

## PROTECTED AREAS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM : FOR THE WELFARE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY AND WILDLIFE

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### Introduction

It is practically impossible to protect and manage the Protected Areas in the country with the help of existing infrastructure and meagre funds available to the Forest Department. The number of Protected Areas (PAs) is increasing at a rapid rate every year. India has one of the world's most extensive network of officially declared PAs, totalling 540 National Parks and Sanctuaries and covering over 4.5% forest area. Declared under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, this network has helped to conserve a significant part of India's biodiversity including a wide variety of natural habitats and plant and animal species. But in past few years it has also generated severe conflict between local communities heavily dependent on the forest resource of the area for their livelihood on one hand and the PA managers on the other. This conflict is one of the most serious threats faced by the PAs and by the biological and cultural diversity they contain (Kothari, 1996). This conflict have generated an environment of mistrust among the local communities and the PA managers, leading to damage of the PAs by poachers and the timber mafia.

One of the basic assumptions in PA management is that PAs cannot be managed unless the people are kept away

from the area. The present conservation strategy has an inbuilt dimension that alienates the local communities (Krishnan, 1996). The thrust towards exclusion is based on the unfounded assumption that human activities invariably degrade biodiversity or cause a decline in wildlife populations. That this is simply not valid, is shown by an increasing number of studies across the world, which show that current levels of diversity sought be to conserved are at least in part influenced by long term interaction with human populations (Gomez-Pompa and Kaus, 1992; Bush and Colinvaux, 1994; Adams and McShane, 1992; Arhean, 1985; Saberwal, 1996). In fact, stoppage of human activities from such ecosystems has actually reduced the biodiversity levels and even made the habitat worse for the conservation of biodiversity (Ali and Vijayan, 1986; Vijayan, 1990; Naithani *et al.*, 1992; Pandey and Singh, 1992).

In view of the above facts, there is realization that conventional management of PAs needs a drastic change. Recently, attention has been directed towards the thought of providing local communities with certain measures of control over natural resources in recognition of the fact that without their involvement, wildlife conservation efforts are destined to fail (Srivastava, 2000). This paper deals with management of PAs

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for the local community and the wildlife, and the global scenario in the new millennium.

### History of Modern PAs

PAs have existed throughout history and all regions of the world. In fact, in order to maintain defined attributes, any area that is subject to particular legal, administrative or traditional controls and management procedures is by definition a Protected Area. Over time, PAs have become a universally adopted way of conserving natural ecosystems for reasons of a broad range of human values. Today, more than 20,000 PAs, covering nearly 5 per cent of the earth's land surface, have been established in more than 130 countries. Such areas are meant to conserve the diversity of species (both plant and animal) as well as the genetic variation within them; maintain the productive capacities of ecosystems; preserve historic and cultural features of importance; secure landscapes and wildlife, which enrich human experience through their beauty; provide opportunities for community development, scientific, research, education, training, recreation and tourism; and serve as sources of national pride and human inspiration.

For the most part, early PAs were zones in which use of only a limited part of the resources was restricted. Gradually, however, there emerged a tendency to interpret PAs as zones in which a particular element was of such importance that the entire zone needed to be shielded from all human activities. This tendency was crystallized in 1872 with the creation of Yellowstone, the first national park in the United States. A key element in the

concept of national parks was that these areas would not be altered by human exploitation or occupation, i.e. *parks = no people*. The American model was adopted at first gradually, and then with increasing rapidity, by other countries around the world; by the 1990s most PAs were based on the principle of limited if not zero human presence. India also adopted the above model and enacted the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 with the main objectives to regulate the PAs and restrict human interference.

However, this tendency has proved to be counter-productive to the achievement of the overall goals of PAs. First of all, many of the PAs already had significant human populations living within their boundaries when they were created. Moreover, growing human pressures on the environment as a whole, and particularly in developing countries, make it totally unrealistic to presume that large additional areas can be set aside as sacrosanct natural habitats that may not be subject to human use or occupancy. In fact, such an attitude can serve only to weaken further the already limited natural constituency for PAs. In some places people are putting pressure to denotify the PAs and in some places denotification have already been done. The challenge is to find ways of conserving valued landscapes, ecosystems and biological diversity while deriving from them as positive a contribution as possible to the welfare of the communities who live in and around them, as well as to society at large. PAs needs to be '*conserved*' rather than '*preserved*' that means an optimal utilization of the PAs for the wildlife and local community is the best alternative for the management of PAs in a country like India.

**Advent of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**

The rapid decline of India's wildlife, one of the richest and most varied in the world, had resulted in the Government of India enacting a comprehensive legislation for the protection of wildlife – The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The basic idea behind this Act is to set apart an area, as a protected one, for virtually exclusive preservation of wildlife flora and fauna. The act discourages human habitation inside the sanctuaries and parks. Forest dwellers are treated as trespassers, their free movement is curtailed, and their use of natural resources is restricted or stopped. But this has also led to increasing conflicts between the local people and forest authority (Krishnan, 1996). This is understandable, since under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, people's interest and the interest of wildlife are perceived to be antagonistic to each other.

While there is continuing support for the idea that some areas are so important for national objectives that the highest degree of protection from human influence is required, it is not recognized that the ideal of national parks being places without significant human influence is often not reflected in practice and also is often inappropriate. In South America, for example, a recent IUCN study found that about 86 per cent of national parks had permanent resident human populations (Amend and Amend, 1992). Most parts of the world already had people living in these PAs, or at least had people with legitimate historical claims to the land and dependent on the PAs for their livelihood. In India also almost every PA is having human settlement inside the area or on the fringe

area and dependent on the PAs for their livelihood.

Recognizing that conserving nature required a more flexible approach in which local people are not excluded, many countries began to develop alternative or complementary approaches for the management of PAs. India is one of the pioneer countries, which included the role of local community in management of forests in its National Forest Policy of 1998.

**Emergence of new management approach**

In view of the above facts, both PA managers and international conservation organizations recognize that new management approaches are needed to build a more positive relationship with the people who live in and around PAs. This new perspective was first given full legitimacy in the World Conservation Strategy (Anon., 1980) and was converted into practical advice at the IIIrd World National Parks Congress, held in Bali, Indonesia, in October 1982. The title of the congress proceedings, *National parks, conservation and development: the role of protected areas in sustaining society*, gives a clear indication of the new directions being advocated (McNeely and Miller, 1984).

After a decade of experience with the new approach, several important lessons have been learned. Many of these were brought together at the IVth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, which was held in Caracas, Venezuela, in February 1992. A number of publications have already resulted from the Congress (McNeely, 1993; Barzetti, 1993;

Thorsell, 1992; Harmon, 1992). The Caracas Congress provided an opportunity to reassess the current status and trends of PAs and to synthesize the lessons learned to date.

The following points indicate the general shape of the new paradigm for PAs at the end of the twentieth century :

- PAs cannot coexist in the long term with communities that are hostile to them. However, when placed in the proper context, PAs can make significant contributions to human welfare. Many PAs face pressure from increasing populations whose economic well being has suffered from a cumulative neglect of land and other resources. For PA managers, detailed knowledge of the people whose lives are affected by the establishment and management of parks is as important as information about the plant and animal species to be conserved. The cultural and socio-economic characteristics of local people form the basis for measures to promote the sustainable use of natural resources, alleviate poverty, raise the quality of human life and create positive support for PAs.
- Because of conflicts between different uses for lands that are important for conservation, or between different economic interests with different objectives, PA managers must give considerable attention to new ways of resolving conflicts. A key step is to get all parties in a conflict to sit down and try to recognize the validity of the opposing views and search for common ground. It is also important to identify the various "stakeholders" involved in the conflict, as well as to identify their interests.
- Human communities living in and around PAs often have important and long standing relationships with these areas. These relationships embrace cultural identity, spirituality and subsistence practices, which are essential to the continued existence of the community and frequently contribute to the maintenance of biological diversity. PAs should thus be seen as making an important contribution to conserving both cultural and biological diversity.
- The relationships between people and land have too often been ignored and even destroyed by well intentioned but insensitive resource conservation and management initiatives. Community participation and equity are necessary components in decision-making processes, together with mutual respect among cultures.
- Customary tenure systems, traditional knowledge and the differential role of men and women in communities must be respected and built on in designing and implementing conservation plans.
- At the same time, community involvement does not mean opening the national parks to all comers, any more than a banker would seek customers by opening the vault. Rather, a wise PA manager, like a wise banker, uses the parks's assets as a base on which to build customer satisfaction, investment and interest.

Above mentioned thinking on the

basis of past experience would pave the way for the management of the PAs in the new millennium for wildlife and local communities.

### **PAs for the community**

Prior to deciding the importance of community in the management of PAs, it is important to understand the place of people in the ecosystem. McNelly analyzed the above facts and concluded that “forest ecosystems are ‘natural’ and humans are essential part of this ‘nature’ ” (McNelly, 2002). The above facts are important for effective management of PAs for the community. Once it is understood that community is not alien to PAs, rather they are the integral part of the ecosystem, then harmonious management of PAs is possible for wildlife and local communities. Management of PAs should aim at providing livelihood to the local community, which in turn will assure the protection of the PAs and its effective management.

The IUCN have taken above facts into account and redefined the protected areas and advocated certain principles for the management of PAs. The IUCN describes a PA as :

*“An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural **and associated cultural resources**, and managed through legal or other effective means [emphasis added]”.*

This reference to “associated cultural resources” reflects a view of conservation that can accommodate the social, economic and cultural interests, values, rights and responsibilities of local communities living in and around PAs. Specifically, what many

indigenous and other traditional peoples’ organisations have demanded is as follows:

- Effectively protect PAs, as well as the people and cultures they contain, from external threats, and in particular reinforce traditional PAs;
- Recognize indigenous and other traditional peoples’ rights to their lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and other resources;
- Recognize their rights to control and co-manage these resources within PAs;
- Allow participation of traditional institutions in co-management arrangements within their terrestrial, coastal/marine and freshwater areas;
- Recognize the rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples to determine their own development priorities – as long as these priorities are compatible with PA objectives;
- A PA be declared only at their initiative, and/or with their free and prior informed consent;
- Incorporate sustainable use of natural resources using methods that maintain the integrity of the ecosystem and that have been used traditionally by indigenous peoples.

These claims can be reconciled with the objectives of PAs, as defined by IUCN. However, they require that governments, that have not already done so, put in place policies and strategies to help establish effective, sustainable partnerships between conservation agencies and indigenous and other traditional peoples. In line with

current understanding of the concept of sustainable development, as well as with the Convention on Biological Diversity, ILO Convention 169, Agenda 21, and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, WWF and IUCN recognize that :

- PAs will survive only if they are seen to be of value, in the widest sense, to the nation as a whole and to local people in particular.
- *Territorial and resource rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples inhabiting PAs must be respected by promoting and allowing full participation in co-management of resources, in a way that would not affect or undermine the objectives for the PAs set out in its management plan.*
- Knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and other traditional peoples have much to contribute to the management of PAs.
- Governments and PA managers should incorporate customary and indigenous tenure and resource use, and control systems, as a means of enhancing biodiversity conservation.
- Indigenous peoples have the right "to participate effectively in the management of the protected areas established on their lands or territories", and therefore agreements should be reached with them "prior to the establishment of protected areas on their lands or territories". This action is to be based on the recognition of land/territorial and resource rights, the necessity for prior agreement on the establishment of new PAs on their

lands or territories, and rights to effective participation in PA management.

### Conclusion

In view of the above facts and changing global scenario, the PA manager must change the approach to management of PAs. Hitherto, local communities are treated as unwanted elements in the management and protection of the PAs. Protected Areas are complex ecosystems and the local communities are an integral part of the ecosystem, forms the basis of change in concept of PA management.

However, this change in approach to PA management requires necessary changes in the legal framework and reorientation of the managers of the PAs. Besides this, the local communities also need proper education and awareness about the changing approach to PA management. Lack of awareness among the local communities in and around the PAs about the importance of conserving the biodiversity for the livelihood of the people dependent on the PAs is the major cause of conflict. If the local communities recognize the benefit from the products and services provided by the forests, they would be motivated to modify their resource- and land-use patterns and invest time and efforts in management of PAs. Symbiotic relationship between local communities and the wildlife plays a vital role in management of the PAs. If the above approach and ideas are adopted by suitably modifying them to suit the local conditions and needs, PAs can definitely be managed for the welfare of wildlife and local communities. In the new millennium PAs will be a boon for the society as whole and for the local community in particular.

### SUMMARY

**It is practically impossible to protect and manage the Protected Areas (PAs) in the country with the help of existing infrastructure and funds available to the Forest Department. Numbers of PAs are increasing at rapid speed every year. India has one of the world's most extensive networks of officially PAs, totalling 540 National Parks and Sanctuaries and covering over 4.5% forest area. Initially PAs were managed by excluding the local community and laws were framed accordingly. However, the results of such management have led to many conflicts and PAs suffer badly. Both PA managers and international conservation organizations should recognize that new management approaches are needed to build a more positive relationship with the people who live in and around PAs based on the facts that PAs are a complex ecosystem and the local communities are the integral part of the ecosystem.**

**नई सहस्राब्दि के संरक्षित क्षेत्र - स्थानीय समुदायों और वन्य प्राणियों के कल्याण के लिए**

**मोहन झा**

**सारांश**

वन विभाग की वर्तमान अधोसंरचना और उसे मिलने वाली धनराशि की मदद से देश के संरक्षित क्षेत्रों की सुरक्षा और प्रबन्ध कर पाना वास्तव में असम्भव ही है। संरक्षित क्षेत्रों की संख्या प्रतिवर्ष बड़ी तेज गति से बढ़ती जा रही है। भारतवर्ष में सरकारी तौर से संरक्षित किए जाने वाले क्षेत्रों का संसार के सर्वधिक विस्तृत जालकर्मों में गिना जाने वाला जालकर्म है जिनकी कुल संख्या 540 राष्ट्रीय उपवन और अभयारण्य होती है जो कुल वन क्षेत्र का 4.5% से कुछ अधिक भाग आवृत करते हैं। आरम्भ में, इन संरक्षित क्षेत्रों का प्रबन्ध इनसे स्थानीय समुदायों को पृथक रखकर किया जाता था और तदनुसार ही कानून बनाए गए थे। किन्तु, ऐसा प्रबन्ध करने का परिणाम बहुत सारे झगड़े उठ खड़े होना हुआ जिससे संरक्षित क्षेत्रों को बहुत हानि पहुँची। उपर्युक्त तथ्यों को ध्यान में रख संरक्षित क्षेत्रों के प्रबन्धकों और अन्तराष्ट्रीय संरक्षण संगठनों, दोनों ने यह स्वीकार किया कि संरक्षित क्षेत्रों में तथा उनके आस-पास बसने वाले लोगों के साथ, इन तथ्यों पर आधारित करते हुए कि संरक्षित क्षेत्र एक जटिल प्रकार की परिस्थिति-संहतियां होते हैं, और स्थानीय समुदाय उन परिस्थिति-संहतियों के अविच्छेद्य भाग होते हैं, अपेक्षतया अधिक सकारात्मक संबंध बनाने के लिए नई प्रबन्ध अभि दृष्टियां अपनाना आवश्यक होगा।

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