

## SOCIO- ECONOMIC STATUS OF MARINE FISHER WOMEN IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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### Abstract

*This article is an attempt has been made to describe the socio-economic status of marine fisher women and also discuss about the empowerment of fisher women in kanyakumari district. The purpose of this research is to study the various problems of the marine fisher women, such as employment, marketing, income, education and health et. The analysis is based on a field visit, case study and collected information both primary and secondary data's. It has been the practice for a long time to call women as the weaker sex. Being given that label, they were subjected to the tyranny of the male and given a subordinate place in society. It is however, a known fact that women in ancient India were given an honored place. Many of our greatest writers have spoken of women in glowing terms. Rabindranath Tagore said, "Women is the builder and molder of the nation's destiny. "According to Gandhiji" woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa "in other words Indian tradition has been characterized by a deep respect and regard for womanhood. Fishes from the major source of employment income and livelihood for most of the people inhabiting the coastal belt Women in fisheries are in general labeled as imperceptible workers as their contributions are not adequately apprehended and realized. Men are actively involved in fishing but women too play a major role in pre and post harvest activities.*

**Keywords:** *socio-economic status, marine fisher women, Kanyakumari district, harvest activities, fisheries sector, eco systems*

The fisheries sector has been recognized as an important income and employment generations. Tamil Nadu is one of the important coastlines of 1076kms. There are 13 coastal districts and 591 fishing villages. Kanyakumari, one of the districts in Tamilnadu, with a land spread of 1,684 sq.km has almost all eco systems- forests, wet lands, fresh water resources marine et. This district is situated at the extreme southern part of the Indian subcontinent; the coast line is formed closely by the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. But the main part of the coast faces the Arabian Sea. The district is divided into four administrative units known as Taluks, like Vilavanvode, Kalkulam, Agasteeswaram and Thovalai. According to Tamil Nadu Marine Fisher Folk Census 2010, a population of 1,43,388 fisher folks are distributed in the 71.5 km of the 42 villages of coastline within Kanyakumari district, and constitute about 26 percent of the total fisher population of Tamilnadu. The fisher women community in the small scale fisheries sector Gender gap in control over common within the community The roles of men and women in fish production, processing and marketing vary but women usually play a pivotal role. Women not only shoulder all the responsibilities, but face increasing workloads as men migrate to other states of India, (viz., Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra etc) for fishing. These migrants are mostly the fishermen but not their households. They come back to their respective homes after fishing. When men migrate, women take up house hold responsibilities. The women enjoy higher autonomy. But it does not contribute to the increase of social status. Social expectations about men's roles as breadwinners often foster male out migration. As gender role norms and expectations continue to change in various cultures. Regions, the role of women in fishing community gradually Generally speaking the social norms in the fisher communities prescribe that the primary producers be men, especially where production activities at sea. Women on the other hand, are expected to perform dual roles, first, as the main stays of their households and second as the mainstays of fish processing, marketing and distribution. Fisher women in kanyakumari district have high literacy rate. Their involvement in self help groups has brought about

tremendous economic activities and participation in political activities. SHGs have become the main vehicle for women's empowerment.

In kanyakumari district the marine fisher women play a major role in decision making in economic activity, but are neglected and their role stand unrecognized. They have a major role regarding expenditure on food, purchase of cloth and jewels and hut repair and maintenance. Women dominated in taking decision on almost all over house hold activities. The fisher women are mainly engaged in household works. In addition they are involved in other works such as traditional fish caring, manual laboring fish selling and chunk collection etc. Fisher women co-operative societies to play vital role in women empowerment and enhancing the socio-economic status of the fisher women the social transformation must be engineered by changing power relations within the households and society, to achieve this government implement and effective action for women. Women also had a major contribution in marketing fresh fish and processing. The fish marketing has been a profit making activity for fisher women. Fisher women in any work sector can be found occupying the position of a sub category or performing supportive roles. In landing centers women involved in fish drying collects small sized by catch. Role of women in fisheries are active participation in allied activities viz, sorting, grading fish salting and drying, fish loading and unloading net mending retail marketing and fish processing while women are engaged in drying and curing fish all along the coast. It is in the kanyakumari district that plays a predominant part in the sun-drying of fish on the beaches and in the curing of fish in fish-curing yards. The role of the women in fishing is largely relies on the socio - economic conditions of the households. The conditions and quality of life for women is deprived. This includes long working hours, poor wage as compared to the men and in addition the burden of household maintenance. However various problems are faced by fisher women. Still they interest to learn new skills and attend training to improve their status in the fishing sector to empower themselves. The political and social involvement of women has been very limited or even negligible. They should be brought out from this social burden and be made to involve in income earning activities to improve their living standards.

Economic uplift of the fisherwomen depends on the growth and development of fisheries sector. Hence, region oriented and resource based developmental schemes are required to be implemented for each region. This would help for socio-economic improvement of fisher women. In fishing community women play either a role of a house wife or as a source of income generator through fish in jobs. Involvement of women in the primary sectors of capture fisheries is negligible hence they have to deal with the deplorable household situation due to decreasing fish catch and down sized income. Women who are involved in marketing meet many problems such as fluctuating market process, unhygienic market places lack of basic amenities in the market place.

The fisher women carry loads of fish from the shore to the nearest markets every day. The women carry the fish on their head and with the load of 50-65 kgs. The pressure comes on their body especially back. The subsistence fisher women are prone to health hazards. Fisher women in generally suffer from malnutrition and dietary imbalances. Fish vending is a traditional occupation that has been a means of livelihood for the thousand people in India. With the majority of fish vendors being women Fish vendors engage in their trade in various ways. They purchase their fish directly from landing centers, where they participate in daily auctions of the catch they buy from traders and merchants, or they buy from the wholesale market for resale at retail/local markets. Fish vendors can be classified into stationary vendors, peripatetic vendors and mobile vendors. The fish vendors face many problems, such as poor access to welfare schemes, lack of facilities at harbors and landing centers, poor access to credit, exorbitant interest rates, lack of public transport to markets lack of ice and proper storage facilities problems at market places poor market infrastructure. Fishing is a way of life with its own tradition and culture. Their inhabitation is obviously in marked by physical marginality, cultural uniqueness and physical marginality makes them remote from the mainland society. Women fish vendors operate mostly on a small scale. They buy a fish in baskets and take them to interior places to sell. Most often they borrow money from money lenders with high interest to invest in their business. The conditions are worse especially when they lack a male support in the family.

Such women are likely to be economically and socially marginalized even within their own community. Their earning is not to meet their day-to-day livings.

Marine fisher folk are members of a low and disadvantaged caste belonging to the lowest economic state in Indian society. The fisher women, in particular have a very low status in the social hierarchy which leaves them worse off than their compatriots. The term "employment" generally refers of paid work but it is used here in a broader sense. Many fisher women sell the fish caught by member of their family, but the proceeds are usually credited to male members of the family.

The status of women has two components. Status in the family and status in the community. Status in society depends on the various tasks performed by fisherwomen in relation to the main occupation of fishing. The role and status of women depends on their family's economic position, and the assets owned them. Women from a better off family rarely engage in household chores or in manual work such as transporting head loads of fish. Fisher women from poor families on the other hand not only perform all the household chores but also have to carry head loads of fish to the markets themselves. Fisher women are considered bold and outspoken. But this is not an indication of a better status in society; in fact these traits are an index of fisher women's inferior socio economic position. Women fish vendors have organized themselves in various ways to facilitate their trade. The organization range from informal groups of women who collectively hire transport to bring their fish to markets. Women vendors and processors in several coastal states are part of self help group (SHGs) and federations. Such membership helps them access the sources of credit and other linkages. Finance and poverty are inter-related. Financial inclusion of the poor women can result in reduction of poverty among them. Self-Help Groups help to improve the morale of the individual and boost up their confidence and bring to the hidden talents and skills of the individuals. SHGs played a major role in the lives of the people and it is enhancing the standards of the people. It is functioning in the village itself. Women find it easy to participate effectively. Women have an opportunity to deliver their ideas. In order to improve the incomes of fishing families, it was felt that income generating activities with financial support by the government or NGOs was necessary. Empowerment is a process of acquiring rights, self development and self realization through independent decision making. The word empowerment refers to the process by which people take control and ownership of their choice. According to the United Nations development fund for women; the women empowerment is acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed. The concept of women's empowerment encompasses certain dimensions such as, Economics empowerment Socio-Culture empowerment. Inter Personal empowerment Legal empowerment, Political empowerment and Psychological empowerment.

In Recent scenario, women's empowerment is considering an essential component of International development and poverty reduction. The emergence of women's empowerment as a central concept in development was the result of earlier grassroots movements aimed at empowering women. Grass roots organizing included the formation of Self-Help-Groups. This became the central ground for women's activism and participation and helped to shape the changing development landscape. Several governments and other organizations have intervened to improve the socio-economic conditions of the women in fishing community, to enhance their role in coastal resources management and their participation in governance and policy processes. The SHGs are mainly meant to promote rural development by helping women living in villages achieve economical empowerment. The formation of SHGs is not ultimately a micro credit project but an empowerment of women through SHGs would give benefit not only to the individual women but also for the family and community as a whole through collective action for development. Participation of women in the development process through SHGs approach brings about desired changes in the quality of individual life and also social cohesion in the society.

Participation of self help group enhances social competence and also overall social empowerment. SHGs which were functioning well have the credibility and the power to ensure their participation in identifying planning, Budgeting and in the implementation of panchayat Raj programmes for their village. Leadership training received in the SHGs has also enabled them to participate effectively in local panchayats. The significant number of SHGs women as panchayat

leaders and ward members. In order to improve the socio- economic status of fisher women in our country, the regional and national fisheries development policy makers must to be consider for the implementation of specific programmes. They are formal and non-formal education to fisher women awareness for social and economic upliftment, training programmes for improvement of skills and enterprise development and creation of extension units to be run by women.

Fisheries are a key sector of Indian economy witnessing progressive and drastic changes over the years, both in production and marketing. The goal for women in fisheries is to make them self-reliant and productive for improving their own and family's living standard. Increasing entrepreneurial activities in post harvest segment of fisheries for women may provide more and more employment opportunities. If India's fisheries sector is to be satisfactorily sustained then fisher women empowerment both socially and economically is essential.

The following consideration given for promoting status of fisher women in society such as, a) women groups to be organized and established small scale production enterprises with the credit support of nationalized financial organization, b).Fisher women co-operative societies should be strengthened in every districts, c). Providing skill oriented programmes, d). To strengthened the existing self-help groups in every villages, e).Conducting awareness programmes about their legal rights and both government and non -government development schemes, f). Fisher women should be enlightened about the socio-cultural norms and hinders their economic resources.

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