

## ANDHARI TIGER SANCTUARY (MAHARASHTRA) : A CASE FOR PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS

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### Introduction

The variety among living organism known as biodiversity, and their ecological habitats are more threatened now than at any time in the past. Its implications are not only aesthetic or ethical but also economic. Fragmentation of habitats destroys the ability to provide the ecosystem services, such as holding and purification of water, regulating temperature, recycling nutrients and wastes, regenerating soil, and the like. Another important thing that it does to human population directly, is its impoverishment.

### Significant Relationship

The significance of the relationship between human beings and other species lies in the unique role that the human beings can play. Among all species, human beings alone can cause changes which can threaten other forms of life, at the same time only they can intervene to protect endangered species, and help in restoring the ecological balance.

Ever since the realisation of the deteriorating environment has dawned, the forest dwellers have been accused for their dependence on forests for fuel, fodder and

food including meat procured through hunting. However, several studies have proved that this demand in its totality is much less than the net regenerating capacity of forests. The critics often tend to forget the times before independence, when hunting was a favorite pastime and the 'trophies' thus earned were indicators of bravery. Even today this attitude has not changed entirely. However, this symbol of gallantry is totally foreign to the forest dwellers, specially the tribals, who have scores of prudent rules and regulations to restrict the life-sustaining resource. In the present circumstances, for protecting wildlife, a lot has to be learnt from the lifestyles of those communities which have lived in harmony with other species, even wild species, for times immemorial.

### Faulty Conventional Conservation Techniques

Creation of wildlife parks was one attempt on behalf of the Government to protect wild species and their habitats. This is a traditional conservation model adopted by most of the developing countries, which give a lot of emphasis on custodial management, such as parks and reserves, which bans most of the human activities within the boundary.

In India, 4 per cent of the land is protected thus, protecting charismatic species, and directly affecting one million people living inside protected areas, and indirectly affecting several millions from adjacent settlements. The policy of eviction of the people from the National Park areas, has given rise to the park vs. people controversy. Laws on wildlife parks differ from country to country, but in most places these affect the life and livelihood of local villagers adversely, as the 'traditional' activities suddenly become illegal. It is a well known fact that the average rate of species extinction, though not known with much precision, has clearly increased dramatically over past few decades. Apart from many reasons, one of the important reasons is the fact that these protected areas are imposed on a community with no input, and no regard for the local people, thus creating conflict. While benefits flow to society at large, costs are borne by local people, whose use of the area is restricted.

While people's participation in forests in the form of joint forest management is being accepted since recently by the professional foresters, they are still not ready to accept the role of locals in the management of protected areas. It is a commonly accepted fact that people in and around forest areas are in general very poor and impoverished and often their main source of subsistence needs and livelihood depends on the forest products. Unless their basic needs are met with legitimately, biodiversity cannot be preserved. The basic reality that is people are not involved as equal partners in the management of forests, forest diversity cannot be preserved either in Protected Areas or in other forest areas, is ignored.

#### Status of the Local People

Actually, local forest dwellers are most vulnerable to the impacts of forest destruction. They are never consulted when

Dear Villagers,

I am sorry that I had to come to your village to have some water today. I had no other option in this scorching heat. Like me, there are many of my friends who are roaming around in search of water. They too may visit your village. All of us have lived in this locality for generations, happily together. Never did we face this problem where not only food and shelter but even water have become so scarce. Shouldn't we ask ourselves who is responsible for this? Who has cut all the trees in our vicinity and for whose benefit? Don't we animals also have equal right over this natural resource?

Yours friendly,  
Deer

*(This is a letter written by a sensitive environmentalist, though an uneducated villager from Rajasthan. He was pained by the fact that 'man-shy' Deer had to risk their life and approach a village to quench their thirst. This was, he thought, because the human beings had encroached upon the right of life of wild animals by denuding the green cover and disturbing the ecosystem.)*

such decisions are made regarding converting their homelands into protected areas, although this change over severely affects their cultural and economic survival. People who depend on the bounty provided by land and biotic resources have a strong and natural interest in maintaining the productivity of those resources though due to the abundance of the resources, their interest is quite passive. But local communities often do not control such resources, have little say in their management, and must pay the cost for their unsustainable use. Often their struggle to be heard coincides with efforts to gain legal title to their lands, or to expand the often restricted holdings they have been granted, or ask for some usufruct rights - so that they have legal standing in their bid to prevent destruction of their forests.

### **The Myth**

"The belief in a total ban on human intervention is misguided. Studies show that the highest level of biological diversity are often found in areas with some (though not excess) human intervention. In opening up new niches to be occupied by insects, plants and birds; partially disturbed ecosystems can have a greater diversity than untouched areas", says Dr. R. Guha. The view that biodiversity is best preserved and fostered in a large enough area kept entirely free from human intervention is challenged and proved wrong by several researchers.

On the contrary, studies on Bharatpur Park area, Valley of Flowers in Himalayan region and some other cases prove that bans on traditional grazing had a negative impact on diversity. A study undertaken by the Bombay Natural History Society specifically mentioned that "buffaloes grazing was an integral part of the eco-

system, helping to counter the tendency of the wetland to turn into a grassland", in case of Bharatpur Park.

It is absolutely naive to believe that forest dwellers are enemies of forests. Animals, including wild animals, are considered as friends by the forest dwellers. In Bhandara District, sighting of a particular bird is considered a good omen as it means the crops will be safe from insects. Phasepardhies would let free a dove if she was pregnant. Van Gujjars and Kathiawadies who live in forests for most part of the year, are vegetarians. Meat eating is allowed only on festive occasions, that too the meat of sheep and goats tended by them.

Animals are very much a part of life for the forest dwellers. So much so that many names and surnames have their origin in the names of animals. Even the deities are in the form of a tree or the face of some animal. In songs and dances, stories of animals, local flora and fauna find a prominent place. Therefore it becomes pertinent to ask whether the objective of protecting other forms of life can be achieved without the creation of huge parks sans 'human beings'.

### **'Human' Element : An Asset**

Such research findings force us to ask a question - can we not consider human beings, forest dwellers in this case, as an asset in management of protected areas? Will the interests of both, human population as well as wild species, not be better served by giving up the notion of parks as areas devoid of human intervention? A better, more rewarding approach will be to look at the possibility of how local people can prove helpful in protection of animals, birds and

plants. If this approach is followed, it is amazing to learn how many skills are already available with local people.

Several communities of forest dwellers have been living in harmony with wildlife for generations. They have self-imposed restrictions on forest use aimed at maintaining the green cover. They also have self-imposed restrictions on hunting or causing any other harm to wild animals. The principle of 'peaceful coexistence' is a real life experience for them. Totally neglecting this fact, the policy for protected areas has been uprooting not only people but also their way of life, and their faith in the principle of 'peaceful coexistence', thereby.

### **Reorienting old Strategies**

As rightly stated in the report 'World Resources - 1992-93', "bio-regional management is a method which takes into consideration the involvement of local people, integrating ecological, economic, cultural and managerial considerations at the regional scale. Biosphere reserves is a conservation technique in which concentric areas are zoned for different uses. They center around a 'core zone' dedicated to preserving biodiversity with no human intervention. Around the core is a 'buffer zone' in which some settlement of resource use is allowed, surrounded in turn by an indefinite 'transition area', where sustainable development activities are promoted. Without local involvement in the buffer zone design and management, the park's conservation goals cannot be achieved."

The problem lies in the fact that forests as an environmental resource, have multiple competing uses. Forests are beneficial not

only for the flow of timber they supply; but as a stock they prevent soil erosion and maintain genetic pool; and provide places of scenic beauty, and homes for the wildlife. Therefore, forests are to be preserved on moral or aesthetic grounds as well. But more important is the fact that they provide with the necessities for the people living in close proximity since times when this aesthetic outlook was alien. And it is possible to develop, maintain and manage such areas, probably in a better manner, with people. Several attempts of protecting surrounding forest have been successfully made by local people in different parts of India. These attempts have been made mainly at Non-Governmental levels. And therefore there is every reason to believe that even the Governmental efforts would succeed if people are actively involved.

### **Present status of Andhari Tiger Sanctuary**

Lesser known Andhari Sanctuary is the area surrounding the famous Tadoba National Park. The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra. The notification for Tadoba Sanctuary was issued way back in 1931, comprising of 116.55 km<sup>2</sup>. It was converted into Tadoba National Park in 1955. Andhari Tiger Sanctuary, was notified in 1986, having the area of 508.85 km<sup>2</sup>. The approval from the Central Government was given in 1993, while the State Govt. declared it as Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (625.40 km<sup>2</sup>) in 1995.

The Park was established (1955) in accordance with the then policy of creating species-specific reserves, devoid of human intervention. It was thought that at least some forest area should be preserved as a natural habitat for the wildlife, specially the Tiger. Existence of human beings was

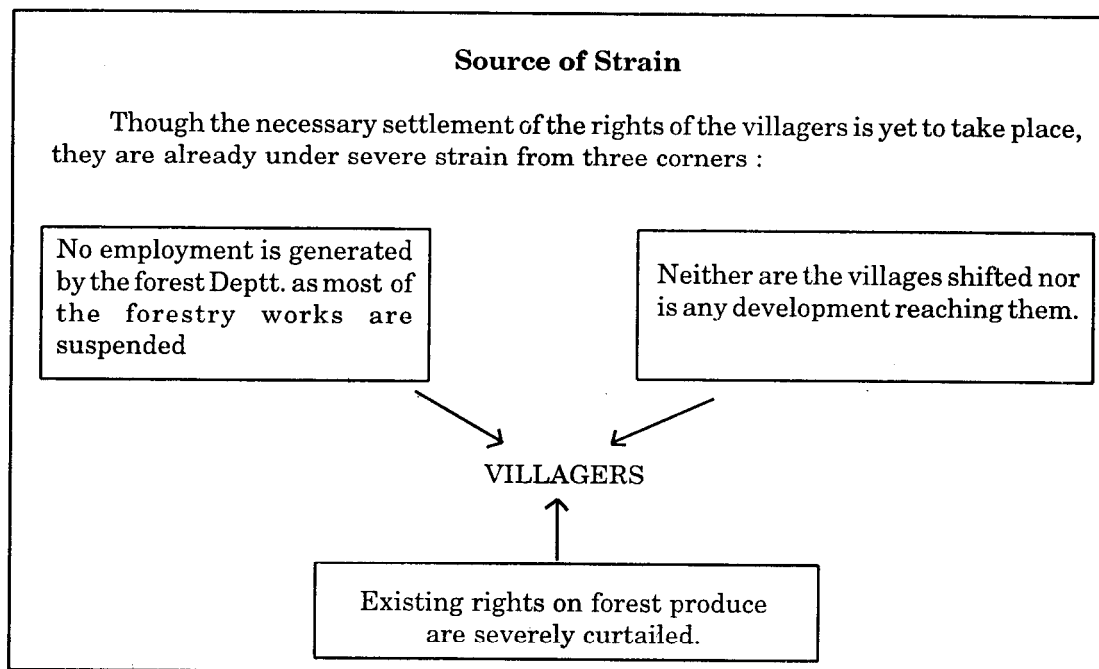
considered 'unnatural' and it was decided to rehabilitate the villages which come within the national park or sanctuary area. Relocation of two such villages which were within the Tadoba National Park, was done promptly. But the six villages in the Andhari Sanctuary are still not shifted as the settlement of their rights and other formalities are yet to be completed. The villages are, Jamani, Nawegaon, Palasgaon, Rantalodhi, Botezari, and Kolsa. These villages are threatened by their inevitable but uncertain displacement. This status quo has brought great suffering to the villagers.

Almost all the six villages are inaccessible during rainy season. None of the villages have all weather roads or a fair price shop. Only one village Kolsa, has a Post Office and a Primary Health Centre. State transport service is available only for two of the six villages; only one village has

an irrigation tank, and five villages receive electricity supply which is very irregular. All the villages have primary schools with all the usual problems. But after passing 4th std., children either have to leave education for good, or go to far-off places for further studies. For all the villages, market place is between 12 to 34 km away. For all their purchases, right from salt to a pair of bullocks, they have to travel on foot, all this distance.

### Increasing pressure

The rich natural resource, surrounding the villages, was once the main source of sustaining their meagre agriculture produce. Fuel, fodder, fruit, other minor forest produce, timber for huts, bamboo for weaving mats and baskets and for fencing the compound etc. were freely available in abundance. It is still available but not accessible due to the stringent restrictions



that come with the declaration of the sanctuary. Villagers do collect fuel and fodder from the adjoining forest but under the threat of being penalized, if caught. Their traditional rights have become illegal activities, without providing for alternatives. Collection of tendu (bidi) leaves was another important source of income for the villagers. But now this collection is also banned. No other forestry operations like felling, plantations etc. take place in the vicinity. Forest Deptt. has been the main source of employment for these villages in the past. In fact most of these villages were settled by the Department, as forest villages, to ensure supply of labour for all the forestry operations. However, now the villagers have to move out to other villages in search of work for at least four months in a year. They do return home despite all the hardships they have to go through in their own villages.

The small patch of cultivable land that the local people own (mostly tribals), produces just enough to feed the families twice a day. There is no irrigation facility, nor have the improved techniques of cultivation reached them. There is no market nearby to experiment with cash crops. All the cultivators grow paddy only once a year, this crop is often disrupted by the Deer and Wild Boars. The villagers are not compensated either for crop-damage or for loss of livestock, because there is no such provision within the National Park or Sanctuary area.

### **Choked Development**

Several Departments of the Government like Tribal Development, Agriculture, Dairy, Horticulture, Fisheries can substantially help these villagers. Three of the six villages are totally tribal villages,

2 villages have majority tribal population, while only one village has only Mana (non-tribal) residents. The Deptt. of Tribal Development has more than 245 developmental schemes meant for the development of tribals. Yet it has not done anything more than distributing a couple of bullocks and some goats. Other departments have grossly neglected these villages. Constructing small culverts, all-weather roads, percolation tanks, mud bunds etc. should have been taken up long back. It is very surprising to see total lack of these facilities. Apart from difficult access, small population and sparse distribution, probably the important reasons for the neglect of development agencies is the fear that, the villages are to be relocated in the near future. This possibility has kept these six villages isolated from any developmental effort. In absence of the development efforts, the villagers feel grossly neglected.

### **'Irritants' for the Forest Department**

For the Forest Department, these villages have become unwanted babies now. Unsympathetic towards the plight of these villagers, the Forest Deptt. officials accuse them of theft of timber, illegal collection of forest produce and the like. The Deptt. blames them of helping poachers and aiding timber smugglers. The villagers are blamed for illegally collecting tendu leaves, deer horn, lac and gum, and also for hunting small game for self consumption. They are also accused of putting fire in forests and destroying the precious wealth. The plight of another 53 villages in the two territorial Forest Divisions around the sanctuary, is not very different. Their dependence on the resource is severely curtailed. While the forest in the sanctuary area is protected and rich, the territorial forest is deteriorating sharply due to increased and

concentrated pressure. The villagers are forced to enter the Protected Area illegally to meet their basic forest needs.

However, some officials accept unofficially that these very villagers help them in the time of crisis - like when forest is on fire, or timber smugglers are to be trapped, or information on poaching is to be procured. There are instances when the villagers came to save a forest official while he was being assaulted by professional timber smugglers. The officials working in the field, who come in contact with the villagers directly, agree that whenever they were associated with some developmental work in the villages, their relations with the villagers improved. The animosity between the two is mainly due to the conflicting approach and outlook. If the two could come together and work together towards protection and management of the protected area, both would benefit.

### **Relationship of Mutual Faith and Trust**

In the given circumstances Forest Deptt. and the villagers, both are the losers. They look at each other with suspicion and distrust. The Forest Deptt. personnel feel that villagers are the encroachers and enemies of forests; while the villagers consider Deptt. people as grabbers and exploiters. As a result, villagers do not have any affinity with the forests to which they have no access. The wild animals are looked as 'your animals' and apart from hunting small game for self-consumption, poaching and hunting by outsiders is not necessarily reported. The lack of the sense of belonging takes away the sense of responsibility as well.

The Department is also well aware of the fact that the protected areas cannot be really protected with the existing handful

of staff. They definitely require help for passing on information and even for organising action against professional looters of the forests. Also, with the given policy of the Govt. regarding fresh recruitment, the Deptt. cannot expect to appoint fresh staff for better protection of the resource. Therefore the existing villagers can be groomed for this purpose. People's participation in the management of the protected areas seems to be of mutual benefit. An eco-development program can be thought of for the villages, which will also incorporate the component of economic development of the villagers. The Deptt., together with the villagers, can plan, protect, develop the Protected Areas in the larger interest of environment.

The Government of West Bengal in its resolution dated 26th June, 1996 has accepted that, "...successful implementation of the Wildlife Conservation Programme is dependent to a large extent on active participation and involvement of the local people". For this purpose Eco-Development Committees are proposed to be constituted and members of such committees are to be allowed benefits of usufruct sharing. Other States like Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh are also in the process of developing such policy resolutions. It is high time that the other States too accept gracefully that Protected Areas can be better managed only with the help of local people. Therefore instead of relocating and rehabilitating, local can be involved in the management in general and protection in particular. Involvement of the villagers living in the periphery of the protected area can also be worked to the advantage of both. It is the matter of realisation and conviction that biodiversity conservation and community development are not mutually-exclusive twin objectives, it is possible to integrate both.

### SUMMARY

Several attempts of protecting surrounding forests have been made. There is need for peoples participation in management of the protected areas through eco-development programmes by developing sense of mutual trust and understanding, so that the ecological and social objectives could be achieved.

अंधेरी बाघ अभयारण्य (महाराष्ट्र) : संरक्षित क्षेत्रों के प्रबन्ध में जनता की भागीदारी रखने का प्रश्न  
ऋचा घाटे

#### सारांश

आस-पास के वनों के संरक्षण के लिए कई प्रयत्न किए गए । आपसी विश्वास और समझबूझ की भावना विकसित करके परिस्थिति विकास कार्यक्रमों द्वारा संरक्षित क्षेत्रों के प्रबन्ध में जनता का सहयोग लेने की जरूरत है । इस तरह पारिस्थिकीय और सामाजिक उद्देश्यों को भी प्राप्त किया जा सकेगा ।

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