**Chapter III: Women in traditional Maritime fishing economy**

**Gender among Fishing societies- world wide**

**:: Women in India::**

In ancient India there was a great deal of social diversity and hardly any organized political or religious machinery to universally implement the religious laws. The Indian subcontinent was hardly under a single administration in its long history. The best way to judge the state of nation is to study the status of the women in that nation. The status of women represents the standard of culture of any age. The status of women in India has been fluctuating. It has gone through several changes during various historical stages. Historically speaking, women in India have passed through two phases of their life – the period of subjugation and the period of liberation. At times she has been suppressed and oppressed and at times she is regarded as the deity of the home. From the Vedic age till today, her status and position has been changing with the passing of time. The social status of the women of a country symbolizes the social spirit of the age. However to draw a conclusion about the position of women is a difficult and complicated problem. It is therefore, necessary to study this position in the historical perspective. In the course of Indian history from prehistoric to modem times, there were distinct stages of the rise and fall in the status and role of women.

To have a look at the status of women in India, and to have a historical over-view of events and situations leading to the varied shifts and value scales of the Indian female, and for the purpose of depicting a brief history of the changing position and role of women in India, the history is broadly categorized as Vedic Period (2500 B.C. to 500 B.C.. in which 2500 BC to 1500 BC is considered as Vedic Period and 1500 BC to 500 BC is considered as Post Vedic Period), 500 BC to 500 AD Smriti Period, 500 AD to 1800 AD Foreign Rulers or Muslim Period then British Period up to independence.

**Women in Vedic Period in India:**

Starting with the Vedic Period, which begins with the Rig Vedic Period around 2500 BC. As there is no proper historical evidence of the human activities in India till about 300 B.C., we have to depend on the Vedic literature as a valid document of Indian social, political and religious history. The Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society and they enjoyed almost equal rights like men. Though the early Vedic family was of the patriarchal type, women had some control over the entire household. The Rig Veda reveals a stage where women enjoyed equal status with men. Their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many women Rishis during this period. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. Child marriage was common and widow should live in austerity. Widows are allowed to remarry. These references are available from the works of Grammarians such as Katyayana and Patanjali. Women also had the freedom to select their husbands. This system was known as ‘Swayamvaram.’ Women enjoyed full freedom and were treated as Ardhanginis, but women had unhappy married life because polygamy was prevalent during that period. Patriarchy never denied women their rights and privileges.

Some verses in Rig Veda are written by women. Upanayana ceremony was performed for women also and consequently they were sent to gurukul like man. But latter this ceremony was performed only to men and they were not allowed to attend gurukul therefore education was denied to them. In Vedic society participation of wives was required in many rituals. It was thought that a widow had to perform a ‘symbolic’ self-immolation at the death of her husband. That the ritual was symbolic in the early period seems evident from the re-marriage of widow, generally to the husband’s brother. A widow was expected to live in austerity, but if of the Kshatriya caste should preferably immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband especially if he had died a hero’s death. This would make her ‘Sati’. Later from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women’s position. Decidedly, during Vedic period, the women could fight back with violence as in Mahabharata or with non-violence as Sita did in the Ramayana.

**Post Vedic Period Women in India:**

After the Vedic period there were remarkable changes in the women's status due to various reasons, among which the most important was the denial of education. Traces of deterioration are found in all periods following 1500 BC, but it became much more marked after the beginning of the Christian era and reached its peak after the Mongol invasion in the tenth century.'' With the lapse of time the position of the daughter also changed. During this period there was a gradual decline in women's education. Girls were not allowed to go to the houses of the preceptor or centre’s of education but was taught only by near relatives like father, brother or the uncle. Therefore, only the girls of rich and cultured families received religious and other training. As a result, there appeared a tendency to curtail the religious rights and privileges of women in general. The desire to get a son to secure future became quite intense and daughters came to be looked upon as encumbrances. They had some voice in the selection of their life partners. The social and family status of the daughter deteriorated in the post Vedic period. Her proprietary right was also the same as it was in the Vedic age. So far as her right in the separate property of the father was concerned, she was not altogether ignored.

Alexander's invasion of India in 326 B.C. was an important factor that affected the Aryan Vedic society. The Greeks who came to India along with Alexander were mainly soldiers. They did not give much importance to high ideals like chastity of women. Due to this the custodians of Hindu religion began to enforce strict moral laws on their followers. They wanted to preserve their Aryan culture by codifying certain rules for the members of their community. This system of law was mainly based on the concept of Dharma which constitutes the privileges, duties and obligations of a Hindu.

Great changes occurred in the Aryan way of life between 500 B.C. and 600 B.C. In the post-Rig Vedic age there was a reaction against rituals. We get an idea of the post-Vedic society from the Brahmanas, Upanishads and the great epics.

The world of Indian woman became much more restricted. In the time of the Smrithi writers, during the time of Kautilya, she began to be treated as a chattel. She had no separate identity of her own. The scriptures as well as the Dharma Sastras favoured the patriarchal system, which marginalized the role of Indian woman. Nothing but implicit obedience or subordination was expected from her. This culminated finally in the seclusion of women. The freedom that she enjoyed during the Rig Vedic age, was gradually taken away from her. By 200 B.C. pre-pubescent marriages became the order of the day. The general belief was that if women were given freedom, they would transgress the limits. The Smriti writers like Kautilya, Manu and Yajnavalkya began to favour seclusion of women.

The social customs and traditions which were reinforced by the law-givers in Smritis and Dharmasastras degraded women. There was no sense of equality or justice in these laws. That women had no recognized place in society was revealed in the laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, property rights and right of inheritance. A thorough discrimination is shown by these Hindu law-givers. The patriarchal family became very powerful during this period and it began to restrict the activities of women. Her position in the family as well as in society became very low. There arose a tendency to picture woman as a weak-minded individual who is prone to all infirmities. Another idea which became popular during this period is that a woman needs protection and disciplining throughout her life. Upper caste ladies had to accept the purdah. During this period men were polygamous and widow burning was an accepted norm. Arthashastra imposed more stigmas on women as Kautilya dismissed women’s liberation and they were not free even to go elsewhere without husband’s permission. They became worse off in the Gupta period. The Smritishastras abused them; Manu dictated a woman would be dependent on her father in childhood, on her husband in youth and on her sob in old age. Apart from child marriage and sati, prostitution and devadasi system became widespread.

Many evil social practices, like the practice of pre-puberty marriages, denial of right of women to education and also to mate selection etc were imposed on women during the periods of Brahmans and Puranas. In the Buddhist period, the position of women improved to some extent. In the religious field, women came to occupy a distinctly superior place. They had their own Sangha called Bhikshuni ‘Sangha’, which provided avenues of cultural activities and social services. They got ample opportunities in public life. However, their economic status remained unchanged.

According to ancient texts and tradition, until about 500 B.C. women in India enjoyed a considerable freedom. But during the next thousand years, women’s position gradually deteriorated. Educational and religious parity was denied to them and widow remarriage was forbidden.

In fact, the status of women started degenerating in the post-Vedic age because of the conception of purity and pollution and restrictions of inter-caste marriages. Child marriage had started in the Smriti age. During this period, a woman’s husband was regarded as God. During the middle ages, the position of women in Hindu society further degenerated. A number of problems arose for Hindu women in the Mughal period. From this period till the middle of the eighteenth century, when the British rule was established in the country the breakdown of social institutions, the vast migration of people and the economic depression in the country contributed to a general decline of social life, particularly among women. The ‘Purdah’ system was followed which resulted in seclusion of women. Education of women in whatever form came to be stopped. Child marriage was started. During this period the inhuman practice of ‘Sati Pratha was in vogue. Purdah Pratha, Sati Pratha, child marriage, girl killing, polygamy etc. were the main social evils of this period. The reasons that are responsible for the deterioration of the status of women in India were: (1) patriarchal joint family system (2) polygamy (3) Sati system (4) Forced widowhood i.e. denial of the right to remarry after widowhood (5) denial of the right to divorce (6) child marriage and (7) the purdah system.

Due to the principles of democracy based on liberty, the role of a woman began to change towards greater emancipation from man's domination. In India, due to efforts of social reformers and social legislations, women were brought out of the confines of their home. The process of industrialization and urbanization had their share in the changes which followed. It was the twentieth century that brought about dynamic changes and new concepts which improved the status of women giving them fresh dignity and importance.

**Women in India Now :**

India is one of the few countries where women enjoy a comparatively better status than many women in other parts of the world. Indian women still face many problems and are subject to the same social pressures which women experience in other parts of the world. On the positive side, women have made rapid strides in every aspect of modern life. Undoubtedly, women of today’s India enjoy a better status and freedom than women in the past. On the negative side, Indian women suffer from many disabilities and social injustices. This is same for all Indian women, to whatever religion they may belong, except where their status, roles and responsibilities are directly influenced by religious beliefs such as marriage and inheritance. It is more acute among women who belong to economically or socially backward communities, and women who are uneducated or solely depend upon their men for survival and sustenance.

Indian women of today are not afraid of voicing their opinions or joining forces with other women in the local communities to fight against social maladies, drugs, alcoholism, domestic abuse and injustice. They now have opportunities to take bold decisions or lead unorthodox lives, which might have made them vulnerable to social ridicule and family pressures few decades ago.

It is difficult to generalize the situation of India women in India due to the heterogeneous nature of Indian society. Indian women belong to different social and economic strata. What is true in case of a particular group may not be true in case of others. So much has been happening in Indian society as of late that it is difficult to make objective conclusions about their status and general conditions without attracting criticism or an opposite response. Such diversity and the sheer size of their population and age groups give wide scope for distortions and misinterpretation. It also leads to exploitative politics and false narratives.

It is true that some of the ancient scriptures of Hinduism were very partial to women and treated them with disdain, but we have no evidence to suggest that all people followed them or abided by them, considering that Indian society was heterogeneous even then, as it is now, and consisted of diverse ethnic, linguistic and regional groups.

Religion was then, as it is now, mostly a matter of personal choice. The law books of Hinduism had a little impact on the day to day lives of most people. They enforced the Hindu laws only if they patronized the Vedic faith in the areas that were directly under their control. It is therefore incorrect to base our conclusions about the status of women in ancient India exclusively according to scriptural injunctions.

We also know that they enjoyed freedom according to their social and economic status and the faith they practiced. Women excelled in arts and crafts and often engaged in wars as soldiers. Chandragupta Maurya employed women as his personal guards. Women gave counsel to their husbands and stood with them in times of crises. In some communities, children inherited their mothers’ names rather than their fathers’. Many women entered the folklore as goddesses for their exceptional lives or sacrifices.

The problems of Hindu women are not peculiar to Indian women. They are the problems which are common to most women in the world, irrespective of their religions, social backgrounds, and nationalities.

The Vedas suggest that a woman's primary duty is to help her husband in performing obligatory duties and enable him to continue his family tradition. Her primary duty is to give birth to his children and take care of them.

Like all the major religions of the world, Hinduism is a predominantly male dominated religion. Women play a secondary role. True in certain ages, such as the Gupta period, women enjoyed freedom and held administrative posts. They also acted as teachers and participated in debates and pubic discussions. However, such privileges were limited to socially well-placed families. It is also true that the norms of conduct were stricter in case of higher caste women and male domination increased in proportion to their caste status. Generally speaking, the Vedas placed comparatively greater duties and responsibilities upon men and exhorted women to help their men in performing such duties. Any respect that women enjoyed in society was as daughters, mothers and wives. It meant that once their husbands passed away, women lost their status in family and suffered from many disabilities.

This is evident from the division of duties prescribed by the scriptures between a man and a woman. A husband has wider obligatory duties than his wife. In fact, the Vedic ceremonies and sacrifices revolve around men. They are performed by men for men. If women are involved, it is usually for conception or procreation where again the emphasis is upon male children. Women cannot officiate in any Vedic ceremony. They may perform domestic rituals such as puja or perform austerities, but the host of a sacrifice is always a male member.

On the brighter side, Hindus worship many female deities, as aspects of Mother Goddess and consorts of male gods. The law books prohibit men from harassing or neglecting women in thief households. It is man's obligatory duty to protect his wife and take care of her until the end. He is not expected to abandon her, since she is a gift from gods under a pledge, except where there was sufficient justification such as mental illness, inability to bear children and adultery. Similarly, he has an obligation to take care of his aged mother or his dependent daughter.Women are considered aspects of Nature or embodiment of Universal Mother, Shakti, in her aspect as pure energy (shaktiswarupini). She is extolled as mata, the Mother Goddess, or devi the auspicious one.

On the other hand, as per tradition, a woman has limited freedom. She is a dependent entity, in a household dominated by male members. As a young child, she lives under the protection of her father or guardians. As a wife she lives under the protection of her husband and acts as his partner, advisor and helper. As a mother she nurtures her children and shapes their destiny. Women like Sita, Satyavati, Draupadi, Ganga, Kunti, Shakuntala, Menaka, Amba, Anasuya, Damayanti, played an important role in exemplifying the ideal conduct of women in private and in public. They also exemplify the hardships faced by women in ancient times. Even, Sita, an incarnation of goddess Lakshmi, the queen of Rama, had to bear the brunt of gender discrimination and public ire. Tradition recommends four prominent roles for a married Hindu woman: that of a servant (dasi), that of an advisor or counselor (mantri), that of a mother (mata) and that of a lover (rambha).

In some communities in the past, upon the death of their husbands women performed sati and self-immolated themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands. This practice is currently banned. Others, who lost their husbands, lived in seclusion or under the care of their sons or close relations. In either case, the life of a widow was a life of severe hardship. The hardships and suffering increased proportionately in case of younger widows. Premature death of a man was attributed to his wife. If a man died early, his close relations pointed their fingers at his wife for bringing misfortune upon the family.

**Social Issues**:

Historically, the status of women in India was ambiguous. In theory, she had many privileges and enjoyed an exalted status as an aspect of goddess. But in practice, most women led miserable lives as servants to their husbands. In the past, until the independence, Hindu men had the freedom to marry more than one wife or keep mistresses.  The law books are unabashedly male-centric. They do suggest that women should not be harassed and the homes in which women suffered would be without peace and happiness. In the same vein, they prescribe many restrictive conditions for women and curtail their freedom.

A modern Hindu woman would feel enraged, rightly so, if she goes through the contents of the Manusmriti, which is particularly discriminatory and harsh against women. It is true that the law books were not followed by many castes and their enforcement was limited by the authority and influences the kings and local rulers enjoyed. In general, Hindu women from the lower castes enjoyed much greater freedom than the women in the households of higher castes. Many girls were married off at an early age to relatively older men and the life of such women when they reached puberty was full of hardship.

The situation is gradually changing. It is difficult to draw generalizations about the status of present day Hindu women because the society is complex. In general, life in cities is much different from life in the rural areas. Those who live abroad live in different conditions than those who live in the country. Yet, we have ample indications that women are still subject to many restrictions and disabilities in rural areas as well as urban areas. The financial independence of women and the education levels of the family play an important role in this regard.Women in urban areas face numerous challenges in their professions and personal lives. But overall, life is better for them compared to the past. Love marriages outside caste or community are scorned and sometimes the couple are killed or excommunicated by the elders in the family or villages. Widows can now have a life of their own and even remarry. They draw a lot of sympathy. But discrimination continues since they are not treated in the same manner as married women during rituals and family functions.

The marriage customs have also undergone change. There are now age restrictions on marriage. Women enjoy a great say in their marriage matters. The law gives them clear assurances as to their rights and freedom. However, Hindu women have a long way to go to enjoy an equal status with men. They have to cope with many social and economic pressures and resolve many problems that afflict their lives today. Women in Hindu families have a long way to go before they can consider themselves truly free. Many Hindu men still entertain a traditional mindset and view women with sexist and judgmental attitude. The Indian movies reflect the attitude of an average Indian male towards women in general. Until that undergoes transformation, women may continue struggle under the weight of traditions, oppression of men, social and economic discrimination and the compulsions of modern life.

Women in India slowly started recognizing her true potential. She has started questioning the rules laid down for her by the society. As a result, she has started breaking barriers and earned a respectable position in the world. Today Indian women have excelled in each and every field from social work to visiting space station. There is no arena, which remains unconquered by Indian women. Whether it is politics, sports, entertainment, literature, technology everywhere, its women power all along. This point of view hasn’t changed much. There is still a large section of women who are uneducated, and married off before the age of 18. Families are required to supply a chaste daughter to the family of her future husband. Also very few women are actually employed in good-paying jobs, and hence parents don’t see the point of spending money on girls’ education.

As compared to the past, women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Women may have left the secured domains of their home, but a harsh, cruel, exploitative world awaits them, where women have to prove their talent against the world who see women as merely vassals of producing children. The Indian woman has to make her way through all the socialised prejudices against her, and the men yet have to allow and accept the women to be equal participants in the country’s way forward.

**Fisherwoman in India:**

Women play an instrumental role in production and trading active ties all over the world. This contribution has further improved through the advent of globalization. Through globalization more opportunities are opening to women.

India with a long coast line of 8129 Kms, two million sq. kms of Exclusive Economic Zone and 1.2 million hectares of brackish water bodies, offers vast potential for development of fisheries. There are about 0.5 million fisher households located all along the Indian coast and a total of 3 million fisherfolk inhabiting the coastal villages. The average number of sea going fishermen is 282 in a coastal village. Out of the 1.2 million fisherfolk in post harvest sector, women occupy a considerable proportion of more than 0.5 million (Sathiadhas *et al.,* 1998). They play a significant role in the pre and post- harvest operations in capture fisheries while their presence is conspicuous in all the stages of culture fisheries. Their role in household management is far higher than the women of other sectors. Majority of the labour force in the pre-processing and processing plants of shrimp are women. Women also occupy a very good proportion of the workforce in export oriented processing of cuttlefish, lobsters, and finfish varieties.

In a fisher's family, the responsibility of household management-food, childcare, education, 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. After mechanization and," intensification of multi-day fishing, the household responsibility of fisher women has increased to a greater extent.

Women's role as a homemaker, though supportive, is indispensable for the men to go for fishing. Activities like cooking, childcare, children's education, family health and sanitation are almost exclusively looked after by women. The role of the women in fishing is largely relies on the socio-economic conditions of the households. Overall, the conditions and quality of life for women is deprived across different fishing groups and communities. This included long working hours, poor wages as compared to the men and in addition the burden of household maintenance. However various problems are faced by fisherwomen, still they expressed interest to learn new skills and attend trainings to improve their status in the fishing sector to empower themselves.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, the main commercial activities of women in the fishing villages are fish drying, curing and fish marketing. Hand braiding of fishing nets is also an important activity in many fishing villages. In recent years, with the establishment of shrimp processing plants in Visakhapatnam and other districts, women are obtaining jobs in the shrimp processing industry in increasing numbers. In the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, women get employment in shrimp farms for 4 to 5 months in a year for activities like pond construction, seed collection and segregation, de-weeding of pond and hand picking of shrimp during harvest. Women do not participate in marine fish capture.

In fishing community women play either a role of a housewife or as a source of income generator through fishing jobs. Involvement of women in the primary sectors of capture fisheries is negligible (mostly in the margin while trading their catch and are largely engaged in peripheral activities like cleaning and drying of the catch which renders low wages) hence they have to deal with the deplorable household situation due to decreasing fish catch and downsized income. Women who are involved in marketing face many problems like fluctuating market prices, unhygienic market places, lack of basic amenities in the market place. Economic uplift of the fisherwomen mainly depends on the growth and development of fisheries sector.

Women are involved in fish handling, processing and marketing, of fish is predominantly in the hands of women. They also work as fish hawkers or run fish stalls in permanent market places or weekly bazaars. Drying and curing of fish is to a large extent done by women. Net making which is the main income-generating occupation is another important activity. In recent times, women engaged, in the marketing of fresh fish, face various problems, such as lack of cold storage facilities and appropriate fish preservation technologies, escalating cost of fish transportation and frequent strikes. They are also engaged in fish net making, raring, processing, washing, cleaning, salting, drying, and also packaging. They also work in some processing plants. The author gives suggestions to improve their condition.

The present involvement of women in predominantly shore-based activities is frequently not a result of deliberate attempts to exclude them from fish capture, though there is some bias against recruiting women for commercial fishing. This bias is partly due to social taboos against having women on board fishing vessels, but more important, it is really a reflection of the choice that women in fisheries have to make when deciding the lines of activity they would assume.

Women combine earning activity with their responsibilities at home. Looking after the family, cooking the meals and raising children are activities not easily relinquished unless the economic returns from taking on other activities are sufficiently high to enable the employment of domestic help, and unless there is no resistance from within the family which are not easy conditions to meet. In view of these difficulties, it is more realistic to concentrate on improving the technical skill in shore-based activities in which women are already engaged, instead of attempting to increase their involvement in fish capture or even to increase the number of women engaged in shore-based activities. This is a more realistic approach and contribution to the development of women’s participation in fisheries because the technical and economic problems faced by women already within the industry are many, and needs to be resolved. Fisheries have reached a point of maximum absorption of manpower and it is difficult to increase the participation of women in fisheries. This may be a result of problems of over-fishing, so that the numbers employed in fishing have to be reduced. It could also be due to mechanization and industrialization, which generally make the production process less labour intensive.

The involvement of women in the fisheries sector in India in earlier times was largely restricted to retail sale of fish and simple indigenous methods of fish processing. The emergence of modern fish processing industries provided a new avenue of employment to innumerable women. Aquaculture as an industry is of very recent origin and is yet to involve women in any significant manner. With the meteoric growth of women’s education in the country in recent decades, women have started entering all the walks of life, including various fisheries sectors, such as research, development, training, extension and industry, and have already made their presence felt. However, even though the integration of women in the fisheries mainstream is already on the move, there is still ample scope for further substantial growth.

**Fisher woman and Family Life**

In most fishing societies in the world, there is a strong sexual division of labor: the men fish while the women mind the household (180). Certainly this is the case in most of the fisheries in the industrialized West. It has been suggested that fishing requires stamina and strength, and women presum­ably do not have these qualities. A variant explanation is that boats are small and cramped, and there is no room for someone who cannot do their share of the work. However, such explanations give a somewhat simpliftic view of the division of labor in fishing societies, because there are a large number of cases where women do participate in fishing. Hornell refers to several examples from around the world in which women are involved in all kinds of fishing operations—some of which are very demanding and dangerous (104). In those Southeast Asian societies where women live on boats, women are, of course, present during all fishing operations (151). There are also women on Russian factory ships and Swedish girls who help pull nets in the Baltic fisheries (123). As Andersen & Wadel (28, p. 142) point out, the relative mix of men and women in different work situations must always be explained "in cultural terms and fishing activities are no exception." However, the conditions under which different mixes of men and women are included in fishing activities has not been delineated.

In our society and in many other societies where fishing is industrialized, there is a sharp division of labor. In these societies, fishermen and their wives and families are separated a good deal of the time and live in separate worlds. This means that the entire family must be able to operate without an adult male much of the time. Wives of fishermen and their families appear to be able to cope as well if not better than wives of military officers or other single household heads (71). The studies of fishing families support the idea that fishermen's wives are unusually independent, resourceful, and generally well able to cope with operating the household single-handedly (71, 240). There is little evidence of unusual pathology. Moreover, in the literature there is no solid evidence that the absence of an adult male is harmful to children—although such harm may in fact be done. This is not to indicate that having a husband absent and working in an unusually dangerous occupation does not cause problems and strain. Orbach (159), Tunstall (240), and Faris (77) give some insight into the difficulties such families face in different parts of the English-speaking world. A study done by Danowski (71), which focused exclusively on the attitudes of fishermen's wives in Rhode Island, turned up some interesting results. Danowski dem­onstrates that fishermen's wives are generally satisfied with their life and husband's occupation, primarily because their husbands like it and because it gives a relatively high income. They are not as disturbed by the danger of the occupation and the threat of instant widowhood as they are by the fact that they cannot plan a schedule in advance, and the fact that fishing takes precedence over important family activities (for example, graduation, birthdays).

Two adaptations deserve mention. In deep sea fisheries especially, hus­bands and wives are apart more than they are together. Both husbands and wives build up separate sets of ties, loyalties, and activities that do not include the other. For the man, his ship is his real home and the ties with his shipmates are as close as those with his family (28). The wife establishes ties with other women, kinsmen, and so on. When the husband returns home, both husband and wife have to reorient themselves to each other and drop the ties they have both established when the husband was away fishing. The time the husband is home often seems like a holiday (71). But because such husbands and wives are really adapted to living apart, a good deal of strain can develop if the husband stays home too long. This strain is exacer­bated by the fact that while husbands are supposed to have authority ashore, real decisions about the family are made by the wife (28). Danowski (71) reports that when the husband is ashore, the wife has to work harder, normal schedules are disrupted, and life is more hectic. When he leaves, things return to normal. The fisherman, for his part, is often glad he is back at sea again (240).

In some fishing societies, wives of skippers also take a very active role in the family fishing business. They regularly do the accounting, bargain with fish dealers, and order parts and gear while their husbands are at sea (71). In at least two reported instances, wives of fishermen organized politically to lobby for the family business (13). While men are at sea they are, of course, unable to attend meetings, take phone calls, do correspondence, and do the myriad of small details any business demands. Their wives also appear more attuned to all aspects of social life ashore.

**Water Resources and Women Activities:**

Though the fishermen settlements are on the coast of Bay of Bengal, whose sheet of water is the main source of economic activity, the fresh water source is essential and plays an integral role in the life of fishing communities. It is fortunate that the local rocks and substrata of the coastal region had freshwater table, and is being used in different ways for domestic purposes. Data related to village / habitation-wise water sources is collected and presented in table- 2.5.

Table- 2.5: Distribution of water sources in use in Maritime Habitations

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S. No | Habitation Category | Water sources | | | | Total | Per cent |
| Open well | Tube well | Storage tank \* | Natural tank |
| 1 | VSKP-Urban (8) | 6 | 46 | 7 | 0 | 59 | 4.16 |
| 2 | VSKP-Rural (57) | 101 | 218 | 42 | 8 | 369 | 26.00 |
| 3 | VIZM (20) | 45 | 57 | 23 | 0 | 125 | 8.81 |
| 4 | SKLM (106) | 323 | 432 | 60 | 51 | 866 | 61.03 |
|  | Total (191) | 475 | 753 | 132 | 59 | 1419 |  |
|  | Per cent | 33.47 | 53.07 | 9.30 | 4.16 |  | 100.00 |

1. \* Storage tanks both at ground and overhead levels

It is clear from the table that four different water sources such as open wells (33.47 per cent), tube wells (53.07 per cent), storage tanks (9.30 per cent) and natural tanks (4.16 per cent) are in use for domestic activities. Water from the open wells is drawn with buckets through string on a pulley manually while in case of tube wells by mechanical and manual means by a hand pump attached to the tube. Water drawn from the ground through electrical succession motor and is pumped into storage tanks built both at ground or overhead levels, from which water is taped by gravitation flow. The open well, tube well water points (used by manual and mechanical means) and storage tanks built at ground level are further provided with cemented platforms to maintain the clean and hygienic premises. Such cemented platforms around these waterholes are the domestic activity areas of women and children.

Besides fetching water, cleaning utensils, washing cloths and taking bath, certainly extend personal cleanliness, but making unhygienic premises due to poor drainage. In addition to these activities, we have observed that the water points are acting as social interacting centres of settlements, where women of different age groups often chitchat and gossip, socialize and share knowledge. Such social and economic knowledge exchange activity is not seen near the storage tanks (taps attached to tanks) or taps provided at different points in a settlement, where water is drawn through gravitation flow. Natural tanks are seen only in rural settlements and they are occasionally used.

***Initiation as fish vendors/ processors***

**Women as fish vendors**

Women play critical roles in fisheries, particularly in the pre- and post-harvest sectors. Looking at marine fisheries, active marine fishing is generally undertaken by men, although a small percentage of women do take part in near shore fishing, seaweed harvesting, and the collection of clams, mussels and bivalves. According to the Marine Fisheries Census, 2005, the total marine fisher folk population of nine coastal States and two Union Territories in mainland India is 3,519,116. Notably, of the 756,391 fisher folk involved in fishing-related activities, 365,463 are women (approximately 48 per cent), with 152,692 of them engaged in marketing of fish, compared to 54,670 men.

Women are thus the primary players in processing, marketing and selling the catch. After the fish has landed, it is the women who take charge of the catch and sell the fish for money and food, contributing to household incomes and food security, and to the local economy. Their labour is, however, often not recognized. Fish vendors operate as an important link between producers and the final consumers, making fish available to consumers in urban and remote rural areas, and enhancing food security in tangible, but unrecognized, ways. In recent years, competition for fish, from exporters and traders with greater access to credit and capital, has, however, affected the overall access of women vendors to fish. This, coupled with the problems they face at harbours, landing centers and markets, and the lack of access to basic facilities at these locations, is affecting their ability to retain their important role in marketing. It is vitally important that the work of fish vendors be recognized and supported.

Women fishworkers in India, as in other parts of the world, play critical roles within the fisheries and fishing communities, roles that are often not recognized or supported. Women are particularly active in postharvest fisheries; in marine fishing communities in India. Women comprise about 75 per cent of those engaged in fish marketing. They contribute in significant ways to the food security needs of a diverse range of consumers. Generally Vending is not recognised as a profession and since vendors form part of the “informal sector'', they can claim few rights. Women in this trade face more problems than their male counterparts. They are not dismissed as domestic workers or housewives. Their role in the sustenance and survival of the fish trade is not acknowledged. Besides all this, they face harassment, sexual and otherwise, problems in transporting their loads and lack of facilities

Most people know little about the daily struggle and lives of women fish vendors, discriminated against not only as women, but also as vendors and as members of economically-backward fishing communities. Census records and surveys of fishing communities rarely acknowledge the presence of women fish vendors. Often labeled as domestic workers or housewives, there is near myopia on the crucial economic and social roles played by them, which contribute significantly towards the sustenance and, survival of fishing communities. This is apparent in the fact that schemes to benefit the ``fishing community'' are aimed primarily at fishermen and at fish harvesting activities. In most areas they are not allowed on public transport with fish baskets. To avail of public transport, fisher women often have to resort to bribing bus drivers and conductors. They are still forced to hire commercial vehicles at considerable expense.

Women fish vendors also have to put up with harassment and extortion by auction agents at landing centers. Along with high auction charges, fish prices are fixed at artificially high levels. To make matters worse, auction agents usually appropriate the better fish from the women after the auction. In addition, few agents are willing to extend credit. For women, with little assets and other credit facilities, this often means procuring loans at high rates of interest. Bank loans for women fish workers are either not available or too cumbersome to access.

While women vending at roadsides are subject to continuous harassment by the police and by administrative authorities, those who operate in markets and pay market tax are little better off. Where markets are leased out, the market tax is usually on the higher side based on inflated estimates of the fish to be sold. Though market taxes are high, few facilities are available in markets to meet the needs of women fish vendors. Shelter, drinking water and toilet facilities are rarely available. Moreover, markets lack waste disposal facilities, so that women fish vendors are often seen as dirty and are ostracised by others in the market place. Their presence is often regarded as objectionable by other occupants of the market.

Nobody knows when the practice of women delivering fish to homes began. Many say their mothers or grandmothers were in the same trade. Poor living conditions and lack of adequate financial support from men have forced most of them to take to fish vending. Unlike men, they cannot relax even when their job is done. At home they have to cook, wash and attend to other chores.

"Small-scale vendors buy fish for Rs 500 to 600 a day. After deducting share to auction agents and for travel, the profit is around Rs 100-125.This is not enough to buy rice and provisions for a day. The budget will collapse if any unexpected expense comes about. "We cannot save a single paise for the future. We often borrow money on heavy interest from lenders to meet children's educational and hospital expenses. Walking long distances with the weight on the head can cause serious health problems," said another fisherwoman.

The fish vending job requires huge physical strength. Many women soon develop serious health problems as their income is not enough to have nutritious food. They have to go for hours without drinking clean water. Many suffer from back pain, disc prolapse, orthopaedic and uterus problems. Gender discrimination is strong in the community. Women walk for hours to sell fish, while men do soon two and three wheelers, using mobile phones to get information on fish availability and prices. "Women have no access to such tools due to financial and cultural reasons." The younger one are not interested. Most older women are illiterate or school dropouts and suffer greatly to educate children to help them get jobs. They also train girl children in more profitable professions like garment-making.

Fish vending is a traditional occupation that has been a means of livelihood for thousands in India, with the majority of fish vendors being women. Fish vendors engage in their trade in various ways: they procure 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 markets for resale at retail/local markets. Vendors also carry out value addition by sorting, grading, cleaning and icing the fish. Fish may be sold as either (a) fresh fish that is stored in ice and sold in local or distant markets or door-to-door by vendors, or (b) salted, dried or smoked fish, which is sold in local markets or to merchants who take it to other markets once it is processed; such processing is usually done by women using traditional methods.

**Fish vendors can be broadly classified under the following categories:**

1) **Stationary vendors who vend on a regular basis at specific locations**: Many vendors sell in designated wholesale or retail markets. They often transport the fish from the landing centre to these markets in trucks or mini-vans, which they hire. Some buy from wholesale markets and sell at retail markets, while some others are wholesale suppliers themselves. Vendors may also procure fish from the landing sites for sale at roadside markets (‘natural markets’), where they have been traditionally congregating and vending fish for years. Many fish vendors sell fish at the landing sites themselves at harbours and beaches. There is thus considerable variation in the scale of operations of stationary vendors—ranging from petty sellers who barter fish in exchange for edible items such as sweet corn, sweets and fruits (or vice versa), to those who are large wholesalers.

2) **Peripatetic vendors who walk from place to place to sell their fish:** These are usually women fish vendors who purchase fish directly at auctions that take place at the village/wholesale markets/landing centres, and sell fish door-to-door, travelling on foot, and carrying their fi sh in bamboo baskets or aluminum vessels. They are a major source of fish supply to consumers within, and close to, coastal areas.

3) **Mobile vendors who move around on bicycles or motorized vehicles**: This type of fish vending, which is very common in States, primarily involves men. These vendors arrive at the landing centres from different villages and purchase fish at auctions at the village/wholesale markets/landing centres, for sale back in their villages. They also sell fish door-to-door. Apart from this, many fish vendors use other means to sell their fish

As we discussed, Fish trade is a traditional occupation that has been a means of livelihood for thousands in India with the majority of fish vendors being women. They have to cooperate with both the public and the law. In the process, they are often forced to deal with inherited prejudices and problems of various kinds. Along with being engaged in household chores from dawn to dusk, fisherwomen play an important role in retailing, auctioning, sorting, grading, curing and drying, prawn peeling and collection of Seaweed apart from hand-braiding and repair of nets.

The role of the women in fishing is largely relies on the socio-economic conditions of the households. Overall, the conditions and quality of life for women is deprived across different fishing groups and communities. This included long working hours, poor wages as compared to the men and in addition the burden of household maintenance. However various problems are faced by fisher women, still they expressed interest to learn new skills and attend trainings to improve their status in the fishing sector to empower themselves.

In the state of Andhra Pradesh, the main commercial activities of women in the fishing villages are fish drying, curing and fish marketing. Hand braiding of fishing nets is also an important activity in many fishing villages. In recent years, with the establishment of shrimp processing plants in Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts, women are obtaining jobs in the shrimp processing industry in increasing numbers. In the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, women get employment in shrimp farms for 4 to 5 months in a year for activities like pond construction, seed collection and segregation, de-weeding of pond and hand picking of shrimp during harvest. Women do not participate in marine fish capture.

Women in fishing villages are mainly involved in shore-based “post-harvest’’ activities such as fish handling, including sorting, grading, weighing, gutting, icing, drying and processing, and marketing: as agents, auctioneers, retail stall holders and itinerant stall holders. Almost all these women are either middle-aged or old. Young or unmarried women do not get involved in marketing of fish. The fisherwomen take part in the fish auction, buy fish and later take it to the market to sell it. Fish marketing means being away from home for half a day. Women who have small children or no one to take care of the house cannot go for marketing fish. The women also take care of preservation of the fish that is not sold fresh. A majority of the women were seen to be in charge of the household economy also.

The situation of fisherwoman was further compounded by widespread indebtedness and the fact that the marketing of fish is considered a very low status occupation for both cultural and practical reasons. Fisher women involved in marketing suffer the double burdens of being women in a traditional and highly prescriptive society and of being engaged in a form of employment, which is considered to be suitable only for older women, widows and the destitute. Some of the women involved in both fresh fish marketing and processing also migrate from one place to another during certain seasons of the year.

Fishing has been one of the oldest economic activities of human race. It comes next to agriculture. Fish and other sea food constitute an integral part of a wholesome food provision.

Fish vending women are facing all the problems faced by any other unorganized sector in general. But the sad part here is this sector is not even considered as one among the unorganized labours. They have no representations in any financial inclusive programme. They are been included in some Self Help Groups because of their community representation.

**Fisherwoman as a Girl and her Marriage:**

The Girl child of fishermen community is not different from other children. They enjoy the childhood same as the girls of other communities. They are giving importance to education now a days. Female child as usual treated inferior to male child. Girls help her parents in household works. She helps her mother in cutting vegetables, in sweeping, in cleaning floors, in cleaning vessels. She takes care of her younger siblings, when her mother is out for fish vending. She enjoys schooling also.

A majority of the fisherwomen are illiterate. Though more girls attend school now than before, the number of girls attending schools regularly is much lower than the corresponding number for boys. Girls gets some knowledge of fish vending, fishing and grading of fishes as she observes all those activities from her childhood. They help parents in fish drying at home. They also help in carrying fish baskets from sea or from market place to their home. Fishermen girls are not supposed to go for fish vending. They are limited to her household activities. After she attains her puberty, her responsibility towards her household works increase. She look after her younger ones, she has to do all the works giving her mother a little bit of relief.

The process of socialization is geared to helping a girl grow up into a woman who will conform to the existing set roles of a woman in the family. She is taught to take care of the male members and the children in the family. The socialization process clearly delineates the sex roles a girl/woman has to perform. She is not allowed to touch the net during the menstrual period and is not allowed on the beach when fishermen set out to fish. Women are, in short, not expected to be involved in any activity directly connected with fishing. Other than household chores, a woman is expected to engage only in shore-based activities like fish marketing and drying. Generally the marriage age of the girl in fishermen community is around 16-25 years depending up on the circumstances of the family. As a matter of fact, the better-off families usually marry off their daughters a year after they reach puberty. The age difference between bride and groom is around six to seven years. The major part of the responsibility of finding the right groom or bride falls on the relatives. The main considerations that affect the choice of a partner are caste, religious group, possible dowry, economic position and the family background. Though dowry is not an entirely new concept in these fishing villages, it did not prevail in the way it does today. Most of the mothers of our respondents got married with a dowry comprising of silver trinkets.

Fisherwomen do not inherit any property. In the rare cases where the fisherwoman is an only child, she inherits from her natal family. All family assets are considered to be the property of the male head of family; thus he controls the economic resources. Even the jewellery and household articles a fisherwoman brings from her natal home at the time of marriage, are deemed to be the property of the male head or her husband. After completing her schooling, generally the girls prefer to work either at home or to work at private or other companies for their financial needs. But they are not interested in fish vending before marriage.

After marriage, and delivering one or two children, depending on the family circumstances, the fisherwoman enters into the field of fish vending. These fisherwomen are introduced to the business by their parents, relatives and their husbands upon marriage.

**Women as Home Maker**

A **homemaker** is a person whose main job is to take care of his or her own family home and children. Traditionally, the job of homemaker is done by women. The Fisherwoman plays huge and vital role as home maker, income source and caretaker of her family. The care given by the mother cannot be measured. Children also enjoy stability and love when they always have their mother at home. They know they can always go back to her when there is a problem. When there are random strangers coming into your home taking care of your child, the child remains disconnected or does not have one stable person that he or she can trust. Women's role as a homemaker, though supportive, is indispensable for the men to go for fishing. Activities like cooking, childcare, children's education, family health and sanitation are almost exclusively looked after by women. However 'an examination of the demographic development indicators like population growth rate, sex ratio and infant mortality among the fisher folk reveal the prevalence of gender injustice and socio-economic marginalisation. In a fisher's family, the responsibility of household management-food, childcare, education, 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. After mechanization and ," intensification of multi-day fishing, the household responsibility of fisherwomen has increased to a greater extent. Women are the real architects of society. Marine fisher folk are members of a low and disadvantaged caste belonging to the lowest economic strata in Indian society. The fisherwomen, in particular, have a very low status in the social hierarchy which leaves them worse off than their compatriots. Even though women have made great strides, a gender gap still exists.

**Marakathe and Berakathe**

**Marakatthe : The Financier Fisher woman**

No other role in the fishermen community stands out for its typical characteristics as that of the Marakatthe. Etymologically it means Marakamu in Telugu Marakamu stands for exchange. But the role of Marakatthe typifies a whole range of institutionalized economic relationships, with a mixture of the banker’s role and of the sharecropper in a peasant society more significant, however, is the personality attributes which most Marakatthe acquire in the process of socialization. They tend to be aggressive energetic bold and incredibly efficient.

A search for similar roles in the anthropological literature is not entirely unrewarding. A review of the literature yields at least two such roles, at one time, female fish retailers in Onitsha, Nigeria, used to make credit advances to fishermen in the northern region who would bring their stock for their creditors. However, as Marganet Katsin reports, the tradition of predominance of female traders in much of Nigeria is being threatened. It **and yoreba** men appear to be taking over the fish trade, formerly controlled by women. Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow who did pioneering cross-cultural work on Women suggest one generalization: Women’s control of wealth is restricted in most tribal and peasant societies at best, their economic roles are limited to a behind-the-scenes manipulation. Yet, they suggest in a few tribal societies strong-minded women with access to property may legitimately assent themselves, rejecting the normally subordinate and restricted role. They are, in effect, typical personalities who are accorded deference and envy. The important question to be considered is why these deviants are respected rather than merely tolerated or condemned for their failure to conform. Oscar Lewis, in his study of the Black boat tribe of the North Piegan, discovers a unique type of female personality known as the mainly hearted women. The Piegan culture puts a premium on masculinity and encourages male dominance. At the same time, women are basic to the functioning of the economic system both in the domestic house hold and as producers of wealth. They are also accorded a major role in Blackfoot religion. Lewis draws attention to the discrepancy between the important economic and religious role played by piegan women and the established standards of female behavior which emphasize weakness and ability which require them to relegate themselves to the background of peigan social life. In terms of the cultural norms the manly hearted woman is a deviant- a highly endowed woman who equals men in their own skills, in personal wealth, in several processes and in religious participation.

Within the fisherman community under study, the role of Marakatthe as a promoter of enterprise cum retail trades woman is unique and perhaps unparalleled among woman across various cultures. A Marakatthe advances credit on fishing boats and nets. In absolute terms the amount advanced ranges from Rs.1000/- to Rs.10000/- on Country crafts and Rs.30000/- to Rs.80000/- on machine boats. In Jalaripeta there were only two instances of the latter category, one given to a kinsman of the same village and another to a neighboring village. The transaction entered into by the Marakatthe with the loan is quite complex but absolutely informal. There are neither written agreements nor witnesses to such transactions. Three aspects of the transaction stand out prominent. Firstly the Loanee’s boat is mortgaged to the Marakatthe. In the event of its disposal sale the Marakatthe remains the first rights over it. Secondly, there is a share-cropping arrangement of the fish harvested. Under this, the Marakatthe has first right over the purchase of fish from the loanee at a price which is usually 8 to 12 percent less than the prevailing market price at the landing point on the shore. The Marakatthe – or – her nominees in case of unavailable circumstances is invariably present at the landing point as the fishing is towed in. The share-cropping arrangements last until the loan in cleared the third aspect pertains to repayment of the Loan. The Loan has to be cleared in one installment one when the loanee is able to pool up capital. There are no pre-fixed terms as to the terminal point of time for clearing the Loan. As there is a share-cropping arrangement the loan does not carry any interest payments one other aspect of the Marakatthe system is that she is under no obligation to advance petty loans to her clients for consumption purposes whenever the fish catch is poor or the individuals fall into distress such advances usually are not added to the major loan but often repaid at short intervals.

A successful Marakatthe in constantly pre-occupied with her economic transactions. She has to keep her eyes wide open all the time. She is usually adopted of vocalizing her point of view. She keeps her lineage connections with the members of the caste panchayat who matter in the event of disputes with her clients with her deft manipulation of property she builds up her productive assets and capital. A Marakatthe is not considered a deviant in terms of the cultural norms of the fishermen community. On the contrary, her economic role in regard to share-cropping arrangement draws considerable social support from the fishermen community, especially the traditional caste panchayat. Yet she remains an object of admiration as well as envy for the personality traits she displays and for the wealth she accumulates.

There are two types of Marakatthes in the Jalari Society. Some Marakatthes who give loans to fishermen buy fish from them at the shore. They immediately sell fish to Berakatthes on the shore itself with 8 to 12 ½% profits. These Marakatthes do not ordinarily go to markets for retail fish trade. The second type of Marakatthes buy fish from their clients and also sometimes from other fisherwomen. These Marakatthes take fish to markets for retail fish trade. The demand for fish has enhanced the position of some of the Marakatthes. Ramayamma, the wealthiest Marakatthe of Jalaripeta, buy fish worth Rs.1000/- to Rs.1500/- each day from her loanees and from other fishermen. She does not take the fish to regular market places. She engages an auto by herself and supplies the fish directly to the five-star hotels and to the Navy Canteen. She sells seer and shark fish only. Ramayamma, supplies fish on a contract basis and arranges door delivery of the fish to the concerned organization. From the role of a petty fish tradeswoman (Baerakatthe) Raayamma has risen to that of a contract supplier. Among the Jalaris Ramayamma is the only woman who was able to catch up with the new business opportunities of an expanding city. The break-through in this respect was perhaps the result of Ramayamma’s second marriage to an ex-navy sergeant, also a fisherman. She lost her first husband after giving birth to two children. After a lapse of two years, as an young widow she came into contact with the navy sergeant. The latter was attracted by Ramayamma’s charms and enterprise. He agreed to marry her. After their marriage they managed to get him an early discharge from the service with the gratuity (Social Security) money he started his smuggling business from Jalripeta, Ramayamma used to deliver the merchandise (Foreign-liquor bottles) occasionally to the five star hotels under the cover of fish in her own basket. These initial contacts with the hotel managements enabled her over a period of time to land contracts for the regular supply of fresh fish. Under these contracts, Ramayamma has to supply fish thrice a week and a fixed quantity at a pre-fixed price. The size and quality of fish are also specified.

The price fixed for the fish is about twenty to twenty five percent higher than the shore price on days of average catch. On few days in a month her margin may be much higher when the catch is abundant. It may be tower or nothing at all on days when the catches are low. On non-fishing days she does not have to supply fish to the hotels and the Navy. Compared to the business of other Marakatthes Ramayamma’s business is less risky and harder. She has a fixed price and an assured clientele. She does not have to spend a long hours at market places or worry about freezing or drying the fish on a bad evening. She takes an auto goes round the two hotels and the Navy canteen, gets the fish weighed and returns home with cash. Assured business on these lines has enabled Ramayamma to lend more and more money on the fishing boats, increasing her daily turnover of fish purchased through share-cropping arrangements. She bought more gold as well. Part of the gold was given as gifts to her grand-daughter. Ramayamma now in her early forties, knows the habits and tastes of the well-to-do urbanities living in the posh colonies. Besides supplying foreign merchandise to them she arranges the delivery of choice varieties of fish with advance notice. Despite a thriving business Ramayamma’s mornings are in Jalaripeta. She lives in a hut along with the other fisher folk in insanitary conditions, breathes the same air and shares the same culture.

The personality traits necessary to become a Marakatthe are imbibed at an early age, mainly in girls of Marakatthe families and particularly in favored girls. Ramayamma learned the skills of Marakatthe from her grandmother Pilla Pydamma was favored by her maternal aunt (Mothers Sister) who was a Marakatthe herself. She used to take her to the beach and to the market regularly. In course of time she picked up the relevant marketing skills which enabled her to become a Marakatthe. Now she is training her sister’s daughter – a 13 Years old girl.

Parentage seems to be an important factor in shaping a Marakatthe both in terms of acquisition of the requisite skills and inheriting the necessary capital. The letter has not been a perquisite in at least a third of the present generation of Marakatthes. They have been able to accumulate capital by sheer hard work, brugal living and business efficiency.

Voliseti Ankamma who is now around 30 years started her career as Marakatthe about twelve years ago. Her mother-in-law who herself was a Markatthe advanced a sum of Rs. 5000/- to Ankamma. In the beginning Ankamma give loans on two fishing boats. Over a period of twelve years she has been able to increase the size of her clients from two to eight. She gave loans on eight theppas (Catamarans). Four of her clients are from jalaripeta, the same village. The other four clients are from Guruvidipalem, about one mile from jalaripeta. Every day she goes to Gurividipalem early in the morning, around 7 am. In this village the fishermen go for fishing at night and return to the share early in the morning. Ankamma buys fish from them and if she has more fish she sells on the shore. She brings the remainder to her village, Jalaripeta, and freezes the produce. She takes a quick lunch and dashes off to the fish landing point. On the shore to catch her clients of Jalaripeta, he also buys fish from others and then rushes to the market for the evening sale. She is joined by her sister-in-law in her business.

Pilla Pydamma (about 35 Years) and Chintapalli Lakshmi (about 30 years) are very successful Marakatthes who combine money-lending with fish retailing. They are sisters who picked up the trade from Polamma, their mother’s sister. Their mother was neither a Berakatthe nor a Marakatthe. Polamma had no children and developed affection towards Pydamma and Lakshmi when they were fairly young. From the ge of ten years they used to go with Polamma to the market. By the time each one attained the age of fifteen they were inducted as independent Berakatthes. Over the years they had slowly accumulated savings. This was much before their marriage. Both of them got married subsequently with in an interval of three years to grooms from the same village. While Pydamma’s husband continued to go for fishing Lakshmi’s husband took to the sale of smuggled merchandise like Scotch whisky tape recorders and other electronic gadgets.

Their mother gave Rs. 4000/- each to Pydamma and Lakshmi with this Pydamma started her business as a Marakatthe over the last twelve years. She has stepped up her money-lending to cover nine boats. Her husband’s small boat was replaced by a catamaran. Lakshmi who entered the business four years after Pydamma was not able to expand her business as a Marakatthe fast enough since her husband turned out to be a drunkard and a spend thrift, frittering away her savings on liquor. Each day lakshmi has to incur Rs.20 to Rz.30 towards her husband’s expenses.

Both Pydamma and Lakshmi run their business of fish retailing jointly. When a new market – Nehru Bazar was constructed in a posh locality (Dwarakanagar) they shifted their business from poorna market which was already overcrowded with fish traders. They managed to get two stalls in a strategic location through the good offices of their brother (Olichetty Chinniah) a youth congress leader and municipal counselor at that time. Chinnayya’s position in local municipal politics and his role as a member of the caste panchayat also come in handy for the sisters to deal with their loanees in a firm manner.

In the retail market Pydamma and Lakshmi run their business jointly. They share the various operations right from purchase of the fish, transportation, retailing and storage. Lakshmi does not have children Pydamma has five kids (here boys and Two girls). She sends her two elder boys of school going age to an English Medium convent. She is not sending her girls to school. It is interesting to note that although Pydamma has built herself up economically as an aggressive Marakatthe she subscribes to the values set by the male dominant fisherman community. Pydamma claims the decision not to send her girls to the school as her own not her husband’s. The preference in favour of sending male children to schools was found in the case of three other Marakatthes as well. They want to train their female children in their own image to succeed them as Marakatthes.

The prevalence of mechanisms for conflict resolution is an integral part of the Marakatthe system in operation in Jalaripeta. The loanees were usually keen to repay the loans as early as possible and honor the informal agreements. The friction between the Marakatthe and her clients is quite common over the fixation of price for the fish catch at the shore point. These get vocalized and tempers are raised. Others present on the scene intervene and instant judgments are given. Both parties abide by them. Another point of friction concerns the non-delivery of the fish harvested by the client when the boat arrives early or when the Marakatthe is unable to visit the landing point. Such instances seldom occur if the Marakatthe and the loanee are from the same village. Disputes relating to the non-delivery of the catch are ordinarily sorted out between the parties themselves. If they still persist they are carried to the caste panchayat. The verdict of the caste Panchayat is binding on the parties to the dispute. Disputes over accounting are also sometimes resolved by the Panchayat.

Marakatthe Ankamma and a loanee from a neighboring village (Vadapalem) were involved in a dispute The Marakatthe complained that her client was selling off fish secretly while telling her that he was not getting any catch. Under the oral contract the client should sell the fish, at a reduced price to Ankamma. The caste panchayat gathered evidence indicating that the loanee was guilty of violation of the contract. The loanee also admitted his guilt, but pleaded that he was in distress and too poor to forego the margin on fish sale due to the Marakatthe. The caste panchayat deliberated on the pros and cons of the dispute and came up with two options.

1. To request another Marakatthe to advance a substitute loan and return the money to Ankamma
2. Reprimand the loanee and fine him for breach of conduct.

No Marakatthe came forward to advance a loan to the client. The issue was not closed. By the time of the completion of field work the case was still pending. This dispute indicates that the Marakatthe has safety valves in the social controls exercised through the caste panchayat. Social status acts as a powerful determent against breach of the oral understandings between a Marakatthe and her client. The parties to the oral contracts are, therefore, induced to abide by the terms. Marginal infringements are sorted out by the parties themselves, but major ones cannot escape the surveillance of the community and its deliberative bodies. However, there are exceptions to this. For instance, Narasimhulu ( A smuggler) raised a Loan of Rs. 30,000/- from his mother’s sister for buying a machine boat. A sum of Rs. 90000/- was raised as loan from Government sources. The Marakatthe was expected to have rights over the fish catch from the machine boat while Narasimhulu would get the catch of prawns. For six months everything went on well. A Slack season set in for prawns catch. Narasimhulu rented the boat to another party, leaving the Marakatthe without any income. He argued that the rent was just sufficient to meet the installment payments to the Government loan and once the loan is cleared both the Marakatthe and himself would start getting income. As the boat and loan were in Narasimhulu’s name, the Marakatthe argued that the former was going to the beneficiary with herself as the loser.

The Marakatthe therefore demanded the return of her capital or divert a part of the rental to compensate for loss of her regular income on the amount of Rs. 30000/- invested by her. She made an alternate proposal to dispose of the boat and return her share of the capital. To this, Narasimhulu did not yield. The Marakatthe was apprehensive that the caste panchayat may not take up the case as the investment was not in the traditional sector. At the time of field work the Marakatthe was busy mobilizing the support of her kinsmen in her favour.

The nature of the relationship between the Marakatthe and her husband is one of the areas of investigation in the resent study. It is not surprising that the wealth and influence of a typical Marakatthe for exceeds that of her husband or son. Marakatthe Pilla Pydamma gave Rs. 10000/- to her husband for the construction of an RCC Slab House. She appears to yield significant influence over her husband and among members of her kin group. Another Marakatthe Volichetti Pydamma has lot of wealth in Cash in Gold Jewellery. She advanced some cash to her son Narasimhulu to finance smuggling business. The Marakatthe who can maintain her traditional rights as independent creditor and trader seems to reinforce older patterns of social controls in economic matters.

One of the fishermen respondents expressed the view that the wealth acquired by Volichetti Ankamma made her too big headed to accept male authority. Her husband confides that he had to beg her for pocket money for snacks, country Cigars or Country liquor. However, the spouses of other Marakatthe did not have such an experience.

They preferred a woman who would be a financial asset rather than a liability. Pilla Polamma, a Marakatthe and her husband are in their late fifties. The man stopped going for fishing about six years ago since his health did not permit it. But Polamma’s earning as Marakatthe have been sustaining the family, consisting of herself, her husband and an unmarried daughter.

Potti Guramma (about 40 Years) started her trade as a Berakatthe. She had no children. She accumulated savings to the tune of Rs. 1700/- as a Berakatthe besides, she inherited from her mother gold worth about Rs. 3000/- with these savings and experience as a Berakatthe. She graduated herself into a Marakatthe. Her investment is modest through she has loaned about Rs. 4500/- on three catamarans in a neighboring village. Her income and assets would have been much higher but for her husband’s extravagance, Guramma laments. Her husband does not go for fishing. Each day, he spends about Rs. 20 towards his liquor and snacks, and all of it from his wife’s earning. Whenever Guramma shows some resistance in giving money she is subdued by beating.

Marakatthe are never under an obligation to transfer their capital or assets to their spouses. They keep their assets in gold or cash. Decisions concerning purchase of gold or money lending on boats are made by themselves. Such decisions are not kept as secrets from their husbands. In fact, before loaning money on a boat information is often sought by a Marakatthe about the loanee’s credit worthiness and consumption habits from her spouse. There are Marakatthe who do not discuss such matters. Marakatthe Ankamma is one such example. She dispenses loans without consulting her husband. Marakatthe do not ordinarily share with their spouses’ information about cash available with them. Marakatthe display an air of independence and self confidence in their economic transactions. Their husbands do not interfere though they are consulted occasionally, as in gathering data on a potential loanee. Overall, they dominate their husbands, in the economic spheres. But this dominance sometimes extends to other spheres. Marakatthe buy expensive sarees and other consumables without consulting their spouses. Marakatthe Volichetty Polamma recently brought a gold chain worth of Rs. 4200/- without her husband’s consent. When her husband saw the gold chain he was pleasantly surprised at his wife’s ingenuity in earning money and saving it.

Marakatthe are most easily distinguished from other fisherwoman on the shore point by their behavior and appearance. They are dressed better than the rest and have some gold jewellery on them. They always talk loud when they bargain fish. These woman uses, with a high frequency four letter word in conversation and vituperative terms in arguments. Abuse and invective are traded frequently in their verbal outbursts. When tempers flame up they throw the fish catch of the other on the beach and even indulge in Physical violence on a small scale by holding the adversary’s hair, pushing and holding them. The waves of the vocal outbursts and physical dragging are not, however, last more than five minutes. Others present on the scene intervene to cool down their tempers and settle the dispute.

To buy fish from her clients, the Marakatthe has to wait on the beach till the boat reaches the shore. The period of waiting may range from one to three hours, often in the hot son. To pass the time on the shore till the boats arrive Berakatthes and Marakatthe gamble a lot. This gambling is a game played with sea shells. Every Berakatthe and Marakatthe has the sea shells stored readily in their cloth wallets. Addicts of this game have to stake large sums of money. But gambling with money at Jalaripeta is prohibited by the caste panchayat, except during the months of festivals.

Many of Marakatthe maneuvers have to do with the preservation of capital in relatively liquid from one season to another or in between the fisherman normally raise loans for boats and nets just before the season. The Marakatthe should therefore, be ready with cash lest she would lose her clients, other than this she has to provide in need small consumption loans Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 to her clients. But the practice of approaching Marakatthe for small consumption loans is on the decline. The needy take groceries on credit from the grocery shop. They do not have to pay any interest, but pay a higher price for the product.

In running the business each Marakatthe has an organization with a set of enduring relationships. A few of these relationships are kin-based while others are apparently secular in their character. In the first set are her loanee clients, her relationship with them in business like and often characterized by an element of friction over the fixation of price for fish sold to her. However, the Marakatthe is always the loanee by providing petty sums of credit in emergencies and by giving gifts of cash Rs. 10 to Rs. 20 to each of the children of the loanee once an year, usually at the time of the festival of the village goddess. Most of the Marakatthe are also reported to be generous in writing of a portion of the loan 10 to 25 percent. In these relationships the attitude of the Marakatthe is that her prosperity depends up on a good harvest of fish to her clients.

In dealing with loanees dispersed at two or more shore points within her village or the neighboring villages a Marakatthe requires the help of others. She cannot be present at more than one point if the boats of the loanees reach the various landing points simultaneously. While advancing loans she considers this aspect too. But as her business increases it becomes impossible to be selective on this point. In such instances it is imperative to depend on the help of some other fisherwoman. In other business situations in the Indian context kinsmen or other close business partners share the responsibilities. Among the Marakatthe also one finds the operation of kin cooperation. A few of the cases were noted earlier. Potti Guramma seeks the help of her sister-in-law to cover a landing point in the neighboring village while she takes care of the landing point in Jalaripeta. At each landing point she engages to other fisherwomen not related to her – to guard the baskets of fish as the sale transactions are in progress. There is no danger of theft but they have to keep the dogs and crows away. During this time Marakatthe is usually busy running up and down as boats keep touching he shore at the peak hours. Although the distance between the place where the baskets are kept and the landing point is usually not more than 50 to 250 yards she has to spend time over the bargain and carry the fish to the baskets while keeping an eye on the boats touching the share point. Since many Marakatthe also buy fish from fishermen who are not their loanees they have to compete with others – Berakatthes and Marakatthes. It turns out to be a period of hectic activity keeping a typical Marakatthe on her toes. In the case of Pilla Pydamma and Chintapalli Lakshmi their aunt (Mothers sister) keeps a watch on their baskets. The latter is their patron-saint who inducted them into the business. Hence they do not pay her anything. But the women guards of other Marakatthes are paid a rupee or receive a small fish.

Marakatthes carrying on fish sale of more than Rs. 200/- a day require business associates. References were made to this practice earlier. There are two categories of business associates. Close kinswomen team up in three cases and neighbours in two others. The kinswomen teams are of a) Pilla Pydamma and her sister b) Olichetti Chinnammi and her daughter and c) Guramma and Her sister-in-law. These teams are operative in the purchase, transport and sale of fish. They share between the two of them several of the major operations and minor chores. For purchasing fish they divide the different landing points if they are located in in the same or neighboring village. In a slack season one of the two will go to the main fishing harbor for purchase of fish. If there is some delay in the arrival of boats one of them would rush to the market with the fish stock so that the stall is opened for the early customers. If one of them is sick or tied up at home for reasons of maternity or sickness the second one takes care of the business. Ten percent of the profit on the total value of the fish purchased id deducted and distributed equally prior to the fish sale. Later, they distribute the fish between them and share the expenses on transport equally profit or loss on the sale of the fish is borne by the seller. In the retail market the partners usually sit side by side or in proximity. If one of them has exhausted her stock she sells the remaining stock of her associate. If a large quantity of unsold if fish is found of the partners takes care of its storage by getting ice blocks, pounding them into crystals and arranging the layers of fish and ice in baskets while the other Marakatthe is busy selling fish.

The transport people – women carriers, auto-rickshaw drivers and rickshaw pullers, ice vendors, cleaners and store watchmen constitute another layer of the Marakatthe organization. All of them serve the Marakatthe – Berakatthe on a regular basis though the payment for the services is on a daily basis.

There are others who help the Marakatthe in her domestic chores especially in cooking food and child care. A close kinswoman or an elderly neighbour provides such domestic help when the Marakatthe is sway. They receive occasional help in cash or kind in return for their services.

The enduring nature of the relationships is significant whether they have kinship ties or not they maintain “jati’ relationships, both in symbolic and substantive terms.

At a symbolic level they address each other in kinship terminology as Amma (Mother), Anna (Brother), Akka (Elder Sister), Chellemma (Younger Sister) and so on. Their relationships are substantive in the sense that they extend beyond business with a sense of obligation in fulfilling commitments and expectations towards each other. Typical is the case of an auto driver who would turn down the offer of a better bargain around the time he has to pick up the Marakatthes / Berakatthes, his regular customers, So does a rickshaw puller. An ice vendor who sells ice regularly to a Marakatthe would keep for his regular fisher women customers a few blocks of ice in late hours in summer or when there is scarcity turning down better offers from other customers.

**Berakatthe: The Fish Trader**

The Word Berakatthe is derived from the Telugu Word Beramu, denoting bargain and sale. Berakatthe among the Jalaris, therefore, refer to the woman who bargains the purchase and sale of fish at two different points, first at two different points, first, at the shore point where the purchases and second, in the retail market where she sells.

By investing time and labour is processing and selling the fish in small quantities Jalari women are in a position to increase the household income. The more woman hours a household uses for presenting and vending the higher is the household income. The time and energy of the housewife or that of other adult woman in a jalari family are sought to be utilized for the economic uplift of the households; they supplement the family earnings in a few cases, provide the only source of livelihood the family.

The training of a fisherwoman in trade starts care in her childhood when she begins to accompany one of the elderly fisherwomen. Data presented in the following table indicates that a fisherwoman learnes her economic skills moistly from her household;

**Table XIII : The Primary Source of Berakatthe’s Skills**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S No | Skills learnt from | No of respondents | Per count of total |
| 1 | Mother | 44 | 51.2 |
| 2 | Self | 15 | 17.4 |
| 3 | Mother in law | 8 | 9.3 |
| 4 | Mothers Sister | 8 | 9.3 |
| 5 | Others in the family (sister-in-law, father’s sister) | 4 | 4.7 |
| 6 | Neighbours | 5 | 1.8 |
| 7 | Don’t know/can’t tell | 2 | 2.3 |
|  | Total Number of respondents |  | 100.00 |

Data presented in Table I show that a majority of the Berakatthes learn trading in fish directly from their mothers, followed by other female relatives within the family (mother-in-law, mother’s sister, sister, sister-in-law, or fathers-sister). The letter group accounts for nearly a quarter (23.2). About one-sixth of the percent of the Berakatthe. It turns out that the family is the most potent source of socialization into fish trade as one of the family members (mother, mother-in-law, mother’s sister, sister, sister-in-law or fathers sister) is the primary source for imparting the relevant skills for three-fourth of the Berakatthes.

Typical is the case of Polamma who commenced her trading activity when she was around in years 1. Polamma hails from Jalaripeta and married Appanna from the same village when she was seventeen. Polamma’s mother was a Berakatthe. Right from the age of ten Polamma used to accompany her mother in the fish market. During these visits she developed familiarity with some aspects of the trade. Before her marriage she had a few opportunities to carry the basket herself and sell the fish with the help of her mother’s sister. By then, Polamma was convinced that some money could be earned if the becomes a Berakatthe, meanwhile, she got married. Within an year following her marriage she maintained the role that she has been aspiring for all along thanks to her mother-in-law’s encouragement. However she was unable to carry on with trading activity on a regular basis beyond a few months as she had to take care of her new-born baby and shoulder responsibility for household work. Over the next six years she gve birth to two more kids. With young children in the house she had to forget about fish trade. But her interest was reviewed as her mother-in-law and her eldest child (a girl) were prepared to take over the responsibility for looking after the younger siblings. She plunged into fish trade once again, picking up the threads of knowledge of Berakatthe’s role. Data concerning the age of the Berakatthes is presented in the following table:

**TABLE XIV : THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF BERAKATTHES**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S NO | Age Group | No of Berakatthes | Per cent of total |
| 1  2  3  4  5  6 | 30 Yrs and below  31-40  41-50  51-60  61 and above  Don’t Know / Cant recall | 10  51  17  2  3  3 | 11.6  59.3  19.6  2.3  3.5  3.5 |
| Total No. of respondents : 86 | | | 100% |

A Vast majority of the Berakatthes are in the age group of 31-60. Nearly four-fifths (79.1 per cent) of the Berakatthes are in the middle age (31-50 years ) and 11.6 percent below 30 years. Only a small percentage (5.0\9) of Berakatthes is above 50 years old.

Nearly a third of the Berakatthes get help in household work and child care either from the old people in the house or their siblings or some other kin whose time is learnt valid for other purposes. Another one-third get practical help from one of these sources. The reminder – nearly 10 percent – of the Berakatthes have to struggle on both fronts i.e., domestic work and marketing. Obviously, their routine in harder than that of an ordinary housewife.

In the past women used to trade fish on the shore itself. Very few fisherwomen were in the habit of taking fish to the retail markets. Their large-scale entry into the market is a more recent phenomenon. Family data show that fish trade by Jalari women started picking up rapidly about two generations ago and more specifically from the Second World War onwards. Several situational factors seem to have facilitated the adoption of new rules, especially in marketing, by the fisherwomen. Traditionally the Hindu social order did not provide any legitimately for the fisherwomen to take the non-familiar rules. But the social framework of the Jalari community tolerated single widows and older women a who did not have the support of male earning members or any other means of continuous to the out a living through marketing of fish by going outside the village 3. Nevertheless, the social status of such woman was rather low, they were looked down upon as deviants from the standard Hindu, norm concerning women. 3 The stigma attached to the Baraketthe was still there. But a number of environmental changes be they urban or technological, afforded opportunities for supplemental income to the fishermen’s family. One of them was she availability of leisure time to fisherwomen. Collection of firewood was a chore and an economic necessity that used to take away a lot of time of the fisherwomen of the previous generation. Another time consuming activity of the previous generation consisted of the manual grinding of flour for cooking purposes. With the introduction of commercial grinding machines the fisherwomen of the present generation is relieved of this work as well. Leisure time apart, the availability of small and medium sized fish is abundance from mechanized boats and easy and quick transportation facilities from their habitat have induced a few fisherwomen to get into fish trade. With the setting up of several ice factories ice became inexpensive and available at the market points, facilitating the storage of fish. Above all, the demand for fish in a sprawling urban center provided further inducement to fisherwomen who were inclined to make a little profit. Fish trade, therefore, became an attractive proposition, especially to those fisherwomen with limited household encumbrances. Women have an inalienable claim upon profits from the sale of fish purchased by them for sale. The fishermen community’s norm that the husband is responsible for the supsport of his family reinforces the rights of women to utilize the profits as they like.

ii

There is considerable diversity among Berakatthes in regard to the extent of regularity of their business, the scale of their investments, rate of returns, business expenses and the mode of transportation used. The following table presents information regarding the regularity or frequency of the Berakatthes’ visits to the market 4.

**TABLE XV : THE FREQUENCY OF BERAKATTHES BUSINESS TRIPS TP THE MARKET PER WEEK**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sl No | Frequency of Business tripe per week | No of respondents | Per cost of total |
| 1  2  3  4  5 | Regular (7 days)  Six days  Four to five days  Three days  One to two days | 48  9  12  11  6 | 55.8  10.4  14.0  12.8  7. |
| Total No of respondents : 86 | | | 100 |

It is evident from Table III that a majority of the Berakatthes (about 56 percent) had not missed a single day of business. Nearly a fifth of them also make extra business trips to the markets in the morning hours. A fourth of the Berakatthes skip business on a few occasions, ranging from to three days in a week. The remainder is much less regular in carrying on their business. About 20 percent of Berakatthes fall in this category. They participate in fish trade less than a quarter of the time. Asked about the reasons for such gross irregularity they cite several reasons. Non-availability of fish at reasonable prices on the shore or at the harbor is stated to be the most important consideration.

Other reasons (in that order of importance) include ill health, the burdens of child care and other domestic pre-occupations.

The family has an obligation towards a woman who is desirous of participating in fish trade. It is also a social norm of the fishing community to provide her the initial capital and to grant some relief from domestic duties. For a Berakatthe, her husband or brother or son may provide initially a little capital (Rs. 25/- to Rs. 50/-) to enable her to begin fish trade. The scale of the business operations of Berakatthes presents wide variations. A look at the data noted in Table XVI indicates the extent of variation.

**TABLE XVI . THE DAILY INVESTMENTS OF BERAKATTHES**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SNo | Range of investment in Rs., | No of respondents | Percent of Total |
| 1  2  3  4  5  6 | 50 andbelow  51-100  101-150  151-200  201-250  251 and above | 12  46  8  4  8  8 | 14.0  53.4  9.3  4.7  9.3  9.3 |
| Total No. of respondents : 86 | | | 100 |

Nearly two-thirds of the Berakatthes invest less than Rs. 100/- per day on their fish trade. The investment also includes the amount paid towards purchase of fish, transport costs, cost of ice and other business of the Berakatthes invest anywhere between Rs. 101/- and Rs. 250/-. The remainder (9.3 percent) invest larger sums. The margin of profits derived from fish business is more or less commensurate with the size of their investments.

The difference in the price of fish between the wholesale rate on the beach and the retail price in the market is about 25 percent on a good day. On an average day it would be between 15 percent and 20 percent. On a bad day (once or twice a month, and usually in the second half of the month) they are likely to sell for less.

The net profit from fish sale on each day ranges from five to fifteen percent. The expenses of the top and medium categories of Berakatthes include transport (Rs.4/- to Rs.12/-), ice (Rs.2/- to Rs.10/-), market tax and other services (Rs.2/- to Rs.5/-). The total daily expenses of the top category of Beraketthes on an average day would be Rs. 25/-. Besides, there are risks arising out of thefts or non-remittance for credit advanced to customers. The data collected from the sample survey show that nearly a fifth (20.9 percent) of the Berakatthes make Rs.10/- or less a day, after deducting the expenses. About 37 percent make any where between Rs.11/- and Rs. 20/- per day. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of the Berakatthes ends up with margins ranging from Rs. 21/- to Rs. 35/- per day. The profit margins of another 10 percent of the Berakatthes range between Rs. 36/- and Rs. 50/- per day. About 8 percent of the Berakatthe who make large scale investments are prone to earn more, anywhere between Rs. 51/- and Rs. 150/- per day.

Transport is one of the Major items of daily expenditure incurred by the most Maraketthes between Jalaripeta and the market points. The following table presents data on the mode of transport used by Bakaketthes.

**TABLE XVII : THE MODE OF TRANSPORT OF BERAKATTHES:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| S No | Mode of daily transport | No of respondents | Percent of total |
| 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8 | Auto rikshaw (motorized three wheeler)  City bus  Horse-drawn cart  Cycle rikshaw  By foot  Bus and auto rikshaw  Bus and cycle rikshaw  Bus and by foot | 26  11  4  2  12  19  8  4 | 30.2  12.8  4.7  2.3  14.0  32.0  9.3  4.7 |
| Total No. of respondents 86 | | | 100 |

Between 3 pm and 4 pm on each day the berakatthes get out of Jalaripeta or the fishing hurbour in a hurry with head-louds of fish. The scene is comparable to the onward rush of people soon after a train steams in at a busy Indian Railway station. Intending to capitalize on the peak business hours in their respective markets they scramble for transport. A few of them (the top category berakatthes) have auto – rikshaw fixed on a regular basis. The drivers of such autos wait for their customers. Other Berakatthes have to fond for some means of transport. A large number of autos and cycle rikshaws arrive at these points, in anticipation of business. Groups of fisherwomen commuting to specified markets bargain the rate and board them with their baskets. For the normal commuters is the city the auto drivers usually charge them by the meter, but not so for the fisherwomen. The load, the stench of fish and the extra number of commuters are factors associated with the extra payment. On a single trip the auto drivers make twice and at times thrice that of the normal fare. Nearly a sixth of the Berakatthes cover the distance by foot, about half of them covering four to six kilometers. Street vendors also by foot. Others who go by feet are mostly those who have to change buses to reach the points of destination and spend a lot of time waiting at the bus stops on city routes with a low frequency of bus transport. They feel that is their hand-load is not very heavy they can cover the distance faster by foot. A barefoot berakatthe risks her capital in vigorous individual competition with others who open their fish stells early to catch up with the rush of business hours. They are, therefore quite calculating in their choice of commuting. There are a few fisherwomen who go by foot because their profit margins are too meager to pay for even bus transport. Many fisherwomen prefer to walk back home in the evenings, the weather permitting. The horse drawn cart, once the major means of transport for Berakatthes, is fading out gradually. It is being replaced by auto-rikshaws, a faster means of transport in a city with an uneven terrain. 5 At present there is only one horse drawn cart, used occasionally by Berakatthes. Cycle rikshaw has never been popular with the Berakatthes because it takes a long time to cover the uneven terrain of the city routes from Jalaripeta.

**Market Rate:**

Market rate is determined on the beach itself, by the amount of catch on a given day. The first boats which return to the beach (around 1pm) get the rate equivalent to that of the previous day. If the catch is enormous, by around 2 pm the price goes down and is keeps going down further until the last arrivals (4 pm). On one such day it started at Rs. 16 per pair of seer fish at 1pn and went down to Rs. 10 by 4pm. On another day catch was slack due through weather. Few fishermen ventured to go out for fishing. Even at 1 pm the price was high (Rs.22 per pair). The Berakatthes know that less than a third of the boats were taken out for fishing. Gradually the price of the fish started going up as the day’s harvest was expected to be low. It shot up to Rs.32 a pair by 4pm. However, fluctuations in the price of fish are rare. Generally, the rates for each variety of fish are steady. 6

The function of market intelligence is performed by fisherwomen, both on the shore as well as outside.7 On the shore there would be lot of fuss over price fixation for the fish produce. While bargaining the fisherwomen make lots of gesticulations and mannerisms, indulge in an extraordinary outburst of vocal power and hurl abuses at each other freely. They keep pushing the catch this side and that side until the price is fixed. Watching the scene an outside observer gets the impression that they were having a big fight. But that was not be. Wild gesticulations and use of slang and abusive language are part of the game of haggling over the sale price. In case of disagreement over the sale price of fish, the owner lifts the catch suddenly, an expression indicating that the offer was humiliating and that it was too low. One of the bidders then offers a little hike. Then other although there are lot of melodramas the whole transaction in completed within an average time of five minutes as the berakatthes and marakatthes do not want to miss the arrivals from other boats. Once the price is settled for one boat’s catch berakatthes and marakatthes other than the bidder can ask for a share. Custom prohibits any single barakatthe or marakatthe to monopolise the entire catch. So, others who lost the bid or did not join the mention are allowed to take a portion. Usually two to three berakatthes distribute the catch for purchase. In all cases of multiple buyers the entire catch ic divided into separate heaps of fish. The choice of heap for each purchaser is then determined by drawing lots of flipping coins.

At least 60 percent of berakatthes report that they do not take their inti-benga (Catch of the family) to markets.

This is for three reasons. Firstly, they want to separate their earnings from that of their spouse(s) or sons(s). Secondly, where the catch is to be jointly shared by eyotus (share-croppers) between their family men and outsiders they intend to avoid the charge of collusion in price fixation. In such cases the fish is auctioned ordinarily participate in such auctions to avoid the possibility of misunderstandings or disputes. A third reason for a fisherwoman to stay away from the husband’s or son’s catch is to stave off criticisms from other fisherwomen berakatthes that the she was monopolizing the fish catch all by herself and cutting off the livelihood of other berakatthes. In instances of scarcity of fish she buys only a portion of the produce of her household and lets other berakatthes to purchase the remainder. In such an event, she would encourage others to do the bidding and settle theprice. When fishing is a joint family operation in which the father and son(s) operate there is a livelihood of the mother-in-law (barakatthe) being criticized by her daughter(s) in law if the former is suspected of any foul-play in price fixation? When fish is abundant on the shore or when demand for fish is sleek the barakatthe (wife of the fisherman) is expected to lift the stock all the by herself. But she has to account for it to her husband or son(s) after the sale is over. The social processes in retailing fish on the shore market are intended to ensure fair price to the producer while at the time the barakatthe who is ordinarily the custodian of the cash (profit or loss in this case) is not allaowed to take advantage of kin ties.

**Markets and Marketing of fish by Fishermen**

The fish market places are overwhelmingly a woman’s milieu. There are more than 215 permanent vendors from Jalaripeta. The vendors pay a fee at different markets to the authorized person of the corporation for their place, usually of 3’ x 2’ size in each case. The fee ranges from Rs. 0.30 to Rs.1.0 per day per basket .8

In addition to the women from Jalaripeta permanent fisherwomen traders of other villages also come to these market places of Visakhapatnam. Apart from these permanent traders who come regularly, a few others join occasionally, most of them on Sundays or when the fish produce is abundant. The locales of the permanent traders in the market place are fixed by informal arrangements. The occasional traders have to find a little space in some corner or on the pavement to put their baskets and sell the fish. The occasional vendors also include those who go to a neighboring market when they are unable to sell their stock on the shore on the Sundays, Fridays, on the eve of festival days or when the fish harvest is good the markets get highly congested. The area earmarked in each market for fish vending is filled with fisherwoman and the buyers. The buyers have to push others to move. As the place gets too crowed it is difficult to attract anybody’s attention. The adage fish market turns out to be literally true.

Not all the selling goes on in the old markets as new markets have come up in various nooks and corners of the city. From Jalaripeta fisherwomen go to is different market places. 9 Some of the places are within the city and some are in the suburbs. The most distant place is about 15 kms from Jalaripeta. In a few markets the regular berakatthes have a place assigned under a roof. Some market places are just open yards. In the markets 9 am to 11 am and 5pm to 7pm are the peak hours for fish sale. The market places are full with buyers to purchase the daily requirements of vegetables, ment, fish fruits, groceries etc. Poorna Market is the largest urban vegetable and non-vegetarian market in down town (Old city). It is colourful, noisy and crowded. As elsewhere the markets in Visakhapatnam are important as they conduct the daily economic transactions, reflecting the distribution of economic and social power.10

Friday is the big market day (santha or fair) at Visakhapatnam Poorna Market in that several people come to the market to sell their produce like vegetables, dry chillies, spices, cereals etc., They spread the produce on the floor and sell. If they do not have space in the market yard they sell on the road outside the market. The products are brought by trucks/lorries as partial load or on bullock carts or push carts or as head-loads in baskets or in gunny bags form the bear by villages. While returning to villages they shop in the market for requirements. On that big market day (santha) the fisherwoman sell more fish and there is a lot of demand for dry fish. On that day, they sell more dry fish because for the village folk who bring merchandise for sale it is inexpensive and easy to carry home. On the big market days the demand for dry fish is, therefore very high. The berakatthes who salt the left – over fish sell the dry fish in the market on these days.

In this market fish is not the only item sold. Butchered meat, chicken, country pork, live chickens, eggs, etc., are also sold in the vicinity.11 A consumer who finds the cost of good variety of fish or meat prohibitive scales down his choice in favour of a cheaper brand of fish or dry fish.

There is stratification among the berakatthes according to the kind and variety of fish theysell, the scale of their operations, the markets where they operte their business and the frequency of their visits to the markets. Thus berakatthes can be classified into four categories: a) top Berakatthes, (b) Intermediate type berakatthes (c) Petty Berakatthes and street vendors.

1. **Top Berakatthes**

They trade in expensive fish and in large quantities and sell mostly in the walled markets with stall or storage facilities in the markets. These berakatthes trade regularly. They invest large amounts of cash and the daily turnover of business of each of them ranges anywhere between Rs. 251 and Rs.800/- depending upon the fish catch on a particular day. Necessarily, the scale of their enterprise is high. They have complete independence in their investments and daily transactions from that of their husbands. There are eight Berakatthes belonging to this category in our sample. Three of them supply fish to the five star hotels in Visakhapatnam and to Navy and other large institutions. They sell the best variety of seer fish known locally as Konam at Rs. 18 to Rs. 20 per kg in the average season. They also sell prawns (Shrimp) at Rs. 100 to Rs. 150 per kg. As these barakatthes accumulate rough capital they aspire to become marakatthes i.e., the highest category in the economic strats of the fishermen community. Indeed, three of them are simultaneously acting as marakatthes. In retail or whole sole business they also offer their merchandise on credit to the consumers, without charging any interest.

Their infrastructure for the trade is based on low levels of technology. They use big baskets and a lot of ice. Wooden boxes are used for storage inside the market. They use sharp knives for cutting the fish and wooden planks for sitting. These items are kept in the market place itself. The people who sleep in the market yard act as watchmen. One of them is paid a rupee per night for keeping a watch on the fish baskets. Despite this, occasionally fish are stolen at night. Once or twice in year, they loose the entire stock or a part of it.

These berakatthes also employ casual labourers to carry the big baskets from the shore to their houses and from there to the main road, a stretch of about half a kilometer. The laboureres are underemployed fisherwomen who get paid Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 per month. These berakatthes invariably use auto-rickshaws (motorized three wheelers) both ways to get to the market and to return home. The fare they pay for each one-way trip ranges from Rs. 10 to Rs. 15, depending upon the number travelling and the weight of the merchandise. Since these berakatthes carry two big baskets to the market each auto is engaged by two only. Ice is brought to Jalaripeta by ice-vendors. They bring ice each day by cycle rickshaws. The big blocks of ice, weighing 20 to 30 kgs are broken into pieces of two rupees worth and retailed to the fisherwomen

**b) Intermediate Type Berakatthe:**

They also undertake trade regularly, either in the walled markets or in the other markets. Few have storage facilities. They also trade in expensive variety of fish like seer fish. But the scale of the daily business turnover is lower, ranging from Rs.100 to Rs. 250/-. There are about twenty Berakatthes in this range in our sample. They are effective competitors on the shore to the first category of berakatthe. They also engage auto – rickshaws , but usually one way, while carrying fish to the market. Three or four of them engage one auto. While returning home they usually catch a city bus.

Less than a quarter of them have storage spaces in the market. As the quantity of fish they put up for sale is limited they do not normally require any storage space. In caase they are left with a surplus by the time of closure of business they either carry the fish home for conversion into dry fish or request someone with storage facility to store it until the next morning. They make an extra trip to the market the next morning only when they are left with a surplus of unsold fish stock the previous night. Cooperation, especially among kin folk, in such respects in very high. Again, it is based on reciprocity. The berakatthe who receives this kind of help would reciprocate such help some other time. When someone else sells the fish in her absence the collection is returned to the owner later. There is complete trust among the berakatthes is transactions carried out during the absence of the owner.

**c) Petty Baraketthes:**

The third set of berakatthes is the pretty category in terms of the scale of their operations. They constitute two thirds of our sample strength. The average values of the fish produce marketed by them each day ranges anywhere between Rs. 20 and Rs. 100. There is a wide fluctuation in this respect, depending on the quality of fish and price levels on a particular day. On a slack day, when catch is low, less than quarter of them go to the market. They stay back home and wash the clothes, clean the surroundings, purchase fire-wood, mend the ropes used for fishing or run other errands. A vast majority of this category constitutes the poorer stratum within the villages the widows accounting for more than a quarter. There are also there unmarried spinsters in this group. The occasion Berakatthes, numbering nearly a third of the total sample also fall in this category. A few fisherwomen take the catch to the market for direct sale when they do not get the expected price or when they were unable to find buyers on the sea-shore. Nearly fifty percent of the low level category buy fish from the machine boats of the fishing harbor, located 4 kms away from the villages. They get among the berakatthes a larger range and variety of fish including small fish and small prawns at the fishing harbor. On buying her fish at the harbor they rush to their respective markets, choosing mostly less expensive means of transport.

Since they don’t have storage facility at the markets they carry their wherewithal (knives fixed to wooden planks, old cloth and a rubber or polythene sheet) with them daily. As the quantity of fish purchased by them is not high they are seldom left with a surplus. They also resort to distress sale in case a little quantity is left over towards the closing time. The case of Ravamma provides a good illustration. On one evening she brought from the Harbor point Rs.15 worth of small fish. She paid Rs. 2/- for the cycle rickshaw. She could not, however, reach the market on time. With great difficulty she was able to sell fish worth Rs.10/-. Half of the merchandise was still there by 7pm. Many of the fisherwomen closed their stalls. Ravamma was looking around for customers desperately. One well-dressed person came and looked at the pile of small fish and walked over to the next stall where big fish are sold. At this point Ravamma divided the fish into four lots. An old woman parried around Ravamma’s stall and asked for the price of two lots. Ravamma quoted Rs.6/-. The customer offered Rs.3/-. The berakatthe scaled down her offer to Rs. 5/-. Then the customer walked off to another stall. Another customer, a young girl, came to Ravamma’s stall, had a feel of the fish with her hands, smelt them and walked off. By this time, there was only one another berakatthe in the market. One middle-aged woman turned up and asked for the price of two lots. Ravamma said: ‘take it, pay me whatever you intend to’. The time was 7.30pm Ravamma was alone in the market and still left with two lots of fish. With a pathetic face she collected the fish in her basket, saying that it is not possible to dry this variety of fish. She ended up with a lossof Rs.5/-.

Most of the petty berakatthes return home in groups by foot, taking short-cut routes. A few catch the city bus, if it is available, upto some point and walk home from there. They do not offer any credit to consumers. The occasional berakatthes do not have an allotted place in the markets they frequent. They usually steal a corner or sit on the road side to sell their produce. Some of them request their kins-women to allow them to sit behind them to sell the produce. In such cases, they borrow the tools of the allottee. For such services one rupee is paid to the patron.

A few fisherwomen (less than 5 percent) are reported to be in trade for other than economic purposes. They seem to enjoy selling fish and the opportunity of going outside the village. Going to market provides them an opportunity to escape, at least temporarily, from the daily routine of household work. For many petty berakatthes livelihood does not depend on profits from market trade; nor are they highly motivated to build domestic assets. In such cases, social and personal motives tend to predominate over economic motives.

**d) Street Vendor Berakatthe:**

The street vendors constitute the fourth category. There are three of them in our sample. They hawk fish with baskets on their heads and go round the streets for selling fish. Their trade is not regular. If the price of fish is too high or the catch is too low or when there is inclement weather most of them skip the trade on that day. There are areas and routes prefixed for each fisherwoman vendor. Other fisherwomen do not encroach into those areas just as the fisherwomen in the market places do not sit at some else’s allotted place. This is governed by custom and violations seldom take place.

The street vendors have regular clientele whose tastes for the variety of fish are known to the vendor. Every street vendor carries fish worth Rs.50/- to Rs. 150/- only. Sometimes, the street vendor makes good profits because the consumer does not know the prevailing market rate. At times, the berakatthe appeals to the vender that the servicing the customer at her doorstep. So she pleads that she deserves a little margin over and above the usual market price. The consumer and the seller bargain for a while. Finally either the bargain is settled or the product is rejected. The street vendors are in the habit of quoting a high price unlike in the market places where there are other fish stalls Sometimes the beraketthe leaves the customer’s house in case of disagreement over the price and returns after a few minutes and sells the produce for the price offered by the consumer. Here the berakatthe tests the willingness of the consumers. The consumer may, at times, call the vendor back and pay the price suggested by the letter. The street vendors offer credit and may sometimes collect advance also. They have the advantage of going back home early and attend to their household duties. Their expenses on the trade are the minimum.

The classification of fish trading women, suggested above, is based on pooling up of a number of important characteristics, the chief determinant being the scale of their investments and the propensity to take risks. It should, however, be made clear that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Empirical data suggest overlapping on a few dimensions. Kin structures in particular serve as an important intervening variable at several points in fostering temporary transfers of capital or eliciting cooperation of other traders whenover there is need. Another intervening variable in the transactions within the jalari fish trading women is the obligation of the better off to help the poorer ones. When there is competition consideration is shows to the less fortunate ones.

**Berakatthe and Retail Fish Markets:**

There is some stratification in the markets where the fish trading women sell. The Poorna Market is the biggest market where about twenty five women from Jalaripeta operate. They constitute nearly 50 percent of the total fish traders there. In each of the other markets about 6 to 15 from Jalaripeta conduct their trade. The better-off sections from the City shop in the big markets like Poorna Market and Nehru bazaar where a large variety of fish, apart from other merchandise, are available. In the small open market yards, a larger number of fish traders sell mostly small and less expensive varieties of fish. The customers who frequent these markets are predominantly composed of salaried employees, wage labourers who cannot afford to buy expensive fish.

The most significant factor influencing price levels across various markets today is the equation between demand and supply. With increasing reliance on freezing by the fish traders as well as the better-off customers who own refrigerators there is a leveling up are the price levels of various markets on any given day in a week. If the nearest is very good the fisherwomen sell the fish in bulk to whole sellers who export it to Calcutta. When the harvest is not very high the fish is frozen for sale on Sunday or for the big market days. Thus the risk factor associated with perishables has come down due to the fisherwoman’s ability to learn to adjust her options to market fluctuations.

Sale of fish to casual customers in the market is a complex game of bargaining and bluffing. Theprice depends upon the availability of similar fish in the market, its condition and the time of the day. Prices are high between 5.30pm and 7 pm and slump a little between 7pm and 8 pm. The regular berakatthes usually do not undersell their fish unless the fish is likely to be spoiled.

Many customers are market experts also, and are as quick to perceive a seller’s willingness to drop the price as the berakatthe is to sense the buyer’s readiness to go little higher. Almost nothing is offered immediately at the “last price”. The berakatthe quotes the price of the fish she sells and the customer states the price he or she is willing to pay and while bargaining the seller reduces the price a little and the customer pushes up the offer a little. Towards the end he/she may either settle the bargain or turn to some other fish vendor. Many customers move around with the hope that they might haggle for a lower price with some other fisherwomen. They are sure to be disappointed if they hope to get a windfall offer. The fisherwomen, selling a particular variety like seer fish, come from the some village or purchased fish form the same market. As such, they would have paid almost the same market. As such, they would have paid almost the same farm for the product. Moreover, it is an unwritten understanding among all the fisherwomen in retail market that they sell a particular type of fish or a set price, with a gross profit margin of 15 to 25 percent. Competition among fisherwomen is conspicuous by its absence among fisherwomen within each market. The situation is rather governed by social norms and usually reinforced by kin group identifies.

The berakatthes use their vocal power and slang in the retail market as well. It is used, through to a lesser extent by other vendors (mainly vegetable vendors) in the market. Vocal power and abusive language are used as a social contract mechanism, to deflate the ego of the customer who is found haggling too much or paying undesirable attention. With the customers bent on bargaining the berakatthes pretend impatience also. Their slang and strong language are intended to force the customer to settle a quick bargain. They wish to clear the customers and avoid hangers-on. If there are more hangers-on bargaining with persistence there is the danger of other customers offering a lower price. Hence, show would like to force a bargain or neck them out so that other customers are allowed to buy. The interaction initiated and controlled by her represents a special marketing skill to keep the price up and let the business go on.

**The clients of berakatthes may be divided into three groups.:**

* Regular customers. Those who buy fish once to thrice a week from the same berakatthe. They come and ask for fish of a certain variety, usually of fixed quantity. They don’t bargain the berakatthe herself suggest the price of a fish or heap of pieces small fish if the prices are high on that day.
* Occasional customers and strangers. They don’t bargain a lot. Some of them may not buy expensive fish at the entire price is high. They shop around and buy the fish which is within their means.
* Tough bargainers/choosers. They buy only if the price of fish is low. Otherwise, they go in for vegetable or dry fish on that day.

Within the first category of customers the berakatthes developed some favored customers who are given a better selection (fresh fish) or a little extra. She also gives fish on credit whenever needed. The berakatthe cuts and cleans the fish to those customers without any extra charge. She directs the other customers the approach other fisherwomen in the market who are specialists in processing cutting and cleaning and who render the service at a fixed price. The berakatthe has personal knowledge of the house addresses and employment particulars of her favored customers. The berakatthe develop with these customers ‘equilibrating relationships’.13 Scarce cash force the customers to rely on credit. For some shippers time is valuable; they prefer to avoid haggling. A few customers are scared of the ‘big-mouthed’ fisherwomen who might shower insults and abuse. These customers therefore prefer long-run reciprocal relation. On the other hand, the berakatthe is interested in stabilizing her business having more steady customers. By providing credit or price reduction or rendering entire services like cutting and cleaning she could make more profits in the long run.14

Besides the operation of price controls there is considerable evidence of cooperation among the berakatthes in regard to sharing of transport, selling the leftover fish of a neighboring stall owner and in several other minor matters. The bands of beraktthes give the appearance of proof of collective spirit in jalari society or evidence or feminist consciousness. But this is not true. To borrow a phrase from Margaret Strobel, ‘they exhibit a kind of sisterhood without solidarity’. The berakatthes act together for personal goals, only incidentally related to the fact they are female.

The demands which fish marketing make upon the berakatthe in terms of energy, wit and resourcefulness are stupendous. They have to work long and hard in order to acquire new capital. Yet, Jalaripeta, with its market system, seems to afford its women a such more active and independent economic role then that provided to the women of other communities. Jalaris’ way of living and their profession of fishing have encouraged the fisherwomen to involve in marketing by reorienting their activities and enlarging their roles. Nevertheless there are upper limits for the expansion of the fisherwoman’s economic activity or for branching off into new productive enterprises.