



# WINTER STUDY TOUR 2019

VISIT TO TADOBA TIGER RESERVE AND OTHER FIELD VISITS.

Bharati Vidyapeeth(Deemed to be University)| New Law College | October 16, 2019

## INTRODUCTION

India is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the world with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover. In the recently concluded Indian State of Forest Review 2017, the total forest and tree cover has been estimated to be 24.39% of the geographical area of the country. The increase in forest cover has been observed as 6,778 sq. km and that of tree cover as 1243 sq. km. This increase in forest cover has been observed in Very Dense Forest (VDF) which absorbs maximum CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. Amongst the nations India was placed 8<sup>th</sup> in the list of top ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.

Equally fascinating are the Protected Areas (PA) in the country. It was through the enactment of Wildlife (Protection) Act in 1972 that the need of creating additional such spaces was reiterated. As a result, from 5 national parks and 60 sanctuaries to approximately 669 Protected Areas, India's 4.92% geographical area comes under such a regime at present.

Keeping up with this trend, various conservation projects like Project Tiger, Project Hangul, Project Elephant etc. have been started.

Therefore, in order to better understand the dynamics and challenges of In-Situ conservation i.e. conserving the various ecological species in their own habitat was chosen as the purpose of our maiden winter study tour. The obvious choice in this regard being Tadoba Tiger Reserve in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra. The aforementioned wildlife sanctuary boasts of more than 100 tigers and a variety of other wild life species like sloth bears, spotted dears, wild pigs, Indian Gaur, etc. Apart from these there are many sacred groves like Banyan trees which are revered by the aboriginals there.

The observations and findings mentioned hence forth are based on the personal interviews of various stakeholders like farmers, the local tribal people, civil society groups, environmentalists engaged in the task of nature conservation.

Our first interview happened to be onboard the train to Nagpur. We had the privilege of meeting Shri. Tushar Kanti, a prolific environmentalist working in the field of environmental conservation and tribal displacement. He gave us many deep insights about the Tadoba Wildlife sanctuary and the problems therewith. The important points which he mentioned did actually help us in a big way in

comparing the various responses of the villagers as also the officers of the forest department. Some of the important points mentioned by him were as follows:-

1. Nagpur, is called the Tiger Capital of this country and that Project Tiger was started in the Melghat Tiger Reserve of Amravati in 1982-83, a decade after it was started nationally. He revealed that there is a great geographical reason behind this. Nagpur is encircled by the following 6 important reserves namely Umrer-karhandla ,Bore , Kanha/Kisley , Dharni (oldest reserve, in Melghat), Pench, Nagjira (Gondia). All of these reserve, he maintained, helped in the free movement of the Tiger thereby providing it unrestricted space to move.
2. He stressed upon the fact, that being the apex species, the Tiger helped in maintaining the ecological balance and ably completed the food chain. He decried the widescale poaching of the majestic species for its skin, fur , nails, tooth. He revealed that the major route of trade was through Nepal and then finally to China from where it went on to the various South East Asian Markets.
3. As someone closely following the Tiger Conservation Programme, Mr. Kanti alleged, that many a times the tiger numbers are over estimated. Unlike the International practice wherein Tigers aged under 1 years are not taken into account, he maintained that it was not so in case of India.
4. With respect to forest encroachments, he explained that allowing plantation agriculture inside the reserve has lead to cutting down of various old hard wood sagwan trees which have earned the timber barons quite a fortune. He claimed that after Burma teak, it was only Gadchirolli Teak which ruled the markets. This was well evident when he said for 1 gun foot of sagwan timber near about 31,000 rupees were paid. It's other quality being its pest resistant ability. The tribals most particularly the Dhurve tribes have rebelled and protested against this practice but have been silenced by one way or the other. Similar was the fate of those opposing the same in the Karwala Tiger Reserve.
5. With respect to the man-animal conflict he said that it was an outcome of the government's mindless pursuit of development by exploiting nature. He said, that villagers never kill animals (something which we found in most of our other interviews). Most of the accidents he said happened when the farmers went deep inside the forest to collect the Mahua flowers and seeds. As such the industrial townships were located close to the forests, he recounted many instances where animals like sloth bears , jackals, hyenas, tigers, leopards had entered the city. The most recent example he quoted

was that of Balarsha where a bear who had climbed on top of a building was tranquilised. He also cited the disturbing practice in Umrer Karhandla forests wherein the farmers encircled their farms with electric fences sometimes causing fatal injuries to the animals who came in direct contact with them.

### ARRIVAL IN NAGPUR: 13<sup>th</sup> oct, 2019.

Keeping up with our schedule, we reached our terminating station on time from where we went straight to meet Shri. Bandhuji Dhotre , Founder President , Eco Pro NGO, Chandrapur. It was indeed an informative and a thought provoking session where our hosts informed us of the many activities undertaken by their group like rescue operations for animals encroaching upon human spaces , emergency services to animals who are accidentally hurt by moving vehicles, heritage conservation etc. As a true environmental soldier, Mr.Dhotre recounted the days of his struggle when he pushed back the Adani Coal Mine project much to the relief of ecological needs of the geographical entity. Apart from this, in his interaction with the members of the delegation he rightfully exchanged his deep insights and experiences regarding biodiversity conservation. His outstanding work with respect to the cleanliness of one of the fort entrances was even cited by the Hon. Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi.

He rightfully extended the importance of cleanliness to the villages in order to prevent animals who feed on wastes to encroach upon the said spaces. He also elucidated that most of the attacks take place in the morning when the villagers go out to relieve themselves. It was mainly through the posture, Mr. Dhotre maintained that the animals especially the Tiger could make out whether it was hunting an animal or a human.

His volunteers reiterated the caution and restraint which they maintained while dealing with any case of rescuing any animal which had wrongfully entered a human space.

This to put in the kind consideration of the college management that the model of engaging like minded people to work for larger social good can surely be replicated in the college as well.

Next our caravan reached the Tadoba Tiger Reserve. Spread in a total area of 1725sq.km comprising 110 sq.km of buffer zone and 625 sq.km under core zone. Our interactions here were divided into 2 parts,

1) With officials from the Forest Department.

These included the Regional Forest Officer , the forest guards as also other frontline staff on duty.

Impressed by the inquisitiveness of the young delegation, the top officer warmly welcomed us at his office. We were also shown a short documentary made on the 4 tigresses apart from others inhabiting the said tiger reserve. He shared all his experiences very diligently. In his interactions he decried the un-necessary sensationalisation of of any tiger death inside the reserve even if it died of natural reasons. He revealed that there is a proper process of investigation undertaken by an investigating officer only after which the said dead body of the tiger is burnt to ashes. He also showcased the various types of camera traps so used inside the forests. He explained that there are mainly 3 types of camera traps of which mostly the ones powered by lithium ion cells are used. He informed us about the compensation scheme being practiced in Maharashtra and the problems the forest officials face in ascertaining the rightful beneficiary of the compensation.

We encountered the various forest guards who were on their way back after their training session. They showed us the hand outs being provided to them and informed us of the usual protocol of using tranquilisers as the last resort. They informed us that they did not carry rifles with themselves during their field duty. However special sessions on M-STRIPES and other technological interventions remained conspicuous by their absence.

2) With the Villagers.

The villagers in the course of their interview opened up and gave us a brief overview as to how is life inside the tiger reserve. We shall dealing with the same in 2 sections namely,

a) Survival

The agriculturists amongst them were generally those who had their farms mainly in the buffer zone, but they usually preferred living near the fringes. As a result, they had to make certain arrangements in order to protect their farms as also themselves. The following were some of the applied mechanisms-

- TAAKI

This was the enclosure made of bamboos where they kept their animals. It was made sure that the structure was so strong that it was difficult for the attacking animals to break the structure.

Equally, such bamboo structures were also used to cover the agricultural fields so that animals don't destroy the harvested crops.

- There was also an arrangement inside the fields wherein a high rise structure was built, which helped these farmers in a keeping a watch on any animal approaching the fields from far of distances.
- Electrical fencing was also one of the preferred means by which the villagers used to scare away the animals. Unlike the earlier practice of supplying 220v to these wires, the forest authorities were now providing them with solar powered fences which had a much lower voltage supply. As a result, the animal used to get only a minor electric shock and used to go away.
- Sometimes, deep trenches were also made which helped in capturing large sized animals. This was practiced when the field size was small.

#### b) CONSERVATION

We were relieved to hear that most of the villagers did not intend to kill the animals in the first place itself. They maintained maximum restraint when it came to animals encroaching their fields and often called the people from the forest department to deal with the same.

As a matter of practice now, those families found in possession of spears, bows and arrows now were boycotted as per the norms set forth by the Gram Sabha. Perhaps it was because of this reason that what used to be the normal sighting of just 1 tiger that too very rarely, a tigress with 3-4 cubs were usually seen inside the forest now.

#### PROBLEMS

On a deeper one was able to discover the following major problems being faced inside the forest-

##### a. The problem of Plantation agriculture

As rightly pointed out earlier, most of the forest space was now under plantation agriculture which included primarily crops like that of sagwan etc.. Equally disturbing were deep tyre marks only a result of heavy vehicles which made their ways even inside the buffer zone.

b. The issue with compensation

The RFO had claimed that Maharashtra continues to be the only state where compensation emanating from any kind of animal attacks is the highest. The claims for the same were usually divided into 3 types namely,

- For Animals,
- For Agricultural Crops,
- For Humans.

After a panchnama and the usual procedure, the money was usually given, it was said. However, our interviews suggested otherwise. Most of the claims were unattended for more than a year and that the compensation sum was also meagre. We could find no one who had lost his loved one or for that matter any productive animal on the fields getting a timely compensation or a sum running in lakhs. It was alleged that favoritism, nepotism and corruption were the order of the day when it came to corruption.

c. No proper monitoring of diseases in the animals

On a question relating to Canine Distemper Virus, the RFO replied that it was difficult to keep a check on every tiger's health. The absence of a research center further emphasized upon this point. The only precaution which the forest authorities took was to prevent the entry of dogs inside the core and buffer zone.

d. The authorities did not keep a check on the spread of Invasive alien Species inside the forests as well. The need for the same was highlighted both by the concerned officer and the RFO.

e. Lack of specificity in calculating the number of tigers. Usually the authorities resorted to 2 of the common methods of tiger calculation, i.e. camera traps and pug marks. However, the international practice of not

calculating Tiger cubs under the age of 1 remained conspicuous by their absence.

- f. In some of our interviews, we found high handedness meted out to the villagers by the forest guards.

As a corrective measure, the following steps can be considered-

1. Banning plantation agriculture inside the protected areas.
2. Transparency and accountability in terms of providing relief and compensation.
3. Opening up of research centers specifically catering to the diseases acquired and those that can infect the big cats.
4. Sensitivity training to the forest guards who continue to remain the first interface of the villagers with the forest department.

## OCT 14,2019: Visit To Hemalkasa

We moved out early the next day to visit Hemalkasa. The members of our delegation were equally enthusiastic to meet and see for themselves how conviction and resolve to bring about a change can yield results. All through out the route majorly inside the city, all we got to see around were chimneys emanating smoke and discharging harmful effluents. The foul smell which the people of the place had now become so accustomed to, was in all the right earnest, unbearable.

On one our stoppages outside the urban area we came across this person who informed us about the tragedy which struck him just a day before. He informed us that his wife had developed a tumor in her lungs which had taken shape of cancer. We were astounded! The result of this growing industrialization was in front of us. He said that most of the lakes in and around his village were polluted and they did not use it for consumption. And quite rarely they used them in the fields.

We reached the said venue on time and the entire delegation was well received by the staff there.



Established in 1973, the campus spread across 35 acres boasts of a school (from standard I to XII) with residential facilities, a hospital catering to the requirement of the villages in and around Hemalkasa and then there were animals who were adopted and had been kept in captivity. A quick analysis of all the facilities have been dealt herein after-

#### SCHOOL AND LODGING

1. Providing basic education in Madia language which is spoken in the adjoining villages. From 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> standard the children were taught in basic Marathi language.
2. The school follows the “Gyan Rachna” scheme of education wherein the knowledge level of the child is ascertained before assigning them the said class.
3. Learning through group work is the preferred mode of knowledge transmission.
4. Till standard 5 there is 1 teacher for 1 class and from 5<sup>th</sup> standard there is one period for every subject.
5. There is no restriction on the amount of food a child wants to eat.
6. A large ground with adequate sporting facilities is also provided to these students.

However, there were following shortcomings which we could observe. The chief among them being the following-

1. Some of the Children in 12<sup>th</sup> standard whom we interviewed were not clear with the basic concepts of maths taught in standard 1<sup>st</sup>.
2. No scientific assessment of the nutritional requirement of the students for their day to day activity was in place.
3. Quality certification by third party of the food and milk so served was unheard of there.
4. Apart from solar panels whose operations could’nt be checked, the campus lacked other facilities like rain water harvesting, solid waste management etc.

#### HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL FACILITIES

Established in 1976, the hospital was the only lifeline of villages sometimes beyond the state boundaries. We came across patients who had come all the way from far

off villages in Chhattisgarh. However, the following aspects remained conspicuous by their absence-

1. No availability of 24x7 ambulance facilities.
2. No provision of generic medicines.
3. Absence of practice of Ayurveda.

## OCT15, 2019 : TIGER SAFARI AND VILLAGE VISIT

The aforementioned date was special in many ways. Not just for one of the most fascinating experiences of my life but for also revealing many other facets of truth which hitherto were un-noticed by us. A cumulative assessment of both the visits are mentioned therewith.

- 1) The boundaries of the Tiger Reserve continue to be undefined. What we came across was just one barricade beyond which was visible the Thermal Power Plant and the coal mine. In between the power plant and the tiger reserve there was an empty patch of land devoid of any trees or vegetation. This was something bewildering as such what we could see all around were only trees and lot of greenery. It was because of this particular aspect that animals inside the reserve like Leopards, Tigers, Sloth bear found it easy to enter the said factory. As a matter of fact, we were informed that a Tigress had given birth to 4 cubs inside the plant.
- 2) The tyre marks inside the buffer zone were much deeper than the usual tyre marks of a 4x4 SUV. As such plantation agriculture was practiced inside the buffer zone as well, the possibility of other heavy vehicles cannot be ignored.
- 3) There was outright violation of the speed limits. Wherein it was prescribed a speed limit of 20km/h as was told to us by our driver we sometimes drove at a speed more than what ought to be. This was in complete disregard to the requirement of a noise free surrounding for the wild animals.
- 4) There was no survey of the Trees neither inside the buffer zone as also the core zone.
- 5) The status of those displaced from the buffer zone remained conspicuous by its absence. We did find some small disbanded hutments inside the buffer zone as well.

SUGGESTIONS-

1. It is hereby recommended that a definitive boundary line of the said Tiger Reserve be ascertained in the first place. The possibility of any sort of manipulation needs to be brought to its minimum.
2. A blanket ban must be imposed on any other vehicle entering the buffer zone, especially heavy vehicles.
3. Plantation agriculture needs to be necessarily banned inside the buffer zone.
4. A tree atlas comprising of the types and number of trees inside the reserve needs to be first prepared.
5. The vehicles being used inside for the Safari must be fixed with certain Gyroscopes which tends to keep a track of the moments when the vehicles exceeded their speed limit. The said explanation for the same must be sought from the concerned driver.

Our next assignment during the trip was the much awaited village visit. It was a revelation of sorts for all of us. It gave us a more vantage perspective as to what can be done to improve the condition of the villagers. Of near about 60 people whom we interviewed, almost everyone spoke from their hearts as though they had finally found someone who would take their concerns seriously. The following were the important issues raised by them-

1) False Cases.

To much of our surprise the first group of people in the said hamlet we met, near about everyone was sent to jail on frivolous grounds of collecting bamboos. Now, Bamboo being declared a grass and not a tree, the erstwhile practice of arresting individuals in the name of falling bamboos should have ended. But this was not so in this village. They informed us that false charges against them in the name of poaching, setting a trap to catch wild animals was filed against them. As a result, some had to spend nearly 15 days in jail and also cough up a fine of 2000Rupees.

2) Displacement & Rehabilitation.

This was one issue which was an eye opener regarding the problem of displacement and rehabilitation. While “Pedasgaon” was one of the villages wherein the villagers displaced from the core area had been relocated, a lot still required to be done there. During one of our interactions with Mr. Satish, a well informed youth revealed that the problem of rehabilitating the inhabitants of Kholsa village still hangs in balance. He alleged that the

forest department and the entire government machinery did not care much about the villagers. He pointed out that those villages who did not relocate during the process initiated in 2007, had all their basic services cut right from education, health and postal services. The promise of a job to those relocated largely remained unfulfilled and they could find only menial jobs not commensurate with their needs.

- 3) Hooch Tragedies and problem of illicit liquor  
Chandrapur witnesses a different situation altogether when it comes to alcoholism. As such it is banned in the district, keeping, trading or consuming it has been made a penal offence. In this backdrop, the individuals who want to relieve themselves of their stress or make merry find it difficult to do so. They resort to local mahua which is no longer traded in its raw form. To make it more addictive, the traders often mix urea in it thereby leading to tragic deaths of many. What is even more depressing is the fact that even children as young as 15 are falling prey to such lurements.
- 4) Lack of Information regarding various Government Schemes like Van Bandhu Scheme , TRIFED, etc.
- 5) Absence of basic infrastructure facilities in the villages.  
Rural households in the said places still yearned for 24X7 electricity. We were informed in the 4 villages of Bhamdili, Kondegaon , Mohorli , Junona there was just one electrician known by the name of Mr. Kowe.
- 6) Lack of employment opportunities.  
With most of its local economy dependent solely on tourism, the youth of the said place found it difficult to fulfill their wishes of having a good job close to their homes. The tourism industry too was crumbling as such from 48 safari vehicles, the government had now limited it to 16/18.
- 7) No uniformity with respect to various Social Assistance Programmes of the government. While some got old age pensions and scholarships, the rest could'nt have such an access owing to their own sheer ignorance.
- 8) The biggest sufferer of the industrial effluents discharged by these big industries were the villages who had access to these natural resources. As a matter of fact, we heard these villages complaining of breathlessness, rashes on their skins etc. This was prominent in the Mohorli village, they said.
- 9) Lack of Transportation facilities deprives them of access to basic services in their close proximity. They said that there was no bus services to Chimur. Chimur is a tehsil they said which has facilities like schools, colleges,

hospitals etc. It was also the place where there was rebellion against the Britishers in the pre-independence era.

#### SUGGESTIONS-

- 1) Constituting citizens group with members from civil society, common citizenry as also the police and forest department must be the top priority in such areas. The said group should report directly to the district collector regarding any discrepancy in the arrests so made by the forest officials.
- 2) There needs to be accountability and transparency when it comes to relocation of tribals from their original habitations. For this the Gram Sabha along with the collectorate must ensure provisioning of basic services to such areas. Furthermore, special grants must be made through MPLAD's for such villages.
- 3) It was suggested to us that either liquor trade be allowed in the district or a complete ban even on the locally available Mahua should be put in place. Regular monitoring should be done of places supplying local mahua to ensure they are not mixed with urea or other insecticides.
- 4) Skill development of the local youth should be introduced.
- 5) It is necessary to create the necessary awareness about schemes like Van Bandhu wherein the various MFP's can be exchanged for assured returns.

Thus, in keeping with what has been experienced for these 3 days, it so appears that a more decentralized approach rather than a top-down one is all what is suitable for conserving Biodiversity in these P.A.N. This would ensure the necessary element of equity and participation. Equally important is training and personnel management of forest officials engaged in the said task because new age challenges would require an intelligent and well informed work force to deal with any contingency. This is more so when the vagaries of climate change portend a dangerous future ahead.

SUBMITTED BY-

Ketan.S.Gujar,

Yash HarshVardhan.

LL.B 1<sup>st</sup> year.

