

Trout farming suffers in Arunachal with no private takers

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ITANAGAR, Jan 27: Four years back, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during his maiden visit to Arunachal Pradesh was served Trout fish specially brought from Twang and he liked it so much that he asked the then chief minister Dorjee Khando to go for its commercial culture.

However, the prohibitive expense involved in rearing the fish have proved to be hurdle. Whatever amount of Trout is farmed, it is done at the government level only.

Trout is a cold water fish which ideally survives in temperature ranging from below freezing point to as high as 20 degrees Celsius, which is the reason why its cultivation has been restricted to Twang and West Kameng districts.

The first attempts to bring brown trout eyed-eggs from England to India were made by F J Mitchell in 1899 and 1900. They came from Howeiton in Scotland and the eggs were successfully hatched in a small trout hatchery at Harwan in Kashmir. The first batch of eggs was obtained from the stock which had been produced from the Scottish eggs. This was the beginning of the spread of brown trout in the Himalayas and elsewhere.

Mitchell also succeeded in bringing and successfully rearing the steelhead strain of rainbow trout from England. Of the two species of trout, brown has become domesticated in culture systems, streams and lakes.

The rainbow trout, however, has remained confined to pond culture and is not established in streams and rivers of the Indian Himalayas. The first organised farming of the fish started in 1967-68 when a government farm along with a hatchery came up along the stream of Nuranang at an altitude of 12,000 feet in Tawang district bordering China.

For the purpose, Brown Trout seedlings were imported from Jammu and

Kashmir.

Five years later after the success story of Trout farming at Nuranang, the state's fishery department set up the second hatchery at Shergaon in West Kameng district situated at a height of 8000 feet.

Two others came up, one at Samteng (West Kameng) and another at Tawang for the culture of the Brown and the Rainbow Trout imported all the way from Himachal Pradesh.

'These hilly districts with low temperature regime offer tremendous scope for trout farming. The species of trout available in the state are considered as high value food,' D Das, deputy director of fisheries, said.

'Brooders are collected from the rivers and kept in the four hatcheries and after incubation, the fingerlings are released in river stretches. Each hatchery has a production capacity of 50,000 to one lakh of eyed ova and the incubation period ranges between 90-120 days (breeding season during October to January),' Das revealed.

The trout fish takes at least three years to mature. The average weight of a matured Trout is less than a kilogramme.

The average annual production of Trout in Tawang and West Kameng districts are little above three tonnes. The price of the fish varies between Rs 500 and Rs 600 per kg as per the approved government rate in the state.

A recent survey revealed that inadequate managerial practices, degraded environment, lack of infrastructure, lack of high quality feeds and awareness are some factors responsible for trout culture not finding its foot in the state.

The survey was conducted by the fisheries specialist from Krishi Vigyan Kendra, West Kameng. Scientists from Directorate of Coldwater Fisheries Research (ICAR), Bhimtal and personnel from the state fishery department.

Commercialisation of Trout culture is a costly affair

as Trout feed is not available in the Northeast and needs to be purchased from either Jammu and Kashmir or Himachal Pradesh.

Moreover, the population of Tawang and West Kameng districts are Buddhists and they are linked to beliefs against catching fish from rivers and rearing fish in natural lakes and streams as they treat water as sacred, Das said.

'Ninty per cent population of Tawang and West Kameng never opted for Trout culture and they are even not allowing the department to release seedlings to over 100 natural lakes which remained untapped in Tawang district,' Das said.

Despite this handicap, the department has started Trout farming in five to six such lakes at Tawang. He said that the National Fishery Development Board has agreed to provide fund for the establishment of mini feed projects for Trout, but the department so far had not submitted any proposal due to lack of private entrepreneurs to take up Trout farming.

Das regretted the fact that all the fish produced had to be sold in the state only though the fish had high demand outside Arunachal Pradesh. 'We are motivating farmers but very few are keen. Unless and until private participation comes up, no large-scale production of Trout is possible in the state,' he said.

During 2011-12, three new lakes Sela-I covering an area of 14 hectares located at an altitude of 4,191 meters, Sela-II with an area of one hectare (4,150 meters) and P Tso with an area of five hectares (3,923) have been taken up by the department at Tawang for releasing Trout fingerlings.

For want of annual harvesting, the fish are dying in some lakes, especially Khalamta Lake near Bumla, the last Indian post, according to James Nabum, district fishery development officer of Tawang.