

A NOTE ON AN UNUSUALLY HEAVY CATCH OF FISH IN A SHORE-SEINE ON THE ANDHRA COAST

DANIAPETA (Latitude 17°-13'N Longitude 82°-28'E) a fishing village in Tuni taluk of East Godavari District was visited during the first week of March, 1968 for collection of routine survey data, when the local fishermen reported about a bumper catch of fish landed on 15-2-'68. Further enquiries revealed the following facts. On that day a single haul of the shore-seine (*Alivi vala*) landed an estimated 40 tonnes of fish which were sold for Rs. 23,000. Of the three other shore-seines operated on the same day, one landed 15 tonnes of fish (sold for Rs. 8,000) while the two others caught only about 150 Kg. each. These shore-seines were operated in about 10-12 meters of water, a kilometer distance from the shore. About 100 fishermen co-operated in hauling the shore-seine containing the 40 tonne catch and 100 more waded into the water to take hold of the net and thus decrease the strain on the net. As the net approached the shore small drag nets called *Konti vala* were operated outside the shore-seine to trap the escaping fish. Even the *Konti vala* catch amounted to be about 1.5 tonnes. Other types of nets were not operated on 15-2-1968. Shore-seines operated on the following days landed less than 100 Kg. of fish per haul.

The magnitude of the catch on 15-2-1968, was said to be unprecedented and the old fishermen of the village declared that they had never seen such a huge catch before in their life-time. Most of the catch was sundried because salt was not readily available to deal with such an unusual catch. A portion of the catch was still seen on the beach spread out for drying and specimens were brought to the laboratory for identification. It was found that the sciaenid *Pseudosciaena axillaris* (Cuvier) 13-15 cms. in T.L. (two specimens deposited in the Reference Collection Museum of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute—Reg. No. CMFRI-F 89/244b) formed about 90% of the catch while *Thrissocles mystax* (Scheider) 12-14 cms. in T.L. and *Lactarius lactarius* (Scheider) 15-19 cms. in T.L. formed about 7% and 3% respectively. The reasons for this unusual catch which was restricted to just one day are not clear. The fishermen reported that sea on this day was muddy and dis-

coloured, and that there was also an abrupt change in the direction of wind from north-east to south-east.

A 40 tonne catch in a shore-seine on the east coast of India is a rare phenomenon while catches of such magnitude are occasionally encountered on the Canara coast in Rampani nets during peak mackerel seasons when over 2 million fish are landed in a single operation (Pradhan and Rao 1958 and Venkataraman 1967). It is of interest to note that the *Alivi vala* is more akin to the *Rampani net* in construction than to the *Kara vala* or *Peria vala* of the Madras coast. The *Alivi vala* lacks a bag or cod end and is an extremely long shore-seine tapering towards the two hauling warps. The net made of cotton twine is about 1140 meters long; the central portion of the net is about 8 meters in height tapering to about one meter in height at the wing tips; mesh size increases from 15 mm. at the centre to 40 mm. at the wing tips.

There is an interesting episode connected with this bounteous harvest. Thursdays are usually observed as weekly fishing holidays by the fishermen of this area and the sale proceeds of the catch by any 'illegal' fishing on Thursdays are confiscated by the village elders and spent for religious functions. But sometimes the fishermen of the village decide by consensus to fish on a Thursday to collect money for religious festivals. 15-2-1968 was a Thursday and the fishermen had decided to fish to raise funds for the Sri Rama Navami Festival in April.

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