

Interview with P.K. Sen [PK]

KB: So is there a tiger crisis?

PK: Obviously there is a tiger crisis. Obviously there is a tiger crisis, at the moment. And this is happening for the last 10 years or so. Maybe more than 10 years.

KB: And how severe is the crisis today?

PK: Why we started the Project Tiger? Let me come back to the Project Tiger business first, which is on the verge of changing its design. But when it was conceived in 1972 and implemented from 1973 onwards, first it had 9 tiger reserves. What is the objective of tiger reserves? Or how could the people know that the tiger number has dwindled to such an extent that it is on the verge of extinction? Through the permit holders. You must be knowing that till 1968 we had the system of issuing permit for killing – hunting of different wild animals including tigers. They were called hunting reserves. They started from the time of Britishers. The facility was provided by the rajas and maharajas, the zamindars and landlords, and for the entertainment of themselves – the owners as well as the civil servants, the army officers and so on and so forth. In other words you can say that it was a weapon of *chamchagiri* to the bureaucrats. Right? And they had a feeling that if you kill a tiger you are a great person. Great sportsman, so on and so forth. So this is how it continued till 1968. There was a provision in every Forest Division that the DFO will issue the permit, the shooting blocks were defined. How many animals they will kill in a span of 15 days ... it varied from 15 days to 3 months. Big people, they were also tour operators. Like Mr VC Shukla, he was a tour operator, hunting operator so to say. So this is how things ran, but when the people who got permits for shooting tigers began reporting that tigers are not available for shooting in this shooting block or that shooting block, then first time it came to the mind of people that tigers are very low in number. They have been over-exploited. The decline is sustained decline. Then people started thinking, some people came to Madam Gandhi and said, “Look, this is the situation of tigers, and the tiger is such a magnificent species and should be protected.” And even the global community came forward for that. It was thought that some areas could be declared as tiger reserves so that the tiger could breed, multiply and spread. The tiger reserve was only a management concept, it was not an administrative concept. There was no legal sanctity for tiger reserves. So parts of sanctuaries, national parks, were notified as tiger reserves ... if they were thought to be viable as tiger units. Now if you see the period between 1973 and 2001, suppose 1971 to 2001, this 30-year span, what has happened – our [human] population has multiplied two and a half times. The cattle population has multiplied almost three times. You know that there is a major proportion of our population that is still dependent on the forest for their sustenance. Similarly, more than 40% of the cattle graze freely inside forests. Even if you were to take a token of Re1 per cattle per year that is nothing. It is ok...leave it. Anyway, this is the situation we have seen in the last 30 years – the creation of Project Tiger in 1973 and the year 2003 am not criticising or commenting on the Census figures of 2002. But I can assure you that in 1999 when the state governments reported back certain figures, I as Field director, cut it off Director, Project Tiger, refused to accept them, except for the figures from Kanha, which was scientifically done. Dr Rajesh Gopal, the present Field Director (Project Tiger), was the Field Director there, and he submitted the report very scientifically and it

could be believed that yes, such a number of tigers is there. Otherwise nobody submitted any such report which was according to the guidelines issued by the Govt of India in 1997. There was a meeting of the experts, so-called experts, of the country, in which, from Dr Ullas Karanth to Mr Binod Rishi, everybody was present. In which we issued a one and a half page circular, with the approval of the Ministry and the Minister himself, and a lot of debates took place on the methodologies to be followed, prescribed to be followed in the tiger reserves, in particular, [while] submit[ting] the report of the Tiger Census. It was never pursued though the Govt of India [agreed] that [for] the entire method if you carry out in the state, the entire cost will be borne by the Govt of India, 100%.

KB: Why do you think it didn't happen?

PK: It didn't happen because...communication system was very poor. ... Wherever they went, whatever sign of tiger or its presence was noted, [Forest Guards] intimated it on a weekly basis to their superior, the Forester. The Forester consolidated reports of 3–4 Forest Guards under him, and intimated [it to] the Range Officer every fortnight. The same thing was compiled by the Range Officer, and when they went to the DFO or the Conservator, for monthly conferences, particularly for getting forest advances, in the first week of the month, they submitted the report – that these are the areas, every evidence, all 7–8 parameters, which have been defined here again, in the present methodology of tiger estimation that was recorded in 1973. And because there was no wireless system, therefore, the DFO or the Conservator, whosoever was in charge of the tiger reserve, had a huge big map on a tracing paper. There, pinned flags were put. What was the advantage? People say that you cannot recognise a tiger. I tell you if you can recognise a tiger by seeing the stripes, the Forest Guard or a tracker seeing a particular tiger every day for almost 9 months in a year...could name it. Now it has become the laughing stock that some tiger we called Raja, now the scientists say this is absurd. No, it is not absurd. How can you identify... I call [a tiger] Raja, you call [it] T1, so [does it mean] you are correct and I am wrong?

KB: So there must be other ...

PK: There is no apparatus, how do you identify a tiger by a camera trap. Ok. By its stripes.

KB: But it is not dependent on individual...

PK: That is individual observation. A group of people say that yes, it is the same tiger. This has been trapped, captured and recaptured, from both sides, that is why it is T1, otherwise how are you going to say it is Tiger T1, or it is T2 or this is tiger T3? ... No, I can't say because I have not mastered that technology. And if you say that this is a methodology that can be mastered by 5 people by seeing photographs 300 times, then imagine a person who is looking at the tiger [in the face] 300 times in a year and at least 60,000 times in his lifetime of 20 years... Why can't he name it? That is the basic thing...

PK: Crisis... This is how it should be done. This is how you know the home range of a tiger. So many things – the stripes, the pugmarks... [You know] what is his home range

by seeing it in different places, OK? And it was always considered a management tool. Suppose I have 50 tigers in X Park. There are 4 ranges, one has 20 tigers in 200 sq km, and one range has 2 tigers in 200 sq km. Why so? That is why it was called a management tool? Now it has become a bone of contention that I am possessing so many tigers? If the numbers are going down then the person[s in charge] will be penalised. From the lowest level to the highest level. That is why people are trying to fudge these figures.

KB: You are agreeing that there is a fudging of figures?

PK: Obviously, because, I tell you, when I took over charge of Palamau Tiger Reserve, there were 69 tigers reported in the previous year. ... But it was just impossible. In 1000 sq km, in that area, you could not [have] 69 tigers, 70 tigers. And ... I tell you, that tiger reserve cannot hold more than 25 tigers because of its prey base, its habitat, and other things – pressure from outside, villages inside, so many factors are there. Because in 1000 sq km the area is reduced if there is one village [nearby]... A village of 2 km radii is not inhabited by tigers, otherwise there will be cattle killed. So if there are 50 villages like that then you lose 50 into 20, 1000 sq km, out of 1000 sq km, [which] means the tiger [population] is virtually nil. That is what is happening nowadays.

KB: No, it is very interesting because you are saying that tiger numbers are fudged. We all know tiger numbers are being fudged for the last 30 years...

PK: Yes, why fudged, I will give you the reasons for that. No.1 is that nobody could dare to say that tiger number has been reduced. When I reduced the number of the tigers, according to the rough estimation (that wasn't the final estimation), to 41, the newspapers reported that P.K. Sen, within a year of his tenure as Field Director, has eaten away 28 tigers. In fact, there was virtually a commission of enquiry against me. Therefore, nobody wants to take this botheration. I will go after 3 years. Next man will come, he will be different. This is the fact. The second thing is the sincerity of the technology that has been downgraded. A Forest Guard with a thick lens at the age of 55 years... OK, the camera, the plaster cast taken. ... How do you know this plaster cast is genuine, or [the plaster cast of] one tiger has not repeatedly been taken by the same Forest Guard. How much effort you are putting in those [things]? ... And what I said earlier, that method was for all the year round, except for the rainy season in the tropical forest. But now we have confined it to 7 days during summer season, when there is a pinch period and the water holes are dry. So presume that everything will come there. It is not a continuous monitoring for the whole year round. That is why there is every chance of wrong perception. Two tigers overlapping in a waterhole. That may happen.

KB: It is very interesting that for 30 years and even now, for 35 years, this lie has been [sustained]. What is the reason?

PK: For that the pseudo-scientists are to be blamed. Not the managers.

KB: Who are the pseudo-scientists?

PK: There are so many pseudo-scientists over here. There are thriving on pseudo-scientific data and information and collection. I will tell you how. You tell me in 1995 300 tigers [died]...that a tiger is dying every day. This is ok. Where from you got the

figure? ... No scientist asked this question as to from where this figure has been calculated. For the first time when I took over in 1996 I said yes, more than 300 tigers are dying. Because the calculation is very simple. In 1989, you had 4,350 tigers. In '93 the tiger number came down to 3,738. OK, so 600 tigers you lost in 4 years. Whereas you should have added 600 tigers in 4 years if you have taken into account the estimate of 4,000 tigers, then the breeding – population dynamics of the tiger – it will add 600 tigers. Instead you lost 600. So it means you have lost 1,200 tigers. So 400–300 tigers are dying every year. That was a simple calculation. But you tell me there were 1,800 tigers in 1973, by which logic it becomes 4,350 tigers in 1989. Then everybody was clapping. That is why you [can] call [these people] pseudo-scientists, [who say] that Project Tiger is great.

KB: So basically it was within the govt...

PK: No... it was not within the Project Tiger. People had to accept it. It was announced in the Parliament. For the first time, in '99 it was announced that no, we don't accept the report of the state governments. And that is why even the Parliament replied, and it was stated "As reported by the State Govts". The Govt of India had no role to play in that. But prior to that we accepted it.

KB: If you go down to park level, state level, say, places like Buxa. Even today they maintain that they have so many tigers. We have gone there, you have gone there – there is no prey base, the forest cannot handle...

PK: There is again politics. The politics is very simple. You see, who is in the govt in West Bengal – Left Front, Left Front is supporting UPA here. If today you say that Buxa has lost tigers, UPA govt will be heckled.

KB: But it is not for today, it has been happening for the last...

PK: It has been for today, but the CPM govt is running there for more than the last 20 years. Before 20 years I don't know what is the situation. But there is definitely a huge amount of pressure, aggravated amount of pressure, in Buxa – number of cattle grazing, number of people entering. The people cannot control the basics. When you sign an agreement with a tea garden, it is mandatory that the tea garden...provide[s] fuel wood or fuel materials to its labour population. What they do, do you know? They make the labour free for one day, particularly the female folks, and ask them to go to the forests, and fetch firewood for the whole week. And we accept it. How many people have seen tigers in the last 20 years in Buxa?

KB: You mean to say that nobody has seen tigers in Buxa...?

PK: I have not seen [in the] last 10 years.

KB: But they have meticulous records of tigers – pugmarks...

PK: ... but where is the prey base? They don't eat human beings.

KB: But how do they have it?

PK: They can always have it. They can always have it. If the plaster cast of 1991 is marked as plaster cast...you can put it on the ground, and get another plaster cast. So things are happening like that.

KB: So they are stamping...?

PK: Yes. How can you say that you have so many tigers in Indravati? Who has been to Indravati? The experts they say that they have gone to Indravati. I know they had gone to Palamau. Two very revered people. Mr Kamal Naidu was one of them, and Mr Patnaik. They went across, from one end to another on a black top road. They didn't have guts to go inside. So who decides that the park is in great shape?

KB: So who stands up and says this is wrong because for 20 years Buxa has been able to...

PK: Every day, every day, for 365 days in an year, and for 5 years, I have been saying that this is wrong, this is wrong. You go and see my reports.

...

KB: Who gives a damn for Project Tiger? I mean, how does it matter? They are still getting the funds, all the states.

PK: It's very simple. We stopped funding [for] a particular park. The Chief Minister of the state came and talked to our minister. He said, "No, release". So we released. Why? It was mandatory [for] the Field Director [to be] appointed with the concurrence of the Steering Committee of Project Tiger. How many are happening today? Not one. So in one state – I will not name that state – I stopped funding. Next month, the Chief Minister of the state came with the Forest Minister, the Chief Wildlife Warden and the DCF. They talked to the Minister, the Minister called me and asked the Additional DG and myself to release the funds.

KB: So what you are saying is that an institution like the Project Tiger doesn't have teeth.

PK: Doesn't have teeth. It definitely doesn't have teeth. And uselessly a person with experience of 20–30 years was brought here in Project Tiger, when his technical advice is not heard by the Ministry. That is the problem. Can you imagine, Dr Rajesh Gopal, has spent 11 years in Kanha as Field Director, 4 years as Deputy Director in Bandhavgarh. The problems are aggravating due to two reasons mainly: political pressure and people's consciousness. You cannot shift the villagers. People's rights. So people's rights activists are much more in number than the requirement. Because they are getting funds from outside. In the name of human activism people get money from outside.

KB: You were talking about Rajesh Gopal. What happened?

PK: Rajesh Gopal is sitting across me, my table. A lady comes from Maharashtra and says he [Rajesh Gopal] is doing crime, without recognising Rajesh Gopal. He is doing crime. He is not giving money to the people who have been shifted outside. What Mr Pawar did by relocating people during the formation of Kanha or after that, you know, 19 villages he shifted. After that Rajesh Gopal paid them...almost Rs 30 lakh annually. To keep Kanha as sanctum sanctorum. Even then that lady came and started complaining to me. Virtually, after some time, they were at blows. Because you are commenting on a person who has been doing a very good job on the directives of the govt. His state govt

wants this, the Govt of India wants this. And he has to follow, what does the govt servant follow? You blame a govt servant, it is fine. Because the media can say anything about a govt servant. But you tell me how the govt servant reacts to it. What is the methodology? The media must see both sides of the coin. What are the handicaps? Today what is happening? When I [talked] to the *Hindustan Times*... It is official now that Project Tiger has flopped. I never said a word like that. I said 30% of the areas under Project Tiger are not under our administrative control. And you calculate even today 40% of our areas are not within our physical control. How do you manage tigers? The largest tiger reserve in the country – is it within our control or is it in the control of the extremists? Palamau, Indravati, I am talking of Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisailem. That is 3,600 sq km. We have put the area under Project Tiger, we say after the inclusion of 38 more tiger reserves it will be 45,000 sq km. Fine, but how many sq km are under our control. These things have to be seen and if we really mean tiger conservation is an important issue for the country's sake, you will have to give two things.

I don't believe human beings and tigers can survive together. Because, which type of human being is surviving there in the forest? They are the poorest of the poor. In last 60 years the entire development fund has been gobbled up by the civil servants and the politicians. Their [the forest-dwelling poor] share of money has not gone to them. Otherwise, their female folk of all ages would not have gone to the forest, cut trees, brought it to the city on their heads, and sold for Rs 10 rupees or 20. Two things happen there. I don't know if you will cut my version. I have seen because I belong to a tribal area. I have spent my life with them. My best friends are tribals. I have gone inside, deep inside, their culture and everything. Whosoever claims today he is doing a great job. Even the politicians, parliamentarians claim today that they are doing a great job. Do they have the guts to ask where these billions of rupees have gone? Should I give you one figure? Till the creation of Jharkhand state, 1981 to 1995, 500 crores. Sorry, 1981 to 1985, 500 crores, 1986 to 1991, 750 crores, 1991 to 1999, 1,000 crores, was given to Chhotanagpur Santhal Pargana Tribal Development Council which is Jharkhand state today. If you calculate...the population of tribals was only 4.6 million, it could give Rs 1 million to every individual, out of that money. But in last 50 years, their status... if there is no rainfall they cannot have even one crop. No improvement in the cropping pattern, whatever land they have. Now, people are crying foul that gross injustice has been done. Which land they will plough, you have not decided. How much area is needed for the sustenance of a particular family, you have not decided, and you are only crying foul that gross injustice has been done by the Britishers which is followed by the independent India. Do you mean to say that every forest land is fit for agriculture? No, it cannot happen. Because forest covers mountains, rocks, everything, riverbed, so on and so forth. But we say that gross injustice has been done, so land should be given to tribals. Initially 2.5 hectares and now the Left Front dominated limping government...had to concede that, not 2.5 hectares, any amount should be given. Nobody asks where that money for rural development has gone. Nobody asks where the money for tribal development has gone. ...over and above this [there] is also the rural development fund. And you could not bring one person out of poverty line. And same is the fate of those people, those who have come out of the villages.

KB: The point of the matter is that all of us believe that there is a crisis?

PK: Yes, there is a crisis. I still believe. Everybody believes. Even in the Govt of India or in the state govt. I tell you, the new methodology, if they follow it, if they are able to follow it and if the state govts are honest to give the report to the Govt of India... [But the] same thing which earlier happened, same thing will happen again. No state govt is in a position to say: this is my tiger reserve. I have reported 26 tigers. And there are 3 found today according to new methodology. They will never report. Can you imagine how many heads will roll in that. And if suppose, today you find, after this analysis, why they are deferring?

KB: 2007...

PK: 2007 September–November now? Why? Is there any fault in the methodology? Why did they announce 2005 September in the initial stages? How much money has gone down? So if you see in totality then this is a crisis within crisis. We are creating crisis. We are expanding things in such a manner that crisis is blowing up. Forget about the tiger. Let Govt of India say: we don't require tigers in the wild. Why this hypocrisy? One tiger dies the whole country starts dancing, but what are we doing for the tiger? That is the most important thing. If you say 5,000 tigers is the viable population [to be] distributed in this-this pockets, if you feel that for the betterment of these 5,000 tigers we need 50,000 sq km area, now it has to be decided, but who will decide it? Not science, not scientists, but the *gram sabha* or the politicians from the Left Front, because it is a votebank. Trees or tiger don't give vote. You understand. That is why I am saying that these people are making a mess of it. No, tiger should be saved. If one tiger dies there is so much hue and cry. Even if it is dying in a zoo there is so much hue and cry. Even today there are 2 articles by the scientists and the foresters that the *barasingha* should be exploited. Commercially exploited for ploughing back the money for conservation. The actual money that you are getting, are you utilising that money for conservation? Or you are only sermonizing? ... Why do you do all these things, keeping the tiger, the leopard, every animal...in the breeding farm and sell[ing] them in the market?

KB: What you are saying is that in the state govts nobody is interested in Project Tiger?

PK: No, nobody is really saving the tiger. Even the people are not interested. The media is also not interested. Nobody is interested. It is all hypocrisy. When one tiger dies, we shout. The next day we forget. Otherwise nobody like Dr Binod Mathur or Dr Pabla can say in today's *Indian Express*...today's *Hindu*... both of them combined together have given this statement – that *barasingha* should be [exploited]. How much of pains have been taken to save the *barasingha*. And now the population is how much? Is it exploitable? Is it spreading? Do they have space to move around? But the sermon is that you can exploit it. At a princely price on each head. What do you do with that?

KB: So how do you assess the Project Tiger?

PK: You see, the Project Tiger was created, that is how you talk about the tiger. Otherwise by now the tiger would have gone. That is the credit of Project Tiger. People thought it is necessary because it keeps the tiger's habitat intact.

KB: But has that happened?

PK: That has not happened. Even today the tiger habitat, whatever is left, is left in the name of the tiger. Nobody will keep a habitat intact in the name of the spotted deer. Can they say Kanha tigers [are] to be exploited at a princely price? Can Pabla or Mathur say this? They can't say this. They are only talking because it [the *barasingha*] is a second-string species. Highly endangered. The Indian highland *barasingha* is more endangered than the tiger. Because it has been retrieved by the efforts of people like Pawar and Rajesh Gopal and so on and so forth. But today you are talking of [exploiting them], at a princely price you sell them. They allow the shooter to shoot them. Don't you think it is hypocrisy? Are you in a position to do that? Who has analysed? I don't have the authority to say these things. And being a representative of the Govt of Madhya Pradesh at the rank of Principal Conservator of Forests, and a Dean of Wildlife Institute of India – a riff-raff like me, who has retired, he can talk all nonsense. But these people have no authority to talk like this.

KB: I have an important and interesting point. You know I have seen through personal experience that individual forest officers have made a difference...like for instance when you were there as Project Tiger Director, from all counts I have heard and I have also experienced that you were one of the most respected directors. Why is it that an institution like the Forest Department...?

PK: That is what I am. It cannot happen because of the political agenda. That is what I am trying to tell you. That is what I am trying to convince you.

KB: How did you manage to do that in your 5 years?

PK: Because I had no axe to grind. If I was transferred I was transferred. Many people don't want transfers. My son – he had to lose 1 year in school. My daughter – she had to lose 2 years in school. How many people are there to satisfy? You see the case of Debroy. Almost similar is my case. My wife died. I reached there after 12 hours of her death. I didn't know when my son has passed class 10, class 12. Which college he is going [to]? What subject he is taking? I didn't know any of this. He did it on his own.

KB: So institution does not provide strength?

PK: No, institution does not provide strength, because institution has broken, completely. And personal agenda counts more than the required agenda of conservation. Conservation is a very difficult subject in the present-day situation. With this massive population, you cannot say that you human being, you move away from this place. That is how it becomes more difficult. But if you want either, if you want conservation, if you want habitat, if you want habitat for recharging your rivers, then you will have to take a final decision. Otherwise nothing will survive.

KB: Sir, what kind of political pressure came on you?

PK: Everything I had. Every day I was threatened that you will be transferred tomorrow. From the Minister. From this, from that. There was a drought. A serious drought, when I joined service in [what] is Palamau Tiger Reserve today, then it was Daltonganj. There was a severe drought in 1966–7. I faced that, so I knew what happens. That was a sanctuary at the time under the Indian Forest Act. Ultimately it became a tiger reserve.

We could not shift 3 villages from inside, due to political pressure. But something was done which can be recorded in golden letters. Dam was not stopped. Why? You will be surprised to know why. Because, Mr Laloo Yadav, as Chief Minister, was convinced that unless the Govt of India gives clearance you cannot close it. He wrote on the file. That is [one] of his actions I admire. I have [spoken of that in an] interview to *Sanctuary* magazine also. No other Chief Minister has done that. The other Chief Ministers, the Congress Chief Ministers, who toed the line of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, they have sold their forests. There are examples, I don't want to name them. Even today they are instrumental behind the Travel Bill and all that. Because the question today is not of forests, not of conservation, but the question is of land. All land other than forest land has been sold. Forest Department, my dear Krishnendu, is not the owner of this land. It is a myth that the Forest Department is the owner. Forest Department is only the custodian of this land. The entire land is owned by the Revenue Department. But because of the Forest Conservation and Wildlife Protection Acts, this land cannot be used or misused by the politicians, bureaucrats, industrialists, miners or anybody. Because Supreme Court is holding...your hair in a grip and you can't budge. Even then they are budging, but secretly they are budging. They are taking land from here to there to there. I can show you a CD of a division in Tamil Nadu. You will be shocked. In the name of tribals land has been transferred. In the name of poor people land has been transferred. Ultimately it has gone to who[m]? It has gone to the biggest business houses in the country. Reserved forest land. I have a CD. I can show it to you. And I am thinking of making some more copies. The edited copy is coming and I will send it to all the people including the Prime Minister, the lady Miss Brinda Karat. She says that to the tribals gross injustice has been done. Then she will understand what is actually happening. Why so much clamour [over] tribals?

KB: What you are saying is that forest land is very politicised land...?

PK: Absolutely, there is no other land which is available... Forest land is most politicised land today, because there is no other govt land which is available. So they want to pounce upon those lands. Forget about trees or no trees. Forget about tribals or no tribals. I have seen in the last 40 years how many tribals have benefited from release of land from the forest. It is total bunkum. Everything has been taken over by the land mafia. Because the tribals are also very comfortable. They will get this land free of cost. 5 hectares, 2.5 hectares. They'll transfer this land to me. They'll get 2 lakhs. Those 2 lakhs will give them a reprieve for drinks, food and other things for at least 10 years. Then they will think after ten years. No tribal thinks of the next day. So if they can think of the next 10 years, that is a very big asset. This is how you exploit people.

KB: So where do you go from here, what is the next step?

PK: Next step... The future is very bleak. Unless you dedicate, you give...it's a question of space. Every living thing requires space. A tree requires space. It doesn't move but it requires space for its survival. A mosquito, a bacteria, a fungus, everything requires space. You are talking of a mega species like a tiger or an elephant or a rhino. Unless you give them some space, they cannot survive. It is basic science. And if you say 5,000 tigers are needed – that is a biologically viable population of tigers, well-distributed in the country, say here, there, there – then you will have to give them certain space. They

cannot compete with the cow or they will kill the cow, and the moment they kill the cow, they will be poisoned. Because the poor man is losing his cow or a bullock which is his asset. He will die of starvation otherwise.

KB: Sir, what kind of viable tiger population...?

PK: Viable tiger population? Let these scientists come out with these figures. Why don't they come out? It is the scientists' job, not the manager's job.

KB: You were saying 5, 7 or 8 hundred...

PK: 5, 7, or 8 hundred tigers are not viable. 5,7,8 hundred tigers are there in South India also, in the bend from Dandeli to Nagerhole. In spite of everything 700 tigers are there in Central India. But how do they survive? How the gene flow is to be maintained? Can you maintain the gene flow in Rajasthan? You can't maintain that. You can maintain some gene flow in Corbett. But you are breaking the corridor by tourism, and by optimising – not optimizing, maximising – tourism. If there is optimum tourism...

KB: Tell me something about the Forest Department's pay and the foresters' pay in India. For instance there are so many people. As many people as wildlife to manage in National Parks and Sanctuaries. Is the Forest Department personnel trained or equipped enough to manage?

PK: There are 2–3 things which have come up now recently in the last 10 years or so. The amount of poaching, the amount of trade-related issues, encroachment. These are the issues which are coming in the way of conservation. Encroachment, free encroachment. Anywhere and everywhere. But where? Only within the forest land. Next is political interference. Combining all these things, the forest officers are not trained to tackle all these things. What training has been given to me? I have done my training in 1965 to 1967. The same design of training is continuing except the [addition of the] computer. Computer doesn't protect the tiger. Computer can't protect the forest. It can give you the data. It has a lot of advantages. But you have to go to the field. You have to know your area. You will have to know what the weaknesses are like. You will have to strengthen those things, bridge the gaps. Are we in a position to do that? Are we trained to control poaching with *dandas* in our hands, which has been continuing for the last 100 years? The number of Forest Guards has increased, but the territorial Forest Guard who is in charge of protecting the tree and the animals, has his area been reduced? What equipment has been given to them? When the land-grabbers instigate the villagers, how he is supposed to tackle them? What instrument he has? The Division Forest Officer in the Forest Department have to go and beg the collector when this is happening. You go and see how the bureaucracy is involved in land-grabbing in the state of Tamil Nadu. The CD I was talking about...

KB: Sir, you were talking about relooking at the forest department...

PK: Definitely. Relooking [at] the structure. Relooking [at] the facilities. Today how much money is spent on the VIP security here? In this country? In Delhi only? I heard it is more than 700 crores per annum plus my time. I spent 45 minutes between Safdarjang Flyover and my office because some VVIP was going. So the roads were blocked. If you calculate this 45 minutes of time multiplied by so many 100s, 1000s of people... That is

not calculated. But [even] without that, 700 crore rupees is spent on annual law and order to protect the VVIP. How much do you give to the Forest Department to protect the wildlife?

KB: What happened in Sariska from the Project Tiger point of view?

PK: From the Project Tiger point of view, I am telling you. 1999. I have seen 5 tigers in 5 different locations. So you could not rule out that 20 tigers are not there, and breeding population also. Valmik was with me. Bittoo. We have seen. A male we have seen in different places...[within] 10 km [on] one drive. Another male we saw on the hilltop. So if 2 males are there, and a female with cubs, it means other females are also there. So we presume that if not 26 if not 30, at least 20 tigers were there and the habitat was full of prey base. You cannot deny that.

[In] 2004 October I received a mail from one gentleman from Noida, a young boy. "Sir, I am writing to you this mail only in the hope that you will inquire into the matter." OK, what was that mail? "For the last [so many years], I have been going there every year. For the last one year, I could not see a tiger, and no tourist could see a tiger. No staff has recorded a single tiger sighting in their register. Therefore, I am very apprehensive there is any tiger left in Sariska or all have been poached." I did not want to embarrass the state govt. I talked to the Deputy Field Director because the Field Director was not in position at that time. That, look, this is the situation. Will you please [check] whether this is a fact or not? So I faxed that mail to him, OK? Instead of taking any corrective measure or finding out whether this mail has [any] truth in it, he [the young lad from Noida] was called by telephone, and banged left and right. Who asked you to write to Mr So and So? So the boy said [to me], "Sir, *aapne aisa aisa kah diya* and now they will stop my entry into Sariska." I said nothing will happen. So in the month of November the Wildlife Institute Team was there, the trainees' team was there – John Singh and his subordinates and the trainees. I got a message from one of the trainees whom I knew, who was on probation under me, that there is no tiger sighted in Sariska, in the last one year. It is corroborated, right? I told Brigadier Talwar [of the WWF?] that please go and see whether it is a fact. Brigadier Talwar, Amir Usmani, Rahul Datta and 3–4 people, hired from local [areas] travelled intensively in the entire area, and came back and reported that there is no tiger. Fortunately or unfortunately, a rough-cut of that communication was placed before me on my table by Brigadier Talwar, and right at that moment, Joy Majumdar entered. He saw and he panicked. He said that I want to go there and see what is the truth. I said I can't tell you the truth, and I cannot say that there is no tiger. Brigadier Talwar had also written that there may be 2–3 tigers left but they are not visible. So he went and reported the matter in the *Indian Express* in the first week of January 2005. Mind it, before that I went to the authorities and the Govt of India and stated that should we not go and verify how far it is a fact. So that WWF report was printed by Joy Majumdar. He went there in the morning and came back. Corroborated things with the staff. I am telling these things on the camera. He did not have the guts to say that WWF reported [it] first. His daughter started shouting. His son started shouting. Everybody supported him...

KB: When did you needed to tell Project Tiger?

PK: In the month of December. The date is 16th of December 2004. Even in January when they went, Katwal and Rajesh Gopal went, they denied that tiger is missing from Sariska. These are documented things. Then suddenly, Prime Minister nominates CBI and CBI gets all the credit. Actually credit should have been given to that boy who sent that mail to me.

KB: So why did the Project Tiger deny it? Again and again? Continuously?

PK: You see the problem. Project Tiger cannot say anything without verifying themselves. And they did not verify it. And the state govt never said this is happening. Therefore, they had to deny it. The ownership lies with the state govt. These are the problems of administration.

KB: And once it came out, in the state govt the heads rolled. To the Project Tiger nothing happened.

PK: No, Project Tiger has no role to play in that. Project Tiger's role was only that they denied it. They should have verified. Gone themselves. Brought the Chief Wildlife Warden. This and that. Heads rolled. What heads rolled? Do you know that the heads should have rolled of the Forest Minister and the Forest Secretary? Why I am saying this? The Forest Minister took the initiative of transferring the Forest Guards. Is it the job of a Forest Guard or is it done by the DFO or is it the job of the Minister?

KB: So why did he do it?

PK: You ask him why did he do it. Why do you ask me?

KB: What is his interest?

PK: Interest is there.

KB: That's what I am asking.

PK: Interest is there. Very clearly. When transfer is taken over of staff, by any senior person, like Minister, there is a hidden agenda behind it. What is that hidden agenda? Money rows. Huge amount of money rows. Particularly in the case of Range Officers, Foresters and nowadays in Forest Guards. ... The rule says Forest Guards must not be transferred from their district. In other places I saw there is...illegal mining. So Sariska and Ranthambor, they were the prestigious places, and the third is Bharatpur. Bharatpur is dying. Everybody knows. Just for want of a little water. So the second thing is: you see the chronological incidents of the postings of the Field Directors and Deputy Director. And they initiated the posting of the Field Director with headquarters in Jaipur. The Govt of India directive is that the Field Director's headquarters should be within 25 km of the border of the Project Tiger. They are shifting him to Jaipur. And he will also see Bharatpur. On the other hand you are not able to post people in different places, because there is stagnation in post. You transferred 4 Deputy Directors in a span of 4 and a half years. Don't you think penalty should have been imposed on the administration – the Secretary and the Minister? Poor Chief Wildlife Warden, he was suspended. Why? What is his role?

KB: You know Sariska is close to Delhi, and is in the limelight like Bharatpur or Ranthambor. So, several Sariskas must be...

PK: Several Sariskas are happening. Many people are corroborating that there are not more than 1,500 tigers [in India]. Yes I don't say anything only because of one reason. I still have faith in people, and the technology and the mechanism. If they do it sincerely, something very concrete will come out. But the gap between sincerity and insincerity is that if some Field Director has reported 2 years earlier 25 tigers in his reserve, and today he is finding it is 5 tigers, or 2 tigers, how does he report to WII? He can't do that. That is why I am very apprehensive whether you will get the accurate figures. Technology does not evolve something unless proper data is fed.