

OF CONSERVATION AND CONSERVATISM

RAKESH SHUKLA*

Introduction

There is absolutely no need to go into the complexities of the well established "whys" of the philosophy of wildlife conservation in the country. Instead, we must now concern ourselves with the "hows" of this philosophy. Despite the fact that wildlife conservation is regarded as a rather newly explored consciousness in the Indian psyche, and the wildlife managers have often risen to the occasion by putting in their sheer competence in various conservation projects, and winning international acclaim, they have, all along, been the targets of criticism from various quarters. What sometimes the media prints/presents is unfounded, unresearched and often distorted versions of information on conservation efforts. Many of the retired government conservationists are also known to be aligned with the NGOs and have almost overnight acquired a surprisingly new perception of wildlife conservation. And the most unfortunate aspect of the total scenario is that instead of pointing out the "conformities" of the System, they pick on the persons of their own choice involved in the conservation efforts.

There is no denying the fact that it was the developed countries which initiated India into conservation strategies and provided it with the much needed funds and expertise in various forms. Now that the country has gained so much experience,

why, then, all this scepticism about conservation efforts reaching a plateau? It seems that the conservation efforts proved to be very effective and brought tremendous success at the initial stages, but later a typical conservation attitude of the whole System overrode the zeal and spirit of the mission. What conservatism here implies is the lack of ruthless convictions with which a system should have been reviewed and revamped over all these preceding years to ensure consistent success.

In retrospect we may identify some inbuilt factors working against the spirit of wildlife conservation.

Fatigued Infrastructure

Assuming the early seventies as the beginning of the serious wildlife conservation efforts, the preceding era has witnessed the prime of a generation's life at the untiring toil to ensure the desired success. The old guard now seems exhausted and spent, looking to the younger lot to take charge. Once on the wrong side of 48, or say, 50, with pressing personal and familial preoccupations, they all more or less call it a day. Therefore frequent recruitments of the younger lot for timely replacement of the seniors, and for learning the basics of conservation from the remaining ones ensure that no vacuum of expertise is created, and at the same time the infrastructure remains young and dynamic. Long spells of

* Range Forest Officer, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Mandla (Madhya Pradesh)

isolation from the family also seem to take their psychological toll, sometimes leading to emotional disorders causing distractions from normal duties.

Neglected Incentives

It is a fact that park services are often more demanding, frighteningly isolated and more difficultly recognisable than those in the other branches of forestry. There is a popular notion that these are a dumping place for the "rejected" and the "dejected". Hard service conditions and such express opinions ensure that there is no competition to serve in the wildlife wing. Furthermore, there is an appalling lack of incentives of any shape or form to boost the morale of the managers and get the best out of them. Sometimes the amount they get as "special pay" is so meagre as to be rather humiliating to them. Such incentive should be in the form of a "real" special pay (at least Rs. 400/- in the case of a Forest Guard) and that too in the descending order for the higher ups, and opportunity of early promotions. There are some more facilities which can be extended to the remotely stationed manager supposed to be shouldering the responsibility of "triple establishments" by say, providing his children with a hostel for their education at a district place.

Tardy Judicial Proceedings

Wildlife managers have no practical training in the investigation of wildlife offences which is often tedious, time consuming and calls for a plethora of formalities before the case is considered fit for submitting to the court. Such expertise is always known to be gained by experience rather than by any special crash courses for the managers. The offences investigated in such manner and produced to the court are

often so technically fragile that they cannot stand the legal battle, and the offender goes scot free making a mockery of both the law and the managers.

This is a well known fact that our judiciary is overburdened with a huge backlog, and this results in slow judicial proceedings of wildlife offences, often taking, on an average, 5 to 10 years in a trial of Tiger poaching, to give the verdict. This lengthy judicial proceeding adversely affects the case in so many ways and provides the offender a "psychological relief", and often the prosecution itself suffers the agony of the "justice delayed is justice denied".

Now it no longer remains a far-fetched concept to seriously consider the possibility of forming mobile courts, to start with one in two or three districts, exclusively for forest/wildlife offences. It will not only reflect the government's sincere commitments to wildlife conservation, it will also put the offenders, in particular, under immense psychological pressure, and the public, in general, in the sheer awe of the law.

The "Indispensability" Syndrome

This is a most unfortunate phenomenon which gradually creeps into any conservation organisation where timely recruitments and proper substitutions have to take a back seat. Though there is no substitute for experience, senior managers often become prone to acquiring this syndrome, resulting in non-coordination confusion and ego problems, and the ultimate casualty is excellence. This also creates uncalled for "dependence" on the "indispensables" and conservation efforts are bound to lose their desired effectiveness. The top brass of such organisations often have difficult times dealing with the matters

which hardly merit their attention. Such static infrastructure gives rise to frequent uncalled for retrospection for references, and the present leadership finds it very difficult to introduce and implement any new strategy for conservation.

Protocolized Tourism

Oflate a frustratingly large percentage of tourism pressure in most of the wildlife reserves has become highly protocolized often putting the managers in constant attendance upon the VIPs. Such frequent and long protocolized preoccupations not only affect the normal conservation duties, they often tend to prevail over the spirit of conservation. Highlighting the problems such tourism pressure causes, efforts must be made by frequently sending appeals to all the ministries and departments, requesting the "target people" to remain satisfied with the services of a protocol officer and his team, and not make mandatory the presence of wildlife manager

for the sake of effective conservation. This readjustment in the attitude of the "target people" will also serve the cause of wildlife conservation.

Arbitrary Personnel Management

Faulty management of personnel is sometimes known to give a serious blow to the conservation efforts. Trained wildlife managers interested to continue in the wildlife wing are often transferred outside in a fairly arbitrary manner. Others are "punished" and find themselves posted to some unit of wildlife conservation. All this is done in the interest of "administration" with hardly any regard for the opinions of those at the helm of affairs, and such practices leave a serious question mark to the commitments to wildlife conservation. It is very important that there must be effective coordination at some higher level to at least minimize the number of such instances that might undermine conservation priorities.

SUMMARY

The paper deals with the prevalent conservatism seriously affecting wildlife conservation in the country. Despite the fact that wildlife conservation was a great success at the initial stages, serious questions are now being raised about it. A critical analysis has been done to identify the inbuilt factors in the System which are undermining the conservation efforts. These factors include - fatigued infrastructure, neglected incentives, tardy judicial proceedings, the "indispensability" syndrome, protocolized tourism and arbitrary personnel management.

संरक्षण एवं रुढ़िवादिता के संदर्भ में

राकेश शुक्ला

सारांश

इस लेख में वन्यप्राणी संरक्षण को गंभीर रूप से प्रभावित कर रही रुढ़िवादिता के बारे में बताया गया है। प्रारंभिक चरणों में वन्यप्राणी संरक्षण में इतनी सफलता अर्जित करने के बावजूद भी आजकल संरक्षण की सफलता को लेकर गंभीर प्रश्न उठाये जा रहे हैं। इस बात का विश्लेषण किया गया है ताकि तंत्र में स्थित उन कारकों को पहचाना जाये जो कि संरक्षण प्रयासों को कमजोर कर रहे हैं। ये कारक है : थका हुआ तंत्र, उपेक्षित उत्साह वर्धन, धीमी न्यायायिक प्रक्रिया, "स्वतो महत्वपूर्ण" लक्ष्यों का समावेश, अति औपचारिक पर्यटन एवं त्रुटिपूर्ण मानव प्रबंधन।