



## Women's Empowerment through Ornamental Fish Farming: Smashing Gender Boundaries!!!

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### Introduction

The ornamental fish business was developed to satisfy a prevailing pastime. In contrast to the food fish market, the ornamental fish trade is relatively tiny worldwide, but it nevertheless contributes significantly to the trade in freshwater and marine aquatic products. After photography, aquarium keeping is thought to be the second most popular hobby worldwide. The ornamental fish keeping which began as a hobby has become a commercially traded commodity due to its burgeoning demand in national and international markets. The aquarium fish and accessories industry is rapidly gaining importance due to its remarkable economic opportunities and prospects. Compared to other aquaculture methods, the culture of ornamental fish, or aquariculture, is straightforward, simple to comprehend, requires less time and less labor.

Furthermore, India has enormous potential for producing ornamental fish because of its favorable climate and high biodiversity of over 250 species; nonetheless, the country ranks 31<sup>st</sup> in the world with only US\$1.6 million in yearly trade (Raja et al. 2019). Neon tetras, goldfish, angel fish, and discus rule the global fish trade, but our native fishes have a lot of promise. According to Vinayak (2017), the current domestic ornamental fish market is worth INR 300 crores and employs about 50,000 people through 5,000 retail aquarium stores and a similar number of production facilities.

Approximately 50% of the world's population is made up of women. The father of the country, "Mahatma Gandhi," once said that women are the most honorable creatures created by God and are the best in their respective fields. Therefore, women from environmentally vulnerable locations can contribute to the creation of a sustainable ornamental fish commerce as well as the protection of endangered ornamental fish species through backyard culture. In India, a lot of women, particularly in rural areas, have taken up backyard ornamental fish

farming or breeding (Roy.A.et al. 2023). Because the culture practice of ornamental fish farming requires relatively basic techniques and modest capital investment, it is thought to be a viable option for women. A little area for setting up fish tanks or a backyard pond can enable women manage the business while juggling household duties and constructive roles in the community. The states of West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala are where the majority of the operations are focused.

Despite this, the patriarchal culture forces her to set limits on her aspirations, emphasizing her responsibilities to her family, their well-being, and their development. Women's empowerment is an investment in the future generation, as they serve as role models for their children and grandchildren. It should never be viewed as a charitable endeavour or a way to reduce poverty (Nune, 2008). This paper focuses on the role of women in ornamental fish farming and the areas to be improved in future.

### **Women in food production sector:**

The process of intensifying women's contributions to farm labor through various combinations of numerous economic, social and political elements is known as "feminization of agriculture." Men are observed moving abroad to work as laborers, rickshaw drivers, and domestic helpers. Their female counterparts were left behind in the village to take care of the elderly and the children. Very few of the countless women who work on these lands truly own them or have the means to lease them. The growing agrarian crisis in India has a feminine face. They are young married women with little to no education, and as a result, they are not eligible for the many programs developed by state government ministries to advance agriculture. The division of labor on farms is still based on sex, and patriarchal culture still sets behavioral norms. Women in India hardly ever have access to resources like as assets, water, electricity, etc. that are needed for agriculture. The secret to the empowerment of women is this ownership.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) believes that feminization has a significant impact on the economic agency, productivity, and revenue from farms of producers. In fact, farm produce might rise by 20–30% if women had equal access to productive resources as men do, adding 2.5–4% to the total agricultural output of developing nations. This increase in production has the potential to reduce global hunger by 12–17% while also raising women's incomes. Women now make up 19% and 12%, respectively, of the workforce in the aquaculture and fisheries sectors (FAO, 2020). Around the world, fish and fish products are a staple in many cuisines. In certain areas, women are involved in both commercial and artisanal fishing, and they even hold a majority in specific tasks like cleaning and marketing. They engage in waged labor as well as shallow water fishing. Since women are not allowed to participate in

some aspects of the fishing industry, the problems are considerably more complicated in the context of fisheries. Although they are primarily not directly involved in the maritime industry's fish production, fishermen do make a substantial contribution to the culture sector.

Along with the men, they help with pond preparation, stocking, feeding, and harvesting. But because their work is typically categorized as household work, it is frequently overlooked. Farm ownership is still primarily held by men. Similar to how agriculture has focused on empowering women through fostering ownership, offering technical assistance, and supplying appropriate inputs, aquaculture also can provide assistance in fish culture and thus their income can be boosted and their contributions can be significantly increased.

### **Opportunities for Women in Fisheries and Ornamental Fish Culture:**

The small-scale ornamental fish culture business in one's backyard is largely steady. Women in isolated communities report that the practice of ornamental fish culture is a profitable enterprise, and they are typically open to embracing new ideas that they deem to be economically beneficial. Businesses such as this ornamental fish culture in the backyard, etc., don't add to their labor because they are easy to run. Farmers' family income is too little to allow them to take risks. To cover the risk of acceptance and the additional labor needed, innovation should yield large returns. Even those without formal education can learn the procedures needed to produce fish at a reasonable cost.

Landless rural women can be ventured into ornamental fish culture as a means of generating extra revenue. Live bearers like guppy, platy, molly, and swordtail are given to the women. An average of Rs. 300–500 might be earned by rural landless women as extra money every week. In an effort to gain a scale advantage, a self-help club for female fish farmers in the area can be established to handle feed and marketing concerns. Additionally, a local organization can be suggested to encourage more women to raise ornamental fish. Breeding procedures, feed details, feeding frequency and technique, water exchange details, growth rate, fecundity, mortality, hatching rate, marketing details should be taught to women who are interested in aquaculture. Following multiple practical training sessions, the women will gain confidence in their abilities and will gradually manage the market also.

Women's income boosts the local economy and, in certain cases, gives male farmers the funds they need to expand their profitable fishing operations. In the West Bengal ornamental fish industry, women handle the feeding, live food collection and retail sales of ornamental fish (Ghosh et al. 2003). In Odisha, backyard ornamental fish cultivation and breeding has gained popularity, particularly in rural regions (Swain et al. 2011). According to Swain et al. (2013), the homestead status of ornamental fish firms has a bearing on the success

of women's self-help groups inside them. This status is further reinforced by the enterprises' connections to commerce, technology, infrastructure, credit, and skill development. Jayalal et al. (2016) emphasized the significance of technology and finance as well. According to research by Raja et al., (2014), ornamental fish businesses can support female farmers by providing jobs and a source of revenue.

### **Role of Self-help groups:**

A potent strategy for promoting women's empowerment and rural entrepreneurship is the establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHG), particularly among female members. SHGs are groups of rural impoverished people who have chosen to band together in order to end member poverty. They commit to setting aside money on a regular basis and transferring it to a common fund called the group corpus. The group members commit to making use of this common fund as well as any additional funds they might get under shared management. "All for All" is the guiding idea of SHGs. It is primarily for the people, by the people, and of the people, and it primarily addresses the impoverished. SHGs are tiny, volunteer organizations that promote microlevel self-help. For their social defense, the weaker groups—women in particular—have received more attention. SHGs have a lot of potential for raising public awareness of everyday issues. It encourages saving as a habit, building one's own and the community's assets, raising one's income, and gaining more social influence.

Self-reliance, self-examination, and confidence are fostered by the idea of SHGs. An organization of impoverished people who get together voluntarily with the goal of achieving social and economic empowerment is known as a SHG. Women could have been able to grow their business if they had known about the funding programs and training programs for ornamental fish culture.

### **Case Studies:**

In southern India, women are demonstrating their suitability for numerous novel positions in aquaculture, in addition to their long-standing and customary responsibilities in the sale, processing, and management of fisheries. Despite demonstrating their ability to embrace new aquaculture technologies, women's roles in this field are severely limited and frequently disregarded. The remoteness of aquaculture sites and sociocultural taboos against women who work to support their families in rural areas are two major contributing factors to this. Rural women in southern India require assistance with capacity building so that they can utilize their full ability in lucrative endeavors like aquaculture, which would ultimately result in their empowerment (Shaleesha and Stanley, 2000). The following case studies have given a

ray of hope for further growth in the field of ornamental fisheries through women empowerment.

### **1. Kancheepuram Case Study**

Kancheepuram District's five women SHGs of Irrular tribal women were engaged in the hobby of ornamental fish culture. Mrs. Latha led the SHG in addition to being a fish grower for ornamental purposes. Due to their low social status, Mrs. Latha and the other members of her group had previously been involved in catching rats and snakes and due to urbanization this is no longer viable and hence they worked to diversify the livelihood. She has put a lot of effort into helping her group members diversify their sources of income by helping them realize that they don't have to rely entirely on their spouses' earnings. Due to their continuous effort, they created an ornamental fish cultivation unit in the Kancheepuram District.

The majority of their time was spent overseeing this unit. There were six types of ornamental fish being raised. The fish were categorized as "M," "S," or "SM" (small medium, a size that falls between medium and small) based on their measurements. A crop's breeding period lasted 15 days, during which 200 fish were added to each tank. These fish were sold for anything from Rs. 70 to Rs. 300. Fish vendors travel from various parts of Chennai to buy these fish. A bank loan of Rs. 200,000 from a self-employment initiative was also given to the SHG. This team achieved success and had substantial savings in a nearby commercial bank, and the bank had given this group numerous loans due to their timely loan repayments. As a very successful SHG, they had also won two honors from the State Government.

#### **Notable gains in women empowerment:**

India's narrative on women's empowerment would be incomplete if it did not highlight the community-based programs that the government and civil society organizations have implemented. In an effort to empower women in both urban and rural areas, the federal and state governments have introduced new laws, programs, and schemes. The Mahila-E-Haat, is one such scheme introduced by the Central government to advance gender equality.

Additionally, the government has made room for foreign organizations to collaborate with regional, state, and private sector organizations.

#### **Constraints and challenges for women empowerment in India:**

This increase is mostly attributable to the Womenomics plan's economic, demographic, and policy aspects. Over time, it has made significant policy changes, such as strengthening child-care regulations, adding new anti-discrimination laws, and modifying labor laws already in place. India's ongoing gender inequality problems need to be viewed within the larger South Asian perspective. Gender inequality persists in rural regions.

## **Conclusion:**

The state of national aquaculture development in any nation, and in particular the corresponding government policy towards the industry, clearly dictates the amount of support needed to increase women's participation in the aquaculture sector. After all, the government is in charge of overseeing the growth of every industry in the nation, including the relatively new aquaculture sector. But an economic sector cannot grow in a vacuum, and aquaculture is showing to be a sector with broad implications. It still has a strong connection to aquariculture and agriculture. It is crucial that aquariculture be taken into account in all national policies and plans for economic development, and that women be recognized as essential contributors to the human resources needed. Fish farming for ornamental purposes offers women a wealth of opportunities for economic empowerment. After all, economic empowerment eliminates all social inequality. As a result, the goal of empowering women by developing their "self-worth" and enabling them to exercise greater "control over their own lives" is realized, improving rural populations' quality of life and strengthening the country as a whole.

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