

CHAPTER V

THE EFFECT OF THE MONSOON

So far the writer has discussed the pattern of household or consumption expenditure among the fisherman during the fishing season but in this chapter the writer will discuss the pattern of expenditure during the off-fishing season. The Monsoon which seriously affects fishing activities has a great influence on the expenditure pattern. It is very noticeable that as soon as the Monsoon sets in there is a marked change in the daily diet of the fisherman.

A. Period of Distress.

To the fisherman, off-fishing season is a period of distress and poverty. It was estimated that during the Monsoon nearly 75 per cent of the fisherman could not go to fish and only about 25 per cent brave the stormy sea to eke out an existence. Since their source of income has been cut off, they have to deplete their savings, which are either in form of money, food stuffs or jewellery.

The fisherman's situation is made worse because fresh fish, which is their staple food, besides rice, and which is consumed in large quantities daily, can no longer be obtained

free of cost or at low prices.

Savings among the fishermen rarely take the form of money. Savings in jewellery is more favoured since it serves a dual purpose; it can be converted into cash in times of need through pawning or sale and at the same time serves as ornaments for the ladies.

B. The Role of Fisherman Co-operative Societies.

Among the fishermen who are members of the village fisherman's co-operative credit and marketing society,¹ the financial burden during the monsoon season is greatly relieved because the Society's compulsory saving scheme can then be put to good use. During the fishing season 10 per cent of the member's income from the sale of fish is deducted and saved in the Society to be refunded to members during the Monsoon.²

C. Storing of Foodstuffs.

Savings in foodstuffs normally takes the form of dry salted or pickled fish. Dry salted fish is preferred to pickled fish since it is more lasting and tastes better. In a few cases rice and sugar are also stored to be consumed during the Monsoon.

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1. There are two Fisherman's Co-operative Credit and Marketing Societies in Besarrah village.
 2. Since another honours student is making a comparative study of these co-operative societies, the writer feels that there is no need to discuss in detail, in this Exercise, the functions of these societies. Refer Yahya bin Haji Talib, Comparative Study of Two Fisherman's Co-Operative Credit and Marketing Societies.

Surprisingly enough, only a few store up rice and sugar for the off-fishing season, for rice and sugar their staple food items are fairly durable commodities, particularly rice. This is not practised on a large scale because the fishermen's incomes are relatively low and, after spending on their daily needs, there is not enough left to buy rice and sugar in large quantities to be stored up for consumption during the off-fishing season.

D. Expenditure Pattern.

It would be very interesting and useful if a table could be drawn up to show the expenditure patterns of these fishermen during the off-fishing season. But because the period of survey was limited and the writer was only on the field during the fishing season, it is greatly regretted that this is not possible. However, through inquiries from the fishermen the writer was able to secure a rough picture of the likely pattern of expenditure during the off-fishing season. This is discussed below.

Generally, the expenditure on rice, wheat flour and glutinous rice will increase slightly during the off-fishing season, followed by a fall on expenditure on non-home-prepared snacks and sweetmeats which are substituted by home-prepared food. Although rice and snacks can be substituted, the income elasticity of demand for rice is lower than that of snacks.

Thus, the expenditure on snacks during the off-fishing season will fall greatly while the increase in the expenditure on rice will be very slight.

The expenditure on sugar, coffee or tea, coconut oil, chillies and fuel will remain almost the same since these items have a very low income elasticity of demand.

The sudden fall in the consumption of fresh fish during the Monsoon is a very noticeable feature among the fishermen. Owing to their high price resulting from a sharp fall in the quantity of fresh supplies, fish is therefore, seldom bought. However, some of the fishermen often manage to catch enough fish for household consumption by using casting nets in the shallower waters of the sea.

It may be expected that, because of the shortage of fresh fish during the Monsoon, meat and eggs may be bought as substitutes for fish. It was learned that this substitution does not take place because meat and eggs appear to be more beyond fishermen's reach when their income falls. However, eggs will be taken more regularly than during the fishing season, but, as during the fishing season, meat is never bought during the Monsoon.

During the Monsoon dry salted fish is taken much more often than is normally taken during the fishing season. The

increase in the consumption of dry salted fish raises the consumption on fresh vegetables, since dry fish and vegetables, to these fishermen, are complementary. During the Monsoon, fresh vegetables are taken on the average of five times per week as compared to less than three times per week during the fishing season.

A new food item that appears in the daily expenditure pattern during the Monsoon is tinned sardine. Sardines are often substituted for dry fish since the daily consumption of dry fish provides a monotonous diet.

With a fall in income during the Monsoon, expenditures on cigarettes fall only slightly since, as shown earlier, this item has a low income elasticity of demand. The slight fall takes place because cheap cigarettes are being substituted for the dear cigarettes.

During the two months of off-fishing season expenditure on durable and semi-durable goods, such as clothing, is totally nil.

The writer was told that during the two months of off-fishing season, the fishermen practically live on a subsistence level. For the fishermen of the low income group, for example the 'mank-mank' in the 'pukat terek', there is hardly enough to

out. Some may even have to borrow or drastically reduce their daily expenditure. The ~~harvest~~ is, ~~then~~, a period when the fishermen are most likely to get themselves into debt. The total average expenditure per household is obviously very much less than during the fishing season,

