

CORRESPONDENCE

Massacre of mahseer fish

On 26 May 1996, tragedy struck the congregation of mahseer fishes at Shishila near Sulya, a small village in Chikmagalur district, Karnataka. The entire lot of fish, all mahseers, zealously guarded and protected by the local villagers in the river Kapila flowing by the side of Sheshileshwara temple was poisoned by fishermen with severe toxic compounds, killed mercilessly and thus made unfit for any purpose. The reason was that being a protected place, a temple sanctuary, where fishing has

been strictly prohibited from 1938, the villagers reprimanded four fishermen for fishing illegally in the night. The fishermen in turn, wrought destruction on the fishes.

It had been my good fortune to visit the same spot in April 1996 in connection with my project on mahseer fishes and I had observed several of them, adult ones swimming merrily.

In many river stretches where a temple or a religious site is located, mahseer fishes are in congregation.

They come to the surface and are fed with puffed rice by pilgrims. The rivers have been stocked with fries and fingerlings by the Karnataka State Fishery department, having obtained them from the fish farm of the Tata Electric Company at Lonavala where artificial hatching and breeding of mahseer fishes are in vogue.

Such river sanctuaries for mahseers exist on the Thunga river at Chiplagudde near Teertahalli (Shimoga district), Sringeri and on the Cauvery at Ramanathapura (Hassan district). Almost all the fishes are the common *Tor khudree* Sykes, though the endangered *Tor mussullah* Sykes is also reported to be present.

This tragedy highlights the socio-economic compulsions of the end users who are fishermen and villagers, whose livelihood and sustenance should be kept in view. A regulated exploitation may serve both ends of compensation and conservation. This matter was extensively reported by Dinesh Patvardhan in the Kannada magazine *Sudha* in the 30 June 1996 issue.

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Lateral view of *Tor khudree* from Shishila (standard length = 350).