

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TRADITIONAL
FISHERMEN OF VITAVA VILLAGE IN THANE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Maharashtra stands third in fish production in the country, with an estimated annual landings of 3.32 lakhs tonnes (1986-87). About 45% of the fishermen are directly involved in fishing. Mechanisation has boosted fish production resulting in gainful employment and higher incomes to fishermen. However, traditional fishermen along Thane creek and who entirely depend on fishing for their livelihood are comparatively poor due to their dependance on subsistence fishing and reduction of fish stock due to pollution of the creek. Conservation of the resources, proper monitoring of pollution and financial assistance and guidance will help the fishermen improve their living conditions.

Maharashtra stands third among the meritime states of India in marine fish production, with an estimated landings of 3.32 lakh tonnes during 1986-87. Out of a total fishermen population of 2.32 lakhs, about 1.04 lakhs (45%) are directly involved in fishing. Mechanisation of fishing boats in the state especially in and around Bombay has received a tremendous boost, resulting in increased production, higher incomes and gainful employment to the fishermen community (Government of Maharashtra, 1982).

Thane district is one of the five coastal districts of Maharashtra and ranks second in marine fish production

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in the state with an average landing of 1.04 lakh tonnes (30%) during the period 1983-84 to 1985-86. Vitava village situated near Kalwa, is one of the landing centres in Thane district and contributes about 5618 tonnes (5.4%) which is lowest in the district during 1983-84 to 1985-86. Some of the fishes like sardines, perches, black pomfret, mackerel, seerfish and lobsters have never been in the landings of Kalwa zone (Government of Maharashtra, 1987). It is observed that the second quarter from October-December is the peak season contributing to about 66% of average landings. The average landings during other seasons range between 5% and 17% (average of 1984-85 to 1986-87) in Kalwa zone. The details are given in Table 1.

Table 1. : Quarterwise marine fish landings (in tonnes) in Kalwa Zone of Thane District from 1984-85 to 1986-87.

| Season | 1984-85 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| July-September | 135 (1.62%) | 356 (9.40%) | 231 (3.39%) |
| October-December | 5958 (71.70%) | 1974 (52.15%) | 5007 (73.59%) |
| January-March | 1019 (12.26%) | 674 (17.81%) | 444 (6.52%) |
| April-June | 1197 (14.41%) | 781 (20.63%) | 1122 (16.49%) |

It is observed that Bombay duck dominates the catch, contributing to about 68% followed by nonpenaied prawns and anchovies. The contribution of other varieties is negligible in the landing centres of Kalwa zone. The details are furnished in Table 2.

Table 2.: Landings (in tonnes) of common varieties in Kalwa zone of Thane district from 1984-85 to 1986-87

| Variety | 1984-85 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Bombay duck | 5961 (71.74%) | 2444 (64.58%) | 4715 (69.30%) |
| Anchoviella | 638 (7.68%) | 296 (7.82%) | 516 (7.58%) |
| Pomfrets | 122 (1.47%) | 119 (3.14%) | 39 (0.58%) |
| Penaeid Prawns | 317 (3.81%) | 179 (4.73%) | 264 (3.88%) |
| Non-penaeid prawns | 1022 (12.30%) | 513 (13.55%) | 1021 (15.00%) |
| Other varieties | 249 (3.00%) | 234 (6.18%) | 249 (3.66%) |
| Total | 8309(100%) | 3785 (100%) | 6804 (100%) |

Vitava village & Kalwa landing centre :

A study on the socioeconomic conditions of the fishermen with reference to production and marketing was conducted for two months in 1987. Vitava village is a traditional fishermen village with a total population of about 280, located between Thane and Kalwa, about 3 km from Thane railway station. About one hundred active fishermen conduct fishing operations in the creek during monsoon and spring tides of other seasons and also use the creek as a landing centre. The creek is shallow with the adjacent areas covered with mangroves, providing estuarine environment during neap tides. Fishing is suspended during this period due to high level of effluents discharged into the creek by the local industries.

However, during the spring tides for 12 days a month, i.e., six days during new moon and six days during full moon, the water level is high and therefore the intensity of pollution in the creek is diluted and active fishing starts in the creek. They conduct fishing day and night, getting about 300 kg fish per fisherman and market the catch at Sassoon Docks and Dadar (near Plaza cinema), earning about Rs.200/day/fisherman.

During the monsoon season there is sufficient water in the creek and toxicity is diluted and the fishermen conduct fishing in the creek and earn incomes from Rs.200 to 300/ day/fisherman. The creek is also a good source for crabs for which crab traps known as galsondi (phag) are operated. About 2-3 dozens of big size crabs are harvested by each fisherman in 6 hours and sold in Thane and Kalwa markets at the rate of Rs.40-60/- per dozen.

In other seasons when fishing is suspended the fishermen take to selling of fish. They buy fish from wholesale markets at Sassoon Docks and Chatrapati Shivaji market while their womenfolk sell in the local retail markets of Kalwa. Besides, groups of boys and girls of 8-12 years carry out fishing activities between 8 am and 3 pm daily in the creek and catch small size fishes, prawns, crabs and clams. These boys and girls themselves sell these fish in the Kalwa retail fish market at low prices. It is reported that each boy or girl earns about Rs.10/- per day. It is a traditional practice of children fishing for their pocket expenses.

Marketing :

In Kalwa village there are no fish markets run by

the village panchayat but the fishermen operate privately two markets. In these markets fish brought by fishermen of Vitava village from Sassoon Docks, Chatrapati Shivaji wholesale market, Mumbra landing centre (catfish) and Marol market (dry fish) are sold by the fisherwomen. These markets are run in shifts by the same condition.

The main fish market, located near CIDCO bus stop functions in the evenings between 4.00 and 8.30 pm and quality fish are sold. In addition, mutton, chicken and vegetables are also sold in this market. Majority of the consumers buy their fish, meat and vegetables from this market. Among the different varieties, consumers prefer black pomfret, white pomfret, surmai, ghol, karkara, kalawa and kati eventhough the prices of these varieties are high. The profit margin for small varieties range between Rs.2 and 4/per kg (pomfrets and kati), whereas is a larger fish like ghol, karkara, kalava etc, it ranges for Rs 3 to 5 per kg. This higher margin serves as an incentive to sell the fish in cut pieces and to cover occasional losses due to loss of weight by cutting the fish into small pieces.

The other market is small, located adjacent to Baboo Rao Salvi Road (Station Road) & runs only during mornings daily from 8.00 am to 12.00 noon. Temporary sheds are erected but the sanitation is poor. Consumers from lower social strata only visit this market and the profit margins are also low compared to that obtained in the main market.

Socioeconomic conditions :

Fishermen of the Vitava village are poor owing to poor scope for fishing in the creek throughout the season. It is only during spring tides when effluents into the creek are diluted by the high tide, fishing becomes possible and a few fishermen take up fishery as a subsidiary occupation. It is observed that the living conditions of these few fishermen are better than those undertaking full time fishery since these fishermen derive other incomes from their main occupation of working as skilled labourers in factories. However, the socioeconomic condition of the remaining fishermen remains much the same. They eke out their livelihood through selling fish.

Improvements suggested :

In order to improve the lot of the majority of the fishermen, it is necessary that discharges of effluents

in the creek are treated properly or led through a long pipeline, far into the sea. This will improve the environment and increase fish stocks in the creek. The active fishermen may be provided financial assistance through commercial banks to enable them to acquire fishing craft and gear. As there is good demand for fish at Kalwa and there are no marketing constraints, all the fish caught in the creek could be sold locally. This would increase the income of fishermen of Vitava village and raise their living standards.

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