
CHAPTER - III
FISHERWOMEN - A PROFILE

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3.1 Introduction.

An emerging phenomenon of the seafood industry is the equal female participation. The labour is divided equally between sexes in poor household. If the male goes to catch fish, out into the sea or to earn an income from other daily labour, the female counterpart undertakes income generating activities related with fish catch. Fisherwomen do undertake activities like processing of fish, selling of fish, drying of fish catch, etc. Fisherwomen of this sector are seen far more economically active than women at the higher level of income.

Based on the sample size of 105 women workers, which is 10 percent of total fisherwomen population of the area, an attempt is made to examine the social and economic status of fisherwomen.

The survey analysis reveals socio-economic profile which is presented in this part in detail and comprehensive style. The profile represents the women of the coastal belt in general and fisherwomen in seafood industry in particular. The seafood industry as mentioned earlier is located on the coastal belt which gives seasonal and casual employment to fishermen and fisherwomen.

The facts presented here introduce fisherwomen, their place of residence, demographic characters like age, caste, mothertongue, marital status, number of children, experience, education,

size of household, nature of work, dependent:earner ratio, etc. The profile is based on the result of the survey conducted in three places where seafood activities are undertaken.

3.2 Location of Fisherwomen.

As revealed in Uttar Kannada District Gazetteer, there are six fish landing centres, namely Majali, Karwar, Baitkol, Binaga, Arga and Chendiya. By looking to the seafood activities, commercial importance and contact convenience, three centres have been chosen. This has been demonstrated in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1
DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN ACCORDING TO LOCATION.

Place	Total Estimated	Sample
Binaga	430	43
Baitkol	309	31
Karwar	305	31
Total:	1044	105

Table 3.1 describes in detail fishing centres, total fisherwomen population and the sample selected. Fisherwomen have been selected from three centres depending on the convenience of the researcher, at the drying yard and in the seafood processing units.

3.3 Age:

An obviously important potentially confounding variable in demographic analysis is the age composition. Every society uses age as a major building block in its social organization. It

not only serves as an important base for ascription of social status but is also related to fertility and mortality. Age-wise distribution of fisherwomen has been given in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2
TABLE SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO AGE.

Age Group	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percen-
Below 20	3	4	2	9	8.57
20-30	14	13	19	46	43.81
30-40	12	6	4	22	20.95
40-50	9	3	4	16	15.24
50-60	2	3	2	7	6.67
60 and above	3	2	-	5	4.76
Total:	43	31	31	105	100.00

(Mean : 33.19)

Table 3.2 reveals that fisherwomen in age group of 20 to 30 years form the major proportion. Fisherwomen in the age group of 30-40 years are not less. 40-50 years age group ranks next. Fisherwomen below 20 years, between 50 and 60 years and above 60 years are countable on finger number 9, 7 and 5 respectively.

Analysis shows that fisherwomen in age group of 20 to 40 years constitute above 64 percent. Fisherwomen above 40 years of age are less than 27 per cent. while fisherwomen below 20 years remained as low as below 9 percent.

From the above data, it is clear that young blood signifies the mainstay of seafood industry as the number of those below 20 years and those above 40 years are limited.

3.4 Caste:

It is a general feeling that fisherwomen belong to fishing castes. But our survey analysis indicates a sharp dichotomy between fishing and non-fishing castes in the seafood sector. Harikantas, Kharvis and Ambis are of fishing caste and Komarpant, Bhandari, Gunagi, Harijan, Muslim, H.Vakkal, Christians, etc. belong to non-fishing castes. The broad classification of caste into fishing and non-fishing caste has been made. This is shown in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3
TABLE SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO CASTE.

Castes	Einaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percen- -tage.
Fishing Castes:					
Harikantas	24	24	1	49	
Kharvis	-	-	12	12	
Ambis	-	-	4	4	
Total:	24	24	17	65	61.90
Non-Fishing Castes:					
Komarpant	8	1	-	9	
Bhandari	3	6	4	13	
Gunagi	6	-	-	6	
Harijan	-	-	3	3	
Muslim	-	-	3	3	
H.Vakkal	-	-	2	2	
Christians	2	-	2	4	
Total:	19	7	14	40	38.10
Grand Total:	43	31	31	105	100.00

It is seen from Table 3.3 that an overwhelming majority of sample respondents, about 61.90 per cent, belong to fishing castes. Within the fishing caste, Harikantas top the list with

49 followed by Kharvis with 12 and Ambis remained at 4.

Turning to the non-fishing castes, Table pinpoints that most of the economically backward caste residents of the area are involved. Bhandari caste fisherwomen remained as high as 13 followed by Komarpant with 9. Gunagi remained at 6, Harijans and Muslims are equal with 3 each. Christians remained at 4 and H.Vokkal with a finger tip number of 2.

It is also clear from Table 3.3 that employment of fishing caste women is almost one and half time more than that of non-fishing caste women. The ratio between fishing caste and non-fishing caste is 3:2 approximately.

It is interesting to note that as a variety of fish and seafood are found in different shapes, taste and size, varieties of fisherwomen belonging to different-caste are found in industry though fishing caste dominates the list. However, it can neither be accepted as caste avocation nor be denied as a non-caste venture.

Thus it seems that seafood activity is spread among several communities though primarily carried on by a few communities.

3.5 Mothertongue.

Mothertongue identifies the people and their castes. It is more or less dominated by the language of the region too. Table 3.4 describes the mothertongue of the fisherwomen.

TABLE 3.4
TABLE SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO MOTHERTONGUE.

Mothertongue	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percentage
Kannada	38(88.30)	25(80.65)	5(16.13)	68	64.76
Konkani	3(6.90)	6(19.35)	23(74.19)	32	30.48
Others	2(4.80)	-	3(9.68)	5	4.76
Total:	43(100)	31(100)	31(100)	105	100

(Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages)

Table 3.4 indicates that majority of fisherwomen are Kannadigas (those who speak Kannada). It constitutes main stream of seafood sector with a pretty big percentage of 64.76. It is followed by Konkani with 30.48 per cent. Fisherwomen speaking other languages like Urdu, Malayalam, etc. remained at less than 5 per cent.

Table 3.4 highlights that 68 workers speak Kannada, 32 speak Konkani and 5 speak other languages. It is a clear indicator that majority speak State language. As the coastal belt is known as Konkan belt, Konkani speaking workers are also not less. Majority at Binaga and Baitkol speak Kannada, whereas majority of Karwar speak Konkani.

3.6 Caste and Mother tongue:

Mother tongue is a variable which is directly related with caste. It is more or less dominated by the language of the region too. In proposition of this, facts have been presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 reveals that out of 49 Harikantas, 48 speak Kannada, of 12 Kharvis all speak Konkani, of 4 Ambi 3 speak

all Komarpants, all Gungis and all Hallaki Vockkals speak Kannada, while all Bhandaris and all Harijans speak Konkani. All Muslims speak other languages like Urdu and Konkani, etc. 50 per cent of Christians speak Konkani and other 50 per cent speak other languages.

As presented and evidenced, it can be safely stated that mothertongue is the caste centred. For fisherwomen of particular caste speak a particular language. Besides, it is generalised that fisherwomen belonging to a particular caste speak particular language and reside at a specific area, e.g. Kharvis and Ambis at Karwar, Harikantas at Binaga and Baitkol.

3.7 Marital Status:

Marital status is another important aspect having a bearing on the employment. This has been shown in Table 3.6.

TABLE 3.6
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO MARITAL STATUS.

Item	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percentage.
Married	27	11	12	50	47.62
Unmarried	13	18	15	46	43.81
Widow	3	2	4	9	8.57
Divorcees	-	-	-	-	-
Total:	43	31	31	105	100

Table 3.6 demonstrates that of the total respondents, 105, 50 fisherwomen with 47.62 per cent are married, 46 fisherwomen with 43.81 per cent are unmarried. Percentage of widows has remained at 8.57, their number being only 9, while no case of divorcee has been found and reported.

Our observations and detailed enquiries show that both in fishing and non-fishing castes, marriages take place with the person of same caste. Inter-caste marriages are not allowed by elders. Generally, marriages take place with the persons of the nearby villages. No son-in-law is allowed to stay in the in-laws' house. The girl goes to her husband's house. Staying at her parents' house is condemned by the society.

Of the total sample, 46 were found unmarried. Enquiry reveals that low income on the one hand and dependents in the household on the other hand, force them to accept the employment which is either casual or seasonal. Such girls do the work till they get married. However, marriages take place early in such families.

In the sample, 9 were found widows who have to earn their own bread not only for themselves but also for their children. These fisherwomen generally are found more hardworking.

No case of divorcee has been found out from the sample. Fisherman community by nature is quite co-operative. It is a clear indicator that quite, mutual understanding between spouses does prevail.

3.8 Number of Children:

Women:Children ratio in the population is a summary indicator of the level of fertility.

TABLE 3.7
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN.

No. of Children	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Per- centage.
Nil	1	2	2	5	8.47
1-2	8	1	9	18	30.51
3-4	17	2	4	23	38.98
5-6	2	4	1	7	11.86
7-8	1	3	-	4	6.79
9 and above	1	1	-	2	3.39
Total:	30	13	16	59	100

(Mean : 3.3471)

Table 3.7 shows that 38.98 per cent of fisherwomen have 3-4 children. Fisherwomen with 5-6 children constitute 11.86 per cent. Number of fisherwomen with children 5 and above constitute 22.04 per cent. Even the women with 1-2 children are not less. They remained at 30.51 per cent.

It has also been found and presented in Table 3.7 that 51 out of total sample of 105 are having no children. They consist of unmarried workers, their number being 46. It is generalised that only 5 married women have no children. They seem married currently for women with no children are limited to 5.

3.9 Literacy:

Karwar taluka in general is having very sound education facilities. The literacy rate of district as per 1981 census is 51.46 per cent and female literacy rate remained at 42.51 per cent. But illiteracy among poor income group has been rampant among women of the career.¹ Table 3.8 presents data relating to literacy.

TABLE 3.8
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO LITERACY.

Item	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percentage.
Illiterate 0	20	16	18	54	51.43
1-4 1	14	6	4	24	22.86
5-7 2	4	5	5	14	13.33
8-10 3	5	4	3	12	11.43
Above 10 4	-	-	1	1	0.95
Total:	43	31	31	105	100

(Mean : 4.5)

Table 3.8 reveals that 51.43 per cent are totally illiterate, 22.86 per cent are between 1-4 which is the minimum requirement for making one to read and write. Besides those in secondary education have remained at 12 with 11.43 per cent.

The fisherwomen literacy remained at 25.71 per cent (with 5th Standard and above), which is much below the women literacy rate of taluka which being 42.51 per cent. It is obvious from the Table that fisherwomen literacy is low and it is the consequent illiteracy that keeps them out of extension activities which require fairly good foundation of literacy. It is inferred that because of the low status they do not receive any education and because of low level of education, they are deprived of skills and jobs which might help them to raise their status. The striking feature is the rate of drop out for fisherwomen is large as they are involved in domestic work and also the economic activities for which they are not paid. Situation did not differ much on various age groups. Hence, it is clear that the education level of the workforce in the region under study is low.

A remarkable point of interest to be noted is that although illiterate, they are quite shrewd in their day-to-day activities. They sell fresh and dried fish, manage the entire household. They hold a fairly good status in family too.

3.10 Pattern of Employment:

Seasonal employment is the characteristic of employment. The stability of employment mainly depends upon the status of employment. Employment status of fisherwomen in seafood sector has been divided into three categories like casual, contract and self-employed.

Casual labour is an employed-labour who has uncertainty of its employment. Such workers do not work all through the season. Such labour is found in fish drying process.

Contract labour is an attached labour which is employed for a definite period. Such labour is employed by seafood processing units like canning plants, freezing plants, etc.

An important characteristic of the unorganised workforce is the preponderance of self-employment.² 'Self-employed' involves women who are not paid for work but their own income has been computed as in case of casual labour. The quality of employment in case of self employed provides no more than the subsistence fishing. Such labour generally undertakes selling fresh fish and drying on a limited scale in case of bulk landing.

Table 3.9 reveals the employment status.

TABLE 3.9
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN OF EMPLOYMENT.

Place	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percentage.
Casual	25	18	11	54	51.43
Contract	8	6	9	23	21.90
Self-employed	10	7	11	28	26.67
Total:	43	31	31	105	100

Table 3.9 demonstrates that the casual labour occupies a significant proportion of women labour force. About 51.43 per cent are casual, about 26.67 per cent are self employed and about 21.90 per cent are attached labour (contract labour).

In other words, above 50 per cent of sample fisherwomen worked as casual labour. They worked as and when work was available, otherwise they were unemployed. The remaining almost 50 per cent were contract or self employed. The contract labour work was for single employer under some kind of contract extending at least a season. The nature of contract work would vary. But all of them had some kind of regular employment. In the season they were not unemployed but were partially unemployed. Coming to the self-employed, they get employment only when they wished, on fish-catch day. They can be regularly employed or remain unemployed. Everything runs at their wish and the availability of the seafood.

Our observation reveals that drying is an important fishing activity in which the casual labour is employed. The employment volume depends upon the fish catch as well as the employees

at the drying yard. If more labour is available for the fish catch, labour had to return without work and that is the reason as to why more casual employment is seen.

3.11 Nature of Operations:

Nature of work and operations involved are inter-related. Operation wise employment has been given in Table 3.10.

TABLE 3.10
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO THE NATURE OF OPERATIONS.

Item	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Per-centage.
Cleaning and Dressing.	8	3	3	14	13.33
Loading, Unloading and Selling.	15	13	19	47	44.76
Grading.	20	9	-	29	27.62
Packing and Labelling.	-	6	9	15	14.29
Total:	43	31	31	105	100

Operations do differ widely and generally depend upon the nature of work. Cleaning, dressing, grading, packing and labelling, etc. are the common operations in canning and freezing plants, whereas cleaning, salting, drying, loading and unloading are the operations in drying and curing processes.

It is observed from Table 3.10 that the labour involved in loading, unloading and selling constitutes a significant portion of the workforce. It occupies 44.76 per cent of the fisherwomen. Grading involves only 27.62 per cent of labour, whereas cleaning and dressing, packing and labelling involves 13.33 per cent

and 14.29 per cent of fisherwomen respectively.

From Table 3.10, it is easy to judge that loading and unloading and marketing of fish is the major fishing operation in which fisherwomen are engaged. Other operations are grading, packing labelling, etc.

3.12 Nature of Work:

Pattern of employment as to the nature of work differs. Varieties of seafood activities are undertaken by the fisherwomen either under the employer in the processing units or on their own. The nature of work done by fisherwomen is divided into four categories, viz. marketing, freezing, canning and drying.

TABLE 3.11
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO THE NATURE OF WORK.

Item	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percentage.
Marketing	10	7	9	26	24.76
Freezing.	12	6	-	18	17.14
Canning.	-	-	12	12	11.43
Drying	21	18	10	49	46.67
Total:	43	31	31	105	100

As shown in Table 3.11, a variety of work is undertaken by the fisherwomen. The most common activity undertaken is drying of fish, the percentage of which has remained above 46 followed by marketing of fish with 24.76 per cent. Freezing and canning activities have remained low which claims approximately 17.14 and 11.43 per cent respectively.

Area-wise analysis of survey reflects that drying is the common activity which is undertaken at all places in the sample area. Freezing and canning are the activities which are concentrated at particular places, i.e. wherever seafood processing units are in operation.

3.13 Sex Composition of Household:

Sex is an important factor in population structure. It often affects socio-economic status. It also determines the number of dependents and earners.

TABLE 3.12
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO SEX COMPOSITION OF HOUSEHOLD.

Sex	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Per Thousand
Male	126	120	93	339(48.91)	1000.00
Female	116	125	113	354(51.09)	1109.72
Total:	242	245	206	693	

(Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages).

Table 3.12 shows that out of 105 households selected, total population is 693 in which 339, i.e. 48.91 per cent are male and 354, i.e. 51.69 per cent are female. The sex ratio indicates that for every 1000 male, there are 1109.72 female.

The sex ratio reflects a relatively excess femininity of its population. This is mainly attributable to the preferential treatment for more female dependents and the poverty. In other words, high female rate gives a clue that the larger female participation in the labour force is available or larger dependency.

3.14 Size of Household:

There is little doubt that the size of the household is an important factor affecting the standard of living. In determining the basic need of worker in respect of food, clothing, housing, medical, etc. family-norm size has served as a chief indicator. It is also true that one of the reasons of poverty in unduly large household is the number of dependents to be supported by per earner in the house. However, it does not mean that the larger household means larger dependents per earner. A large household may have more earners in which case it would have larger income.

TABLE 3.13
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO THE HOUSEHOLD SIZE.

No.of Persons	Binaga	Baitkol	Karwar	Total	Percentage.
1-2	2	-	1	3	2.86
3-4	10	2	7	19	18.10
5-6	21	6	6	33	31.42
7-8	8	9	10	27	25.71
9-10	1	10	5	16	15.24
Above 10	1	4	2	7	6.67
Total:	43	31	31	105	100

(Mean : 6.69)

Table 3.13 shows that the size of the household varies widely from 1-2 to 10 and above. The average family size of the labour household remained 6.69. Details show that more than 55 per cent of household have 5-8 as household size. Exceptionally also, one person household is not found. Area-wise analysis shows that in Baitkol village, there are 10 families with the household size of 9-10.

3.15 Caste and Literacy:

Illiteracy is rampant among backward castes. Hence, caste and illiteracy are inter-related factors. This has been demonstrated in Table 3.14.

TABLE 3.14
TABLE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO CASTE AND LITERACY.

Item	Fishing Castes	Non-Fishing Castes	Total
Illiterate.	40 (74.07)	14 (25.93)	54 (100)
1-4	15 (62.50)	9 (37.50)	24 (100)
5-7	8 (57.14)	6 (42.86)	14 (100)
8-10	2 (16.67)	10 (83.33)	12 (100)
Above 10	-	1 (100)	1 (100)
Total:	65	40	105

(Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages).

Observations from Table 3.14 indicate that the fisherwomen's level of literacy is in descending order for the fishing castes, whereas trend for non-fishing caste shows ascending order. The percentage of totally illiterate remained as high as 74.07 for fishing castes. On the other hand, the percentage of literate with education between 8-10 remained as low as 16.67. Against this, the percentage of total illiteracy remained low at 25.93, while those above 10th standard remained at 100 per cent in non-fishing castes. It clearly pinpoints the rampant illiteracy in the fishing castes.

3.16 Dependents/Earners of Household:

Number of earners and dependents in the household is an important factor which influences per capita income and the standard of living. Earner/Dependent ratio also depends upon the sex. The size and internal break-up of the family members into earning and dependent affects the level and pattern of consumption, besides affecting potentialities of income.

TABLE 3.15
TABLE SHOWING SEXWISE DISTRIBUTION OF EARNERS AND
DEPENDENTS OF FISHERWOMEN HOUSEHOLD.

Place and Sex	Dependents	Earners	Total
Binaga			
Male	43	83	126
Female	66	50	116
Total:	109	133	242
Baitkol			
Male	67	53	120
Female	61	64	125
Total;	128	117	245
Karwar			
Male	40	53	93
Female	62	51	113
Total:	102	104	206
Sex-wise Grand Total			
Male	150 (44.25)	189 (53.39)	339 (48.91)
Female	189 (55.75)	165 (46.61)	354 (51.09)
Grand Total:	339 (100)	354 (100)	693 (100)

(Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages).

Table 3.15 reveals that the fisherwomen accounted for almost 51.09 per cent of total household population, whereas it accounts for only 46.61 percent of household work force. The dependent females compared to male dependents remained as high as 55.75 per cent against male percentage, which remained at 44.25 per cent. It indicates that female dependency is more because of more female population on the one hand and less earners on the other.

On the whole, there were 339 males and 354 females. Of this, there were 189 male earners and 165 female earners and the balancing figures of 150 and 189 represent male and female dependents respectively. Thus, within the labour force fisherwomen, proportion remained low at 46.61 per cent.

Our enquiry reveals that unmarried women belonging to fishing caste do not go for work if the number of male earners is more in the household. That is why the percentage has remained low. The economic classification of workers in 105 household of survey. 46.61 per cent are women as against 53.39 per cent of male workers. Within the sample size of population ratio of female earners to male earners is 5.5 to 6.3 and female dependents to male dependents is 6.3 to 5.0. It is a clear indicator that participation of women is less compared to male. This is due to less women participation.

3.17 Age and Fertility:

Age is the variable which is directly related with fertility. This has been demonstrated in Table 3.16.

TABLE 3.16
TABLE SHOWING DISTRIBUTION OF FISHERWOMEN
ACCORDING TO AGE AND FERTILITY.

Item	Nil	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	Above 8	Total	Percen tage.
Below 20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
20-30	3	5	4	-	-	-	12	20.35
30-40	-	6	8	4	1	-	19	32.20
40-50	-	5	8	1	2	-	16	27.12
50-60	1	3	1	1	1	-	7	11.86
60 and above.	1	-	1	1	-	2	5	8.47
Total:	5	19	22	7	4	2	59	100
Percentage:	8.48	32.21	37.28	11.86	6.78	3.39	100	

As stated, fertility is a variable which is related to the Age. Table 3.16 reveals that more than 52 per cent of married fisherwomen are below 40 years of age, whereas almost 50 per cent of fisherwomen have children between 3 to 6. It clearly indicates that fertility is directly related to the age.

3.18 Family Structure:

With the gradual social change in the family living system from joint to nuclear, fisherwomen households also split from joint in favour of nuclear system. The tendency for families in lower income group to live in a joint household.³ This does not apply here. Our observation, even with statistical evidences, indicates that the fisherwomen household were the nuclear families with hardly 2 or so with joint family.

Coming to the status of fisherwomen in family structure, though for important community affairs, political and econo-

-mic transactions, men count within the family, fisherwomen have fairly better status than the male counterparts. The reason tackled is men go to sea and moreover are addicted to drinking liquor. Naturally, child care and also the economic burden falls on women. This stark reality of poverty and drinking men around them have put upon women the thriving burden of sustaining a family. Thus, they enjoy better status in the family.

† † †

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CHAPTER-III

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