

# Present Status and Problems of Fishermen in the Marine Fishing Industry

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With rising pressure on food producing land resources, an increasing share of future food supply needs, especially of developing countries like India may have to be met from fisheries. The present study focuses on the prevailing problems connected to the fishing populations in our rural coastal regions and the crucial socio-economic problems affecting peace and stability in our country,

The total fishermen population of India was about 55.8 million, representing about one percent of the total population of the country. Along the coast line live around 32.8 million fisher folk. About one million fishermen of the country have distinct tradition of their own. They belong to all the major religions namely Hindu, Christian and Islam and to several communities which differ from state to state.

In most countries, fishing makes a small contribution to national income. Large segments of the population in the coastal areas of our country depend for their livelihood exclusively on fisheries.

As human food, fish and shell fish are considered exceptionally valuable

from a nutritional stand point, primarily because it contains a high percentage of readily digestible animal proteins. Among the countries bordering the Indian ocean, India is the largest and it contributes to about 45 percent of the fish production from the region. The fisheries of the country is in the transitional phase from the traditional to the modern ways of exploitation.

On the exploitation of common property, fishery resources are threatened by 'over fishing'. Regulation of a type leading to a reduction in the number of fishing units seems desirable to conserve valuable resources, forestall economic difficulties and reduce the likelihood of political clashes. In Tamil Nadu, recently, there has been clashes between catamaran operators and mechanised boat operators, due to the mechanised boats operating in areas which are traditionally fished by Catamaran. Besides creating a law and order problem the increased number of mechanised boats of 30 and 32 feet would further aggravate the situation. It is therefore necessary to plan the commissioning of boats for the future in a manner which would render the boats with longer operational

range, so that the conflict between mechanised boat operators and catamaran operators would be minimised or avoided.

The use of new techniques to modify the resources of the seas holds out some promise for increasing the fish crop in India. India has a coast line of 6,500 kms. offering considerable scope for the establishment of fisheries and is ranked at present seventh among fishing nations of the world as far as fish production is concerned. The Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea abounding in fishing grounds, gulfs and bays all along the coast and a large number of islands with their mangrove swamps and coral reefs are rich sources of marine fish.

Fishing in Indian seas is generally confined to a narrow coastal belt, 11-16 km. width and the richer offshore and deep-sea water are practically unexploited. This is largely due to the inadequacy of fishing craft and gear in use. Except for the mechanised craft recently introduced in some parts of India, fishing craft and gear in use throughout the country are indigenous, non-mechanised and locally built. They have been designed to suit local conditions. On the east coast the sea is rough and the coast is surf beaten and the landing places are very few except the open coast. Consequently the chief craft used are the floating raft or the catamaran and non-rigid masula boat. On the west coast the sea is calm except during south-west monsoon when operations are almost suspended, and small canoes and large rigid and strongly constructed boats are operated.

A large variety of specialised nets have been developed for capturing

different types of fishes and most of the fishing units are of a high operational efficiency in the inshore waters. The development of the Indian fishing fleet has proceeded along two lines viz: the gradual mechanisation and modification of indigenous boats and the introduction of new mechanised boats suitable for new fishing methods. The mechanisation of available indigenous boats is only a transitional phase and the real improvement of the Indian fishing fleet lies in the field of new designs.

Emphasis in the marine fisheries sector was on the mechanisation of indigenous crafts, introduction of mechanised fishing boats, improvements of fishing gears, establishment of infrastructure facilities such as processing plants, cold storages and landing and berthing facilities of boats, processing, transportation and marketing. These programmes backed by the discovery of rich fishing grounds in the inshore waters paved the way for the establishment of a seafood export industry for the welfare of fisherman and to the country. Research on various aspects of marine fisheries and exploration of their resources gave further impetus to the development of the Indian fisheries, which stressed on an increased production of fish to meet the protein requirement in the Indian diet and improvement of socio-economic conditions of fishermen; and realisation of enhanced foreign exchange earnings through the export of selected marine products. Extension of fishing to under and unexploited areas, diversification of fishing and fish products, and improvement of traditional fisheries are the other core programmes of developmental strategy taken up during the period. Development of technologies

in the culture of selected varieties of fishes, prawns, shell fishes and sea weeds of commercial importance formed an important activity of marine fishery research. These technologies should be made available to the rural fishermen and the government may offer them some piece of land in the coastal backwater areas with some financial help to start coastal aquaculture in non-seasonal months.

Although fantastic advances have been made in fishing technology, practically it has not reached the poor fisherman. For example, the ecosounders used in detection of fish shoals are only in experimental stage to fishermen. Today thousands of mechanised boats are in fishing operation. But they do not have arrangements to make fruitful use of their effort. The old customery way of detection by casting the net is the only resort that they adopt. By luck, if the grounds are located, other boats crowd over that area to filter the water. This is due to many reasons (1) fishermen do not realise the importance of the device (2) the cost of the instrument and lack of expert hands for its operation (3) the fact that the expenditure they have to incur in detection of shoal is not minimized even by the use of the device (expenditure for running the boats). The problem is definitely more crude as it reaches the fisherman with Catamarans and canoes. Another problem is the difficulty in passing on the information regarding the existence of the fishery resources to the fisherman. Although to some extent, fishing forecasts are made possible, it does not have practical outcomes. If the fishermen are to have the forecast as is done for weather, it could have worked out advantageously.

From a survey of Kerala coast during recent years, it could be observed that fishing season in the different locations of the coast has been much scattered. Also during recent years, it was evidenced that fishing boats had good catches during the monsoon periods. From these, it could only be said that the fishing season is ill-defined or rather scattered. This has become an additional problem facing the fishermen as they have to keep a watch during the whole year for their catches. However, here also practical difficulties like risks involved in launching into the rough sea cannot be ignored.

The extension wings of all the marine fisheries research institutes by way of demonstration of diversified fishing methods and publication of the results of the marine fishery resources survey could bring the knowledge to the fishermen thereby to benefit the country. Although the existing extension services help to disseminate the technology developed in the country to the fishermen, fish farmers and the industry to certain extent, a well planned system of extension both in the state and national level is to be organised and strengthened to co-ordinate research, developmental and industrial activities so as to make the best use of the resources.

Most developed countries have attempted to maintain the living standards of fishermen and the ability of their fishing industries to compete effectively by providing price supports, subsidies, tariff protection and sundry fiscal

advantages. Assistance in developmental efforts has usually been based on programmes for market expansion, increased productivity, exploration of fishing grounds and research on new gear and fishing methods.

With a view to promoting integrated fisheries activities, fisheries corporations were established in the country and subsequently all the maritime states also organised fisheries corporations. The working of the corporations include commercial fishing activities such as fishing operations, ice production, processing, storage, marketing and construction and repair of fishing vessels. To provide assistance to fishermen who are the actual producers, fisheries co-operative system in the country was organised. These societies are engaged in a variety of activities such as fishing operations, marketing and providing facilities like short term loans for the purchase of fishing implements. Besides the subsidies provided by the central and state governments on various items of fishing requisites, credit facilities for the promotion of the industry are provided by the commercial banking institutions.

Several factors such as low social status, poor economic conditions, illiteracy, heavy leaning on middle men, traditional fishing equipments and methods of fishing, low production rate and income influence the socio-economic conditions of fishermen. Though the answer to the problems of the fishermen may be the fishery co-operatives, much has yet to be done in the matter of actual management. ●