PREFACE

One of the acute problems facing our country today is the severe food shortage which is not merely due to insufficient production but also due to the enormous increase in the population, thereby resulting in either under nutrition or malnutrition. This is due to the fact that the diet is deficient in protein. The per capita consumption of protein, particularly animal protein in India is one of the lowest in the world and the available land does not hold much promise to increase rapidly the animal protein availability from land based sources, and thus the main source of protein will be from fish. About 70.8% of earth surface is covered by oceans. Apart from oceans, the vast and varied inland water bodies of India comprising rivers, estuaries, fresh and brackish water lakes, innumerable ponds, tanks and a large number of reservoirs produce a little less than half a million ton of fish per year. The research investigations conducted during the last three decades are gradually helping to adopt scientific techniques of fish culture in island waters and the application of sound management practices, based on scientific research would increase the present production. *Rita hastata* is consumed by poor class people and is available throughout the year in the local Marathwada Markets.
Studies on the biology of *Rita rita* have been carried out by Khan (1934), Karamchandani and Motawani (1955) and Mayashankeralal (1969-80) in the northern rivers of India. A study of *Rita hastata* available in the rivers of India south of the Vindhyas has been attempted here.

A review of the literature on the genus *Rita* shows that no systematic efforts has been made so far to collect detailed information on important aspects dealing with the biology and chemical composition in relation to maturity of *Rita hastata*. A good knowledge of the spawning and growth food and feeding habits, chemical composition is essential for providing a sound basis for conservation and rational exploitation. As a matter of interest some ecological parameters were also studied.

The present investigation on *Rita hastata* was undertaken on the above lines.