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# What Happened to the Fishing School?

## Education, Mobility and Perceptions of Well-being in a Traditional Fishing Community in Western India

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### Introduction

*Bombay duck and Pomfret are found in abundance on this coast which is why we were taught about the fishing practices and methods employed in harvesting these two species. Raapan net is not used for pomfret and Bombay duck; this is used for fish like bangda (Indian mackerel) and kati (Mustached Anchovy), and the seabed is shallower in depth. We use dole nets here. We were given this knowledge in school, but now the school has been taken over by the zilla parishad (district government) and doesn't teach such skills. None of the teachers have such knowledge now.*

(Sitakant, 57, who completed his schooling in the Fisheries School in 1978)

The previous quote captures Sitakant's nostalgia about the coast's significance as a major breeding ground for pomfret and Bombay duck during his period at school. This chapter is based on an in-depth study of Satpati, a large fishing village in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. Home to the first fishing cooperative in the country, as well as the first 'fishing school', the village has witnessed rapid transformations, including the development of industrial estates and infrastructure projects. The fishing school sought to impart key vocational skills to facilitate innovations in the fishing enterprise alongside mainstream curriculum. It is now in decline, with little attention given to either maintenance or quality, and a student strength roughly half that in its heyday. The decline of the Fisheries School also signifies a loss of heritage, the ethics of caring and

sharing, and a pride in the occupation that drove the need to learn, share and transmit its intricacies to the younger generation.

One needs to locate this phenomenon within the larger context of fisheries development in India and the study location. In keeping with the Blue Growth agenda, the overall fish production and its GDP share has been increasing in India, from 7.52 lakh<sup>1</sup> tons in 1950–1 to 125.90 lakh tons in 2017–18. While Maharashtra ranked first in marine fish production among Indian coastal states in 1985, it has witnessed a decline from 3.36 lakh tons in 1985 to 2.01 lakh tons in 2019 (CMFRI 2020). Now ranked fifth, Maharashtra, experiencing negative productivity (–5.83 per cent) between 2000 and 2010 (Kuriakose 2013), has been overtaken by the states of Gujarat and Kerala, which have focused on developing a range of training facilities to enhance productivity.

This decline in fisheries has created pressure on coastal rural households to diversify their sources of income. With few alternate opportunities, educational attainment has come to be perceived as critical to support diversification out of fisheries, and integration into the larger national economy. Parents increasingly aspire for their children to move out of the village, to ‘skilled’ jobs in the nearby metropolis of Mumbai, the state capital. As a symbol of this social and spatial mobility, many families, living in poverty, demonstrate a preference for private, English-medium schools and sacrifice their immediate consumption to pay the fees for their children (Rose 2009).

Education carries multiple meanings in people’s lives, ranging from the acquisition of functional skills to earning a living (Rao and Hossain 2012), claiming social status as an ‘educated person’ (Jeffrey et al. 2008), building social networks and ‘social capital’ (Bourdieu 1987) or expanding one’s capacities or ‘capabilities’ and in turn opportunities for shaping one’s life (Dreze and Sen 1995). Formal schooling is then constructed by both the state and the community as the most important pathway for learning ‘modern ways of being and doing’. Educational aspirations and choices are therefore not just material but embedded in considerations of social mobility and status enhancement. While skill-based apprenticeships or other forms of intergenerational learning may provide a safe route to employment (Marchand 2010; Rao and Hossain 2012), certification and credentials are seen to contribute to status (Jeffrey et al. 2008) and ‘mobile cultural capital’, which can be exchanged in a variety of labour markets (Corbett 2007: 28).

Formal education can, however, deny recognition to non-schooled or traditional knowledge such as acquired through small-scale marine fisheries in India. As an inherited, caste-based occupation, young boys and girls learn a

range of skills and behaviours, including an ethic of hard work and risk-taking from observing and helping their parents (Corbett 2007; Sundar 2018). The fisher castes, while specialized and skilled in fishing, are ranked as a low caste in the social hierarchy of India. Even though fisheries and allied activities can provide economic security (Bavinck 2014) and a better quality of life compared to 'footloose' wage work in a range of informal sector activities (Breman 1996), such communities strive to challenge the construction of their social identity as 'illiterate' and 'backward' – terms attributed to many low-caste, artisanal groups in India (Kumar 2000). And in their resistance, the only option available to them is formal schooling, with a hope to secure employment that is both remunerative and respectable, outside fisheries.

This ambiguous and at times contradictory role of education (Unterhalter 1999) in securing livelihoods and creating respectable identities is particularly pertinent in the current context of globalization and widespread migration, wherein educational qualifications do not guarantee 'decent work' and, instead of intergenerational mobility, may end up reproducing pre-existing social inequalities (Rao 2011). Research with young fishermen in Tamil Nadu revealed that most young men had completed schooling and even secured engineering or other graduate degrees. Unable to secure what they perceived as 'suitable' jobs, they migrated overseas to earn money but typically found themselves in manual work and poor living and working conditions. Consequently, most returned home and entered the family occupation of fishing (Rao and Manimohan 2020). They, however, struggled with representing themselves as 'modern', so sought to improve their class position through capital investments in boats and gear, seen by the elders as contributing to unsustainable fisheries and contradicting the ethics of sharing and equity that the community prided itself for (Rao and Manimohan 2020).

An important concept that seeks to bridge the gap between spatial mobility (migration) and social mobility is that of 'motility', which represents the potential for movement or mobility, rather than necessarily its practice. Kaufmann et al. (2004: 750) define motility as the 'capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social or geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances'. Clearly, the potential for such mobility can be realized in different ways across varying sociocultural contexts, and is shaped by a range of factors, including physical aptitude or skills, accessibility to opportunities and services (including education), and aspirations, or how people interpret and act upon their skills and opportunities within specific space-time constraints. Formal

educational credentials are perceived to provide basic human capabilities which can enhance the potential to move and, hence, are seen as a form of 'mobile' capital. People's educational aspirations and choices are then not deterred by the realities of sociocultural, economic and political processes, which may in reality constrain such movement, as once they are seen to have options or the potential to move, staying back can be represented as a choice rather than a necessity.

In this chapter, we examine the changing meanings of education to the fishing community in the study locality, through the lens of the fishing school. With growing challenges to fisheries and the coast, due to climate change and other transformations, these communities seek upward mobility through white-collar occupations outside fisheries. While they may or may not be successful, such mobility aspirations have impacts on education policy and systems, as well as learner experiences and well-being. We examine changes in the philosophy behind educational policies over time as they shifted from a focus on contextual relevance and social interdependence within the curriculum and pedagogy, to a more universalist curriculum meant for all sections of the population in pursuit of a 'modern' identity. This simultaneously entailed a shift away from recognizing different forms of learning, practical and theoretical, and a redefining of what constitutes 'knowledge' (Kumar 2000), in the process undermining the self-worth and self-identity of communities. Alienation from their occupational skills seems to have contributed to the simultaneous decline in the fishing school and fish production in the village from the late 1980s onwards.

Having set out the key conceptual ideas, we next describe the context of the study village and the methods used for the study. We then outline a short history of fisheries education before presenting different perceptions about the Fisheries School and its potential for enabling change alongside rationales for its neglect and decline.

## Context and Methods

### **The Study Village**

Satpati is one of the most important fishing centres on the west coast of India, in Palghar district, Maharashtra. Even in the late nineteenth century (between 1874 and 1879), the village was exporting fish worth Rs 56,670 (£5667). The first fisheries cooperative society was established here in 1937, followed by a second one in 1946 (Government of Maharashtra 1882; 1982). In 1951, the Sarvodaya

Fishermen Co-operative Society operated an ice factory and cold storage plant, later supported by a Government Service Station for repairs and maintenance (Government of Maharashtra 1982). Their boat building yard had the capacity to construct seven fishing crafts a year (Bombay State Dept. of Fisheries 1951). Around the same time, in 1950, the fisheries primary school was set up in the village, to ensure a transmission of skills, upgrading and updating them as required.

The village population of 17,032 in 2011 (Census Organisation of India 2011) appears to have almost doubled to 35,000 at present, of which 30,000 belong to the fishing community Koli. The Koli are divided into two sub-castes – Vyeti and Mangela – both similar in terms of social hierarchy and status. The remaining population comprises Muslim traders, *malis* (cultivators), *bhandari* (toddy-tappers) and *adivasi* (classified as Scheduled Tribes or indigenous) communities. Fishers who are members of the cooperatives can avail of a range of benefits, including diesel and ice at subsidized prices, fishing equipment and food rations.

### **Decline in Fishing, Migration and Livelihood Choices**

*The trawlers are not allowed to enter our oceans but as they bribe the officials, no one stops them. Our ocean was sold years ago. It is not for us anymore.*

(Rina, fish vendor)

Mechanization of fisheries and the entry of trawlers and purse seiners using nets made of durable materials like nylon and synthetic thread rather than the traditional cotton, smaller mesh sizes and other modern equipment have led to overfishing and reduced the fish catch per unit (Pillai et al. 2000). Inability to access adequate fish or to enhance substantively their own investments in the fishing enterprise has adversely affected the livelihoods of small-scale fishers, whether boat owners, fish vending women or wage workers. Records of the fisher cooperative societies confirm a 62 per cent decline in the catch of pomfret between 1990 and 2019.

The loss of livelihoods is real; but it is not only due to the large trawl boats and industrial fishing. Rather, it has been aggravated by climate change as witnessed through recurring storms in the Arabian Sea, industrial pollution affecting fish stock and the lack of technological assistance and financial support to the traditional fishers. The Arabian Sea faced over seventeen major storms between 2010 and 2019. Fishermen faced huge losses of boats and equipment yet, largely uncompensated by the government, were burdened with huge debts

(Lokmat News Network 2019). Additionally, a thermal power plant, industries, amusement parks, harbours and ports have been built along this coastline in the name of growth and development. These have far-reaching effects on fishing livelihoods due to pollution, destruction of the natural habitat and displacement (Chouhan et al. 2018). Central government support for such projects has left the traditional fishers vulnerable (Warhaft 2001; Rao and Manimohan 2020), forced to diversify for survival.

While elites among the fishers can engage with trade (including exports), processing, machine repair and allied activities, such opportunities are not available to many small-scale fishers and fishing labour. Many women, earlier engaged in the drying of Bombay duck, for example, now seek work in the industrial complex at Palghar, working long hours for low wages, with hardly any leave. Given the growing precarity of the fishing enterprise, parents, especially those poor and lacking in social connections, view education as the pathway to mobility, but equally to income and livelihood security for their children.

## **Methods**

The study used a combination of archival materials and interviews with key informants to understand the relationship between education, skills and their perceptions of mobility/immobility. The field research was undertaken between August 2019 and March 2020. The cooperative societies, which were our entry point into the village, provided a historical background of fisheries and introductions to the fishing community.

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted, six with former students, three with former teachers and the rest with community leaders, boat owners and women vendors. While some were in-person, the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown brought the field work to a standstill, and the remaining interviews were conducted by phone between September and December 2020. Snowball sampling and key informants were used to identify respondents, especially past students of the school. Despite efforts, we were unable to speak to fisheries or education officials in the district.

Archival material, including annual reports of the Fisheries Department of the erstwhile Bombay state and syllabus of the Fisheries School, was accessed from the Asiatic Society Library and Maharashtra State Archives in Mumbai. News articles about the coast were also reviewed.

## Fisheries Education in Satpati

In this section, we trace the shifts in policy thinking on fisheries education since independence, locating changes at both the national and the regional/state levels. We then focus on the Fisheries School, discussing the innovations in pedagogy and curriculum that made it unique, relevant and progressive for its time.

### **Fisheries Education Policies since Independence**

The foundation for fisheries training was established during 'British India' with two central fisheries training centres established in 1945, followed by several State Fisheries Departments setting up their own in-service programmes to train district-level fisheries officers (Silas 1977). Post-independence, the five-year plans aimed to improve training facilities to enable fishermen to undertake longer fishing trips, use mechanized gear and commence deep sea fishing (Government of India 1951). In 1959, a Committee on Fisheries Education sought to create an integrated fisheries education system in India, to address questions of skill renewal and upgrade (Kumar 1977). The Central Institute of Fisheries Education (CIFE) and the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training (CIFNET) were established (Lok Sabha Secretariat 1968; Silas 1977). By 1967, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Kochi, and the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), Barrackpore, were brought under the aegis of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) (earlier the Imperial Council), to be developed as an integral part of agricultural research and training in India (Mruthyunjaya 2004).

Alongside these central institutions, several fisheries colleges and universities emerged across the coastal states of India, yet basic skills training at the community level was neglected. In 2008, with the establishment of the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC), there was a new push to utilize effectively the 'demographic dividend' by addressing the non-employability of formally educated youth. The first National Policy on Skill Development, 2009, provided a framework for skills training, focusing on short-term, industry-relevant courses which would result in jobs for the trainees (Government of India 2009; Chenoy 2012). The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015, upscaled this policy, including fisheries and aquaculture in its ambit, to promote innovation-based entrepreneurship for ensuring sustainable livelihoods (Government of India 2015). Yet unlike the Fisheries



School, these interventions are not embedded in the community and its culture and are viewed as a source of employment, rather than a way of life.

### **The Fisheries Schools in Maharashtra**

Maharashtra was always a front runner in the development of fisheries education alongside schemes for increasing fish production, including infrastructures for storing and processing fish as well as supporting equitable returns through the development of fishermen's cooperatives (Dept. of Fisheries 1965). A unique initiative was the setting up of Fisheries Schools, providing access to basic education alongside training in fishing skills to children from fishing communities. The State Fisheries Department established eight Fisheries Primary Schools in 1950. The medium of instruction was the local language – Marathi, Gujarati or Kannada – depending on the location of the school. Certification was central to ensuring appropriation of the skills by the community and giving them value (cf. Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye et al. 2004).

The Fisheries Schools soon also became cultural centres for adult fishermen. This is because the 'technology of education, (which) consists, among other things, of the teacher, the space, the text, the teaching strategy and the rituals' (Kumar 2000: 23), were all embedded within the philosophy and ethos of the fisher community. While 'expert' fishermen were brought in as teachers, students were also provided a range of opportunities to gain exposure and experience, such as visits aboard a naval training ship to see the working of its equipment; or participating in the District Agricultural and Cattle Show, which led to the award of merit certificates (Bombay State Dept. of Fisheries 1954). Seen as an exemplar in basic fisheries education, by 1956, the student enrolment in the Satpati Fisheries Primary School had risen to 562, from 462 in its first year; with 15 teachers on its roll. Given the rising demand for fisheries education, in 1965–6, a local private school, the Adi Janata High School, was taken over by the Fisheries Department and converted into a Fisheries High School. The school at this time had 800 students and 26 teachers (Bombay State Dept. of Fisheries 1956).

### **The Curriculum: A Combination of Theory and Practice**

The Fisheries School Certificate was awarded to students completing the seventh-grade examination for a range of fisheries-related subjects along with mathematics, science, geography, history and a second regional language

(Bombay State Dept. of Fisheries 1955a). The curriculum included both theory and practical training. Marde, the headmaster at Satpati Fisheries School in the 1960s, himself from the fishing community, would take the boys on a boat 'to show them *gholaav* (how to estimate the depth of the water) and *paakjal* (techniques) for throwing nets targeting different fish species'. The rationale was later discussed in the classroom.

Satyendra, a former student, recalls studying about different fish species and nets, navigation and wind direction, as well as learning net weaving, stitching and carpentry. Students not belonging to boat owner families would also learn these skills, and after school help boat owner families with net stitching to earn a little money for themselves.

There is a double knot, we were taught how to tie the various knots, where to make a loop and put the string, do it in a way that our skin does not peel, and also when to use a particular loop or knot. The *kavi* net had 5 different parts, I memorized the names as a kid and still remember them – *mohor*, *chirat*, *katra*, *mazvala* and *khola*. Each part is smaller than the one before, so *mohor* was the largest and *khola* so small that even your thumb would not pass through it. The smallest fish would be in the *khola*. (Satyendra, 60)

Clearly what one learnt had implications for both the ways of learning and the evaluation of this learning (Rogers 2014). While Satyendra's son is clueless about the methods and techniques used in fishing, the knowledge Satyendra gained from his school days is still fresh in his own memory.

As it was mandatory for at least one person on every boat to have a 'training certificate', in order to be eligible for subsidies for boats and gear from the National Cooperative Development Corporation, Tandel joined the Fisheries Training Centre, established in 1954. The minimum entry requirement was primary education and at least five years of fishing experience. Meant for traditional fishermen with basic knowledge of net throwing, net weaving and fishing; while some training on fishing methods, elementary principles of navigation and running and maintenance of small marine diesel engines, was included in the training, this was not covered in any depth (Silas 1977; Swaminath 1983). Speaking about the quality of the training centre, Rajesh, forty-two, a member of the Gram Panchayat, felt that it was never developed properly, hence did not benefit the community much. For those who had been to the Fisheries School, the six-month training helped consolidate their knowledge; for others it was inadequate. The link between access to credit and finance and the certification, however, meant that students had no option but to complete the course.

In 2002, the administration of the Fisheries School in Satpati was transferred to the Zilla Parishad (district council) by the Fisheries Department. While the provision of fisheries courses remains on the school curriculum, Rajesh observed: 'for years there has been no instructor to provide technical training to the children. There are no qualified teachers to teach the higher grades. Parents hence don't want to send their children to the Fisheries School.' In 2019, the school had only 310 students enrolled from the sixth to tenth grades. Of the 26 teacher positions, only 11 were filled, raising questions around the quality of provisioning.

### **Fishing as a Masculine Industry: Neglecting Girls' Education**

Women are integral to fisheries, responsible for both preparatory and post-harvest work. Despite a high enrolment of girls in the school, there was, however, no specific practical training for them. Prema, fifty-six, who studied at the Fisheries School, recalls that boys would be taken for practical trips, while girls had none: 'I remember we had some theory on which fish is found where in the sea, how fish swim and so on. We would take notebooks from the boys and copy drawings of nets, or fish species.' The department introduced 'domestic science' as a practical subject for girls in lieu of 'carpentry' for boys, yet this course was contingent on the appointment of a 'trained lady teacher'. Deepa, fifty-six, who studied in the Fisheries School from fifth to ninth grades, said:

What was the domestic science subject? What does it say in the syllabus? I don't know because none of it was taught. Boys had technical training, boat carpentry, net weaving, but we did not have any of it.

For girls, the learning of trade-related skills was entirely informal and intergenerational, passed on by elder women in the family. They were directly socialized into adult occupational roles as the Fisheries School curriculum did not include fish vending, drying or processing training for them. As Prema noted:

Every boy would go on fishing trips with his father and we girls would help our mother sort fish. My mother would give me small portions of fish in the morning, to sell in the market before school. All of us learnt by observing the elders in our family.

Perhaps this exclusion of specific skills for girls in the school curriculum is because while 'women are considered active fishermen due to their major

contribution to marketing activities' (Ketan Patil, Chairman of Sarvodaya Co-operative Society), they remain under-represented in the society and its decision-making mechanisms. With boats and gear being in men's domain, there was, therefore, probably no representation to the curriculum committee for including skills relevant to fisherwomen in the school. For girls, then, it was just a normal state school.

We now turn to the perceptions about fisheries education, especially the school, and its decline from the perspective of a range of stakeholders – former students, teachers and community leaders.

## Perceptions about Fisheries Education

In this section we explore some of the perceptions, discourses and justifications for the state of the Fisheries School today.

### **Bureaucratization of Fisheries Education: Losing Contact with the Needs of Fishers**

Several people from the fishing community – former teachers and students – blamed the decline of the school on the bureaucratization of fisheries education, and a lack of understanding or contact by administrators with the real needs and problems of fishers, and the new challenges they confront. Rupesh, a former chairman of the Sarvodaya Co-operative Society, commented: 'the Fisheries ministers are not experts and lack the knowledge and understanding of the fishing sector. They will not know the name of the fish or how fishing is done.'

Apart from the lack of sensitivity to or understanding of the needs of fishers, some felt the decline was due to a lack of coordination between the Fisheries and Education Departments. Satyendra noted that while the Fisheries Department expected the Education Department to streamline the training and curriculum after it took over the school in 2002, the latter had little idea about fisheries as a subject, hence let it fall into disuse. Sitakant too emphasized that in the 1960s, unlike nowadays, the provision of fishing knowledge and skills was seen as important to the growth of the industry; hence, there was a push for the inclusion of these skills in the school's curriculum. He explained:

But as times changed, they don't feel fishing knowledge is crucial anymore. Globalization has happened, IT and software industries have grown, and options

have emerged in other fields. The government seems to have replaced fishing knowledge and skills with computers.

The lack of relevant fisheries skills training in the school, able to keep pace with contemporary changes in the complex web of fisheries relationships and technologies between the state, corporates, fisher castes, classes of labour and genders, seems also to have contributed to its decline. For other skills such as in IT or computers, parents prefer to send their children to private schools in nearby towns.

### **The Need for a Relevant, Professional Curriculum**

In the early years, flexibility in the educational system allowed for the recruitment of local fishers to teach a range of skills in the school. This practice gave recognition to practical skills as an important part of learning and also gave visibility to the 'funds of knowledge' and 'banks of skills' that fisher children brought with them to school (Moll et al. 1992). Additionally, by creating space for intergenerational learning within the formal context of the school, the school became attractive to parents, as a symbol of their heritage, their values and 'lifeways' based on egalitarian economic relations (Corbett 2007: 25) and recognition of their traditional, artisanal knowledge, while simultaneously providing the potential for mobility.

The community nevertheless saw a case for modernizing and professionalizing the curriculum of the Fisheries School and training centre, yet this was not happening in practice. Tamore reflected:

In the training course I attended in Cochin (in the 1960s), apart from different types of fishing, we learnt how to repair and maintain engines, but importantly, we learnt the latest techniques, for example, how to operate the Fish Finder (device). None of that is taught here. While the examinations include both practical and theoretical assessments, the syllabus has not been updated to reflect changes in modern methods and technology.

Satyendra added that while their cooperative society had a boat building yard which had successfully 'competed with private concerns and secured a contract on open tender basis for construction of fishing boats of the Saurashtra Government' (Bombay State Dept. of Fisheries 1955b), there has been no training or investment in upgrading its equipment despite the potential as a good source of employment for youth. Tamore expressed a similar sentiment:

The youth today know English and are better educated than us. As there are no jobs, many young men return to fishing. If they have access to professional skills,

in fishing but also in allied activities, are trained and acquainted with modern tools and techniques, they will succeed and move forward.

While fisheries is a traditional occupation for the community and households in Satpati, there is an awareness of the need to update these skills with the times, especially with respect to modern technology. Community leaders recognized that in the early years, alongside facilities and equipment, there was an emphasis on skills and knowledge, as reflected in the setting up of Fisheries Schools. The objective was to develop both the fishing enterprise and the community. Clearly there is a desire for fisheries education to rebrand fisheries as a 'modern' and 'respectable' profession. Yet the state is apparently failing to hear these demands and skills programmes continue to focus on creating 'workers' rather than 'entrepreneurs' among the fishing community.

### **Changing Parental and Youth Aspirations in Terms of Mobility and Migration**

Tamore, now seventy-three, completed his education at the Adi Janta High School in 1965, and then went to Cochin, in the southern state of Kerala, to complete his marine fisheries training course. While having a 'training certificate' was a requirement to avail benefits under governmental schemes, he attributes his success to the quality of the training he received and his ability to communicate in English. His four children studied in English-medium schools in Palghar and all but one son moved out of the fishing occupation. Sachin, now forty-six, inherited his father's boat. After studying till tenth grade in Palghar, he completed the six-month fisheries training in Satpati. While he chose to handle the family's boat and fishing business, his wife is determined to keep their two children away from fishing: 'the way our life is going, we don't want them to enter the fishing business at any cost.' Both children are now pursuing higher education outside the village. Sachin added: 'It is tough for me to sustain; I won't let my kids enter the boat. Small work is okay, I ask them to go buy nets or things, but I don't take them on the boat.'

Previously, many children dropped out of school to join the family fishing enterprise; while others like Rupesh or Ketan, both trained as engineers, or Dewan, with a postgraduate degree in commerce, chose fisheries as a business and profession. This is now rare and, given the rising costs and falling incomes, more and more parents from the fishing community actively want their children to move into other occupations.

Yet there is another side too. Tandel, fifty-five, belongs to a boat-owning family. He went to the Fisheries School in Satpati, later completed the fisheries training course and was able to acquire his boat through a loan under the NCDC scheme, which otherwise would have been difficult. While he did not send his children to the Fisheries School, his son has joined the boat business. He noted, 'Education is important, nothing will happen if they continue in fishing. But even after education, getting a job is not sure.' Perhaps if the fishing school had retained its quality, provided relevant skills and trained the fisher children to address emergent challenges on the coast, Tandel might have been open to sending his children to the fishing school. As succinctly expressed by Sitakant,

This village is of the fishing community, illiteracy rates were high, and education was often ignored. My father was a traditional fisherman, and when he saw the fishing school giving training in fishing apart from other subjects, he pushed me to attend. But now, people see the condition of the Fisheries School, there are no teachers, fishing courses have been stopped, the community is no longer involved, so they send their children to convent schools in surrounding towns, hoping to provide them with better education. Parents now aspire that their children get jobs in Mumbai or even leave the country, as they believe that conditions won't improve if they stay in Satpati.

Arti, a fish vending woman, told us of the financial and human losses they faced when their boat drowned following an accident. They have struggled to provide good education to their three children; in English-medium schools and colleges in Palghar. She stresses the importance of quality education but also the difficulties confronted in educating children with their meagre earnings from fishing: 'The government should provide good education to our children. Education has so much value, but it is so very expensive.'

## Conclusion

In the case of single industry communities, schooling is often seen as a contradictory process – providing successful students with mobile cultural capital that prepares them to leave, while those who choose to stay are invariably labelled as school dropouts (Corbett 2007). This chapter has explored a unique example of a 'fishing school' that sought to enhance the skills of children belonging to the fishing community, alongside providing them a generic education, building their motility or the potential and capacities for

socio-spatial mobility, both in the community and outside. This strategy increased the choices available to fisher children; many educated young men, with higher degrees, returned to work in their family fishing businesses. At the same time, this emphasis on skills and training, and its positive valuation, contributed to the emergence of Maharashtra as the foremost Indian state in marine fish production and exports.

A point worth reiterating is the gendered nature of training in occupational skills. While even earlier, the fishing school focused on boys as 'fishermen' rather than girls as 'fish traders and marketers,' this has remained unchanged. While a few women continue fish trading activities, requiring considerable skills in accounting and money management, these have been learnt not from the school but 'on-the-job'. In today's context, state-promoted self-help groups of women are a site for learning financial skills. Nevertheless, with the decline in fisheries, a majority of poor fisherwomen have now moved to unskilled work in local factories and other informal enterprises, representing a process of 'deskilling' rather than skill upgradation.

Fishing is a traditional occupation, which has seen tremendous technological advancements in recent years. Relative to agriculture and many other forms of informal employment, the returns remain significant (Bavinck 2014). The fishing community, with their traditional knowledge and seafaring skills, clearly have an advantage in seizing new opportunities in this sector, yet present-day governments, given their sectoral organization, appear to devalue traditional knowledge and skills, as reflected in homogenizing education and school curricula, often with no relevance to local needs or identities. While in its early years, the fishing school combined theoretical and practical knowledge, bringing in 'experts' from the community to 'teach' practical skills, this is no longer the case. While some fishing subjects are retained, the so-called modern knowledge and techniques are taught in a vacuum, disconnected from local skills, knowledges and practices. The devaluation and lack of recognition of their skills and capacities have also meant that the fishing community including the older generations no longer take pride in the school as reflective of their heritage. Instead, parents struggle to send their children to fee-paying English medium schools, hoping to enable their exit from fisheries into secure jobs in the city.

Clearly, investing in the education and skills of fisher communities, including technologies that support the construction of fishing as a 'modern' occupation (Rao and Manimohan 2020), alongside respectful attention to and incorporation of traditional and modern sources of knowledge in mainstream education,



is vital for sustaining the growth and development of both the sector and the people. The fisheries sector in Maharashtra is a testimony to this.

## Note

- 1 One lakh is equivalent to 100,000.

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