

## **COMMUNITY-BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: CASE STUDY OF KATTUDEL IN CHILAW**

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### ABSTRACT

The Kattudel fishing industry is traditional and stake net fishing is practised in the Chilaw lagoon. The main species caught is prawn. The fishing rights are shared between three clans, who together have formed the Traditional Kattudel Owners Association. The three main groups, each closely associated with a particular church, are allocated different fishing days. Sub-groups are organised for fishing purposes. Since only male descendants of Kattudel fishermen can become owners, entry to the fishery is limited. An applicant for ownership must fulfil various requirements and obey fishing regulations. Any disputes are dealt with by the association. The areas set aside by custom for the Kattudel fishing industry have, as a result of conflict with fishermen using other methods, been demarcated by the courts. A Government commission was set up to settle a number of disputes and fix equitable fishing times and areas for fishermen living on the lagoon. Pollution now threatens the Kattudel fishery and an in-depth study of Chitaw lagoon's resources is urgently required. The participation of the community in such a study is essential.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Chilaw is situated 80 km north of the City of Colombo along the coast in the administrative district of Puttalam of the Western Province. In terms of fisheries Chilaw remains a separate administrative district. Ptolemy's Coordinates (dating back to 110 B.C.) identifies Chilaw as Ostia Soana, indicating that it was a mini-harbour. The Chilaw lagoon and the Deduru Oya form one single estuary, where the sand bars shift according to the monsoons. A study of the socio-economic status of the fisheries community in the district of Chilaw was undertaken by the Bay of Bengal Programme based on a survey carried out in 1988.

The technique used is stake net fishing. Stakes are planted with open arm nets facing the current. Each arm has about four or five stakes according to need. Each stake is about 4m in height. The net, tied to the stakes, braces itself against them and stretches from the bottom to above water level. The net purses itself to become a trap. The nets and the stakes are carried to their position by a boat about 6m long. The traditional Kattudel fishing industry is restricted to Negombo and Chilaw lagoons. When the opportunity has arisen it has also been tried in Kokilai and Jaffna lagoons. The main target species is prawn while some fish and crabs are also caught if they cannot swim against the current.

### 2. THE FISHERY COMMUNITY

I have personal experience of being a member of a Kattudel fishing family of Negombo and have been involved in fisheries community development for the last 25 years. The study on Chilaw Kattudel fisheries was made by several visits to the area and meeting the Kattudel fishermen along with the other fishermen involved in lagoon and sea fishing.

The history of the Kattudel community begins in 1816 when ten fishing families from Duwa,

near Negombo migrated to Chilaw. They all belonged to the Hihindukulasuriya clan and were Roman Catholics by religion. They built their huts at Pokkalithungaha by the side of the Dedury Oya. The Kattudel fishing rights were restricted to the descendants of this clan. Later the Jayasuriya clan and the Warnakulasuriya clan staked their claims to the Kattudel fishing rights, Today they are joined together as one federated association under the name of “Halavatha Paramarika Kattudel Pellakaruvange Sangamaya” Chilaw (Traditional Kattudel Owners Association).

## 2.1 Membership

There are three main groups identified according to their churches and sub- groups are organised according to the days of fishing. Each group is called a Pella; the number of members are show in brackets. The total membership is 475.

- i. The first group belongs to our Lady of Mount Carmel Church. It is identified as Chilaw-Pitipana Street Pella Group, and comprises Kurum Pella (38), Halmassa Pella (38), Kali-issan Pella (40), Aluth del Pella (45), Egoda watte, comprising Heda Alut watte (38) and Aluthkattiya (42).
- ii. The second group belongs to St. Sebastians Church, Alutwatte. Only those originally registered can claim ownership. This group is known as Kosgama Medda Pella (81). Its members are of the Jayasuriya clan. There are two sub-groups (of 46 and 35) for the purpose of fishing.
- iii. The third main group belongs to St. Bernadette’s Church. Its members are of the Warnakulasuriya clan. They are known as Wattakuliya Pella. There are three sub-groups (28,25,27) for the purpose of fishing. The Wella veediya contains two groups of 40 and 33.

## 2.2 Fishing days

- i. Chilaw – Pitipana Veediya, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday  
Egodawatte: Thursday
- ii. Kosgama Hedda Pella, Wednesday
- iii. Wattakuliya – Thursday and Friday

## 2.3 Ownership

Only the male descendants can claim ownership. They should be christians and if married, it should be a church marriage. They should be above the age of 18 and under the age of 50. In applying for ownership, the applicant should pay the stipulated membership fee and should prepare the nets according to the traditional rules and regulations. If the nets are not made according to the accepted methods, then the application is rejected. The member of a Pella cannot engage in any type of fishing in the lagoon between 6am and 6pm. Any conflict will be resolved by the association. The member has to obey the Government fishing regulations.

## **2.4 Membership Fee**

There is an entry fee and a monthly fee. The moneys are used to protect the rights of the Association in case of litigation, and for welfare activities. Membership fees for each Pella differ. The sub-groups have their own welfare programmes. The moneys are credited in a bank.

## **2.5 The Constitution**

The Association has a constitution and meets annually to elect office bearers. There is an executive committee. A general assembly is held every three months.

There are special by-laws for each Pella relating to how the ownership of the Kattudel is identified. Every applicant should be able to prove that his father or grandfather was a Kattudel fisherman. Each Pella demands that certain items of fishing equipment needed for the Kattudel be owned by a person applying for membership.

## **3. THE FISHING AREA**

Kattudel Paduwa is that part of the lagoon where the stakes are planted. There are five areas that are marked out for the planting of the stakes. The number of nets utilised is determined by the monsoonal rains.

In Chilaw Lagoon Moya the shifting of the Moya must be taken into account. There is a possibility of having five nets. Deduru Oya: Moya with its shifting sands has the Moya proper, near Palugaha, near St. Sebastian's Church, Karukupane. The other areas are, Alutwatte, near the bridge, Sudeuwella and Thani Pol gaha (near a single coconut tree).

The above areas are specifically set apart by custom for the Kattudel fishing industry. Owing to various disputes with other types of fishermen, these areas have also been demarcated by the courts and after a number of disputes, a commission was set up by the Government to:

- i. Determine the type and number of fishermen, and allocate areas for the fishermen living beside the lagoon.
- ii. Determine equitable times and areas of fishing for those fishermen living along the banks of the lagoon.
- iii. According to the present needs, sort out the Kattudel fishing industry from other types of fishing and determine a system where future clashes could be avoided.

The Commissioner was W.A.B. Oscar Fernand. The Gazette of 1989.11.27 published recommendations of the commission: (Haras delis a type of drift net)

- i. The Haras del should be laid out two miles to the south of the Chilaw bridge.
- ii. They should avoid the channels determined by the Ministry of Fisheries and should utilise the sides.
- iii. There should be a distance of 100m between two haras del.

- iv. The haras del mesh should not be less than 3 8mm.
- v. According to the new law (Vol 32 page 260) enacted by the legal department and according to tradition, the Kattudel fishermen have a right to fish between 6pm and 6am.
- vi. Cast nets can be utilised by any one during the day.

#### **4. THE FISHING OPERATION AND MARKET**

The fishing trip is a joint venture of the members of the Pella. Around 30 members give their names for the determined day. They share the labour and divide the profits equally among themselves. Not all members own boats, nets and stakes. Therefore the group hires them. There are only six boats available to them. Each boat is hired for Rs. 50. Ten to 12 stakes are needed. A pair of stakes is hired for Rs. 50. In the early days dry coconut leaves bundled together were taken for the purpose of light. Later kerosene lamps were introduced. Today a generator with a 500 watt flasher is hired for Rs. 1,500. This is of special value because it helps other fishing craft speeding to and from the sea to avoid the Kattudel nets. While three or four help in the boats to fix the stakes and tie the nets, the others wait in a mechanised 10m boat to collect the catch. The mechanised boat is hired for the purpose. The catch is sorted and taken to the Lellama (market) for auctioning. The profits are shared equally.

The market is owned by the Urban Council of Chilaw and is rented out to a person who organises the sales mechanism. Earlier this was organised under the auspices of the church. At present the Urban Council has rented out the Lellama for 2,200,000 Rs. per annum. The renter must find this money and all extra moneys that go to himself and his staff. The members who belong to the Lellama pay 2% of their catch to the renter. Outsiders pay 3% or 5% of their income to the renter. Although in theory there is open access marketing, a non-transparent monopolistic mechanism operates. Although the Urban Council collects the rent, the welfare facilities provided by the Council are poor. When ice is not provided there is a downward trend in prices. The middlemen transport the fish and prawns to Chilaw and Colombo.

#### **5. SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS**

The members of the Kattudel Community are all Christians and their religious activities are centred round their churches. The church associations bring various types of fishermen into common groups. Associations are organised into different age groups. Religious values are imparted through these associations. The Sunday pulpit is used to diffuse information to the community and the Kattudel Association also makes use of this means to communicate with its members. While earlier the parish priest was the patron of the association, today this function is performed by a lay person. The Kattudel community is Sinhalese by race while a certain section of the Wamakulasuriya community speaks Tamil. The young are all educated in Sinhala.

The average family consists of five members. The families are dispersed and do not live along the banks of the lagoon. Depending on their socio-economic situation, their houses are of brick and tiles, brick without tiles, or wattle and daub with cadjan roofing. Some do not own any land.

All the Kattudel fishermen are literate and some have received university education. Their employment reflects their education. Three percent live by Kattudel fishing only and do odd jobs during the day; 60% go to sea in boats; 5% are employed by the Government or on the land.

Kattudel fishermen earn an average income of Rs. 2,000 per month. Saving habits are poor among the less educated. Women do not participate in any of the fishing activity of the Kattudel. Among the poorer families, they are involved in alternative odd job activities. The Kattudel Association provides help when accidents occur during fishing and helps with funeral expenses.

## **6. THE CHILAW LAGOON**

The Kattudel fisheries depend totally on the purity of the lagoon water. The recently established prawn farms are a real threat to the environment. Millions of gallons of water are pumped into the ponds. With no monsoonal rains sand banks close off the lagoon and estuary and the water level falls. Reduced acreage of water affects the plant and aquatic life of the lagoon. The waste water from the prawn farms is pumped back into the lagoon. The use of lands by industries other than the allied fishing industry would affect the Kattudel industry. Increased use of mechanised boats within the lagoon has also created a number of problems.

- i. Kerosene and diesel in the lagoon water has made certain fish uneatable.
- ii. Kerosene and diesel on the lagoon bed affect the plants and the breeding grounds.
- iii. The speed boats disturb the breeding grounds.
- iv. Speed boats at night are a threat to the nets of the Kattudel fishing industry.

## **7. A PLEA FOR THE FUTURE**

An in-depth study of the resources of the Chilaw lagoon is urgently needed. In undertaking this study community participation is essential. There should be transparency in the budget proposal and its implementation. The development studies by experts should go hand in hand with community education. The technological terms should be translated to understandable community language. Otherwise there would be a communication gap and community resistance to change would develop.

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