

A Brief Study on Human–Wildlife Conflict and Conservation in India

Priyanka A.*

Abstract

This research paper analyses the illegal wildlife trade in India, where many animals and related items are dispatched daily as food, pets, medications, clothing, and trophies which threatens plants and animals to the verge of extinction and obstructs sustainable development leading to corruption and criminality. Further, it highlights the increasing human-wildlife conflicts and the reasons behind them. Various strategies are adopted to mitigate such conflicts around India and provide the varied wildlife and forests conservation policies and methods adopted throughout the country.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Human–wildlife conflict, Illegal wildlife trade, Verge of extension, corruption and criminality

INTRODUCTION TO ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE-THE INDIAN SCENARIO

Wildlife implies the local wild fauna and flora of a region. According to Section 2 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, "wildlife" incorporates any creature, honeybees, butterflies, crustaceans, fish, and moths; and amphibian or land vegetation which structures part of any habitat. The definition accepts all wildlife frames. India has almost 6.5% of the world's known wildlife species.

Protection of forest and wildlife bears utmost importance in the current situation because of developing pressure on woodland and the financial worth associated with the wildlife trade. India is a shipper, exporter, and a course for wildlife that enters the \$ 25 billion yearly worldwide business. India was one of the underlying individuals from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); in this way, swearing worldwide helps to a definitive cause, both in its homegrown and global arrangement on wildlife [1]. There are different organizations endowed with the obligation against poaching. Some of them are Customs, Wildlife Protection Department, Railway Protection Force, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, etc. The laws focusing on wildlife assurance were incorporated in The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, The Indian Forest Act (1927) and Forest Acts of State Governments, and so on [2].

Wildlife trade is any deal or trade of wild creature and plant assets by individuals. It can be in live animals or their parts, items, and subsidiaries, including plant concentrates and portions of animals utilized in meds, vacationer knick-knacks, skin, lumber, fish, or other food items. Live animal parts

are just a tiny piece of the trade. Wildlife trade can be at the local level, local retail and wholesale levels, or worldwide import and commodity levels. Wildlife trade is a genuine protection issue since it negatively affects the practicality of numerous wildlife populations and is one of the significant dangers to the endurance of vertebrate species. Today, wildlife crimes are one of the most profitable unlawful trades on the planet. The traders of wildlife materials comprise the most influential gathering of wildlife wrongdoers, and they work in

*Author for Correspondence

Priyanka A.
E-mail: a.priyanka@law.christunivetsity.in

Student, Christ University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

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a profoundly coordinated way. Organizations of such coordinated wildlife criminals have a worldwide presence, and they make the most significant commercial gain from these crimes [3].

At the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP, 2015), India, under the Bonn Challenge focused on the objective of reestablishing 13 million hectares (MHA) of debased and deforested land by 2020 and 8 extra MHA by 2030. Moreover, in its vow to decrease the discharge force of its GDP by 33-35 percent by 2030 (from 2005 levels) through alleviation endeavors across different areas, India imagines making an extra carbon sink of 2.5-3.0 billion tons of CO₂eq through additional forest and tree cover by 2030 [4].

The Indian government seeks after afforestation and reforestation through approaches and projects like the National Mission on Green India, the National Afforestation Program, compensatory afforestation, and ranch drives across States. In the Union Budget 2020-21, the general designation for the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has expanded to ₹ 31000 million for 2020-21 from ₹ 2, 6579.4 million in the amended gauge of 2019-20, a critical part of which is relied upon diverting to the collective advancement of forest biology. Moreover, in October 2019, the MoEFCC moved ₹ 47,436 crores under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) to 27 States for their afforestation endeavors [5].

India is currently positioned third on the planet for yearly net addition as far as the forest region is concerned. The biennial India State of Forest Report-2019 delivered by the Union Ministry for Environment, Forest, and Climate Change reports that India has accomplished an expansion of 24.56 percent in its absolute forest and tree cover. Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has asserted that India's green cover has expanded by 15,000 km over four years. To accomplish its climate responsibilities, India would have to bring 33% of its topographical region under forest cover by 2022. The current forest cover is at 24%. This policy would require an expansion in the forest cover by almost 2% consistently till 2022. However, forest cover in the nation has developed by 0.56 percent or 3,976 kilometers starting around 2017 [6].

INDIA'S FORESTS-STATUS QUO

India's forest environments support the economy and occupation of roughly 300 million ancestral and nearby individuals in forest villages. Covering 80.73 MHA or 24.56 percent of the geological space of the nation, forests are home to 80 percent of the earthly biodiversity, give 40% of energy needs, and 30 percent of the feed supply. Besides driving maintainable development, forests are a characteristic settling specialist for the climate as they essentially control the carbon cycle. Carbon sequestration through photosynthesis is one of the most powerful and modest strategies for climate change relief. The 2020 Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region coordinates the accentuation of forest arrangement towards green urban spaces and forests. The report additionally features the job of trees in relieving the overwhelming effects of dry seasons, streak floods, and avalanches and in expanding coastal framework resilience [7]. Forests are the primary exceptional, protected, and economical carbon catch and capacity innovation that is usually accessible at scale with the possibility to kill worldwide CO₂ fixations.

The India State of Forest Report-2019 distributed by the Forest Survey of India characterizes forest cover into (i) Very Dense Forest (VDF); (ii) Moderately Dense Forest (MDF); and (iii) Open Forest (OF). It gauges the all-out forest cover at 21.67 percent of the complete topographical space of the country. A late survey concerning the equivalent portrays the level of forest cover classes in the country. The report specifies that all our green cover has expanded by 3,976 km. sq between 2017 and 2019, and characteristics such as improvement to better preservation and assurance measures, agroforestry, and tree plantation drives are adopted.

The forest sector in India has tremendous potential to moderate climate change by accomplishing an extra 3 billion tons of carbon sequestration by 2030. In any case, achieving this would require

genuine efforts to preserve, rebuild and regenerate the nation's forests. The sector has exceptionally goal-oriented focuses to accomplish, yet there are critical implication challenges. Over the most recent couple of years, India has witnessed a degradation of its thick forest cover at a remarkable rate. While it might appear to be that there is political will and financing accessible for an aggressive forest program, there is a critical requirement for reimagination and advancement in making a coordinated forest administration system, assuming India needs to saddle its climate and reasonable improvement benefits. Given the primary territory of India's forests, the public authority should exhibit a desire to move quickly in legitimately arranging its afforestation program and do actual execution on the ground.

HUMAN–WILDLIFE CONFLICTS AND CONSERVATION

Human–wildlife conflicts are a phenomenon where humans or wildlife harm each other while fulfilling their desired interests. This achievement of interests can lead to instances where the wildlife attacks or threatens the lives of humans and humans as a retaliation, resort to measures like abusing or killing wildlife, putting fences, traps, etc., which harms an animal and can take the life of several animals. The gravity of such conflicts increases when people conceive wildlife as the obstacle that hinders the achievement of the desired interests. The killing of animals increases affecting their population, people refuse to cooperate with the Conservation or governmental authorities., etc. Consequently, these conflicts are a significant reason behind the sudden danger to the animal species especially, elephants, wolves, tigers, who are closer to human habitats.

Several challenges deter wildlife conservation practice and put forth the factors behind mitigation activities arising from powerful human–wildlife conflicts in India. These factors are - loss of crops and livestock, damage to the property, human injury, and death which have increased due to the expansion of activities in the forests and surrounding areas. Hence, this lead to the fact that the people who adopted mitigation strategies were due to various patterns, examples of those patterns is past conflicts, previous design proving to be ineffective, geographic proximity to reserves, higher crop and livestock ownership, along with the interaction with specific species associated with livestock and crop damage, e.g., pigs, leopards, etc. The Government's response to the instances mentioned above is usually in these post hoc compensation, insurance schemes, modification of behaviors, and the relocation of the affected communities, which do not focus on the welfare and conservation of the animals.

However, there are various constraints to wildlife conservation due to the human–wildlife conflicts and the absence of improving and encouraging positive relations between humans and wildlife. These constraints identify through the multiple categories of human–wildlife conflicts, namely conflicts where wildlife impacts humans, humans' impact wildlife, and conflicts between humans over nature. Focusing on these conflicts is a constraint in conservation wherein integrating conflict–focused approaches with community development initiatives will prove beneficial.

Another vital aspect arising from human–wildlife conflicts in India is gender-based violence, a hidden result of socio-environmental networks. This violence arises from several factors apart from the human–wildlife conflicts, such as the patriarchal societal structure, gendered human-environmental relations, prejudiced opinions on wildlife, and its impact on regional conservation [8]. The complications arising from the heavy dependence of the locals on the forests make human–wildlife conflicts unavoidable and hinder the conservation practices. One such activity is biomass emission, prominent in the country, which significantly affects the ecological balance. The role of gender–mainstreaming in community–based conservation practices in India can expand and improve the scope of conservation by shaping the knowledge, use, and access/control of environmental resources.

The concept of eco-tourism is gaining prominence globally, as seen in the Ladakh region in India. It sets an example to show how wildlife and humans can co-exist while fulfilling their needs at the same

time without causing external harm or damage. Ladakh's model revolves around wildlife and shifts towards a more promising livelihood while promoting and conserving the species. In addition to this, researchers observed that since the locals depended on the population of snow leopards, wolves to earn and provide for their families, this led to more conservation practices being adopted, which stabilized the declining population of the carnivores in the region [9]. This adoption of activities has proved effective in assisting human development and showed increased conservation of the endangered and other scattered wildlife species.

In order to efficiently deal with mitigating human–wildlife conflicts, law and policy induced schemes need to be understood. To protect a specific area that consists of significant wildlife species, the concept of the protected area was introduced [10]. However, these distinctions of areas do not prove beneficial for the wildlife as it is insufficient to sustain such a diverse population of wildlife. This gradually results in instances where wildlife interventions are witnessed in human settlements. Further, there is the element of cost incurred [11] for conservation in India; the local population usually incurs such costs as they have to install protective fences, traps, etc. to preserve their domestic animals, crops, while also safeguarding their own lives. Illegal or unregulated hunting activities aggravate human–wildlife conflicts as it institutionalized such practices towards particular species.

There is no legislative framework in India that deals with the issue of human–wildlife conflicts. It has been unregulated and unrecognized by the Indian statutes. However, a notification was issued [12] on 5th January 2021 by the Standing Committee of the National Board of Wildlife that had its 60th meeting. The statement provided that an advisory that deals with human–wildlife conflicts was approved. This advisory contains certain vital recommendations related to the role of the Indian states/ Union territories in dealing with the disputes. It further brings the gram panchayat as an authority to deal with problematic wild animals which is provided under Section 11 (1)(b) of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 [13]. The damage to the crops of the tribal or the rural compensation shall be compensated through the scheme known as the 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana' so that human–wildlife conflicts can be reduced by providing relief to the affected family within 24 hours from the incident. Furthermore, the formation of inter-departmental committees was advised, along with the adoption of scientific warning systems rather than laying down of traps, creation of barriers, formation, and appointment of the special task force who are knowledgeable and well equipped to sustainably resolve the conflict without harming animals or humans and also prescribed that hotspots of conflicts should be identified to formulate area-specific plans. The measures prescribed by the committee are commendable. However, it should be noted that these are not yet implemented, nor are they backed by any legislation. It should be ensured that these prescribed measures are adopted soon, and legislations are made to focus on the development and welfare of not only humans but also wildlife.

CONCLUSION

The forest sector in India has tremendous potential to moderate climate change, and achieving this would require genuine efforts to preserve, rebuild and regenerate the nation's forests. Over the most recent couple of years, India has witnessed a degradation of its thick forest cover at a remarkable rate. Given the primary territory of India's forests, the public authority should exhibit a desire to move quickly in legitimately arranging its afforestation program and do actual execution on the ground. To further ensure utmost environmental protection, seeking practical solutions to mitigate the consequences of human–wildlife conflict beyond mere compensation is necessary. Policy reforms, adequate legislation, and local regulations have reduced the problems faced while preserving wildlife and simultaneously protecting human habitats. The government must take all the aforementioned steps to ward off forest and wildlife degradation. After all, as fittingly stated by Justice Bhagwati, the right to life also includes the right to a healthy environment [14].

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