

## **A Study Of Changing Livelihoods Of Odisha's Coastal Fishing Communities: Reasons And Effects**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Fishing and fishing industry are dominant at Puri – a popular coastal town of Odisha. Traditional fishing community that belong to the Kaibarta caste live alongside the Puri beaches and the Chilika Lake. Fishing, processing, drying, and packaging are main livelihoods of these marine and riverine fishers. However, migration from adjacent states, infiltration of non-fishing caste people, and the disgruntled new generation (of traditional fisher folks) have subtly changed the livelihood patterns and socio-economic condition of the traditional fishing community of Odisha. This study has focused mainly on Puri district and studied the livelihoods of the active fishing population, and why and how they have changed.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Fishing, community, migration, livelihoods, industry, caste, Puri.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Odisha, a coastal state of India, has nearly 480 kilometers coastline. Six maritime districts – Bhadrak, Balasore, Kendrapara, Puri, Ganjam, and Jagatsinghpur – lie along this long coastline. Nearly thousand fishing villages are situated in these very states. The number of the fishing villages keeps on changing in each DOF yearbook [1] because cyclone and other marine storms destroys lots of villages each year. However, according to the DOF (Department of Fisheries) yearbooks the marine fishing population of these districts are nearly a million. Comparing the DOF yearbooks one can see a steady rise in the fisher population of Odisha's coastal states. However, a large portion of this active fisher population are seasonal labourers or migrating fisher people from adjacent states of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal [2]. These migrating seasonal labourers not only work alongside the traditional fisher folks but also work as fish processors, handlers, intermediaries, transporters, carriers, shrimp-processors, peelers, sellers, ice crushers and so on. The intrusion of these migrating people are changing the contours of the patterns of the livelihoods of the fishing communities of these coastal states. This study has focused mainly on Puri district and studied the livelihoods of the active fishing population, and why and how they have changed.

Puri district is one of the important districts in marine fish production in Odisha. There are five blocks of marine fishing villages in the district of Puri. These are Puri Sadar, Krushnaprasad, Astarang, Brahmagiri and Gop. Though all these blocks have more or less marine fishing villages the Astarang block has the largest number of fishing villages. But, Puri Sadar block has the largest percent of the fishermen population. In fact, Puri is the leading district in Odisha for having the maximum number of fishing gear (such as trawlers, hooks, lines, drift/gillnets, shore seines, bag nets, small purse- seines and boat seines). Boat-seines (nearly 57%) is the main gear of Astarang block, hooks and lines are seen in Puri Sadar and gill net is the main gear of Krushnaprasad block [3]. Though all the blocks are engaged in livelihoods related to fishing, the livelihoods and lives of the fishers of Puri are multifaceted and multidimensional. This multidimensional aspect rises from the caste, migration, and changing choices of the new generation. The traditional fishing-caste people do the basic fishing activities (such as catching, processing, marketing, and manufacturing) but the non-fishing caste people, migrating fishing people, conduct additional activities. Before analyzing how the non-fishing caste people and the migrating labourers affecting the livelihood patterns of the fishing communities of Puri, this paper would discuss how socio-economic reasons affect the fishing activities and life of fisher people.

### **II. ASSETS**

Access to the assets (crafts and gears) depend on the socio-economic status of the fishing people. Ability to access the natural resources depends on the access to the assets and defines the socio-economic status of the fisher people of Puri and overall Odisha. The owners of the traditional catamarans or dinghies are mainly considered to be the poor fishing people, whereas motorized or mechanized are richer than them. Only affluent people can buy such mechanized or motorized boats and these people hire poor fishing folks to work on these boats. Therefore, economic stability not only designates the social status but also defines the status within the

fishing community. Apart from the motorized boats and trawlers (big and small) accumulation of other gears such as nets, lines also influence the socio-economic status of the fishing people. As for example, *bedhajal* or encircling nets help lots of fishing people get employment. Today poor and old fisher people can earn some money from making the pieces of a large *bedhajal*. After making the pieces of the net they join those pieces together forming a circle. It is considered that only the poor fisher people are engaged in making *bedhajal* and each person gets his share from the catch. Beach seine – another net- needs lot of people to make and use it properly. Even if this kind of net employs lots of people from fishing community this is going out of use due to the impracticality and inconveniency of the usage of this net. Besides these two types of nets, cast or push-net fishers are also considered poor. They mainly use such nets in creeks and rivers rather than in sea fishing. Fisher people of Astarang block use such nets to catch fish on part-time basis. They sell their catch to the local fish vendors and to the local people for regular use.

### **III. ADDITIONAL FISHING LIVELIHOODS:**

Apart from direct marine and riverine fishing there are lots additional fishing livelihoods available to both the traditional fishing-caste and non-fishing caste people. Such livelihoods are more apparent in the creeks, rivers, lakes, and estuarine areas. Crab collecting is an important fishing related livelihood seen in the Puri district. Lots of people collect mud crabs from the Chilika Lake. Poor fisher people who do not have assets to organize riverine or marine fishing become crab collectors, shrimp-seed collectors, shell collectors. Shell collecting is also another important activity in the district of Puri. In the villages surrounding the Chilika Lake both fishermen, fisher women and their children collect shells. Shells are used in making ornaments and other home decorations. Though some people collect shell on their own and without any official permission, mainly the Revenue Department allows fisher people to collect shell from certain areas. Besides these livelihoods, there are shrimp-seed collectors. Large number of poor fishermen, women and even their children collect shrimp-seed for aquaculture purpose each year. However, such untrained seed collections destroy other seeds of other fishes. Odisha Marine Fishing Regulation Act has banned such untrained activities but this cannot stop the poor fisher people from this activity. Related to this shrimp-seed collecting there are activities such as shrimp peelers and graders. However, in shrimp peeling and grading hardly any traditional fishing folks are engaged.

### **IV. TRADING AS LIVELIHOOD:**

Besides the basic fish trading and distributing there are additional and supplementary livelihoods related to fish trading, vending and distributing. Such as women of poor fishing families door-to-door sell fish, poor fishermen also sell fish on their bicycles. At times non-fishing caste people use their bicycles to sell fish. Some people work as carriers of fish from the trawlers or motorized boats to the auction area. At times, affluent boat owners and trawler-owners employ poor fishing people to carry the day's catch to the auction area for little sum of money. Apart from these small livelihood options, there is also the livelihood of auctioneering. Today, auctioneering has become important in the whole fish trading and distributing. Auctioneers also work as agents for affluent boat owners. Apart from these livelihoods, one can find independent traders and agents.

## **V. REASONS THAT AFFECT THE FISHING LIVELIHOODS**

### **V.1.Migration**

The livelihoods mentioned above are the general livelihoods visible in the coastal regions of Puri. However, these livelihoods are not restricted to the traditional fishing caste. The major fishing caste of Puri (even Odisha) is Kaibarta. The Kaibarta caste has its sub-castes such as Jalia Kaibarta, Dhibar Kaibarta, Jalari Kaibarta. Kondra and Khotia are two subdivision of Dhibar Kaibarta that are active in Puri district. However, another branch of Jalari kaibarta caste – Nolia – has been migrated from the neighboring state Andhra Pradesh. The actual time and period of their first migration are not clear [4]. Regarding the time of the Nolia migration in Odisha (specially Chilika Lake region) O'Malley says, "the fisher folk of this location, however have their origin not only in the Kaibarta and Kondara castes but also in the Telegu fisher folk, who had been invited in the second half of 18<sup>th</sup> Century by the ruler of Machhagaon, Basudev Maharaj to settle at the mouth of the river Devi to serve him as Pirates" (1985, pp: 84-85) [5]. These Nolias have deep impact on the fishing livelihoods of Puri. Some of them migrated from Andhra Pradesh and started living in Odisha. However, a lot of the Nolias come to Puri during major fishing season (May to November). Their presence and their engagement in the fishing livelihoods of Puri fishing community challenges not only the homogenous structure of the community but also changes the patterns of livelihoods of them. These seasonal Nolias live at the traditional fishing villages or even at the thatched houses along the sea beaches of Puri. Even if they work along the traditional fishing community of Puri, they are not considered as part of the traditional fishing villages or communities of Puri. These seasonal Nolias work in the large engine boats and trawlers used in marine fishing. Apart from working in such motorized boats they at times individually collect fishes and package them for export to sell to the local vendors. Actually, these seasonal labourers want to earn maximum profit within a

short period. For this reason, apart from being involved in marine fishing they work as wage labourers at the fish packaging and processing centers, collect sells from the Puri beaches and the Chilika lake area and make ornaments and imitation goods, and work at the sea beaches during tourist seasons.

The Nolias, who have become permanent residents of Puri, own small engine boats and small nets to catch fish. Being the permanent residents, they are more involved with the fish marketing and distributing procedures than the seasonal Nolias. They live mainly near the Pentacota beach and its adjacent territory. These Nolias are the Telegu speaking people who actually have infiltrated the traditional fishing community of Puri and destabilized its demographic structure. Since the permanent Nolias have been living for quite a long time in Puri some of them have got married to the traditional fishing families and changed the social relationship patterns of the traditional fishing caste of Prui. These kinds of social bondages established the Nolias as the important parts of the fishing community of Puri. The Nolias have encroached a large portion of the livelihood options of the fishing community of Puri. Even where the traditional fishing caste of Puri (better say Odisha) do not want to engage themselves the Nolias easily can work and earn profit [6]. Critics such as Tietze have marked the Nolias as the most ingenious marine fishers of eastern coast. Even if they are treated as outsiders by the traditional fishing castes of Puri, none can negate their presence and importance [7]. As the traditional fishing castes look down upon the Nolias, they remain deprived of several government benefits that are available for the fishers of Odisha. Due their language barrier at times, they cannot understand the local rights to the fishing areas. As a result, they hardly have any hold over the water bodies and just work as employees. In Puri district, several Nolia women (even if they are permanent residents) speak in mixed Telegu and Odiya. Due to this language problem, they cannot get hold of the schemes available for the women workers and fisherwomen. However, in Puri district the Nolias can be considered as the predominant working force inside the existing fishing community. The migration of the Nolia from Andhra Pradesh to Odisha, thus have changed both the social structure of the fishing community and their livelihood patterns.

### **V.2. Infiltration of non-fishing caste**

Apart from the Nolias numerous non-fishing caste people have infiltrated in the daily jobs of fishing and its related jobs. In Puri, several non-fishing caste people work as wage labourers in the fisheries, packaging centers, dry-fishing areas. These people do not belong to the traditional fishing caste rather they have chosen these livelihoods just to earn money and meet up their needs. However, one should not think that all non-fishing caste people are poor. Rather, rich non-fishing caste people invest in aquaculture and inland fresh water fisheries. These affluent non-fishing caste people play an important role in the development of the fisheries and lives of the fishers. Since they have the power to invest large amount of funds their presence cannot be ignored and avoided. Rather these people are subtly changing the concept of traditional fishing livelihoods.

### **V.3. Lack of interest in present generation**

The decreased involvement of the new generation of the traditional fishing caste actually creating spaces for the non-fishing caste and migrating people. Generally, fisher folks in Puri are considered poor and their livelihoods are assumed not sufficient and profitable. Besides, the emergence of the private fisheries has made the fishing industry more competitive and less profitable. As a result, the young generation of the fishing castes consider fishing and its related livelihoods non-profitable and too strenuous to try. Rather, they search for easy jobs in big cities (such as Kolkata, Chennai, Bhubaneswar). Thus, the number of traditional fisher folks are gradually decreasing and with the emergence of the non-fishing caste in the fishing industry, the traditional livelihoods are changing their patterns and contours.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

All these reasons have affected not only the livelihoods of the fisher folks of Puri but also left impact on the socio-economic system and the structure of fishing market itself. Due to the infiltration of non-fishing caste people in the Puri fishing industry, several big private fisheries now a days hire cheap labourers from southern states of India. Because, they can pay those labourers lower than the traditional fishing people. As a result, the number of wage labourers from different states have increased in recent years in the fishing industry. On the other side the traditional fishing folks are losing their hold over the available livelihoods within the fishing industry [8]. Along with the fishing livelihoods these migrating people, seasonal labourers and non-traditional fishing people have wrought a cultural transformation within the fishing villages. On the one hand the migrating people have adopted the cultures, customs and livelihoods of the host place, on the other have changes several traditional customs, cultures and livelihood patterns of the host state. Thus, one can conclude that these people have produced a socio-economic and cultural transformation in the lives of the traditional fishing caste of Puri.

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