



## Mumbai's Koli community leave fishing for greener pastures

KARISHMA GOENKA | Thu, 21 Nov 2013-11:35pm , Mumbai , dna

Mumbai's oldest inhabitants and true natives, the Koli community, are seeing their community slowly dispersing and the younger generations straying away from the traditional family business, fishing.

“Our community started opening up to society around 20 years ago. We started getting our children educated and wanted them to have more than what our community had to offer,” said Praveen Bhave (48), a resident of Versova fishing village.

Praveen, the oldest of three brothers born to a fisherman, has been working at Air India since the last 22 years. While his youngest brother Pritam has settled down in California, the third sibling, Parag, has chosen to carry on with the family's traditional fishing business.

“Over 35 per cent of fishermen have already stopped fishing because of the mounting expenditure. Each fishing trip on the trawler costs about Rs1.6 lakh, and diesel prices continue to shoot up,” said Parag, who has been in the business for 32 years.

Parag explained how when they were younger, fishing trips would last only five days, but now, they go on for 15 days. This is because earlier, fishermen would go out in smaller boats and procure a good catch closer to shore, unlike today where they need trawlers to go deeper into the sea to get a decent catch.

With fishing becoming an expensive affair and catch decreasing considerably, many reluctantly moved on to other means of income to keep money flowing.

“People have to fill their stomachs and we can’t tell them not to earn a living”, said Praveen, whose daughter wants to study mass media when she grows up.

He added, “We fisherfolk have always learned to laugh, dance and make merry. Most of the uneducated lot are too bothered about their daily problems to look at the larger issues. Our water is being polluted as we speak and the government has no control over any of the industries that dump effluents in it. The first thing we would do after school is jump into the water and swim to Madh, but now we have forbidden our children from entering the water because it is filthy.”

Experts say overfishing and the increasing number of trawlers have decreased the individual catch of each fisherman. “The per boat catch is declining even though the total fish landing in a year has increased,” said Dr Vinay Deshmukh of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute.

Dr WS Lakra, director, Central Institute of Fisheries Education, said, “General fish population has definitely decreased maybe because of pollution, development and other factors. But more than anything else, it is because of overfishing and catching juvenile fish that are not allowed to mature.”

“I am afraid our fishing community will perish within the next decade”, said Parag.