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A study of socio-economic status of fisher communities in district Baramulla of Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract

Present study investigates the socio-economic status of two fisher communities along River Jhelum in Sopore and Baramulla regions of district Baramulla. A total number of 256 fishers were selected randomly around River Jhelum in Sopore (152 fishers) and Baramulla (104). The socio-economic information was collected through personal interview method on a well structured pre-tested schedule developed for the purpose. The data collected was subjected to statistical analysis using descriptive statistics and chi square (χ^2) test. The study revealed that most of the people involved in fishing belongs to age group of 41-50 years with a significant difference in literacy rate ($p < 0.05$) in both the communities. In terms of monthly monetary gains, the overall poor economic conditions in both the fisher communities were noticed with highest frequency distribution falling under 10,000 – 15,000 rupees a month. A meagre return from the capture fisheries has enforced them to switch over to other professions of labouring, fruit vending, auto driving, snack and barbeque selling. Besides the problems of illiteracy and poor economic conditions, the problems of credits, taken by them for various purposes was found a hurdle for their upliftment. Among the social problems faced by fishers were caste bias, residential seclusion, inter castes marriages and non- acceptability of being religious or social heads. The overall study revealed that fisher communities of these two areas are poor for which steps need to be taken for their upliftment.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, fishers, River Jhelum, Sopore, Baramulla, poverty alleviation

Introduction

Fisheries sector occupies an important place in the socio-economic development of the country as it contributes to 1.01% of total GDP and 5.15% of agricultural GDP generating employment to about 14 million people in India (Anonymous). The sector has proved to set an impulse growth of a number of subsidiary industries as it supplies a source of cheap and nutritious food (qayoom *et al.*, 2016) [2]. However, the fishers, who hold a primary position as stakeholders of this sector, are still being treated as backward community. It is not only due to the perception of considering fishing as a socially low profession, but the financial setback suffered by this community as well which hampers their progress. Moreover, the persons associated with the artisanal fisheries have profoundly been found affected with the socio-economic problems as compared to those associated with culture practices. They are largely illiterate, superstitious, and unhygienic with the problems of sanitation in their insubstantial houses. Therefore it is important for us to plan their development and devise policies at governmental and non-governmental levels for their socio-economic upliftment. It will also help in the development of fishing industry in the state. For the formulation of comprehensive policies for their betterment, it is necessary first to have baseline information of fisher communities including their financial strength, literacy, technical knowhow and constraints faced by them in this sector.

Hence the present study was undertaken to assess the socio-economic status of fisher communities residing around river Jhelum in sopore and Baramulla areas of Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir. Problems faced by the people associated with the sector was also assessed and related with the data obtained.

Material and Methods

The socio-economic investigation was carried out in the fisher community in the district Baramulla of Jammu & Kashmir. A total number of 256 fishers were selected randomly around River Jhelum in Sopore (152 fishers) and Baramulla (104). The socio-economic information was collected through personal interview method on a well structured pre-tested

schedule developed for the purpose. The data collected was subjected to statistical analysis using descriptive statistics and chi square (χ^2) test. The parameters were compared with each other using p-value of significance.

Results

The analysis on the socio-economic condition of the fishers in Sopore and Baramulla is given below:

Age Distribution of Respondents

The respondents were divided in five age groups from 20–70 years. The frequency of age distribution was found high in the age group of 41-50 years in both the study sites. There were 38.82 percent fishers in Sopore while as 46.15 percent in Baramulla falling in this age group (Table 1). No significant difference ($p>0.05$) was found between the age groups of fishers in both areas.

Occupation of the respondents

Fishers are operationally defined as the persons who, irrespective of their castes, pursue fishing as their chief occupation. The primary occupation of the respondents (92.12%) in Sopore and 93.27% in Baramulla) under study was obviously fishing around the study areas. However, a fair number of fishers were noticed to have switched over to other professions like labouring, fruit vending, auto driving, agriculture farming or selling of barbeques and Kashmiri snacks (Nadir Mounje). Majority of the fishers in Sopore (44.74%) and Baramulla (68.27%) were noticed to have opted for labouring while as a fair number of fishers from Sopore (42.12%) had switched to fruit vending business (Table 1). There was no statistical difference ($p\leq 0.05$) found between the occupations of fishers in the areas.

Literacy status of the respondents

The study revealed that the majority of fisher communities of both the areas under study were illiterate. Baramulla region recorded more illiteracy (60.58%) than the Sopore area (46.05%) with a significant difference ($p\leq 0.05$) between the two areas. Only little percentage in both the areas could reach to higher secondary or college level. A good number of children studying in primary level fail to reach to higher classes (Table 1).

Family size of the respondents

Family size of the respondents comprised of 5–6 members for maximum number of subjects (51.32%) in sopore while as in

Baramulla, majority of the family ranged between 3–4 members (46.15%). The survey revealed that majority of the respondents had large families ranging from at least 3 to 6 members (Table 1). However, an insignificant ($p\leq 0.05$) difference was found between the two study areas.

Economic Status of Fishers

Monthly Income

Most of the fishers in both the study areas revealed that their monthly income lied between 10,000 – 15,000 per month. 50.00 percent of fishers in Sopore area while as 36.54 percent in Baramulla were recorded to have maximum monthly income not more than 15,000 per month (Table 2). A fair number of fishers had income below 10,000 which revealed their poor economic conditions in both the areas. Less than 4 percent fishers in sopore and 2 percent in Baramulla were recorded to have monthly income of more than 20,000. The monthly income of the two study areas differed significantly ($p\leq 0.05$) with each other.

Amount of Credit Taken

The study revealed that fishers had taken credit from their relatives, friends and other known persons as they were not able to suffice with their monthly income. In Sopore, 51.97 percent of the fishers were found to have taken credits upto rupees 10,000. 11.18 percent were having upto rupees 40,000 credits taken from friends. In Baramulla, 29.81 percent of fishers were found to have taken credits upto rupees 15,000 and more than 20 percent had credits of upto rupees 20,000. A significant difference ($p\leq 0.05$) was observed between the two groups in the amounts of credits taken (Table 2).

Most of the fishers defined purpose of taking credits was either marriage of their kin, building of concrete (puccha) house, purchase of gear or craft for their occupation or even as a capital to invest in other business (Table 2).

Social Bias Faced by Fishers

There was an obvious bias, as observed by the fishers and recorded in the present study of both the study areas. Majority of the fishers (59.21% in Sopore and 64.42% in Baramulla) were feeling to suffer a caste bias in both the regions. The problems of inter community marriages, residential seclusions and non-acceptability of being religious or social heads in the society was common problems faced by them (Table 3)

Table 1: General information about family of fishers

S. No.	Characteristics		River Jhelum along Sopore		River Jhelum along Baramulla		Chi Square/ P value
			No. of respondents	Percentage (%)	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)	
1	Age group (Year)	20 – 30	23	15.13	10	9.62	$\chi^2 = 6.37,$ $P > 0.05$
		31 – 40	49	32.24	22	21.15	
		41 – 50	59	38.82	48	46.15	
		51 – 60	19	12.5	17	16.35	
		61 – 70	02	1.32	03	2.88	
2	Occupation	Fishing	140	92.12	97	93.27	$\chi^2 = 62.59,$ $P > 0.05$
		Labour	68	44.74	71	68.27	
		Fruit Vending	64	42.12	04	3.85	
		Agriculture	06	3.95	09	8.65	
		Driving	03	1.97	13	12.5	
		Barbeque selling	08	5.26	-	-	
3	Literary status	Kashmiri Snack	03	1.97	07	6.73	$\chi^2 = 19.69,$ $P < 0.05$
		Illiterate	70	46.05	63	60.58	
		Primary	30	19.74	27	25.96	
		Middle	23	15.13	06	5.77	
		Secondary	12	7.89	02	1.92	
		Higher Secondary	08	5.26	01	0.962	
		College	07	4.61	01	0.962	
University	02	1.32	-	-			

4	Family size	1-2	-	-	-	-	$\chi^2 = 2.95,$ P>0.05
		3-4	57	37.5	48	46.15	
		5-6	78	51.32	41	39.42	
		7-8	14	9.21	09	8.65	
		9-10	03	1.97	02	1.92	

Table 2: Economic status of fishers in Sopore and Baramulla areas

S. No.	Characteristics	River Jhelum along Sopore		River Jhelum along Baramulla		Chi Square/ P value	
		No. of respondents	Percentage (%)	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)		
1	Monthly Income		07	4.61	17	16.35	$\chi^2 = 11.7,$ P <0.05
		5000 – 10,000	47	30.92	30	28.85	
		10,000 – 15,000	76	50.00	38	36.54	
		15,000 – 20,000	16	10.53	13	12.5	
		>20,000	06	3.95	02	1.92	
2	Amount of Credit Taken	5000 – 10,000	79	51.97	20	19.23	$\chi^2 = 59.54,$ P <0.05
		10,000 – 15,000	3	1.97	31	29.81	
		15,000 – 20,000	19	12.5	21	20.19	
		20,000 – 30,000	15	9.87	15	14.42	
		30,000 – 40,000	17	11.18	05	4.81	
3	Purpose of credit taken	40,000 – 50,000	19	12.5	12	11.54	$\chi^2 = 14.48,$ P <0.05
		Building House	28	18.42	12	11.54	
		Marriage of kin(s)	36	23.68	22	21.15	
		Purchase of gear or craft	35	23.03	21	20.19	
		Treatment of ill family members	18	11.84	30	28.85	
Investment in business	13	8.55	11	10.58			
Agriculture or cattle rearing	22	14.47	08	7.69			

Table 3: Social bias faced by fishers in Sopore and Baramulla areas

S. No.	Social problems faced by fishers	River Jhelum in Sopore		River Jhelum in Baramulla		Chi Square/ P value
		No. of respondents	Percentage (%)	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)	
1	Caste bias	90	59.21	67	64.42	$\chi^2 = 27.38,$ P <0.05
2	Inter caste marriages	10	6.58	23	22.12	
3	Residential seclusion	10	6.58	02	1.92	
4	Non-acceptability of being religious or social heads	42	27.63	8	7.69	

Discussion

Present study was undertaken to assess the overall socio-economic status of fisher communities along river Jhelum in Sopore and Baramulla regions. The personal interviews and in-depth guided questionnaire formulated for this purpose revealed that overall social and economic status of fishers in both the areas was kaput and weak. The primary sector of their earning was fisheries sector to which most of the respondents were not satisfied to suffice their needs. It was due to this reason they were compelled to switch over to other professions like fruit vending, barbeque and snack selling, labouring and auto driving. The reasons for low catch in the river, as said by the fishers, might be increased pollution levels, urbanisation and deteriorated water quality of the river over the period of time which has resulted in low catch. The insignificant difference in the change in occupation of two study areas indicates that the fishers of both regions are facing problems in getting a sufficient fish catch out of the waterbody. Moreover, they complained of having sub-standard gear and less technical knowhow regarding potential catch, effective methods of capture and measures to obtain maximum sustainable yield from the river. Fruit vending in Sopore was opted as a prime occupation after fishing while as in Baramulla, agriculture was seen to be most preferred after fishing. It is because that agricultural land available in Sopore is mostly under Apple orchards while as land in Baramulla is utilized for the cultivation of crops. Bordoloi, *et al.*, 2007 reported 23.81% of fishers involved in agricultural farming Jankhana village could be attributed to the fact that there is

availability of agricultural land in that area which enables them to either switch over or opt as a secondary occupation. Qayoom *et al.*, 2016 reported fishers around Dal Lake, River Jhelum and Anchar Lake in Srinagar district have switched over to other professions like labouring, Fruit vending and auto driving as in Srinagar no land is available for agricultural activities around these areas. Therefore the above mentioned professions were the best choices available for fishers for their sustenance.

The literary status of fishers was poor (Table 1) in both the regions which may be due to large family size to make their both ends meet and low income (Table 2). The large family size does not allow them to invest money the schooling of their children. There are a number of government schemes like free education or provision of mid-day meals to poor students of primary level which justifies a fair number of students present at primary level as observed in this study (Table 1). The literary status is also directly dependent upon the economic conditions of any family. As the study indicates the poor economic status of fishers and also the lot of amount they already have taken as credits from their known ones. This becomes a hurdle in sending their kids to school and higher secondary for attaining higher education. A significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the literary status of resident of Sopore and Baramulla might be due to the fact that there are a fair number of job opportunities in Sopore as compared to Baramulla. For example Sopore is the place where numerous apple orchards are present. Therefore working there as labours, working in the huge apple landing centre, fruit

vending or working in the pesticide selling dealers is the main occupations to which fishers of Sopore have opted them as their secondary occupation. These facilities are less available in Baramulla which might be the key factor responsible for their poor income and justifies the low literacy rate of the area as compared to Sopore.

One of the profound problems faced by the fishers in the study was the social bias they are facing in day to day life. Inter caste marriages, residential seclusion, casteism and non-acceptability of being religious heads were the prime social partialities encountered by them. It is a problem in third world countries where such problems still exist and need to be tackled by educating masses, road shows, seminars and dialogues.

Conclusion

In the present study the artisanal fisher folk along River Jhelum in Sopore and Baramulla were mostly adult males in active age range of 40-51 years and with low level of formal education. There was very low application of modern technologies in artisanal fisheries in the study area. This could be due to low level of education of the fisher folk and lack of requisite capital to purchase modern inputs. There was a very high need for information on improved fisheries practices among the fisher folk. The key areas of information need included sources of microcredit, modern fish capture methods, fish processing, storage and marketing. Accessibility to needed information was very low among the fisher folk. Low level of education, poverty and lack of fisheries extension in fishing communities could have been responsible for the low access to needed information. Extension packages that revolve around the information needs of fisher folk should be provided in fishing communities. Adult literacy programs as well as micro-credits should be provided to artisanal fisher folk to enhance their access to needed information and modern fishing gears and storage facilities. Problems of social bias and community partiality must be dealt with comprehensive methods of teaching.

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