

TOPIC: TRADITIONAL FISHING

Investigator: Jovilisi T.

INTERVIEWED: Sanaila Nasegesege..... Teci, Yasawa.

SUBJECT: FISHING

- Could you talk to me about this type of fishing which you call it Ika Yasali or Hurricane Fish.

Thank-you. Ika Yasali or Hurrican Fish appear when a Hurrican or Cyclone hits Yasawa Islands, Lau or Kadavu or any other part of Fiji. This Hurricane Fish or Ika Yasali usually appear after one or two days after the cyclone and the people of Teci are waiting, prepared for the sign to appear. The first sign is when the sky gives a reddish colour after sunset or Teidamu and secondly the westerly breeze begins to blow across Teci Village. These two signs tells the people of Teci that the Ika Yasali or Hurricane Fish would appear on the next day. On that particular day, the men of Teci gather at a beach not far from the village called Oba. Fishing tasks are divided into four parts with four different Tokatoka to handle each task. First the Tokatoka-i-lawa positioned themselves on a high rock to act as SAU or to watch when the fish arrives. The second called Tokatoka Teci position themselves on a high rock opposite TOKATOKA-I-CAWA. These two rocks is the entrance to the

Cont'd Page 2

bay of Oba. The third Tokatoka which is called MUA-I-YATA performs a traditional role called MATA NI SAVA. The fourth group includes everybody in the village apart from the three Tokatoka. This group arrives at a beach called YAROYARO and prepare traditional net made of coconut leaves and vine called RAU and carry them to Oba beach. This type of fishing called IKA YASALI is performed only by men and young boys, no women allowed. When everybody arrives on Oba beach, they respect the place and no one is allowed to roam around the place or to make noise. Everyone is gathered under a TIVI tree and awaiting orders. One interesting feature about this fishing is every men should be naked while waiting for the fish to arrive. The TOKATOKA CAVA and TECI who acts as SAU will give orders. The TOKATOKA MUA-I-YATA will perform the MATA-I-SAVA. That is by presenting a bunch of coconut that has been felled by the hurricane or taken from the tree in one bunch. Before the ceremony, they dressed themselves with leaves and present the bunch of coconut to the MATA-NI-SAVA. This MATA NI SAVA is a hollowed tree with which they believe two goddess lived. These two goddess when approached during the ceremony gives special power to the men of Teci. This power enables them to catch the fish without using spears, nets and fishing line but by just getting the

Cont'd Page 3

fish by their hands to the beach without hurting them. The fish usually arrives in groups. While the men are waiting, naked, on the beach TOKATOKA CAWA will give orders. They are the firsts to notice the fish, but while waiting on the rock, they show respect by sitting silently and not moving about despite the heat of the sun. TOKATOKA CAWA will stand when they see a group of fish approaching the entrance of the bay. A great shout by Tokatoka Cawa alerts everyone on that beach a group of fish is coming. They will escort the fish from the entrance to the beach where all the people waiting. TOKATOKA TECI will shout also in reply to the one made by TOKATOKA CAWA. The group of fish will be escorted also by two or three sharks to act as guards. When the fish is surrounded by the RAU and dragged ashore, part of the RAU will be lifted upwards to make way for the sharks to get out. The sharks will wait for another group of fish to come and they would guard them to the beach so that no one escapes. When the fish reaches the beach after being surrounded, no one is allowed to use spear, sticks or knives, all we have to do is to sit down and collect the fish with your hands and carry them ashore. One group of fish usually numbered one thousand or more and we can imagine how long will it take to carry all the fish with your hands ashore. It is a great task to complete one or two groups of fish in one day and if it happens to get dark, the MATA NI SAWA will be approached again in the same manner and asked to stop the fish from coming until the next day.

Cont'd Page 4

On the next day, everything done will be similar to the ones done on the first day. Every TOKATOKA knows his role and are performed accordingly. When the fish arrives and refuses to come to the beach, they'll know that something is wrong with the MATA-NI-SAVA. Tokatoka MUA-I-YATA will again approach the MATA-NI-SAVA in the usual manner. The way we surround the fish is similar to ones done in a traditional fish drive but the only difference is that in the fish drive or YARA RAU, the coconut leaves or RAU surrounded the group of fish three or four times to make sure no fish escapes. In the IKA YASALI fishing, the coconut leaves surround the group of fish once and there are gaps for fish to escape but they couldn't cause they are said to be in a state of shock due to the hurricane. On the first day of fishing, the first group of fish to appear are called TIVITIVI or butterfly fish and it has become a tradition that this type of fish always leads other fish. When all the TIVITIVI has been taken ashore, two men are chosen to collect and carry the fish to the village. Before entering the village, they will come by way of a small hill not far from the village. There is a coconut palm on top this hill called NIU kei LELE and they will shout on top of their voice to inform the women and children in the village that the first fish TIVITIVI is on the way. In the olden days, they termed this as TITI which means the first fish.

Cont'd Page 5

Reaching the village, there is a special ground or place for the men to leave the fish and not directly to the TUI TECI, the name of the place is called MANA. This is the sharing place of the TITI and it is done by the MATA NI VANUA or Village Heralds. Some are taken to TOKATOKA CAWA and some to TOKATOKA MUA-I-YATA and the rest shared to other homes in the village including the Tui Teci.

Each house in the village have got a place called NAI BARA NI IKA or place to dry fish by means of fire.

Back at Oba beach fish began to pour in groups and I've just said a group consists of thousand or more fish. Everyone taking part in the fishing should be naked and nothing else should be on their bodies. The belief is that, these two goddess at Mata-ni-Sava wants to enjoy looking at the mens private parts in broad day light and the taboo is that while the fishing is in progress no one is allowed to poke someone else's arse or to touch others private parts. If you betray the taboo, you'll get hurt instantly by the fish. The fishing can continue for days provided they follow and perform the ceremonies well. People will come as far as TAMUSUA and YASAWA-I-RARA villages to get fish from Teci and take with them what they could carry but there are still plenty of fish on Oba beach, houses in Teci will fill their RARA NI IKA or fish drier with fish until there is no more room for anymore fish will be left outside to be fed to dogs and pigs. The fishing will end when the last group of fish called IKA YALEWA arrives

and it has become a tradition that these group of fish ends the IKA YASALI or Hurricane Fish. If this group of fish does not occur, they will continue fishing for days or weeks until the IKA YALEWA arrives. There will be no more IKA YASALI until the next hurricane or cyclone arrives.

- Your story was very interesting and I heard you said Mata-ni-Sava. Could you explain more about Mata-ni-Sava?

Mata-ni-Sava is a sacred place and it is the word that clearly describes the solemn ceremony of respect and the traditional rites about this type of fishing. It has been done in the olden days and it is still practiced today.

- I also heard that you were saying the 'CALA NI MATA NI SAVA' or if there is anything wrong with the Mata ni Sava.

This is when the TOKATOKA MUA-I-YATA does not follow the right or traditional way to approach the Mata-ni-Sava.

If they don't say the right words or dress in the traditional way and the presentation of the bunch of coconut, the fish would behave in such a manner that they refuse to come to the beach.

THANK-YOU.