Gujarat
Three fishing communities are predominant in Gujarat. They are Kharvas, Kolis and Macchiyars.

The kharvas are found mainly in Veraval, Mangrol and Porbundar. They are either owners or workers of the sailing vessels, locally called vahans. The fishing community is stratified both economically and socially with the Kharva boat owners owning several trawlers at the higher end, followed by the kharva single boat owners, then the koli trawl boat owners. For all practical purposes therefore the entry in trawler fishery is closed to other communities. An unwritten norm of exclusive ownership of trawl boats by kharva and koli communities exists in Veraval, even though the State has not recognized it.

The machhiyars are the traditional Muslim fishermen, who migrated from Sind 400 years ago and live in small ports or ‘baru’ around Jaleshwar. This community is poor and lives in huts near the sea, cut off from amenities such as drinking water, public distribution system, schools, health services and electricity. It has no entitlement to either house or land. While the artisanal fishers are generally poorer than the trawl fishers, they too are organized as community organizations, but the machhiyars communities are socially more backward and poor. The machhiyars are involved only in hodi fishing and not allowed to own any trawl boats or use the harbour facilities for fishing.

Community Institutions
Caste panchayats exist in all the communities including the Muslims. These are very powerful elected bodies that control the social life of the community. They are the law keepers of the local community creating norms and settling disputes. The caste panchayats are the strongest in the fishing community among which the Kharva samaj is the most powerful. They are made up of elected male members representing the different areas of the community and also representatives of the different boat associations. The patels of each community command respect and all negotiations between communities take place between these samaj committees.

For further reading:


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