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A NOTE ON THE PROCESSING OF THE JELLY FISH AT ALAMBARAIKUPPAM NEAR MAHABALIPURAM*

Jelly fish, a marine resource are being exploited in India on a small scale since a few years. Govindan (*Sea food Export Jour.*, 16 (7) : 9-11, 1984), Santhana-krishnan (*Sea food Export Jour.*, 16 (7) : 23-26, 1984) and Chidambaram (*Mar. Fish. Infor. Serv., T & E Ser.*, 60: 11-12) have given accounts of the various stages of processing and the export potential of jelly fish. Morikawa (*Infofish*, 1/84: 37-39, 1984) has dealt with the various stages of jelly fish, their processing methods, demand and supply and import prices in Japan. James *et al.* (*J. mar. biol. Ass. India*, 27 (1 & 2): 170-174, 1985) have suggested how jelly fish which are a menace off Madras coast can be processed and exported. They have also made passing reference to the processing done at Alambaraikuppam located about 50 km south of Mahabalipuram.

Interest in processing jelly fish for export is of recent origin in India. In 1984 processing was done at Thirumullaivasal. In 1986 processing was done near Marakanam beach and at Ekkikuppam for three months from July. August and September are the best months for collection and processing jelly fish. In 1984 processing was done near Pondicherry also.

Cambionella stuhlmanni is a common jelly fish occurring gregariously along the Tamil Nadu coast. Off Madras maximum numbers are seen in July and again in February. They often hamper fishing operations. The species mentioned as *Rhizostoma* sp. by

Chidambaram (*op. cit*) from Pondicherry refers to the species mentioned above.

For the processing and utilization of the commonly occurring jelly fish along Madras coast, one of the entrepreneurs erected in July, 1988 a huge thatched shed (Fig. 1) on the beach at Alambaraikuppam (Fig. 2). In the processing shed six improvised tables were arranged where about 25 women worked (Fig. 3). The top of the

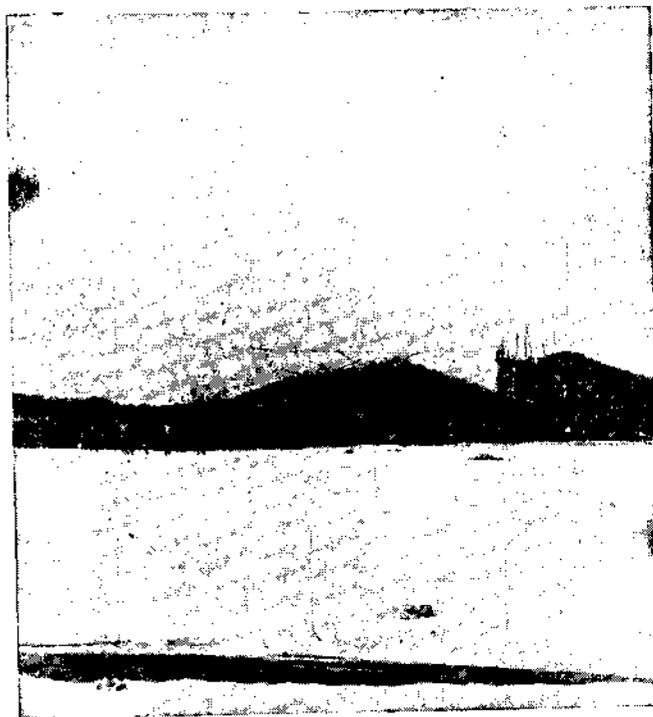


Fig. 1. Sheds where processing of jelly fish was carried out.

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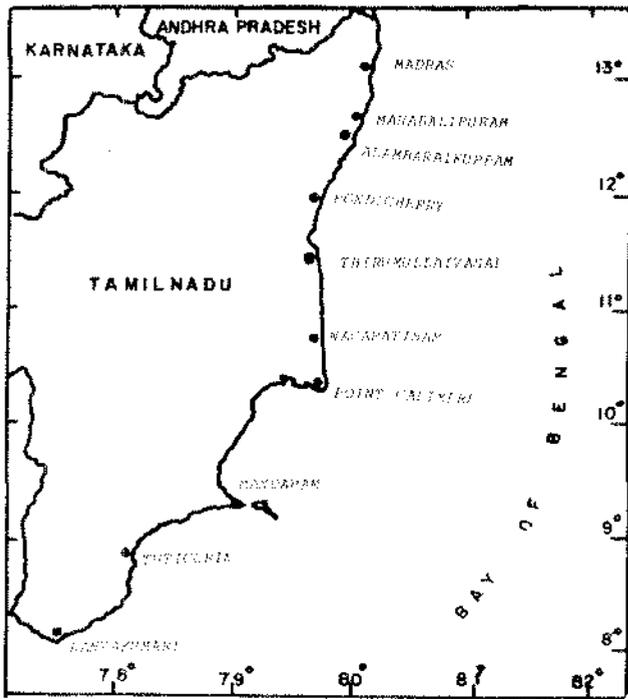


Fig. 2. Map of Tamil Nadu coast showing centres where jelly fish are abundant.

table was covered with black polythene sheets. The actual processing started on 10-7-'87 and lasted till the end of September, 1987.

The jelly fish are collected by a scoop net (Fig. 4) locally known as *Nandu katcha*. The diameter of the scoop net is 50-58 cm. The mesh size of the net is 9.5 cm. The scoop net has a wooden handle. The length of the handle is 64 cm. The fishermen start at 0600 hrs for gathering the jelly fish and return by 1400

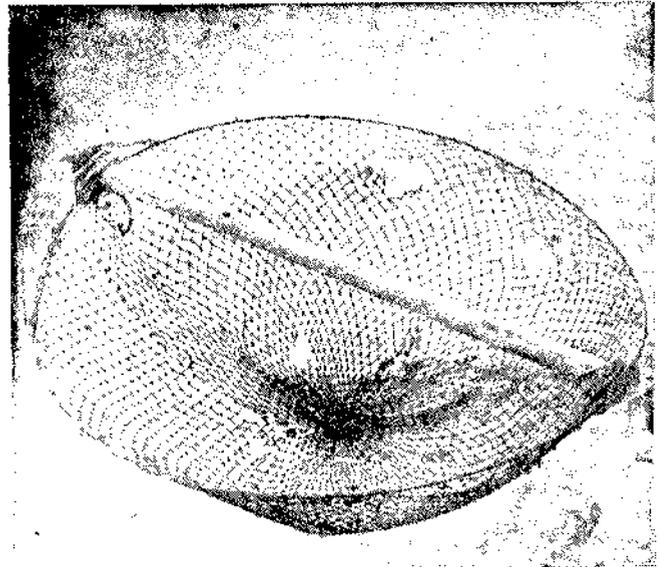


Fig. 4. A scoop net used for catching jelly fish from the sea.



Fig. 3. Women workers engaged in jelly fish processing.

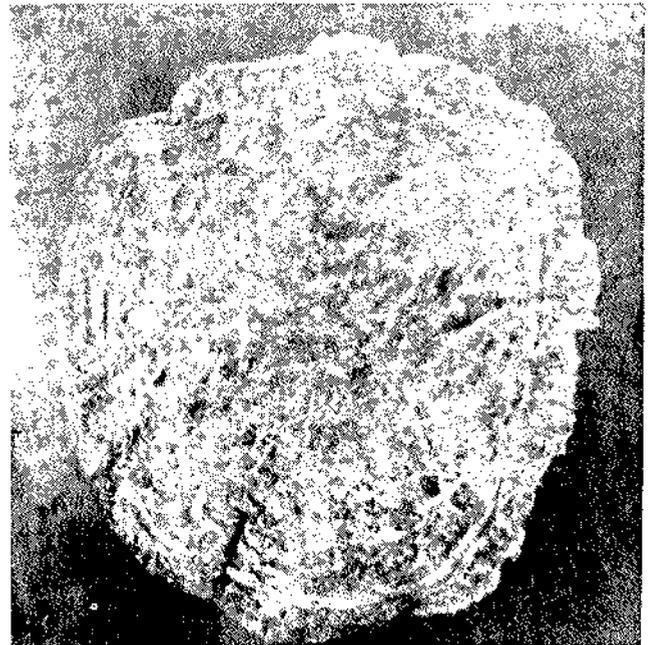


Fig. 5. The processed final product of jelly fish.

hrs. Three men go in a catamaran and bring on an average 300 jelly fish per day. On days when wind is favourable they collect as many as 13,000 jelly fish while on some days no jelly fish was obtained. The fishermen make one or two trips per day depending on the availability of the jelly fish. They go five kilometres from the shore, where the depth is about 18 metres. The fishermen collect normally 300-1,000 jelly fish per day and the processor pays them 25 paise/ jelly fish.

Processing of jelly fish has been described by Santhanakrishnan (*op. cit*) and Chidambaram (*op. cit*). The jelly fish which are collected from the sea are brought in baskets and put on a slanting table. They slide down into a tank containing sea water, salt and chemicals. In good season 2,000 to 3,000 jelly fish are processed per day. At first the tentacles are removed by hand and then the projections on the ventral side are cut off from the disc with a knife to make the product look like a disc. The edges of the umbrella are scraped. The umbrella of jelly fish are soaked for one day in sea water along with the tentacles and the duration of processing is 14-21 days. Processing is carried out in tanks of size 3 x 1.5 x 0.75 m lined by polythene sheets. The final product (Fig. 5) is disc like, spongy and known as *Hatchphi* in Chinese. The diameter varies from 13 to 18 cm and the weight from 68 to 152 g.

Two companies at Madras, M/s. Haniff Associates and Evershine Exporters processed and exported jelly

fish to Singapore. The details of exports in weight and value for the years 1984-'88 are as follows*.

| Year | Weight (Tonnes) | Value (Rupees) |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1984 | 17.9 | 2,55,000 |
| 1985 | 10.9 | 92,872 |
| 1986 | 17.3 | 1,89,912 |
| 1987 | Nil | Nil |
| 1988 (upto October) | 10.0 | 1,65,670 |

Apart from Mahabalipuram coast, jelly fish are very common in several areas along Tamil Nadu like Madras, Ennore, Kalpakkam, Pondicherry and Tuticorin. As jelly fish have export potential, it is suggested that they could be processed and exported on a large scale in Tamil Nadu during August and September when they are abundant in coastal waters. The jelly fish not only hamper the fishing operations of indigenous as well as mechanised vessels but also obstruct the work of the Madras Atomic power plant at Kalpakkam by blocking the sea water inlet pipes of the cooling systems of the power station. A jelly fish processing unit could be established at Kalpakkam to make use of the jelly fish available in the area and avert the menace caused to the power station.

