



The Pattern of Livelihood: A Study of Fishing Community Living Along Wular Lake, Jammu & Kashmir

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The increasing impact of fish and fisheries products on socioeconomic standpoints, in terms of income, employment generation, nutrition value, and many more, benefit the livelihood patterns of many fishing communities in the world. But this is not in the case with the fishing community of the Kashmir valley living along the shores of Wular Lake. This fishing community has always remained differentiated and suffered low esteem in the social hierarchy. This community forms the artisanal/traditional fisheries of the Kashmir valley and supplies the bulk of fish consumed by the native residents. This artisanal fishing community forms a most neglected group and often finds itself outside the mainstream of economic, social, and political activities. This research was carried out to study the present livelihood status of the fishing community of the Kashmir valley. The data was collected from two villages, Zurimanz, in the Bandipora district and Ghat, in the Baramulla district.

Introduction

Livelihood possesses different meanings and can be used in different ways altogether. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, the assets (natural, physical, human, financial, and social capital), the activities and the accesses to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual household (Chambers and Conway, 1992). A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers and Conway, 1992).

Presently, India is facing various kinds of crises, which are directly or indirectly influencing undesirably the livelihood patterns of rural areas, employment sectors, human development indicators, rights of residents, environmental and ecological sustainability. As this paper tracks around the core concept of livelihood, it is important to elaborate, what livelihood is. Different scholars describe livelihood in different ways; Chambers and Conway (1992) define a livelihood as “adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs”. The Oxford Dictionary defines livelihood as “a means of earning money to live” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English, VIIIth Edition). The Dorling Kindersley Oxford Dictionary defines livelihood as “a means of living; sustenance”. Niehof and Price (2001) depict “Livelihood” generation as an entity that encompasses all activities undertaken by people to meet their basic needs and for the “results or outcome of

those activities the term livelihood is used". Livelihood is here conceptualized as going beyond income, not only to include both cash and kind, but also other factors, such as social institutions, gender relations, and property rights (Ellis, 2000). More or less the livelihood encompasses all the assets, resources, institutions, organizations, outcomes, claims, capabilities of a community, society, or a group of people persisting a common niche.

An estimated 93-97 million people were directly involved in fishing, processing, and marketing in small-scale fisheries in the developing world in 2008, 51 million of whom were associated with inland fisheries (BNP 2008). Indian fisheries and aquaculture are an important sector of food production providing nutritional security, besides livelihood support and gainful employment to more than 14 million people, and contributing to agricultural exports. With diverse resources ranging from deep seas to lakes in the mountains and more than 10% of the global biodiversity in terms of fish and shellfish species, the country has shown continuous and sustained increments in fish production since independence. The total fish production during 2017-18 is estimated to be 12.60 million metric tonnes, of which nearly 65% is from the inland sector and about 50% of the total production is from culture fisheries and constitutes about 6.3% of the global fish production (NFDB, 2020).

The Fisheries sector of Jammu and Kashmir occupies an important place in the socio-economic development as it contributes about 16.05 % to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), allied with Agriculture and Forestry, for the year of (2018-19), (J&K ENVIS Centre). Besides being an allied activity with agriculture, fisheries represent an influential segment into the economy and generate a massive spectrum of self-employment. "Fishing is one of the oldest means of subsistence of mankind. Many nations now compete to exploit the virgin areas of the oceans with modern fishing fleets. But, despite modern technology and increasing innovations in the fishing industry, it remains, by and large, in its traditional form even today", (Pramanik, S.K, 1993:1). Fisheries in Kashmir are roughly forked into artisanal and culture-oriented fishing practices. On the whole they form the 'fishing community' of the Kashmir valley, which is natively labelled as *Haanz*. They work together with their common niche of traditional fishing, without any gender disparity to satisfy economic subsistence.

This artisanal fishing community always remained discriminated against and has a low position in the ladder of social hierarchy. This community girdles in the most neglected groups and more often finds itself outside of conventional socio-political and economic activities. Since, in many societies, people indulge in the occupation as a source of income and livelihood, one cannot overlook the fact that the growth of other sectors has deeply challenged the traditional and primary sectors such as fishing. Although, the increase of capitalistic income, has immensely affected the sustainability of the traditional fishing practice.

This paper tries to elaborate the basic livelihood assets, livelihood outcomes, strategies, resources, livelihood institutions, and organizations of the fishing community of the Kashmir valley.

Methodology

Objective: The objective of this study was to assess the livelihood pattern of the fishing community living along the Wular Lake in District Bandipora and Baramulla.

Area of the study: This research was conducted in 'Zurimanz' a village, in the Bandipora district and in 'Ghat' a village in the district Baramulla of Jammu and Kashmir. The livelihood of both villages is directly involved with the traditional fishing practices across Wular lake.

Data Collection Methods: This research started with a survey to get general quantitative data about the villages. Primary data was collected through different anthropological data collection techniques such as observation method, structured and unstructured interviews, focused group discussion, case studies, and genealogical method. A very little amount of secondary data was used, that have been collected from various, books, magazines, journals, online blogs, and various websites (Fig. 1).

Results and Discussion

Livelihood encompasses numerous domains of an individual or a group; hereafter cannot be detailed in a single window. This study divides the livelihood pattern of the fishing community into various sub-themes so that detailed information can be portrayed.

Livelihood backgrounds

Historical

As per many historical and literary sources, initial habitations in the Kashmir valley settled on the fringes of the water bodies, such as Dal Lake, Jhelum river, or Wular lake. Living nearby the water bodies must have benefited the inhabitants in multiple ways. For their livelihood, they preferred the prime niche of fishing, along with some kind of settled agriculture. As time passed, many of them shifted to the mainland and opted for different occupations. But in contradiction to the developing world, these traditional fisherfolk remained bound to their traditional fishing practices and stayed isolated from the rest of the mainstream world. Their social and economic status gradually started mortifying and affecting their life forms.

Cultural

This fishing community of Kashmir valley forms a substantial group of people, living along the riverside banks in *Khannabal* in District Anantnag of South Kashmir, where the river Jhelum flows through Wular lake and goes to *Khadniyarin*, in Baramulla District of North Kashmir. All-over India, fishing is considered a low-grade profession, and it is also the case of this community. Individuals belong to backward families, who are largely illiterate, superstitious, and live in extremely poor economic conditions. They possess various endemic cultural traits, which make them different from the fishers of the Indian subcontinent and form a distinct cultural and ethnic identity.

Infrastructure

These two villages are located at the periphery of their districts, with just a few kilometers from the gap between the two. Road facilities are available, connecting them with the main markets. But due to the surface variation of the lake, roads remain submerged for most of the time. Main town markets are almost 18 km away from the habitual area, making it tough for 80% of the fisherwomen to reach and sell the catch. Residents are provided with gas, electricity, and telecommunication services. There is only one primary school, one high school, four mosques, and some small shops (Fig. 2).

Education

Education is one of the essential factors for the development of any civilization. It is a vehicle, which can bring sustainability, feasibility, and practicability to society. The Education status of this fishing community is not that good. About 7.1 % can read and write, 11.7 % have primary education, 8.6 % have a secondary level of education while as 4.9 and 3.8 have reached graduation and post-graduation respectively. Almost 63 % of individuals approximately are illiterate. In the only Government primary school in the area, there are 5 teachers, with the student engagement of approximately 300. There are more boys than girls attending the schools, because of the stereotype that, girls need to look after the household chores rather than attending schools (Graph. 1).

Health

These inhabitants live almost 20 km away from a district Government hospital and major private clinics. As a result, it becomes hard for the residents to reach the hospital on time in case of any emergency. A New Type Primary Health Centre (NTPHC) has been allotted and the building has been under construction for the last

three years. Common diseases included fevers and colds, dysentery, diarrhoea, and other water-borne diseases presently treated in an unsatisfactory building, which has been hired from a local fisherman. The drinking water facility is provided by the government via pipelines. The individuals are very much aware of family planning, most of the couples understand the importance of using different birth control measures.

Livelihood Resources

Human labour

As per the revenue records, the estimated population of these villages is approximately 1686, out of which 973 are males and 713 are females. A major part of the people, with almost about 73 % are directly involved in fishing, which includes fish catching, fish drying, and fish selling, whereas the second-highest percentage is made of daily wage labours (14%). There were (4%) respondents who were doing Government jobs. The rest were engaged in Carpentry (2%), Masonry (2%) Drivers (1%), and others (4%) which includes bus conductors, salesmen, electricians, barbers, etc. Most of the daily wage labours work in the paddy fields, apple orchids, construction works of the nearby villages (Graph. 2).

Social

Being in a community, creates intangible relations, in the form of social ties, mental ties, and personal relationships. They possess a psychological identity, that bonds the community in unit within a common niche. Most of the time, they go fishing in groups, so that in case of any emergency, they can help each other. In winter times, when the fish catch remains low, they fish jointly. All the individuals together catch fish, with the help of dip nets, and share the catch equally. A good symbiotic relation is found between the market fish retailers and the fishermen families. In hard times, retailers provide all the home essentials to these fisherfolks, and get fish from them in the good fishing seasons. Marriages are mostly done within the community. Trends of divorce and second marriages are found in this community.

Physical

There are approximately 190 families in these villages. Almost 80 % people live close to the shores of Wular lake. About 28 % live in tin-sheds, 48 % live in single-level pucca houses, 14 % in double story pucca houses, and 10 % in kutchra houses. Middle-class individuals possess more than one boat and several nets. Only 28% families have a television set, while about 86% families owned radios and tape recorders. Almost all the families used cell phones. There are about 20 small shops owned by the villagers. Nearly, all the families possess boats, nets, harpoons, and other traditional fishing gear.

Economics

Small-scale fisheries contribute significantly to the local economy and culture and are important for the survival of many coastal fishing communities. More than 90% of all fishers across the globe rely on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods (Chuenpagdee, 2011) however it generates reasonably less income than large-scale fisheries do. The nearest commercial bank is almost 6-7 km away. So, the people often take credits from the local fish traders with a high rate of interest. These local fish traders provide these fisherfolks money, home groceries, medical emergency funds, etc., but in give-and-take get fish from them at low-cost rates. More often, these fisherfolks spend what they earn daily. Only 19 % of the individuals have some kind of savings in banks or other co-operative systems. Many of them have taken loans from the banks to improve their livelihoods, but are now unable to pay them back, leading them to economic crises. This fishing community is following a trend of an occupational shift to withstand with the developing world.

Natural

These villages are located on the shore of the Wular Lake. About Six different varieties of fish are wedged from the lake. Besides fish, cattle foods, chestnuts, lotus roots, etc. are also foraged. About 68 % of these dwellers live on the government land. As these fisherfolk are overexploiting the lake ecosystems, this inimitable resource is under threat, influencing their socio-economic conditions severely.

Health

There are many health issues, which are hampering the capacity of work for these fisherfolks. Working for almost 13 hours a day affects their health recklessly. Waterborne diseases like Cholera, Scabies, Typhoid, Hookworm infection, Ring Worm, or Tinea and other skin related infections are prominently found in these fisherfolks. With fewer security measures in their traditional boats, there is always a high risk of drowning, as tides rise about 4- 5 feet in winds. These fisherfolks hardly care about the minor illness of cough, cold and fevers, and continue their work in such cases.

Livelihood approaches and results

Major risk and coping strategy

The degradation of the lake both biotically and abiotically is the major concern for the villagers. As the lake is changing its topography into a wetland, the risk of floods increases. Oversupply of fish during the good fishing seasons leads to a price drop, which affects economically these fisherfolks. Boat and other fishing gear damages are also key risk factors for the poor fisherfolks. The sickness or death of an earning member of a family can be a major risk.

On-farm and off-farm income

Fishing is the main occupation of this community. These villagers catch fish in almost all the seasons, with the peak season of June- September, which is also facilitated by selling chestnuts. During the season of fish spawning, they shift to off-farm activities including labor working in construction sites, agricultural fields, apple orchards, etc. Some of them take agricultural lands on lease from the neighbouring villagers and work there, to support their livelihood.

Mutual sustenance

There are hardly any conflicts between the individuals, so more often they support each other physically, economically in various functions like house construction or maintenance, marriage, boat making, fishing gear maintenance, etc. The government also provides financial assistance for the construction of houses for those who can fulfil all the multifaceted requirements.

Food Security

These fisherfolks continuously adjust their diets according to their income throughout the year. Most of these fisherfolks are not food secured, as environmental and economic influences are directly proportional to their food safety. Usually, rice is a staple food with pulses, vegetables, and fish. Eggs and meat are consumed twice or thrice a month. Food security has a direct link with poverty, susceptibility, and livelihoods.

Protagonist women

Empowerment is a course of acquiring rights, self-development and self-realization through self-regulating decision making. Thus, when we speak of women empowerment, it means providing social, economic, political, educational rights, so as to give them a status in par with men. The average Indian fishing family today finds it difficult to earn a livelihood throughout the year. Therefore, the vast potential available among the unemployed fisherwomen needs to be tapped, which can be done by making them capable of doing something remunerative on their own. This however requires that the women are motivated, have a degree of awareness, the ability to think critically and take decisions and above all possess a measure of self-esteem. This power has to be acquired, sustained and exercised.

In contrast to the dominating male attitude, at present times the women of this fishing community have an important role to play in terms of market sellers. Along with being engaged from dawn to

dusk in the household chores, these fisherwomen play a significant role in retailing, sorting, chestnut harvesting, weed gathering, child caring, chestnut drying processing and household upholding.

They are setting an example and breaking the stereotypes, refraining from staying at home. With the help of their male counterparts, they are equally responsible and making efforts to empower themselves.

Marketing strategies

Three kinds of markets are available for these fisherfolks to sell their catches, which are: the local village market, town markets, and wholesale markets. All three are important in one or another way. Local village markets encompass the periphery of about 5 km to 7 km of the neighbouring village area, which men visit on their bicycles. So, they can sell their catch as early as possible and save time for further fishing. Town markets are usually visited by women, which covers 15 km to 20 km of the access area. Individuals, who are the only earners in the family, sell their catch directly to the wholesalers in the lake at cheap prices.

Conclusion

From this study, it was found that this fishing community survives on a very deprived state of livelihood. Wular lake is the foremost natural resource for them. Their subsistence is directly influenced by the dynamic relationship with the lake. For the livelihood upliftment of this community, multifaceted approaches are the need of the hour. From food security to health care, economic upliftment to developmental policies, education facilities to infrastructure, etc., all these aspects need special considerations. These fisherfolks should be made aware of sustainable development, through various campaigns, and mass media communication resources. Subsequently, various government organizations and other NGO's should come forward in creating employment opportunities, so that these fisherfolk can earn throughout the year. These fisherfolks are suffering from huge psychological trauma, steep economic decline, plunging social status, adverse health issues, illiteracy, underdeveloped mechanization, and many more.

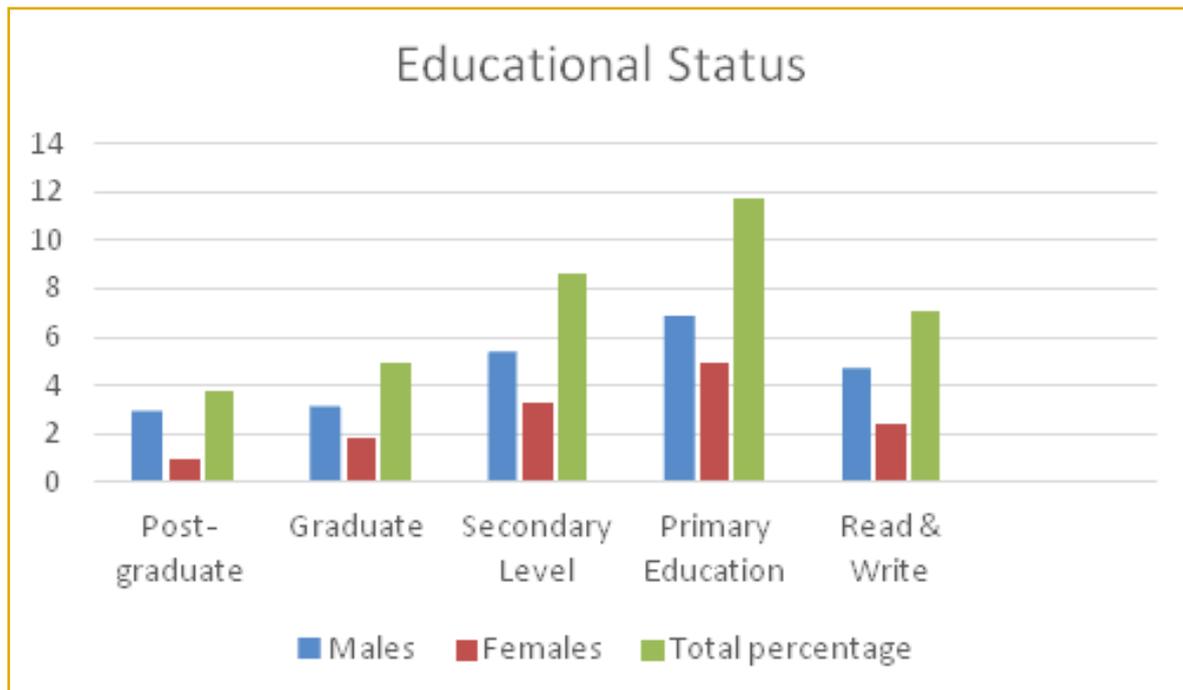
The government should build different fishing colonies, around the lake, which can benefit this community and can get some help in improving their social and economic conditions. There is a need for immediate health care facilities like Primary Health Centres, well-being conveniences like wells, eco-friendly toilets, and approachable roads to fishing villages.

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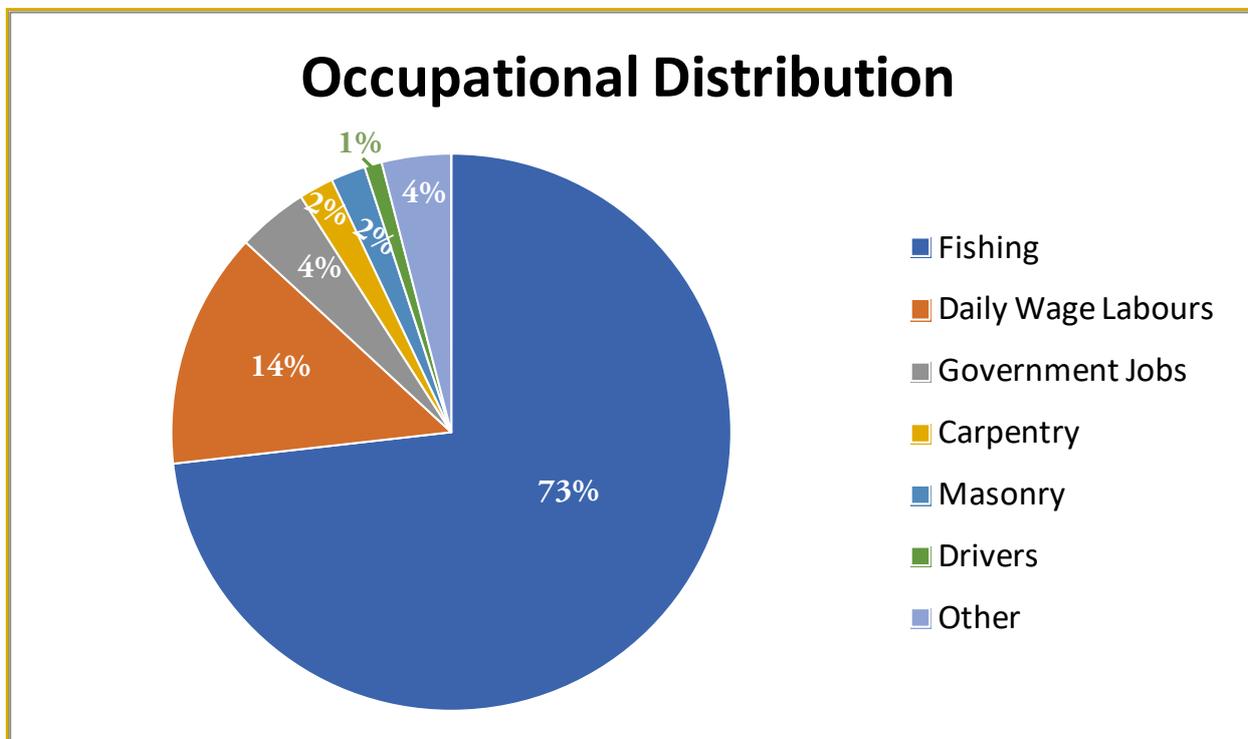
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Graph- 1 - Educational Status.



Graph 2 - Occupational Distribution



Pictures



Figure. 1 - Map of the area (Source: Google maps)



Figure 2 - Road submerged underwater.