



A Narration of Biocultural Practices of Communities of Sariska Tiger Reserve

KRAPAVIS

NATURAL JUSTICE

About the report

This report attempts to bring forth the perceptions and bio-cultural practices of forest dwelling and forest dependent communities of the Sariska Tiger Reserve. Forming a part of the Aravalli Range, Sariska Tiger Reserve is situated in the Alwar district of the Indian State of Rajasthan.

The report explores the perception of the communities about their relationship with forest resources, their traditional practices with respect to resource governance and major challenges relating to livelihood and land tenure.

Methodologies

This report is an outcome of a series of participatory workshops, interactive sessions and interviews jointly organised by Natural Justice and KRAPAVIS with the communities of Sariska Tiger Reserve. In addition to regular interactions, we used participatory tools like community village visioning, community territory mapping, community resource mapping. Visual tools were prepared to introduce various provisions of Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Wild Life Protection Act, 1972.

The participatory activities and interactions were held with various communities of the Reserve namely, Gujjar, Jatavs, Meena, Jogi and other stakeholders including forest officers during the period of September 2014-August 2015. The communities we interacted with were mainly from the villages of Bakhatpura, Bera, Kalikhol, Nathusar, Loj, Binak and Lilunda. Some secondary materials are also relied on for the historical enquiry regarding the formation of Sariska Tiger Reserve.

Dedication

We dedicate this report to the community members for their love, kindness, co-operation and the cultural ties with the nature

“Forest gives us everything”



A Gujar woman with water pots

Communities of Sariska Tiger Reserve

The Sariska Tiger Reserve is multi-demographic occupied by several communities, namely, Gujjar, Meena, Meos, Jatav, Jogi, Rajputs, Bawariyas, Ahirs, Gadiya Lohirs. But majority belong to Gujjars who are semi-pastoralists.



As per the official records, there are about 28 villages in the three core areas of Sariska Tiger Reserve. Some villages consist only of Gujjars such as the village of Lilunda of Core I, Bera of Core II. But some are multi-demographic like Nathusar comprising Gujjar, Rajputs, Jogi; Kalikhhol comprising Gujjar, Jadavs etc.

Some villages have also seen migration of members of community such as Meena to other villages or areas of the reserve.

Communities' Landscape: Kholas, Mala aur Basti



A house at the bottom of hill (*pahad*) with a neem tree planted adjacent to it. In many villages, it is a custom to plant and conserve neem in every household.

Communities visualise their territory spread as hills, which they call as '*pahad*' comprising various '*maala*' (hill plateau) and '*khola*' ('valley'), dotted with '*johad*' (ponds/water tanks) and '*nadhi/naala*' (streams/rivers).

The communities traditionally have also assigned different nomenclature denoting the ecological or cultural significance of the land. They are named as '*roondhs*', '*devbannis*', '*bastis*', '*kankads*', '*aabadi*'.

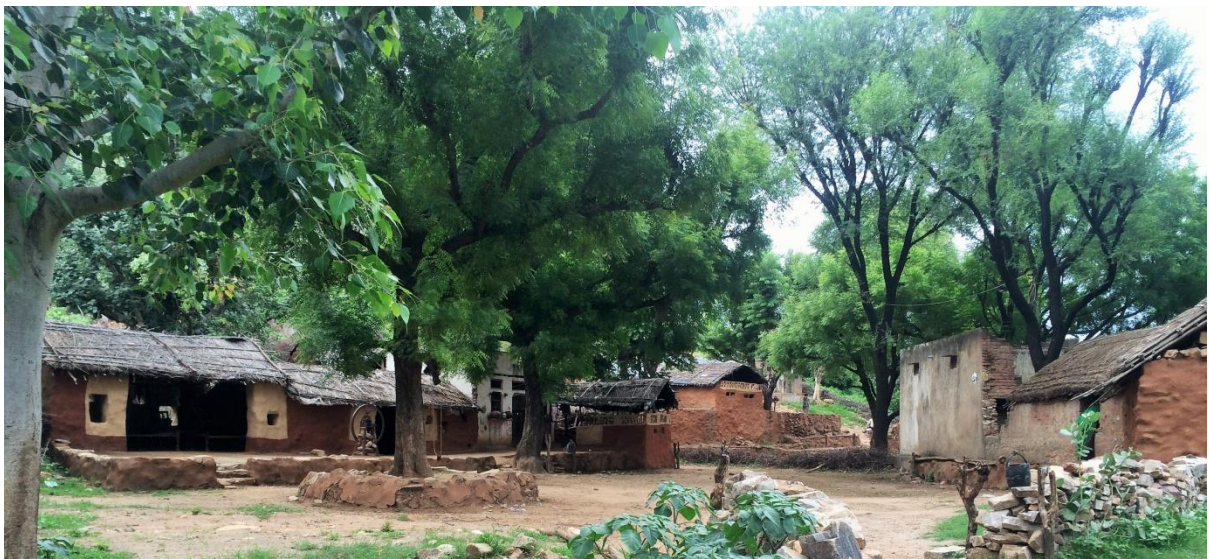
Grazing areas: Roondh and Bani

Roondhs are the major grazing areas where communities customarily graze their livestock such as buffaloes, goats, camels, cows. They also collect forest resources such as grass, stone, wood from *Roondhs*. They also have demarcated areas that are dedicated to a local deity usually called *Devbannis* which they actively conserve and protect through various rules. *Devbannis* serve as grazing areas even in summer.

According to the Gazette of Ulwar (Alwar), *runds (or Rundhs)* are tracts of wood and grass reserves and *bannis* are reserves which preserve only wood. (Gazette of Ulwar, p. 103)



***Basti* (Village Settlements)**



Bastis are village sites with the residence of a group of families. The community lives in traditional houses. Traditionally their houses are made of mud, wood and grass. But now some are living in pucca houses. *Basti* will also have a source of water like *johad* (pond, or water harvesting tank) or well nearby. The communities traditionally used to have village boundaries which were called *kankads*.



A traditional Gujjar house

History of the landscape

Sariska Valley was a part of Princely State of Alwar. The administration of the valley was mainly through zamindars or intermediaries who used to issue passes for grazing and collecting grass.

The official records of the Princely State of Alwar titled '*History of Sariska Valley Circle*' reveals that on 25th May 1916, the Head of the Princely State of Alwar ordered the formation of forest of Sariska Valley by acquiring and converting ten revenue villages namely, Madhogarh, Khushalgarh, Kalachchara, Indok, Sariska, Doharmala,

Karna-ka-bas, Kundal Ka, Kiraska and Dabli. It further notes that though a compensation of 78094 rupees 13 *paisa* and 6 *anna* was determined, the same was not paid since villagers deserted the villages out of fear as the forest laws were administered with vengeance and spite.

"Forest laws were administered with strictness amounting to vengeance and the villagers deserted the villages at their own accord, most probably without claiming any compensation: consequently no compensation has so far been paid"- A short note on the History of Sariska Valley Circle

Later, the Sariska Valley became administered for the sole purpose of conservation by declaring it as a game reserve under the administration of Shikhari and Forest Department. The boundaries and limits of the valley keep extending. Various parts of the forest were declared as Reserve Forest and Protected Forest under the forest laws of Princely State of Alwar.

After Independence, in 1955, the sanctuary area was declared as Wild Life Reserve under the Rajasthan Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act, 1951. In the 1970s the forests came under Project Tiger consisting of three cores areas (Core I, II and III) and the Buffer area. An official history of the Sariska Tiger Reserve is provided in Appendix One.

Livelihood of the Forest Dependent Communities

Despite various official interventions in the landscape of Sariska, communities have been living in the reserve areas for generations. Co-existing with wild animals such as tiger, leopard etc., the communities have been customarily accessing and utilising the forests of Sariska. The communities like Gujjar were regarded as professional grazers by the administration of Princely State of Alwar.

The major herd of the communities includes buffalo, goats, and camels. They graze their herd in and around their village, in the hills and valleys and sometimes, outside the reserve till Haryana. They sell daily products like milk, ghee, *mawa* sweet in the nearby markets. They are also involved in the trade of livestock.

Primarily the men take the cattle for grazing, especially when they are migrating outside their village and are also engaged in the sale of dairy products. Women predominantly collect water, firewood, fodder, graze the cattle in the nearby pastures and make the *mawa* sweet.



A woman making *mawa* sweet

'Mawa'

'Mawa' is a sweet made by heating the fresh milk continuously till it becomes a bit dense. The boiling milk needs to be stirred constantly. To the dense milk, sugar is mixed.

Communities identify dhok (black and white), chhila/dhak, khair, kair, ber, khajur (dates), tendu, bas (bamboo), salar etc. as major forest resources that sustain and support them. They make pickle out of ber and kair. Most of the forest resources are used as food, fodder, fuel and wood for housing. Details of the forest resources are provided in Appendix Two.

Depending on the location of the villages and the availability of resources, communities engage in other activities as well. Villagers in the buffer areas have been involved in agricultural activities and cultivate bajra, mustard, chillies, onions among other crops.

Villagers of major pilgrim centres like the Bajri Nath, Narayani Ma, Pandu Pole have temple-related livelihood. In some villages like Bakhatpura, villagers also traditionally used to catch fish in the nearby *johad* (ponds).

Some members of the community are also engaged in government jobs and as wage labourers in cities like Delhi and abroad.

Traditional Resource Utilization Practices

- **Seasonal Grazing:** Communities practice a seasonal grazing pattern that they have developed based on their traditional ecological knowledge. During monsoons, when fodder is available in plenty, communities stay in the villages and access the nearby forest and other grazing areas. During winter season, they go to the hills and make *Guada* which are temporary sheds constructed to enable stay in the *maalas* while their livestock graze. During summers, when the resource is scarce, communities migrate to other villages and sometimes even to other states like Haryana, in search of pasture and fodder. This seasonal rotation allows the resource to regenerate, thus sustaining the natural ecology of the region. The seasonal use of resources is practised even today.
- **Devbanni:** Most villages have a *devbanni*/sacred grove, which is conserved in the name of a local deity. This is a traditional community conserved area. Most *devbannis* have a *sadhu* who resides and takes care of the *devbanni* on behalf of the villagers. There are rules for grazing and utilization of resources. Festivals are also celebrated in *devbannis*.



Ramkumar Baba of Dev Narain Devbanni

Dev Narain Devabani is located in the village, Loj. The *sadhu* in the Devbanni, Shri Ram Kumar baba, is a traditional healer and takes care of the Banni on behalf of the villagers.

It is a cultural practice of the *Sadhu* to feed hundreds of peacocks, parrots and other birds with *chuga* in the morning and evening. The Devbanni also harbours several species of wild animals includes nilgai, sambar antelopes, jackal, snakes, squirrel, langur, parrot, owl, and bulbul. There exists a *johad* (pond) in the Devbanni which is a source of drinking water for the animals and birds.

The Devbanni also harbours many trees like neem, babul, kair, khair, dhok, ber, peepal, chapun, gular, papadi, bhargad. Kadiyala and khairi are also found here.

Traditional governance systems

Important decisions concerning the village are taken by majority of the villagers based on common consensus. The villagers look up to elders for guidance in all matters. The chiefs of the village/*basti* who are normally the elders of each family, play a prominent role in facilitating and making the decision.

During the time of the kings, it had been a tradition that the Patels generally lead and represent the community in matters relating to the village. This type of leadership is still functional in some villages.

Recently, youngsters have also been representing the village in the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Traditional Knowledge and Biodiversity

Most community members use forest resource on a daily basis for their nutritional requirements. The Sadhus of most *devbannis* are also traditional healers. Villagers come to them for many medical emergencies. They have their own customary norms and beliefs for safeguarding their traditional knowledge. They believe that it is their responsibility to disclose the traditional knowledge only to those who are dedicated and who will use it for the benefit of the community.

The forest was also once abundant in its vegetation. The communities have noted down certain plants that have depleted over the years in the forest near their village. A preliminary list of plants is documented in Appendix Three. Some of them are concerned about the increasing growth of invasive species like '*juliflora prosopis*'. Others also pointed out that

the large scale destruction and plunder of forest used to happen when major trees used to be contracted out for cutting through contractors.

Major Challenges

A. Rights: Settlement and Delay in recognising the rights

The communities have been customarily dependent on the forest. They have been living in the forest and they were provided with grazing permits. It was noted earlier that the settlement of rights had not taken place prior to independence. But the practice of issuing grazing permits continued till the area was declared as tiger reserve in 1970s when the grazing permits were revoked unilaterally. The communities were not consulted nor were they compensated. While the Forest Rights Act, 2006 has the potential to undo the injustice, it is not also implemented by the authorities in Sariska Reserve. The villagers live in constant uncertainty and insecurity over the land and other resources. They are subjected to various harassments including imposition of fines and other penalties for accessing the forest areas. Sometimes, their livestock are taken in custody by the forest officials.

B. Relocation

Pursuant to the 2006 amendment to the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972, 881.11 sq km of Sariska Tiger Reserve has been legally notified as a Critical Tiger Habitat. 28 villages in the core area are listed for relocation. The relocated villagers in Maujpur Roondh are not given permanent pattas over the land but are provided with temporary pattas which are valid only for 10 years. They are also not provided with the benefits of community hall, a functioning school and other mandates as per law.

Efforts for relocation have been taking place since 1970s. It has to be noted that some community members prefer to stay back in the forest and its vicinity while others want to relocate.

C. Lack of basic amenities like electricity, schools, primary health centres.

The core villages do not have amenities like electricity, schools, primary health centres and roads. While some core villages do not consider these as necessary, some hope that the basic civic amenities will be provided. Forest department has been citing availability of better facilities in relocated areas as an incentive for relocation. But with the developmental rights guaranteed in Forest Rights Act, some villagers look forward for implementation of these rights.

D. Cattle lifting and Crop raiding by wild animals

There are frequent instances of cattle lifting and crop raiding by wild animals. While the Wild Life Protection Act guarantees compensation for cattle lifting and crop raiding, communities complain that the procedure for claiming compensation is tedious, compensation amount is inadequate and dispersal of compensation arbitrary.

The communities have to establish the following:

- Ownership of the dead cattle by the obtaining a certificate from the panchayat
- certification from Van Pal regarding cause of death
- photograph of the dead animal

Once all the required documents are obtained, the same needs to be forwarded to the through Range Officer.

There have been uncertainties and irregularities in receiving compensation. Villagers also frequently complain that not everyone gets a compensation for the livestock being killed by Tigers.

Although the ratio between the livestock killed and the compensation allocated varies from village to village, the compensation scheme is a redressal policy rather than addressing the primary issue that is the lack of prey base for the tigers.

Appendix One

Legal Categorisation of Sariska Tiger Reserve

1914-1918	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sariska Valley Forest was formed by the State of Alwar by acquiring ten revenue villages, namely, Madhogarh, Khushalgrah, Kalachhara, Indok, Seriska, Dohermala, Karna-kabas, Kundal Ka, Kiraska and Dabli• An area around 50,000 bighas• No compensation paid
Pre-Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hunting Reserve
7 th November 1955	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declared as a 'Reserved Area' under the Rajasthan Wild Animals and Birds Protection Act, 1951
18 th September 1958	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notified as a Wildlife Sanctuary under Sec.5 of the Wild Animals & Birds Protection Act, 1951 and Sec 66(4) of Wild Life Protection Act,1972 (492.00 sq.k.m)
1978	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Included in the List of Tiger Reserves by the Government of India
27 th August 1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preliminary Notification as 'Sariska National Park' under Sec. 35 of WLPA,1972 (400.14 sq. k.m)
28 th December 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notified as a Critical Tiger Habitat under Sec. 38 under Wild Life Protection Act ,1972 amended in 2006 (881.11 sq.km.)

Appendix Two

List of major forest resource essential for sustenance of the community recorded by the community in eco-calender. Table provides scientific names

Local Name	Scientific Name
Kala dhok	Anogeissus latifolia
Safed dhok	Anogeissus pendula
Chhila/dhak	Butea monosperma
Khair	Acacia catechu
Kair	Capparis decidua
Ber	Zizyphus mauritiana
Khajur (Date palm)	Phoenix sylvestris
Salar	Boswellia serrata
Tendu	Diospyros melanoxylon
Bas (Bamboo)	Dendrocalamus strictus
Pan Patha	



Eco-calender

Appendix Three

Trees or plants that have depleted over time as identified by the villagers in Kalikhol village:



Ladokali ki peed (*Gloriosa superba*)



Gugal (*Commiphora wightii*)

Sl No.	Common Name (Hindi Name)	Scientific Name	Habit	Propagation	Growing Season (life cycle)	Remarks
1.	Kateera / Karaya	<i>Sterculia urens</i>	Tree	Natural - From Seed, Artificial - from cuttings (Not in Practice)	Perennial (flowering during Dec. To March, fruiting during Apr. To May)	EN*
2.	Kalakuda	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
3.	Guggal	<i>Commiphora wightii</i>	Shurb	Natural - from Seeds; Artificial - Cuttings in Nurseries	Flowering & Fruiting - throughout the year, Maximum during Apr.-May & Nov.	CR*
4.	Kalihari / Ladokli	<i>Gloriosa superba</i>	Climber	Natural - from Seeds and Rhizome, Artificial - from Rhizome cuttings	Monsoon	VU*

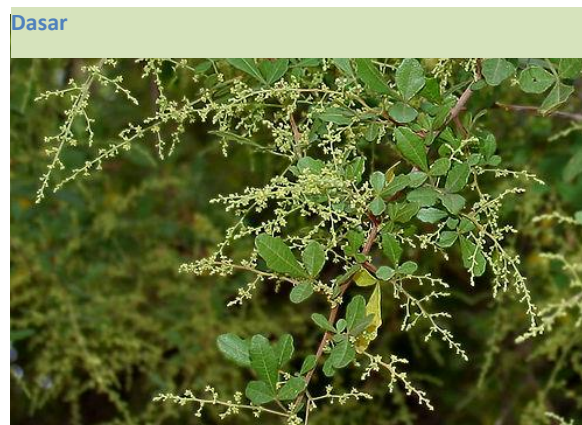
5.	Khejri / Sigrela	<i>Prosopis cineraria</i>	Tree	Natural - from primary roots (vegetative), Seeds	Flowering & Fruiting - Feb.- March to May-June	State Tree of Rajasthan
6.	Dansar (Mkalj)	<i>Rhus mysorensis</i>	Shrub	Natural - from Seeds	Flowering & Fruiting - Nov.- Jan.	Used in thatching, fencing; for making baskets & other household items

Acronyms: CR - Critically Endangered, EN - Endangered, VU - Vulnerable

* Categorised during Conservation Assessment and Management Prioritization (CAMP) for the Medicinal Plants of Rajasthan, Workshop held at Jaipur, organized by FRLHT, Bangalore in association with State Forest Dept. of Rajasthan, supported by UNDP, September 10 -13, 2007.



Karaya





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