



A STUDY ON WILDLIFE PROTECTION IN INDIA'S HISTORY

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Abstract:

In India, wildlife management has been around for a long time. Animals are lauded in hymns found in the Vedas. Sanatan Dharma believes that tying some animals to a certain deity or goddess is the greatest approach to ensure the long-term survival of the species. Animals like pythons, snakes, swans, and lions have been identified with gods and goddesses, making them sacred and protected. Animals were revered, cared for, and even adored by the ancient Indians because they recognised their right to co-exist with humans. Almost every deity in our pantheon has a connection to a particular animal, which is often treated as if it were a god or goddess in and of itself. Our mythology, fine art, and handicrafts are all infused with a deep respect for and admiration for animals. India has a long history of preserving its natural resources, including both plants and animals. Many monarchs and emperors also made steps to safeguard the animals.." Wild animals are revered and adored in Indian mythology, which includes many allusions and examples. Because of religious beliefs and aspirations, wildlife has been protected and safeguarded from the dawn of time. All industrialised countries have seen a rise in the number of people concerned about the preservation of wildlife. India has a long history of wildlife management. Animals are lauded in hymns found in the Vedas. The greatest approach to save wildlife, according to Sanatan Dharma, is to identify individual animals with specific Gods or Goddesses. The preservation of the environment has always been an essential part of Hindu culture. Between 2000 and 5000 BC, civilizations including Mohanjo-Daro, Harrappa, and Channudare in India practised this ancient ritual. In the third century BC, the Mauryan dynasty established its dominance in India and made a substantial environmental contribution via the building of exquisite gardens, fruit orchards, and green parks surrounding the emperor's palace, central and provincial offices, etc. The absence of regulation over hunting during the Mugal era

led to a continuous fall in animal populations. In spite of this, India was home to a plethora of wildlife before to the British arrival.

Keywords: Wildlife Protection in Ancient India, Mugal Regime, British India & Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972

Introduction:

History and nature don't seem to have much in common at first glance. A layperson's view on history is limited to battlefields, monuments, and sacred texts; while a picture of nature evokes the National Geographic Channel's depiction of animals roaming the globe. India has a long history and practise of protecting its wildlife in the best possible manner. Wild animals are revered and adored in Indian mythology, which includes many allusions and examples. Because of religious beliefs and aspirations, wildlife has been protected and safeguarded from the dawn of time. All industrialised countries have seen a rise in the number of people concerned about the preservation of wildlife.

Wildlife Protection in Ancient India:

India has a long history of wildlife management. Animals are lauded in hymns found in the Vedas. Sanatan Dharma believes that tying some animals to a certain deity or goddess is the greatest approach to ensure the long-term survival of the species. Animals like pythons, snakes, swans, and lions have been identified with gods and goddesses, making them sacred and protected. Animals were revered, cared for, and even adored by the ancient Indians because they recognised their right to co-exist with humans. Almost every deity in our pantheon has a connection to a particular animal, which is often treated as if it were a god or goddess in and of itself. Our mythology, fine art, and handicrafts are all infused with a deep respect for and admiration for animals. India has a long history of preserving its natural resources, including both plants and animals. There were also steps taken by several monarchs and emperors to safeguard animals.

Protecting the natural world was a major theme in ancient Hindu texts. Hindu scriptures such as the Yajur Veda, the BridhaSamiti, the YajnavalkyaSmriti, and the Vishnu Samhita all emphasise the importance of peaceful coexistence with animals and serving them, whether they be domestic or wild. In addition to the Panchatantra and the Buddhist Jataka tales, many additional stories and fables about Indian animals have been written. Numerous tales with animals may be found in the 2,000-year-old Panchatantra. Even now, reading these animal tales still excites both

youngsters and adults. We've all heard the tales of the talking turtle, the foolish frog, the rat, and the lion. Similarly, ravens, sparrows, and snakes are common protagonists in all of Grandma's tales. Numerous compilations by court poets include minute descriptions of animal life. This advice is found in holy Indian literatures such as the Gita; Ramayana; and Mahabharata. Wild animals in India are sacred to both the country's people and its religion. For religious and cultural reasons, communities throughout the nation still safeguard animal species.

Wildlife Protection during Medieval India:

Changes in the landscape throughout time may be traced back to animal remains found in archaeological digs. There's no denying that rice cultivation and harvesting was place in India for years before Christ, and that the two, along with the practise of consuming grains, were often associated. Wild animals were an important source of meat in the Harrappan culture long before the eras alluded to in the Sanskrit literature. More than 1,000 pre-1700 B.C. sites have been discovered or examined in northern India. In addition to the huge Indian one-horned rhino, the bones of the wild ass and elephants have also been discovered. In various places in the Indus Valley, they account for around a quarter of the animal remains. Seeds from wild plant species that have not yet become extinct may be discovered in the historic homes of western Indian locations. Climate alterations may have had a role in certain changes in faunal and floral distribution. Early humans may have had a role in the development of certain species.

Five thousand years ago, in Mohan-jo-Daro, the Indus Valley was home to a rhinoceros population. As far back as 800 B.C., the swamp deer or Barasingha may be seen in Mehrgarh in Baluchistan. Over-hunting and farming of the riverfront habitat may have contributed to its local demise. Iron implements and fire are often praised in Sanskrit writings as being responsible for the transformation of the wild into agriculture and nature into society. There is little question that the cultivation and domestication of animals such as the elephant, the rooster, the water buffalo, and the zebra cow were significant milestones in human history.

The preservation of the environment has always been an essential part of Hindu culture. Between 2000 and 5000 BC, civilizations including Mohanjo-Daro, Harrappa, and Channudare in India practised this ancient ritual. The Mauryans arrived in India in the third century B.C. and established themselves as the country's dominant power. They preferred elephants over horses because they were easier to capture and train. Ashoka and other Mauryan kings took elephant preservation very seriously. Ashoka made considerable improvements to his governing style in

the latter stages of his reign. He gave up the royal hunt in order to safeguard 86 birds and other creatures, which he saw as sacred. India's efforts to safeguard wildlife seem to have begun around 242 BC, when Ashoka issued regulations to protect trees, birds, and animals from extinction. As early as the third century BC, monarch Ashoka created the oldest known written rule to protect wildlife and the environment by outlawing specific animal killings including as the poaching of parrots, red-breasted geese, and rhinoceros. Living creatures have been given full protection by Ashoka, India's greatest and most honourable monarch.

It was common knowledge among the forest tribes that Ashoka's tolerance with them was finite. It was not difficult to impose a prohibition on hunting, fishing, or forest fires. In addition to the woodland dwellers, it is likely that even the farmers killed animals on a regular basis. Deer poaching in the forest was punishable by a fine of 100 panas or coins, which indicates rulebreakers existed. "Our monarch murdered relatively few animals," read an edict from the fifth pillar of the church. Ashoka's Edicts- "I have enforced the prohibition against killing some animals and many others, but the greatest righteousness among mankind come from the encouragement in favour of non-injury to life and abstinence from murdering living creatures.." Ashoka was a model of animal-loving pragmatism. He significantly reduced the royal palace's intake of non-vegetarian meals. When it came to his uniqueness, he went outside the borders of his kingdom to help creatures in need. Toward the end of his rule, he had outlawed the slaughter of some types of animals.

To discourage the slaughter of endangered species, wildlife professionals use Ashoka's decrees on animal care. Dharmaśāstras or the 'Law of Piety' was introduced by Emperor Ashoka. Prohibition against murdering primates and carnivorous animals for a total of 72 days in a lunar year was also in place for certain kinds of birds, fishes, and wild animals. It was completely forbidden for any hunter, trapper, bird catcher, or fisherman to kill any animals.

The sanctuaries for wild animals established by Emperor Ashoka may have been the first official legislation to preserve animal preservation. Administration, law, industry, trade, and foreign policy are all included in the 14 volumes that make up the Arthashastra. Abhyaranya woods, which are accessible to everyone, were preserved in Arthashastra between 321 and 300 BC. Environmental protection was extensively addressed in Kautilya's Arthashastra. The laws required the rulers to save woods and wildlife. They wanted to establish additional woods, ideally on the

state's borders. Wildlife was protected by the kings and queens. Certain animals and birds were also forbidden from being killed or injured. Offenders were subjected to harsh punishment.

Wildlife during Mugal Regime:

The Mugal rulers of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries are often regarded as some of the greatest hunters in the history of the country. As an example, it should be recalled that "the huge Indian rhinoceros," which was hunted by the mugal in the Indus valley as late as 1519, was preserved by Akbar the great and used to hunt antelopes with a thousand trained Cheetahs. His successor also used them to hunt other species, including 889 nilgai.

During the Mugal era, the development of exquisite gardens, fruit orchards, and green parks around the emperor's palace, central and provincial offices, etc., made a substantial environmental impact. While Akbar's religious policy founded on the idea of total tolerance clearly indicates care for the conservation of birds and creatures by attempting to prohibit their gratuitous slaughter, this is not the only example of this. In 1634, Shah Jahan, the Mugal Ruler, decided to hunt in Palam. Using the royal rifle, he killed forty black antelopes in a single day. Hunting used to be more than just a way to build muscle and test one's nerves; killing fierce monsters or deer who looted the maize was considered an act of religious worth.

Since the dawn of time, animals and birds have featured prominently in our mythology, folklore, epics, and literature. The Mugal court favoured the use of birds and animals in landscapes and portraits as key aspects.

The Rajputana and Pahari schools of painting were also known for their liberal use of animals and birds in their artwork. A good example of this is the book titled "Flora and Fauna in Mugal Art. " A stunning black buck image adorns the jacket. From the Middle Ages until his death in 1526, the Mugal Emperor took a keen interest in India's wildlife. They've established hunting reserves called 'shikargaha' to safeguard and preserve game species.

More than 17,000 animals were slain by Jahangir in the first 12 years of his reign. 889 nilgai, 86 tigers, and 1,670 gazelle or antelope make up this group. Jahangir used the word "noxious beasts" to describe the tiger he killed near the fort of Mandu, and the hunt served as a symbol of the king's ability to defeat dangerous animals. On the eve of an important military campaign, the success or failure of a hunting excursion was viewed as an omen. Babur described 'huge masses' of rhinos between the Indus River and the city of Bhira as a common occurrence. Rhino horn cups, which were supposed to be excellent in detecting poison, were in high demand.

Wildlife in India offered excellent sport and thrill for the nobles of the period during the Mughal era. Babur was a devoted environmentalist who cared much about the preservation of forests and wild creatures. The emperor Jahangir was a keen naturalist who left behind an unique record of his observations of birds and animals in his memoirs, which have since been praised by modern naturalists for their accuracy and depth of understanding. His account of the extinct Dodo bird is the sole proof of the bird's existence in this part of the continent. As contemporary bird watchers, he observed birds with the same level of precision and scientific rigour.

It's noteworthy to know that Akbar had a thousand trained cheetahs at his disposal. Invader Timur massacred a large number of rhinos at the current Kashmiri border in 1398. Only a few areas of Nepal, West Bengal, and Assam are still home to the rhinoceros. Hunting was formerly seen as a noble pastime. The monarch had a responsibility to protect his people from the wrath of terrible creatures. Many elephants and horses were sacrificed in the sake of victory.

Wildlife Protection During British India:

The absence of regulation over hunting during the Mughal era led to a continuous fall in animal populations. In spite of this, India was home to a plethora of wildlife before to the British arrival. After the famous Battle of Plassey in 1757 saw the British defeat the kings of Bengal, they immediately declared special incentives for the killing of any tigers. Bengal, the first Indian state they invaded, was a major source of British hostility to the jungle and its wild people. Around 1770, one in three people died in eastern India due to a catastrophic famine. Large tracts of agriculture were left fallow and reverted to jungle as a consequence of the epidemic's widespread demise.

Because fewer tigers meant more land could be cultivated, imperialism benefited from the abolition of the oriental despot. Killing tigresses brought in larger sums of money, while cubs brought in special awards. Carnivores' prey base was diminished by sahibs or peasants who wanted to consume more meat. Major prey species like as rhino and wild buffalo were gone by 1850 from the north Bengal plains, and the nilgai had become uncommon in the drier parts. One of the most effective means of controlling the number of wild animals was eliminated by colonial prohibitions on santhal tribal hunting. In the 1870s, the Government of India worked hard to determine the best technique of eradicating wild animals in British-ruled regions.

Specimens were valued at 25 rupees in the Madras Presidency by collectors. As far as rewards go, the Maharao of Kotah in Rajasthan paid anybody who brought him or her a lion's head 25

rupees. Royal States of Saurashtra were the last remaining habitat for the lion in British India by 1920. Perhaps since the Cheetah was not a sought-after trophy animal, it could not be saved from extinction. The massacre of over 80,000 tigers, over 150,000 leopards, and over 2,000 wolves occurred between 1875 and 1925.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, British rulers and some Indian rulers destroyed Indian wildlife ruthlessly for food, recreation, hide, horn, musk, etc. and also deforestation (i.e. the act of destroying the natural abode of game animals), for the construction of highways, railways, dams, human habitations and many other similar purposes. This is a cause for grave concern.

Every ruler of India was fascinated by the country's plentiful wildlife, and hunting was a favourite pastime for kings, property owners, and other aristocracy alike. Hunting lions was a privilege reserved for a select few by the Nawab of Junagarh. Because they were utilised in battle, elephants were designed to be captured alive. Hunting for sport became increasingly popular under the British Raj, and this period marked the beginning of the demise of India's wildlife from a historical perspective. According to a report on a duck shot, 3511 ducks were killed in one day's worth of action. The notion of hunting elephants in the Raj was more than just an extravagant display of sportsmanship; rather, it was a way to show off one's physical ability and to demonstrate one's skill in the field. As elephants became more valuable, British attitudes about elephants as a source of entertainment changed as well. During the 19th century, the British enjoyed a variety of field sports, but the shikar of elephants took on a whole new connotation. Since the words of Sir Sydney Cotton, elephants have become a vital part of combat, despite the technological advancements made possible by artillery.

High-powered firearms were also a favourite hunting method for the British military, government workers, and tea plantations in India. For many years, it was a favourite pastime in India to take a shot at a tiger. Wild animals and birds were still at risk because to deforestation and habitat degradation. Demand for animal tusks, skins, and horns, along with the growth of taxidermy, has hastened the eradication of species. Only when many species were on the verge of extinction did methods for their preservation emerge.

Preservation of Wildlife after Independence:

When the British Raj came to an end in India, a new chapter in the history of wildlife was inaugurated. However, the Raj's legacy endured, and hunting continued to be popular far into the 1960s. Automobiles, long-range firearms, and other "modern civilisation" tools hastened India's

wildlife's demise even more. Whether it was land, woods, animals, or common grazing pastures, the British colonial rulers exploited them all entirely for the government's income requirements when they ruled the colonies. Under the pretext of sovereignty, the local people were exploited. Liberation brought with it a new age of unrestrained slaughtering of wild animals. Farmers and others were given firearms by the government to defend crops against depredations by wild animals, which resulted in a large-scale slaughter of wild animals. The cheetah has been extinct since 1951, when the last one was killed. There was a steady increase in the slaughter of animals from 1947 to 1951. Poachers with little respect for the norms and regulations of the forest department began killing wild animals indiscriminately once the rulers of princely States lost authority and power. There had already been irreparable harm done to nature the time the government stepped in to address the issue.

Sadly, much of the Indian tradition has been lost due to the country's recent violent past. Indian wildlife has been decimated as a result of centuries of overhunting by British and Indian Rajas, extensive destruction of forests for cultivation, widespread ownership of firearms, poaching, the use of toxic pesticides, and an ever-increasing population. As a result, the government has set up over 350 parks, sanctuaries, and reserves in the last several decades to deal with environmental issues effectively.

It was Major General Hutson, a British officer, who wrote an early account of Delhi's birds in 1854, and it helped raise awareness of the city's rich wildlife among its residents.

At this time, India's wildlife is in peril. Wildlife in the nation under a greater danger from human population growth and commercialization than ever before.

It is the dispute between local people and wildlife protection agencies that is causing the most harm. Colonial Forest Department and Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 may have given the local residents the worst deal. To ensure the safety of animals, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks were formed. These regions, which were vital to local populations for the production of food, fuel, medicine and fodder, were now off-limits to the general public. Locals have been seen as invaders, poachers, and wildlife-killers by the general public..

Wild animals in India are sacred to both the country's people and its religion. For religious and cultural reasons, communities throughout the nation still safeguard animal species. A particular mention should be made of the Bishnoi people. Wood must be clear of all insects before it can be

burned by a Bishnoi. In order to protect the black buck from poachers, they've gone to great lengths, even risking their own lives.

When Guru Jambheshwar founded a new religion, known as Bishnoi, 500 years ago, the roots of a unique conservation movement were sowed. All in all, 29-linguistically in local dialect-described basic daily living and lifestyle practises represent the highest rule of behaviour. They are classified as Bishnoi if they follow and adhere to the Bishnoi values. Despite the passage of five centuries, these exceptional individuals remain committed to protecting the local species and vegetation. Every creature that lives in Bishnoi villages, from the black buck to the Indian bustard to the partridge, has a fearless existence.

CONCLUSION

India's legends and history have helped to keep the cause of animal preservation alive. All of the Hindu gods and goddesses have their favourite animal depicted in religious texts, sculptures, and paintings. Kautilya, in the third century B.C., penned the world's earliest known set of rules for a game. Early attempts to safeguard animals seem to have focused on individual species rather than their ecosystems. As a result of the Indian Forest Act of 1878, certain Government-owned woods were designated as "reserved forest" for the first time. Many laws have been passed by the federal government and state governments to protect animal resources and prevent their decline. It wasn't until 1972, twenty-five years after the country's independence, that legal remedies could be enforced via the passage and execution of the Wildlife Protection Act of that time.

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