
CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO



Vol. III

DECEMBER 1934

p. 227

Inland Fisheries in India.

THE *Statesman* of Calcutta recently published a series of short articles on "Fisheries of the Punjab" contributed by a correspondent. These articles disclose an inside knowledge of the working of the Department of Fisheries in the Punjab, and raise certain problems of such fundamental importance in regard to its administration and scientific aspects, that we think it necessary in the interests of the fishing industry to invite public attention to them.

Some twenty years ago when the Punjab Government organised the Fisheries Department, Mr. G. C. L. Howell, I.C.S., was placed in charge of its destinies. This appointment was in general conformity with the doctrine which all the governments used fondly to entertain (on the basis of the principles of facultative psychology), that a member of Civil Service is good enough for every conceivable branch of administration. The reason why a civilian is not appointed as head of the Cavendish Laboratory may, however, be found in the fact that it is not an earning department and its output is not immediately taxable. But in all industrial concerns where a deep scientific knowledge and technical training are indispensable for efficient and successful management of their affairs, Government assumes that the administrative experience of its officers is more than their equivalent. It is true that the general administrative officers possess alertness of mind, a comprehensive vision, tact, ability and application, but neither any one of these qualities

nor all of them together will avail in the management of departments in which an intensive scientific training, technical experience, acquaintance with the methods of research and ability to initiate original investigations are required for making the concern a remunerative one; knowledge of revenue collection and of the penal code must, at all times, be a poor substitute for these qualities. The administrative duties in the fishery and agricultural departments are considerable and responsible, and it seems to us that the head of such departments must also be a research worker himself so as to be able to guide the laboratory work of his assistants, to assess their results and suggest problems for fresh investigations. Moreover, the administrative functions of scientific departments are not identical with those of the general branches of government, and a blank mind, which is not often the supreme qualification of even a judicial officer, can never be an equipment for scientific posts. The prevailing practice of appointing civil officers as heads of technical and scientific departments is due to the fact that Government, which expends money on their organisation, desires to control their output, and no one is more competent to advise Government on the subject of prices and taxation than its civil servants. An industry, whose scientific problems are subjected to considerations of prices and taxation, must ultimately become as inefficient as an industry that has no scientific problems. An industry without a civilian head to control its affairs is as blessed as a country which has no history.

The correspondent of the *Statesman* suggests in the concluding portion of his contribution that the research work on Fisheries in the Punjab should be closed down "until such time as adequate funds are available to place it on a proper footing, with a pisciculturist from Europe or America at its head". This is just the kind of advice that a civilian administrator of scientific departments would, in a spirit of despair, tender to the government when its financial resources might temporarily be dislocated; but the viewpoint of a scientist would precisely be the opposite. A time of economic depression is manifestly the psychological moment for the display of financial courage and technical skill, for if the lines of scientific investigation in the government industrial departments have been carefully planned with reference to the experimental and other environmental conditions,

then it would be realised that the only protection against depression is more research. If the major industries such as agriculture,—and under their category we would also include pisciculture,—are ultimately to be depended upon for the restoration of financial stability, then the suggestion for the curtailment of research, even as a provisional measure, would appear to be fatal to the best interests of government. We have had occasion (*Curr. Sci.*, Oct. 1933) to comment on the subject of research on Fishery work while reviewing Mr. Sorley's report on the Marine Fisheries of the Bombay Presidency, and we would repeat once more that if research work is entrusted to competent persons, then government will find it profitable to invest more funds in its promotion. The prosperity of any industrial organisation must depend upon continuous and anticipatory scientific research, and industrial prosperity implies the financial stability of government. In the existing scheme of competitive internationalism, the advocacy of the policy of closing down research departments of government industries, such as is advocated by the correspondent of the *Statesman* and Mr. Sorley, can only be accepted on the responsibility of placing the country in a state of perpetual dependence on foreign products.

The second proposal made by the correspondent, viz., that a European or an American pisciculturist ought to be appointed as head of the fisheries department in the Punjab betrays his ignorance on the subject of fisheries research in India. An American or European pisciculturist may be a very eminent scientist in his own country, but in the widely different conditions prevailing in the tropics, he will generally find that he has to unlearn a great part of his training and experience before he can understand the complicated

situation arising from the vagaries of the dry Indian climate, the rainfalls which obey no known law, the little understood habits of fishes which still have to be studied more intimately, the diverse customs and practices of the country, the nature of the rivers and tanks and the uses made of their waters for irrigational purposes. In the case of all appointments of foreign scientists, a more or less prolonged period of self-education in the complicated and unfamiliar local conditions must necessarily precede the acquisition of anything like a clear grasp of the situation and the nature of Indian problems. If these scientists are really capable men, they may begin to gather experience of fishery work in the tropics during the probationary period and start on some useful lines of scientific investigation, otherwise they drift into the administrative branches of their department. In fact, it has been a singular misfortune of the Fishery Researches in India that, after Francis Day, persons, without competent knowledge and experience of the peculiar local conditions, have been appointed in most of the provinces, with the result that their efforts have been always unsatisfactory. So far in the Punjab there have been two directors of the department, but neither of them could claim to possess any scientific training or previous experience of fishery work, and accordingly they attended only to the administrative aspect of their work to the detriment of the more important side of scientific enquiries. The department needs the scientific atmosphere and inspiration for the junior workers, and they can be provided only by the unbounded zeal of the head of the department who must be an intrepid research worker himself.

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