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Protection and Conservation of Protected Areas

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Abstract

Protected areas are the critical tool to conserve biodiversity in the face of the global crisis of species extinction and the loss of the world's natural capacity to support all life and human existence. Protected areas lie at the heart of global commitments intended to preserve for the benefit of present and future generations a range of goods and services essential for life on Earth. Protected areas are the critical tool to conserve biodiversity in the face of the global crisis of species extinction and the loss of the world's natural capacity to support all life and human existence. Both protected areas and the lands around them face increasing degradation as a result of large-scale development projects, expanding agricultural frontiers, illegal hunting, logging, firewood collection and uncontrolled burning.

Keywords: Protection, Conservation, Protected Areas

Introduction

Protecting natural areas to maintain their intrinsic values is not a recent phenomenon, rather has been part of human endeavor for millennia, occurring in all human inhabiting regions. Motivation for protecting natural areas has ranged from religious to resource or species management. Initiatives such as designating sacred groves and prohibiting exploitation of particular species in certain areas are outcome of such motivation. For example, those areas set aside by Pacific Islanders, European hunting reserves and forest, elephant, fish and wildlife reserves established by the Mauryan kings of India in the second and third centuries BC. Protected areas are a cultural response to perceived threats to nature. Because society is constantly changing, so too are social perspectives on protected areas and values, that they are established to conserve. The generic term 'protected areas' is applied in connection with a number of different situations, ranging from large reserves for flora and fauna to small sites dedicated to the conservation of particular species. These may be integral reserves, excluding human intervention, or inhabited zones in which the protection of flora and fauna is ensured by involving local populations in the management of the environment and its species.

The protection of wildlife has a long tradition in Indian history. Man has always been fascinated by the diversity of life. Hunter-gatherers celebrated it through paintings in their caves. Wise use of natural resources was a prerequisite for many hunter-gatherer societies which date back to at least 6000 BC. According to the IUCN, a protected area is defined as "An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated for the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means. Six categories of protected area based on primary management objectives have being defined by the IUCN which is as under:

Category I (a): Strict Nature Reserve

Category I (b): Wilderness Area

Category II: National Park

Category III: Natural Monument

Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area

Category V: Protected Landscape/Seascape

Category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area

Protected areas lie at the heart of global commitments intended to preserve for the benefit of present and future generations a range of goods and services essential for life on Earth. They are homes for human communities, natural buffers against climate change, sources of pure water and other vital ecosystem services, genetic storehouses, protection for sacred sites, and

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places for recreation and spiritual and physical renewal. Protected areas cover almost 12 per cent of the Earth's land surface and constitute one of the largest conscious changes of land use in history. While they represent our best chance of effective in situ conservation of biological diversity, protected areas have many other demands upon them. Comprehensive and effectively managed protected areas networks at national, regional and consequently at global levels are therefore critical elements in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Existing protected areas contribute significantly to species conservation worldwide and many species now restricted to protected areas, having lost their habitat elsewhere. Critically Endangered Pygmy Hog, *Sits salvanlus*, which had an extensive range in the Himalayan foothills previously, now restricted to Manas Sancturay in India.

In recent years the importance of a rich biodiversity in context of human prosperity and a balanced environment has been well realized. Looking to the fast depleting biotic resources, decreasing diversity of plants and animals and consequent degradation of human environment, the United Nations General Assembly has declared the year 2010 as the year of biodiversity. There is a decline in the natural forest areas of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim etc. Over exploitation of ground water and mining has affected the life of coastal fauna and flora of Kutch and Saurashtra. Virtually, all the forest ecosystems in India are facing some kind of threat or the other from external agents. Both protected areas and the lands around them face increasing degradation as a result of large-scale development projects, expanding agricultural frontiers, illegal hunting, logging, firewood collection and uncontrolled burning.

Managing Protected Areas for Biological Diversity and ecosystem functions

Protected areas are the cornerstones of global efforts to conserve biodiversity. Biological diversity and ecosystem functions are the fundamental components of any ecosystem that protected area managers must consider to be successful. Successful management of protected areas requires thinking of them as an integrated system that has a system level goal, such as ecological integrity. The practical management of ecological integrity often means managing biological diversity (most generally, species) and ecological functions. Globally, protected areas form a primary tool for maintaining biodiversity.

In situ and ex situ conservation

In-situ conservation or conservation of species in their natural habitats is considered to be the most appropriate way of conserving biodiversity, while ex-situ conservation is complementary to in-situ methods providing "insurance policy" against species extinction. Protected areas are the main device for in-situ conservation, relying on ecosystems to sustain themselves, with some help. According to CBD, ex-situ conservation is defined as the conservation of the components of biological diversity outside their natural habitats.

Ex-situ and in-situ conservation should not be thought of as alternatives or rivals. Ex-situ schemes should be linked to in-situ projects to augment remaining populations or establish new ones. Ex-situ schemes can link directly with protected areas, providing stock to release, research data and, in the case of zoos, funds from ticket sales.

Importance of Protected Areas

Protected areas are important at many levels, including local, national, and global. Protected areas are the critical tool to conserve biodiversity in the face of the global crisis of species extinction and the loss of the world's natural capacity to support all life and human existence. At the same time, the protected resources are often essential to assuring healthy communities.

Values of Protected Areas

Use values

Direct use values such as grazing, harvesting, tourism and research. Indirect use values like carbon sequestration and replenishment of water supplies.

Non-use values

Existence values including aesthetic, spiritual and cultural. However, many protected area values are notoriously difficult to capture in economic terms.

Benefits of Protected Areas

- Protected areas as safeguards for Earth's natural heritage.
- They help in maintaining our life-supporting systems.
- They help in regulating and supporting other services.
- Natural disasters can be mitigated by protected areas.
- Protected areas provide various tangible resources that protected areas either provide directly or support. For eg. food, water raw materials, medicinal resources, Genetic resources etc.
- Cultural services are also provided by them.
- Recreation and tourism facilities are also provided by them.
- They have aesthetic value.
- Educational and research facilities are also provided by them.
- They help in protection and maintenance of cultural identity and heritage.
- They also help in achieving peace and stability.

Issues and Challenges

Some of the challenges and issues in path of protection of Protected Areas are as follows:

- Climate change
- Establishing new protected areas
- There is inadequate coverage of protected areas on Earth.
- Weak legislative enforcement
- Effective governance and management
- Lack of Local Community Involvement
- Lack of funds
- Lack of information, awareness and education for conservation are also issues.

International and National enactments relevant to Protected Areas

- ❖ The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or Biodiversity Convention, 1992.
- ❖ Conference of the Parties (COP) to CBD.
- ❖ Forest Act, 1927.
- ❖ Forest (conservation) Act, 1947.
- ❖ The Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- ❖ Environment Protection Act, 1986
- ❖ The Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 1991
- ❖ Biological Diversity Act, 2002

There are also a number of national conservation projects, notably Project Tiger, initiated in April 1973 by the Government of India with support from WWF, and the Crocodile Breeding and Management Project, launched on 1 April, 1975.

Role of Judiciary

Courts are playing an active role in protection of protected areas. Uncontrolled mining is always an environmental problem. Courts have dealt with the issue on several occasions. The question as to whether mining can be done inside a protected area, namely the Sariska Tiger Park in Rajasthan, came under the consideration of the Supreme Court in *Tarun Bharat Sangh v. Union of India*, the Court held that wherever admittedly or indisputably mines are situated within a protected area, mining activities must be stopped. But if upon demarcation of the boundary line, any mining area is shown to fall clearly outside the protected area, the ban order will not operate.

The Supreme Court in *Navin, M. Raheja v. Union of India* interfered with a matter in which road was proposed through a national park. The Court directed the realignment through a place that did not pass through the park.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conservation and development are linked. Protected areas can provide development opportunities for communities. Unfortunately, despite the significant monetary and non-monetary values of protected areas their importance remains poorly understood and greatly undervalued. As a result protected areas, in many instances, do not receive adequate financing or resources, making their effective management a challenging task. Conservation of Sacred groves and other traditional systems needs to be strengthened by providing economic incentives to local communities.

Suggestions for protection of Protected Areas

- Prioritising conservation of biodiversity globally.
- Enforcement of existing laws in more effective mode
- Proper management and monitoring of conservation programmes. Without provision of proper management plan and monitoring the conservation of environmental biodiversity in protected areas cannot be attained.
- Community involvement in conservation programmes.
- Promotion of education and awareness regarding conservation of biodiversity
- Reasonable funding for welfare of these areas.

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