

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE FISHER FOLK OF UPPER BAHMAPUTRA RIVER: A
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ABSTRACT : The fisher folk are belongs to schedule cast community. They are known as Koibotra community in Assam. The total 50 families of the village were surveyed during the study. The results reveal that total number of population of the village was 210; 61.90 % (literate) and 38.1% (Illiterate). Among the literate population, 51.53 % have upto primary, 33.84 % up to middle school, 11.53 % up to matriculation and only 3.07 % of the fisherman was found to be higher degree. The peoples were in different services such as agriculture (23.81 %), fishing (28.1 %), business (19.52 %), service (15.24 %) and labour (13.33 %). Again, 90% people were lived in the kachcha house and remaining (10 %) in pukka house while, per month income was found to be lowest (Rs. 500-1000) in the age of 20-30 and highest (1500- 4000) in the age of 50-60 group. The overall fish production of the beel was 1757 kg/yr. Out of these productions, miscellaneous was found to be maximum (679 kg/yr) with 38.65% while feather back was minimum (218 kg/yr) with 12.41%. Production of carp was lowest but production of small fishes was highest. All the villagers were not only confined in fishing but also in different occupation, because of reducing fish production in the beels due to overexploitation, siltation, human activities etc.

Key words: Nahotia, Wetland, Livelihood, Beel, Jorhat.

INTRODUCTION

Study of socio-economic status is important factor for sustainable management of wetlands and enhancement fish production as well as upliftment of rural economy. Scioeconomic status of beel dependent people was studied by few workers in Assam. Out of these workers Bhagowati *et al.* (1987), Dutta *et al.* (1987), Jhingran *et al.* (1994), Goswami *et al.* (1994), Baishya *et al.* (2009) are important works. Fisheries sector occupies a very important place in the socio-economic development of the country. It has been recognized as a powerful income and employment generator as it stimulates growth of a number of subsidiary industries and is a source of cheap and nutritious food besides being a foreign exchange earner. At the same time, it is an instrument of livelihood for a large section of economically backward population of the country.

Fisheries acquired the status of one of the fastest growing sector for increasing food production as well as solving unemployment problems owing to introduction of scientific fish farming and artificial propagation for enhancement of fish production. Fish production potential of India is estimated about 8.4 million tons (Hand Book on Fisheries Statistics (2000). Again, the present fish production is about 6.8 million tons (Hand Book on Fisheries Statistics (2000). The annual fish production can be increase if the available techniques of aquaculture are fully adopted in the rural weaker sectors of the states. Though India is the sixth largest producer of fish in the World and second in inland fish production but socio-economic condition of the rural peoples is very poor in most of the part of India especially in the North East India. In India, development of fishermen is often neglected (Dutta and Kundu, 2007).

Capture fisheries have undergone a declining production over the past few years due to over-fishing, flouting of fishing norms, increasing demand for fish. Therefore, in Assam the numbers of the indigenous and tribal fishers are decreasing from fishing business while there appears an increasing presence of emigrant fishers (Bhattacharyya & Dutta 2012). Before introduction of an aquaculture technology in the rural area, survey of the beels dependent people should be given first preference for sustainable development of beel as well as beel dependent community. With this aim, socio- economic status of the beel dependent people was studied in Jankhana village of Nahotia beel, Kokilamukh, Jorhat District, Assam.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The studies were conducted during 2009–2010 to evaluate socio-economic status of fisher folk community of the Jankhana village which situated near Nahotia wetland (beel) of Jorhat district of Assam. The Nahotia wetland is located in the geographical ordinates of 26°48′-26°49′N and 94°12′-94°13′ E. The beel is situated 10 km away from Jorhat town. Socio-economic status was studied with help of a format (questionnaire) of National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources with some modification. Data were collected by visiting the target village and from personal interview. The fish catch data were collected from fisher man, mohlder and personal interview.

RESULTS

Results of livelihood and production of fish in the present study were summarized in the Table 1 & 2. Total number of population of the village was 210, among these 71.4% were male and 28.56% were female. The results of the survey indicated that the literacy rate among the fishermen in the village was poor. It has been found that about 61.90 per cent of the fisher is literate and 38.1 per cent of the total fishermen are illiterate. Among the literate population, 51.53 % have only upto primary, 33.84 % have up to middle school, 11.53 % up to matriculation and only 3.07 % of the fisherman was found to be higher degree. The peoples were in different services such as agriculture (23.81 %), fishing (28.1 %), business (19.52 %), service (15.24 %) and labour (13.33 %). 90% people of the village were lived in the kachcha house and remaining 10 % people in pukka house. Per month income for age group 20-30, 30-40, 50-60 and 60 -70 were Rs. 500 - 1000/, 1500 -3000/, 1500- 4000/ and 1500 - 4000/ respectively. The overall fish production of the beel was 1757 kg/yr. Out of these productions, carp was found as 253 kg/yr (14.4 %), catfish as 268 kg/yr (15.25 %), murrels as 339 (19.29 %), feather back as 218 kg/yr with (12.41 %), miscellaneous as 679 kg/yr (38.65 %).

DISCUSSION

The economic status of the people was fairly poor as they were not fully engaged in particular work specially in the business of fish, because of declining fish production in the beels due to anthropogenic pressure, floods and siltation. Most of the peoples were not aware of modern aquaculture technique. They used traditional fishing methods. Light of present aquaculture tools have not seen in the village. Therefore, urgent needs of awareness programme regarding modern scientific farming technique among the beels peoples. The overall fish production of the beel was about 1757 kg/yr. Out of these productions, miscellaneous was found to be maximum while feather back was minimum. Again, miscellaneous was found to be maximum production and followed by murrels, catfish, carps and feather back. Minimum production for carps was recorded in February while maximum in October and November; for cat fish, minimum was observed in March and maximum in November; for murrels, the lowest production was found in March and highest in September; for feather back, the minimum was recorded in February and maximum in November; for misc. the minimum production was found in January and maximum in August to October. The production of fish species was highest during monsoon and post-monsoon and lowest during winter season. They were also used traditional fishing methods and most of the people were not aware of modern aquacultural technique

Table 1: Socio-economic status of Jankhana village in Nahatia wetland (2009 - 2010).

Sl. No.	Parameters	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Population of Jankhana Gaon	210	71.42 (Male) 28.58 (Female)
2.	Type of house %		
	a) Kachcha	189	90.0
	b) Pukka	21	10.0
5.	Educational status		
	a) Illiterate	80	38.1
	b) Literate	130	61.90
	i. Primary School	67	51.53
	ii. Middle school	44	33.84
	iii. High School	15	11.53
	iv. Higher degree	4	3.07
6.	Main occupation of the family		
	a) Fishing	59	28.1
	b) Agriculture	50	23.81
	c) Business	41	19.52
	d) Services	32	15.24
	e) Any labour	28	13.33
8.	Monthly income of the family with age distribution	Minimum (Rs.)	Maximum (Rs.)
	a) 0-10 years	0	0
	b) 10-20 years	0	0
	c) 20-30 years	500/-	1,000/-
	d) 40-50 years	1,500/-	3,000/-
	e) 50-60 years	1,500/-	4,000/-
	f) 60-70 years	1,500/-	4,000/-

Table 2: Fish Production (kg/month) in the Nahatia wetland during 2009-2010

Production of Fish (Nahatia)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Total & %
Carp	5	3	5	10	20	20	30	30	30	50	50	253 (14.4%)
Catfish	5	6	4	20	20	10	33	30	40	30	70	268 (15.25%)
Murrels	7	10	5	7	30	20	20	50	90	60	40	339 (19.29%)
Feather back	4	2	4	6	4	5	20	50	40	18	65	218 (12.41%)
Misc.	29	50	50	50	50	50	50	100	100	100	50	679 (38.65%)
Total	50	71	68	93	124	105	153	260	300	258	275	1757

*Misc = Miscellaneous including indigenous small fish

Although, there is no coverage by any welfare programmes for Traditional Fishermen through there are some important programmes for the welfare of fishermen: (i) Group Accident Insurance Scheme for active fishermen, and (ii) Development of Model Fishermen Village in some parts of India. In this programmes fishermen could be insured for Rs 50,000 in case of death or permanent disability and for Rs 25,000 in case of partial disability. Under the programme of Development of Model Fishermen Villages is not included the surveyed village.

Due to poor economy of rural people definitely impact on wetlands and leads to reducing fish production and cause threats to biodiversity. Moreover, growing urbanization, globalization and rapidly changing social structures had a major impact on the fisheries structure in the India. During the year 2009 -2010, the state produced 2.18 lakh ton of fish against the demand of 2.86 lakh ton (Economic Survey Assam, 2010-11). Fisheries are a sunrise sector of our economy. Its role in increasing food supply, generating job opportunities, raising nutritional level and earning foreign exchange has been important. Fisheries and aquaculture emerged as the important commercial activity from its traditional role as subsistence supplementary.

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