

A STUDY ON SOCIO-ECONOMICAL BACKGROUND OF FISHERMEN IN NAGAPATTINAM DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

India is predominantly a peasant economy. A study of the income and expenditure pattern of households of a particular community warrants an insight into its socio-economic and cultural parameters like educational status, religion, community, level of economic and cultural progress, backwardness, level of indebtedness, housing pattern, family size, living standards, status of women and the like.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of Indian's economy. Being the largest economic activity, agriculture is the premier source of national income for India. The agriculture and allied sectors contribute nearly 25 per cent of Gross Domestic Production, while about 65-70 per cent of the population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Agriculture includes cultivation of land, rearing of livestock, poultry, sericulture and fishing. The importance of fish as food products is realised by all nations of the world because of its protein richness. So fish, the cheap protein provider, has become an important item in the international trade. It helps in rising nutritional level, augmenting food supply and earning foreign exchange.

Fishing and its allied activities like fish-processing and marketing offer a lot of enjoyment opportunities. Fish is an important foreign exchange earner among all agricultural products traded by the developing countries of the world. Income and expenditure pattern of people in a country is one of the important factors influencing the economic development of that country. Generally a developed country is characterised by high levels of income and high levels of income and low levels of consumption. The income and consumption are inter-connected.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The socio-economic cultural backwardness of Nagapattinam district fisherfolk should be analysed from an entirely different angle, that is, from the point of view of their income and expenditure pattern which, among other factors, plays a vital role in the lives of the fisherfolk. Generally, a majority of fisherfolk in Nagapattinam district have the tendency to spend their entire income without savings. When they do not get any income they borrow in order to meet the minimum consumption expenditure to subsist, which is bound to worsen the existing quality of living conditions. Again, there are many factors, which affect the income and expenditure of the fisherfolk, which in turn have the impact on their standard of living.

Robbed of their sociological and cultural foundations and prone to natural hazards like perils of sea, which includes the 'Tsunami' (the large seismic waves caused by undersea earthquake), the marine fisherfolk of Nagapattinam district face a dismal future. Unless some concrete steps to improve the living standards of marine fisherfolk are taken, the 71.50 km long coastline of Nagapattinam district could become the next amphitheatre of social violence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the socio-economic and cultural background of fisherfolk of sample households.
2. To examine the level, composition and distribution of fisherfolk's household income and to identify the factors influencing the household income.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study, descriptive and empirical in nature, is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from the households of the fishermen with the help of pre-tested interview schedule. Secondary data were collected from journals, magazines, newspapers and books, documents, Pamphlets and reports published by The Department of Fisheries, Departments of Economics and Statistics and Department of Evaluation and Applied Research of Government of Tamilnadu.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of existing studies undertaken by both individuals and institutions was found highly useful in designing this study. A brief account of some of the relevant studies made is given below,

K.M. Warriar (1979) in his study, 'A Socio-economic survey of Fisherman in Madras City' focused the attention on the literacy rate, pattern and level of employment, levels of income, indebtedness and the expenditure pattern of fishermen. He found that most of the fishermen households did not save and they were under indebtedness. He attributed the causes for the low income of fishermen to lack of fishing equipment's, intensive competition among fishermen and migration of fish shoals.

A. Durai Raj (1981) in his work entitled, 'Study of Marine Fishing Industry in Thanjavur District' concluded that mechanised boat was the best to have more fish catch. He estimated that only 57 per cent of the price paid by the consumer had gone to the fisherman and the middlemen and the middlemen had provided 60 per cent of credit requirements of fishermen at an exorbitant rate of interest, which varied between 16 and 60 per cent, It was suggested that money lending practices in fishing villages should be regulated immediately.

D. Amutha (1998) in her work, 'Socio-economic conditions of Fishermen in Tuticorin' pointed out that the gross annual income of fishermen in mechanised sector was three times greater than that in non-mechanised sector.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this study, the data are analysed through statistical tools. Fishing being the main occupation, the coastal fisherfolk has to encounter the sea-based natural calamities and pirates at times. The occupational and safety and Health branch of the international labour Organisation estimates that every year 24000 persons die across the globe while fishing at sea. In a number of countries the mortality rates in fishing far exceed the national average for occupational fatalities. Past experiences indicated that the average mortality rate in fishing is estimated at 18 persons per year in Nagapattinam district.

TABLE 1
SAMPLE HOSEHOLDS WITH MAJOR AND SUBSIDIARY OCCUPATIONS

MAJOR OCCUPATION	SUBSIDIARY HAVING	OCCUPATION NOT HAVING	TOTAL
A.FishingMechanised Boat Fishing.	10	38	48
Motorised Craft Fishing	4	18	22
Traditional Craft Fishing	1	12	13
B.Fishing-allied Activities	7	10	17
Total	22	78	100

Source: Primary Data.

The above table shows that 100 sample households only 22 households have subsidiary occupation. Majority of the heads of sample households having no subsidiary occupation have stated that they do not know any alternative work.

TABLE 2
SOURCES, PURPOSES AND RATES OF INTEREST ON BORROWING BY THE SAMPOLED HOUSEHOLDS

SOURCES	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AVAILING LOAN				TOTAL		RATE OF INTEREST
	PRODUCTIVE PURPOSE		UNPRODUCTIVE PURPOSE				
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	%
Public Financial Institutions	60	12.00	11	2.2	71	14.20	8-15
Private Finance	63	12.60	420	84.00	483	96.60	36-60
Fishermen co-operatives societies	221	44.20	27	5.40	248	49.60	10-16
Employer/Owner Fishermen	48	9.60	230	46.00	278	55.60	24-36
Others (Friends/Relatives)	42	8.40	428	85.60	470	94.00	36-60

Source: Primary Data

CONCLUSION

The Fishing community of the coastal belt of Nagapattinam district consists of two culturally distinct groups. Out of 100 sample households, 78 per cent households have fishing as their major sources of income and the rest derive their major portion of income from fish-allied activities. While 43 per cent of total Households derive their major source of income from mechanised boat fishing, 22 per cent have their main source of income from motorised craft fishing and 13 per cent have traditional craft fishing as their main occupation. Even though per occupation is seasonal 4.40 per cent of sample households have subsidiary occupations. Majority of the sample households avail loan from private money lenders, friends and relatives at high interest rates, which range from 36 to 50 per cent p.a and only a few (8.40% of households) have the regular habit of savings. A majority of 363 (72.66%) respondents keep their savings with private chit and private finance companies. The income-sharing pattern among the fisherfolk depends upon the type of fishing and craft and gears used. It was found that only 35 per cent of total households of fishermen engaged in fishing own fishing craft.

REFERENCES

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