

# THE SITUATION

## FOR

### TIGER LINKS

It is extremely difficult to make an assessment about what has happened in the field of conservation of the Tiger during the last 3 years or so in India. If one goes by papers and government opinion, things will have appeared to be improving. Some new areas have come under the Project Tiger, protection of wildlife outside the P.A. systems is receiving some consideration, some research in Tiger ecology is going on etc. etc. Though there are occasional reports about poaching and seizures of Tigers and Leopards, yet by and large it would appear that the dangerous downward slide of the Tiger has probably been arrested, as per official papers.

- But I personally feel<sup>l</sup> this could be only a false feeling of so called "normalcy". In reality human pressure, both direct and indirect is continuously eroding wildlife and ecological interests of not only the Tiger, but also of other wild fauna and flora. Many of the Protected areas themselves appear to have become clearly vulnerable. Some of the much acclaimed Core areas of Project Tiger areas, which are most intensively managed wildlife areas of this country, have been vandalised beyond belief during the past decade or so. Despite knocking at the door of the State and Central governments repeatedly, nothing appears to have been done till now and some of the Core areas are virtually lying at the mercy of the outlaws. Govt. authority is nearly no-existent in some areas and yet govt. appears to be quite unmoved, which seems to be inexplicable. Many years of hard work had been able to rejuvenate some of these areas, but all seem to have been lost and the present status of
- some of these areas may be much worse than that <sup>when</sup> which Project Tiger had been first launched in these areas. Quite a number of new areas have been included in the Project Tiger list, but I am afraid adding only new prospective areas as Tiger Reserves does not actually mean anything positive, when the old areas themselves are not being cared for
- properly. I have an increasing feeling that wildlife management is <sup>buckling</sup> backing under huge
- human pressure, which may be <sup>a result of</sup> manifest in lack of political support and political will.

- In paper a lot of emphasis is being laid on Conservation of wildlife outside the P.A. system and quite rightly so. But if one takes a decisive impassionate look at these areas, most such areas will reveal a pathetic situation. In extensive areas the habitat is severely
- degraded and the natural prey base has been very badly decimated, unable to support
- Tiger populations, which could be regarded safe beyond the present generation. In large tracts Tigers are already out for the last one to three years. In others there are only some vagrant propulations of individuals who do not have any fixed or even floating 'Home Range'. The Tigers in such areas somehow hang on with their normal social life completely upset, which makes breeding nearly impossible or at best a virtual miracle. Such tigers

\*\*\* Besides even the P. As are coming under unspecified human pressure mainly for exploitation of non-wood forest product. There is a N.G.O. movement growing momentum which demands that exploitation of such products be allowed from the P. As. Govt. also appears to be not at all averse to this idea, which is possibly manifest in its eager acceptance of joint forest management to be extended into the Protected Area net work. This has been strongly advocated to accommodate the traditional and cultural usage of such n.w.f.p by the indigenous forest dwellers like the tribals. But in reality the benefit of such exploitation of renewable natural resources is siphoned off chiefly by the urban communities upto over 75%, by using the indigenous people as their handling agents. Wildlife Act allows such use of n.w.f.p. from even P.As except National Parks, which forms barely 1% of the total land area of the country. Now even this minuscule 1% sacrosanct area is attempted to be molested, even <sup>if necessary</sup> ~~if necessary~~ by amending the Wildlife Act! The N.G.Os who are pushing for such policy change are preparing even to knock the door of Human Rights Commission, forgetting that this will amount to infringement of human right of the future generations!

It is also a comic situation that <sup>when</sup> ~~when~~ such people are crying hoarse for indigenous peoples traditional rights, they are, at the same time, welcoming a cultural invasion in the life style of these people for the sake of what is termed as "Sustainable development." This is, to me, the height of dichotomy, an unabashed manifestation of human greed, which shall devastate the already disoriented ecological scene. The wildlife manager has no longer remained a "Resource manager". He has been transformed into what I term as a "Gap manager", trying desperately and unsuccessfully to manage the widening gap between the ~~human~~ human demand and consumption of natural resources which has far ~~at~~ outstripped the sustainable yield, ~~which~~ and ~~has~~ reduced ~~to~~ the growing stock below sustainable ~~level~~ level.

depend almost entirely on domestic stock and is therefore not only extremely harassed but are vulnerable to poaching by the graziers. A situation like this is clearly rich ground for the Tiger parts smugglers, who take full advantage. Under such excruciating conditions survival of the Tiger or rearing of the rarely bred <sup>Litters</sup> ~~tires~~ is as uncertain as one can imagine. Survival of the Tiger in such areas beyond the present generation will be nothing short of a miracle, unless some new tigers colonise such areas from nearby P.As.

Management of wildlife in such forest areas, outside the P.A. system, remains almost non-existent, as virtually all the managerial efforts go for what can be termed as production forestry and raising plantations (often monoculture), even on the face of the '88 national forest policy which aims at safeguarding "Ecological interests". The prevailing situation in the 'other' forest areas, which still holds one third of the total country population of the Tigers will certainly have a telling effect as far as the future of this species as concerned.

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The overall situation about the Tiger during the three past years thus appears to be grim, there seems to be at least no improvement, the negative factors still continue to impoverish the habitat and decimate the tigers and its natural prey base. If at all, the impact of developmental forces are possibly pushing the tigers more than ever. It appears that the socio-economic factors at play are probably causing more damage to the Tiger than the biological factors. A little analysis may not therefore be out of place.

The human community, in India as also elsewhere, is facing a serious natural resource crunch, which is apparent from the fact that the demand and supply of natural (renewable) resources of all kinds has far outstripped the availability and supply of such resources on a "sustainable yield" basis. But despite serious resource gap the demand and use of such resources by the human community paradoxically continues to rise, firstly to cope with a rising human population level and secondly because of a changing life style which is inducing increased per capita consumption of such resources to complicate the issue further.

In India the change in indigenous lifestyle is in full swing and the 'Development <sup>fever</sup> ~~furere~~' is accelerating the process both directly and indirectly. This change in lifestyle is mainly aimed at upgrading the "standard of living" and is quite oblivious about the "quality of life", which is probably deplorable. This all out blind urge (will you call it "Craze"! ) for Development is actually causing the biggest damage to the cause of Conservation in this country (and elsewhere in the developing countries). But no one appears to be seriously concerned. Tall talks, advices and suggestions are readily available in good measure but such lip service seem to be used only as a shield by the authorities against the little awareness that has come about and not for any practical purpose or demonstration in the field. Examples after examples of gross violation of Conservation Act or dilution of its provisions, dereservation of wildlife <sup>o</sup> ~~pract~~ected areas and non-implementation of various reports/suggestions of those numerous committees, appointed by the Govt. itself will testify about the governments' mock seriousness about conservation. But this is probably not surprising under the system in which conservation is being practised. Those who are responsible for taking decision unfortunately, I feel, do not have the requisite understanding or the perception of the infinitely complicated Ecological balance and true "Sustainability". Human interests, for such people,

- wildlife*
- are overpowering and almost always wildlife or ecological interests are subjugated. Valid opposition to <sup>proposed</sup> works or projects which are likely to erode ecological interests are often brushed aside by clever and not so clever bureaucratic or political manouvering and the wildlife manager does not have any real say in such matters. Straight forward and
- uncompromising officers have frequently to suffer for <sup>their</sup> this stand. As a result most succumb under pressure and toe the line of the political and bureaucratic bosses.

As long as this system with a vice-grip on the ecological management continues, there cannot be any hope of revival of the situation. Bit by bit the Tiger is being strangulated under our very nose. But this is happening in a very imperceptible way, without being noticed even by the wildlife oriented people. Large areas outside the Protected area network have lost the Tiger in the last five years. There are yet other such areas where probably the last Tiger is now roaming and the death of "this tiger" is only too likely to remain as a permanent vacuum. By this I certainly do not want to underestimate the threat posed by poaching and underworld trade of Tiger parts. Poaching has become the last nail in the coffin in areas where the tiger population and the prey base has been already drastically reduced. In such areas one tiger eliminated may end the track of the species for ever. But if the habitat and the prey base had been left reasonably well stocked, the chance of return of the Tiger will have remained, specially with a chain of well maintained Protected areas, if available.

- There are*
- But there are various seemingly unrelated matters which are also eroding the very base of what we term as "ecological balance". A spell of tense unstable political situation, both at national and international levels, liberalisation and globalisation of economy and the blind pursuit of "Development", all are fastening the noose around the Tiger's neck, though remotely and imperceptibly.

The political imbroglio has made the political bosses make desperate bid to survive, which leaves no room or scope for these decision makers to even ponder about the survival of the Tiger or for that matter nature conservation. I have sometimes a cynical feeling that such people who decides the destiny of nations hardly differ from those uneducated poor who live by the side of our P.As and indulge in poaching of animals and other forest produce for survival, when they are debarred from traditional use of natural renewable resources. Amusingly the latter may have hardly any or no option whereas the elite seemingly have many! But facts remain that political uncertainty adversely affects wildlife anywhere in the world, particularly in populous trouble-ridden countries.

- The proposed liberalisation and globalisation of national economy which this country has opted for is another aspect that is going to effect ecology adversely, which is not
- perceived by the planners and the politicians, who does not seem <sup>to</sup> to probe beyond skin deep about the probable future implication of such a major shift in economic policy. Such economic policy is oriented totally toward "consumerism" and "market economy", which brings about increased level of consumption of renewable natural resources. It certainly does not take any ingenuity to visualise that what is required today is controlled and reduced consumption which remains within sustainable yield. But strangely the world today

is following the opposite route. In fact we are so engrossed with consumerism and market economy that we are unable to even think of anything contrary or even of any alternative.

The Ecodevelopment planning which had been designed to garner popular support towards conservation seems to have also been strongly influenced by the same underlying idea through upgradation of the 'standard of living'. The Ecological aspects of such plans had to take a back seat, which should actually be the <sup>have</sup> ~~core~~ <sup>central point</sup> areas of highest importance! 'Ecodevelopment' has now become a trendy word.

But this estimation of the status of the Tiger and its more or less devastated prey base is unlikely to be accepted by the govt. Government seems to truly believe that the status of wild life is more or less alright. I have talked to field officers, who are young and energetic, who are also keen. <sup>Even</sup> They believe that the status of wildlife is alright. This may be because they fail to estimate or visualise the carrying capacity of these areas. They have unfortunately not seen these areas during the days when the biomass productivity had been higher and supported many times more animal biomass compared to that of today. The degradation caused to the habitat as also to the wildlife is not conceivable to the present generation of field staff and they, therefore, don't have the base line parameter to evaluate the present status.

Countless committees had been set up by the govt. to find solutions to problems. But recommendations of these committees are rarely implemented later on, which only betrays the mood of manouvering for compromising ecological interests, which gets one of the lowest priority in the Govt. This is amply reflected in the owfully inadequate financial support that wildlife and forestry sector receives. Country's development planning has hardly any consideration for ecological demands, specially for reviving the continuously sagging "Ecological Economics". Indian economy is based mainly on agriculture, which makes it imperative to have a sound ecological economics. But this all important fact seems to have been glossed over by the planners, who simply talk about ecological facts as an unavoidable subject only. There are no dirt of national and international level conferences, seminars and meetings etc. but it appears such well intentionat <sup>ed</sup> deliberations do not effect the languishing wildlife including the Tiger. The example of Rio summit on Biodiversity Convention may be one example. We have left that summit 5 years behind, but how this world summit has been able to help field conservation of any of the threatened species is open for all to see! 'Valuable' papers are <sup>piling</sup> picking up with monotonous regularity, international debate is razing about patent rights, equitable distribution of resources and "sustainable development" (if the expression has any meaning, I am doubtfull!), but all these very important business end up with the Tiger sinking deeper into the quick sand of human greed and its consequent "rape" of nature, which seems to be enveloping the world with something inertable. *inevitable.*

The real reasons of the Tiger's unenviable fate seems to be more indirect, than it is conceived of. In this country encroachment of Tiger's domain by an ever expanding human population and abuse of the remaining habitat appears to be doing more harm to the Tiger than what is being caused by direct persecution for trade in its parts and a lot of funds are

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This clear mood of uncertainty and neglect towards ecological interests manifest in Govt. outlook has probably resulted in some judicial activism in this country. This I take as a <sup>signal</sup> ~~sign~~ of hope and concrete sign of environmental awareness. But boundless human greed and the systemic monopoly is not likely to take this positive effort with broad outlook or kindly. Already there is a consideration brewing whether some legislation should be brought about to curb the tendency of such challenge thrown at the indignant authority.

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being available for the same. But if the local populace experiences any cultural shift and adopts consumerism, I am afraid the situation may worsen and go beyond control. The indigenous culture and, tradition of these people still remain a strong point of support for conservation, though the population growth and the consequent demand on resources has, without doubt, made things increasingly more difficult to manage the resources sustainably.

The N.G.Os, I am afraid, have not been able to improve the situation to any appreciable degree. Their voice of concern does not seem to register to draw any real action from the government's side. Besides, N.G.Os are also probably divided in <sup>their</sup> ~~this~~ opinion and approach. A divided house is naturally weak and is easily ignored. The exploits of the Global Tiger Forum, the only organisation which could have led the fight from the front is very nearly ~~is~~ very nearly NIL. The less said is probably better.

It is the State who has a constitutional mandate to protect wildlife. Prime Minister had assured his commitment to save the Tiger during first week of October last. But by the end of the same month he suggested that the National Forest Policy should be recast, oriental <sup>oriented</sup> ~~oriental~~ towards industrialisation! This may quite clearly betray the mood, the signal being picked up enthusiastically by the planners!

Dispassionate analysis of the prevailing situation, does not leave much room for me to hope for the Tiger's return, from where it had to disappear. On the contrary the tiger is apparently losing its foothold from even newer areas. The picture presently is grim indeed.

The highly complex ecosystems that held the Tiger and its wide ranging prey base has been severely damaged by the homosapians. To add to it, the status of the Tiger in most areas has been <sup>severely depleted</sup> ~~surely deflected~~, with its normal sex ratio, age grouping and spacing gone heywire. This is certainly adversely effecting the breeding potential and survival percentage of the species. A number of Tiger reserve Core area have also suffered serious set back.

Losing the Tiger in the wild shall certainly be a black day in human history and will indicate with no ambiguity his inability to hold on to Sustainable living. It is incredible that man today is chasing a mirage, which is not unknown to him, but he is unable to check the temptation and in the process heading for the bottomless abyss. <sup>greed or</sup>

The authorities would do well to size up the actual situation and do something on war footing. History of the initial decade of Project Tiger may with a little luck, repeat itself with a bit of extra initiative and commitment. The human community has a challenge, a point to prove for the sake of nothing but his own future existence. The stake is high and to me any price to be paid, cannot be regarded as impossible. <sup>or too high.</sup>

**S. Deb Roy**

December, 1997

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In India the chase in indigenous life style is in full swing and the 'development for future' is accelerating the process both directly and indirectly. This change in life style is mainly aimed at upgrading the "standard of living" and is quite oblivious about the "quality of life", which is probably deplorable. This all out <sup>blind</sup> pursuit (will you call it "crave"?) for development is actually causing the biggest damage to the cause of conservation in this country (and elsewhere in the developing countries). But ~~now~~ no one appears to be seriously concerned. Tall talks, ~~and~~ advice and suggestions are readily available in good measure but such lip service seem to be used only as a shield by the authorities against the little awareness that has come about and not for any practical

~~purpose or demonstration in the field.~~ Examples after examples of gross violation of Conservation Act or dilution of its provisions, diversion of wildlife protected areas and non implementation of various reports/suggestions of those numerous committees, appointed by the Govt. itself will testify about the govt's mock seriousness about conservation. But this is probably not surprising under the system <sup>in which</sup> ~~that~~ conservation is being practised. Those who are responsible for taking decision unfortunately, I feel, do not have the requisite understanding or the perception of the infinitely complicated ecological balance and true "Sustainability". Human interests, for such people, are overpowering and almost always wildlife or ecological interests are subjugated. <sup>Valid</sup> Opposition to works or projects which are likely to erode ecological interests are often brushed aside by clever and not so clever bureaucratic or political manoeuvring and the wildlife manager does not have any real say in such matters. Straight forward and uncompromising officers have frequently to suffer for their stand. As a result most succumb under pressure and toe the line of the political and ~~the~~ bureaucratic bosses.

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But there are various seemingly unrelated matters which are also eroding the very base of what we term as "ecological balance". A spill of tense unstable political situation, both at national and international levels, liberalisation and globalisation of economy and the blind pursuit of "development", all are fastening the noose around the Tiger's neck, though remotely and imperceptibly.

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