Ganjam district in the southern part of Odisha, India. Once a commercial port, it is now a famous sea beach and tourist destination around 15 km from Berhampur. Gopalpur also has an ancient, commercial port, now lying in ruins. From an obscure little fishing village, Gopalpur became a prominent trading port during the days of British East India Company. The East India Company built large warehouses and godowns because the trade with Burma had picked up and it had become a trading point for rice from Rangoon. The reconstruction of the port is under development. The Gopalpur city is divided into 11 wards for which elections are held every 5 years. The Gopalpur Notified Area Committee has population of 7,221 of which 3,622 are males while 3,599 are females as per report released by Census India 2011.

Population of Children with age of 0-6 is 794 which is 11.00 % of total population of Gopalpur (NAC). In Gopalpur Notified Area Committee, Female Sex Ratio is of 994 against state average of 979. Moreover Child Sex Ratio in Gopalpur is around 923 compared to Orissa state average of 941. Literacy rate of Gopalpur city is 61.77 % lower than state average of 72.87 %. In Gopalpur, Male literacy is around 69.90 % while female literacy rate is 53.67 %.

Methods of Data Collection

Information relevant to the study has been collected through face to face interview. The survey was conducted in five villages covering 100 sample respondents from five villages namely, Gopalpur, Deegipur, venkentraipur, New Buxipalli and Old Buxipalli.

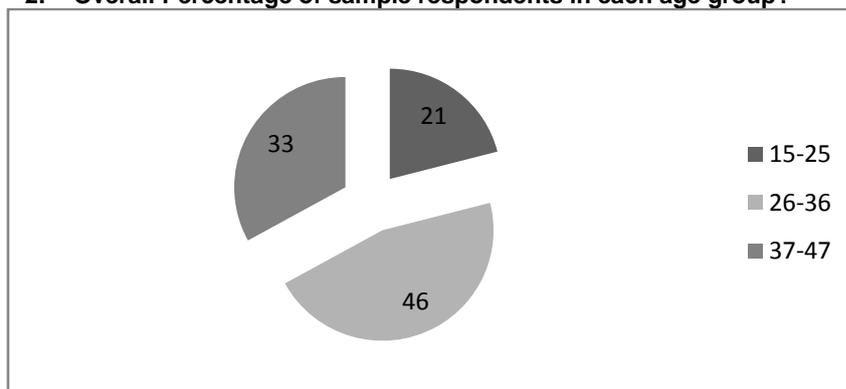
Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Places & number of samples taken in each area?

Gopalpur			Deegipur			Venkentraipur			New Buxipalli			Old Buxipalli		
C	M	F	C	M	F	C	M	F	C	M	F	C	M	F
03	10	08	05	08	04	04	07	06	05	09	07	04	12	08

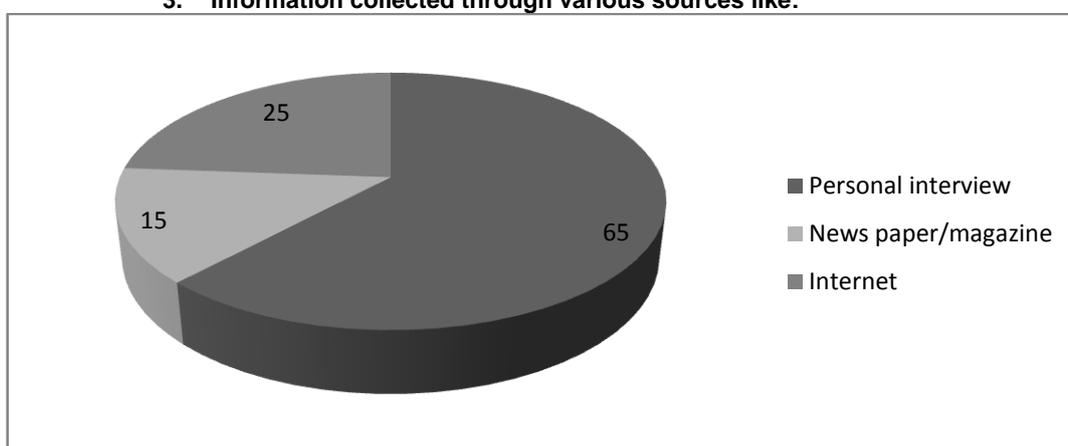
Source: Primary Data

2. Overall Percentage of sample respondents in each age group?



Source: Primary Data

3. Information collected through various sources like:



Impacts of Migration on the Fishers' families And The Community

Being a major shift in the way the fishermen lived and worked all their lives, migration does have a major impact on their physical and emotional conditions. Spending nine months in what is virtually a foreign land, exposed to hard living conditions, denied the most basic rights and braving exceptionally difficult conditions both on the sea and on the shore, the fishers undergo a rapid metamorphosis which is positive in some respects and negative in others – in all cases, the impacts are permanent. Some features of 'migrant condition' have already been discussed in the previous chapter. An important aspect of seasonal migration is that its impacts are not confined to those who migrate. In the absence of the head of the household, the pressure of managing the family falls on the women. Even if the men do send their earnings home, it is still a burden to run the family and forces the women to take up new activities to meet the family needs. The adaptations include taking up locally available opportunities – fish trade, agriculture and construction works, etc – but increasingly cover a few activities that are not so 'legitimate'.

Besides the actual migrants and their families – who are the 'direct stakeholders' in the migration process – there are a large number of 'secondary stakeholders' – petty fish traders, fish processors, transporters, repairers, basket weavers,

ice and salt makers and sellers – who simply lose their livelihoods when their primary customers (the fishers) move out of the area for large parts of the year. With a sizeable proportion of men of a productive age group being away for a large part of the year, the social security nets weaken and the impact is felt by the aged people and the poorest families in the villages, who – as many research studies have indicated – rarely migrate because they cannot afford the cost of migration or are unable to take advantage of the opportunities that migration provides.

Impact of Migration at the Household Level Pressure on women

Traditionally, women have played an important role in fish trade and processing. As fish catches began to dwindle and competition with the larger traders deprived them of fish, the women's role in processing and trade declined. The 1980s and early-1990s were the period of 'masculinisation' of the fisheries -related activities in the villages and the women's role was increasingly confined to the kitchen, while the men took on the responsibility of feeding the home. By 1990s, as the men move out of the village and spend considerable periods of time away from home (in a year they spend three times as long away from home as they spend at home), the women found themselves facing the responsibility of running the household once again.

There are two major differences between the previous and the current contribution of the women to the family needs: one, in the earlier instance, their earnings was *supplementing* those of their men, whereas now, they are the prime providers to the family because the men's earnings take time in reaching the family and are not always reliable. The second difference is that while the women were making use of an opportunity offered by the availability of fish at their doorstep in the earlier instance, now the opportunity is no longer available to them (apart from the other factors, the migration of the men itself means a drastic decline in fish catches) and they are forced to go out in search of work in a multitude of activities *to survive*.

Before they leave on their annual migration, the fishers going to work in Gujarat fisheries obtain an advance from the *Tindal* and use this to buy provisions for the family to subsist until they start earning their salaries and sending them home. However, the provisions hardly last a month or, at best, six weeks and it is at least two months, but generally much longer, before the migrant manages to pay off his dues to the *Sait* and begins to collect his pay. In several cases, the payments are seldom regular and the *Sait*s also choose to pay the fishers in one or two instalments or right at the end of the contract period, which will certainly jeopardise the monthly remittance to the fishers' homes.

The family has to survive in the meantime. For the women who have always been housewives, the only option is to borrow in cash or kind for her family needs from her neighbours and relations. The social networks are fortunately still strong in many fishing villages and so do kinship relations – generations of endogamous marriages have at least this virtue: everyone in a fishing village can claim to be related to everyone else. This means that in the short term the family survives relatively easily. But, in a context of general and all-pervading poverty in the village and the region as a whole, the capacity of the neighbours to continue to show largesse to the needy family is necessarily very limited and soon the woman finds the need to look for work.

Moneylenders who come from the neighbouring agrarian villages are an important source of loans, provided the family has at least some assets (own houses, fishing craft and tackle – things that would attract the moneylender's attention) and is also willing to pay a sizeable interest – ranging between three and five percent per month, frequently more. Irregular payments or inability to repay would attract harsh measures like confiscating the assets or evicting from the house. There are also a few affluent households in each village who also lend money, but their terms are no better, and often worse (because of their proximity in geographical and caste terms as well as their social standing within the village), than those of the outsider -moneylenders. For a large number of assets-less fishing labourers' families, borrowing is a closed avenue anyway. Those who have a few family heirlooms – mainly copper and brass vessels given in dowry by the woman's parents when she married –

also pawn them, which is a one-way street to temporary survival. Hardly a fraction of the utensils pawned ever make it back to their parental abode.

Once the woman exhausts all possibilities of obtaining support in cash or kind, she begins to look around for work. In spite of a vast reduction in the scale of opportunities, fish processing and trade do provide a few women with work, but this is confined to those who have traditionally continued to be in the activity. For a newcomer, with hardly any money in her hand to invest in the fish and no experience of markets, this is again a *cul-de-sac*. The category of workers called 'processing assistants' – i.e., women who helped in the processing operations of the larger traders – have more or less disappeared in most villages, so even wage labour in processing is no longer possible. Even if bulk landings occurred incidentally and the processors needed assistance, the most they would pay is the fish guts, which suffice to make the day's curry.

The next option available to the woman is as a wage labourer in agriculture in the neighbouring area. Considering that agriculture in the coastal plains in Srikakulam has always been a difficult proposition and that the labour-force in agriculture itself has been migrating *en masse* to other areas, this is not an option at all. The best that a woman can hope to get is work for about 30 days in a year, but with competition from her own villagers being what it is, it rarely exceeds a couple of weeks in a year. She also tries her hand at making coir rope locally. She works as a servant maid in the neighbouring agrarian villages, if there is work to be had. She helps in husking rice and pounding it, but is so lacking in skills that it takes her three times as long and as much pain as it would to a more skilled woman in the same village. She might try her hand at collecting firewood from the neighbouring casuarina groves, when the owners are not watching. She also tries her hand at setting up a food-stall, but the tiny hamlet – bereft of most of its earning citizens at that – does not need more than one such enterprise. She takes a cast net and tries it in the nearby water bodies, and sometimes manages to catch enough fish to suffice for the day's needs. She collects toddy-palm fruits and makes some food items.

Any other option would necessitate the woman herself moving out on a daily basis into an urban area like Srikakulam or Palasa on the doubtful assumption that she might find some work there. The women from fishing villages close to urban areas do find much work as servant maids and cleaners. But considering the general lack of skills, exposure to the outside world and competition in the urban areas, many women frequently find it more profitable to stay at home and starve, hoping that their men will manage to earn something to send home soon.

Impact on Children

But the women have responsibilities that go beyond their own needs. Their children have to be fed and clothed and sent to school, if only to keep them from asking for food. In several cases, the kids support their mothers by working on the beaches – mending nets, pulling the shore-seines (which

thankfully do not migrate and their operations actually developed in such a way that the benefits are spread as widely – if thinly – as possible) and helping in segregating the catches, carrying them into the village – and a host of other jobs not always approved by the adults and bring something back home for the day's dinner. When there is not that much to bring home, they exchange it for some sweetmeats or other edible items and thus at least fend for themselves – one less stomach for their hapless mother to worry about. Obviously, their education is a major casualty in the process, but no one is complaining.

The widespread belief that education does not help the children in any way was rather pleasantly shattered when the Government of Andhra Pradesh started its midday meal scheme for school-going children in early 2003. The attendance at schools improved miraculously because, for most fisher children, this was their only chance to get a meal for the day.

Impact on Old People

While the woman has more than her hands full taking care of her children, she has frequently to fend for her in-laws. Old age catches up rather early in fishing villages and man of fifty is long past his prime and energy while his forty five year old wife (a grand-grandmother of thirteen children) is practically unable to do any work and not just because there isn't any. During the 1980s, both her husband and his two grown up sons earned well and the family had no need to worry about where the next day's meal was going to come from. Now, with their three sons gone away to a distant place and the daughters-in-law indifferent to the point of being callous to their fate, the old couple does not know how to survive. Poverty and hunger, helplessness and mounting responsibilities, no doubt frequently coupled with memories of old slights, make it easier for the woman to ignore the older couple as much as she can. And when she does care for her in-laws, which indeed happens in many cases, the conditions only become worse. Taking care of the invalids' needs and frequently finding the means to get them some medical assistance eat into her time to do some work as well as the meagre earnings that she earns.

Impact on Healthcare

If a member of the household falls ill, it is ignored by everyone in the family – including the patient – for as long as they can, and even then, home remedies are the most preferred option. When this fails, the invalid is taken (often by walk) to the nearest government public health centre (PHC) and that's the farthest the patient and his/her disease can go physically as well as economically. That the PHCs are not exactly the best equipped medical centres anywhere is widely accepted, but they are the only source of affordable healthcare in most villages. The 'rumour' that the government was thinking of introducing a 'user fee' for patients visiting the government hospitals created a big scare in the villages; in any case, most patients agree that the number of medicines they would get free from the PHCs has come down to a trickle. Nowadays, the

PHC only issues them with 'white slips' which one is expected to take to the pharmacy in the nearest town for purchasing the medicines. Most fishers safely tuck away the white slips in the gaps between the beams and the roof of their houses, in the hope that one day, when their men come home with their earnings; they might be able to purchase the medicines. The economic conditions in the fishing villages have deteriorated to an extent where even the itinerant quacks do not show up as frequently as they used to in the past. Some fishers themselves have become quacks instead because it was as good a livelihood option as any. Salagrama (2003) provides a detailed analysis of the quality of life issues in the coastal fishing communities.

Impact on Food Security

An important incentive for the fishers migrating to Gujarat fisheries is that they get free meals during the period of contract, and a constant refrain that one hears from the fishers is how the food they get onboard is so much better than what they eat at home. At home, however, there is increasing evidence that food insecurity is on the rise in many fishing villages. During the rainy months – which are routinely dubbed as 'Hunger Months' by the fishers in many villages – a large proportion of households make do with one meal or less a day. While this is more serious in households headed by single-women or aged people unable to move out in search of work, the study has shown that the families of migrants also suffer no less. Within the households, there exist disparities in food consumption based on gender and age. Even when the families do get to eat something, the variety, quantity, quality and number of meals taken in a day leaves much to be desired. Ironically, fish consumption among the fishing households has been dwindling and even dried fish which was a staple during lean periods has become a rarity in the meals.

Psychological Impact

Besides the pressures of day-to-day survival, the women also have to fend with anxiety for their husbands and their well-being. The men, once they leave the village, are practically cut off from the family for the duration of their stay in Gujarat, and the only news about their wellbeing trickles in from the phone calls that the *Tindals* make to their own houses and from the other migrants returning home due to ill-health or other reasons. If the *Tindal* does not come from the same village as the fisher, or if his family members do not like the fisher's wife for any reason, the information flows are drastically reduced. In such circumstances, as one woman put it, "I dread to hear any news about him – because any news that is important enough to be passed on to me cannot be good news!" No news, as the cliché goes, is good news.

When news about the Bhuj earthquake and the cyclones that preceded it came into the villages, many families waited anxiously for word about their loved ones for days together – foregoing food, walking around the village like zombies, asking one another if they had any news, waiting for the radio to tell something about their men, making the trips to the

Department of Fisheries offices in Srikakulam for any information they might have – and discovering that there was no earthly way to know the wellbeing of their men unless the latter could somehow get home to tell them all about it; which they did, after more than a week.

That there are cyclones periodically hitting the coast of Srikakulam is also a cause for concern. The fear of losing lives is not a major issue anymore because the government has been active in prevention measures like evacuation, every village has cyclone shelters and many *pucca* houses that can withstand cyclonic gales and the villages themselves are generally some distance from the sea with sand dunes forming natural barriers. However, the real worry concerns the fear of damages to their makeshift homes as well as to their few assets. When the tiles from a rooftop gets blown away in a gale or – in case of a thatched house – the thatch is destroyed, the family has a tough time to repair the damage. Many houses are covered with plastic sail cloths to hide the gaps left by a gale, which is just as well because it is perhaps the only use the sail cloth will be put to in any case, because the boats on the beach would have sunk deeper into the sand during the cyclone.

The more the boat and the engine deteriorate, the less are the chances for the fisher – when he comes back – to make use of them and consequently, the more he is dependent upon migration for survival. Most fishers, when they return, find it easier to join the shore-seine crew in pulling the net and taking a share than to dig up their boat and spend a fortune in repairing it, only to have to abandon it to its fate when Gujarat beckons again. Those who can sell the boats or the engines do so; if they don't, their wives will, to meet their subsistence needs when the men are away.

An important outcome of Gujarat migration is that the asset base of the fishers is reduced drastically. This means that when Srikakulam fisheries revive once again in due course, the fishers will be in no position to take advantage of them. Similarly, with decreasing ownership of assets at the household level, many families have come down in social terms and their capacity to access any support also declined as a consequence. As one woman in Mofus Bandar put it, "A family that has only two pots can store sufficient water to drink for the day, while the neighbouring family with ten pots can not only store water for longer but also afford to wash and bathe with the same water."

Impacts of More Serious Nature

It is no wonder that with large families to support, very few opportunities for work and prolonged absence of their men from villages, some women find an extreme option to survive and support their family: prostitution. This study has not explored this detail at all because of its sensitive nature, but newspaper accounts and other reports indicate that this is increasingly the option for some women to survive in many coastal areas. The social security nets within the villages are strong and resilient to help the women withstand external pressures and even extend support in case of need, but it is the internal

pressures that force a few women to take this painful option. This is however only a preliminary impression and will need further, more concrete, corroboration.

On the other hand, the fact that seasonal migrations have always been an 'all-male' activity has long served the men as a good excuse for turning to prostitutes. As we have seen, right from the days of Burma migration, the men had recourse to prostitutes, a fact that may well have contributed to some of the migrant groups – who were quite well off from an economic perspective – ostracised from their villages. Still, the prolonged periods of stay away from home and a widespread feeling of loneliness amongst the migrants continue to force them to take recourse to local women. As economic imperatives override social mores, their wives back in the villages resign themselves to it, much as they have accepted drunkenness among their men as a prerequisite for withstanding the rough sea conditions. Naturally, an important concern in all this is the spread of contagious diseases, which have generally been considered a part and parcel of the 'migrant condition', but acquire increased poignancy in the face of rapid spread of AIDS (another phantom that is more felt than seen with naked eyes) in the coastal areas and particularly among women and children, who may have become quite unknowingly infected.

Impact on Incomes

There is evidence that a few migrants did manage to succeed in their new endeavours and earned enough to come back and retire more or less permanently. The *Tindals* are by far the best off among the migrants. They built new houses, rigged their houses with the new symbols of prosperity – cable television, double-cot beds, telephones – and even owned their mode of transport (motor-cycles or scooters), which is indeed a big advantage in an area notorious for poor transport facilities. Besides, they educate their children in convents, acquire landed properties and also save their earnings as gold and cash in a bank. These people also managed to take a lead in the affairs of the village, automatically assuming decision-making roles, aided by the general perception that their having lived for a long time in another state made them more worldly-wise and capable of tackling any problem. A smattering of languages picked up during their travel also came handy to reinforce the respect they commanded in the villages. With no surplus left from a year's hard work, there are even a number of migrants whose household economies have collapsed even as the men migrated regularly for years. Even if the men do bring their earnings home, it is apparent that the amount barely covers the loans run up by the family in their absence, and whatever little is left is spent in a very short while, so the cycle of indebtedness begins already by the time the migrant leaves for Gujarat again.

Thus, a one-off setback – illness, a wedding or a death in the family – could put the family behind for years. The utter loneliness of existence far away from their families leads some of the fishers to increased drunkenness and debauchery, leading not only to exhausting most of their earnings, but also to

health related problems. Alternatively, the men fall sick or not get paid their full wages by the *Sait* or somehow manage to spend or lose their earnings, even as their family runs up a sizeable debt to survive in the village, and this classic combination of factors put the family at the grind for years to come in a struggle to clear the debts. And for those who are unable to travel anymore for any reason, the state of affairs can only worsen. Having lost the yen for fishing from their own village and unable to find the opportunity to move out, these fishers take to drinking with a vengeance.

Still, it can be said that the quality of life in many households improved as a result of their male earners migrating to work in a distant place. The 'money-order economy' has become a vibrant institution in itself for sending remittances home and the families of the fishers certainly made good use of the money, often better than when the man himself was running the family. If the conditions still remain precarious, the only consolation is that they are at least better than if the fishers stayed at home!

Impacts on Social Behaviour

The women aver that things have become considerably quiet after the men started migrating to Gujarat. The fishers were easily provoked and fights constantly broke out, particularly at the liquor shops. At the time of elections, when the fishers were in a perpetually inebriated condition, they were even more dangerous and hence useful to the political parties. After the fishers began migrating to Gujarat, not only has there been a perceptible decline in alcoholism among many men, but they are also much better behaved as befits a well-travelled gentleman. The reduction in liquor consumption is attributed to the long periods that they are forced to spend without liquor onboard the trawlers. They also reportedly speak less and only after carefully considering their answers. They dress well and move about gracefully, taking care to see that their new dress does not get ruined for any reason. Naturally, such people have little heart for political parties and fistfights.

The migrants also lay special emphasis on 'good breeding', which is considered to be an outcome of education, so they insist on sending their children to schools. Many children are sent to the 'convent schools', where often the medium of instruction is 'English' and the children are encouraged to call their parents as 'mummy' and 'daddy'. Subsequently, some of these children would be removed from the convent school and readmitted into the government school when the man goes away on his next trip leaving his wife to fend for the family on her own meagre resources, but the fact remains that the children continue to be sent to school.

Impact of Migration on The Community at Large

Usually, the people who do not migrate from the villages include: village elders; elected representatives to the local *panchayat*, *mandal* and *zilla parishad*; aged people; physically handicapped persons; women and children below ten years of age; persons who have secure sources of earning within the villages (including fishing; one must remember that in many villages, more than half the fishers tend

to stay put and continue their operations), and people with landed properties, own businesses or assured employment. At the household level, the families which have no man of a suitable age to undertake migration (particularly single-women headed households) are ruled out naturally.

There are also people who fear long journeys and those who like their villages too much to think of leaving them for long durations (although necessity frequently forces them out). Some others suffer from sea-sickness or fear working on trawlers. People belonging to non-fishing communities, who constitute a minority in the fishing villages, also do not generally migrate. Some people do not migrate either because they managed to do well during their previous migrations or because their migratory experiences left bitter memories. Naturally, the impact of the migration by a large number of people from the village is felt differently on different categories of those who remain behind.

Impact on the Resident Fishers

For the fishers who remained behind and continued to fish, migration of a sizeable workforce from the village is an opportunity in that the reduced competition at the fishing grounds allows them to fish more freely and without bumping into one another. During the peak periods of migration, the fishers say, the catches show a definite improvement. On the other hand, with mass migration, the resident fishers face two problems: one, as a large number of able-bodied crew leave the village, it is difficult to find workers for fishing as well as for launching and hauling the boat for fishing operations. The remaining workers demand higher shares in the catches. Secondly, with fewer boats operating, the quantum of catches – even if good on a per-capita basis – reduces overall, which acts as a disincentive for the traders from the towns to come and collect the catches from distant villages regularly, hence losses mount in spite of good individual catches. Most fishers carry their catch to the town themselves, and also diversify fishing effort to catch cheaper and locally traded varieties. This helps them to balance their earnings while the women in the village also get to buy some fish for processing and trade.

Impact on the Fish Processors and Traders

For most processors and petty fresh fish traders, the migration of a large number of fishers from the village is a major setback. Although their access to fish has been declining even at the best of times, the reduction in fishing activities in the village does hurt them badly. Many of the people in these categories are women, often coming from single-women headed households. Their chances for migration to other areas or diversifying into other activities being very minimal, the impact of migration on this category of people is quite considerable.

On the other hand, when the men are not migrating and fish catches are good, they also bring a number of traders – bicycle fish vendors and urban fresh fish traders – who also compete with the women for the same varieties that the latter habitually buy. This competition is not confined to the catches from the boats, but also extends to the shore-seines, which

have of late been the sole suppliers of cheap varieties of fish for processing and petty trade. So, when the migrants are away, fewer traders come to the village and the women can look forward to less competition for fish particularly in the shore-seines.

There is one category of extremely poor fish traders who obtain their fish by exchanging sweet-meats, boiled tubers etc with the fishers on their return from the sea. These women – generally aged widows – have a maximum investment of Rs 50 which they use to buy their edible items, and selling the fish obtained in exchange in door-to-door sale locally and in the nearby villages, earn about Rs 5-10 a day. For this category of women, the absence of men from the village for long periods is a major setback. Similarly, a number of other women manage many tasks – as auctioneers, as collection agents, as resellers on the beach, as carriers from the landing centres to the processing and/or packaging areas etc – on the beach when the fishing activities are in full flow, and they lose much as a result of slackening of fishing in the area.

Impact on Large Trader-Investors

The impact of mass migration on the large trader-investors – involved mainly in export trade (for shrimp) and urban trade (for large fish) – is even more serious than on the other categories because, by virtue of sizeable investments made in the sector, the trader-investors are direct stakeholders on the activity and get to lose the most when fishing fails in an area.

The average investment of a village-level trader-investor in a small fishing village seldom comes under Rs 200 000; frequently it goes beyond Rs 500 000. With the interest built into the procurement price of the fish, the traders are entirely dependent on good catches of fish both for recovering their investment as well as make some returns on their investment. Year after year, their capacity to recover their investment has become more difficult, while decreased fish catches and increased competition (due to growing market demand) have meant that their capacity to insist on repayment also declined. To add to their troubles, when fishers start migrating to Gujarat or elsewhere for extended periods, there is no way the traders can recover their investment. When pressured for repayment, the fishers actually tell the trader-investors to take away their boats and nets as their payment; as they spend nine months in Gujarat, they have no further need for the fishing equipment and it is in any case very doubtful whether they would make use of it in the near future. At least a few trader-investors in every area have lost seriously and folded up their operations.

Impact on Local Economy

Whenever the fishermen come back from a good fishing trip (and often a bad fishing trip too), they generally share their earnings with a number of these establishments even as they make their way home. Similarly, most people milling about the beach throughout the day on various jobs – women, children, and older people – and who managed to earn a few rupees from their labours spend them immediately. People coming from outside make purchases of salt, ice, plastic bags, ropes etc as well as their personal

needs (food, tea, cigarettes) from the local shops. Larger traders use some of these shops as their agents for storing fish or ice, as well as to set up a telephone to contact their offices to pass information on landings and to ask to send trucks etc.

Thus, the local economy is much dependent upon the fishing activity and a reduction in fishing in the area automatically slows down the economy and hurts everyone. The traders running local groceries, eateries, *pan* and cigarette shops, liquor outlets and PDS ration shops report a slackening of business during the period of migration. Even barbers have been known to move out of a fishing village because of a fall in their business with most customers having gone away to a distant land.

One direct beneficiary in the local economy with the remittances from Gujarat is the postman. When the families of the fishers receive money sent from Gujarat as Money Order, the postman habitually collects his 'commission' after making the payment. The fishers pay because they need to keep the postman happy in order to receive future remittances. The postman can find any number of interesting reasons for failing to make the payment or at least for delaying it for a long time. The dependence of the fisher-families in far-flung villages on the postman is even more acute and so also his capacity to harass them. The inaccessibility of formal banking systems – in physical as well as professional terms – to the fishers remains a big stumbling block in their ability to make use of more cost-effective and fail-safe methods of sending remittances to their families.

Impact on Social Infrastructure and Community Development

As can be expected, a village without nearly half of its men does not have much of a social structure left and whatever remains is largely ornamental. While this has an impact upon the traditional systems of governance (caste panchayats), which depend on consensual decision-making, the formal institutions (panchayats at the village and *mandal* levels) appear to be having it easy for the same reason. As the vociferous majority is missing from the village, the representatives in the panchayats have a relatively freehand in determining the nature, scope and access to the development works for the villagers. It has been reported that the number of votes polled in the fishing villages in the 1999 elections – which took place at the peak migration time– were very low and the elected members in some areas resented this so much that they seldom visited the villages afterwards.

As large majorities of the working class people are away, the opportunities are ripe for the local elites to strengthen themselves further. Increasingly, a section of the fishers who have succeeded in overcoming the need to go fishing completely diversified into a range of non-fishing activities including agriculture and thus become the biggest employers in the area. As moneylenders to the village at large, their hold on the people and their choices has become stronger, and so also their capacity to garner any government support to themselves. In a sense, the fishers might be reverting

to feudalism, which had never been in existence in this particular community.

With the migration of people, their traditional use rights in water bodies – rivers, backwaters, tanks – are weakened. The threats to their traditional rights come both from other users such as themselves as well as from new users – i.e., aqua culturists and industrialists – who refuse to recognize traditional rights. While in some cases, this has been the cause of migration, in others, the weakening of traditional hold has been the consequence of migration. The vacuum created by the large-scale departure of the fishers from an area also attracts other categories of people – from non-fishing communities, which are equally stressed with shrinking work opportunities – to move into traditional occupations. While fishing is still something of a skilled activity, which is more inherited than learned, there are already indications of non-traditional castes moving into fishing as a desperate measure. As the access to water bodies declines, so does the viability of the fishing operations in future, thereby setting in motion a vicious circle of never ending migrations.

It is possible that many of these changes might have happened even if there was no migration, but the fact that a large number of fishers is away most of the time facilitates the process. On the other hand, migration is also a liberating process, as the fishers manage to get out from under the shade of the elites and accepted notions of tradition, duty and obligations as well as acquire a broader world view. The general run -of-the-mill problems lose their relevance momentarily, although awareness about such issues becomes sharper in the light of the clarity of thought and freedom from orthodoxies that migration showers upon people. There is a constant reappraisal of their status and values which leads to some striking adaptations, changes in attitudes, values and perceptions. Most importantly, the migrant attempts to, and largely succeeds in, becoming self-sufficient. New skills are learned, difficult needs are avoided to the extent possible and diversification becomes an ingrained habit. Many women narrated how their men refused to take orders from anyone without knowing why. Having travelled far and long and experienced how power operates, they have developed an instinct about it and oppose it: particularly when they know that the local powers cannot stop them from living life on their own terms.

Findings & Suggestions

Fishing is the main occupation of many coastal people. It is the only source of income for most of them. But everyday they cannot go to the sea to catch the fishes. During rainy season, it is very risky to get into the sea. Since fishermen do not have any other way to earn money, they have to go to the sea as often as possible. Fishermen are unorganized and they do not get proper support from the government. Sometimes they even get involved in

anti-social activities to earn their food, when they cannot catch the fishes from sea. There have been several instances where fishermen have dared to get into the sea in dangerous circumstances and landed up losing their lives. Most of them were found to not even have any insurance policy, leaving their family members without any source of income.

Fishing is mostly continued as an inherited profession. People get the experience of fishing in their childhood itself. So, they do not generally think about going for higher education and going for a dignified job. In childhood and in young age, their profession would help them to get good pocket money. But when they have the responsibility of managing their family, the income from fishing does not help them much. At that time they realize about the difficulty in their profession. But by then it is too late for them to think of switching onto other professions.

So, the government should bring the measures to solve the problems of fishermen. They have to be given some job to lead their life during the dangerous times. It would help them to not go into the sea, during times when the tides are high and can be dangerous for their lives. Government should also give them insurance coverage, as there is a lot of risk in this profession. This will protect the life of the dependants upon the death of a fisherman so that his family is not left stranded.

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