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Self-governance of fishing institutions and community resilience: An anthropological inquiry of fishing villages in Godavari Valley, Andhra Pradesh, India

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It is well informed in the academic circles that Fishing sector is in transition as any other sector. Direct and indirect role of market forces affected the fishing sector and as a cause and affect the rights and entitlements of the fishing community are at stake not only in India but also in the world. Many studies have highlighted several issues, like migration, mechanization, fishing rights, issues and operationalization of ICZM, middlemen domination, post-harvest technology facilities; dwindling catches, gender relations, and occupational shift, etc. Very few studies have focused on the indigenous institutions and the customary rights and Governance structure of these institutions. Especially in India the focus on Indigenous institutions in the fishing sector is not well documented by the researchers. This paper is an outcome of a rigorous anthropological investigation into the indigenous knowledge and practices of the fisherfolk of the Coastal Andhra. Indigenously evolved institutional form, “Walakatlu”, evolved over centuries in the past, is still in vogue in the fishing villages. This institution provides fish catch to the share-cropper (the right comes through lineage as ancestral immovable right) on the day of their turn (Vantu). Another institution “Ayyalu”, a community institution, includes both consanguineal and affinal kin members as partners. In light of this, the proposed paper discusses the structure of these institutions, rules, and regulations, allocation of rights over territories, income levels of appropriators, investment patterns, debt repayment mechanism, the role of middlemen, transfer of rights, sanctions on violators of norms, etc. The paper primarily examines the role of indigenous institutions in shaping the socio-economic fabric of the fishing community. Secondly, it proposes to look at how these institutions are made use of by the community for creating sustainable livelihoods. Thirdly, it examines the community’s perspective of livelihood options derived out of rural developmental programmes (State Sponsored) and the livelihood choices carved out of rich natural resource base.

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