

‘Churukkumadi’ fishing problem: Ground reality and solution



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It is well-known that the traditional fishermen's 'Churukkumadi' fishing method (purse seine) in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu has triggered law and order problems in the areas concerned. If this kind of fishing done through fiber boats in south during the period of October-January is allowed in northern districts except during the ban period, it will likely be carried on with fiber and power boats.

This 'churukkumadi' fishing has run into trouble on account of lack of understanding on the part of the ruling class

and whims and fancies of certain powerful individuals in the coastal areas. As a result, the rich school of fish temporarily swimming in coastal sea and neritic regions of the sea goes waste, benefitting none.

‘Churukkumadi’ fishing

The 'churukkumadi' fishing is a next level technology invented by the traditional fishermen with the help of knowledge gained from their past experiences. The fishermen, who used to employ handy nets, switched over to the purse seine net at one point of time and accompanied by a few more companions, chased and caught the school of fish in the currents. That is called 'churukkumadi' fishing.

Unlike trawling nets, the 'churukkumadi' nets do not damage the rocks in the sea bottom. This fishing method targets the school of fish coming up at the tide, hardly damaging the environment and fish reproduction. The fishermen begin their fish hunting post-sunrise, after properly gauging the sea currents. Sometimes, it so happens that the fish chased will not be caught and the venture turns a failure. In the South African sea, the school of fish starts its journey from the sea bottom rocks and gets controlled by the countercurrents in the coastal sea, finally turning out to be a boon to the coastal towns in the country. Understanding the limited life-span of the fish, the traditional fishermen chase and catch them in the coastal and neritic regions of the sea.

The basis of the problem

Since the 'churukkumadi' demands higher investment unlike the usual 'chevul' net, the traditional fishermen families join together and engage in the 'churukkumadi' fishing. There are differences in quantity and quality of fish caught through 'churukkumadi' and 'chevul' nets. So, this fishing industry is responsible for individual likes and dislikes. This is the basis of the problem the 'churukkumadi' fishing is confronted with. This industry fetches larger schools of fish ashore, creating direct and indirect job opportunities. It is embroiled in the local politics. As there is no minimum support price fixed for the fish, the local traders themselves fix the prices at their whims and fancies. Though there is a persistent demand in the coastal towns that the government fix the minimum support prices for the fish, it is only the local market that decides on the prices. The price of fish caught through 'chevul' nets is determined, depending on the availability of fish caught through 'churukkumadi'. The problem gets more acute and sharper when large amounts of fish are caught through 'churukkumadi' and brought ashore and as a result, there is a cut-throat competition among the local traders to catch hold of those fish.

The 'churukkumadi' fishermen ask why their occupation quite popular along the west coast in the country should be banned. There is no dearth of fish in the Arabic Sea starting from Gujarat and running up to Kerala along the west coast. There is no competition between the 'chevul' net fishermen and the 'churukkumadi' fishermen in the

sprawling sea overlying the continental shelf. But back in our Tamil Nadu, there are problems that threaten to push the region into a riotous situation.

Ground reality and solution

There is an occupational competition in the limited sea space overlying the continental shelf in Tamil Nadu. The ‘chevul’ fishermen see red in the larger quantity and better quality of fish brought ashore by the ‘churukkumadi’ fishermen though both types of fishermen earn their livelihood on the same seashore.

Since the ‘chevul’ fishermen are a majority incurring heavy losses and the ‘churukkumadi’ fishermen are only a minority, the government sides with the former. The basic reason for the sea turning sterile is the trawl net fishing. Even after the schemes were brought in by both union and state governments to boost deep-sea fishing, the trawl net fishing has not yet stopped. Of course, it is not right to stop the ‘churukkumadi’ fishermen from catching the school of fish that will die on its own within certain time-limits. But at the same time, the economic misery of the ‘chevul’ fishermen must also be taken into consideration. Accordingly, the state fisheries department is taking measures depending on the regions involved. If a proper examination of the ground reality is done with care and diligence, it can be discovered that the solution to the problem of ‘churukkumadi’ fishing does not lie with the powers-that-be, nor with the fisheries department. Rather it lies in the hands of the united traditional fishermen.

An arrangement must be put in place to give priority to the ‘chevul’ fishermen whose fish must be first auctioned and then to start auctioning the fish brought by the ‘churukkumadi’ fishermen who must agree to the arrangement.

Next the ‘chevul’ fishermen complain of the size of the ‘churukkumadi’ net’s mesh. They allege that fish like ‘nethili’, limited in quantity, cannot escape when enmeshed in the ‘churukkumadi’ and so other kinds of accompanying fish get diverted to the deep sea for want of food on their trajectory. This results in losses to the ‘chevul’ net fishermen, they say.

The meshes of the trawl nets used by the commercial fishermen are below 12 mm and those of the nets used by the ‘churukkumadi’

fishermen are in the range of 18-20 mm. The measurement of the churukkumadi nets' meshes in their production/distribution stage itself must be monitored by the government. Only then the 'churukumadi' problem can be solved and the school of fish going waste in the sea itself can be stopped and the fish can be brought into use.

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