

Singing fish of Batticaloa - It is no fiction, but fact

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Abstract

Batticaloa is famed for the Singing Fish and it is internationally known as the Land of the Singing Fish. Among them singing fish of Batticaloa was special in the sense that no one identified the creature making the noise so far. This unique attraction, the unusual sound – described by others as “the sweetest treble mingling with the lowest bass” and “the twanging in thirds of the G string on the violin”. There has been age-old controversies concerning the source of these sounds (like the tuning up of a string orchestra, with predominant basses) but none at all that they exist. The sounds are best heard from April to September; clearest on moonlight nights, waxing with the moon; and heard to best advantage with an ear placed against an oar thrust into the water from a boat in mid lagoon. They have been explained variously as caused by fish and shellfish, of various species or as caused by tides rushing through empty molluscs shells or fretted rocks in the lagoon bed. Another theory is that they come from the Topsail Catfish which congregates in great numbers in the lagoon during the appropriate periods. More than that hardly even a few local inhabitants are aware of this phenomena. There are several evidences in the past to say that this is a solid fact not a fiction. Among the local who were aware of this phenomenon was Swami Vipulananthar. It is acknowledged in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1967. Sir Emerson Tennant arrived in the then Ceylon in 1845 states: “distinctly heard the sounds and they came from water like the gently thrills of a music cord, or the faint vibration of a wine glass, when the rim is rub by a wet finger. It was not one sustained note but a multitude of sounds, each clear and distinct itself, the sweetest terrible mingling with the lowest bass.” Lord Holden Vide in his book “Ceylon” states “sure enough the music of “singing fish” could distinctly be heard below, it reminded me of the twanging in third of the G string of the violin.” One of Sri Lanka’s under water divers Rodney Jonklass unearthed various species of underwater livings, but the identities of the “singers” remain unknown. This paper reviews the various evidences collected from the literature available in Batticaloa and interviews conducted with the surviving eminent old people and fishermen of Batticaloa who listened the sound of singing fish in the Batticaloa Lagoon.

Key Words: Singing Fish, Mingling, Molluscs, Shellfish, Twanging, Basses, Orchestra