

# MODERNISATION, VULNERABILITY AND COPING STRATEGIES: A STUDY ON KOLI WOMEN IN MUMBAI, INDIA

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**Abstract :** The modernisation process in fisheries and development activities along the coast have worsened the vulnerability contexts of traditional and artisanal fisher-folk in India. The Koli fishing communities in the coastal villages of Mumbai are exposed to several factors such as modernisation in fisheries, coastal development and industrialisation. As a result, they face severe constraints in resource access and sustaining their livelihoods. This paper looks specifically into the lived experiences of Koli women to these modernisation and coastal development processes. Apart from examining the vulnerability contexts of Koli women to the processes of modernisation, urbanisation and livelihood transitions, this paper further examines the coping strategies of Koli women to deal with livelihood uncertainties. This paper has applied a Marxist Feminist lens to analyse the lived experiences and livelihood transitions of Koli women that is embedded in a tradition-modernity continuum. Qualitative in nature, this paper has adopted an ethnographic research design to describe and analyse the process of modernisation, as well as gather valuable information on the coping strategies of Koli women to deal with such transitions.

**Keywords:** Gender, Modernisation, Vulnerability, Livelihoods, Fisheries, Urban Villages.

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## INTRODUCTION

Women in the Koli fishing community have been traditionally dependent on fisheries-based livelihoods. Nevertheless, several contextual factors constrain or enable them to access a decent livelihood. This paper explores the vulnerability contexts of Koli women in an urban village of Mumbai. The vulnerability could be understood as pre-events, and inherent characteristics or qualities of social systems that create

the potential to harm (Cutter et al., 2008). Apart from natural factors, socio-economic, cultural and political factors shape the progression of vulnerability (Fara, 2001). For instance, the poor economic condition of artisanal fishing families and high susceptibility of the capture fisheries-based economic system to risk is high, which in turn make these families more vulnerable and often restrict their ability to cope with livelihood uncertainties (Panda, 2009). The modernisation in fisheries and transitions in the coastal landscape make women in these fishing communities more vulnerable, as their everyday practices within and outside their community organise their subordination. Often these are expressed and legitimised in and through various norms, values and ideologies, institutions and structures, and that these forces are intersected differentially with class, caste, ethnicity, region/nation and religion (Patel, 2016).

The modernisation process is an increasingly complex socio-economic and political environment, whose outcomes may not be always positive or progressive (Klinghopper, 1973). Modernisation accompanied by technological change is mostly considered as a social process rather than economic, while economic growth merely becomes part of this process (Abumere, 1983 cited Brookfield, 1973; Charlick, 1973). Nevertheless, it inevitably disturbs the pre-existing structure of meaning and motivation of traditional societies such as the artisanal fishing communities (Bellah, 1968). In India, the modernisation of the fisheries sector commenced in the late 1950s. This phase witnessed the large scale introduction of mechanised boats and crafts, nylon nets and other advanced fishing gears in marine capture fisheries. It also resulted in the influx of new actors entering into the fisheries sector and those were business people who had the capital to invest in advanced fishing technologies (Swaminathan, 2014). They also began to dominate the post-harvest spaces in the fishery.

The marginalisation of artisanal fishing communities deepened with the modernisation of fisheries in India (Abraham, 1996; Aerthayil, 2000; Bavinck, 2001; Gadgil and Guha, 1995; Kurien and Achari, 1994). The liberalisation of the fisheries sector in the 1990s has further resulted in new forms of competition and resource exploitation in the marine fisheries sector (Shanon, 2008). These processes have further accentuated the vulnerabilities of artisanal and traditional fishing communities in India (Ray, 2014). The coastal landscapes of Mumbai have witnessed the process of urbanisation on a large scale that is characterised by vertical and horizontal land use changes, in-migration and population rise, and other related environmental changes as-

sociated with the growth of a city. These transitions have also affected the Koli communities in Mumbai, who were once identified and recognised for their unique culture, habitat and occupation.

The Koli communities in Mumbai do find mention in the oral and written history of the city. It is believed that the unusual practices of 'Joban Kar' or 'Choli Kar' (a tax levied on Koli women to cover their breast) on the Kolis of Raigad by Chief Angres (Chief of King Shivaji) in the 12th century forced them to migrate to Mumbai (Ranade, 2014). The coastal landscape of Mumbai has thereafter emerged as crucial habitat for Koli people as fishing remained their primary economic activity. While the Koli men worked in the harvest sector, the Koli women were largely involved with the post-harvest sector. The Koli women are mostly excluded from fish catching activity and are not allowed to access fish resources directly. Being as a woman, Koli fisherwomen are bound within the traditional norms and practices and it makes them highly dependent on men to access the basic livelihood resources (Ram, 1991). Their struggle with traditional resources is quite visible, as they still have to carry heavy baskets of fish on their head and sell fish. Even though technological transitions have taken place in the pre-harvest sector, Koli women have to struggle with limited resources in the post-harvest sector. Though Koli women play a significant role in the fisheries sector and fisheries economy, yet their work remains unrecognised. Therefore there is a need to locate and explore the vulnerability context of Koli women in the process of modernisation. The Koli women could be seen involved in individual vending, roadside vending and door to door selling. In the wake of globalisation, urbanisation and liberalisation policies, newer actors have begun to engage and negotiate in the day-to-day affairs of the market, which are the basic livelihood spaces of fisherwomen (Santha, 2007). In these contexts, it is also important to examine the nature of women's responses to these changes.

### **Theoretical perspective**

This paper applies a Marxist Feminist perspective to explore, understand and analyse the vulnerability contexts of Koli women. This theoretical lens mostly focuses on gender relations in capitalism and their distinction or interconnectedness in the process of production and reproduction (Shakib, 2010). According to Marxian thought, women's domination is linked to the economic base and broader economy of capitalist society (Safuta, 2016). However, Marxists feminists argue that such a materialistic analysis ignores the inherent power structure that shapes resource accessibility and productivity. According to them,

the root cause of women's vulnerability is patriarchy embedded in capitalism (Shakib, 2010). Therefore, one needs to look at the intersection between patriarchy and capitalism and in the overall organisation of the social reproduction of labour (Messerschmidt, 2009; Gimenez and Vogel, 2005). The sexual division of labour associated with both patriarchy and capitalism could deepen social differences that are intersectional and socially located such as in terms of gender, class, caste or race, and sexuality (Ebert, 2005).

Feminist scholars believe that discriminatory traditions are not only a continuation of old practices from the past, but it also emerges in new forms in the contemporary era (Patel, 2016). According to Sangri and Vaid (1989), patriarchy exists in both tradition and modernity. Women are forced to carry certain traditional ideologies and at the same time contemplate on changes taking place in it. Along with capitalism, traditional culture and practices in local communities have taken a new form of celebration and have evolved as a force for consumption. This new trend of fusing conventional practices with modernity is governing people's day-to-day lives (Choudhary, 2010). Along with this, capitalism today has separated the workplace from home. In the case of labour scarcity, women due to their cheap wages replace men's labour. This reversal of roles has overburdened women and at the same time created tension inside the family, as women become the primary bread earner (Waters, 1999).

Even though the gendered division of labour has altered with modernity, women's right to access resources is still limited. According to Jha and Pujari (1996), patriarchy, poverty and powerlessness of women are related to their lack of assets. Socio-cultural norms and practices deny the transfer of assets to a daughter from their parents. Even though Hindu law had provided authority to both daughter and son equally, these laws are hardly implemented. Along with the traditional patriarchal practices, new forms of development that privatises common pool resources is taking away women's right over these resources. Newly emerging factors in the modern world are moulding gender relations and altering the status of women in traditional communities (Mishra and Upadhyay, 2007). In contemporary society, women are depicted as victims of these circumstances and face more violence (Mishra and Upadhyay, 2007). Women attempt to come out of traditional patriarchal practices, but they may not wholly succeed in it, as strong patriarchal domination will make them more deprived in their struggle (Zang, 2017).

## **Methodology**

Taking a Qualitative Research approach, this study has attempted to examine the livelihood struggles and coping strategies of Koli women through Feminist ethnography. The ethnographic fieldwork helped to understand the traditional culture, practices and norms interfacing with the livelihoods of Koli communities. Among 37 Koliwadadas (fishing villages) in Mumbai, the researcher visited 12 Koliwadadas (urban fishing villages) to understand the socio-cultural and ecological context of these Koliwadadas, their population and configuration of the community, nature of fisheries modernisation, urbanisation and other related transitions in these Koliwadadas. A total of 20 key informant interviews were carried out in this phase of research. Finally, Versova Koliwada, a relatively urbanised fishing village was purposively selected to understand the process of modernisation and vulnerability context of Koli women. The process of urbanisation and change in technology and livelihood practices were visibly high in this fishing village.

Data collection began through oral histories, observation and interviews. The oral histories were conducted with 15 elderly men and 10 women. In-depth interviews were primarily conducted with 19 Koli women, and five Koli men. The respondents of the study were purposively selected based on snowball sampling technique. The principle of saturation was applied during data collection and on-site data analysis also helped to move from one category of respondents to another as data got saturated. Apart from the occupational category, age group and marital status were also taken into consideration. Women respondents included ten fish traders, six home makers and three women with other jobs. These women in the non-fisheries sector were working in sectors such as education, bank, industries or private institutions. Data was collected through semi-structured interview schedules, and field notes were used to capture the large extent of informal conversations. The transcribed data were coded and thematically analysed using Atlas.ti software. Some of the key themes and findings associated with the research are discussed in the following sections.

### **Vulnerability contexts of Koli women in Versova**

#### **Modernisation in fisheries**

The traditional fishery in Versova was largely based on dolnet or bag net fishing. Three to four decades ago, the fishing practices of most of the Koli men were thus limited to the coast and creek regions. The creek near their village was abundant with plenty of diverse fish vari-

eties, which used to meet their livelihood and household needs. Those days the fishermen used to go fishing late at night and returned early in the morning with their catch. Most of the deals were carried at dawn. The mechanised trawlers were introduced in Versova during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Reports indicate that there were 41 trawlers at Versova in 1982 (GoM, 1982; Kohli and Rao, 1984-85). Today, there are 156 trawlers, 21 gillnetters, and eight dolnetters. A total of 185 mechanised crafts and 14 non-mechanised crafts are being used in the Koliwada. Most of the families in Versova are today involved in trawler fisheries.

Till a few decades back, Koli women in Versova were involved in the drying and sale of dry fish. The Koli women used to follow different techniques to dry fish. 'Khali' and 'Mandav' were the main platforms to dry fish. They dried the fish on the Khali, which is an open clean platform layered with cow dung or could be a cemented platform; or the Mandav (platform made up of bamboos at a particular height from the ground). These women used to spend most of their time on the drying land under the scorching sun. The boats used to land on their coast with the fish catch, and women used to unload and dry that fish on the coast. However, with the mechanisation of fishing crafts and gears, the Koli men began to travel far off from the coast. As daily fisheries were economically unviable, they began to return to the coast only once in a fortnight. This, in turn, affected the daily supply of fish to the Koli women. The trawl-based fishery reduced the supply of those fish varieties that were regularly used for drying. As there was considerable disruption in the supply of fish, women began to venture out to buy fresh fish from wholesale markets and sell them on a retail basis. No Koli women in Versova sells dry fish these days. Many women have thus diversified their livelihoods to fresh fish vending. However, with limited space in the market, many women started selling their fish on the streets.

Unlike earlier days, Koli women's boats return to the coast once in a week or once in a fortnight, as the case might be. The widening gap between high investments and low returns has forced many Koli families in Versova to sell their boat. As the boats stopped returning to the coast on a daily basis, it also reduced the daily supply of fish for drying. Therefore, to sustain their trade they have to buy fish from other wholesale markets like Sasoon Dock or Bhaucha Dhakka. Big fishermen and fish merchants from other parts of Mumbai and even other states dominate these markets and monopolised fish trade and restrict other boats

to dock their vessel near the market. Women vendors also have to negotiate with dealers or intermediaries in wholesale fish markets. These dealers mostly prefer to sell their fish to fish merchants (men) who buy them in bulk amount. These women get less preference as they buy less quantity of fish and sometimes have to buy fish at a higher cost.

In addition to these troubles, Koli women now have to compete with migrant workers in the fish market. They have almost monopolised the fish trading activities in selected markets. The population of both native fisherfolk and migrant labourers has seen a gradual increase in the last two decades. Koli women opine that they have lost their spaces to move freely in the Koliwada. They also complain that with the influx of migrants, the quiet beach spaces have become noisier and crowded. The women also feel unsafe to move freely at night. Instances of theft have also increased in the Koliwada.

The modernisation in fisheries has led to a rise in the number of big mechanised boats with greater engine capacity and new types of exploitative fishing gears. This technology is very exploitative and is detrimental to the sustainability of marine resources. After this transition fishing practices were outsourced to the workers. But, the loyalty of workers becomes a crucial factor for the smooth management of the fisheries operations. For instance, there were incidents where the workers cheated their boat owner. Sometimes, without the boat owner's knowledge, these workers sell their catch to other boats in the sea. On the other hand, men prefer the rental money for income from constructed buildings. They become lazier and do not prefer to involve in fishing practices. It seems that the hard-working nature of men has disappeared and they have imposed the entire economic burden on women. This transformation has overburdened women with both domestic work and their fisheries business too. Along with this, with the transition in fisheries practices, many women had lost their gold ornaments and jewellery after investing in their fisheries business. The fisheries sector with modernisation has become highly speculative and unpredictable for Koli families.

### **Urbanisation**

Versova is situated along the west coast of greater Mumbai region covered with long sandy beaches. With the passage of time, Versova was often referred to as 'Gaathan' or an urban village. The Madh Island and the Malad creek in the west surround the village. This geographical specificity acts as a natural buffer against huge tidal waves and storms that could impact the village. Versova is also gifted with a

natural harbour due to its geographical location. During the colonial period, boats used to anchor here with their cargo of spices. The village and its harbour have thus been centres of economic transactions for many decades. Versova was once upon a time surrounded by vast stretches of mangrove forests. Today, tall buildings such as flats and apartments have almost replaced these forests as well as the traditional Koli houses. The open spaces that were earlier available in the front and back of the Koli houses are today completely reclaimed for the construction of apartments.

With urbanisation and demand for land, even drying lands have also become pathways to high-rise buildings. In 2016, the State government had issued a legal notice to the people staying in these apartments to demolish their illegal constructions. The Koli families are now caught in-between the builders and the government. Most of them had handed over their land to the builders and now they find it difficult to reclaim its custodianship. This has resulted in intra-community conflict within the Koliwada as well. There are some privileged families who benefit due to their association with the builders. On the other hand, the builders seemed to have cheated many other Koli families. Some people have lost all their property and wealth due to the malpractices of builders. The Koliwada has also become a very narrow, congested and over-crowded space due to the ad-hoc planning and constructions of these structures

With the process of urbanisation, the subsequent coastal environmental pollution has very much affected the fishery resources of Versova. The waste dumped from Mumbai's urban spaces has affected the common beaches, water bodies and fish availability in Versova. Similarly, waste dumped by the tourists, wastewater and chemical effluents from industries along the coast of Malad creek increased the concentration of pollutants in the creek. Therefore, these days' fishermen are venturing into the deep sea to capture fish. Waste materials such as debris and sewage are all dumped into the coast. The constructions on the coast have destroyed mangroves, the fish habitats and the livelihoods of small-scale fishing households. Many fish varieties such as jawala, karandi, dolphin and hark have become rare due to the exploitation of fisheries resources, unscientific coastal development, and the rapid growth of mechanised and trawler-based fisheries

### **Patriarchy**

Even though Koli women enjoy liberty in their livelihood practices, traditional patriarchal structures control their resources through traditional norms and practices. Menstruation is still considered as a taboo and



prohibits menstruating women from entering holy places and the boat. The 'impurity' of women might impact on their livelihood, as they consider a touch by the menstruating women would pollute the boat. Such norms excluded menstruating women from accessing fish and thereby prevented them from continuing their livelihoods. These stringent norms have been diluted to some extent with the transitions in the family structure. At the same time, with the complexities arising out of modernisation, these women have no other choice for survival. A Koli woman shared her experience,

"Earlier, we had to sit at one corner of a house during menstruation. We had to sit there for three days, and other members of the family used to provide all the necessary stuff to us, as we were not allowed to touch anything in the house. There were more people in the joint family to help and work during our menstruation period. After the separation in the family, we have to look after all the work inside and outside the house. Therefore, we gradually began to work in the house and in the market even if we were menstruating. These norms are not strictly followed these days in the market and house. However, we do not enter the temple or worship places." (Harsha Thapke, 45).

With transitions in fisheries and its labour economy, Koli men in Versova have stopped working directly in the fisheries sector. However, many women are still engaged in their business of selling fresh fish. In some families, women have to continue this business due to certain patriarchal conceptions. Men in these families do not allow women to work in any other sectors except their traditional business of fish vending. Many women have become victims of domestic violence as men force them to generate income for their survival. Along with patriarchal structures, illiteracy and lack of skills forced them to choose fisheries practices as their livelihood option. Therefore, women in the Koli community have very limited opportunity to explore jobs in other sectors. In the words of a Koli woman,

"I have done my graduation in Commerce with good marks. I got a job offer from one company but, my husband did not want me to work there. According to him, if I work in any other sector, then there is nobody to sell our fish in the market. To send the boat again to the sea, we need the money and that we will get only if we sell our fish. Otherwise, it is difficult to do our business. Therefore, women are the main part of our fisheries business and the market." (Darshana Sidhhe, 25).

Joint families have broken down into nuclear families and traditional support has almost broken down in the Koli community. This erosion in

familial support system accompanied by a transformation in the livelihoods has differently impacted the lives of women in these families. These transitions do have implications on the Koli women's authority and mobility at her workplace. Unlike earlier days, their source of income has stopped and they are unable to support their family and have to survive on limited resources. Prior to modernisation, patriarchal relations within the family largely shaped the livelihood strategies of the Koli woman. Moreover, she was in a lower class ladder when compared to other members of her community. With modernisation, the patriarchal relations within her household have not completely changed.

With the modernisation, Koli women have to compete with new actors in fisheries sectors, State, and politicians. Koli women remain at the end of the value chain. She is always less preferred in the fisheries economy and gets neglected by the State. Men utilise their labour but control her labour with the patriarchal structure. Koligirls or women have higher demand in malls, shopping complex due to their outstanding management skills. These modern structures utilise their labour but they get paid very less. Even in wholesale fisheries market, Koli women get lower preferences than rich merchants. They have exploited these practices and restrict their resource access. The men folk know her helplessness and negotiate with her. In such a patriarchy-embedded-capitalist form of livelihood, one needs to reflect on what is meant by financial autonomy in both private and public spaces. The financial autonomy of the woman in her family might have improved (or has always been the same). But, in the public space, she might be caught in a web of exploitative patriarchy-embedded-capitalist forces undermining her autonomy.

### **Livelihood Shocks and Uncertainties**

Unpredictability and uncertainty seem to be an inherent characteristic of their livelihoods, and women mostly bear the burden of these uncertainties. They always have the fear of the safety of their men, due to unnatural deaths from accidents at sea. These events not only deprive women of their loved ones but also hinder their access to resources for survival. Along with these shocks, factors such as health issues, illiteracy, geographical specificity, less resource accessibility, and poor financial condition make Koli women more vulnerable. Koli women's access to resources is constrained by both patriarchy and unequal class relations. The Koli woman has to depend on men in the family – be it her father, husband or son. In addition, her vulnerability deepens if she hails from a poor small-scale fishing household. This has

made them more marginalised in the fisheries sector, especially when the sources of male support are not available anymore.

"...my husband died due to a heart attack. After his death, I became very lonely... I don't have kids! After my husband's death, my brother-in-law took that boat. I lost all access to procure fish. Therefore I had to stop drying fish...Nevertheless, for my survival, I started working on other drying lands as a labourer. I used to get income on a daily basis. Two years ago I met with an accident. My hand got fractured in that accident. After that, I was unable to work properly in the drying land. My source of income stopped thereafter. I am neither educated nor skilled to take up any other work. Then I decided to work as a domestic maid in other houses" (Parvati Koli, 65 years)

### **Coping strategies of Koli women**

Coping strategies are the self-adjusting processes individuals adapt to sustain their traditional livelihoods in the context of struggles between tradition and modernity. Observations show that asset-based coping strategies become an important element of the Koli woman's day-to-day livelihood struggles. Their struggle is also, therefore, to enhance and sustain their livelihood assets, largely physical assets (fishing crafts and gears), natural assets (the fish catch) and the human assets (the migrant workers who are employed in the boats and drying lands). Cultural belief systems and faith in their community gods and goddesses do play an important role in enhancing their coping capabilities. Koli women adopted important measures as coping strategies such as mobility, diversification, storage, communal pooling and market exchange (Agrawal, 2008: 16-18).

With modernisation and transition in fisheries practices, Koli women in Versova diversified their livelihood practices in fisheries and other sectors. These women sell fish across various markets in Mumbai instead of selling in Versova. These women moved from dry fish vending to fresh fish vending. Along with that many took education and chose other livelihood options than fisheries. Similarly, many women used their skills and traditional knowledge in the catering business, food festivals and authentic foods clubs. It helped them to gain economic benefits along with the preservation of traditional practices. These women are generating income through the rent of Mandav or houses. Koli women adopted new strategies of storage instead of saving in the form of gold. Now, these women save in the form of fixed deposits, recurring deposits, real estate or construction of buildings. In fisheries market role of women changed from seller to buyer, as their own sources of fish do not remain anymore. Many women now prefer to buy fish from the wholesale market and sell it in retail. These market strategies helped

them to gain a little income and sustain their fisheries business. Also, these helped them to generate income to a certain extent but strategies such as taking loans from moneylenders or expansion of fisheries business put them in the cycle of loan and debt.

Koli women's coping strategies as part of their day-to-day livelihood struggles is also about resisting diverse forces of patriarchy and capitalism that attempt to dominate them. This resistance and coping are largely carried out through a process of 'self-organisation'. Self-organisation could be understood as a process where women collectivise around particular issues concerning their livelihoods, coastal landscapes and identity; and at the same time engage collectively in creating appropriate spaces for representation and recognition. This self-organisation of Koli women is not only to address certain sphere-of-production issues. Instead, they also aim at resisting and transforming the forces of patriarchy both within and outside their family. Thus, they tend to self-organise through issues that affect Koli women primarily as 'traditional fish-workers' and 'women' at the same time.

The Koli women have drawn adequate strength to self-organise through their collective agency, which is shaped through their traditional identity, negotiation and bargaining skills, and social network. Koli women help each other in business activities and support each other to

solve personal problems. As spaces for mutual interactions are diminishing, these women have formed informal groups along each street in the Koliwada. These women's groups organise meetings, collect chit funds, and arrange tours for women in the group. Moreover, these groups play a major role during times of accidents or deaths of members in any of their families. These women come forward and help the affected family emotionally and financially. However, women in Versova observe that the Koli men restrict them from coming together and engaging themselves as a collective. Even though women represent these institutions, it is a daily struggle for them to assert their presence and voices in these platforms. A Koli woman narrates,

"...We had to sell their fish in the open space under the scorching sun and heavy rains. But, no one took the initiative to do something for women. Hence, I was forced to take the initiative, which resulted in the establishment of the 'Marol Bazaar Masali Vikreta Koli Mahila Sanstha' in 2007. Now, this market is officially registered and has developed its own institutional identity in the city. After registration, we constructed sheds and basement in the market, provided light and sanitation facilities for women. Today, around 5,000 women are working under this cooperative society..."

Apart from these practices women are self-organising and trying to sustain their traditional practices and coastal environment. The informal groups of women of each cluster participate in festival celebration. Villagers initiated community marriage practices which helped to involve in marriage ceremonies without extravagance investments. As a measure to reinforce their culture and identity, the Koli women had initiated the 'Versova food festival'. During this festival, they prepare their traditional foods and showcase their traditional culture through performances of Koli songs and dance. Even these women are taking the initiative to clean their coast and have approached the State. Their collective efforts are aimed at sustaining their culture, identity and traditional livelihood practices.

## CONCLUSION

Versova's geographical specificity and its direct linkage to the mainland fostered along history of marine trade and entrepreneurship among the Koli community. It was found that the initial stages of modernisation in fisheries and the surrounding urban development did certainly benefit the Koli community in Versova. They were able to harness the opportunities thus provided to access and addvalue to diverse forms of livelihood assets. Still, Versova has opportunities to generate revenue through the wholesale fish market, ferry services, tourism and rent money. In this regard, the historicity of the coastal landscape does matter in determining whether each phase of modernisation could turn out into a moment of advantage or disadvantage for the Koliwada community.

One cannot ignore the negative consequence of fisheries modernisation and urbanisation on the coastal and marine environment. Industrialisation, pollution, reclamation, destruction of mangroves forest and fish breeding habitat, violation of Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) norms through illegal construction are the end result of these processes. Apart from that, many fish varieties have become extinct in creek ecosystem. Rampant coastal development and construction of infrastructures have also reduced the social gathering spaces of women and children.

The Koli women are thus the primary victims of environmental degradation and transitions in the coastal landscape (Agarwal, 1992). The vulnerability of Koli women has worsened further with the over exploitation and the resultant scarcity of marine resources. The changes in the ecological subsystem have not only deepened the layers of women's vulnerability but also have affected the entire social subsystem of the

Koli community (Nayak et. al., 2014). Initially, these processes helped them in improving their livelihood assets, but gradually it affected their access to crucial resources. These processes benefitted certain classes only. The subjugated classes in the community can be further marginalised without having the capabilities and authority to access their essential livelihood resources.

Several contextual factors have forced Koli women in Versova to diversify their livelihoods from dry fish selling to fresh fish buying and vending. Contextual factors such as family structure, technological changes, intervention by State government, market, and resource scarcity could significantly influence sustainable fishing practices and the embedded gender relations within these practices (Santha, 2009). These processes changed the status of women from the 'owner' of fish to 'buyer and seller' of fish. It is in itself an important characteristic of capitalism in an urban landscape. These women are thus in the process of transitioning from a natural resource-dependent livelihood practice to a market-dependent livelihood practice. Men restrict Koli women to work in other sectors than fisheries, otherwise force them to look after household chores and domestic work, and this is often considered as 'unproductive' labour. This itself is a characteristic of capitalism in the Third World, where women are often retained in the traditional forms of production and their work is also rendered invisible (Bryceson, 1985; Gwon 2005; Salmi and Sonck-Rautio, 2018). Thus, there is also an erosion of Koli women's financial autonomy and agency to be involved in 'productive' work. These processes again reinforce patriarchal power relations resulting in the subjugation of women.

Patriarchy insists that women are allocated only those works that are denoted as 'women's work'. Often, these kinds of work are considered to be less dignified than men's work. In this regard, household chores and domestic work is defined as women's work and is considered as most suitable for them (Friedman et.al, 1987). It was found that changes in the traditional division of labour in the Koli community has also altered the decision-making rights in the economic affairs of the family. The economic role of Koli women is now transferred to Koli men and has made Koli women even more dependent on them.

The obligation of continuing the traditional norms, beliefs and practices in the Koli community is mostly vested with the Koli women. These practices induce a kind of feminine role of tolerance and self-restraint among women (Dube, 1988). Further, the risks and uncertainties associated with the fisheries-based livelihoods force them to rely on these practices even more. It has been found that a key determinant of women's vulnerability is their lack of access to livelihood assets and

decision-making structures. The Koli woman's authority over the coastal resources is very limited, and they hardly yield any control over their income (Kulkarni, 2007).

In Versova, men have become more dependent on women towards sustaining their fisheries business in the context of modernisation. The men themselves seemed to have moved away from their traditional fishing practices, but have overburdened women with fisheries and household responsibilities (Samuel, 2007; Hapke, 2001). Govinda (2013: 5) through her research also cautions that such men who are no longer involved in productive spheres do not withdraw into private spaces (or so-called women's spaces); and instead, develop newer strategies to retain their hegemonic masculinities and thereby maintain the prevalent gender asymmetries. This phenomenon of domestic violence as an increasing tendency among men who do not have any labour to do, but reap the benefits of women's hard labour. Along with that, Koli women have to face conflict with the new entrants in the landing yards and market spaces with the rise in competition.

For instance, livelihood diversification is a key strategy of Koli women in Versova. Moreover, all Koli women in Versova did neither have the equal opportunity nor capability to rely on diversification as a key strategy for their survival. Specifically, illiterate women had fewer opportunities to diversify than educated women. Educated women gain opportunities to expand their boundaries of work, while illiterate women are often restricted to the boundaries of traditional livelihoods and household activities (Rajgopal, 2007). Thus, factors such as age, marital status, class, and human capital determine women's ability to cope with risks and uncertainties in their day-to-day life (Adger et al., 2007).

The study has found that Koli women use their identity and vulnerability situation as a focal point to be organised and face diverse challenges as a collective. Women are able to forge this connection among them, as they are able to empathetically understand the vulnerable situation and strengths of other women and identify that with being 'a woman, a Koli woman and a fish-workers'. With the transitions in the socio-ecological landscape and cultural practices, women's social boundaries have also expanded. These also facilitated women to collectivise, engage and negotiate with the dominating structures using their inherent skills and social network. As per the boundaries of Koli women expanded, they also began to self-organise and ensure their representation in both formal and informal spaces. The Koli women make use of their self-organisation capacities to collectivise and resist various dominating forces. Basically, their self-organisation strategies help them to claim their rights over basic resources and raise their voice against

violence (Krishna, 2007). Women in Versova collectively organised and resisted politicians and builders to protect their age-old fisheries market in Mumbai. Koliwomen in Versova are more socially and politically aware of their circumstances.

Therefore, they have formed multiple informal organisations in the Koliwada, gained entry into the otherwise male-dominated fisheries cooperatives and have also facilitated the establishment of exclusive fisheries cooperative for women in Marol market to fight for their rights and sustain their livelihood practices.

Contemporary views of Marxist feminists are also concerned about the other issues of women that are root causes of their problems known as 'woman question' and those are ground realities of 'global capitalism' (Ebert, 2005). They consider the interrelationship between social structure and human agency which is becoming complex, as structures have forced human beings to change themselves and to the world according to their will (Mann and Huffman, 2005). As a result, they insist on equality in land or property rights and wage labour for women, as it will motivate women to explore their hidden qualities. Ebert (2005) asserts that the liberation of women will be possible only through the transformation of the sexual division of labour and women should actively participate in production activity.

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