

Short stint night fish markets in Kerala: A case study

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Kerala's population is essentially a fish eating population with the level of fish consumption four times that of national average. The fish consumption stood at 26 kg per capita per annum (Shyam, 2012). The domestic market for fish in Kerala is governed not only by the purchasing power of the consumers but also by their tastes and preferences. The domestic market for fish in Kerala is inelastic both in terms of income and price. The marine fish consumption is predominant in coastal districts since marine fishes are prone to deterioration in quality during long distance transport to the land locked and hilly regions. However, the demand for fish in these regions was met through inland and cultured freshwater species.

Night markets of short stints (mostly one to two hours) are found to exist mostly in the landlocked regions of Kottayam and Idukki districts in Kerala. These markets offer sizeable fish trade with arrivals from different coastal states. There exist "identified" traders and possess "dedicated" roads for the timely disposal of the fish in the shortest time possible. The functioning and performance appraisal of the two prominent short stint night markets in Ernakulam district viz., Perumbavoor and Muvattupuzha was studied.

Night fish market at Perumbavoor

The short stint night fish market at Perumbavoor is located 30 km away from Ernakulam railway station and 33 km from CMFRI, Cochin and has been operational since last five decades. The wholesale fish market at Perumbavoor functions between 1.30 to 2.30 am and following that, some 15 to 20 retail vendors sell the fish in the market area during the day time on all week days. The market area is under the Perumbavoor municipality and the ownership is leased to individuals through auction by the Perumbavoor municipality for an amount. The

market arrivals in truck/ lorry/ van are levied rental charges of ₹125 -150. Eight per cent of the auction amount of every box traded is sought as commission by the market committee of which two per cent each for the buyers and sellers is paid back as incentive. Mostly the fishes come from adjoining states or from far-off landing centres in Karwar in Andhra Pradesh and Mangalore in Karnataka as well as from Maharashtra in addition to local arrivals from Vypeen and Munambam fishing harbour (Cochin) and from Vizhinjam (Thiruvananthapuram). The bulk of the procured fish from Perumbavoor market is sold to the High Range markets in Idukki district like Kattappana, Kallar, Munnar and Wagamon. Different market functionaries are also available in the markets in loading and unloading of baskets at the rate of ₹14/ per basket. An average of 10-15 labourers/ workers are usually engaged in these night markets with a daily remuneration of minimum of ₹ 500 (Fig. 1). The auction amount of some commercially important fish species in Perumbavoor night fish market is mentioned below:

Table 1. Auction charges of some commercially important fish species in Perumbavoor night fish market

Fishes	Weight (g)	Amount/box* (₹)
Mackerel	150-200	3000
Oil Sardine	40-60	1800
Horse mackerel	300-400	3000
Scads	100-150	800
Thread fin bream	50-70	1300
Red snapper	50-75	800
Bulls eye	70-80	1200
Barracuda	80-90	1800
Moon fish	30-40	1800
Rohu/ Cutla	200-300	2500
Tilapia	80-120	900

*On an average a box weighs 45 kg with ice ranging from 5-10 kg



Fig. 1. Night Fish Trading in Perumbavoor market

The marine pelagics (sardine, mackerel) constitute majority of the fish trade. Different fresh waterfishes like Rohu and Mrigal were also found to be available in the market. If there are enough buyers in the markets the fish supplies moves to Thodupuzha, Muvattupuzha and Ettumaanur based on demand. The average return for a vendor on trading a box of fish was found to be ₹ 300 to 400 within a market radius of 5-6 km during the day. The quantity of ice used varied with the distance to be covered and type of van delivering the fish (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Fish Trading in Perumbavoor market

Night fish market at Muvattupuzha

The short stint night fish market in Muvattupuzha is located 45 km away from Ernakulam railway station and 42 km from CMFRI, Cochin. The private wholesale market owned by ten traders in Muvattupuzha was established in the year 1950 and it functions between 2.00 am to 3.30 am. Some of the markets adjacent to the Muvattupuzha night fish market are Ettumanur, Changanacherry,

Payippadu, Thiruvalla, Chambakkara and Kottayam (Fig. 3). The market arrivals were from the states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Goa as well as from Vizhinjam and Munambam harbour within Kerala. Fishes were sold through auction system. Through auction, the auctioneers would get a commission of around 10 to 15% with two per cent paid back as incentives to the buyers and sellers. Around 75-100 labourers representing different trade unions are involved in the market functioning and are paid Rs.14 for loading and unloading each basket (Fig. 4). Every day around 80-100 loads each with a capacity of 3-4 tonnes arrive in the market. The auction amount of the major traded commercially important fish species at Muvattupuzha night fish market is furnished in Table 2.



Fig. 3. Night fish markets at Muvattupuzha

Table 2. Auction amount of major commercially important fish species in Muvattupuzha night fish market

Fishes	Weight in gram	Amount per box*
Mackerel	200-250	3000
Horse mackerel	150-200	2000
Scads	75-90	1000
Thread fin bream	50-80	1500
Red snapper	100-150	1200
Barracuda	120-150	2100
Yellow fin tuna	35000	110
Moon fish	30-40	2400
Anchovies	8-10	2000
Oil sardine	50-75	1800
Lizard fish	100-150	1500
Yellowfin Tuna	35 kg	110/kg
Sail fish	40 kg	100/kg

*On an average a box weighs 45 kg with ice ranging from 5-10 kg

The traded fishes are purchased by agents catering to the high ranges of Idukki district and are marketed



Fig. 4. Fish arrivals and auctions at Muvattupuzha night market

locally within 2-3 hours in places like Nedunkandam, Pulyanmala, Moolamattam, Neriamanglam, Kattapana, Kallar, Munnar and Wagamon.

Conclusions

The market structure existing at Perumbavoor and Muvattupuzha markets like infrastructure amenities, parking facilities, number of stalls operating in the market, takings of the market, number of vendors, trucks entering and exiting with load *etc.* Perumbavoor market can be graded as a 'C grade market' and Muvattupuzha market as an 'A grade market'.

Mostly trucks carrying fishes from the night fish markets at Perumbavoor and Muvattupuzha transports it to hilly areas like Idukki. As it is early morning these trucks carrying fishes from night fish markets can pass through, without any traffic or any other obstacles in their way, thus reaching the destination within a short time span, thereby supplying fresh fish at the end points. Thus quality fishes are available in high ranges like Idukki, even though it is considered as a land locked area. The traditional understanding of low marine fish demand for hilly regions and landlocked area were found to be a mismatch considering the amount of fish inflow to those areas and the quality of fish available for consumption. An important observation was the existence of dedicated roads catering to the improved time utility in fish consumption as the fish is getting transported during early morning hours. The market capitalization is around 200-300 tonnes per day amounting to an average turnover of ₹ 500- 600 crores.