

A Brief Account on the 'Gunja Net' Fishing of the Kutch Backwaters (Gujarat)

The prawn fishery in the coastal waters of the Gulf of Kutch and adjacent creeks and backwaters is one of the major fishing activities of the region landing an average of 3500 t *per annum*. Nearly 3000 to 4000 fishermen are engaged in this fishery. A general review of the prawn fishery of the Kutch region (Lakumb, 1960) and its biological aspects (Ramamoorthy, 1967; Deshmukh, 1975) have already been studied but no information is available on the details of fishing gear and methods. The present note attempts to survey the fishing gear and methods.

The area of fishing activities extends from the coastal regions of the Gulf of Kutch to the far interior villages on the Little Rann of Kutch. The important centres are Mathwa, Navalaki, Sossaria etc. (Fig. 1). Fishermen camp at the centre during the season,

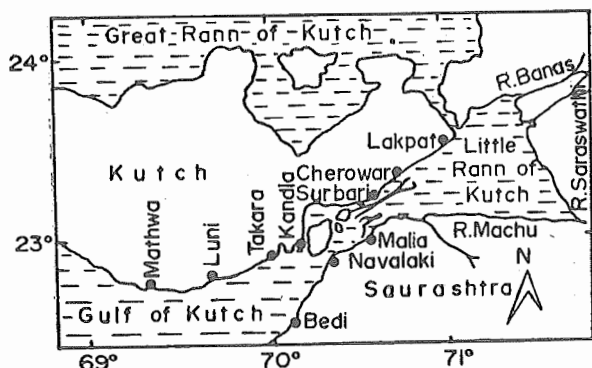


Fig. 1. The location of fishing centres

engage in fishing and move from centre to centre. Fishing gear is a simple type of stake net locally called 'Gunja net' and in some places a rectangular piece of net called 'Patti' is also employed. A typical Gunja net is fabricated by joining together a number of pieces with uniform tapering to form a conical bag with a small cod end. The fore part of the net is hung to 3 mm dia HDPE rope making a circular shape in the

mouth region. The important fishing seasons are monsoon fishing season (August to October) and winter fishing season (November to February). The size of the net varies according to the region of operation.

Monsoon fishing is done in the upper reaches of creeks and backwaters when they are flooded with rain and discharge from the river Matchu, Banas and Saraswathy. The size of the net used here is smaller (Fig. 2 Design A) and is operated at a depth of 2 to 5 m during low tide and high tide against the flow of water. Initially two poles are fixed at the bottom at a distance of 3 to 6 m. The net is then tied to the poles at four different points (Fig. 2). The fishing operations start early in the morning and continue till evening. For every two hours the cod end is taken out and catch collected. The average catch per haul varies between 5 to 15 kg. This type of fishing is very active at Surajbari and nearby areas. At Adisar/Lakpet region of the Little Rann of Kutch, the depth of water is very shallow. Here the net is tied to two semi-circular poles at four different points to get a rectangular mouth opening and dragged by two fishermen through the bottom. Fishing is carried during morning hours and the net is hauled every 30 to 45 min. to unload the catch.

The winter fishing activities is confined to the lower region in the inshore waters of the Gulf of Kutch using a larger net (Fig. 2, Design B). The method of operation is the same as in the Surajbari region.

Monsoon fishing is more active and important contributing nearly 2/3 of the total prawn landing in this region. But the success of the monsoon fishing depends mainly on the intensity of rain fall. A good rain fall always result in better catch. A corresponding decrease in the prawn catch has been observed consequent to the reduction in

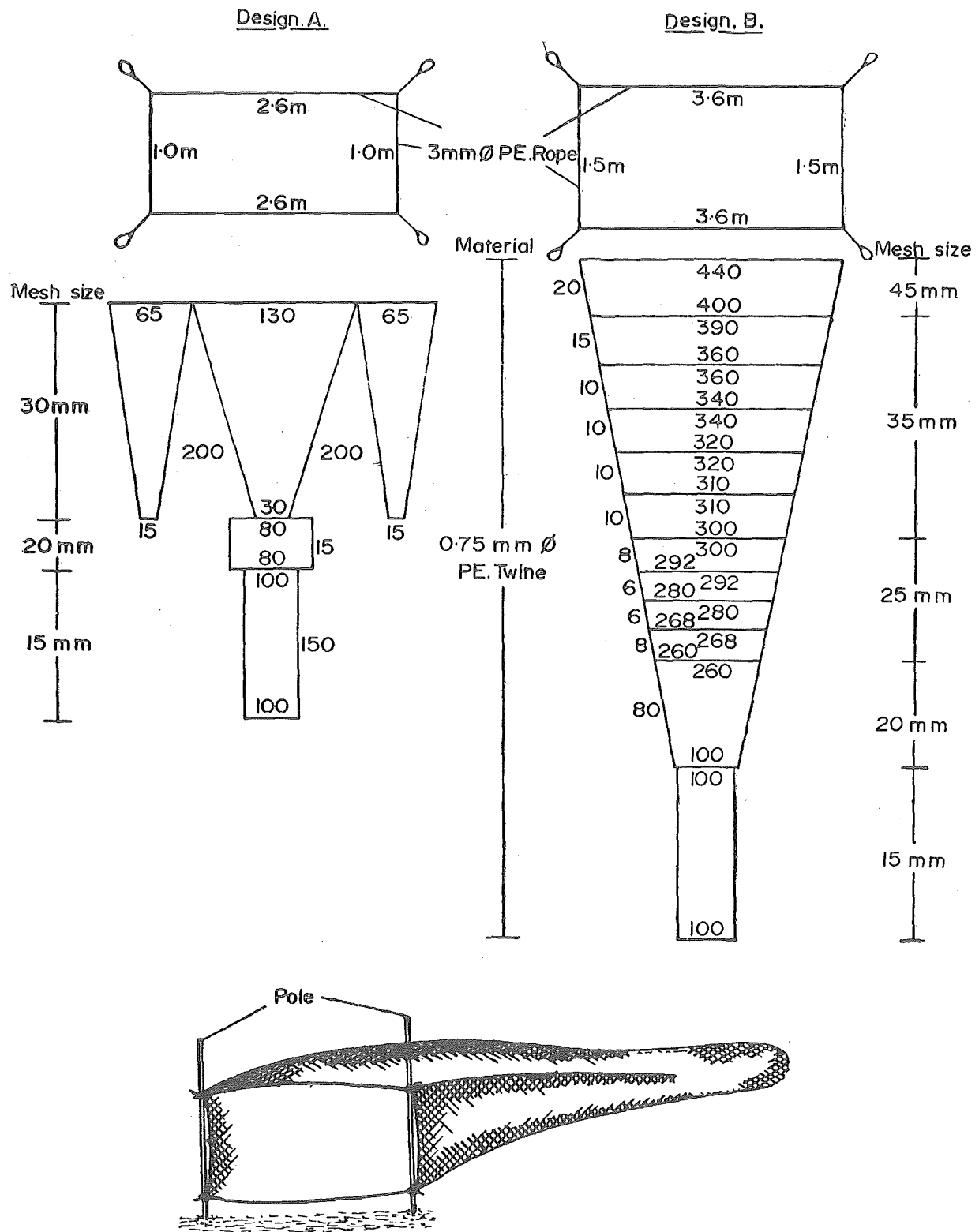


Fig 2. Design details of two different gunja nets operated
at the Kutch Backwaters

rains. (Ramamoorthi, 1967). The prawns caught in the upper creeks and backwaters during the monsoon are *Metapenaeus kutchensis*, while in the lower region of the Gulf, *Metapenaeus brevicornis* and *Penaeus indicus* are the main species caught, during winter.

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