

Namdapha

Namdapha Reserve in Changlang District of Arunachal: Aparajita Dutta, a wildlife biologist with Nautre conservation foundation, a Mysore based NGO, has been studying the region for a while and believes that the hunting pressures in the forests here are extreme and it is, ironically, the hunting tribes who know the region well enough also.

The Lisu, also referred to as Yobin by some communities, are agriculturists and also known to be good hunter gatherers. The tribe has been annoyed with the creation of the Park since they feel that the forest department has alienated them from their own jungles. The biggest grievance is that the creation of the park boundary was carried out in 1983 without any consultation with these surrounding tribes. Many insist that the area between Deban and Gandhigram is their area and they had no idea that a park was to come up here. The biggest hurdle to their development, they feel the, is the restriction on making arterial road which the forest department imposed after the making of the park and they also stopped all road repair work in 2000.

On the other hand, the field staff in Namdapha is very low. There are merely 22 sanctioned posts of forest guards to protect 1,985 sq. km. of area. Most of the staff is from outside and not a single Lisu tribe person is employed with the forest department. This is a big hurdle because not only does the animosity between the dept. and people keep building up to a point of hostile tension, the area is not also not as familiar to the officials as it would be to the Lisu inhabitants.

Involving the community in the administrative and governance of the park would help address these issues in a crucial sense as also suggested by Dutta's study.

Bawarias in Sariska Rajasthan is another such example of a community of past hunters turning to "protectors" of agricultural land against onslaughts by wild animals like Nilgai etc. The Bawaria is a nomadic, traditionally a hunting community in Sariska. 5 members were arrested here after the recent Sariska crisis. A socio economic study done by Bahar Dutt for Muktidhara shows how the occupational patterns of his community are

changing today and they are no longer a hunting tribe. In the current generation, the study shows, 80 % of Bawarias in Alwar district have taken to protecting agricultural fields against onslaughts of animals like the Nilgai. Their skills in hunting are being used by neighboring communities as well but since the utilization of their skills continues at an informal level, there is no recognition given to them in state records, of being that of a protector. Today they resort to hunting, only in times of distress. Their insecurity also comes from the fact that even though some of them have been given land, a lot of them are still fighting for suitable relocated land to earn their living from. They face a high level of harassment from the landholding communities and the administration.

They remain strangers today to their own land and its forests. Here again a policy of "inclusion" would mutually benefit the forest dept. as well as the tribal community.

It is also interesting to see what happens if some activity is "legalized" and is the same one remains "illegal" in the eyes of the law. The Task Force has analyzed the case of two reservoirs, one on Tawa River in MP and the other on Satpura river in Pench in Maharashtra, both of which fall in the reserve and hence, by policy any human activity here is banned.

In Tawa, 44 displaced villages took up an alternate source of livelihood and have managed their natural resources in a sustainable manner over the past 9 years. In 1974, the reservoir was handed over to the state and in 1975 for fish production to MP Fisheries Development Corporation till 1994. It was auctioned to a private contractor for a year after that. The reservoir was open to all from 1995-96 and then handed over to a cooperative after a prolonged struggle. Because of lack of any other employment opportunities to the displaced people, they asked for exclusive fishing rights here and thus after a long struggle Tawa Matsya Society was formed.

The co-operative is constituted solely of local communities and is two tiered. A report by Ahmedabad based Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology shows that production here was highly fluctuating when the reservoir was under the control of Mp Fisheries department and under Matsya society it increased from 100 tonnes in 1996 to 400 tonnes in 2000. The society has also successfully employed marketing strategies.

However in the neighboring Totladoh settlement in PENCH, the situation is quite the opposite. This is a settlement from Seoni and Chhindwada districts of MP and Nagpur district in Maharashtra in the 1970's .After the creation of PENCH hydroelectric project, most villagers in the submergence areas also came here. They have been asking for legal fishing rights in the reservoir but have been consistently put off. In an agreement between states of MP and Maharashtra, an agreement was reached over fishing rights in Totladoh reservoir and the Nehru Yuva Matsay Society was formed. In 1995 Maharashtra govt. banned fishing in the reservoir claiming that this area came under the reserve. On MP's side, the state paid compensation to people in lieu of giving up their fishing rights. As a result now the fishing trade is carried out illegally in the reservoir. Fisher folk apparently enter the park on a sly at night and work there for four hours. Any seizure by the forest department is received by the locals with a violent response.

Note: It is also pertinent here to look at Ranthambore Foundation and see why it failed in establishing the people conservation model that it had initiated in the park