

MIGRATION OF THE FISHERMAN COMMUNITY: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the causes and consequences of migration among the fishermen in the *Chalan Beel* (largest wetland in Northern Bangladesh) area. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through schedule technique and structured questionnaire as tools of social survey method along with Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Both the open-ended and close-ended questions were used in the structured questionnaire. Three generations were considered to identify the fishing community. Fishermen were migrated due to scarcity of fish, financial crisis, harassment and to avail occupational and educational opportunities for their children in the destination. Both internal and external migrations were found in the fishing community. It was found that their socio-economic conditions have been improved and they were satisfied with their present status.

Keywords: Migration, Fishermen, Fishing Community

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally, migration means moving from one place to another for securing livelihood or to live permanently. According to Shaw (1975), "migration is the relatively permanent movement of persons over a significant distance". Two things are important for migration. Kok (1999) rightly mentioned that migration has both 'distance' and 'time' dimensions whereas the migration process may refer movement from one geographical area to another geographical area. Gould and Kolb (1964) and Raj (1990) also have mentioned the causes of migration in which pull and push factors were common. Cox (1970) mentioned few causes for migration namely education, housing, occupation, savings and investment. Age is considered as an important factor for migration. Bhatia (1992) has emphasized that younger age groups and higher occupational categories are more prone to migrate to distant places in comparison with those in the middle and older age groups and in lower occupational categories. People who are engaged in manual work,

less likely to migrate over a long distance. Education play significant role in migration. Sometimes people are migrated due to their children's education (Fichter, 1957). This was common in the study of Sharma (1994), Ullah et al. (1999) and Islam (2001). Rural urban migrants in Indonesia tend to come from higher status families than rural stayers, while educational levels among city bound migrants in this setting are higher than those found among non-migrants in either community of origin or of destination (Speare, 1976; Hardjono, 1980; Hugo 1983). Migrated people think upon their occupational status. Income opportunities are not equal in the rural and urban areas that matters decision making of migration. Abdullah (1991) and Ahmed and Hasan (1998) have discussed about the rural urban migration that revealed the causes of migration. Opportunities are priorities and subject matter for migration. Relevantly, Blau and Duncan (1967) have written "migration, however, partly removes these ascribed restrictions on achievement by enabling a man to take advantage of opportunities not available in his original community". Migration is a social process, formed by gender, class, ethnicity and affects social relations and structures (De Hann and Rogaly, 2002). Scarcity of fish is one of the most significant reasons for migration of the fishing community in this study. A fishing community was displaced from the beel (wetland which is habitat of fishes) area of Churamonkathi in the Jessore region in Bangladesh due to the decline of the availability of small, native species of fish (Mazumder et al., 2000). The causes behind the scarcity of fish are related to the crisis of water and its impact on fishing (Ahmed and Rashid, 2001). Social mobility is also connected with the migration decision. The decision making unit in free migration, as distinct from forced migration, is often the individual, seeking personal upward economic and social mobility (Nage, 1979). Hence, vertical social mobility is low among the fishing community in the study area (Repon, 2007) and for other reasons they have tried to engage themselves in different occupations besides their traditional occupation which ends in migrations (Repon, 2016).

Migrated fishermen have been taking new occupations besides their traditional occupation. Due to the decreasing fishing grounds and fishery resources, members of the fishing communities have tended to leave their traditional occupation in search of other jobs. Whatever the causes of migration of the fishing community in the study are is found the rate of migration of the fishing community is significant in comparison to the non-fishing community. Thus, the aim of the study was to explore the causes of migration of the fishing community in the study area. Besides the socio-economic conditions of the migrated fishermen were studied in relation to formulate what should be done for their betterment.

2. CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE FISHING COMMUNITY

Traditionally, fishermen have been thought as lower occupational caste of the Hindus. This occupation is ascribed and hereditary. Hindu fishermen believe their occupation to be sacred, although in the caste hierarchy, the fishermen are ranked the lowest of all occupational groups. On the other hand, the principal sects among Muslims in Bangladesh who have been fishing or involved in fish related occupation are known as *mahefaros* or *mahimals* (Persian word *mahi* meaning fish and *farosh* as vendor), *dalatya*, *nikari*, *gutia*, *jelia*, *jiani*, *dhawa*, *abdal* and *bebajya* (Islam, 2003). *Jaliya*, *Jele*, *Jalwa*, *Jeliya*, are some general terms have been using throughout Bengal Proper as the popular designation of all classes of people who are engaged in boating or fishing. Strictly speaking, it is not a caste name, but is applied indifferently to *Malos*, *Tiyars*, *Kaibarttas*, *Bauris*, *Bagdis*, *Rajbansis*, and *Mahomedans* (Risley, 1981). *Nikaries* of Bengal are *jele* (who uses net for fishing) who are Muslims (Bhattacharya, 1973). Fishermen were found very conscious of their cultural unity and distinctness, maintain a strong kinship bond.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at *Bilsha* of *Gurudaspur upazila* (sub-district) under the *Natore* district of Bangladesh. The study area is the largest wetland in nature and known as *Chalan Beel*. Study area was selected through purposive sampling technique. Schedule technique and structured questionnaire as tools of survey method were used to collect data where both open-ended and close-ended questions were employed in the structured questionnaire for the present study. Three consecutive generations were considered to identify the fishing community. Though the third generation was not involved in fishing but considering the ascribed inheritance of the occupation of fishing community, they were termed as fishermen community. It is vivid that their father or grandfather were engaged in fishing. Data were collected from the relatives of the migrated fishermen who were living in the study area. At first, a pilot survey was conducted to identify the fishermen and 65 households were identified. Among these, 64 households were involved in catching fish and trying to cope with the current socio-economic conditions while only one was engaged in agricultural activities. Data were collected from the 65 head of the households who were the relatives of the migrated fishermen. Total number of migrated fishermen were 120 who were living in different time in the study area. So 65 household heads were the sources of data where 120 migrated fishermen were the unit of analysis in this study. From a village perspective, the migration was overwhelming. Thus this significant phenomenon required study for understanding and realizing the real scenario of the causes of the migration, their livelihood. This can pave the way to the new researcher and policy formulations for the development actors.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 AGE

Age was considered as an important factor to migrate anywhere. Age determines the ability to catch fish as well as other economic and meaningful activities. Those who were able to and interested to catch fish or any other activities, migrated from the study area. As a result different ages of the fishermen were migrated in different times.

Table 1: Age of the migrated fishermen

Age (Year)	Percentage of Respondents
25-30	5.83
30-35	23.33
35-40	31.67
40-45	17.50
45-50	14.17
50-55	02.50
55-60	03.33
60+	01.67
Total	100.00

Data revealed that most of the migrated fishermen were 35-40 years old. It was mentioned that about 86.67 percent fishermen migrated between the ages of 30-50 years. This range was suitable for migration according to the respondents. They mentioned that this age range was characterized by high adaptation capacity that helped to adapt with different places, fulfil their demand and aim as well. This range of age was very productive along with necessary brave and consciousness to sustain and cope with any awkward circumstance. Few fishermen also migrated from home to abroad within this age category. Those who were migrated within the age range of 20-30 years, were well known to others. They were also encouraged by the previously migrated fishermen indicating the networking feature of social capital in migration. Those fishermen above 50 years old were migrated with their sons and native relatives. The average age of the migrated fishermen was 39.50 years.

4.2 EDUCATION

Education played significant role in receiving occupation. It also helped to achieve social values and to realize the social customs among the fishermen community. Migrated fishermen got chance to obtain occupation but they could not avail these opportunities as most of them were illiterate.

Table 2: Educational status of the migrated fishermen

Types of Education	Percentage of Respondents
Illiterate	93.34
Secondary	04.17
Higher secondary	0.83
Higher	1.66
Total	100.00

Data show that 93.34 percent migrated fishermen were illiterate due to their poverty, lack of interest in getting education, poor family consciousness, and scarce opportunities. Only 1.66 percent have received higher education and trying to lead their best livelihood through their occupational status.

Those having secondary education were tried to involve alternate occupation besides their traditional occupations. Those who were catching fish, never thought and imagined that scarcity of fish will be placed in the study area. About 40-50 years ago, study area was abundant with various species of fishes. For the richness of fishes along with catching availability, fishermen community was less interested to receive education. This was evident from the lower educational attainment of the migrated fishermen resulted in poverty as well.

4.3 LAND PROPERTY

Bangladesh being an agricultural country, land property was the measuring rod of social status in the rural area. It provides security in life. It also has played significant role for maintaining the livelihood in the migrated fishermen.

Table 3: Property of the migrated fishermen

Types of Property		Percentage of Respondents
Homestead (decimal)	0	04.17
	> 4	71.67
	4-8	12.50
	8-12	08.33
	12+	03.33
	Total	100.00
Arable Land (acre)	0	96.67
	>2	02.50
	2-4	00.83
	Total	100.00

Respondents reported that about 04.17 percent migrated fishermen had no land of homestead. Most of the migrated fishermen (71.67%) had 4-8 decimal homestead land. On the contrary 96.67 percent migrated fishermen had no arable land due to their poverty also implies the livelihood was not highly satisfactory. Most of the cases, they inherited arable land. This feature was prevalent in the study area. Those who had no homestead land were living either in the rented houses and or sharing with their relatives.

4.4 OCCUPATION

Occupational diversity was found in the migrated fishermen. There were seven types of occupations besides fishing was found among the migrated fishermen.

Table 4: Occupational status among the migrated fishermen

Forms of Occupation	Before Migration	After Migration
	Percentage of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Fishermen/ catching fish	99.17	92.51
Purchasing and sailing fish	--	01.67
Advocate	--	00.83
Staff of a paper mill	--	00.83
Making net	--	01.67
Agriculture	0.83	00.83
Rural doctor	--	00.83
Shop keeper	--	00.83
Total	100.00	100.00

Respondents reported that almost all the migrated people (99.17%) were involved in catching fish before their migration. But this tendency was reduced after migration of the people. After migration 92.51 percent were involved in catching fish as fishing community. Occupational diversity was clear to above mentioned table. Those who were involved in different occupation besides fishing were comparatively better in terms of their livelihood.

4.5 INCOME

Annual income was low among the migrants and differed on the basis of their occupational diversity. Poor annual income was found among the fish catchers. Yet, their income was found comparatively better than their previous income.

The average income in the migrated people was calculated 106333.33 Bangladeshi taka (BDT) per year. Most of the migrated people's income was 100000-120000 BDT per year. Lower

income was emanated from a number of factors like occupational status, lack of opportunities, lack of education and poverty as well (Table 5).

Table 5: Yearly income of the migrated fishermen

Income (Taka)	Percentage of Respondents
40000-60000	01.67
60000-80000	10.00
80000-100000	20.00
100000-120000	55.00
120000-140000	5.83
140000-160000	3.33
160000-180000	2.50
180000+	1.67
Total	100.00

4.6 PLACE OF MIGRATION

The fishermen were migrated to different places where they envisioned of receiving opportunities of their respective works. Migration was found both in the home and abroad.

Table 6: Place of migration among the migrated fishermen

Country and Place		Percentage of Respondents
Bangladesh	Pabna	00.83
	Sirajgong	24.18
	Natore	43.33
India		31.66
Total		100.00

Table showed that 68.34 percent fishermen migrated in different places in Bangladesh and 31.66 percent were migrated abroad especially in India. Among those migrated in India are Hindu regarding their religious practices and identity. The migrated people in Sirajgonj, a district of Bangladesh (adjacent to the Natore district) were living at *Tarash, Bashbaria, Hundial* and *Bostul* area. Those who were migrated within Natore were living at *Bonpara, Dahia, Gurudaspur, Hordama, Chouddogram, Biash, Sripur, Singra* and other places where ample opportunities were found potential in terms of catching fish and their occupation. They have been preferring catching fish due to the unavailability of opportunities resulted from their poor educational attainment and financial capacity.

4.7 TIME OF MIGRATION

Members of the fishermen community were migrated from the study area in different time spans depending on their felt needs, potential opportunities and existing crisis.

Table 7: Time of migration of the migrated fishermen

Time (Year)	Percentage of Respondents
>10	31.67
10-20	38.33
20-30	25.00
30-40	02.50
40-50	01.67
50+	00.83
Total	100.00

Respondent reported that most of the members of the fishing community migrated from the study area 10-20 years ago. 00.83 percent were migrated about 50 years ago. Yet, 95.00 percent members of the fishing community were migrated 30 years ago. So, it was clear that crisis pushed them to migrate 30 years ago. Before that period, opportunities and livelihood were in favour of them to sustain in the study area.

4.8 CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Members of the fishing community have migrated for the various causes. Most of the cases, the causes behind migration had astounding similarities.

Table 8: Causes of migration among the migrated fishermen

Causes	Percentage of Respondents
Financial crisis	93.33
Scarcity of fish	92.50
Crisis of homestead	05.83
Education for the children	01.67
Occupational opportunities	04.17
Harassment	22.50

(Taken multiple responses)

Respondents mentioned that there were so many reasons for migration from the study area. Most of the members of the fishing community were migrated for financial crisis and scarcity of fishes. Scarcity of fish was found more likely in the summer season. Though abundance of fish is

becoming rare also in the rainy season at present but the situation was quite reverse about 30 years ago. Very few were migrated for the purpose of their children’s education and their occupational opportunities. Data revealed that 22.50 percent fishermen were migrated for various harassments both by the fishing and non-fishing community. Financial crisis, scarcity of fish, crisis of homestead and harassment were the push factors, and education for the children and occupational opportunities were the pull factors for the migrated fishermen.

4.9 CONSEQUENCES OF MIGRATION

Members of the fishing community were migrated with a lure of hope for their betterment of the livelihood and uplifting of their socio-economic condition. They got chance to engage themselves in various occupations due to migration. Occupational diversity was found among the migrated people.

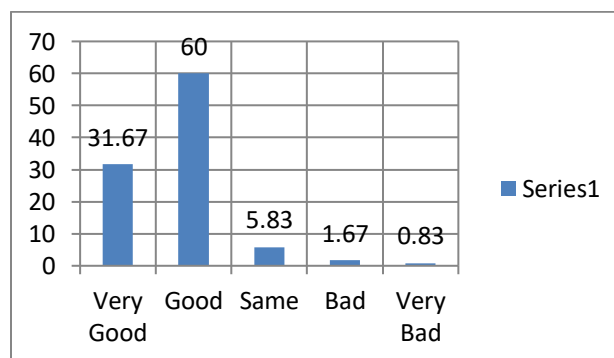


Figure 1: Opinion on the consequences of migration

Data showed that 60.00 percent migrated people’s livelihood was good and 31.67 percent people’s livelihood was very good. Most of them were very happy in relation to their livelihood due to increasing income and occupational status which helped to secure education of their children. Those migrated fishermen, dissatisfied with existing status were resulted from extended household sizes, financial hardships and inability to explore the opportunities available to them.

4.10 SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social mobility among the migrated fishermen, was the movements of an individual or group from one social position to another in relation to social status. Three types of mobility were found among the migrated community but horizontal mobility ranked first.

Table 9: Social mobility among the migrated fishermen

Forms of Social Mobility	Percentage of Respondents
Horizontal mobility	92.50
Upward vertical mobility	06.67
Downward vertical mobility	00.83

Those who were involved in their father’s occupation and did not change their social status were classified in the category of horizontal mobility and indeed prevalent in the study. They had no alternative way to engage themselves in any other occupations due to poor educational attainment, working inability and minimum skill. Upward vertical mobility was found among 06.67 percent, conceptualised where the individual was holding comparatively better occupation than his father. Occupational opportunities fostered their expected life for themselves and children as well. Finally the case of those who were involved in the lower occupational opportunities in relation to their fathers were termed as downward vertical mobility. This category belonged to only 00.83 percent of the migrated fishermen community.

5. CONCLUSION

Good number of causes behind the scarcity of fishes in the study area were found. The use of current net, catching mother fishes with egg, lack of fishing place in the rainy season, water crisis in the summer season, over use of agrochemicals in the agriculture etc. were opined as the principal factors. Among the migrated fishermen, educational status was not high. Large number of them were illiterate, having small amount of homestead and arable land, lower occupational diversity and status. Despite these, income has been increased among the migrated fishermen in comparison to their previous position. Most of the fishermen migrated where fishes were available. Both internal and external migration was found which were related to pull and push factors. Internal migration was higher than external migration among the fishing community. Fishermen were migrated due to financial crisis, scarcity of fish, crisis of homestead, educational opportunities for their children, occupational opportunities and harassment. After migration, most of the migrated fishermen were found well. Horizontal social mobility was very high but vertical mobility was low among the migrated fishermen.

So measures should be taken to improve the livelihood of the fishing community which could help to reduce migration from the study area. Financial security, opportunity for catching fish freely, sanction loan with flexible condition, to stop the use of current net, to ensure social security, to arrange training for cultivation of fish, to allocate ponds in the summer or dry season and to create occupational opportunities in the summer or dry season could be some sustainable measures toward ensuring the livelihood of the fishermen community in the study area. Without taking

positive and effective measures, fishing community might be endangered and abolished as well. So it is essential to take initiatives for the fishing community that will help them to survive without migration and continue the cultural heritage of the study area.

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