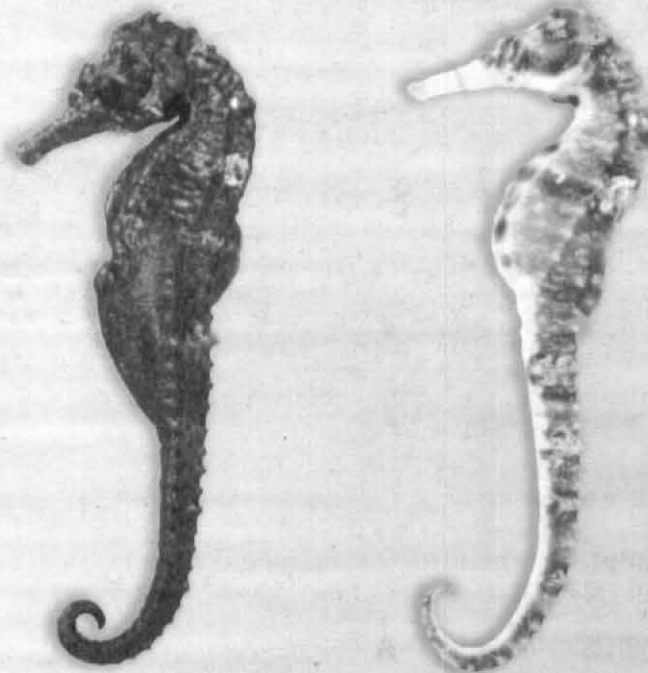




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Exploitation of molluscs, producing marine pearl was done for the collection of natural / cultured pearls only, whereas, the exploitation of windowpane oyster was mostly for their shells. The pearls obtained from windowpane oyster, *Placuna placenta* were mostly ivory or white in colour and small in size. The translucent shells are commercially and economically important in shell craft industry. Hence they are exploited in large quantities from the east and west coast of India.

Large population of windowpane oyster was seen in silty-clay bottom of Nauxim Bay

of the Zuari estuary of Goa. A major resource of this species exists in the Gulf of Kutch in Gujarat. In the east coast they occur in high density in Kakinada Bay, whereas it is a minor resource in Tuticorin Bay and adjacent areas.

Although a fishery exists for windowpane oysters at Tuticorin Bay, it was mainly for extraction of natural pearls, while the shells were often discarded on the shore. Viewing the economic value of these shells, the merchants engaged fishermen for the collection of live windowpane oyster in areas other than the Tuticorin Bay. Recently they have located a new site in the river area near Vellapatti, a coastal village 3 km away from the Tuticorin Bay where a dense population of windowpane oyster exists. The exploitation of windowpane oyster at Vellapatti is mainly for shells of different size groups.

Intensive collections were made during off-fishing season when the boats were laid ashore due to poor fish catch. The windowpane oysters occurred at 3 fathoms depth. During 2000, 150 tons of windowpane oysters were exploited. Exploitation was done by skin diving. The live windowpane oysters were sun-dried on the seashore (Fig.1). No flesh or pearl was extracted. About 150 boats were engaged in the exploitation in 2001. A total of 60 tons were reported to have been fished during 2001. The sun-dried shells were packed in polyethylene bags and transported to Bombay via Bangalore for sale.



Fig.1. Live windowpane oysters

As the shell chips had shining property, the first quality product was used in cosmetic industry for preparation of face make-up. The residual shell chip was mixed with paints to increase its viscosity. The shell crush remains were utilized for poultry feed and lime preparation. The live windowpane oysters were purchased at the rate of Rs.1.90/kg from fishers and sold Rs.2.00/kg to traders. The size of oysters ranged from 80 to 160 mm in dorso-ventral axis (DVM) with a dominant mode at 111-120 mm which constituted 28%. The other dominant modes were at 101-110 and 121-130 mm in February 2000.

Prepared by: **S. Dharmaraj and M.K. Sreenivasagam, Tuticorin Research Centre of CMFRI, Tuticorin**