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ADVENTUROUS LAUNCHING OF CATAMARANS FOR MONSOON FISHERY AT VALIATHURA, TRIVANDRUM

G. Luther, P. A. Thomas, P. N. Radhakrishnan Nair and R. Bhaskaran Achari,
Vizhinjam Research Centre of C. M. F. R. Institute

The way the fishermen of Valiathura and adjacent fishing villages near Trivandrum launch out their catamarans into the sea during the period of southwest monsoon is an example of overcoming obstacles of nature through innovations and ingenuity. Fishing activity in many parts of the southwest coast lying between Cape Comorin and Quilon remains suspended often at many centres during June to August, the southwest monsoon period, mainly because the fishermen find it difficult to negotiate their catamarans through the breakers. The unfavourable height, direction and type of breakers that prevail along the coast during this period mainly cause this difficulty. On account of this the fishermen move to certain centres that afford favourable conditions for setting off their crafts into the sea. Centres like Colachal, Kollangode, Vizhinjam and Quilon have bays or barriers and hence are considered good for fishing operations during monsoon period. The fishermen of the area from Kovalam to Veli where the coast is rather straight, sandy and much exposed to the fury of monsoon waves, solve this problem by taking advantage of Valiathura pier for launching the craft safely into the sea.

The operations (Fig. 1-6)

The logs of catamarans are transported upto the terminus of the pier on trollies provided by the port authorities. Here, the logs are assembled and the fishing gear is loaded and fastened tight by the crew at the front part of the catamaran together with personal belongings of fishermen such as beetle leaves, beedis, etc. packed in polythene covers. A nylon rope is fastened to the front part of the catamaran with its free end tied to the fist or waist of one of the crew who gets ready to plunge into the sea. On noticing a major receding wave with no incoming ones in sight, this fisherman jumps into the sea. The force of the receding wave takes him away from the pier. On noticing a similar powerful receding wave the catamaran also is pushed diagonally into the sea. The catamaran, like the fishermen, moves away

from the pier, but its further movements are controlled by the first fisherman holding the rope. The other two fishermen forming the crew of the fishing unit likewise jump into the sea and all the three get into the craft as quick and fast as possible and manoeuvre it well beyond the wave crests.

Field enquiries made at Valiathura revealed that this practice was in vogue even in the olden days when a wooden pier existed at the place of the present pier. It is not known when this practice of fishing started at Valiathura. Usually fishermen below 40 years of age venture in this type of fishing activity.

The catamaran engaged in monsoon fishing is to be registered every season and a licence fee of Rs. 5 per fishing unit is levied at present by the port authorities. The system of licensing started in 1956 when the present pier was commissioned. During the period 1977-1981 the number of licences issued for such catamarans varied from 334 to 442 with an average of 403 per monsoon season. Of these the majority (75%) is for boat seine and the rest for hooks and line.

Though the Valiathura pier is open to all fishermen during the southwest monsoon period for launching their catamarans, only fishermen of Valiaveli (Veli), Vettukadu, Kannenthura, Cheriathura, Poonthura and Panathura, besides Valiathura alone make use of this facility. The fishermen intending to launch the craft from the pier start moving their units to Valiathura by the end of May. The crafts are transported by bullock-carts and by lorries. Apart from transporting charges, coolie charges also will have to be paid for handling the logs upto the pier.

No remuneration in cash is paid to the fishermen engaged in this type of fishing, the sale proceeds of the catch being divided among the crew and others in the following manner: owner of the craft and gear, 40%; crew, 40%; church, 10%; barber, 3% and other helpers, 7%.

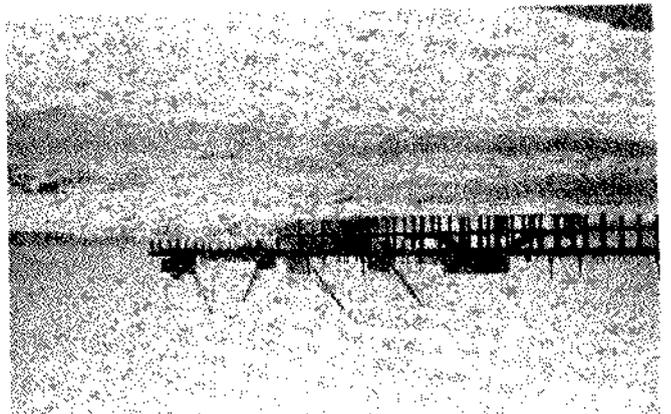


Fig. 1. Valiathura Pier

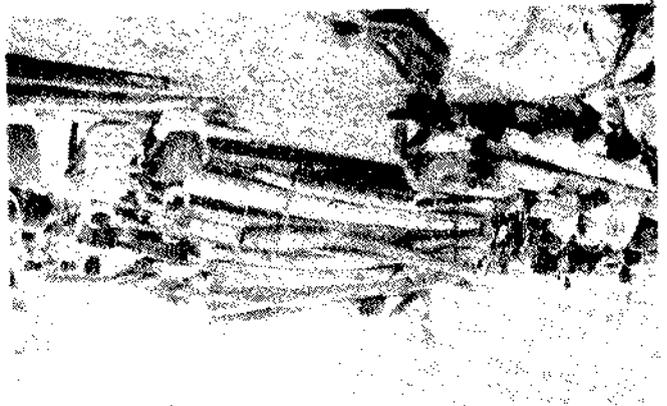


Fig. 2. Waiting for their turn-Catamarans are loaded on the trolley to be taken to the terminus of the pier.

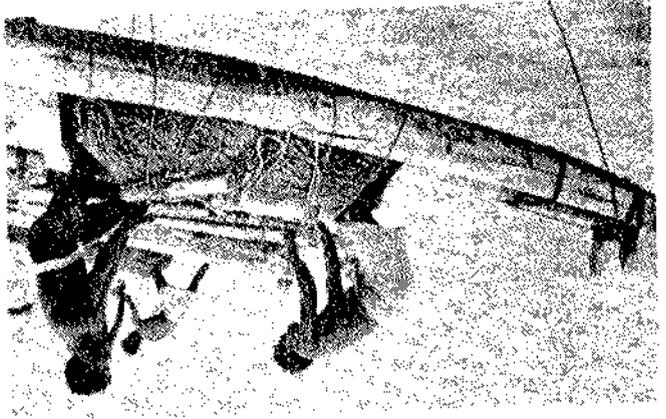


Fig. 3. Loading the gear and other personal belongings.

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Fig. 4. The catamaran is pushed into the sea.

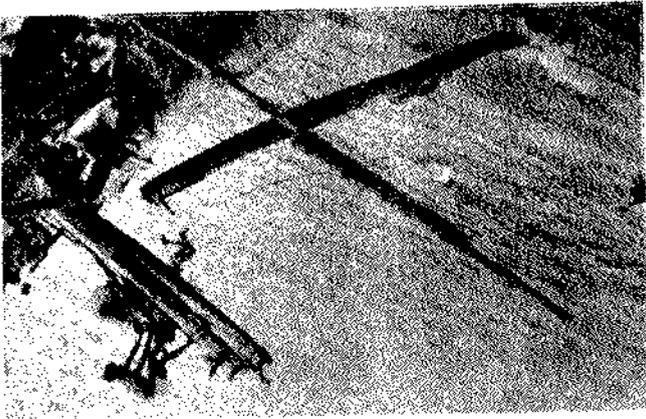


Fig. 5. The catamaran being pushed into the sea followed by the crew.



Fig. 6. Fisherman leaping into the turbulent sea.

Fishery

Observations on the trend of fishing effort and fish landings during 1977-1981 period at Valiathura and adjacent centres (Fig. 7) revealed an increase in the fishing activity in some centres during the southwest monsoon period (Figs. 8 & 9). The fishing effort has been standardized to boat seine unit, which is the common and effective fishing gear in this area (*Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv. T & E Ser., No. 38: 1982*). During the monsoon period the fishing crafts of the adjacent centres also take off from Valiathura pier but land at their respective landing centres, as by tradition, fishing units not belonging to a particular centre are forbidden to land at that centre mainly due to problem of marketing. However, when the wind and water current conditions are not favourable to land at their respective centres, they may land at Valiathura or any other adjacent centres.

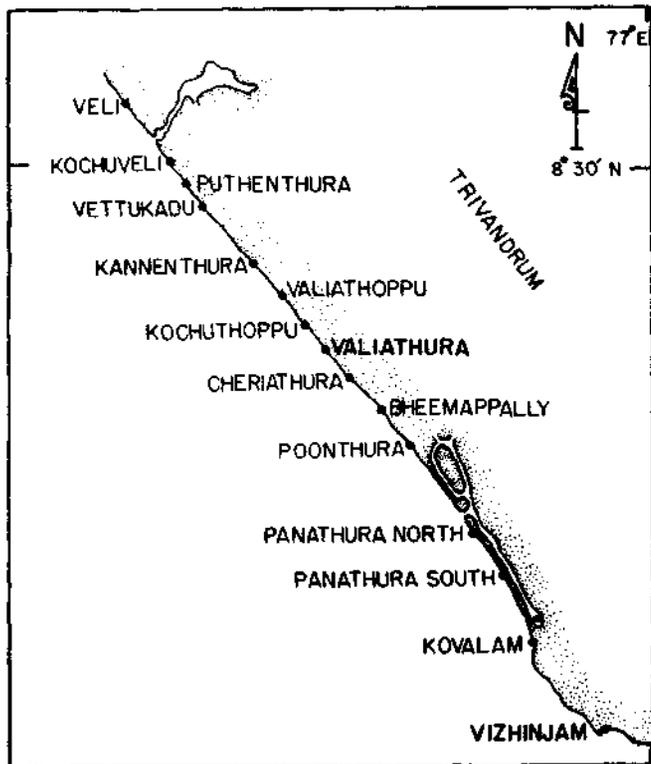


Fig. 7. Map showing Valiathura and adjacent landing centres.

Among the 14 centres, maximum fishing is carried out by the fishermen of Poonthura involving round the year operations of the indigenous gears. Kovalam, Panathura, Bheemappally, Cheriathura and Valiathura are the other important cen-

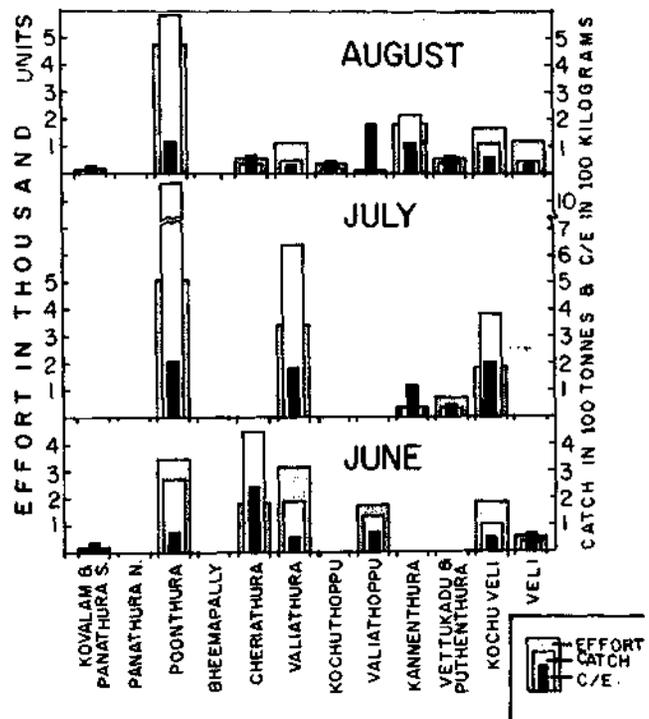


Fig. 8. Seasonal trend in the fishery (Effort, Catch and Catch/Effort) at Valiathura and adjacent centres.

tres from where considerable quantities of fish are supplied to the markets in Trivandrum city. It could be seen from Fig. 9 that while at most of these centres the fishery is at its peak either before or after the monsoon season, at Valiathura it is maximum during the early part of the monsoon period due to the concentration of fishing activities on account of the launching facilities available there. The highest catch as well as catch rates of fish are recorded during the monsoon months at Valiathura, Cheriathura and Kochuveli. At the other centres while the most productive period falls outside the monsoon season relatively higher catch rates are recorded during the southwest monsoon months at Poonthura, Kannanthura, Valiathoppu and Kochuthoppu.

The fish landings during monsoon period at Valiathura account for about 77% of the total annual landings at this centre. Similar figures for other centres are: Kovalam & Panathura, 7.3%; Panathura North, nil; Poonthura, 50%; Bheemappally, nil; Cheriathura, 45.6%; Kochuthoppu, 5.8%; Valiathoppu, 9.7%; Kannenthura, 16%; Vettukadu & Puthenthura, 6.4%; Kochuveli, 32% and

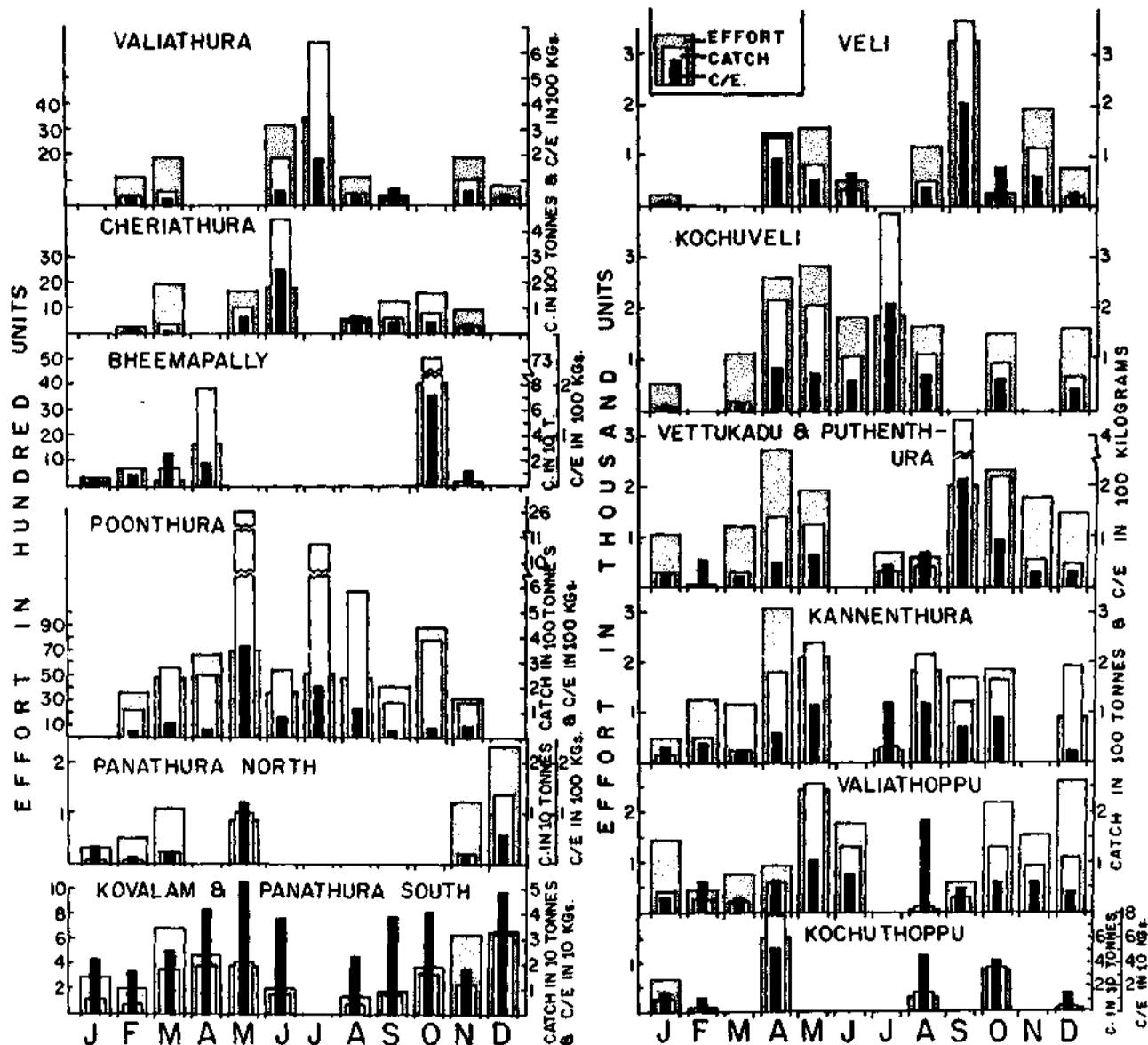


Fig. 9. Effort, Catch and Catch/Effort at different Centres during the southwest monsoon period.

Veli, 4.7%. As could be expected, no fishing activity takes place sometimes during the monsoon period at some of these centres due to rough sea. But the daring fishermen of Valiaveli, Vettukadu, Kannenthura, Cheriathura, Poonthura and Panathura brave the rough sea even during this period when the sea is relatively calm. Resumption of normal post-monsoon fishing activity takes place at most of the centres by about middle of August when the fury of the monsoon abates.

The major components of fish landed at Valiathura and the adjacent centres during this period are *Trichiurus haumela*, tunas (*Euthynnus affinis* and *Auxis thazard*), species of *Stolephorus*, namely *S. devisi*, *S. bataviensis* and *S. buccaneeri*, *Caranx* sp., *Nemipterus* sp. and *Saurida* sp. as well as perches. Species of *Loligo* and *Aetes* also contribute to a minor share during the monsoon period.

Remarks

Although the method adopted by the fishermen for launching of their catamarans is quite ingenious, it is most hazardous and full of perils. Out of sheer necessity to make a livelihood the fishermen have evolved this method when the stormy breakers of the monsoon season prevent them from launching their crafts into the sea. Accidents, sometimes fatal, often happen while launching or landing these fishing crafts. The catamaran on launching, may hit against the con-

crete pillars of the pier and break into bits. The fishermen sometimes sustain hits, cuts and fractures on jumping into the water, as waves dash them against the concrete pillar or the catamaran itself. Several such accidents have been reported. In this connection it would be most useful if the state Government think in terms of implementing insurance or some such schemes in order to help the fishermen and their family who get involved in such calamities.

