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INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Genesis or Origin of Problem:

Visit to the fishmarket as a buyer brought the researcher close to the fisherwomen. Karwar being the district headquarters of Uttar Kannada District is a place of prominence. It is situated on the coastal belt of Arabian Sea. Fish combined with rice is the staple food of people of this area. As fishing is the function of men, selling it in the market is the task of women. The fresh fish caught is generally transported in headloads or in rickshaws for the purpose of selling at a central market place like Karwar.

The major characteristic of fisherwomen is that most of them belong to local area who come from socially and economically backward families. They always smell of fish and others, therefore, keep a distance from them. The fishing community, as a whole, is looked down upon by other members of the society. The unhygienic huts on the seashore where fishing caste pass their night cannot remain without attracting the attention of an ordinary person. The researcher was not an exception to this. Again, visits to many seafood processing units where women are employed could not control the overwhelming curiosity to study their socio and economic status. Thus, the problem of women labour force was recognised.

In general, small and marginal farmers, landless labourers, fishing folk who generally belong to backward communities, form the low income group in the Indian rural economy. To this population living in extreme poverty, seafood industry is the attraction for employment to sustain life in the vicinity of Karwar coast. Fishing labour, the weaker section of society, constitutes a sizable portion of the population of the district. The area is growing rapidly as a commercial and cultural centre.

The peculiarity of fisherwomen is that they toil and moil hard from dawn to dusk. They are rather an exception to the female sex in general. They are burdened with the household work as well as the work outside. They are compelled to finish the household work for their men in early hours of morning and leave the house themselves, leaving children to the mercy of God and the younger ones, with the hope of returning at night again to keep the food prepared and relax. The poverty of these people is evident and extreme despite hard labour on the one hand and the zooming prices for the fish on the other hand.

1.2 Statement of Problem:

The statement of the problem is defined in the foregoing paragraphs. Similarly, the scope of the study has also been given.

Seafood industry by nature is highly labour intensive, raw material located, export-oriented and beyond all, seasonal in character. It has made rapid strides and the number of factories

connected with the industry have come up during last four decades. The raw-material for this industry is fish, the supply position of which is not steady. Hence, the industry does not work continuously. Working solely depends upon the grace and mercy of nature. To be brief, employment is also seasonal and casual in nature.

Labour employed belong to the economically and socially backward class. They depend on daily earning which is not certain. This class apparently leads life of abject poverty, continuous insecurity and social obligation. As men are involved in fish catch, transporting, processing and marketing of fish is the task of fisherwomen. The labour employed for the purpose of processing in the form of drying and curing, freezing, canning, etc. is of female sex. If we glance at the location of curing yards in drying process, dressing halls in canning plants, prawn-peeling sheds in freezing plants, we can well imagine how difficult it would be to keep the labour continuously attached to the work-place stinking with fish odour and hands cracked because of handling of salted fish.

Most of the fisherwomen come from local area and depend for their sustenance on the availability of casual and seasonal employment. Such workers are deprived of regular employment in other sectors, behind which illiteracy and low-education are the causes. Besides, their absolute poverty also forces them to accept employment in this industry. Labour force from fishing caste is generally not much interested in the processing activity under employer. Fishing caste fisherwomen find it as less remunerative and they get themselves involved in fresh fish selling, processing in the form of

drying, curing, etc. independently. In other words, they seem self employed. As fishing caste labour is not much interested under employer, naturally processing in canning plant and also freezing plant is done by non-fishing caste. The non-fishing caste labour are forced to accept employment to sustain their living. As units do work only in season, fisherwomen are paid for the season and when the season is over they have to sit at home and find some work to earn their own bread. Again such fisherwomen would be given chance in the coming years. This practice creates and ensures regular but periodic supply of labour.

However, no element of compulsion is involved. It does not mean that they do enjoy the right of re-employment in the same unit. They are not organised in Unions and have little access to systematic means of job seeking. It is evident from their extremely poor living condition that they are subject to a large extent of economic exploitation and live in chronic indebtedness.

The key factor to be noted is that they are compelled to work in unfavourable socio-economic conditions. Generally, a large proportion of these workers live in insecure one room huts located in dingy, unhygienic and slum areas. To assess, examine and evaluate the reality of the living conditions of these women labour force, an attempt has been made by taking sample survey covering three places of importance in seafood sector.

1.3 Need for Study.

There is a plethora of legislation to ensure and

protect women and to raise their status. The importance of understanding women's socio economic activities has now been recognised by number of international development agencies. Labour fact sheets and interview guides are prepared by the International Labour Organization and Food and Agricultural Organization to collect reliable data on sexual division of labour. The Planned Development Programme on Rural Women is an important issue of considerable interest to social scientists. The status of women in the easily accessible areas has been studied. The experts, researchers and scholars are devoting most of their time for the development of women. But the poor, down-trodden women have been neglected for a long time. It is on this background the present study is propelled.

The present study has attempted to acquaint the reader with women's condition with a particular focus on fisherwomen of seafood industry of Uttar Kannada district. The regional and location specific studies focussing on female half of the population are important for both analytical and policy related purpose.

Regarding women labour force, following questions become of analytical interest:

1. Why do these fisherwomen compel to work so hard?
2. What is their economic and social status?
3. Why do they live in extreme poverty inspite of the legislations designed to improve women's status in the economic sphere?
4. What is to be done to improve the socio-economic status?

To get response for the above mentioned questions

it was decided to conduct a sample survey of women labour force in three places, namely Binaga, Baitkol and Karwar, where seafood activities are carried on by the fisherwomen.

1.4. Approach to Study.

There is much noise and voice in the nook and corner of the country about the economic development. In recent years, our economists have added to the human resource development. The development connects itself with all aspects of social and economic development. Economic growth is directly related to social justice. Our development programmes would remain a far cry unless social and economic status of the human factor is improved. Improvement of the situation would mean progress in economic and social life of the whole nation.¹ Development programmes for poor masses, who are half-fed and half-starved is meaningless without improvement of socio-economic status of people. To put it into nutshell, socio-economic improvement must be the first step and an integral part of the entire development programme.

The role of labour in the economic development should not be overemphasized. It is regarded as a key to the economic development. The key to the development lies in men's mind.² Today problems of labour are complex. If we look at the unorganised labour force their position is worst. They are not protected and have no social security. Legal regulations of employment, wage, working hours, holidays are not existing for them. If they exist, it is extremely difficult to enforce them.

Turning to the women labour which constitute world's half population their position is worst and they are real sufferers. Their drudgery knows no bound. In addition to the domestic work, they have to work outside to support family income. Their economic condition is worst, which forces them to work outside. Most of them are in unorganised sector who are not protected. Income and poverty study in recent period have shown that more women are poor than men and that poverty of women is more acute than poverty of men.³ It has been demonstrated that women achievement, social values, attitudes, hopes, etc. have a great bearing on the family and the nation. The future of the mankind is linked to the development of women's potentialities.⁴

The present study deals with the socio-economic status of women labour force who are in the unorganized sector. It is the need of the hour to improve the status of poor working women before adoption of the other development programmes. The improvement of the socio-economic status of the poor women labour is a must for overall prosperity and development. The transformation of the socio-economic condition is admittedly a challenging task demanding commitment, dedication and hard work.⁵ It is the need for detailed information on such important fields as adequacy of the existing structure, extent of unemployment and underemployment, law and practice, income, wages, expenditure and living conditions in general. It is the hard fact that poor women are far more economically active than women at higher level of income. It is necessary that planning and implementation of the programme be based on facts and data. In this respect, socio-economic status studies assume significance.

1.5. Conceptual Framework and Operational Definitions:

The basic concepts and operational definitions involved in the present sample survey, analysis and interpretation of data collected are as given below:-

1.5.1. Seafood.

The dictionary definition of noun 'food' refers to anything which satisfies hunger. The living vertebrate available in sea if used to satisfy hunger is termed as seafood whether processed or not. It involves all marine fishes used as a source of food in human and animal diet, either fresh or processed and preserved. In other words, seafish, ready-cook or ready-eat fish and fish products constitute seafood. It involves fresh, iced, canned, frozen, cured and dried fish, fishmeal, fish-oil, etc.

1.5.2. Processing and Preservation.

Processing and preservation is a specific field. It is well known that fish and fish products are subject to quick spoilage and the main intention is the prevention of spoilage by processing and preservation.

The term processing and preserving is a phrase which involves cleaning and removal of inedible and unwanted parts, improving organoleptic quality, changing form with or without addition, making them more convenient and ready for consumption which change characters.

1.5.3. Fisherwomen:

Women involved in fish and fish related activities like cleaning, dressing, transportation, marketing, grading, drying,

etc. are fisherwomen. They are not necessarily from fishing caste. Fisherwomen by and large include all the women labour engaged in seafood activities. The women labour force in seafood industry here has been defined as fisherwomen.

1.5.4. Labour Force:

The employed and unemployed together constitute labour force, the rest of all person not in labour force.⁶ It involves all women workers either working casually or seasonally employed in the seafood processing units and self-employed women taking fish-related activities independently. Fisherwomen have been defined as women labour force.

1.5.5. Condition:

The term 'condition' is synonymous with status. Status stands for the social and economic position. It has come to be a synonym for any position in the social system.⁷ Social condition implies education, health, recreation and housing status. Economic conditions involve position related to material sources like income, expenditure, investment, etc.

1.5.6. Household:

A group of persons who usually lived together and took their meals from a common kitchen constitute a household.⁸ The standard definition in terms of group who eat and sleep under the same roof is not necessarily suffice here. There were many cases where persons ate together but did not sleep under the same roof. The household are made up of coconut leaves thatched with hay without separate room, constructed with mud or stones roofed with tiles with a couple of rooms found in 'Wadas'.

1.5.7. Literacy:

Literacy is having the ability to read and write. A person who can both read and write with understanding in any language is to be taken as literate. A person who can merely read and not write is not a literate.⁹ It has been observed that practical literacy requires three to four years of schooling. This means, in effect, that only those who have completed a good part of primary grade should be treated as literate.

1.5.8. Household Size:

The number of members in a household indicate size of household.¹⁰ It involves husband, sons, daughters, unmarried brothers and sisters of husband also the aged parents of the husband sometimes.

1.5.9. Nuclear Family:

Family containing husband, wife with unmarried children or husband and wife without children (no children born).

1.5.10. Joint Family:

Family in which two or more couples of the same generation with or without living children.

1.6 Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of the present study is to examine the socio economic conditions of women labour force in seafood industries with special reference to Karwar Taluka and understand their socio-economic fabric of life. The other objectives are:-

1. To assess the nature, extent, degree and composition of women labour force;
2. To examine their demographic characters like age, marital status, caste, education, fertility, size of household, etc. and to highlight their profile;
3. To know about their economic conditions by examining earning, income, expenditure, savings, investment, etc. and to know their economic status;
4. To outline their problems related to health, education, recreation, voting rights, grain-shop, trade-union, etc. that are encountered;
5. To review the socio-economic conditions in which these labour live at present;
6. To suggest measures for further improvement of their social and economic life.

In order to examine the above mentioned objectives, it was found necessary to collect information through direct observation and administration of schedule to the fisherwomen.

1.7. Study Area:

Uttar Kannada District is one of the two coastal districts of Karnataka. It has 144 kms. of sea-front with Karwar at the mouth of Kali river. It is considered as nature's treasure-house with vast natural resources. It is fortunate in its unique combination of bountiful forest, minerals and marine resources. The district is divided into 11 talukas.

Karwar is one of the important talukas having

length of 18 miles from north to south and breadth of 28 miles from east to west. The taluka is bounded by Goa on the north and by Ankola on the south on the one hand and by Supa taluka on the east and the vast Arabian sea on the west. The total area of the taluka is 7321 sq.km., which accounts for 7.1 percent of the district. It consists of 58 villages, of which 6 are important marine fish landing centres.

The population of taluka as per 1981 Census is 1,25,635, of which 62,821 are male and 62,814 are female. Fishing population of the taluka is 14,963, of which 4,881 are males and 4,888 are female and 5,194 are children. The fishing population constitutes 28.09 percent of the district.

The climate of the taluka is hot. The natural division of taluka is in forest, plain land, rivers and ocean. The taluka is rich in forest, minerals and marine resources.

The main item of food of people is rice and its substitute combined with fish. Main occupation of people is agriculture and to a limited extent, fishing.

1.7.1. Karwar Coast:

The coastal tract of Karwar begins in north from village Majali on the Goa border and continues in the south upto Ankola taluka boundary, a little beyond the border of Amadalli village. The tract in its northern extremity is a narrow coastal strip with the large fishing village of Majali - a focus of human activity. A little to its south overlooking mouth of Kali river lies in the ancient fort of Sadashivgad and its minor counterpart in Chittakul both standing

on lateritic cliff. To the south, the town of Karwar extends along the Baitkol cove which is a natural harbour giving good anchorages to small steamers. It extends its urban influence upto fishing village situated at the head of the cove. The newly founded chemical factory at Binaga has added to the importance of this region.

1.7.2. Area of Fisheries:

The coastal tract between Karwar and Ankola is popularly known as mackerel belt of Karnataka, as mackerel, a type of fish, are available in abundance. The coastal area of the taluka is 42 kms. which accounts for 29 percent of the total area of the district. According to an official DANIDA Project, the belt is the best fish breeding centre in whole Asia. Over 47,719 tons of fish valued over Rs.17,18,00,490 was procured during 1985-86.

1.7.3. Development of Fisheries:

A glance at the backward shows that the conditions were different. Mechanised fishing and scientific methods of preservation of fish were practically unknown. Lot of fishes used to go waste in glut season. Curing and drying were the only method at that time. Fish-processing were in state of utter despair. Mechanisation was started by S.R.Tandel in the year 1956 for the first time. With mechanisation, infrastructure like ice-plants, cold-storage, freezing-plants, canning-plants, fishmeal plants were started first by the Government and later on, by private agencies, which were encouraged by offering subsidies to these units. Co-operatives and State Fisheries Corporation were also encouraged to put up the

necessary infrastructure. At present, there are four ice-plants, two freezing plants, two frozen-storages, two cold-storages, one fishmeal plant and a canning plant.

1.7.4. Sample Villages:

The study mainly consists of the places of eminence, viz. Binaga, Baitkol and Karwar Division - II, which are within 3.6 kms, radial distance of taluka headquarters.

Binaga. It is a revenue village with a total population of 6674, of which 3551 are male and 3123 are female as per 1981 census. It is located 6 kms. away from Karwar town. This has risen to prominence due to the newly founded Caustic Soda Factory. The famous Anjidev Island under Goa administration is 4 kms. from here and can be reached from Goa coast. It is a very important fishing centre. Binaga bay is well sheltered from north to west. More of a traditional fishing centre lying close to Karwar, Binaga has a fleet of 10 purseines, 14 trawlers, 15 gillnetters, 121 dugouts and 50 other crafts with gear operation. This port has no creeks.

A fish curingyard, an ice-plant, a freezing-plant and a society are the other features. There is a possibility of shifting the landing centre to Majali. The area of the village is 1943 acres.

Baitkol. Baitkol is an ancient Arabic term, Bait-el-kol means a bay of safety. Baitkol covers a shallow cove on the southern end of Karwar bay, is a well protected shelter for sailing vessels. It is acclaimed as the queen of ports and is one of the finest natural ports on par. Nature has bestowed all favours on this port with sheltered harbour and anchorage convenience. The bay is protective

even in the worst of storms. It is remarkable for its beautiful scenery studded with rows of coconut groves all along.

The area of the village is 665 acres (268 hectares). A freezing plant, an ice-plant, a fishmeal plant, a frozen storage and a fisherwomen society are its features.

Karwar. The district and taluka headquarters, is a place of prominence. The place name Karwar is misnomer named after Kadwad, a far off village. It was an ancient site of sea trade visited by Arabs, Dutch, Portuguese, etc. It is the safest port south of Bombay. The port is a hill projecting into the sea, called Karwar Head. It has seven divisions, in first three of which, fishing is concentrated. The population is 47210 of which 24831 are male and 22379 are female.

Karwar being the major fishing centre of Uttar Kannada, has a fleet of 14 purseine, 56 trawlers, 5 gillnetters, 595 indigenous craft in operation. There are ten boat building yards also. An ice-plant and a canning plant are the other features related to fisheries.

1.8. Data and Methodology.

Collected data of any field study must be based on scientific method of enquiry. To serve this purpose, similar procedure was followed and care was taken. To generalise the findings of the study, a sample survey was taken.

In this part, the nature and sources of data, procedure for selection of area, sample of the workers, tools and techniques of data collection, analysis and interpretation technique have been defined.

1.8.1. Nature and Sources of Data:

As the study is related with the field work, data collected is from primary sources. The study intended to collect the data with the help of sample survey, representing three centres adequately. The survey was conducted with the following tools:-

1. Schedule for fisherwomen necessarily used as an interview schedule;
2. Interviews with labour leaders, seafood merchants and owners of the seafood processing plants;
3. On-the-spot observations.

A survey involves various economic aspects like earning levels, employment, working conditions, income, expenditure, indebtedness, savings, investment, etc. It also involves social aspects like housing, health, education, recreation, etc. This information was collected through fisherwomen schedule administered at the work place. Data related with the seafood activities like pre-processing, packing and other general information was collected with the help of personal interviews of the owners of seafood units and the seafood dealers.

Secondary data related to the seafood processing units, infrastructure, capacity utilization, fish catch, employment details, etc. were collected from published and unpublished records of the Department of Fisheries, of different seafood processing units. Theoretical literature regarding the development of seafood industry was obtained from the Central Marine Research Institute and the Deputy Director of Fisheries, Karwar.

Moreover, the data related to work, working conditions, work environment, etc. have been observed at the work places. Data related with the welfare facilities for the fisherwomen has been collected from the Social and Welfare Office, Karwar.

1.8.2. Sample Area:

The area covered in the sample has been mentioned herebelow. It is to be noted that there are six important fish landing centres, namely Binaga, Arga, Chendiya, Baitkol, Majali and Karwar. The selection of places namely Binaga, Baitkol and Karwar has been made by looking at the historical and commercial importance. Further, seafood processing units coming under small scale sector are located in these three places. This has added to the selection of these places. Contact convenience of the researcher and the field-workers was another factor for selecting these places.

To put in nutshell, commercial importance of the places, location of seafood processing units and contact convenience of both surveyors and enumerators facilitated to choose these three places.

1.8.3. Sample Size:

The next step after determining the area of study was the selection of sample for collecting the primary data. As the seafood sector is highly scattered and unorganised, no exact record of women workers in seafood sector was available either with the village panchayats or the owners of the seafood processing units (casual labour) and the seafood merchants. However, owners of the processing units could give details of number of their employed fisherwomen.

It was felt necessary to select the sample on the basis of the number of fisherwomen as per 1981 census. To the fisherwomen (working) in seafood sector, additional 20 percent was added. Thus, keeping in view, the number of women workers on an average, the sample size was determined at 105 out of 1044 estimated women workers. In the ultimate analysis, sample turned out to be simple random sampling.

1.8.4. Selection Procedure:

As women are found in group and as the list of the women workers was not available, they were consulted at their work place for interview purpose. The most crowded place where fisherwomen seen are the landing centres, fish-markets, drying yards and the processing plants. At these places, interviews were taken for filling the schedule prepared. While selecting the workers, they were called one by one till the quota was finished. However, care has been taken to see that the fisherwomen interviewed are not from the same household. The immigrants also were excluded.

1.8.5. Investigation Procedure:

All the places selected for study were visited before drawing the actual sample as it was necessary to collect the primary data. During the visits, it was revealed that the majority of women workers were from the socially and economically backward families. They were consisted of both fishing and non-fishing castes. This information had been received from local leaders, owners of processing units, personal observation and talks with the workers. Data relating to seafood processing units was obtained from the District Industries Centre, Karwar, and also from the Deputy Director of Fisheries, Statistical Department, etc.

1.8.6. Preparation and Pretesting of Schedule:

For the collection of data from workers relating to demographic characters, working conditions, income and expenditure, savings, investment, housing, education, health, recreation, etc. a detailed four-part schedule was prepared in view of the illiteracy and low level of education.

The first part of the schedule included questions regarding general identifying information related with workers' background like age, marital status, number of children, education, experience, etc.

The questions in the second part were related to earning, income, expenditure, savings, investment, indebtedness, etc.

The questions in the third part were related to the employment and the working conditions.

The fourth part of the schedule included questions related to the social status involving housing, education, training, health, recreation, etc.

Care had been taken to avoid personal and leading questions. Questions were framed by taking into consideration the respondents' frame of reference. Clear and short questions were included. Both open-ended and close-ended questions were also used.

The schedule was pretested on five respondents from Binaga village and five respondents from Baitkol and in the light of that, some unrelated questions were dropped and some others were suitably modified.

1.8.7. Administration of Schedule:

The pretested schedules were administered by the field worker and by the researcher. Detailed instructions to the field worker were given relating to the administration. Though it was prepared in English, questions to the workers were asked in Kannada and Konkani. A specimen of the schedule is given in Appendix-1.

1.8.8. Spot Observation:

As much observation of the problem was needed, often visits to the sample area were made. This was necessary for spot-observations to know the day-to-day life of the workers. Such observations were related to their housing, living accommodation, alcoholism, household-chores, child-care, etc. However, the researcher had pretty bitter experience in establishing a rapport and to win their confidence. The problem, however, was solved when the researcher stepped with the enumerators and local leaders.

1.8.9. Tabulation and Interpretation:

After getting all the duly filled in schedules, data were compiled and tables were prepared with hand and then analysis and interpretation were done on the basis of which inferences were drawn.

On the whole, methodology of data collection was the combination of spot observation and sample survey. In order to facilitate the data collection and also to ensure that the maximum amount of information had been collected from all the selected respondents, guidelines for undertaking interviews were prepared and provided to the investigators.

1.9. Limitations:

The study is subject to the following limitations:-

1. Size of the sample is roughly 10 percent of the female population estimated. It is likely that inferences may be not so justifying.
2. Selection procedure of workers is unsystematic and haphazard and, therefore, it is likely that sample may be not truly representative though it is supposed to be.
3. Respondents were illiterate and found suspicious. It implies that answers may be subject to respondent bias.
4. As the study is on labour of unorganised sector, the findings may not be applicable on a generalised plan to different types of women workers in other industrial sector.
5. The conditions of emigrant workers has not been examined. Hence, emigrants who form a part of the seafood sector, has been excluded. The conclusions, therefore, may not be applicable to emigrants.

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