

Influence of Social and Economic Problems on the Educational Development of Fishermen Community in Kerala



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Education is regarded not only as one of the most important human basic need but also as a means for meeting other needs. The fishermen as a whole are looked down upon by other communities with contempt and disdain. The main reason of backwardness of fishermen community is their lack of education. It is a conceptual paper which mainly focuses on the social and economic issues associated with the fishermen community in Kerala and describes how it act as barriers to the educational development.

Keywords: Education, Fishermen, Socio economic condition.

1. Introduction

Fishing has been the main occupation of the people of the coastal belt from the time immemorial. The fishing sector is a unique source of animal protein to the population, employment and income for the rural poor and the source of valuable foreign exchange for the country. India has a coastline of over 8000sq km and an exclusive economic zone of over 2 million sq km. Fisheries play a vital role, marine fisheries contribute to the food security and provide direct and indirect employment opportunities.

Kerala is one of the active maritime states in India. With its coast line about 590 km, which is around 10% of India's coastline. Kerala rank second in marine fish production of India, around 1.24 lakh MTs in the year 2010-11 and earned the income of 2002.10 crores. Around 1.85 lakh people are directly involving the marine fishing activity and 5,00,000 people are doing fishing contributing 21% to the total annual production. It makes a significant contribution to the national income through export of marine products. Fishing community is one of the important segments of the state's population, as per the population census 2011, the fisher folk population in Kerala is estimated as 10.02 lakh, covering 7.71 lakh in the coastal area and 2.31 lakh in the Inland sector. Constitutes 3.1 percent of the state total. They are spread out along the coastal belt in over 222 fishing villages in 9 coastal Districts.

More than 800 species of fishes landed along Kerala coast of which 200 are commercially imported. During 2011-12, 5.53 lakh MTs tones of marine fish were landed in Kerala, Kerala export allied activities. The traditional fishers who had no other employment option suffered as a community they continued to lag behind others in the rest of the state in all areas of development (Bindu George, 2011).

A study (2001) on "Educational development of Marine fishing community of Malabar" conducted by MCITRA reveals that dropping out of schools have been the major reason for the educational backwardness of fishing community of Malabar. Dropouts in the elementary schools in some villages were found to be of undesirable standard. With the introduction of District Planning for Educational Programmes (DPEP) and Mid-day meal scheme at schools the situation is improving gradually. The study observes that 75 percent of students from general category reach tenth standard. Whereas in the case of fishing community it is only 40 percent even from this 40 percent only a limited number complete 10th standard successfully. The unsuccessful fails to make further attempts while those who pass hardly opt for higher studies.

2. The Problem and its Significance

Values and ideas of learning and educational system is provided by the vedas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The real emphasis of these works is on acquisition of knowledge, discipline of the mind and the body. However education was exclusively meant for the elite group of the society and the disparity in educational access and opportunities were very conspicuous at that time. Since the commencement of missionary interventions the situation had changed a great deal, the pecking order could be reduced and education spread into the grass root level. Yet still millions of children in rural India go without basic education. The quality of life in Kerala is much higher than the rest of India, despite the fact that the percapita income of the state is far lower than the country as a whole. It was made possible through what is termed as the Kerala model development. A number of economists and social scientists argue that this development model is not the result of any preplanned project or programme (Surendran P., 1998). Rather it was evolved through the life style within the orbit of socio-economic, cultural and political realities prevailed in Kerala. However, the fishing community, which holds more than 3 percent of the state population have more or less consistently lagged behind in accessing the benefits of the Kerala model development process. They were unable

to achieve the least minimum standard of living. In such a situation we need to identify what are the reasons of this backwardness of fishing community of Kerala. The socio economic situation prevailing in the fishing village is the major obstacle to the education of fishermen (Fr.Jose Puthenveedu, 1985).

3. Concept of Education

Several educational books and school of thoughts emphasizes that education is the most powerful instrument for social mobility, equality and empowerment. People who are deprived of educational opportunities have undergone various forms of exploitation and servitude for ages. The absence of adequate education leads a society to more vulnerable and to bondage of poverty and ignorance. Education is a process of developing the human personality in its all dimensions intellectual, physical, social, moral and spiritual. It is perceived as an empowering influence as a way to break all the bondage of poverty and ignorance. It is an excellent tool for bringing about behavioral change in one's life and also a source to earn the means of living to a large majority of people. Education enhances our Competitiveness and self-esteem. It enables us to distinguish right from wrong and brings us to the zenith of civilization.

Education is just as important as the primary basic needs. It enhances one's knowledge, gives one a broader view of the world around us and how things work, reduces the social and economic disparity thus propagating equality and it also raises one's self esteem. Education is regarded not only as one of the most important human basic need but also as a means for meeting other needs and as one of human development and human resource formation. It is also one of the methods of eliminating poverty since it creates independence of thought. This study aims to point out the social and economic issues of fishermen community in Kerala and describes how it can act as a barrier for the educational development. The study is done by collecting various literatures and analyzing it. Data has been collected from various reports from Kerala state planning board, Center for development studies Trivandrum, Fisheries department, through Google search engine.

4. Socio Economic Issues of Fishermen Community for the Development of Education

Fishermen mean the person who engaged mainly in fishing and related activities for their livelihood (Ambili C S,2008). They are very close to nature and element of great risk to life make him as superstitious as he is generous and care free. The greatest asset of fishermen in Kerala is their accumulated Knowledge about the fish, fish habits, waves, currents and stars. They have a tradition of learning by doing, handed over from generation to generation.(John Kurien, 1981). Family background influences mental ability of children through pre-natal and post-natal care, intake of food, and the ability to go through a sustained educational process (Bhagawathi, 1973).

To go to school implies keeping away from fishing. Most of the arts of fishing, particularly with traditional craft and gear, can only be pick up through a process of learning by doing from young age. Consequently schooling on one hand result in putting the out of their traditional occupation (John Kurien, 1981) and also the dropout rate is higher in fisher folk. Mainly because of the reason such as

- Problem of crowding
- Health condition
- The Housing Problem
- Recreational Facilities
- Economic backwardness
- Behavioral issues
- Teacher-Student relationship
- Lack of Finance
- Inadequate facilities for studying
- Lack of parallel attention and encouragement from parents
- Influence of political party
- Mass Media Participation
- The high rate of unemployment among the educated children of fishermen have a negative influence on educational development (John Kurien, 1981)

a. Problem of Crowding

One of the paramount reason for the poor quality of life and substandard conditions of habitat of marine fishing community of the state is crowding of the whole community on a narrow strip of the coastline. As a result, there are 222 fishing villages in 590 km, and none of these villages is more than half km wide from the sea front. In some districts like Trivandrum and Quilon they are hardly half km wide. This is the one of the reason for during monsoon the sea may take away land and houses of fishermen. The life is always in the doldrums (Dhanuraj D, 2004).That makes an unsuitable environment for studies.

b. Health Condition

A study of health status of Kerala state(Panikar& soman,2003)highlight that respiratory and skin infections, diarrheal disorders and hook worm infestations are much more in the coastal area of the state. This is due to overcrowding, lack of facilities for disposal of wastage, Scarcity of drinking water- naturally providing an ideal breeding ground for these

infections and disorders. Another important problem is related with their health problem is lack of sufficient amenities and Hygienic issues. This will leads to regular absenteeism in classes and situation for studying.

c. The Housing Problem

One main impact of crowding is reflected in the land holding pattern. Most of the fishermen does not have their own homestead plot. They are living on Purampoke(Land owned by Government) without any little deed. Inadequate housing condition is the main Killer of Education of Their children, diseases. All their earnings and precious health are consumed by ill health and they reduced to utter poverty and socio economic paralysis (Fr. Jose Puthenveed,(1985)

d. Recreational Facilities

In most of the fishermen villages, there is no convenience for relaxation and fun. Many fishermen waste their time in playing cards, gambling, or drinks which consume their earnings and health (Fr.Jose Puthenveed,1985).That is adversely affect the children and youth.

e. Economic Backwardness

The lion's share of income is spent by the fishermen for earning their bread. He spend a little for his housing, dress, education and recreation. A big portion of amount goes for medical facilities. The chronic alcoholic addiction among the vast majority of the fisher folk and related issues are the another contributive factor for their educational backwardness of fisher folk of kerala (Fr.Jose Puthenveed,1985).

f. Inadequate Facilities for Studying

The teachers from non-fisheries sector are generally reluctant to work in coastal schools and when it happens, they do their duty half-heartedly. Insufficient teaching staff, frequent transfer in a short span of time and high absenteeism adversely affects the performance of students.

g. Lack of Parallel Attention and Encouragement from Parents

There is a popular saying that a child on the farm or field is more productive and valuable than a child at school. This possibility has often attributed as one of the strong reasons for fishing community children being kept away from schools. Many parents in this sector do have an attitude that school education is nonproductive and continuing with the traditional occupation is the better option. Often parents pursue their children for gainful employment, very early, in order to make additional income to the family. Though some of them do have interest in sending their children to schools and even for higher studies, they fails to provide children required motivation out of their poor educational back ground, inadequate and unhealthy family and cultural milieu.(Dr .Thomas S.J,2002)

h. Influence of Political Party

In the current political set up, the voice of the community is not heard in the policy-making bodies and legislation for lack of their own representations into these forums, even though they are considered as vote banks. The fishing community is left behind in the cast-driven party political scenario of the state wherein all dominant religious and caste groups exert pressure to their advantage in the ruling system. Although the fishing community population constitutes 3.1 percent of the state total, they have no representation in the State Legislative Assembly. Another noteworthy feature of the state economy is that with each change in government, the development schemes and plans adopted by the earlier is discarded by the later. This is fundamentally since there is no consensus between the ruling and opposition on development model and schemes. This results in discontinuity and fragmentation in development (mcitra-2002).

i. Behavioral Issues

The fishermen always had very low status in our Indian society. They have been categorized as a lower caste. As a community they have been isolated and unorganized. There associations are of communal nature that is, his interactions are almost with same type of people with similar experience, ideas and culture. They hesitate to mingle freely with the people of other communities and trades (John Kurian, 1981).

j. Teacher-Student Relationship

The most significant variable relating to the extent dropout of students is the teacher – student relationship. The more interactions between teachers and students less would be the extent of dropouts. The main reason could be attributed to massive drop out of the students from coastal area was the lack of teacher - student relationship. The students overall found teachers unapproachable and not able to share their doubts and problems with them. As a result the student began to keep aloof from the teacher and decline involvement in the subject taught by them, leading to regular absenteeism and eventually to the dropout. Further, when the students reach adolescence ie., during high school classes, student - teacher relationship become strained since they begin to observe critically the mannerisms and attitudes of teachers. They are able to judge the performance of their teachers. When the teachers do not raise up to their expectation these adolescence get disillusioned and eventually dropout. Taking cue from the fact that it is the male students who are the majority

dropouts, the rebelliousness of adolescence towards critical evaluation could be perceived. Similarly, since almost all teachers are from non-fishing community they seem to have reluctance to work in coastal schools and when that happens they do not show much interest to understand the community and cultural specificity of the students. However, there are exceptions to this general rule (mcitra-2002)

k. Mass Media Participation

Most of the fishing villages of Kerala there are insufficient number of public libraries and reading rooms. With lesser income it would also be difficult for them to subscribe their own newspapers and other magazines. This shows that initiatives need to be made for public access and also continued educational/adult literacy programmes among fisher folk (mcitra-2002).

l. The high rate of Unemployment among the Educated Children

The high rate of unemployment among the educated children of fishermen has a negative influence on educational development (John Kurien, 1981). Parent's position in the hierarchy of relations is an important aspect of socio-economic background. It develops in children's personality traits corresponding to particular class cultures. It is again reinforced in the secondary socialization institutions, i.e., school (Kohn, 1969; Bowels, 1972). These personality traits play a major role in determining one's success in gaining higher incomes.

Kerala's achievements in the educational scenario are far famed. In this respect the state is often compared not only with other Indian states but also among some of the developed countries. Kerala had achieved near total literacy, free and universal elementary education, low dropout rate at the school level, easy access to educational institutions etc.. However, the situation in coastal area reveals that the fishing community has been kept away from this educational development. This inaccessibility to educational process has been instrumental in bringing them to the abysmal of poverty and to the bottom end of social structure (mcitra-2002).

5. Conclusion

The introduction of technology and the effect of globalization have alienated the poor, illiterate and, unskilled from the fisheries sector. . While the modern society has progressed into the digital age, the fishing community is still striving to tackle basic literacy. It is a fact that the traditional artisans are under threat of expulsion from this sector and even the current basic education would be insufficient for their future survival. Education is a key aspect of human development with important benefits for people's livelihoods and capabilities, influencing their ability to access information and resources and to manage change. This growth was made possible through high awareness on parents and children's and remedial measures taken by the state.

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