

## **MARANAO FISHING GEARS AND PRACTICES\***

**Ismael Pumbaya**

The *Ranao* (Lake), from which the word "Maranao" (Lake people) is derived, is the Maranao fishermen's major source of livelihood. With the lake, the Maranaos as a whole have bound their identity, both in their own perception and in the concept of outsiders. With its water, the Maranaos purify themselves for prayer. From it they take water for drinking, cleaning and bathing. With their traditional dugout canoe (*awang*) and the introduction of modern launches powered by gasoline engines the Maranaos travel and transport their goods across the lake's great expanse to the neighboring communities. From the depths of the lake, rivers, creeks and ponds the Maranao fishermen gather fish. In the lowland farmland (*basak*) the Maranao farmers cultivate rice agriculture. Any sort of destruction, therefore, that may be introduced in the lake will affect the livelihood of the lake people, culturally and economically.

### **Maranao Fishing Gears and Practices**

The Maranao fishermen have various fishing gears and methods of catching fish which may be grouped into seven categories: 1) traps and weirs; 2) hand and spear fishing; and 3) hooks and lines; 4) nets; 5) poison; 6) dynamite fishing; and 7) electrocution fishing. Except for dynamite, electrocution fishing and the use of kerosene pressure - lanterns which have diffused in the Lake.

## PUMBAYA : MARANAO FISHING/81

Lanao region, all the other fishing gears and practices are traditional to the Maranao fishermen.

Before the extinction or decrease of mostly indigenous fish species in the lake, it did not matter what type of fishing equipment the Maranao fishermen used. The catch was always plenty enough to sell in the market and for family consumption. Today, most traditional fishing gears are still used, but the catch is not as plentiful as those of many years ago.

Some Maranao fishing gears are used seasonally rather than all year round. The *remo* or *tilba*, *saydan* or *bonsodan*, *bo'ò sa babeg*, *biyala* and *sokob* are used during fishing season only. The *kapanowig*, *kapeligaw* and *tagik* are used during the dry season. Other than the abovementioned fishing gears and practices all the rest are used all year round.

### Traps and Weirs

Traps and weirs are classified into seven categories – 1) *remo* or *tilba*; 2) *saydan*; 3) *romoso*; 4) *tagik*; 5) *pamipis*; 6) *sokob* and 7) *bo'ò*

After the dry season, when the first rains of the rainy season begins and rivers and creeks flow down the lake swiftly, fish love to go ashore and up the streams and rivers to look for the best spawning places. Prior to or at the start of the first rains in the rainy season, fishermen busy themselves preparing for the fishing season. They repair and/or just make fish traps, such as the *saydan*, *bo'ò sa babeg*, *sokob* and *remo* or *tilba*. You see smiles and grins of joy in their faces during this period. They cut bamboos, branches of tree, and water reed (*bombong*) for their traps and weirs. Along the rivers banks you see men busy repairing or just starting to make *saydan*. At home, in the backyard or under the house a man would be busy repairing or making *bo'ò* or *sokob*. By the lakeshore and at the opening of the river or creek into the lake, men of all ages dig their false channels.

*Saydan* is built along the river banks and creeks and is shaped like a square-fence constructed out of bamboo strips, one inch in

diameter and six to twelve feet in height. These strips are woven together with rattan. The entrance is made in such manner that mudfish or carp cannot escape once they enter the weir. The *saydan* may be built with its entrance facing the river current or against it. Its opening out into the river is fenced so there will be more fish that enter the trap. At the center of the *saydan* is planted a bamboo stick that moves when the fish enters and runs into it. Another way of noticing if there is fish that has entered the trap is the sound the fish makes when it jumps. Once the fisherman notices the presence of fish inside the trap he gets inside it and catches the fish with his bare hands or with the use of a fish-net attached to a circular or oblong bamboo frame (*sabur*).

*Romoso* is almost the same as the *saydan*, but is smaller and circular, constructed out of bamboo-like water reed (*bambong*) or bamboo splits. Its entrance resembles that of the *tangkal*, in such a way that it automatically closes once a fish enters it. At the center is a stick on which a rope connected to the door is attached. Once the fish enters and runs into the stick, the door drops down and the fish is trapped. *Romoso* is set in a pond or by the lake shore where reeds and grasses thickly grow. This type of weir catches only one or two fishes at a time due to its automatic door.

*Remo* or *tilba* is dug along the river banks by the lakeshore where water is about two feet deep. It is dug close enough to the opening of the river into the lake. It is made deep enough so that when its entrance is opened and filled with water the false channel is about four feet deep or more. The entrance out to the lake or river is made deeper and artificially planted with water plants to make it look more natural, thus tempting the fish to enter. Fish commonly caught in this false channel were usually mudfish, perch and catfish, but today it mainly catches *gourami* (*Osphronemus goramy*) and can hardly catch one mudfish. Inside the *remo* is planted with tree branches. The surface is shaded and covered with water reed and water hyacinths to attract the fish to enter.

To catch the fish inside, the entrance is blocked and the water is bailed out. When most of the water has been bailed out the cover is removed to check if there are fishes inside. Sometimes, when the catch is good the fish swims to the entrance and

tries to jump out while bailing is going on. If there are bubbles inside the *remo* and the water is dark, it is possible that there are fish inside. Catch from the *remo* was once plentiful, but today this trap can hardly catch one mudfish.

*Sokob* is a fishing gear made of bamboo strips and is cylindrical in shape with two openings, the top opening and the bottom, with its ends pointed. The bamboo splits are tied together closely so that the trapped fish cannot escape.

After the first heavy rains, the sound of the *sokob* plunging in the water is heard. It is raised and plunged down the water continually to catch fish. Once the fish is trapped inside, it tries to swim out. The fisherman catches the fish with his bare hand through the trap's top opening.

*Tagik* is another kind of weir used to catch mudfish, carp, catfish, etc.. More recently, however, it has fallen to disuse due to the depletion of mudfish, carp and catfish in the lake. *Tagik* is constructed out of bamboo splits of about one inch in diameter and six feet or more in length tied together vertically with rattan to hold the sticks firmly. The other ends are pointed purposely for sticking in the water down to the bottom, forming a square-like enclosure or any shape the fishermen prefer. The weir pieces are joined together with bamboo pins when set in order to prevent the fish from slipping out. This type of weir is placed in an area with plenty of water hyacinths that provide shelter for the fish. Before the weir is enclosed completely, fish are driven inside with the use of a bamboo tube supported with a pole (*tembor*), which is plunged into the water to cause the fish to swim into the trap. After the fish have been enclosed, water hyacinths and other water plants are gathered and thrown out. Little corners or divisions are constructed inside to further enclose the fish. Commonly caught are mudfish, catfish and carp. Bare hands and small fishnets attached to a circular or oblong bamboo frame (*tembor*) dipped in the water to scoop out the fish are used to catch fish after they have been driven into the already-constructed corners and divisions. This type of fishing takes most of the day, but in the past the time and effort spent were not wasted because the catch paid for the time and effort spent.

*Pamipis* is used to catch schools of mudfish fry by setting it close to the school which is driven inside by splashing on the water with one's hands and with the *tembor*. This type of fishing gear is destructive in that the fish fry are caught before they are fully grown enough to spawn. It especially endangers the mudfish species. Maranao fishermen have lately rejected it because of the imminent extinction of a variety of fish species in the lake, including the mudfish. *Bo'òs* are of five types which differ in sizes and shapes depending on the kind of fish the trap is intended for. These are *bo'ò sa babeg*, *betor*, *tentang*, *tangkal* and *bo'ò sa kasili*. *Bo'ò sa babeg* which is oblong is constructed out of tiny bamboo strips. It has two openings, one through which the fish enters and one through which the catch is poured out. The opening through which the catch is poured out is made on the trap's side. The opposite side of the entrance is covered with coconut shell to keep the fish from escaping.

*Bo'ò sa babeg* is used during the fishing season (*togon*). It is set with its entrance facing against the current so that any fish that goes down the stream or up the stream may be trapped.

*Bo'ò sa odang* such as *betor*, *tentang*, *tangkal* and *bo'ò sa kasili* are set in the deeper portion of the lake and pounded rice bran is used as bait. *Betor* and *tentang* can also catch *babeg* but they are mainly traps for shrimps. *Betor* is circular in shape with openings on both ends. It may have one or three triangular entrances on both ends and one door on the side from which the catch is poured out. The *tentang* on the other hand is cylindrical with two circular entrances made of coconut shells and the window from which the catch is poured out is built on the side.

*Tangkal* is a box made of bamboo strips. It is used to catch tilapia and carp. This kind of snare has a special kind of trapdoor manipulated with strips of rubber band which automatically close the door once the fish enters the trap.

*Bo'ò sa kasili* (for eel) is longer than any of the *bo'ò* and is cylindrical in shape. It is constructed from tiny bamboo splits. One end is rimmed with coconut shell through which the fish passes; the opposite end is closed.

## Spear fishing

Spear fishermen employ four kinds of spear fishing and gears: 1) *pana* or *tipara*; 2) *osod*; 3) *kapanowig*; 4) *kapeligaw*.

On a moonless and quiet night when the water is clear and calm, fishermen, usually in pairs, go out on their canoe (*awang*) to spearfish. They are often equipped with flashlight, speargun (*panu* or *tipara*), or a Maranao fishing spear with five or seven fork-like steel prongs supported with a hardwood handle and tightly tied with wires to hold the spear firmly. The partner sits at the rear to row the boat gently and quietly, making sure he does not bang the boat with the paddle or splash the water or the fish would swim away. The other sets himself on the prow with the spear and flashlight ready to shoot any bigger fish that comes along.

The speargun type of fishing gear which the Maranao synonymously call *pana* or *tipara* is very popular among the Maranao fishermen. Even small children have their own type of speargun. The *pana* is made of three, four or five steel arrowheads attached to an iron shaft set in a wooden gun-like implement with longitudinal groove into which the shaft is slipped and set prior to the shooting. It is provided with rubber and straps which are stretched and connected to a built-in hook in the shaft to provide force to the spear when released. The wooden gun is also provided with a trigger which holds the nock when the arrow is ready for use.

The speargun implement is usually employed during a moonless night, but it can also be used underwater during a calm and clear day. Spearguns vary in sizes and number of spears, depending on the age of person using it. The smallest speargun is used by the small children to catch smaller fish along the lake shore and canal.

## Kapanowig

In the summer or dry season the level of the lake, rivers, creeks and pond tend to lower. Fishermen and part-time fisher-

men go out in the hot sun to bail out water from the rice paddies, canals and to some extent a portion of a creek. This procedure is undertaken for fun, exercise and catching fish. It is called *kapanowig*. Fish caught in this manner of fishing are mudfish, catfish, perch and gorami.

A pool of water suspected to be good fishing ground becomes the target of the fishermen. Anyone who surveys an area that is good fishing ground gets a *bombong* and ties a knot on its leaves and plants it on the fishing area. This knotted bamboo reed signifies that the marked area is already preserved for someone, thus prohibiting anyone from fishing in it, except the person who marked it.

After having surveyed and marked his area, the fisherman invites his friends to join him in bailing out the water. This is group fishing and any catch will be divided among the team members.

They leave very early in the morning equipped with cans and cutlasses (*tabas*). They also bring with them their lunch wrapped in banana leaves or placed in an indigenous Maranao sack (*mamargasa*) woven out of grass locally called *sesed*.

They build a blockade or dam (*pelit*) at the entrance of the pond big enough so that the water does not flow back when it is bailed out. With the use of the *tabas* they clear the edges by cutting the grasses which could also be used in building the dam. After they are through constructing the dam, they start bailing out the water. As they bail out, at least one of the team members tries to check whether the water leaks back into the fishing area. Sometimes the dam is washed away by the water current, requiring the fishermen to rebuild it. When most of the water is bailed out and what remains is mostly mud, catching of the fish that hide under the water plants and mud is begun with bare hands (*kasikep*). The fishermen catch the fish as they clear the pond by removing all the water hyacinths where the fish may be hiding.

One way of gathering fish with bare hands during dry season is called *kapeligaw*. This is done in a pond covered with water plants and grasses floating (*vono*) which would make direct bailing out of the water impossible. Passageways are hacked out of the thick growing plants with the use of *tabas*. The fishermen then get

in and catch the fish with their bare hands.

### Hooks and Lines

Hook-and-line fishing equipment are classified into three types: long line (*komentay*), hand line (*banowit*) and stick and line (*litag a raway*). It is a trawl line where the hooks, tied with a string of about one meter in length, are tied about one fathom apart so the hooks do not get tangled up. The main line is submerged with the hooks in the water but they do not touch bottom. Shrimps are used as baits for this fishing equipment (*babeg* were also used as baits before they became extinct). Today, the *komentay* catches few mudfish, gobies and *katolong*.

The stick-and-line fishing gear is also used by the Maranaos to catch mudfish. Fish hooks tied with a string of about one meter in length is tied to a bamboo stick which is posted in a leaning position in the rice paddies and along the lakeshore thickly covered with water hyacinths. The hook hangs down the water. Earthworms and crickets are used as baits for this fishing water.

The hand lines are of two kinds; 1) *banowit* ; and 2) *banayaw*. *Banowit* is used to catch smaller fish such as gobies, perch, etc., *banayaw* is used to catch big fish like mudfish and carp. The length of the line used in the hand line depends on the depth of the water where it is used. And the size of the fish hooks used also depends on the size of the fish for which they are intended. The size of the bamboo rod used also depends on the kind or size of fish intended for catching. The rod for simple hook-and-line which is intended to catch small fish is a small bamboo twig, for big-sized fish, a bigger bamboo twig (e.g., *bakayawa*) is used.

### Nets

Maranao fishnets (*poket*) discussed below are generally classified into three types : 1) set net; 2) trawl net; 3) liftnet. The commonly used set net in the lake are : a) net with small mesh

(*masirit*), which is used to catch small fish; and b) net with big mesh that is used to catch big fish. Although *masirit* is a set net it was also used as a drag or trawl net. It is towed on both ends by two persons who encircle the fish along the lakeshore of about four feet deep. When this is done, the water is splashed to scare the fish so they would swim into the net. Net with big mesh (*mala'ang*) is steadily set in the deeper portion of the lake anchored with stones to make it sink vertically to the bottom.

*Balabak* is a type of set net which is set lying in a horizontal position on the surface of the water. Bamboo-like water reeds, are tied on the net at about one fathom apart to serve as buoys to keep the net afloat. Only two stone-sinkers tied with strings of about two fathoms or more, depending on the depth of the water where it is set, are tied on both ends of the net, protecting the latter from being washed away by the water current or waves. This kind of set net is different from the others which can be set permanently for days. It is temporarily set at night and taken out early in the morning for the reason that it is a floating net and if motor boats run into it, it may be cut to pieces. *Balabak* catches any fish that goes up the surface.

In the trawl nets, we have the *libot* and the *ambit*. On moonless nights, farther beyond on the lake, you see twinkling lights of the fishermen using *libot* to gather *sireng* and small *katolong*. The *libot* is a net horizontally set on the water's surface. Above it is kerosene pressure lantern on an innertube (*payaw*) floating on the surface of the lake above the net to attract *sireng* and *katolong*. At the time the net is darkened with fish it is pulled up by its two ends into the boat by the fishermen. The use of said lanterns by the Maranao fishermen is a new method of fishing they have adopted.

*Libot* is a type of fish net used to catch big fish like carp and mudfish by encircling the water hyacinths under which the fish usually hide. Once the net is set around the water hyacinths, the latter are gathered and thrown out until the net is made into a small enclosure.

Liftnets are of four kinds; *siyor sa odang*; *sabur*; *biyala* and *kayakayat*. Little farther out from the lakeshore on a clear day,

## PUMBAYA : MARANAO FISHING/89

fishermen dip this *siyor* in the lake and push it onward to catch small shrimps. When it is harder to push he lifts it up and empties the catch into the boat or to any container he has for the catch.

The indigenous *siyor* is made of abaca fiber refined from the traditional abaca refiner (*lagita*). It is woven in an indigenous Maranao backloom (*awola*) by Maranao women. The finished woven material is sewn into a circular or oblong bamboo frame with the handle tied across the frame. The handle is made longer for the convenient use of the fisherman.

*Sabor* is a liftnet dipped in the water to scoop the fish. It is used in the *tagik*, *saydan* and *kapeligaw*. It is also employed to catch any fish afloat—especially those that are killed by the poison and dynamite fishing practices.

Cast net (*biyala*) is often used during the fishing season. Along the river banks, at the opening of the river into the lake fishermen cast their *biyala* that take a circular shape when cast out in the lake.

Small round sinkers are sewn below the net to make it spread well and sink in the water faster so the fish cannot slip out underneath. It is pulled slowly after having been cast to check if there are fish caught in it.

*Biyala* is not only used along the river banks or at the opening of the river into the lake during fishing season, but it can also be used in the deeper part of the lake. When used in the deeper part of the lake a fisherman stands on his boat to cast it. Both big and small-sized fish (e.g., mudfish, carp, perch, etc.) can be caught in this kind of net.

*Kayakayat* is a type of liftnet but is not used often because it does not catch any great volume of fish. It is usually employed by small children to catch small shrimps to be used as baits for their simple *banowit*. The *kayakayat* is made of a square piece of cloth through which water can pass easily. Each corner of the piece of cloth used is tied with strings which are then tied to a piece of bamboo or water hyacinth that serves as float. This kind of simple fishing equipment is spread flat on the bottom of the water, usually along the lakeshore. Once it is spread flat, rice bran is dropped down the *kayakayat* to attract the shrimps. Today,

*kayakayat* is hardly used. Shrimps in the lake are almost extinct and hard to catch; besides, *katolong* can be used as bait for the *banowit*.

### Poison

In poison fishing, a mixture of poisonous plant leaves and roots are used. After certain leaves and roots of poisonous plants have been mixed together and pounded, the mixture is spread around a pond or enclosed fishing ground. It kills all fish that go up the surface to breath. One poison mixture is known as *tigaw* in Maranao. This was applied in a secluded area. *Tigaw* was never done in the lake due to the lake's being used for drinking, bathing, etc.. The poisoned fish have proven harmless to man; no death among the Maranaos have been reported as caused by the *tigaw*. But it is disadvantageous because it also kills all small fish in the area where the poison is applied.

Dynamite fishing is both a harmful to the fisherman using it and the small fish. Powder used in dynamite fishing is placed in a bottle (e.g., a soft drink bottle). A small straw-like wick (*sombowan*) is directly connected down the powder that causes it to burst when lighted. The wick is placed at the bottle head through the cork. When the wick is lighted, the dynamite is thrown quickly at a school of fish (*mboreng*) because if it burst in the hand it would cause serious injuries to the fisherman throwing it. Some experts on dynamite fishing do not throw it right away but time their throwing by some seconds to make sure the dynamite burst as soon as it goes down the school of fish. Dynamite fishing is less commonly used because it is illegal.

### Electrocution

Electrocution is a very recent fishing practice the Maranao fishermen have invented when electricity reached the Lanao Province. This has not gained popularity because it is risky. Some

## PUMBAYA : MARANAO FISHING/91

fishermen have already suffered from electrocution themselves. One fisherman in Tamparan connected his electric wire to the main electric line and dipped his steel wire in the water. He caught a fish but in a state of excitement he forgot to disconnect his electric wire from the main line or pull out the wire from the water and got in the water to catch the fish. Before he could catch the fish he was shocked by the strong current of the electricity. Fortunately his companions were able to save his life.

Besides the electric current, car battery (usually 12 volts) is used. An electric wire attached to a steel wire with handle wrapped in rubber is connected to the battery. The steel wire is dipped in the water to electrocute the fish. This is done along the river banks, creeks, canals and in the lake.

Dynamite and electrocution are not commonly used, not only because they destroy small fish, but more importantly because they are dangerous to the fishermen using them.

\*The bulk of this article is based on the author's actual experience and observation of Maranao fishermen in the Municipality of Tamparan on the eastern side of the lake, twenty-seven kilometers from Marawi City.

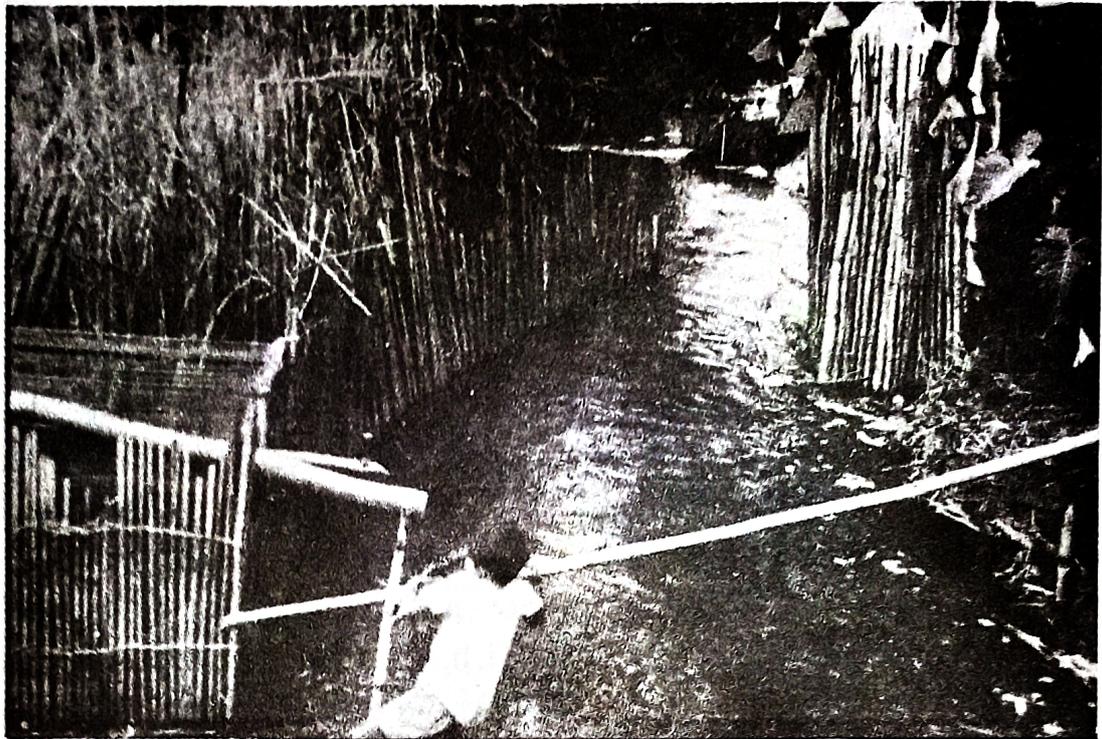


Fig. 1. Weirs (*sa 'idan* or *bonsodan*) built along the river banks.



Fig. 2. Small children enjoy catching fish with the *sabor* and a piece of cloth in the river.



Fig. 3. Mudfish, enmeshed in a set-net (*balabak*). The man behind the fisherman is a fish dealer who buys fish from the fishermen. He later brings the fish to the market to sell at a higher price.

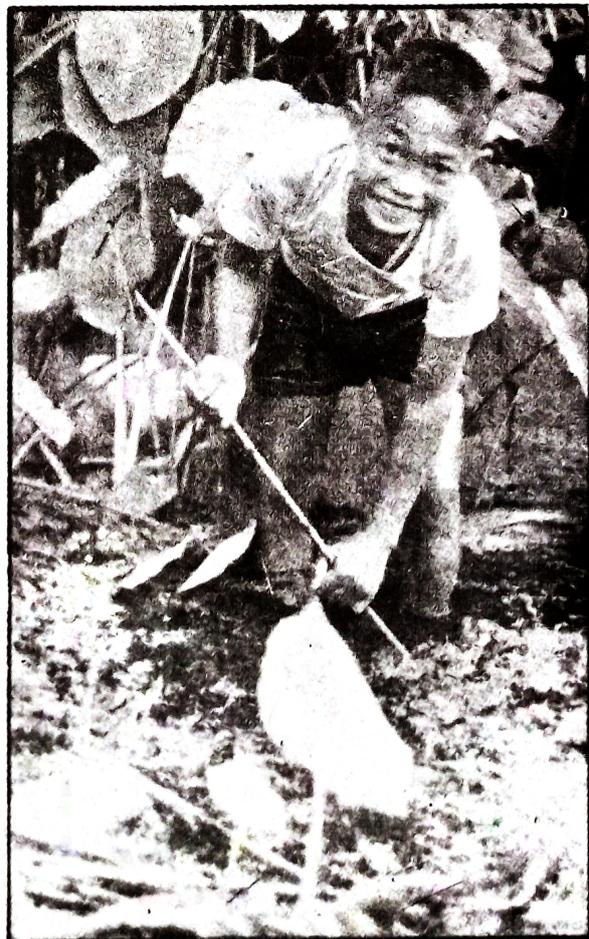


Fig. 4. A small boy sets his hook and line (*litag a raway*) in a canal along the lakeshore.

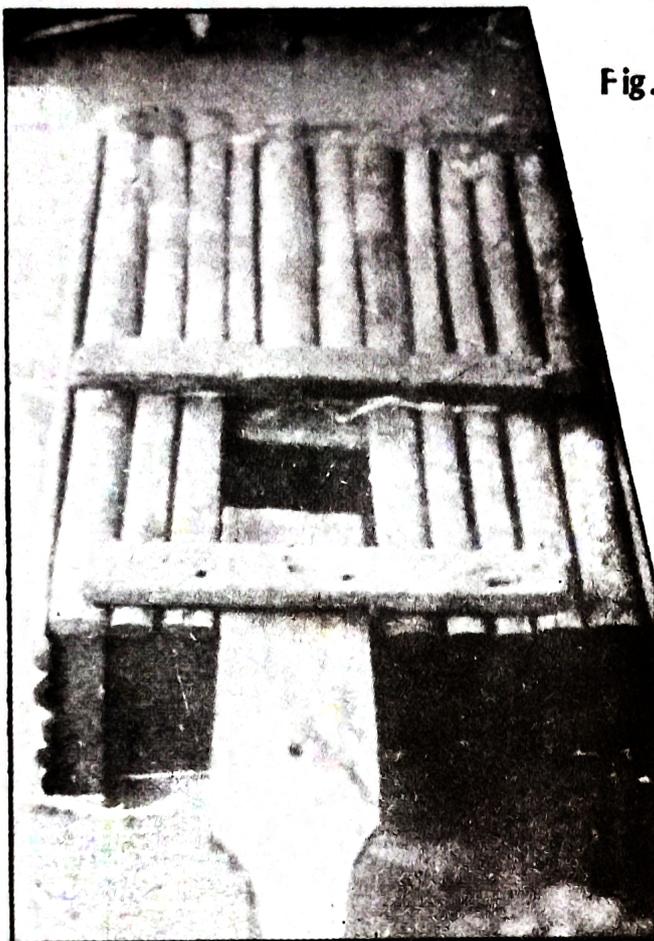


Fig. 5. When a fisherman catches only one or two mudfish, he places them in a bamboo aquarium (*ayama*) to wait for another catch before they are taken to the market.



Fig. 6. Fisherman on a boat (*awang*) checks his shrimp trap (*bo'o a tentang*).



Fig. 7. Spear gun ( *pana* or *tipara* ) ; the fisherman keeps himself afloat on a tire- interior.



Fig. 8. False channel ( *remo* or *tilba* ) amidst grasses along the lakeshore. The fisherman builds a fence at the trap's entrance.