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Gender Issues and Challenges of Fisherwomen to Become an Entrepreneur in Kerala

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Abstract

In fishermen family in Kerala, the male fishermen are actively involved with fishing activities. But due to the uncertainties prevailing in the fishing sector there is no guaranteed income of them. The responsibility of household management-food, childcare, children's education, family health, sanitation, financial management and the responsibility of getting and repaying debts will be mostly on the women's shoulders. Fisherwomen from fishermen community, who try to enter an industry facing various problems, after mechanization the intensification of multi-day fishing, the household responsibility of fisher women has increased to a greater extent. The women fisher folk of the fishing sector in the real force behind the fisher folk to cater the domestic needs. The geographical focus of the study is Kerala. The study is an attempt to document the issues and difficulties that are addressed by fisherwomen in the context of entrepreneurship. This conceptual study aims to describe the problems faced by the women entrepreneurs in the fishermen community and describe the role of education for the empowerment of them.

Keywords: Fishermen Community, Fisherwomen, Entrepreneurship, Education

Introduction

Fishing is the main occupation of people from the coastal belt from time immemorial. Before the introduction of agriculture, fishing and hunting were the sources to satisfy their need of sustenance, even after agriculture becomes the main nourishment for human, resources from forest and sea supplements his daily requirements. When the traditional hunting become lesser and is replaced by modern animal husbandry, fishing becomes more accepted as the best way for getting protein rich food (Fenando 1981). In addition to serving as food, fishing satisfies a wide range of human wants and needs, both physical and spiritual. The capture, preparation, and consumption of food have so many social aspects. We cannot imagine a worthwhile human society that does not include such cultural enrichment (Kirkegaard 1999). The fishing sector is an inimitable source of animal protein to the people. It can act as a major source of income and generate lots of employment opportunities for rural poor as well as it helps to meet the daily requirements of food. It was provided as cheap and caloric item in the food menu (Dhanuraj 2004).

Fisheries Sector Indian Scenario

The fishing sector is a unique source of animal protein to the population, employment and source of income for the rural poor people and source of foreign exchange for the country

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(George 2011). India has a coastline of over 8000 km, and an exclusive economic zone of over 2 million sq km, fisheries play a vital role. The fisheries sector plays a vital role in the economy of India. This sector provides employment to over 5 million fishers and fish farmers. Majority of them are living in over 6300 coastal villages besides fishers' hamlets along major river basins and reservoirs in the country (Sreeranganadhan 2012).

After that fish production in India is coming through a revolutionary growth since 1950, the total fish production was increased from 534000 ton to 3375000 ton, in 2013. There has been steady growth in the export of fish and fish products over the period. During 2013-2014 the volume of fish and fish products exported was 9, 83,756 tonne worth Rs. 30213.26 crores (Handbook on Fisheries Statistics 2014).

Kerala Scenario

The fisheries sector plays a vital role in Indian economy in general and Kerala economy in particular. This sector provides employment and income to more than 5 million fishers (Najmudeen & Sathiadhas 2007). Majority of them are living in coastal areas. In Kerala the total geographical area comes around 38, 863 sq.km. The total coastline is 590 k. m s. The entire coastline is divided in to 222 fishing villages. The total number fishermen population is 8, 55, 828 in which 3, 35, 271 male and 3, 00, 305 female. Children's number is 2, 20,252. The density of population in the coastal area is 2168 persons per sq. Km (Economic Review 2014).

The more direct involvement of women from fishing community are in fish processing and marketing related activities like peeling, curing, trading, export oriented works, making value - added products, fish drying, small scale entrepreneurship, shell collection etc. The involvement of women in these activities generates additional income for their families and it is very much essential for their family to sustain. But the earnings of women are less as compared to men as they are equally efficient as men. Less wage rate for women is a common phenomenon in every field. One can achieve the overall progress only through their social and economic progress. Fisher women comprises about half of the overall population of fishermen community, their role in development is very much important. But now it is not significant because of lack of empowerment.

Role of Fisher Women in Their Families

In fishermen family, the male fishermen are actively involved with fishing activities. But due to the uncertainties prevailing in the fishing sector there is no guaranteed income of them. The responsibility of household management-food, childcare, children's education, family health, sanitation, financial management and the responsibility of getting and repaying debts will be mostly on the women's shoulders. The burden of her responsibilities doubles in the off-season (Sreeranganadhan 2012). After mechanization the intensification of multi-day fishing, the household responsibility of fisher women has increased to a greater extent. Actually the women fisher folk of the fishing sector in the real force behind the fisher folk to cater the domestic needs.

Review of Literature

John (1989) observes that, 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. Their 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

As Ashaletha et al. (1998), the course of changes in the role of fisherwomen has traversed during the major phases of technological transformation in household management as well as pre and post-harvest activities in the fisheries sector of the state. The indirect role women play are concerning decision making, financial management, family welfare, net making, running petty shops and mobile food supply for the workers at the landing centres and fish markets.

As Orhan (1999), women entrepreneurs often feel that they are victims of discrimination. This statement was also emphasized by who found that one of the most interesting issues with regard to women entrepreneurship is the different ways women are discriminated against in concealed ways.

As Sathiadas (2009), constraints faced by the women in the post-harvest Fisheries is Seasonal availability of raw material, uncertainties of catch, High perishability, Intense competition from men, Lack of cold storage facility at markets, Low income, Lack of transportation facilities for women, Inadequate facilities for women at markets and landing center, Have to support families, No alternate income source, Exploitation by middle man, Long working hours High indebtedness and poor credit facilities.

Statement of the Problem

Fishermen community in Kerala is a marginalized group in the socio political life of Kerala. Poverty is the synonym for fishery sector. The other society of Kerala is always trying to sideline the fishermen community. Major political parties are considered the fishermen as a strong vote bank. Religious leaders especially the Christian dominated churches are also not an exception to this general rule. High exploitation of fishermen by merchant middlemen is another reason for their economic backwardness. Most of these middlemen have high political connection. Their decision about the price of the catch is the final.

After 1960, the mechanization of the fishing crafts becomes popular and common. The fisher sector attracted the entrepreneurs who are from outside the fishermen community also have enough capital to invest. Another impact of mechanization is in the drastic reduction in the human resource in this sector and loss of job to a significant number of fishermen. Most of these jobs losses haven't any skill for doing jobs other than fishing and many of them were indulged in playing cards and consuming liquor and other alcoholic products.

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Significance of the Study

Due to the irresponsible behavior of the fishermen, who is the head of the family, most of the fishermen families were under Sevier poverty. In order to save the family including the head from starvation fishermen women folks were compelled to do the jobs which are closely related to fishing or related activities. Traditionally women used to get their fish for sale from the catch brought by their husbands or relatives. Their area of disposal of fish was within radius of 10 k ms they are used to walk with the head load of fish and sell it door by door.

But today the situation is different. They have to travel miles and miles for gathering fish: Get up very early in the morning; rushing through one catch center to another for the collection of fish. By doing the retail sale of fish and fish products from house to house they are carrying a major income by which they are looking after the whole family.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the problems faced by the fisherwomen entrepreneurs in Kerala
2. Describe the need of Education for the empowerment of Fisherwomen.

Methodology

The study is a descriptive one. The data for the study were collected from Secondary sources of information such as journals, Magazines, Newspapers, Fisheries Department, web sites, Newsletters and reports from fisheries and from Government of Kerala the study also utilize the data obtained from the discussions with experts in the area.

Findings and Discussion

Entrepreneurship is the capacity and willingness to develop, organize, manage and control a business venture, they may make profit along with risks and It creates incremental wealth and suffering the major risks in terms of capital, time, operational cost and labor for providing value for some product or service (Ulomi 2003).

Fisherwomen in Kerala particularly involved in fish processing and marketing. However, they have to face various challenges than a normal women entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship education and training gives a good motivation and encouragement to them, there by women's social and economic role could be considerably enhanced. A few problems have been identified in the course of the study which has been listed here.

1. Lack of Education and Awareness

Education level of the entrepreneur and the knowledge of technological changes in the industry are significant factors that are affecting a business very much. Fishing community is traditionally lacking the culture of education, and they have been kept away from the general educational milieu (John 1989). According to fishermen community education is not felt as compulsory since children could be employed in fishing and fish related jobs from their childhood itself. That helps them to satisfying the financial needs of their family. This perception towards education of fisher folk adversely effect in the overall educational development. . The communication with the children and parents are considered as a peer

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ground for social wellbeing. In the coastal area the communication status of children with family members seems very low. Many children have the same complaint of their parents have no time to listen them, and they were always engaged in work and work related activities. The overall status 50 percentage children seems to be low in the coastal area and the status male children is higher than the female children (Nazy 2007)

2. Social and Economic Issues

In a traditional fisher's society, women's social status is often referred with respect to that of her husband. When a women from fishing community went for a job it will be counted as the inability of her husband to support family. Because of this reason the women usually do not enjoy the freedom to go for some work or starts a business or interact with agents, customers especially when they are males (John 1981). Women from fishermen community usually engaged in the sub category works or performing supportive roles to men. Their presence is lagging from the main stream of works. At landing centers women engaged in fish drying, collection of shells, peelers collect small size or low value fishes etc. Even in the market they are selling the low value products in the remote corners of the markets. In Kerala the number of women wholesalers from fisher folk is very few because of the reason that they are women (Ashaletha et al. 1998).

3. Financial Problems

The bankers consider women loonies as higher risky than men loonies, and that risk is doubled when women are from fishing community. Normally fisherwomen preferred house-based ventures, but they are unable to find an apt financial resource for working capital. Majority of women entrepreneurs does not have any tangible assets because majority build their houses in purampokes or the land owned by Government, that help the financial institutions to reject their applications (Jose 1985). Fishermen are requires diverse credit needs and the banks are reluctant to cater to these increasing credit needs of them. The too-formal administrative procedures for obtaining loans also make it inaccessible for fisherwomen entrepreneurs and with series formalities and procedures coupled with lack of basic education and awareness makes the fisher folks to become shy to approach these institutions (Ashaletha et al. 1998).

At the same time the chit agents/ money lenders collect the money personally and all the transactions can be done only through oral communication, at the same time, none of the financial institutions under the government sector have this much flexibility in their operations. As a result they land in the debt trap of the informal credit system comprising moneylenders, financiers, chit funds and borrowings from friends and relatives (John 1989). They were utilizing the unawareness and low level education of fisher folks. The middle financiers thus become the shylocks exploiting the indebted fishermen forcing them even sell their house, crafts, gears and other belongings and they have to pay extra ordinary interest for these loans (Sherry 2003).

4. Family Problems of Fisherwomen

In India, especially in Kerala the women give more emphasis for family and relationships. If a women from a family doing job or run a business she has to make a fine balance between business and home, at the same time, the business success depends on the support of the family members. In a fishermen family, the male fishermen are actively involved in fishing activities but to the uncertainties prevailing in the fishing sector there is no guaranteed about the income (Sreeranganadhan 2012). Majority of them spend more time in sea itself. Then responsibility of household management-food, childcare, children's education, family health, sanitation, financial management and the responsibility of getting and repaying debts will be mostly on the women's shoulders and the burden of her responsibilities doubles in the off-season (Sherry 2003).

5. Lack of Managerial Skills and Behavioral Issues

The fishermen always had very low status in our Indian society. They are living as an isolated section of the society and have been categorized as a lower caste (John 1989). Their associations are with in this community. Their interactions are almost with the people from fishermen community with similar ideas as and culture (John 1981). They are reluctant to mingle freely with the people from other communities and trades that leads to lack of motivation for change. And the majority of fisher women work in the marketing and processing fields. Marketing requires the mobility and confidence in dealing with the external world. Now a day's the intermediaries or the middlemen take the major share of profit (Ashaletha et al. 1998).

Empowerment of Fisherwomen through Education

Women from fishermen community who try to enter an industry, either in managerial or in entrepreneurial role are generally facing various constraints. To Start and operate a business involves considerable risk and effort on the part of the entrepreneur. For the success they definitely needs education. Education level of the entrepreneur and the knowledge of technological changes in the industry are significant factors that are affecting a business very much. Because of the rare in success stories of women entrepreneurs, they didn't have any role models in their path (Ashaletha et al. 1998). So for success they definitely need motivation and training.

They require education and training for different areas of management and production. Because of the special character of the fisher women community, training approach is the best suitable approach for women entrepreneurs to build enough confidence among them to meet their own specific needs and find solutions for their own unique problems. To become a successful entrepreneur they needs a basic grounding in planning, organizing, leading, controlling. It can be given through formal or informal education. Through such a development strategy they definitely become the driving force behind the fight against poverty.

Conclusion

Economic and social uplift of the weaker section of the society is the one of the prime objective of India. The pathetic situation of life of traditional fishermen community in Kerala demands top priority in policy formulation. Fishermen constituting about 3.36 percentage of the total population, and women is around half of that population. Their lack of awareness and low level education are one of the major obstacles for their development. They need continuous motivation and encouragement for development. That helps their socio economic development. The proper education and training definitely motivates them to start the entrepreneurial activities among them. The Entrepreneurship among women, no doubt, improves the wealth of the family and nation. The women empowerment among the women fisher folk is the need of the day.

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