ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to analyse the vulnerability contexts and livelihood struggles of Koli women in the context of fisheries modernisation and urbanisation in two Koliwadas of Mumbai. In this context, it specifically explores how forces such as patriarchy and capitalism intrude into their day-to-day lived experiences, identity and decision making spaces. The key assumption of this thesis is that fisheries modernisation, coastal development and urbanisation in Mumbai has neglected the day-to-day struggles, needs and aspirations of Koli women. The livelihood struggles of Koli women situated amidst tradition (as a manifestation of patriarchy) and modernity (as a manifestation of capitalism) are therefore the primary concern of this study.

This study examines the socio-ecological transitions of two Koliwadas in Mumbai, and its implications on the livelihood struggles of Koli women. It specifically explores the social processes that Koli women engage in their journey along a tradition-modernity continuum. Further this study attempts to understand the contextual factors affecting the livelihoods of Koli women and it further examines the coping strategies of Koli women to deal with livelihood uncertainties. This research uses a ‘Marxist Feminist’ lens embedded in a tradition-modernity continuum to analyse the lived experiences and livelihood transitions of Koli women. Qualitative in nature, this research seeks to understand the livelihood struggles of Koli women and their coping strategies through an ethnographic lens. The ethnographic fieldwork in two Koliwadas helped to describe and analyse the process of modernisation from tradition to modernity, as well as gather valuable information on the coping strategies of Koli women to deal with such transitions in both the fishing villages.

This study shows that even though women have larger contribution in fisheries sector and its sustenance, Koli women are highly deprived due to their lack of assets. The traditional structures and institutions deny property rights to Koli women and have also restricted their access to diverse livelihood resources. Adding to these, the modernisation in fisheries has also impacted upon their resource accessibility, reduction in livelihood spaces, and increased market competition. Other intersectional dimensions of vulnerability such as age, class, education, marital status, technological access and change also add to the vulnerability of these women in the context of
modernisation, urbanisation and changing employer-labour relations. Along with the traditional patriarchal structures and practices, these contextual factors also hinder women's accessibility to new forms of livelihood resources and they are always subjugated to diverse structures of domination. Yet another key finding of this research is that Koli women attempt to resist the exploitative structures of both tradition and modernity through strategies of self-organisation. This self-organisation is largely internal driven. Koli women use their agency to self-organise and thereby collectively attempt to protect their livelihood spaces.