



India's Fisheries at a New High: The Rising Power of Inland Fish Production

**Siddharth Kumar Jatav
Pragya Mehta
Varun Mishra, Ranju Kumari**

Assistant Professor, Department
of Fisheries Science, Narayan
Institute of Agricultural
sciences, Gopal Narayan Singh
University, Jamuhar, Rohtas,
Bihar



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*Corresponding Author
Siddharth Kumar Jatav*

Article History

Received: 09.09.2026

Revised: 14.09.2026

Accepted: 19.09.2026

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INTRODUCTION

India's relationship with fish is deeply connected with its rivers, wetlands, reservoirs, ponds and coastal ecosystems. For generations, fishing communities have depended on aquatic resources for food, employment and income. From traditional fishing in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins to scientifically managed carp farms and modern intensive aquaculture systems, Indian fisheries have undergone a remarkable transformation. Today, the fisheries sector encompasses inland capture fisheries, freshwater aquaculture, reservoir and wetland fisheries, marine fisheries, brackish-water aquaculture, cage culture, integrated fish farming and export-oriented shrimp aquaculture. The scale of this transformation is remarkable. India's total fish production increased from only **7.52 lakh tonnes in 1950–51 to 197.75 lakh tonnes during 2024–25 (provisional)**, representing more than a 26-fold increase over seven decades (Department of Fisheries, 2026). Of the total production, **151.60 lakh tonnes (76.66%) came from inland fisheries and aquaculture**, while marine fisheries contributed **46.15 lakh tonnes (23.34%)** (Department of Fisheries, 2026). This clearly demonstrates the increasing importance of inland fisheries and aquaculture in India's fisheries economy.

Inland Fisheries: The Backbone of Production

India possesses enormous inland aquatic resources, including rivers, canals, reservoirs, lakes, ponds, tanks and floodplain wetlands. These resources support both capture fisheries and aquaculture and provide livelihoods to millions of people. Indian inland fisheries include riverine, reservoir, lake and floodplain fisheries, as well as pond-based aquaculture, cage and pen culture, biofloc systems, Recirculatory Aquaculture Systems and integrated fish farming. The dominance of the inland sector is clearly reflected in national production statistics.

In 2024–25, inland fisheries and aquaculture contributed **151.60 lakh tonnes, equivalent to 76.66% of India's total fish production** (Department of Fisheries, 2026). This makes the inland sector the principal engine of India's fisheries growth. However, inland waters are not simply production units; rivers and wetlands also provide breeding, spawning, nursery and feeding habitats and support aquatic biodiversity. Therefore, future production enhancement must be accompanied by scientific resource management and ecosystem conservation.

Indian Major Carps: The Foundation of Freshwater Aquaculture

The Indian major carps **Catla (*Catla catla*)**, **Rohu (*Labeo rohita*)** and **Mrigal (*Cirrhinus mrigala*)** continue to form the foundation of freshwater aquaculture in India. Their importance is largely due to their complementary feeding behaviour. Catla mainly utilizes the surface and upper water column, Rohu is predominantly a column feeder, while Mrigal primarily utilizes resources near the pond bottom. This complementary use of different feeding niches makes them particularly suitable for composite fish culture.

Their good growth, consumer acceptance, availability of hatchery-produced seed, adaptation to Indian climatic conditions and established farming technologies have ensured their continuing importance in Indian aquaculture (Department of Fisheries, 2026). Nevertheless, Indian aquaculture is gradually diversifying, with common carp, grass carp, silver carp, tilapia and Pangasius becoming increasingly important. Modern technologies such as cage culture, biofloc and RAS are also opening new avenues for intensive fish production.

Andhra Pradesh Leads Indian Fish Production

Fish production is distributed throughout India, but certain states have emerged as major

production centres. Andhra Pradesh recorded approximately 55.39 lakh tonnes of fish production during 2024–25, making it the leading fish-producing state. It was followed by West Bengal with 23.74 lakh tonnes, Uttar Pradesh with 13.31 lakh tonnes, Odisha with 11.92 lakh tonnes and Bihar with 9.60 lakh tonnes (Department of Fisheries, 2026).

The success of these states reflects differences in water resources, aquaculture intensity, fish seed availability, infrastructure, market access, technical knowledge and government support. The rapid growth of aquaculture in these states demonstrates the enormous potential of inland fisheries to strengthen rural economies and improve fish availability.

India in the Global Fisheries Landscape

India's fisheries growth is occurring alongside a major transformation in global aquatic-food production. According to the FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2026, global fisheries and aquaculture production reached a record 235 million tonnes in 2024 (FAO, 2026). This included approximately 195 million tonnes of aquatic animals and around 40 million tonnes of algae (FAO, 2026).

Aquaculture has emerged as the major driver of this global growth. In 2024, global aquaculture production reached approximately 142 million tonnes, including algae, of which around 103 million tonnes were aquatic animals. Capture fisheries produced approximately 92 million tonnes of aquatic animals (FAO, 2026). Thus, aquaculture has become the dominant source of aquatic-animal production globally, marking a historic transformation in the relationship between humans and aquatic resources.

Asia continues to dominate global aquatic-food production, accounting for approximately three-quarters of global aquatic-animal production. China remains the world's largest producer, while India is among the leading global producers of fish and aquaculture products (FAO, 2026). India's

large inland water resources, rich fish biodiversity, established carp-culture technologies, expanding hatchery network and huge domestic market provide a strong foundation for further growth.

Shrimp and India's Export Potential

While inland fish production dominates India's domestic fisheries sector, shrimp is the country's major export-oriented aquaculture commodity. The Pacific white shrimp, *vannamei* (*Litopenaeus vannamei*), has become particularly important to India's seafood industry. Shrimp aquaculture generates employment and income across farming, processing, transportation and export value chains and contributes significantly to India's foreign-exchange earnings (MPEDA, 2025).

However, shrimp farming also faces challenges related to disease, biosecurity, water quality, effluent management and climate change. Sustainable shrimp production therefore requires scientific farm management, improved disease surveillance, responsible stocking density and environmental safeguards.

Fisheries, Food Security and Rural Livelihoods

The importance of fisheries extends far beyond production statistics. Fish provides high-quality protein as well as essential amino acids, vitamins, minerals and beneficial fatty acids. Globally, aquatic foods are increasingly recognized as an important component of food and nutritional security. Approximately 89% of global aquatic-animal production was used for direct human consumption in 2024, demonstrating the central role of aquatic foods in global diets (FAO, 2026).

In India, fisheries also support a vast employment network extending from fish breeding and seed production to farming, harvesting, transportation, processing, marketing and retail. For small and marginal farmers, aquaculture can be integrated with

agriculture, livestock and horticulture, making integrated fish farming an important opportunity for income diversification and efficient resource utilization (Department of Fisheries, 2026).

Government Support and the New Fisheries Era

The transformation of Indian fisheries has been supported by national programmes such as the **Blue Revolution** and the **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**. PMMSY focuses on increasing fish production and productivity, developing fisheries infrastructure, improving post-harvest management, strengthening value chains and supporting fishers and fish farmers (Department of Fisheries, 2026). The programme has also promoted modern production technologies, including cage culture, RAS, biofloc systems and other forms of aquaculture intensification. The **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)** further supports fisheries enterprises, formalization, access to finance, quality improvement and value-chain development (Department of Fisheries, 2026). These initiatives demonstrate India's transition towards a more organized, technology-driven and market-oriented fisheries sector.

CONCLUSION

India's fisheries sector has evolved from traditional capture fishing into a modern, diversified and increasingly science-based aquatic-food sector. With 197.75 lakh tonnes of fish production in 2024–25, and inland fisheries and aquaculture contributing 76.66% of national production, India has demonstrated its enormous potential as a global fisheries power. At the global level, fisheries and aquaculture production reached a record 235 million tonnes in 2024, with aquaculture emerging as the dominant source of aquatic-animal production. The next phase of India's Blue Revolution must therefore focus not only on producing more fish but on producing fish

efficiently, profitably, equitably and sustainably. Scientific aquaculture, ecosystem-based fisheries management, climate-resilient technologies, improved post-harvest systems and community participation will be essential.

India's fisheries story is no longer merely a story of catching fish; it is a story of science, food security, rural livelihoods, innovation, biodiversity and sustainable development.

Table 1: Key Indicators of Fisheries and Aquaculture: India and the World

Indicator	Global Status	India
Total fisheries and aquaculture production	235 million tonnes (2024)	197.75 lakh tonnes (2024–25 P)
Aquatic-animal production	195 million tonnes (2024)	—
Aquaculture production	142 million tonnes (including algae)	Major contributor to inland production
Aquaculture aquatic animals	103 million tonnes	—
Capture fisheries production	~93 million tonnes	Inland + marine capture fisheries
Inland fisheries production	12.3 million tonnes (2024)	151.60 lakh tonnes (2024–25 P)
Contribution of inland sector	—	76.66% of total fish production
Marine fish production	—	46.15 lakh tonnes (2024–25 P)
Leading producer	China	Andhra Pradesh – 55.39 lakh tonnes
India's global position	—	2 nd among the world's leading fish-producing countries
Major freshwater species	Grass carp, silver carp, common carp, Nile tilapia	Catla, Rohu, Mrigal, common carp, tilapia
Major export-oriented species	Shrimp, salmon, tuna and others	Vannamei shrimp (<i>Litopenaeus vannamei</i>)
Major production system	Aquaculture increasingly dominant	Inland aquaculture increasingly dominant

From traditional river fisheries to modern aquaculture, India's fisheries sector is emerging as a major pillar of food security, rural livelihoods and the blue economy.

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