

Kashmir: The Angler's Paradise

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Now a days, in Western countries, Kashmir is famous by the name “the anglers’ paradise” because the valley is gifted with crystal-clear cold-water streams, enormous springs, many high-altitude lakes, lofty snow-covered mountains, thick forests of pine and cedar trees, amazing green meadows, beautiful valleys and an excellent fish fauna with a delightful and healthy climate. Thus, making the region a perfect place for sport or recreational fishing activities. Sport fisheries or Angling means catching the fish with a hook attached to a rod. Usually, Angling is famous in Western countries for recreational purposes. The favouring waters of Kashmir valley offer great scope for sport fisheries. That is why anglers worldwide come here yearly to enjoy the thrill and excitement of angling in the snow-fed streams and lakes. Fisheries, in terms of its value, is an important industrial sector for a state like Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir, one of the few places on earth, earns considerable foreign exchange money through tourism, including fishing. Sport fishing satisfies diverse tastes and pursuits. It is a source of recreation for thousands of tourists. Angling has already become a source of entertainment for people of all ages and socioeconomic strata in different countries. Like any

other recreation, family fishing must be geared to provide a pleasant experience to members of both sexes and widely varying ages. Besides, the different elements of importance in sport fishing are natural environments, water quality, natural beauty, privacy etc., increasing the number of people fishing. The history of the introduction of trout fish into the Kashmir valley is an interesting one. The first trout eggs were introduced about a hundred years ago from Scotland. And the man behind this success was a redoubtable angler, an owner of the carpet factory Frank J Mitchel. Later on, due to heavy floods, the fingerlings raised in primitive rearing houses were released automatically in natural water bodies. Since then, the essential trout fisheries have metamorphosed into a vital industry sector of the state of J&K. Trout has made Kashmir one of the world's major angling destinations. Tourists from all over the world now come to the valley to catch the fish. The Sindh, Lidder, Kokernag, Verinag, Sukhnag, and Daksum streams offer the finest fish anywhere in the world. A few high-altitude lakes like Krishansar, Vishansar also carry plenty of brown (*Salmo trutta fario*) and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). One has to track to reach these two lakes. The anglers come from Russia, Germany, Britain, Japan, Holland, Canada, Oman, Dubai, and other Gulf countries. The angling season remains for six months, from April to September.



Although the state has great potential for sport fisheries, the number of angling tourists currently exceeds 1500. There are around 175 boats, each accommodating two anglers a day; the state can host 300 anglers a day. So, in 6 months of angling season, the number can go up to 30,000. It is currently woeful short of the figure.



The natural attraction of trout in the valley is in the wild, in the numerous snow-fed freshwater streams. Unfortunately, the trout catch is declining due to combining effects of pollution, human intervention and climate change. Catch per unit effort has decreased over the years. The ecological disintegration in their habitats due to lifting pebbles, boulders and stones from the stream beds illegally has affected their population over the years. Heavy deforestation in forests has caused sedimentation in trout streams, damaging their habitats. Trout need cobble and boulders and crystal-clear water. Sedimentation changes this and turns water muddy. Constructions close to the banks of snow-fed streams like Sindh, Lidder and Ferozpora drastically affect trout fisheries. The impact of climate change, as yet poorly understood in the



region, is an additional threat. Causing water levels in Kashmir rivers to fluctuate alarmingly, from floods to low flow, due to which the trout habitat is in danger.

Issuing of fishing licence by the state fisheries department is another task. It should be cleared off immediately whenever the angler needs consent for game fishing so that the department can simultaneously encourage the participants and gain revenue from the state. Lastly, enforcement of fish laws should be carried out to prevent illegal trout fishing. This also calls for building proper infrastructure in the state by adequately training Fisheries Department officials in enforcing various conservation measures. The department can promote trout angling at tourist destinations over a confined area by offering considerable rates, especially for the local people of the state. So, they also get attracted and enjoy the trip with their family members. To develop tourism in the state, it is necessary to promote sport fishery so that anglers can be attracted. This will add to the source of indirect income for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Considerable efforts will have to make in this direction.