A heavy mortality of fish occurred in Lake Pichola in Udaipur, in May 1973, due to an unprecedented draught. While most of the smaller-sized fishes were dead, the larger ones were fished out and marketed before the lake totally dried up. The method of fishing adopted is briefly described.

Lake Pichola is the oldest lake in Udaipur city, reported to be in existence since the thirteenth century. It is named after the village Pichholia then existing on its banks (Mehla 1969). The lake has a water-spread of about 6.5 sq. km and an average depth of about 6 m. The lake is never known to have dried before. It is reported that heavy rains have breached the masonry embankments of the lake and washed away most of Udaipur town in 1795. The embankments were later repaired and strengthened during 1825-38. The lake was afterwards connected with lakes Rangsagar and Swaroopswargar on the northern side, thereby considerably expanding its spread (Fig. 1). Ever since the city
was founded in 1559, no fishing was allowed in the lake owing to religious reasons, although a good amount of poaching was probably going on.

Udaipur has an average annual rainfall of 700 m. But in 1971 and 1972 the average rainfall was only 469 and 359 mm respectively. Owing to this draught condition of these two consecutive years and to the consequent heavy draining of water for irrigation, the water level dropped very low in the lake, and by middle of May 1973 the lake was reduced to a muddy pond with a maximum depth of only 1.2 m. The oxygen content of the water was reduced to 2.3 p.p.m. and the average pH to 6.4. The water temperature was 35.9°C. The fishes were found surfacing for oxygen en masse. In a day or two mortality ensued and a large number of dead fishes were floating on the surface (Fig. 2). These were mainly species of *Labeo, Puntius* and *Oxygaster*. Species of *Wallago, Mystus, Heteropneustes, Clarias, Mastacembelus, Channa*, and the large-sized *Labeo* and mrigal, on the other hand, were found to have survived these conditions. At this stage, the lake was let open for fishing at first to the public and later to a contractor appointed exclusively for the purpose by the Maharaja of Udaipur who owns the lake as his private property. Owing to silting for many years the lake had been covered at the bottom by soft mud ranging in depth from 1.2 to 2 m, which made the fishing operation hazardous. In order to reach the waterline the fishermen had to crawl over the mud for fear they would be marooned. They crawled over the mud after tying themselves one another by a rope at their waist. After reaching the water the fish were captured by clubbing them with rods. The dazed fish were pushed in the mud head down so as to kill them by suffocation. Drag-netting was nevertheless attempted to, but without success.
The fishes caught were generally large-sized. *Wallago*, more than 1 m long, were very common in the catches. Rohu and mrigal measured up to 75 cm and weighed 5.8 kg. This fishing was going on intensively for two days, and as a result, about 6 tonnes of fishes were taken. The lake completely dried up within the next four days. Other inhabitants like the crocodiles and turtles seemed to have migrated to Swaroopsagar and Fatehsagar lakes, for, out of a large number of these animals which were inhabiting in this lake, only one crocodile and a few turtles were found stranded in the drying lake.

The soft silt after drying was excavated largely for agricultural use. In this process of excavation the lake basin got deepened. The lake began getting filled up with water within the next fortnight when the catchment area received heavy rainfall. Water crossed the sill level on August 31 and rose to a level that would threaten a breach of the embankment like in 1795.