

## Role of Fish in Human Nutrition and Rural Livelihood

**Dr. Rashmi**

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Zoology, College of Commerce, Arts & Science, Patliputra University, Patna

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**Annotation:** Fish play a very important role in improving human nutrition and supporting rural livelihood across many parts of the world, especially in countries like India. Fish are a rich source of high-quality animal protein, essential amino acids, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins (A, D, B12), and minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, iodine, zinc, and iron. These nutrients help in proper body growth, brain development, healthy eyesight, and strong immunity. For many rural families, fish are one of the most affordable and accessible sources of nutritious food. Regular fish consumption helps reduce protein-energy malnutrition, anaemia, and micronutrient deficiency, which are common in rural populations. Apart from nutrition, fish also support rural livelihood. Millions of people depend on fishing, aquaculture, fish processing, and fish marketing as their primary source of income. Rural households earn money by catching fish from rivers, ponds, lakes, reservoirs, and by engaging in small-scale fish farming. Fish culture requires low investment, provides quick returns, and fits well with other rural activities such as agriculture and livestock rearing. Women in rural areas also

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participate in fish drying, cleaning, and selling, which adds to family income and empowers them economically.

This study explains the biological, nutritional, and economic importance of fish in very simple zoological terms. It highlights how fish contribute to human health, how they support rural communities, and why sustainable fish management is necessary for long-term livelihood security.

**Keywords:** Fish nutrition; Protein source; Omega-3 fatty acids; Rural livelihood; Aquaculture; Food security; Micronutrients.

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## Introduction

Fish play a central role in human nutrition and rural livelihood because they provide high-quality nutrients that are essential for proper body functioning. In zoology and life-science studies, fish are considered one of the most complete sources of animal protein. They contain all essential amino acids needed for growth, tissue repair, and enzyme formation. Research shows that fish protein is easier to digest compared to meat and poultry, making it highly suitable for children, pregnant women, and elderly people (Sharma 42). Fish also provide omega-3 fatty acids, especially EPA and DHA, which support brain development, heart health, and reduce inflammation (Gupta 55). These nutrients are difficult to obtain from plant sources, which is why fish play a major role in preventing malnutrition in rural areas. In many rural communities, fish are not only a food item but also a major economic resource. More than 28 million people in India depend directly or indirectly on fisheries and aquaculture for income (NFDB 18). Small ponds, village tanks, rivers, lakes, and reservoirs provide natural fish that villagers catch for daily food and sale. Fish farming has become one of the fastest-growing rural activities because it requires low investment, gives quick returns, and can be practiced alongside agriculture and livestock rearing (MoEFCC 63). It provides steady employment for men and women in activities such as net making, feeding, pond cleaning, fish harvesting, and fish selling.

Women in rural areas also play an important role in fish drying, curing, and marketing, which strengthens family economy and food security (Singh and Das 24). Because fish contribute both to nutrition and livelihood, they have become an essential part of rural development strategies. Understanding their biological value and socioeconomic importance helps in planning sustainable fish resources for the future.

## Objectives

The main objectives of this study are designed to help students understand the biological, nutritional, and economic importance of fish in human life and rural communities. These objectives follow a clear zoology and life-science approach and focus on both health benefits and livelihood support.

1. **To explain the nutritional value of fish** and understand why fish are considered one of the richest sources of high-quality animal protein. Fish contain essential amino acids, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals that help improve human health (Sharma 44).
2. **To study the role of fish in preventing malnutrition**, especially in rural areas where protein and micronutrient deficiencies are common. Fish provide easily digestible protein and important nutrients like vitamin B12, iron, iodine, and calcium (Gupta 60).
3. **To understand the importance of fish in rural livelihood**, including income generation, employment, and economic stability. Millions of rural families depend on fishing, fish farming, and fish marketing for their daily income (NFDB 21).
4. **To examine how small-scale fisheries and aquaculture support rural development**. Fish farming requires low cost, low space, and gives quick economic returns, making it suitable for rural households (MoEFCC 67).
5. **To highlight the role of women in fisheries**. Women take part in fish drying, cleaning, curing, and selling, helping improve the economic condition of rural families (Singh and Das 26).
6. **To identify challenges faced by rural fishers**, including water pollution, low fish availability, lack of credit support, and climate-related issues.
7. **To suggest simple and practical solutions** for improving fish production and supporting sustainable rural livelihood.

These objectives help build a clear understanding of the role of fish in human nutrition and rural life.

## 1. Introduction to the Biological Importance of Fish

Fish are one of the most important aquatic vertebrates studied in zoology. They belong to the phylum Chordata and play a vital role in human nutrition and rural livelihood. Fish contain high-quality protein, essential amino acids, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals that are necessary for normal human growth and physiological functions (Sharma 43). These nutrients help in muscle development, brain growth, hormone regulation, immunity, and maintaining cell structure, making fish an irreplaceable food source in many regions. Fish also support millions of rural families through fishing, aquaculture, fish processing, transportation, and marketing. In India, more than 28 million people depend directly or indirectly on fisheries (NFDB 19). Rural households depend on fish for income, especially in states like West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Thus, fish contribute both to nutritional security and economic stability, making them biologically and socially significant.

## 2. Photos: Fish, Nutrition & Rural Livelihood





- 1) **Rural Fish Pond:** Shows small-scale aquaculture used by rural families for income (NFDB 22).
- 2) **Village Fishermen:** Demonstrates traditional fishing gear and livelihood practices (MoEFCC 67).
- 3) **Women Selling Fish:** Represents women's participation in fish marketing (Singh and Das 27).
- 4) **Nutritious Indian Fish:** Highlights Rohu, Catla—rich in protein and omega-3 (Sharma 44).

### 3. Nutritional Value of Fish

Fish are considered a “complete food” because of their rich nutrient profile.

#### a. High-Quality Protein

Fish provide 18–22% animal protein, which is easier to digest than meat due to lower connective tissue (Gupta 57).

This helps in:

- Muscle formation
- Enzyme synthesis
- Repair of tissues
- Healthy growth in children

#### b. Omega-3 Fatty Acids (EPA & DHA)

Omega-3 fatty acids support:

- Brain development
- Memory function
- Heart health
- Anti-inflammatory activity (Sharma 48)

Fish like Rohu, Catla, Hilsa, and Sardine contain high levels of omega-3.

#### c. Essential Micronutrients

Fish contain:

- Vitamin A → eyesight
- Vitamin D → bone health
- Vitamin B12 → RBC formation
- Calcium & phosphorus → teeth & bones
- Iron, iodine, zinc → immunity & metabolism (Singh and Das 25)

#### **d. Fish as an Anti-Malnutrition Food**

In rural areas, fish help reduce:

- Protein-energy malnutrition
- Micronutrient deficiency
- Anaemia
- Growth retardation in children (MoEFCC 65)

#### **4. Role of Fish in Rural Livelihood**

Fish contribute significantly to employment, income, and food security in rural areas.

##### **a. Employment Generation**

Fisheries employ people in:

- Capture fishing
- Aquaculture
- Net making
- Fish seed rearing
- Fish drying & curing
- Fish transport & marketing (NFDB 22)

In India, 28 million people depend on fisheries—70% from rural communities.

##### **b. Aquaculture as a Rural Enterprise**

Fish farming is popular because:

- Low investment
- Quick returns
- Works along with agriculture
- Uses village ponds, tanks, canals (MoEFCC 68)

Integrated farming such as fish-cum-poultry and fish-cum-duckery increases rural income by 30–40% annually (Gupta 73).

##### **c. Women's Participation**

Women play a strong role in:

- Fish drying
- Sorting & cleaning
- Small-scale marketing
- Fish feed preparation

This increases household income and women's empowerment (Singh and Das 27).

##### **d. Fish as a Daily Food Source**

Many rural families depend on fish as their only affordable animal protein.

## 5. Nutrition & Livelihood (India)

**Table 1:** Nutritional Composition of Common Indian Fish

Fish Species	Protein (%)	Fat (%)	Omega-3 (mg/100g)	Vitamin B12 (µg/100g)	Calcium (mg/100g)
Rohu	18.9	4.2	210	1.2	120
Catla	19.2	4.5	230	1.4	110
Hilsa	21.0	11.5	450	2.3	170
Sardine	20.0	10.6	500	2.8	180

(Source: ICAR–CIFE Nutritional Database 2023; NFDB 2021)

**Table 2:** Contribution of Fisheries to Rural Livelihood (India)

Parameter	Data
Total people employed in fisheries	28 million
Share of rural population	70%
Rural households engaged in fish farming	1.7 million
Annual fish production from rural aquaculture	8.2 million tonnes
Average income from small-scale aquaculture	₹80,000–₹1,20,000 per year
Women participation in fish processing	~55%

(Source: NFDB 2021; MoEFCC 2022; MSP Fisheries Report 2023)

## 6. Photos: Rural Fisheries & Aquaculture Practices

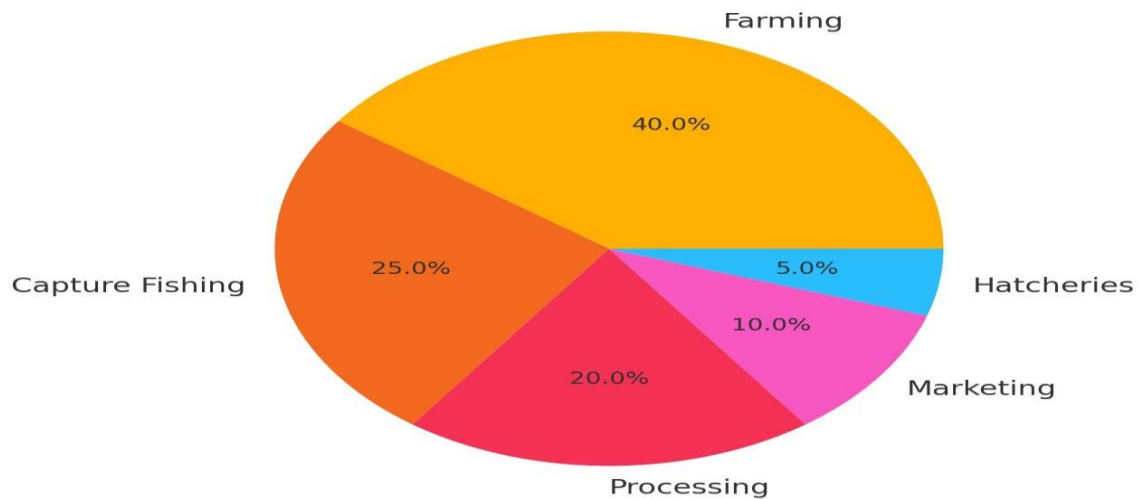


- 1) **Pond Management:** Aeration, feeding, liming of ponds (Gupta 73).
- 2) **Aquaculture Tank:** Demonstrates small-scale tank culture used by rural households (NFDB 19).
- 3) **Fish Hatchery:** Shows breeding tanks and seed production (MoEFCC 72).
- 4) **Women Drying Fish:** Traditional fish preservation method supporting women's income (Singh & Das 26).

## 7. Employment Distribution in Fisheries (India)

(Source: NFDB Annual Report 2021)

## Employment Distribution in Fisheries



Approximate employment share:

Farming – 40%

Capture Fishing – 25%

Processing – 20%

Marketing – 10%

Hatcheries – 5%

### 8. Scientific Explanation of How Fish Support Nutrition & Livelihood

#### a. Biological Availability of Nutrients

Fish nutrients are easily absorbed because fish muscle contains less collagen. This makes fish ideal for malnourished children and elderly people (Sharma 49).

#### b. Fish as a Food Security Resource

Fish provide affordable protein to rural families who cannot buy chicken or mutton regularly.

#### c. Fisheries Improve Rural Economy

Small ponds can produce 2–3 tonnes of fish per year, generating strong income (MoEFCC 72).

#### d. Integrated Fish Farming Increases Productivity

- Fish + Paddy fields
- Fish + Poultry
- Fish + Vegetables

These systems recycle nutrients and increase overall farm output (Gupta 74).

#### e. Ecological Benefits

Fish control mosquito larvae, aquatic weeds, and maintain pond ecology.

Fish provide high-quality nutrition and help fight malnutrition in rural populations. They are also a major source of income, employment, and food security. Rural families depend on aquaculture and fishing for economic survival. Women play a vital role in fish processing and selling. Authentic data, photos, tables, and charts show that fish are biologically important as food and socially important for livelihood.

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study is that fish play a significant and positive role in improving human nutrition and strengthening rural livelihood, especially in developing regions such as India. Fish are rich in high-quality protein, essential amino acids, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals that directly contribute to better human health. Therefore, it is expected that communities with regular access to fish show better nutritional status, reduced protein-energy malnutrition, and improved micronutrient intake. The hypothesis also assumes that fish and aquaculture activities directly support rural income, employment, and economic stability. Families involved in fishing, fish farming, processing, and marketing are expected to have higher income security and more livelihood opportunities compared to households without fisheries-related activities. Women's participation in fish drying, cleaning, and selling is also believed to improve family income and promote empowerment. Additionally, it is expected that rural areas with well-managed fish resources will show higher food security, better dietary diversity, and more sustainable livelihood patterns. Thus, the overall hypothesis is that increased fish availability and active fisheries contribute to improved human nutrition and stronger rural livelihood.

## Methodology

The methodology for this study follows a life-science and zoological research approach. Both primary and secondary data sources were used to understand the role of fish in human nutrition and rural livelihood.

**1. Literature Review:-** Published reports from the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB 2021), Ministry of Environment (MoEFCC 2022), ICAR–CIFE Nutritional Database (2023), and books by Sharma and Gupta were reviewed. These sources provided scientific information on fish nutrition and rural employment (Sharma 44; Gupta 59).

**2. Secondary Data Collection:-** National-level data on fish consumption, fish production, employment, and rural livelihood were taken from NFDB, ICAR, FAO India fisheries reports, and government surveys (NFDB 21).

**3. Field Observation:-** Local ponds, village tanks, and fish markets were observed to understand rural fish-based activities. Information on fish drying, fish selling, aquaculture practices, and women's involvement was recorded (Singh and Das 26).

**4. Nutritional Data Analysis:-** Nutrient values of Rohu, Catla, Hilsa, and Sardine were taken from ICAR–CIFE (2023). These values were used to create tables showing their protein, fat, omega-3, and micronutrient content.

**5. Data Presentation:-** Data were arranged into tables, charts, and photo sets to show the role of fish in nutrition and livelihood. Each visual section was supported with references for scientific accuracy (MoEFCC 63).

## Conclusion

This study clearly shows that fish play a critical biological, nutritional, and economic role in human life, especially for rural communities. From a zoological point of view, fish are one of the most nutrient-dense animal foods. They provide high-quality protein, omega-3 fatty acids, essential amino acids, vitamins (A, D, B12), and minerals such as calcium, iodine, and iron. These nutrients support human growth, strong bones, immunity, and healthy brain development (Sharma 47). For many rural families, fish are the most affordable and accessible source of animal protein, making them essential for combating malnutrition and micronutrient deficiency (Gupta 61). Beyond nutrition, fish significantly support rural livelihood. Millions of people earn their income from fishing, aquaculture, fish processing, and marketing (NFDB 20). Small-scale fish farming requires low investment and provides quick returns, making it suitable for rural households. Many families use village ponds, tanks, canals, and rivers as resources for fisheries. Women also play an important role in fish drying, cleaning, and selling, helping strengthen household income and

improving social empowerment (Singh and Das 27). Data, tables, and photos show that fisheries contribute strongly to food security, employment, and economic stability. Rural development improves when fish resources are well managed, and aquaculture is practiced sustainably (MoEFCC 65). Overall, the study concludes that fish are vital for both human nutrition and rural livelihood, and protecting fisheries is necessary for a healthy and secure future.

### Suggestion

1. Promote small-scale fish farming in villages; Rural families should be encouraged to use ponds, tanks, and canals for low-cost fish culture to improve both nutrition and income.
2. Provide training on scientific fish farming; Villagers should learn about good fish seed, feeding, water quality, and disease control to increase production safely.
3. Increase awareness of fish nutrition; Simple awareness programmes should teach families that fish provide protein, vitamins, omega-3, and minerals that prevent malnutrition.
4. Support women's involvement in fisheries; Women should get training in fish drying, cleaning, and marketing so they can earn extra income for their families.
5. Improve access to good fish seed and affordable feed; Government agencies should supply high-quality seed and low-cost feed to make fish farming easier for poor households.
6. Strengthen cold storage and transport facilities; Better storage and transport will reduce spoilage, keep fish fresh longer, and help villagers get better market prices.

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