

Speargun fishing off Kovalam coast

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As an adventure underwater sport, speargun fishing is practiced at Kovalam coast near Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Spearguns are designed to launch a spear at fish or other underwater animals based on a trigger mechanism. The spear has a flopper or barb that is attached to the muzzle of the gun by a monofilament line and basically the two types of guns used are pneumatic and rubber band powered spear guns. Off Kovalam coast, mainly imported ones obtained from the visiting foreign tourists are popular (Fig.1).

Fishermen as well as expert skin divers whenever free from other fishing and livelihood activities, are involved

in spear gun fishing designed for sport tourists, which occurs throughout the year but peaks during October - March period. A fisherman or an expert diver who can do dives of about 12-15 m from the surface proceeds to the ground located around 2 km from the coast along with the tourists. A fibre boat with an overall length of 9 m fitted with an outboard engine of 40 hp with a fish hold on the deck to hold the catch in fresh condition is employed. The duration of the trip varies from 3-5 hours and can bring in about 12-30 kg of high valued table fishes. Assorted reef fish, such as groupers, red snappers, jacks, barracudas, mackerels, cobia, leather skin, sweet lips, spade fish, surgeon fish

and big trevally in extremely fresh condition, fetches high price from the nearby star hotels at Kovalam which in turn provides further income to the fishers. Harpooning or spear fishing is restricted mainly to sport fishing in most of the countries. Often, the fishermen selectively target the biggest fish they can find, which often will be the brooders whose excessive removal can affect the reproductive potential of that particular

stock. Also with prevalent low concern about diving safety, several divers carrying a loaded spear gun in a restricted area during the peak seasons can be potentially dangerous. This adventurous fishing activity, needs to be focused and developed as a sport with proper guidelines for safety of the sports fishermen as well as the fishermen community who guide and conduct these programmes.



Fig.1. A spear gun operated along Kovalam coast