

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF JAT AND FISHERMAN COMMUNITIES OF DISTRICT THATTA

Fateh Muhammad Burfat*
Naima Saeed**
Mushtaq Ali***

Abstract

Jat and Fishermen, the main communities of Indus Delta are mostly settled in District Thatta, Sindh. Fishing and camel keeping are their main source of income. There are three main favorable factors which enabled them to settle on the creeks and on the coast close to the mouths of Indus River. The flow of sea waters, tidal ebbs, and monsoon rains give rise to the mangrove growth in the area. This provides food and fodder for camels and fuel for the settlers. Secondly, numerous tidal creeks provide to the communities shelter along with their boats. Fishermen also use creeks as passage between the coast and the open sea. This helps to cut mangroves for fuel and find food and fodder. There are three permanent settlements and several hundred fishing villages in the area. The huts, houses and masjids are built from local resources. Mat, mud, ropes and wooden sticks are used for the purpose of building. The communities face serious social problem like poverty, unemployment, shortage of clean drinking water, decrease in livestock, illiteracy, health and their fishing related problem. This study attempts to highlight the living pattern and socio-economic problems, of the Jat and Fishermen communities.

Keywords: jat, fishermen communities, deltaic communities, coastal communities, poverty, unemployment, ill-health, ill-literacy, socio-economic problems, Shah Bander, Deti Bander, Kharo Chan

* Fateh Muhammad Burfat, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Karachi

** Naima Saeed, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Karachi

*** Mushtaq Ali, Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Karachi

Introduction

The population of fishing villages of Indus delta is composed of many races and different confession which play an important role in their economies and social life. Jat and fisherman of coastal area of district Thatta are main Communities dependent on fishing and camel keeping. The fisherman erect temporary huts on the fringes of creeks during the fishing season.

Shah Bandar, Kati Bandar and Kharo Chan are permanent settlements on the coast. There are also several permanent fishing villages and numerous little villages of temporary settlements. Each settlement consists of mat or *pakha* huts jumbled together in disorder. They are made solely with grass *Convolvulus arvensis* locally called Narro and pann. Their walls made with *Tamarix* covering wooden sticks of *Tamarix* Dioca, *Salvadora oledives* (jar) and *prosopis glandulose* (Devi) and *seccharum arundinaceum* (sarr). They are easy to construct and mainly constructed by the inhabitants themselves. It occupies a small area and consists of one room. Mostly poor fishermen built type of *Pakha* huts. Other types of huts are totally made with wood, *Tamarix Articulata* (lavo), *Acacia nilotica* (babool) *capparis aphylla* (kirir) and *prosopis glandulosa* (devi). The foundation of such houses is one or two feet deep, the depth to which the wooden frame of the walls is sunk in to the ground. On the roof sloping or flat, there is left some open space for a wind catch. Some wooden houses are plastered with mud. They are mostly built by economically sound households. In permanent settlements and villages some houses are made with cement blocks covered with cement sheets. Mosques are however made with cement blocks or best possible available materials. Their roofs are made with T iron and bricks. They are used for prayers as well as for schools for the children.

Jat and fisherman communities have been facing multiple problem out of them a serious problem is obtaining a fresh water. Main source of sweet and fresh water is Indus River. After seventeen years the Indus delta has received fresh water recently in 2010 AD. Deltaic communities are happy on the reaching of sweet and fresh water in Hajamo Chan, Haidary and other creeks. Inhabitants of coastal zone are facing other problems like frequent use of harmful and destructive fishing gears, over traditional fishing, degeneration of the mangrove vegetation and habitat and shortage of grass and grazing areas for their camels etc. In recent years 16,000 camels were available in the coast zone which has been reduced and latest census report shows only 3,000 camels in the area which is serious concern for the Jat Community. These issues are the primary concerns discussed in this study.

Objective of the study

The aim of the present study is to draw attention to the settlement patterns of the coastal communities and to find out their socio-economic problems. Different factors are responsible for the poverty, unemployment illiteracy, ill health of the coastal population. Main objective is to enquire into the literary status, causes of poverty, ill health and resurface of income and socio-economic conditions of the Jat and Fisherman communities of the coastal area.

Methodology of the study

The study has been conducted on the Jat and fisherman communities living in the coastal area of Thatta. Descriptive research involves collecting data to test hypothesis or answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. Interview schedule (Gay, 1992) was prepared, pre-tested and used to collect the data. Several visits of the project area were conducted and respondents took face to face interviews. The data thus collected has been processed, tabulated and analyzed through suitable statistical methods.

Literature review

Historically, people migrate from mountains to plain areas and river- belts in search of food, grass and water. They settled either on the bank of river or lakes. One race after another, settled temporarily at suitable places, and then passed on, leaving its influence behind. Important settlements in the inland areas of Sindh along the banks of the rivers and its branches and canals on the trade routes came into being. There is no known record of any permanent settlement on the Sindh coast before the Alexander's expedition (325,326 BC). Patala, once established by the Greek invaders, at the head of the delta, has disappeared from the current map.

Many of the river ports also came into being and disappeared because of excessive silting of the mouths. Debal alone persisted because of its favorable location and its safety from flood and tidal waves during the Arab occupation of Sindh(Pithawalla,1976). Several other places were noted during later periods such as Meenagarh, Barbarican, Thatta, Bambhore and Shah Bandar which were the older settlements of Indus delta. Many towns and villages rose and fell with the floods and changing mouths of the river or other natural phenomena.

Debel Bandar, Shah Bandar, Orange Bandar, Rato kot, Lahri Bandar, Sokhi Bandar were older permanent settlements in the project area, the traders of these settlements left to continue trading in Bombay, Sumatra, Java, Sri Lanka, Busra. Oman, Egypt and Iraq. Up until 1956 the fisherman established twenty eight permanent settlements on the 640 K.M of the West Pakistan coastal front. They were nearly all closed to the sea with free access to the landing beaches. The fishermen living on the eastern coast from Karachi to Sir Creek face major problems created by the Indus delta. The communities could never find permanent sites for villages along the creek of the delta because of silting and the shifting of its water currents (Siddiqi, 1956).

Settlement patterns

There are three types of settlements on the coastal area.

- Permanent settlements of small towns.
- Settlements of Permanent villages.
- Temporary settlements.

Permanent settlement of small towns

Keti Bandar, Shah Bandar and Kharo Chan come to some extent in this type of Settlement category. Although they do not possess all the essential Characteristics of urban settlement, but in order to distinguish between the above three types of settlements the status of a small town is given to them, although the settlement is of low grade.

- **Shah Bandar**

Shah Bandar has been given the status of Taluka of Thatta district. Although in the past it remained as a historical sea and river port but currently it is a small settlement. Except for a few, the houses are mostly made with wood mud and straw. Majority of the people of the community live in Pakha huts. Shah Bandar was established and populated in 1759 by Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro the then ruler of Sindh. His fleet was anchored there. Earth quake of 1819 depopulated this port. Kachi and Bhatia were the residents of the port and they carried on trade with Musqat and other Cities (Kaleech Beg,1966).

- **Keti Bandar**

Keti Bander town is situated on Ochito creek which enters in to sea through Hajamro creek. Town is spread over about 35 acres surrounded by Bund which protects it from sea water.40 percent houses in the town are made of bricks and block masonry,60 percent houses are kacha made with mud and wood. Other permanent settlements are also situated on Hajamro creek. According to prominent writer Mirza Kaleech Beg, Keti Bandar was established on the place of Wikir Bandar which was drowned in the sea. After the depopulation of Shah Bandar and Dharaja, it became famous. Trade of this port during the British period was so significant that it enjoys the status of Municipality.

- **Kharo Chan**

According to Government of Sindh, Gazette (2010) the Taluka consist of 42 Dehs with the population of 25700 but according to the census of 1998 the population was 26,000. Kharo chan is a permanent settlement. Except few, all houses are made with mud, straw and wood. In Kharo Chan fluvial water is pumped into village ponds during the monsoon. This store of sweet water is used for a period of 3 to 4 months after the monsoon (Government of Sindh Gazette, 2010).

Settlement of permanent villages

Permanent settlements are mainly found in Kharo Chan and western parts of Shah Bandar area. They receive fresh water during the monsoon season. Villagers store some of water in ponds and small creeks. Mostly people lives in the hutment made of wood material. Mosques are however built with cemented blocks. Some permanent villages consist primarily of huts, houses, motels, shops, a primary school and mosque. The villagers are traditionally looked after by the village head (Saryal).

Mostly the villages are without health facilities. There is no gas line in any village however in a few villages, electricity lines have been supplied by the present government regime. Mobile phones are working in these areas. The cellular networks

are the primary means of open access to the rest of the society and mobiles are being enjoyed by the people of rural society.

Temporary settlements

Temporary settlements are on the fringes of creeks. They consist of kacha huts or pakha. Some fishermen live on their boats. The huts in temporary settlements are made of straw wood and grass.

Households living on the coastal land are bordering the mangrove eco-system, where fresh water reaches the coastal line in monsoon season. In flood season, Indus River flows in to the Indus delta for a period up to two to three months. In other seasons Jat and fishermen get sweet water from the ponds or Dhands or depurations of Indus River and transport it in boats for their own use and that of their livestock. They live a tough life and use mangrove wood for fuel and leaves and branches or bushes of the plants for food and fodder of their livestock. Health and educational facilities are distant dreams and far removed from them.

Some of the community are themselves boat owners. Others are called khalasis and boat nakhas. The community revolves around the fishing industry. There are transporters and drivers of fish carrier vehicles, merchants of shops and even workers in Karachi ice factories. Many other members are engaged in hoteling run pan and tobacco cabins, fruit shops, and lastly medical stores. An almost negligible number of the members of the coastal town are employed in highly valued government services jobs.

Socio-economic problems

- **Shortage of Clean Drinking Water**

The main problem faced by the communities is the shortage of sweet and clean drinking water. Drinking water is a rare commodity for the coastal population. Few villagers have constructed water tanks to store drinking water and some have established water ponds or other storages of water. Some people spend large amount of their earning on the purchase of drinking water. The villagers from the remote areas purchase water from the fisher towns which consumes much time. Peoples living on the fringes of creeks take water by their boats for themselves and their live stock. When the sea tides engulfed the creeks they have been completely disconnected from the land. About 65% of the coastal population is still fetching drinking water from wells, ponds, depressions and hand pumps installed outside their houses.

- **Reduced Flow of Sweet Water**

Reduced flow of sweet water not only limited drinking water for people and animals but it has also reduced irrigation water for the purposes of agriculture. Water supply for irrigation purposes is a major issue in Indus delta. Shortage of water resulted in severe damage to the agriculture of this region in Sindh. , In Thatta district, canals such as Kalri, Baghar, Khanto, Ghar, Kodario, Gungro, Saida Mirza and Gungri irrigate the land. Due to water flows many areas have been completely inundated by sea intrusion.

Shah Bundar, Ketu Bundar and other fisher villages are barely inhabited and 5,64,493 hectares land is badly affected.

- **Over Fishing**

Federal Marine Fisheries Department figures shows in 1999 there were recorded 2,564 trawlers in the fleet. According to the Federal Government deep sea fishing policy of 1980 foreign trawlers and long liners operator in the 200 mile EEZ under an arrangement whereby they are locally flagged. In 2005 there were 58 trawlers licensed by the Federal Marine Department of Fisheries. Their activities are unsupervised and much of the catch goes unreported. Apart from the above, there are 2,305 gill netters, 3,755 mechanized sail boats and 6,358 sail boats registered as vessels in the marine fishery. Fishermen cooperative society at Karachi Fish Harbor has 11,179 members all of which should be vessel owners. This heavy fleet has resulted in over-fishing.

- **Non Judicious Fishing Techniques**

In exercise of the powers conferred under this section, there had been notification vide no so (fish) 5(4) 195 dated: 5.9.1995 imposing total ban on fishing by some destructive fishing gears. These include the following kinds of nets found within the limits of Government of Sindh's sea waters 1. Boolo 2. Gujjo 3. Kutra. In spite of this law for prohibition, we were told that fishing with these gears continues throughout the inland coastal waters of Sindh.

- **Stoppage of Fresh Water Flow**

Due to stoppage of fresh water flow in Indus delta, the Palla which migrates up the creeks as main branch of the Indus has declined significantly. Fishermen near coastal areas are forced to rely on catching more marine species, which have lower value than fresh water species in our country.

- **Reduction in Fish Catch**

Fishing is the key lively-hood resource for the communities of Indus delta. Fish catch has drastically reduced due to increase in number of fishing boats, as well as increase in fisher folk population. All the valueable fish and shrimp species, which were important source of earning for the local population, have come under severe threat.

- **Decline in Mangrove Areas**

The Indus delta mangroves are important as a nursery ground for fish especially shrimp. This is a valueable export earner. Decline of mangroves resulted in decline of mangrove dependent fishes.

- **Lack of Fish Landing Facilities**

Live stock is a very valuable resource for the deltaic communities especially for Jat people who keep camels. Live stock as a source of income has declined over the years. As far as livestock is concerned the camel population has declined immensely and other

than camels, the farmers in coastal areas traditionally keep a few heads of cattle, buffaloes for milk and poultry for eggs and meat.

- **Decrease in Grazing Areas**

Villagers grazed their animals on the mud flats during the monsoon period. In the past the fodder crops were produced on the Agricultural land. After flood much grass grows in the riverine belt and communities seemed to rely less on the mangroves. Now due to reduce flow of water in Indus River the grass does not grow in the *kacha* areas. And small quantities of fodder are now produced in the agricultural fields. Several farmers collect fodder from the mangrove area as the grass on the mud flats is very limited.

- **Degradation of Mangrove Forests**

Significant reduction in the mangrove area was identified in the Indus delta. 263,000 hectares in 1977 AD reduced to 73,000 hectares in 2000AD. The reasons for the decline in mangrove areas were shortflow of fresh water in Indus delta, over harvesting of mangroves for fuel wood, reduced sediment load, browsing by camels and lack of enforcement of forest laws.

- **Illiteracy Problem**

There is 99% rate of illiteracy in coastal areas. Officially there has been shown 19% literacy ratio in district. That is the ratio in rural areas is much lower than Urban areas. The condition of female education is worse. In fact poverty and the lack of educational opportunities was seen as major cause of illiteracy.

- **Health Problem**

Almost every respondent interviewed by the researcher mentioned the lack of drinking water. The health of the population in the coastal areas was observed as being very poor. Fundamental cause of ill health is lack of clean drinking water. Dirty water brings with it a variety of diseases such as malaria, hepatitis, and kidney failure etc. Use of saline water is likely to be a major cause of ill health.

- **Unemployment**

Lack of employment opportunities was seen as a major constraint and the perceived cause of low income. People cannot earn regular income. In 1999, for large gill netters and trawlers of 9 to 15 m length with 6 to 15 crew received 7.5 patis divided equally. Similarly the Income of laborers and boat owners varies according to the boat size. For a small boat there are 5 patis. One pati is to be given to boat for net, boat owner labor and two regular laborers. Each laborer does not earn much. Mostly the small boat owners are indebted. Pati is divided after the deduction of commission and loan from the catch value. In the period when fish catch is ban (June-July) some laborers use to go to Karachi to work on daily wages in the factories. However the majority remained without a job.

• **Environmental Pollution**

Discharge of untreated sewage water and industrial discharges from the industries of Gharo, Dhabeji and Ghaghar Industrial areas causes a high nutrient content in the water which has caused eutrophication in Gharo, Essaro and other creeks. Similarly waste and oil discharges from ships including oil spills and sewage and industrial waste from steel mills refineries power stations and other mills affecting the regeneration of the mangroves and other faunal population. This pollution affects the growth of fisheries also. Sewage from other settlements including Ketu Bundar also affects the flora and fauna.

• **Cyclone and Tidal Waves**

For the coastal and island villagers main hazard is cyclone and monthly tidal waves when sea is on rise. Brief history of the cyclone storms which came from the Arabian sea and hit the coastal zone is given below.

- On 13th May 1902 cyclone from the Arabian sea entered the Indus delta caused damaged by sinking boats and destroying whole villages, winds and floods from the ocean. Increases in rainfall of approximately 100mm was observed.
- On 16th June, 1902 a smaller storm hit the coast of Karachi, Son Miani and Ormara. At Karachi the tide rose at a height of 7 feet 2 inches and wiped out the villages of Bhit on the sandpit. Houses and boats were also destroyed in Ormara and Son Miani.
- In 1945 disaster occurred on the coast. Boats and houses of poor fisherman were on the hit.
- In 1954 a similar disaster hit the coast and the fishermen of the coast were badly affected.
- In 1964 swift wind and rain resulted losses of live stock, rice crop and kacha houses.
- In 1973 heavy rains resulted losses of live stock, rice crop, *kacha houses*, life losses, boats and fishing nets.
- In 1994 heavy rains resulted losses of livestock and rice crops.
- In 1999 cyclone hit the area and resulted loss of human lives, boats nets live stock and rice crop.
- Earthquake of 2001 affected the area. Infections, cyclones and disasters remained the great problems for deltaic communities. Similarly monthly tidal waves are also great problem for the villagers of the area.

Conclusion

This study is specified to state settlement patterns and socio-Economic problems of Jat and fishermen communities of the coastal zone of District Thatta and to offer some suggestions for the improvement of their social and economic status. The problems of the said communities can be viewed, visualized and gauged from the discretions given in this report. The biggest problem highlighted in this study was the surface and underground water resources. Drinking water is a rare commodity for the coastal population. Due to reduced water flows much land has vanished by sea intrusion. This issue can be rectified by allowing sufficient quantity of fresh water in the down-stream of Kotri. Jat Community depends on agriculture, livestock(especially camel keeping) and fisheries. These sectors are in decline. By reducing grass, grazing areas due to the non availability of sweet water has decreased to the extent that in the past 16,000 camels were grazing in the Indus Delta and out of that stock only 3,000 camels are reported as remaining in the census report of 2000 published by the Bureau of statistics Government of Sindh.

Fishing is the main source of employment and income for both Jat and Fishermen Communities. Asian Development Bank PPTA has calculated that there are about 100,000 individuals dependent on fishing sector. This sector is also in decline due to frequently use of Bollo, Gujjo and Katro; the most harmful fishing nets. Over fishing has resulted in degeneration to the mangrove vegetation and habitat. Mostly old type of gears and boats are used by the fishermen. These old boats and nets have been in use for centuries without improvements, And now the fishermen cannot get a sufficient catch. The life of fishermen depends on the credit or loans provided to him by middle men. The middle man pays lower prices to the indebted fishermen. By reducing value of the catch and poor marketing, the fishermen are under poverty pressure. Fishermen of Kharo Chan and other fishing villages were of the opinion that the middle men are beneficial to them as they have easy access to credit or loans otherwise they would not be able to pay or repair boats and nets due to non availability of funds. They get easy loans from the middle men whenever they are required which they have to pay in the shape of fish catch in installments and this system is going on since primitive time. Illiteracy, poor health facilities and unemployment are additional problems of magnitude in the affected project area. Government has been showing 19% literacy ratio in district Thatta whereas during this survey 99% illiteracy rate was identified in the fisher folk communities. Additionally dirty water is the main cause of diseases like malaria, hepatitis, T.B and kidney failure. Provision of sweet water facilities are the primary redressal required to realign the development of Jat and Fishermen communities and eco-systems.

References

- Asian Development Bank.(2005).*Pakistan: Sindh Coastal and Inland Community Development Project*. Technical Assistance Consultant's Report.
- Beg, Mirza, Kaleech.(1966). *Qadeem Sindh unja Mashoor Shaher aeen Manhoon*. Sindhi Adabi Board.P-92
- “Brief Note on Activities of Fisheries Department in District Thatta.” No date
- Burns,Alexander.(1843). *A narrative of a journey to Cabool*. London:Book Jungle. P 9
- Bureau of Statistics Planning and Development. (2008) *Development Statistics of Sindh*. Karachi: Sindh Government press. P 8 & 40.
- Gay,sss, I.R.(1992). *Educational Research*. Newyork: Macmillan. P20.
- Government of Sindh.(2010). *Government of Sindh Gazette*. Karachi: Sindh Government press.
- McGoodwin,James R.(2001).*Understanding the Cultures of Fishing Communities: A Key to fisheries Management and Food Security*.Boulder:FAO.
- Nurul Islam,H.M.,Ansari,Md.Sazzad. and Roy,Kushal.(2011).*Climate change and Fisherman Community*.Dhacca: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Pithawalla, Manek.(1976). *A Physical And Economic Geography Of Sindh*. Hyderabad: Sindh,Adabi Boad.PP 278-284.
- Population Census Organization, Statistics Division.(1998).*District Census Report of Tahтта 1998*. Islamabad:Gop
- Pramanik,Sankar Kumar.(1993).*Fishermen Community of Coastal Villages in West Bengal*.Dhacca:Rawat Publications
- Richards,David Adams.(2002).*Lines on the Water: A Fly Fisherman's Life on the Miramichi*. New York: Arcade Publishing.
- Shah, Wajed A.(2009). *Pond Fisheries in Bangladesh: Socioeconomic Studies on NGO Participation and Development Issues*. University of Michigan: Environment and Resources Analysis Center.
- Siddiqi, Mohammad Ismail.(1956).*The fishermen's settlements on the coast of west Pakistan*. Jm Selbstverlag Des Geographischen Institute Der Universitat Kiel. Pp 39-42.
- State of Alaska.(1995).*Revised Draft Report: Economic Impacts of the Pollock Community Development Quota Program*. State of Alaska. Anchorage Alaska.
- World Bank.(2005).*Socioeconomic Study and Proposal for Livelihood Improvements: Badin and Tatta Districts, Sindh, Pakistan*. Agriculture and Rural development Sector Unit, South Asia Region.
- World Bank.(2006).*Inspection Panel Investigation Report, Pakistan National Drainage Program Project*. Management Response, Elaboration of the Short Term Action Plan.
- WWF Pakistan. (2005). *Village Development Plan, Keti Bunder*. Karachi:WWF.