

A study on fishing community of Gopal Jaroni, a small river island of Brahmaputra at Sonitpur District of Assam with reference to socio-economic status

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Abstract

The study relates to the socio-economic condition of the fishing community of Gopal Jaroni, a small river island of Brahmaputra at Sonitpur District, Assam, India. The result shows a very miserable condition. Fishing was found to be the prime business along with milk selling and mustard cultivation of the studied area. The literacy among the respondents is not good where 17% of them are illiterate. Among the literates, however, 13% of them are having bachelor degree and the others have educational qualification up to primary and secondary level only. Most of the fisher was in early middle aged with daily income ranges from Rs.100 to Rs. 500. The poor condition of the villagers may be due to high family size, scarcity of alternate employment opportunities, non availability of nearby market for selling of fish and low education level are the prime causes for the same.

Keywords: Fishing community, Gopal Jaroni, Socio-Economic

1. Introduction

In Assam capture fishery is endowed with two major river systems namely the Brahmaputra and the Barak along with many flood plain wetlands. Both the River systems and their tributaries are important fisheries resource of Assam to fulfil the state's domestic demand for fish providing cheap human nutrition, major livelihood of many fisher families and generating the state economy as well. In India, developments of fisher are often restricted to the traditional fishing communities near the coastal areas while the interest of those associated with inland fishery is relatively neglected (Dutta and Kundu, 2007) [2]. At present in Assam the demand for fish in a year is about 2.95 lakh metric tons, but from both culture and capture fisheries the production is 2.82 lakh metric tons per year (Directorate of Fisheries, Assam). Therefore, import of fish from other states of India like Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar to supply the demand is necessary in the state. Fishing is an important business for generation of employment, income source for many families and supporting livelihood worldwide. But, the research related to the socio-economic condition of the fisher community is very scarce not only in flood plain wetlands in India but also in riverside area causing lack of information about these areas to prepare developmental programmes for them. The present study is therefore, an attempt with an aim to investigate the socio-economy condition of the people of Gopal Jaroni of Sonitpur District, Assam, India

2. Materials and Method

The present work was based on the studies carried out for a period of 6 months, commencing from Jan, 2015 to June, 2015 in a small river island of Brahmaputra called Gopal Jaroni situated at Sonitpur District of Assam (latitude 90°17' to 93°47' and longitude 26°30' to 27°2'). The study was based on the analysis of data regarding various aspects of socio-economic condition of the villagers of Gopal Jaroni who were involved in

fishing both permanently (primary income source) and partially (secondary source of income). A household survey was conducted with the help of a prepared questionnaire. A door to door survey was carried out and in that process; the head of the family were interviewed. The people who were illiterate, the questionnaires were not distributed to get their responses. Instead, each item in the form of question of the questionnaire was discussed and their verbal responses were recorded in the appropriate column of the questionnaire. During the discussions the outcome were recorded systematically to know more about the socio-economic conditions of the people living in the studied village. During the study, data were collected from twenty five families using well-structured questionnaire.

3. Results

The socio-economic studies of the present investigations reveal that almost all the families of the village are engaged in fishing. Besides these, milk selling and mustard cultivation are also done by these villagers along with fishing. The study reveals that 40% of the fishermen solely depend on fishing; 44% on fishing along with mustard cultivation and 16% on milk selling along with fishing (Figure-1). Although fishing is the prime business of these villagers but they do not have any training from Government or NGO. Even the Fishermen are not getting any government support in financial matter. In fact they have to take constrain in financial matter especially in breeding season because they have to avoid fishing during that period under Assam Fishing Rule, 1953.

The study also shows that among all the fishermen, most of them are under matriculate and the least percentage are graduate (having bachelor degree), which is about 13% of the total fishermen (Figure-2). It is also observed that 17% fishermen are illiterate and 33% are under primary group (Figure-2).

During the study, it was observed that the age of the fishermen varies between 20 and 60 years or slightly more. In the study,

age of the fishermen were classified into four groups as young aged (20-30 years), early middle age (31-40 years), late middle age (41-50 years) and old (51-60 years). It is noteworthy that 52% are in the age range of 31-40 years and the least are in between 51-60% which is only 4% of the total fisher population (Figure-3).

Be what it may, daily income of this group of people is in the range of Rs 100- 500. The highest numbers of people are in the income range of Rs 100- 300 which is about 24% of the total population (Figure-4). A very few have an income of Rs 400-500. As per study and opinion of the most of the fishermen (48%), the highest production of fishes is found in the month of October – November followed by a lean period of fishing (Figure-5). It is also imperative to note that about 92% fishermen are aware about the conservation of fishes (Figure-6) and is reported to avoid fishing during breeding season of the year.

It is important to note that there is no local market in the area and the fishes have to be sold to wholesalers or middleman.

The family size of the fisher was divided into three classes as small, medium & large size. From the study, it was found that, the majority of the fisher has large size family composed of 10-15 members. Small and nuclear family is very scarce in the village.

During the survey attempts were also made to find out the condition of living of the fisher. The housing conditions of fisher were exclusively *chang ghar* (hut). No Pacca house, tin roofed house, brick walled or concrete floor house were recorded in the study area.

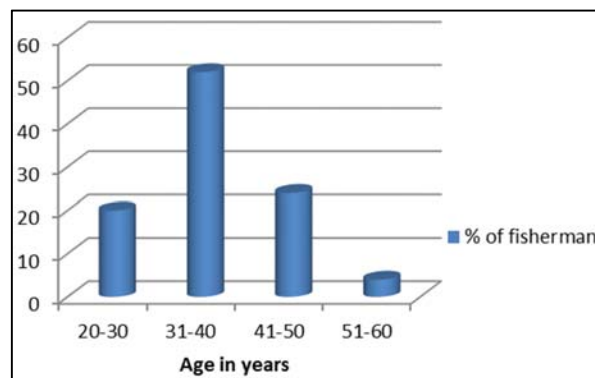


Fig 3: Age distribution of Fisherman

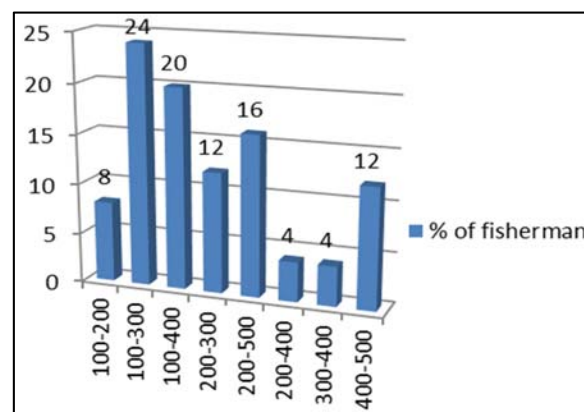


Fig 4: Income of the people

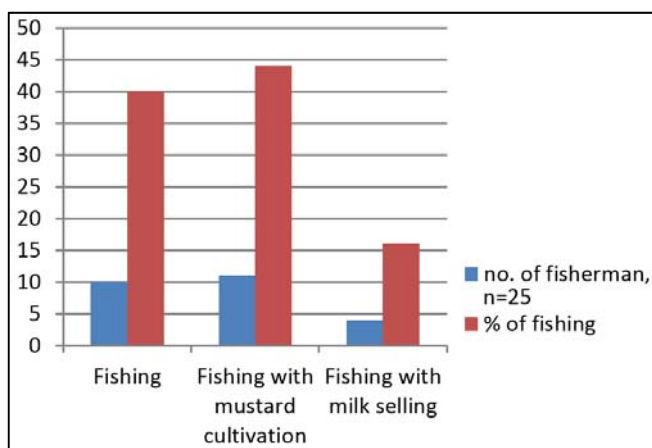


Fig 1: Occupation of the villagers

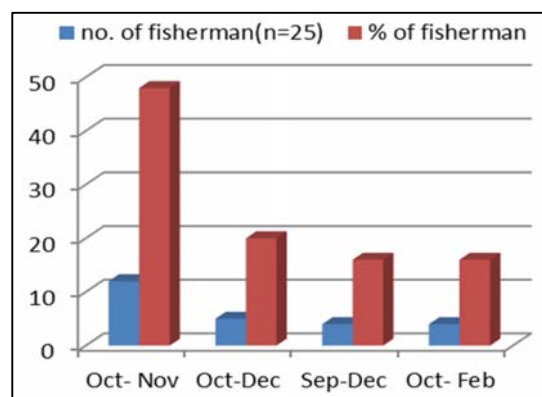


Fig 5: Fish catch statistics

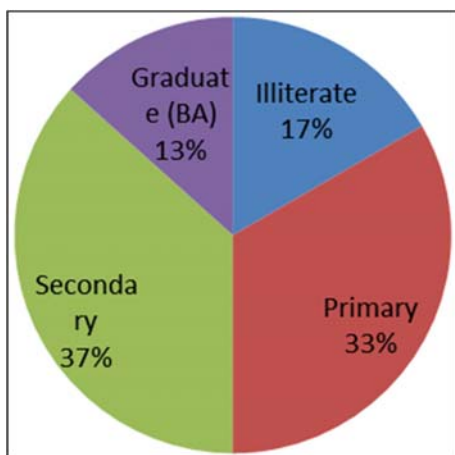


Fig 2: Educational Status

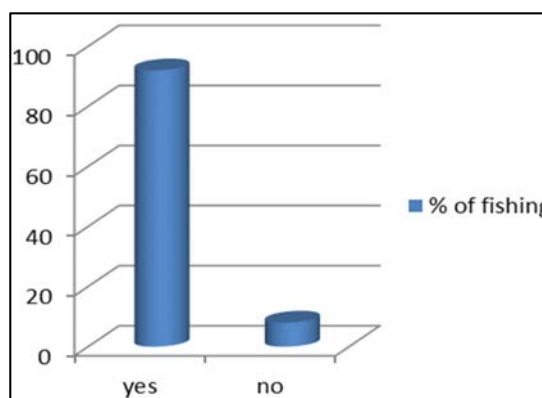


Fig 6: Awareness towards preservation

4. Discussion

The present study reveals some factors responsible for the poor socio economic condition and low standard of living of the villagers. The socio economic condition of the villagers where fishing is the prime male dominated business of the area is very poor and miserable. In these modern days of global economic changes, the fishers are not found to have the basic necessities to elevate their living condition. They are still in the stage with limited or no scientific and technical guidance for the use of wetlands and rivers more economically and sustainably (Sheikh and Goswami, 2013)^[5]. The leading factor for this is the lack of social infrastructure which is also reported from different studies on fisher communities by Bhaumik and Pandit (1991)^[1]; Goswami *et al.*, 1994^[3]; Sheikh and Goswami, 2013^[5]; Kalita and Deka, 2015^[4]. Secondly, development in education is not satisfactory which is the most essential prerequisite for the all-round development to fight against social injustice as education play an essential role regarding technical and economical information about their occupation (Sheikh and Goswami, 2013; Kalita and Deka, 2015)^[5, 4]. Thirdly, non availability of local fish market in the studied area, the fishers have to depend upon the wholesalers and middlemen for their fishes to be sold and as a result they did not get the actual price that they should get for the fishes. The selling of fishes at a low price against purchasing household requisites at a high price contributes to the poor socio economic condition of the people which is also reported by Kalita and Deka, 2015^[4] from adjoining area of Motapung-Maguri Beel of Tinsukia district of Assam. Moreover high family sizes, scarcity of alternate employment opportunities are some factors for poverty of fisherman. Although their financial condition is inclined by the mustard cultivation and milk selling business, but still it cannot fulfil their minimum requirement.

5. References

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