A REVIEW OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The highly fragile forest ecosystem which forms the natural habitat of wild animal has been subjected to series of devastations in the past. Present communication is an attempt to critically review the wildlife management scenario in India, with an objective to illuminate various potent hurdles which caused irreversible damage to Indian wildlife.

INTRODUCTION

A keen perusal of the history of Indian Wildlife reveals that they have been exposed to three distinct era namely; a) Mythological era, b) Exploitation era, and c) Conservation era. During ancient times, wildlife enjoyed a quite privileged position through religious sentiments and superstitions. The religious epics and the sacred literatures are full of examples showing strong mythological protection to the wild animals by almost majority of the religions coexisting in this country. Ancient concern for the wild animals has nicely been expressed in Kautilya's "Arthashastra" which perhaps forms the first milestone in the long history of wildlife management, by introducing the concept of "Abhyaarnaya" or forest sanctuaries where animals enjoyed life without any fear. The ancient Indian concept of "Ahimsa Parmodharma" forms the baseline of conservation ethics in the modern world.

Then came the era of exploitation, marked by a series of aggressions and wars, resulting into invasion of foreign ruling dynasties in India. The Mughals have left a very unfortunate history of hunting at large scale for their recreation and sports. Further, the needs of growing human population for food, resulted in clearing of wildlife habitat on large scale to cater the demand for arable land.

The feed back from the nature reminded of the atrocities committed on the innocent wild creatures, whose population recorded a speedy decline. The realisation of misadventures of the past brought the era of management for conservation of wildlife in India.

Past Status of Indian Wildlife

India, once famous for its richness in Biodiversity has become the focal point of global concern for conservation. Alarmingly sharp declining trend in Wildlife species diversity can be traced back to the era of the devastative World Wars I & II. The reckless destructions caused to the Indian green wealth for catering to the unfathomable timber requirements for the two great wars resulted in denudation of the large forest areas leaving suicidal options for the native faunal complex. Immediately after World War II, and during transfer of power and partition of India, unscrupulous poachers took the advantage of the transition and started a massacre of wildlife and their habitat (Shankhla, 1971).

After independence, the growing craze for industrial and technological advancements, discovery of latest generation firearms and mass scale urbanisation trends have further accelerated the devastative momentum against the wildlife heritage of the country.

Impacts of National Development

Development projects in Himalayan areas have really left no option other than death for most of the high altitude wild fauna, on one hand, and contributed much to the natural calamities like floods, droughts, fire, epidemics and landslides etc., leading to the destabilisation of wildlife in planes, on the other.

Unchecked effluent loads of highly toxic nature, into the Indian river systems have hammered hard the existing aquatic wildlife. The vast expanse of Indian coastline too reflects the same catastrophic scenario, and above all, the ever increasing direct man-wild animal conflict is posing a real potent hurdle in the implementation of restorative measures. Gujjars in the hills of U.P., H.P. and J&K and the terror of extremists in Bihar and Tamil Nadu, Maldharis in Gir forests, are some of the burning examples, besides the widespread man-wild animal conflicts in almost all the National Parks and Sanctuaries of India.

Policies and Legislation

A perusal of evolutionary trends in Indian Forest Policies clearly reveals that the first National Forest Policy, 1894 had absolutely no concern for wildlife; rather the treatment of forests as handmaid of agriculture gave more strength to the destructive forces. Only the second National Forest Policy, 1952 included the protection of the animal kingdom. Creation of special laws for setting up of National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries on large scale and recommendation for creation of Central Board for Wildlife were the noteworthy features of this NFP (Rao *et. al.*, 1961)

The 4th World Forestry Congress held in the year 1954, in its resolutions on the "management of forest lands for wildlife", recommended following points (Stracy, 1963).

(a) Recognition should be accorded to the fact that wildlife is an integral part of the forest complex and its proper treatment and maintenance are important to mankind.

(b) The concept of wildlife as a forest crop should be given adequate recognition. Research is needed for scientific planning that will provide an adequate basis for proper practices.

(c) Wherein tropical areas, it is necessary to segregate timber and wildlife production for the protection of crops and man, this may be done by confining certain animals to specially managed areas.

(d) Where protection to certain species of fauna of great economic or scientific value is justified, this may be done by the framing of suitable game laws and the provisions of nature

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reserves and sanctuaries.

(e) The introduction of exotic animal species, though in instances desirable, should be done with caution and only after full careful study.

The year 1972 was a land mark when a special act - Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA, 1972) was implemented to further strengthen the legal support to the wildlife conservation, and on the basis of experiences and views of wildlife experts this act was amended in the year 1991.

A major breakthrough in wildlife management was the statement of the then Prime Minister Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, to the 15th meeting of Indian Board for Wildlife, held on October 1st, 1982, which laid down a detailed list of twelve point programme for wildlife conservation in the country. In response to this a very elaborate National Wildlife Action Pan (NWAP, 1983) was drafted in which agencies like Department of Environment (DOEn), Forest Survey of India (FSI), Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Geological Survey of India (GSI), Wildlife Institute of India (WII), and International Union For Conservation of Nature & Natural Resources (IUCN) were involved for effective conservation, planning and execution under given period (NWAP, 1983).

The fast pace of increasing threats to wildlife dominated during formulation of 3rd National Forest Policy (NFP, 1988). This policy gave wider coverage to the cause of wildlife and recommended for provision of "corridors" for linking the protected areas in order to maintain continuity between artificially separated sub-sections of migrant wildlife.

Present Status of Indian Wildlife

India today has 441 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 80 National Parks with protected area notching about 4.5% of the total land mass. The list of threatened animals in India includes 5 spp. of mammals, 69 spp. of birds (the fourth highest rate in world), 23 spp. of reptiles (the second highest in world), 3 spp. of amphibian and 22 spp. of invertebrates (TOI, 1996). Although, conservation efforts have taken great strides, still the gravity of this problem demands more attention.

Reasons for Decline

The alarming rate of decline of wildlife populations is much faster than the rate of decline in forest cover during recent past, suggesting involvement of some other more potent factors against the management schemes. An alarming and depressing scenario of general apathy and lack of motivation has been noticed in Project Tiger Reserves, National Parks and Sanctuaries by an expert committee headed by Mr. M. F. Ahmad (I.G. Forest), who conducted a survey on the directives of Hon'ble Delhi High Court (TOI, 1996). Dr. Mahesh Rangarajan, a research scholar at Nehru Museum and Libarary holds human activities in the core areas responsible for threats to wildlife. Mr. Ashish Kothari of Indian institute of Public Administraion, projects conflicts with the local people as the most serious problem and he suggests that "while keeping conservation in view, rights and livelihood of the local people must be kept in mind". Mr. A.J.T. Johnsingh of Wildlife Institute of India, emphasises the importance of people participation in wildlife management. Mr. J.B. Patnaik, Conservation of Forests, Lucknow, is hopeful about encouraging impacts of the future Eco-tourism Project (an expected World Bank Project). Bittu Saigal holds the government Industrial ambitions and the so called developmental activities more responsible for the destructions, than the tribals.

Quli (1992) has reported three basic reasons responsible for accelerated rate of extinction of wild animals, namely: a) excess exploitation of the animal species, b) damages to the wildlife habitat, and c) the changed climatic condition due to decreased forest and increased pollution agencies.

The above explanations clearly reflected that the reasons for decline of wildlife populations are manifold namely - lack of motivation and peoples participation, human activities, local conflicts and overall urbanisation and developmental trends. The fact that only 4.5% of the land mass is being utilised for wildlife conservation (TOI, 1996) out of the 19.47% of forest area cover in the country (FSI, 1993), reflects that decrease in forest cover is comparatively less responsible than the other factors as listed by Quli (1992).

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