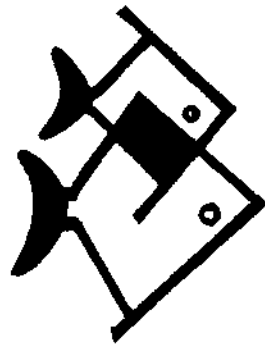


INDIAN FISHERIES

1947 - 1977



**ISSUED ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH SESSION OF
THE INDIAN OCEAN FISHERY COMMISSION HELD AT COCHIN FROM
19TH TO 26TH OCTOBER, 1977**

introduction

Fish occupies an important place in the Indian mythology, history and tradition. According to mythology, one of the incarnations of God was in the form of fish ("Matsyavathara"). Profuse references to fish are found in the great epics of the country, in the stone carvings and paintings. Historically, reference to fish, its trade and fisher community are found in the Songs of the Sangam Age (1st to 4th Century A.D.) and in the diaries and records of travellers to India like Pliny and the anonymous author of the "Periplus of the Erythraen Sea" early in the first century A.D. Records also show that in the 18th century salt-fish trade flourished along the western coast of India. Traditionally, fishing has been the principal avocation for the livelihood of a segment of the population living in the coastal region, and on the banks of rivers, lakes and canals.

Despite its distinct tradition and significant trade, fisheries of the country received scant attention in the last century as well as in the first half of the current century, when the rest of the world marched ahead

with its development. The important event that took place in the history of Fisheries of India in the 19th century was the enactment of "Indian Fisheries Act" in 1897. This Act delegated the States (erstwhile Provinces), the responsibility of development and conservation of fisheries in the inland and territorial waters of the respective States. It also empowered the States to formulate their own rules/laws for the safeguard of the fishery. Further, the Act provided certain conservational measures to prevent the destruction of the resources. Thus, the development, management and conservation of fisheries became principally a state subject. However, the fisheries of the country remained in a dormant state throughout this period.

Nevertheless, early naturalists like Hamilton-Buchanan, Sykes, Jerdon, Gunther, Day, Alcock, Anderson and others who worked on the Indian aquatic fauna made valuable contributions on the systematics, distribution and bionomics of the fresh water and marine fishes of the country. Subsequent works

by Hora, Misra, Trewaves, and others have added considerably to the knowledge of the ichthyofauna of the country. The fisheries research which was included as a subject in the concurrent list, was rather unorganised and diffused except for certain notable contributions by Day, Nicholson, Hornell, Hora, and Setna.

Concerted efforts for the development of the fisheries of the country were initiated only when we became independent in 1947. Immediately steps were taken for organised research and development with the establishment of the Central Fisheries Research Institutes for marine and inland fisheries, the Deep Sea Fishing Station, and subsequently, the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology. The Five Year Plans initiated to strengthen the foundation of economic and social structure, and to stimulate industrial, economic, scientific and technical advances, began to cater to specific needs of the development of fisheries of the country, and thereafter, the Indian Fisheries showed a progressive development.

During the first two Five Year Plans, emphasis on the marine fisheries sector was on the mechanisation of indigenous crafts, introduction of mechanised fishing boats, improvements of fishing gears, establishment of infrastructure facilities such as processing plants, ice plants, cold storages, and landing and berthing facilities. These programmes, backed by the discovery of rich fishing grounds in the inshore waters, paved the way for the establishment of a seafood export industry. In the inland fisheries sector, prospects of culture of freshwater fishes, spawn and fry production received greater attention.

In the subsequent Plan periods, the above programmes were continued with greater emphasis on introduction of mechanised fishing boats and adoption of synthetic materials for the fishing gears, establishment of facilities such as landing and berthing of boats, processing, transportation and marketing. Research on various aspects of marine fisheries and exploration of their resources were intensified. Increasing demand for fish and fishery products in the foreign markets gave a fillip for the export trade. During the Fourth Five Year Plan period a beginning was made in deep-sea fishing through import of trawlers as well as their indigenous construction. A breakthrough in inland fish culture was achieved by the

successful development of induced breeding and rearing techniques as well as improved methods of spawn and fry collections.

The programmes of the Fifth Five Year Plan gave further impetus to the development of the Indian fisheries, which stressed on an increased production of fish to meet the protein requirement in the Indian diet; improvement of socio-economic conditions of fishermen; and realisation of enhanced foreign exchange earnings through the export of selected marine products. Greater priority has been given for an integrated development aimed at a balanced progress of all the sectors of marine fisheries. With the declaration of an Exclusive Economic Zone of 200 miles in 1976, the programmes relating to deep-sea fishing and provision of necessary infrastructural facilities are intensified. Extension of fishing to under- and unexploited areas, diversification of fishing and fishery products, and improvement of traditional fisheries are the other core programmes of developmental strategy taken up during the period. Research and exploratory surveys on marine fishery resources are stepped up. Development of technologies of culture of selected varieties of fishes, prawns, shell fishes and seaweeds of commercial importance has formed an important activity of marine fishery research. In the inland fishery sector, projects on freshwater fish culture, composite fish culture, culture of air breathing fishes, frogs, etc. form the main activities. On the developmental side, intensive culture is being widely propagated through the formation of Fish Farmers Development Agencies and establishment of seed production centres. Simultaneously the fishing industry of the country backed by progressive increase of export of marine products has also shown considerable expansion. A number of ancillary industries such as boat building, net making, marine diesel engine manufacture, etc. are also established. The developmental measures taken up during 1947-77 thus helped the country to build up a modern fishing industry with a significant role to play in the country's economy.

India is ranked at present seventh among the fishing nations of the world as far as fish production is concerned. It is estimated that about fortyfive per cent of the total fish production in the Indian Ocean is by India. The country has a coastline of about 6500 km and an inland freshwater spread of 1.6 million hectares of impounded culturable area excluding

riverine sources. However, India is considerably behind in per capita production and consumption of fish. The current level of availability of fish for the entire population is only 4.13 kg per capita per annum, as compared to 14.9 kg in the United States of America and 20.9 kg for the United Kingdom. The national income from fisheries, as assessed by the Central Statistical Organisation is of the order of Rs. 3,610 million out of the total national income from Agriculture estimated at Rs. 2,74,760 million.

The achievements registered in the fish production from a level of 0.75 million tonnes to 2.3 million tonnes

and the export earning through marine products from Rs. 25.6 million to Rs. 2,000 million during the last 25 years, is highly significant. However, when compared to the vast resources potential, it should be possible to raise substantially the level of production and export earnings. The National Commission on Agriculture has estimated that the fish production of the country could be stepped up to 8 million tonnes in the next twenty five years.

This document on "Indian Fisheries" endeavours to review briefly the progress of fisheries and cognate aspects during the last thirty years.