



Marine Fisheries Information Service

Technical and Extension Series

Number 197

July - September 2008



Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute

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Trap fishing in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay

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Trap fishing is one of the indigenous methods of fishing prevalent in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay. Fish traps, locally known as 'koodu' are extensively used in this area for perch fishery. As these areas are shallow, with rocks and corals, other methods of fishing using nets cannot be operated successfully, which probably explains the development of trap fishing in this part of the country as an organised fishery. Prabhu (1954) and Thomas (1968) have given fairly good accounts on the fabrication and mode of operation of the traps while studying the fishery of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay. After that, there is no information available on trap fishing in this area. After 1968, several modifications have taken place in the types of traps being operated, the mode of operation of traps and the number of traps being operated at different centres. New material for the construction of traps is also introduced recently. Hence, an attempt is made here to present the recent developments in this aspect, in this area.

Traps with one, two or three openings are being operated (Fig.1, 2 and 3)

On enquiry, the trap fishermen informed that fishes caught in traps with one opening are bigger than those caught in traps with two and three openings, as the mouth opening is bigger in this type

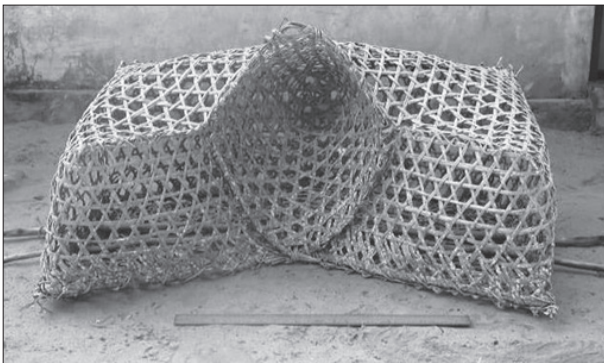


Fig. 1 : Trap with one opening

and hence, the traps with one opening is preferred over others. Moreover, the cost of construction is less for the traps with one opening. Three types of single opening traps are available, which are classified based on the height. 5, 6 and 7 'kanni' traps means,

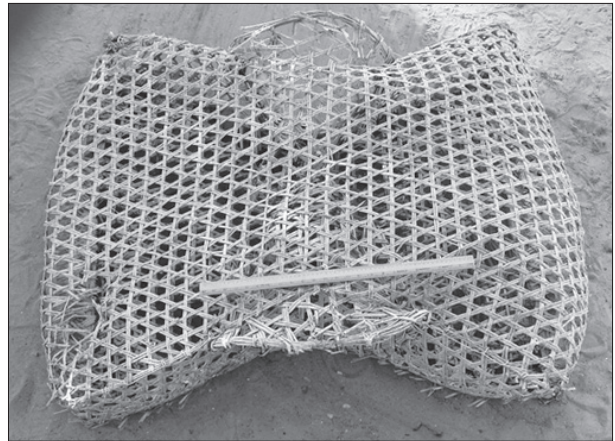


Fig.2.Trap with two openings

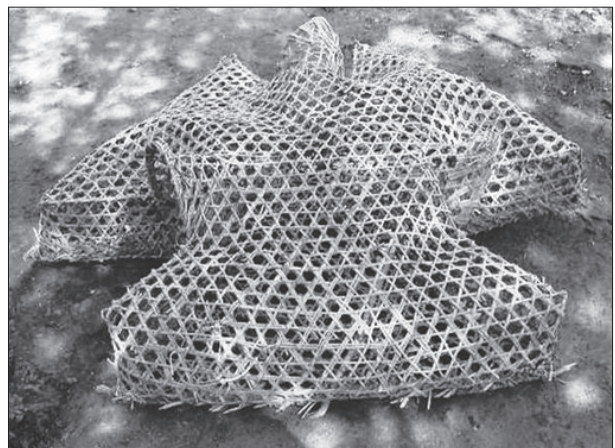


Fig.3. Trap with three openings

traps with heights of 5, 6 and 7 meshes respectively. The mesh size of 5 'kanni' trap is normally 4 cm and are being commonly used.

The materials used for fabricating traps are Odai tree's sticks, Eeecha tree's sticks, Palmyrah roots,

Palmyrah leaves and another synthetic material, Polypropylene, locally known as 'wire', which is usually used as packing strap for cartons. The 'wire' is a recent introduction as a material for the construction of traps here, which normally last for 5 years. The traps made of Odai tree (*Acacia planifrons*) usually last for 1 year and those of Eeecha tree last for about 2 months. After assessing the cost of construction and efficiency of fishing in terms of size and quantity, the fishermen in this area prefer to use the traps made of Odai tree.

The traps are usually operated in rocky and coral reef areas. Shrimp heads are commonly used as bait. The fishermen informed that when jelly fish is used as bait, the catch of *Siganus* spp. seems to be more as the smell of jelly fish attracts the *Siganus* spp. After

introducing baits, the traps are taken to the fishing place and laid at the bottom with the help of stone by the fishermen who dive into the water. Similarly, diving is resorted to when the catches are removed after 24 hours. After removing the catch, fresh bait is introduced and the traps are set again under water. This is continued, and at an interval of 10 to 12 days the traps are taken to the shore, cleaned and sun-dried for a day or two to make them more durable, and again used.

At present, the trap fishing is carried out at Rameswaram, Keelakarai, Ervadi and Mandapam, of which has the maximum number of traps. At Rameswaram, about 150 persons are engaged in trap fishing and each person has 10 - 15 traps. This is the major livelihood of the fishermen in this area.