

# Celebrating India's Riverine Fisheries on the World Fisheries Day

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**Above: Women fishing in small pools near (■■■■■■■ ■■■■) Sadiya Ghat on (■■■■■■■) Lohit and Dibang Rivers. Women use several gear, baskets and nets to catch fish from the slush. The activity is accompanied by laughter, chatter and songs.**

## Photo

: **Author** 21<sup>st</sup> November is celebrated as World Fisheries Day. Since the past few years we have been trying to highlight the significance and richness of India's riverine fisheries which support over 10 million people by providing livelihoods and nutritional security. Ironically, although India is the world's biggest inland fish producer, our riverine fisheries are woefully neglected. We do not have a record of riverine fish catch and its trends, people dependent on riverine fishing, species of fish and their population trends, etc. Interventions like dams, water abstraction and pollution have severely affected riverine fisheries, which do not find a place in the dominant water management narrative. This does not dampen the scale, diversity and the beauty of riverine fisheries and fishing communities in India. And so, this World Fisheries Day, we try to put together a photo journey looking at some fish-rich rivers and some remarkable fishing communities in the country. We would be grateful if you could share information riverine/freshwater fisheries from your region. Riverine fisheries are special. They not only support vulnerable communities and contribute to food sovereignty of far-flung places, but are the true ambassadors of healthy and living rivers. **Happy World Fisheries Day (belated!) -- (All pictures by Author)**

*Above: Ladies off for fishing in a tributary of Tengapani River in Arunachal Pradesh*

**Above: Local market in Kameng Basin.**

**Endangered Tor Putitora or Golden Mahseer forms a part of the village catch!**

**Above: A young tribal man fishing in the Lohit River at Parsuram Kund. The site for 1750 MW Lower Demwe Dam is just one kilometer upstream from here. When the dam is commissioned, water level fluctuations here at Parshuram Kund would be nearly 5 feet every single day in lean season. Impact of the dam on the fish in Lohit would be disastrous. Lohit River Basin has more than 12 dams under various stages of sanctioning.**

*Above*

: *Lady with her quick catch at Alubari Ghat on the Lohit River in Arunachal Pradesh. Several catches like these throughout the day help her with her livelihood and protein security.*

*Above and below: A small fishing hut on the Nizamghat where River Dibang enters the plains, Arunachal Pradesh. Two fishermen stay here for four months. This incidentally is also a tiger territory. Catch includes Trout, occasional Mahseer, Labeo species, etc. It takes several hours to reach Roing, the nearest town, from Nizamghat. Fish is taken on bicycles across a vast fan of Dibang, Idu Mishmi villages, orange plantations, dense forests and steep hills.*

*The fishermen living here are isolated from the world. Kamlesh told us that he has encountered tigers (not rare at Nizamghat) and Himalayan Bears from his small makeshift tent. If the 3000 MW Dibang Multipurpose project is commissioned, it will be just 10-14 kms upstream from here and water level fluctuations, twice daily in winter season would be about 10 feet in Nizam Ghat!*

**Above: Fishing gear affixed to rocks in the Dibang basin, much downstream of Nizamghat**

*Above*

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Adi Tribals collecting Koroi Puk, an insect in the Siang Riverbed at Pasighat where the mighty Siang reaches the plains in Arunachal Pradesh. Koroi Puk is a much sought after delicacy and Siang river bed here and in the downstream D'Ering Sanctuary is teeming with men, women and children tenaciously peering under pebbles for the insect. However, this site is also just 12-14 kms downstream the dam axis of the proposed 2700 MW Lower Siang HEP. Hydropeaking from the Lower Siang and upstream Siang projects (45 Dams!) will lead to level fluctuations [more than 24 feet in a day here!](#) These people are right in the middle of the vast river bed, and the scale of danger can be imagined. The Siang Basin Cumulative Impact Assessment does not include any credible account of these uses of the river.

**Above: Women collecting fish near Sadiya Ghat on Lohit. Small fish pools are inseparable from rice fields here. Water Hyacinth is specifically grown to lure and trap fish. Women use several gear, baskets and nets to catch fish from the slush. The activity is accompanied by laughter, chatter and songs. Above: Fishing at Sadiya Ghat across Lohit-Dibang. Dolphin Sightings are common here.**

*Above and below: Maguri Beel: rich in birds, wildlife like water buffaloes and fish! The entire Beel, near the Dibru Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve is teeming with fish and fisher communities. Various fishing gears are used here.*

*Above: Different fishing practices in tributaries of Burhi Dihing. Most of the fish is for domestic consumption and only the left over is sold.*

*Above and below*

: *Guijan Ghat near Dibru Saikhowa Reserve, where Lohit, Dibang and Siang meet and form the Brahmaputra Trijunction, is a small but significant fish market. A bustling fish auction takes place here in the early mornings where fisher folk hurry in with their catches. They invariably reach the ghat in small boats. The catch is auctioned in a frenzy and the retailer then hurries away to sell the catch in markets of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and further.*

*Catch has a great variety, I could see Golden Mahseer too. On the ghat, just behind the auction site, Dolphins glide and dive gracefully in the Lohit. Some glimpses from the auction below.*

*.. Below: Boats in the Bhagirathi, fed by water diverted by Farakka Barrage, West Bengal*

[Below](#): Lone Ilish (Hilsa) caught, which was hurriedly taken over by the agent. The fisherfolk gets about 100 Rs while the agent will sell it for about 400 Rs. Farakka Barrage has single handedly destroyed Hilsa fisheries in the Ganga and Padma in West Bengal

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Western Ghats

**Above**: Fishing at the Vashishthi Estuary. Vashishthi is a west flowing river in Maharashtra Western Ghats. Fish population here has collapsed following pollution from Lote Parshuram Chemical Industries and water releases from Koyna HEP Above: Mussel (Bivalve) Collection in one of Western Ghat River Estuaries

Above: Temple Fish Sanctuary at Kumardhara River (Nethravati River Basin, Karnataka Western Ghats), protecting Deccan Mahseer. This place is threatened by a string of mini hydel projects in the upstream and downstream

**Above and below**

: Meager Fish Catch from Shastri Estuary, Maharashtra is the key to nutritional security of their families

Below

: Kadar tribesman fishing in the Chalakudy River in Kerala Western Ghats, just downstream the site of the proposed 163 MW Athirapally Hydropower Project. Chalakudy is an extremely fish rich river and its last flowing refuge will be destroyed by the HEP Although much-ravaged, riverine fisheries and fishing communities are still thriving at many places across the country. The rivers or fisher-folks or the fish receive no special attention or protection. On the contrary dam projects do not even consider their impacts on fisheries, nor any compensation for the affected families. There is a need to get together to acknowledge, understand and conserve the beautiful riverine fisheries of India...Let us hope we stand up to the challenge.

(All photos by author)

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