

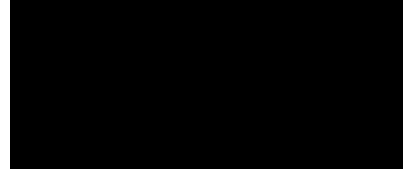
Engaging Conservation:
Village-Forest Relations around
Panna Tiger Reserve in Central
India

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Anthropology,
University College London

2020

I, Adam Aaron John Runacres, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.



Abstract and Impact Statement

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationships between the Forest Department and local villagers around Panna Tiger Reserve, in Madhya Pradesh, Central India, where a successful reintroduction project has rebuilt the local tiger population following its extinction in 2009. Through an anthropological analysis of ‘village-forest relations’ the thesis asks what might be gained by focusing on ‘engagement’ alongside and beyond predominant narratives of exclusion and conflict between foresters and villagers in the literature on Indian conservation. Based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork spent living around the reserve, it explores the different ways in which the Forest Department and local people ‘engage’ with one another in public outreach, the enforcement of forest regulations, local employment and village relocation. I argue that village-forest relations, as a form of environmental politics, articulates the antagonistic vulnerabilities of ‘village’ and *jungle* and the state’s prioritisation of the latter. In each form of ‘engagement’, discourses of vulnerable, threatening villagers and vulnerable, threatened *jungles* legitimise state intervention to reify, separate and control both. At

the same time, villagers assert and express their own vulnerability in livelihood, labour and citizenship to work around, negotiate and draw benefits from 'village-forest relations' and from relationships with other stakeholders in the landscape. I draw on a range of disciplines, including anthropology, environmental history, geography and political ecology, to interrogate and situate key concepts like vulnerability and engagement, speaking to broader discussions about politics, livelihoods, labour, development, bureaucracy and government in Indian conservation contexts. The thesis demonstrates the potential contribution of anthropologies of Indian politics and government to discussions about the impact of conservation on local populations. Finally, the thesis argues for approaches to conservation intervention that make use of the interdependent and locally situated character of village-forest relations towards more equitable outcomes for local people.

(293 words)

Impact Statement

The potential impacts of this research beyond academia are far-reaching. The thesis concerns the situation of villagers living along the border of a tiger reserve in India and therefore comments on the extensive disadvantages they face due to conservation. Moreover, it offers an insight into how local relationships with the state and processes of development, employment and mobility are in flux in such areas. Here I will mention three

areas of potential contribution and impact: 1) conservation policy, 2) development policy, 3) international funding and NGO work in both sectors.

In terms of impact on conservation policy and practice in India, the thesis is designed to explore how to improve relationships between the Forest Department and local people, with regards to community outreach, forest rules, local employment and village resettlement. Each facet of Indian conservation requires reform towards more equitable outcomes for local people. The thesis highlights that community outreach programmes ought to encompass the variety of local relationships to the environment in order to encourage support for conservation, rather than attempt to convert local people into conservationists. Forest rules need to be more accommodating for local livelihoods disrupted by conservation intervention, and corruption minimised, and local relationships should be key to decision-making processes around enforcement. Conservation-based employment is severely lacking in merit across India, as the precariousness of livelihoods and exploitation discourages local support for conservation efforts. The terms of village resettlement for conservation desperately need updating, as legislation has not changed for over ten years and both Forest Departments and local communities are kept waiting for government intervention.

In terms of impact on development policy, the thesis also highlights key issues in the roles of government agencies and NGOs in local development. Where comprehensive support for the most disadvantaged groups is needed, piecemeal schemes perpetuate inequalities due to access and status. Targeted interventions aimed at first understanding local dynamics and providing sustainable support to populations in avoidance of

elite capture or discrimination should be a key objective of development policy. The key issues faced by most of the participants are unproductive agriculture and minimal opportunities for employment and economic mobility. Finding ways to make conservation, development and productive agriculture co-exist will be key unless the opportunities for gainful and secure jobs for rural populations improves.

Finally, the research could impact the approach of international and national NGOs to solving conservation and development issues in India. International understandings of wildlife conservation are often at odds with local realities. The exclusion and exploitation of local people in favour of preserving wildlife demonstrates a wilful ignorance to the deficiencies of conservation practice on the part of international funders. Local NGOs and broader civil society in India will be key to tackling specific issues and scrutinising Forest Department practices. Each of these areas merit further research and collaboration between government, academia, local people and NGOs, particularly on employment, out-migration due to conservation, deficiencies in agricultural practice and the role of media and NGOs in more equitable Indian conservation.

(495 words)

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

All Hindi terms are italicised in the text unless proper nouns.

- Aadhaar: an ID scheme launched by the Indian government to register all citizens
- AD: Assistant Director
- Adhikaari: officer
- Adivasi: tribal
- AfDB: African Development Bank
- ALP: Alternative Livelihoods Proejct
- ASA: Association of Social Anthropologists
- Babu: clerk
- Bade sahib: big boss (Field Director)
- BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation
- Bek: sub-caste
- BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party
- Boond: drop
- CE: Common Era
- CEC: Central Empowered Committee
- Chana: chickpea
- Charpoy: bed made from woven fabric suspended between wooden posts
- Cheetal: spotted deer (*Axis axis*)
- Chhaachh: buttermilk
- Chowk: roundabout/intersection
- Chowki: station/post
- Chowkidaar: watchman
- Churai: intersection, crossway
- CISF: Central Industrial Security Forces
- Compartment: the basic units of Indian forest administration, with a typical compartment between 40 and 100 hectares, demarcated according to similar soil and vegetation within a particular area
- Coolie: offensive colonial term referring to unskilled labourers
- Crore: 10,000,000
- Dakaiti: banditry
- Darshan: opportunity to see and be seen by deity or holy figure
- Dhaba: cafe
- Dia: candle
- District Collector: the senior officer in charge of a district's revenue administration
- Eco-Vikas Simiti: Eco-Development Committee
- EDC: Eco-Development Committee

- EIA: Environmental Investigation Agency
- ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council
- Forestwale: a shorthand for forest staff
- FRA: Forest Rights Act
- Gareeb: poor
- GBP: Great British Pounds
- Ghee: clarified butter
- Gol: Government of India
- Gram Panchayat: village council
- Gram Sabha: meeting of adults within a gram panchayat
- ICDP: Integrated Conservation and Development Program
- IFS: Indian Forest Service
- IMF: International Monetary Fund
- INR: Indian Rupees
- IUCN: International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- Jagirdath: feudal landlord
- Jajmani: reciprocal system of economic exchange based on caste livelihood
- Jan pehechan: known person, acquaintance
- Jan sankhya: population
- Jati: caste
- JD: Joint Director
- JFM: Joint Forest Management
- Jhopri: house or hut made from grass and mud
- Jugaad: a type of virtuous innovation that makes use of limited resources
- Jugaadi: someone who does *jugaad*
- Jungle: an area of land covered by dense forest and vegetation. Origins in Sanskrit word *jungla* meaning open and deserted dry land, reinterpreted to mean dense forest (see Dove 1992; Zimmermann 1987)
- Jungly: wild
- Kaam: work
- Kabza: enclosure/capture
- Kanji house: livestock pen
- Kanya bhoj: feeding young girls
- Kaushal: skilled
- Khadaan: mine
- Kharif: monsoon or autumn crops
- Kshatriya: warrior/ruler caste
- Lakh: 100,000
- Lathi: stick, staff
- Mahawat: elephant handler

- Majboori: compulsion, necessity, vulnerability
- Majdooori: labouring
- Mana: banned
- MFP: Minor Forest Produce
- MGNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- MLA: Member of Legislative Assembly
- MoEFCC: Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- Mohalla: neighbourhood
- MP: Madhya Pradesh
- Nala: stream
- Naukri: job
- Nazar me parna: to fall into the (disfavourable) gaze
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
- Nilgai: Blue bull antelope
- Nistar: local use
- NITI Aayog: Policy Commission
- NMDC: National Mineral Development Corporation
- NSDC: National Skill Development Corporation
- NTCA: National Tiger Conservation Authority
- NTFP: Non-timber Forest Products
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PA: Protected Area
- Panchnama: five witnesses
- Patwari: land accountant
- PNC: Panna Nature Camp
- PNP: Panna National Park
- Puja: ritual
- Prakriti: nature
- Pratibhandit: prohibited/forbidden
- Project Tiger: conservation initiative launched in 1973 by Indian government
- PTR: Panna Tiger Reserve
- Pukka: certain, sure
- Rabi: winter crops
- Rozgaar: regular employment
- Safed pattar: white stone
- Sahib: boss, sir
- Sambar: common deer species across South Asia (*Rusa unicolor*)
- Sanad: land or property deed
- Sarkar: government/state
- Sarpanch: elected head of village council
- Sarson: mustard

- SC: Scheduled Caste
- Shramik: worker, labourer
- ST: Scheduled Tribe
- Sthaan: place of worship
- TATR: Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve
- Teheri: post-funerary ritual that occurs 13 days after death
- Tehsil: block
- Tekedaar: contractor
- Tempo: minivan
- Thakur: a colloquial term referring to people of ruling castes (Kshatriya, Rajput)
- Tiffin: lunchbox
- UCL: University College London
- Ulta: upside down
- UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
- UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme
- UP: Uttar Pradesh
- USD: United States Dollar
- Van gaon: forest village
- Vansh: clan
- Varna: refers to ancient Hindu divisions that describe social class. Understood as one of the bases for the caste system.
- Vikas: development
- Viksit: developed
- WCED: World Commission on Environment and Development
- WPA: Wildlife Protection Act
- WWF: World Wildlife Fund
- Zamindar: landlord
- Zila: district
- Zila Panchayat: district council

Acknowledgements

There are innumerable people to thank who have helped me throughout this thesis, encouraged and guided me over the past four years. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Katherine Homewood, who has been a wonderful mentor, endless source of support and guidance from the time I applied to the programme to the very end. The fastest email replier in the world, the steadiest hand and calmest voice through the difficulties of the thesis, without your help I would never have produced these pages. I would also like to thank the other members of staff in UCL Anthropology for their constructive critiques, infinite reading suggestions and encouragement. In particular, thank you to Jerome Lewis, Phil Burnham, Charles Stewart, Lewis Daly, Susanne Kuechler, Alison McDonald, Marie-Annick Moreau, Emily Woodhouse, Allen Abramson, Jill Reese, Ashraf Hoque, Ruth Mandel and all the people who have nudged me in the right direction over these past years. The Human Ecology Research Group has been a wonderful home throughout my MRes and PhD and I have benefitted no end from the fruitful discussions and lively debates. As a proud member of HERG, I am deeply grateful to all AED and PhD students as well as staff and presenters. Thank you also to the ESRC for generously funding this research and supporting me throughout the pre-field and writing up stages.

Without the support of our administrative staff (past and present), I would be nowhere, the unsung heroes of our Department: Keiko, Paul, Martin, Chris H., Yang, Rikke, Chiara and Wendy. During fieldwork, my supervisors and co-guides, Dr. Swarup Dutta and Dr. Sudipta Chatterjee,

were endlessly helpful at the PhD and pilot stages of the project. My sincerest thanks go to TERI School of Advanced Studies for hosting me, Dr. Rajiv Seth and the entire administrative staff, for helping me to navigate the Indian visa bureaucracy. I also want to thank Jaibodh Pandey and his family, as well as the Landour Language School and the Kudles at Villa Bethany who helped me to fulfil a lifelong dream to speak Hindi. To this end, I would also like to thank my friends in Delhi, particularly the Singhs, Maliks, my buddies in the Vivekanand Camp and of course, Sanjay, whose friendship I cherish above all others.

Without my cohort and fellow students, my friends and family in London and across the world, I never would have achieved anything. A special thanks goes to my colleagues from HERG, Bikku, Tom, Lydia, Sahil and Andrea B, as well as Tim, Meredith, Jenny, Izzy, Sabine, Fran, Johanna, Cristina, Andrea L, Toyin, Rosalie and Zora. Thank you for the laughs, lunches, days sitting out in the park and regular cups of tea. You have all made a contribution bigger than you could ever know. I am deeply sorry to anyone I have omitted. To my parents, siblings, grandparents, girlfriend, friends from London and from Cambridge- thank you for keeping me grounded and supporting me when I needed it most. The struggles of this PhD have been incredibly overwhelming at times and without you there by my side, I would have given up long ago. Dr. Maryon McDonald also deserves a special mention, the anthropological voice in my head, the reason why I started on this road to study social anthropology, the person I echo when I tell students to 'situate, treat things ethnographically' and that 'they'll be fine'.

I will be forever indebted to the people who so generously let me into their lives and made me feel welcome and at home in Panna. My association with Panna is due to the endless lifelines of Vini and Bhavna at Ken River Lodge and their staff. You are the reason I even knew about Panna and I cannot thank you enough. To the people of Hinauta, Madla, Bador and all the other villages I visited, words cannot express what a difference you have made to my life. I never thought that I would come to feel more myself than ever in a remote part of Central India. Having grown up in Delhi, I could have never anticipated falling in love with a district in Bundelkhand so far removed from everything I knew, where I would develop lasting friendships. In particular, I want to thank the safari guide community in Madla, the friendly and welcoming staff at the Forest Department, and my neighbours and friends, the Sarpanch and panchayat in Hinauta.

Finally, but most significantly, there is one person without whom my fieldwork would have failed miserably and that is Kailash Maharaj. Maharaj, I cannot explain how much you mean to me as a friend, guide, teacher, confidant and a big brother. You are the only reason why I learned anything in Panna and by showing up at my hotel room that very first week in April when everything was so overwhelming, you changed my life forever. I will remain forever in your and your family's debt. This thesis is dedicated to you.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is an anthropological study of the relationships between the Forest Department and local communities around Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR). Based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork spent living around the reserve, the research addresses the different ways in which forest staff and local people ‘engage’ with one another, situated within the specific socio-political context of Panna. Located in Madhya Pradesh, Central India, Panna Tiger Reserve is best known for the loss of its tigers to poaching and the local extinction of the population in 2009 and the subsequent successful reintroduction of tigers to rebuild the population. While this is hailed a great conservation success, this thesis addresses the situation of those living along the edges of PTR through a detailed analysis of what I term ‘village-forest relations. Panna is also known for its rich diamond resources, home to the only government operated diamond mine in all of Asia, and it forms part of the understudied and under-developed cultural region of Bundelkhand in Central India.

Drawing on insights and expertise from anthropology and the findings of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis speaks across multiple disciplines about a range of conservation concerns and interests in India, focusing on the lives and politics of formerly forest-dependent populations. In this introduction to the thesis, I give a brief historical sketch and profile of the region, state my research questions, outline the main arguments and

conceptual and analytical framework, and describe the methodologies employed as well as ethical concerns before laying out the contents of the forthcoming chapters.

Bundelkhand and Panna

Archaeological evidence suggests that Bundelkhand has been inhabited since the Stone Age. Rock art is found throughout the Vindhya Hills which run along its eastern edge, dated from 14,000 to 1300 years ago (Lorblanchet 1992; Walimbe and Schug 2016). Due to its central location, the region has historically been a gateway between North and South India. The geographical boundaries of the region are roughly defined by rivers: Yamuna in the North, Narmada in the South, Chambal in the West and Tons in the East.

The early sacred Hindu literature describes the existence of the Vassa or Vatsa country, whose capital was Kausambiya, one of the six great cities of India during the time of Buddha (6th CE). In the Puranas' traditional account, the Kingdom of Kaushambi (a current city in the region) was a flourishing state in the 1st millennium BC and attracted the attention of the Puravana King Yadu (from whom members of the Yadav caste claim descent). He governed a country watered by the Chambal, Betwa and Ken Rivers: an area one could estimate as the present-day Bundelkhand districts of Bandu, Hamirpur and Jhansi. Regions of Bundelkhand were part of the great Mauryan Empire and were witness to the early Buddhist activity of Asoka (Nigam 1983).

Land of the Bundelas

The most recent group to rule over Bundelkhand as an independent region were the Bundela Rajputs. Members of the Kshatriya (warrior) caste, they controlled a number of independent states during the Mughal and Maratha Empires which variously resisted, ceded control to or negotiated treaties with the British. They claimed descent from Virabhadra, the Raja of Ancient Benares (Kasi), a direct descendant of Surya (the sun) and Lord Vishnu. Their origin myth recounts that Bundela was a son created by a drop of Pancham's blood¹ falling on the earth, which was nourished by Vindhyavasini Devi (the female goddess embodied in the Vindhya hills), who blessed a long lineage of royal sons. This representation of territory in the form of Vindhyavasini Devi, Jain (2002) argues, is endowed with 'multivocal symbolic significance', combining female principle and territory as a 'giver and nourisher of princes'. He later goes on to say that "the symbolic equivalence of 'territory for kingdom' with the female principle, as contained in the legend of Bundela origin, is conducive to the formation of a territorial state based on a confederation of three Rajput clans that exchange women" (Jain 2002: 26). This directly influenced the social organisation of dominance and the structure of marriage exchange among the Bundelas (Jain 2002).

The Bundelas began to acquire power in the 14th century. The overall trajectory of Bundela rule appears to move between fragmentation

¹ The Bundelas are often referred to as the Boondelas, and the word *boond* in Hindi means 'drop', a direct reference to this origin myth (Sharma and Sharma 2006)

and unification, often a great unifying rulers' territory divided between their descendants. When unified, Bundela areas were able to effectively chip away at imperial powers like the Mughals. The states of Orchha and Datia were under the suzerainty of Emperor Jahangir and later Mughals, but their status was relatively autonomous, as feudal chiefs rather than imperial subjects. Champat Rai ruled over central Bundelkhand in the mid-1600s, but upon falling into disfavour with the Mughals, was attacked and asked his wife to kill him, immediately after which she took her own life². Chhatrasal, Champat Rai's son, took over and began to expand and consolidate land throughout Bundelkhand.

Maharaja Chhatrasal

Throughout his life, Chhatrasal engaged in predatory warfare against other Bundela chiefs and Mughal representatives from his base at Mehwa. In a letter to his son, Chhatrasal recounts meeting a charismatic holy man who beckoned him away from Mahewa and to Panna. The sage told him that if he stayed in Panna, he would rule a kingdom and have many sons. Panna had been a Gond settlement up until the 13th or 14th century when it fell to the Baghelas of Rewa (from the neighbouring region of Baghelkhand). In 1675, Chhatrasal seized Panna and made it his territorial capital. Following a decisive defeat of central Indian Mughal forces in 1729 with help from the great Maratha leader, the Peshwa Baji Rao I, Chhatrasal divided his vast possessions amongst his heirs before his death in 1732. Panna went to his eldest son Hirde Shah, who was succeeded by Sabha

² Some accounts suggest that it was his wife's relations who killed him (Jain 2002).

Singh³. Chhatrasal gave some of his territory to the Marathas in exchange for their help against the Mughals, who took advantage of this foothold when fighting broke out among Chhatrasal's descendants in the 1770s. These internal dissensions fell prey to descendants of Peshwa Baji Rao and when British supremacy over the Marathas was established with the Treaty of Bassein in 1802, *sanads* (deeds) granted to the Bundela chiefs by the Marathas were reassigned by the British (Jain 2002).

British Rule and Independence

The British first entered Bundelkhand in 1776 and according to Imperial Gazetteers, it was 'settled' by 1811, with the Governor-General for Bundelkhand based in Banda. This was subsequently moved to numerous other locations until the creation of the Central India Agency in 1854 and the Bundelkhand Agency in 1865. The Bundelkhand Agency was administered by a Political Agent based in Nowgong, approximately 100 kilometres northwest of Panna. Kasturi (1999: 80) argues that "Bundelkhand became a political and economic backwater under British rule". This led to the decay of its former trading centres like Jhansi, since the colonial administration neglected the once thriving cotton industry and did not invest in irrigation throughout the region. The role of Bundelkhandi kingdoms in the 1857 Mutiny contributed to the lack of British economic investment in the area. Along with repeated droughts and agricultural crises, this led to increased

³ Unless stated otherwise, Singh refers to people from a Kshatriya (warrior-ruler) caste (Rajput, Thakur), not from the Sikh religion.

criminal activity and the association of Bundelkhand with Rajput banditry and lawlessness, particularly in the Western Chambal areas of the region (Kasturi 1999; NITI Aayog & UNDP 2012; Singh 2014).

The British policy was to confirm the holdings of chiefs granted under Maratha supremacy subject to the conditions of allegiance and fidelity, the relinquishing of all lands acquired after the death of the last ruler, and the renunciation of all intent to further expand. For their compliance, the chiefs received *sanad* deeds confirming the possession of their state lands. In 1862, these deeds expanded to allow the chiefs to adopt heirs, conditional on the payment of succession dues. In Panna, Madho Singh was deposed for his complicity in the murder of his uncle, and Maharaja Jadvendra Singh was in power from the early 1900s (Nigam 1983). The native states of Bundelkhand remained separate until their integration into the Indian Union in 1948. Panna became part of the newly formed Vindhya Pradesh in 1950, which was divided into the Bundelkhand Division to the West and Baghelkhand Division to the East. Vindhya Pradesh was merged into Madhya Pradesh in 1956 and Bundelkhand was split between Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP).

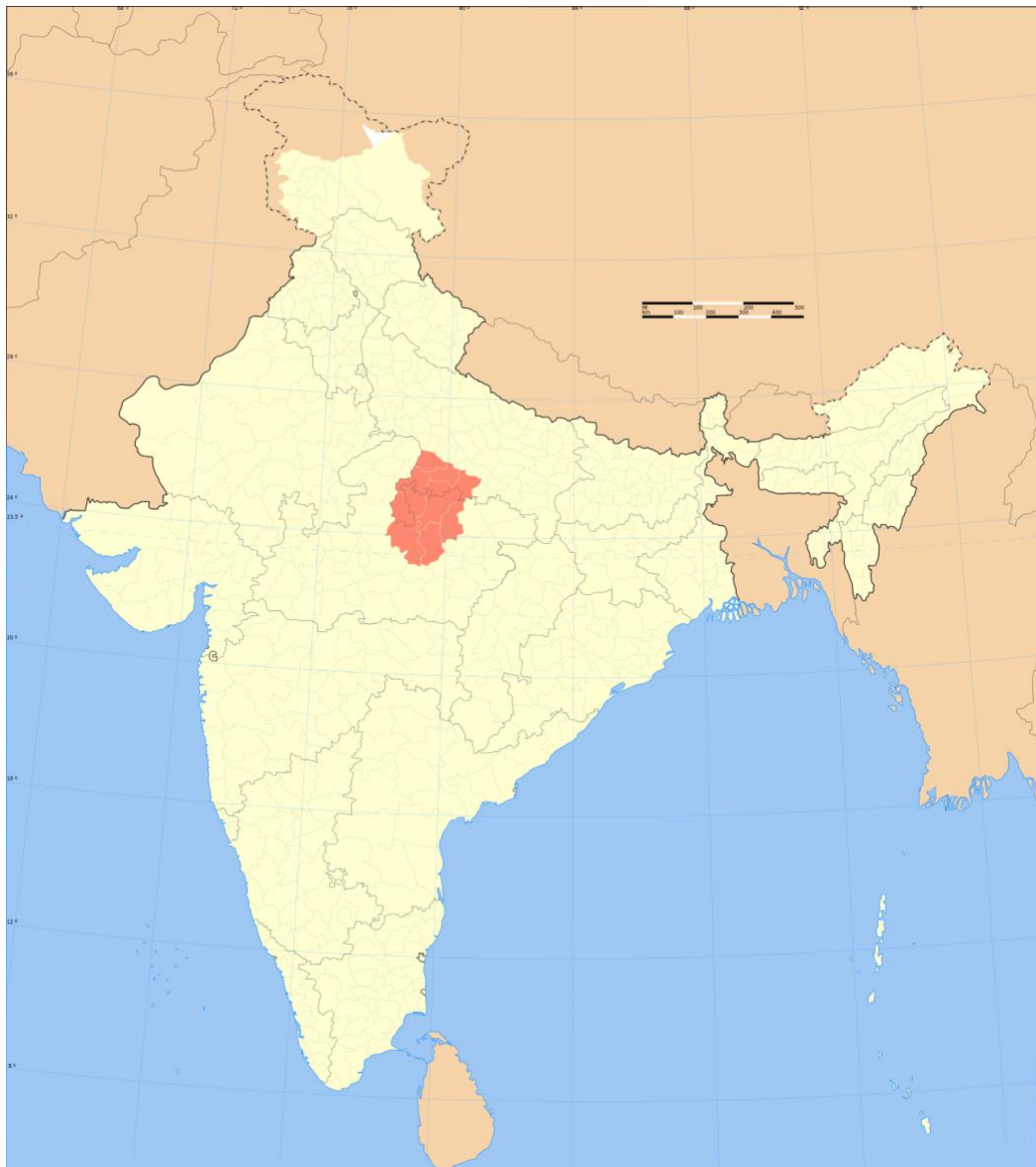


Figure 1: Map of Bundelkhand within India (Source: WikiCommons)

Bundelkhand and Panna Now

Bundelkhand now comprises an area of thirteen districts spread across Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh totalling 753,700 square kilometres and home to 18.3 million people (NITI Aayog and UNDP 2012). It is united by its shared history, geography and common cultural and linguistic background but not recognised as a separate political entity.⁴ The region is known for its low agricultural productivity, poor economic growth, repeated droughts and mass migrations to urban centres (Anuja et al. 2018; Niazi 2018; Saxena 2018; Parth 2019; Purushotham & Paani 2016; Suthar

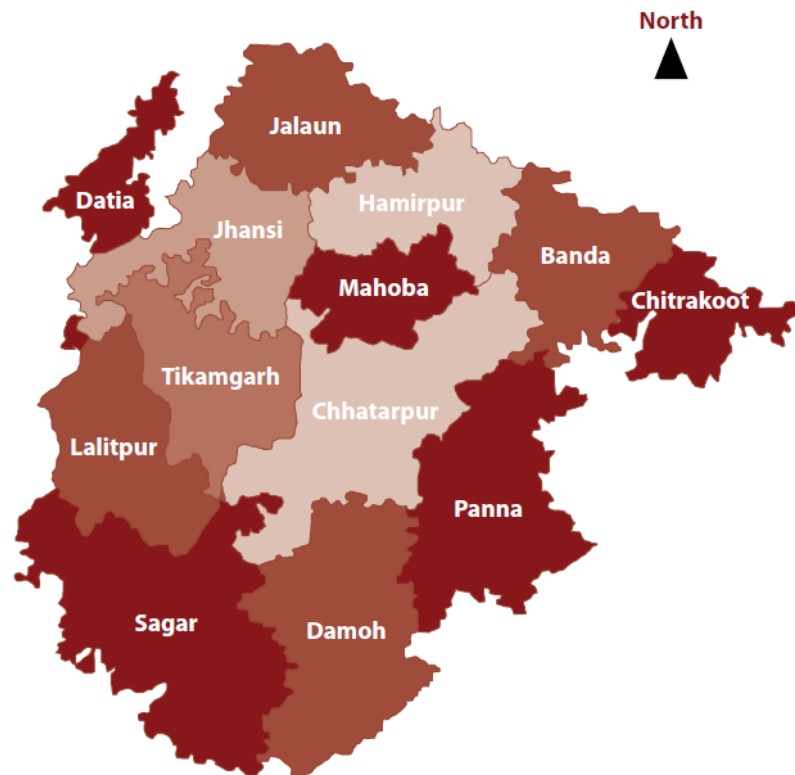


Figure 2: Map of Bundelkhand (Source: UNDP & NITI Aayog 2012)

⁴ Bundelkhadi or Bundeli is the most common dialect spoke across Bundelkhand, though it varies from district to district. My interlocutors described the Bundelkhadi in Chhatarpur to be purer in comparison to Panna where Bundelkhand meet Baghelkhand to the East, where the dialect Baghelkhadi is most prevalent.

2018). It has a low level of urbanisation (22.4%), depends heavily on agriculture for employment (70%) and counts 10 of its 13 districts in the Indian Planning Commission's list of the 250 "most backward districts" across India (NITI Aayog and UNDP 2012).

An NGO based in Panna, the Prithvi Trust, estimates that 55-60% of Bundelkhand residents migrate every year. This trend started in the 1990s and has only increased in recent years (Parth 2019). High levels of migration are due to successive droughts, crop failures, and the inability of various drought relief packages announced by state and central governments to mitigate their negative effects (Anuja et al. 2018; Niazi 2018). The lack of industrial investment and dependency on increasingly unreliable agriculture also mean that the large SC/ST population in the region (23.5% and 4.3% respectively) find themselves at a great disadvantage, as very few households have assets to fall back on. Increasingly, there are few employment opportunities for unskilled and skilled labourers (NITI Aayog and UNDP 2012; KMPG and NSDC 2013). Government schemes like the NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) have failed to remedy these conditions. One report shows that although 4.5 *lakh*⁵ (450,000) households were listed as 'employed' under the scheme across the six MP Bundelkhand districts, only 6589 actually received the stipulated 100 days of work (Parth 2019). Scholars like Suthar (2018) argue that development policies in the region have been guided primarily by short-term electoral gains rather than long-term

⁵ 1 lakh = 100,000

strategies for effective planning. Along with the division of Bundelkhand across two states, this has led to a lack of concentrated effort to improve the region's economic situation.



Figure 3: Map of Panna within MP within India

(Source: WikiCommons)

Panna is the easternmost district within MP Bundelkhand, sharing a border with UP to the North, and according to the NITI Aayaog and UNDP (2012), it has the lowest Human Development Index in Bundelkhand. The

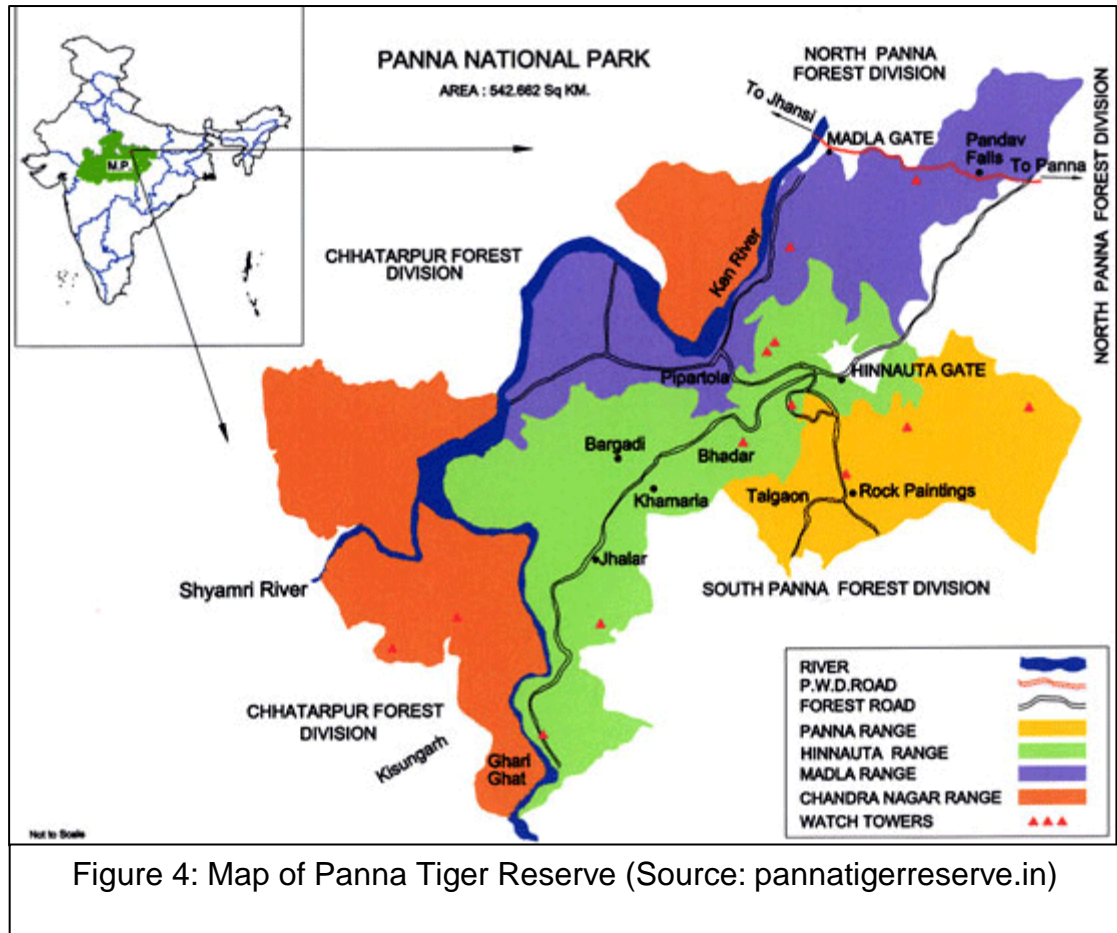
2011 Census recorded Panna's population as 10.16 lakhs with 87.7% in rural areas. It is sparsely populated (142 people per square kilometre) and has a high SC/ST⁶ population (20% and 15.39 % respectively) and low per capita income (INR 16,177 per month)⁷ compared to the rest of the state (average INR 25,175). The poor state of industries and lowest road density in Bundelkhand are due mainly to the large amount of protected forest cover (38.4% of total geographic area) and the resultant low incentive for private investment (Forest Survey of India 2019; NSDC and KPMG 2013). The neighbouring districts of Chhattarpur and Satna boast better connectivity to regional urban centres with multiple large railway stations as well as better schools and hospitals.

The defining geographic features of Panna are the Ken River and the large forested area now comprising Panna National Park (PNP). The district is also known for its diamond industry, home to the only mechanised diamond mine in Asia, operated by the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC), as well as smaller private mining enterprises (Lahiri-Dutt and Chowdhury 2018). Tourism is slowly growing in Panna due to Panna National Park and its close proximity to the World Heritage Site Khajuraho Group of Temples. Panna is home to the Prannath Temple, the main pilgrimage site for the Pranami sect of Hindus, as well as the impressive Kalinjar and Ajaygarh forts. With no train station in the district,

⁶ Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe: government designations that identify certain lower castes and entitle them access to particular benefits or reservations.

⁷ INR 10,000 = approx. £110

visitors rely on buses or private transport to reach the hubs of Khajuraho (air and rail) or Satna (rail).



Previous Work on Panna

There are a handful of recently conducted studies on life around Panna Tiger Reserve and Panna more broadly, and here I signpost their contribution to the forthcoming chapters and how their findings align or contrast with mine.

The Emerald Tigers

The story of Panna's tiger population has gained global recognition and garnered interest across wildlife research communities. Dr. Raghu Chundawat's (2018) account of his research on Panna's tigers details the reserve's early history and the controversy that surrounded its decline. His description of how the Forest Department behaved with suspicion and distrust during the decline of the tiger population is particularly valuable. More recently, Shekhar Kolipaka has completed a PhD Thesis (University of Leiden, 2018a) and published a number of papers (2018b; 2017; 2015) on human-tiger coexistence around PTR. He conducted surveys throughout the buffer zone area of PTR and examined the ways in which people manage relationships with large carnivores as well as the behavioural patterns of tigers, using a mixed methods approach. His interest lies in deducing the ways in which human-tiger coexistence can be encouraged, with a focus on livestock ownership and religious beliefs.

Kolipaka's background data is useful to my own research, particularly as he had the full support of the Forest Department and access to the whole reserve. This means that the scope of his research is much greater than my own, but he fails to acknowledge the influence that his association with Forest Department may have had on his interlocutors' responses. Furthermore, his conclusions about local religious beliefs are questionable as he uses images of 'tiger temples' from different tiger reserves, over-emphasising minor ritual practices about tigers, many of which my interlocutors dismissed as something only a few people used to do in the past. It is possible that our results diverge due to different field sites.

However, I would argue that his association with the Forest Department and desire to find modes of coexistence prevented him from producing more political or nuanced results, leading to this mischaracterisation. Still, I see our research as complementary rather than contradictory. His research was concerned with human-tiger relationships, and mine is concerned with village-Forest Department relationships.

Informal Economy and Mining

The only recent full-length monograph published on Panna is Smita Yadav's (2018) *Precarious Labour and Informal Economy: Work, Anarchy and Society in an Indian Village*. She explores the life, labour and politics of a village of Sur-Gonds (a sub-caste of the tribal population Gond), their relationships with the state and reliance on the informal mining economy in the face of livelihood restrictions due to conservation. Yadav argues that they use the informality of their labour arrangements to their advantage, as a strategy of negotiation with the state. Her monograph covers a range of topics like kinship, household and the family as well as state policies of welfare and education.

Our results diverge partially due to her focus on the life and organisation of a particular single-caste Sur Gond village and their engagement with the informal economy, whereas my interests lie with village-forest relations. However, her overemphasis on the independence and unique cultural heritage of the Gonds distracts from the broader context of unemployment and the desire for income stability amongst other groups similarly affected by the restrictions of the Forest Department. In that way,

her ethnography risks fetishizing these populations, and similarly to Kolipaka, over-emphasising their 'indigenous ways of life' while disregarding the politics of the Forest Department (cf. Runacres 2018).

Finally, Panna's diamond resources have started to garner academic attention in recent years, with scholars like Lahiri-Dutt and Chowdhury (2018) publishing on artisanal mining and Sindhuja Sunder pursuing a PhD thesis (University of Delaware) on the same topic. Lahiri-Dutt and Chowdhury explore Gond mining in Northern Panna, where the imagination of diamonds and their mining refracts through local folk history. Their data on the history of diamond mining in Panna is useful and their results are intriguing. This area may prove to be of increasing interest, as Panna remains the only diamond-producing region of India.

Research Questions and Interests

This research has changed shape and focus since its inception, and the project has moved through three main forms. Originally, I intended to examine the success of the Panna tiger reintroduction project, to explore how local models of achievement resonated or conflicted with the conservation success. I arrived to conduct pilot fieldwork in summer 2016 with this in mind, but it became apparent that whatever conservation success had taken place, local people were more concerned with the challenges they faced due to the extreme heat and lack of local employment. They displayed very little interest in the tiger reserve. Thus, I shifted my focus to what would become the main topic of the thesis- the

everyday relationships between the Forest Department and local communities.

During pilot fieldwork, the concerns that repeatedly appeared for my interlocutors included low agricultural productivity, a lack of employment and the possibility of village relocation, all topics which I address in this thesis. Before the end of my pilot fieldwork, the Forest Department held an exploratory meeting in Hinauta village (where I had been staying) to discuss the possibility of relocation and resettlement. I returned to London to prepare for an extended stay in Panna, reshaping the project to focus on the potential consequences of village relocation. Additionally, a proposed river linking project was approved by State and Central Governments to connect the Ken River, which runs through Panna Tiger Reserve, with the Betwa River, in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh. I redesigned the project to anticipate the potential effects of both village relocation and of the river-link. Under the advice of my supervisors and other members of my cohort, I planned to keep a focus on the everyday relations between Forest Department and local communities, in case either of the interventions did not go-ahead during fieldwork.

Neither relocation nor river link occurred during fieldwork and thus the project returned to its core interest- the relationships between local communities and Forest Department- as well as the broader impact of the conservation area on people living around its edges. Within that broader concern, topics of interest emerged, including human-wildlife conflict, displacement and resettlement and the broader socio-political and institutional context of Indian forestry and conservation. I set out to explore

‘village-forest relations’ by attempting to find the places, points, moments and processes where I could observe ‘the village’ and ‘the forest’ coming together. This shift in focus after pilot fieldwork and during doctoral fieldwork led to the following research questions.

Research Questions

The central question that this thesis addresses is.

- What might be gained by looking at ‘engagement’ alongside exclusion in the social analysis of conservation landscapes?

Theoretical Questions

In addition, in this thesis, I attempt to answer the following theoretical questions about the contributions of an anthropological approach to the field of conservation social science.

- What can anthropologies of Indian politics help explain about socio-political dynamics around protected areas in India?
- What can anthropological theory contribute to the social science of Indian conservation? What analytical language is appropriate to communicate across disciplines?

Substantive Questions

These questions focus on ‘village-forest relations’ and the possible insights which anthropological theory and anthropologies of Indian politics might contribute to the study of Indian conservation. This helps to frame my substantive questions, focusing mainly on local people employed by the Forest Department (forest-employed villagers) and processes like village relocation.

- What can ethnographic fieldwork illuminate about the everyday character of village-forest relations?
- How does forest employment alongside exclusion and conflict shape relationships with the Forest Department? How does that vary between individuals and why?
- What roles do forest-employed villagers play in the relations between the forest bureaucracy and village communities? How do they negotiate the dual roles of villager and forest worker in an atmosphere of conflict and mistrust?
- What are the main reasons for interactions between bureaucracies and village communities? How do these 'engagements' vary between groups within villages and why? Do they have differential outcomes in terms of access to and provision of benefits or opportunity?
- What sorts of political dynamics are evident in the anticipation of village relocation? Are these dynamics also evident in the anticipation of development interventions like the Ken-Betwa river link?

Practical Questions

Finally, the research project has always been concerned with the practical implications of understanding village-forest relations and attempts to answer the following.

- What does an understanding of everyday village-forest relations illuminate that can help with their improvement? Are there routes to this improvement?

- What recommendations emerge from an exploration into various forms of engagement that might lead to more equitable conservation?

In order to answer these questions while contributing to the literature on social science of Indian conservation as well as specific anthropological debates, the following conceptual and analytical framework helps to direct and focus the main arguments of the thesis.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

In this section, I outline the conceptual and analytical framework that structure the thesis, addressing the main topic, 'village-forest relations', the analytical terms 'vulnerability' and 'articulation', and the guiding concept of 'engagement'. In doing so, I outline the dimensions of the three interrelated arguments at the heart of the thesis.

1. I argue for a rethinking of 'village-forest relations' in the Indian conservation context, critically unpacking the expression to explore their particular interdependent, political, emergent and contingent character.
2. Secondly, I argue that, as a form of environmental politics, these village-forest relations articulate two antagonistic forms of vulnerability, the vulnerability of tigers and *jungles*, and the vulnerability of local people, and demonstrate the state's prioritization of the former over the latter. This is inspired mainly by Tim Choy

(2011) and elaborated through a detailed look at vulnerability, discourse and articulation (Howarth 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

3. Finally, I offer 'engagement' as a guiding concept to frame the thesis, as a heuristic to illuminate village-forest relations' multiple forms and work towards their practical improvement in communication with academics and practitioners.

These are the main contextual, conceptual and practical arguments made in this thesis.

Village-Forest Relations

The social sciences have offered many critiques of conservation from across the world, drawing on a variety of disciplinary approaches, including political ecology, institutional analysis, geography, social anthropology and environmental history. A great success of this field of enquiry has been the deconstruction of dominant discourses about the relationship between humans and their environment and the elucidation of the disenfranchisement and marginalisation caused by conservation across the world. While these are crucial arguments that underpin the field, a number of different trends point to a need for fine-tuned socio-political analysis of what can be broadly termed in contexts like India as 'village-forest relations'; the relationships between conservation officials and the people living around or within the conservation area. That is the central concern of the thesis. I summarise how this trend emerges in Chapter 2, but here I want to focus on exactly what it means to study 'village-forest relations' to

acknowledge their nuance and complexity as a particular form of environmental politics.

The Village, the Forest, the Relations and the Hyphen⁸

While 'village-forest relations' is a useful shorthand for the relationships between Forest Department and local people, it carries many potential assumptions that need to be unpacked and deconstructed. Each term offers a potentially narrow, simplistic and static view of both local people and forest officials as well as the ways they interact and their relationships within the local context. In addition, 'the village' and 'the forest' are themselves discursive categories and descriptors employed with political effects by both conservation actors and local people. A critical view of the 'relations' within, without and between 'village' and 'forest' emphasises the internal heterogeneity of both and highlights the importance of treating them ethnographically. Overall, the expression 'village-forest relations' illuminates the everyday interrelationships, interactions and interdependencies that entangle and link Forest Department and local people in a context like Panna Tiger Reserve.

'The Village'

'The Indian village' has been an object of anthropological inquiry for as long as the discipline has studied the region. Anthropological engagements with Indian villages from the 1950s emerged in reaction to the colonial representation of villages as 'little republics'; self-sufficient

⁸ This is a reference to Latour's (1999: 15) remark on the four difficulties of actor-network theory.

communities with functional integration based on a traditional *jajmani* system of complementary economic practices and ritual hierarchies based on caste. 'The village' became the basic administrative unit within colonial and post-Independence governments, further reifying its containment and boundedness as the instrument of centralised planning (Simpson 2016). Following the Second World War, an interest in peasant communities within the social sciences grew as decolonisation accelerated, and anthropologists trained in structural-functionalist and interactionist schools of thought turned to study villages across India, producing some of the first 'village ethnographies' (Beteille 1965; Marriott 1955; Srinivas 1955)¹⁰.

In general, they provided an account of the social, economic and cultural life of a particular village, highlighting the unique aspects of caste, social structure, kinship and religion in each place. "Villages, for an anthropologist, were 'invaluable observation-centres' where he can study in detail social processes and problems to be found occurring in great parts of India, if not in a great part of the world" (Srinivas 1955: 99). This shift to a 'field view' was important to gather intimate data about rural life and the character of particular cultural forms like caste, kinship, agriculture and religion, and fieldworkers demonstrated the internal complexity, heterogeneity and connectedness of villages across India (Jhodka 1998).

⁹ Economic system based on reciprocal exchange of patron-client relations between upper and lower castes (Jodhka 2012).

¹⁰ These ethnographies contributed to the growing popularity of peasant studies and discussions about 'moral economy' (e.g. Chayanov et al. 1966; Thompson 1963; Wolf 1966) especially in their elucidation of life amongst the rural classes in the Global South and their growing interconnections with urban economies post-Independence.

Postmodern anthropologists from the 1980s critiqued these early ethnographers for not fully decolonising ‘the village’ as an analytical object, but they tossed out ‘the village’ instead of certain representations of it, failing to treat it ethnographically (Gallo 2015)¹¹. Now, half a century after those first forays, anthropologists are finding ways of integrating older insights with newer approaches. Village ‘restudies’ have shown that older ethnography foresaw many changes in their field sites, including the decline of farming, the increase in migration, mass unemployment and land fragmentation (Simpson 2016). Furthermore, ‘the village’ remains a “unit of political mobilisation” (Simpson 2016: 26), and an important “receiving and departure point for *folk multi-sited strategies* of emplacement and belonging” in the politics of identity across India (Gallo 2015: 251, emphasis original).

It is this unbounded, internally dynamic and heterogeneous understanding of ‘village’ as ‘field of relations’ (Ferguson 2011: 198) that I would like to emphasise in this thesis, while also recognising its salience as a historical concept, administrative unit, cultural referent and political entity. In the thesis, I demonstrate that conservation practices and interventions continuously reify villages along the borders and within protected areas as bounded and isolated, separating them from their surrounding social and spatial environment. This is particularly evident in community outreach and public engagement (Ch. 4) and processes of village relocation (Ch. 7).

¹¹ This follows a broader trend in anthropology in which the opposition between multi-sited and single-sited ethnography has been challenged and critiqued (See Candea 2007; 2009).

It is worth noting that there has been considerable anthropological attention paid to the implications of the word ‘community’ in the Indian context, most notably by Das (1995) and, in relation to participatory forestry by Agrawal (1999)¹². While their insights are significant, there is no scope within the thesis to offer a more critical take on the word ‘community’ as an analytical concept, and I use it as a more colloquial term to broadly encompass different groupings of people living around PTR. It does not feature as an exact substitute for ‘village’, ‘class’ or ‘caste’ though its usage may overlap with those terms. That being said, I attempt to avoid the pitfalls of certain usages noted by the authors and take their critiques into consideration, particularly in Chapter 4 on ‘community’ engagement.

‘The Forest’

In this conceptualisation of ‘village-forest relations’, I intend to treat ‘the forest’ as I do ‘village’: as an administrative unit and historical concept, but also as a cultural referent and political entity in the local context. As an emic term, my interlocutors used the English word ‘forest’ as a shorthand for ‘the Forest Department’, preferring the Hindi word *jungle* to describe the surrounding forested land.¹³ In this thesis, village-forest relations are not synonymous with human-nature or socio-environmental relations, and while the usage of *jungle* and forest did overlap, the term ‘forest’ always carried a connotation of ‘the state’ for local people. Therefore, the thesis does not contain a detailed look at local conceptualisations of ‘nature’ or local

¹² Also see Leach et al. (1997) on the definition of community in sustainable development.

¹³ See Dove (1992) and Zimmerman (1987) on the origins of the word *jungle* and its link to the Sanskrit word *jungla*.

relationships with ‘the environment’ without acknowledging the centrality of the state Forest Department in shaping them. Throughout I use the term *jungle* to refer to the surrounding environment, italicised to indicate its Hindi origin. For my interlocutors, the shift from *jungle* to ‘forest’ through the introduction of forestry and conservation has fundamentally changed the ways in which they interact with their environment, how they make a living and negotiate with the state in its multiple guises. I draw attention to how state forestry and conservation have separated ‘the village’ from the surrounding *jungle* (Chapter 4) and how that separation manifests materially in boundary walls and forest regulations (Chapter 5) and motivates processes like relocation (Chapter 7).

Just as ‘the village’ ought not to be treated as a ‘monolithic entity’ (cf. Nagendra et al. 2010), nor should the Forest Department. A handful of scholars have examined the internal heterogeneity and historical development of the Indian forest bureaucracy, drawing mainly on institutional analysis but also political ecology and anthropology (Fleischman 2012; 2015; Robbins 2000, 2001; 2007; 2009; Vasan 2002; 2006; Wangel 2018). They address the bureaucratic behaviour, motivations and dilemmas amongst forest officials, the constraints and conflicts they experience within the bureaucracy, and their negotiations with local communities as representatives and agents of the state. It is not that ‘the forest’ is mediated, controlled or managed by a government institution called the Forest Department, it is rather that ‘the forest’ is inextricable from the Forest Department.

Both 'village' and 'forest' are thus simultaneously historical concepts, political entities, administrative units, cultural referents, 'field of relations' as well as material spaces and places. The relations between the two are deeply complex, in a constant state of flux, refracting and refracted through local socio-political dynamics. Often, these relations have been simplistically characterised within the social science of conservation in terms of exclusion and conflict. However, I find this starting point not conducive towards their improvement. Instead, following Nagendra et al. (2010) forest and village ought not to be seen as monolithic entities always already in opposition, and their 'relations' need to be situated and treated ethnographically to see where conflict arises. This is the project of this thesis.

Before exploring the implications of seeing 'village-forest relations' as a particular form of environmental politics, it is important to examine exactly what is meant by 'relations', a term which is familiar in its ubiquity but also deceptive, opaque, slippery and in need of unpacking.

The Relations

While I cannot explicate all dimensions of the word 'relations' and its, or their, significance to anthropological analysis, it is worth exploring what potential 'relations' hold for the present analysis. To this end, I find Strathern's (2018) entry on relations in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Stein et al. 2018) instructive. Strathern (2018) writes that anthropologists have long taken for granted that their job is to "show relations between phenomena", seeing culture or society as a "bundle of relations" and human behaviours, practices and beliefs as situated within a

relational context. 'Relating' and relations have been considered fundamental to human experience, the 'stuff' that goes on between or within people and things. However, where did this term come from and what analytical work has it done in anthropology?

Strathern points out that the Latin term *relatio* did not connote a state of 'betweenness', but instead referred to what was carried back (to someone), referring to motion or narration (e.g. relating a story to someone), while Medieval philosophers used it to refer to an inclination or disposition towards something. She suggests that the emergence of scientific inquiry in which a worldview rested on structures holding together discrete entities employed the term relation to refer to this 'holding together'. This would lead to a distinction between an empiricist view of social relations that imagined them to be external to individual entities (relations between) and an idealist view that suggested that social relations are constitutive of individuals (relations within). Both of these stances took hold in anthropology to variant ends, establishing the necessity to 'put things into context' by situating phenomena within a relational nexus as well as providing a vocabulary to challenge the discrete nature of phenomena by seeing relations and relating as integral to their existence. She writes,

Thus a relation-between may be imagined as itself composed of terms and relations (the relation only works with reference to something other, the 'terms' it links). Either the term or the relation can then be internally differentiated. Within the term, the conception of an entity's self-referential 'identity' becomes modified when that entity is thought of 'in respect to' another, some degree of interdependency is implied (Strathern 2018).

This means that while ‘relations’ simultaneously differentiate between and identify entities, they can themselves be internally differentiated as well, varying in their form or intensity. The quality of relations can change depending on what is related or relating in a particular instance. Moreover, through ethnography and cross-cultural comparison, the distinction between external relations (relating between) and internal relations (relating within) may collapse or transform.

Strathern suggests that what makes ‘relation’ so compelling in the English language is its ability to invoke a wide range of entities and phenomena. She argues that it conceives of persons as “beings inevitably enmeshed in a relational world”, particularly evident in terms like ‘relative’ when discussing kinship. The ultimately interpersonal and enduring quality of ‘relations’ allows the term to capture both the sense of ‘connection’ and ‘relationship’ in its heterogeneity, embracing both connection and disconnection, attachment and detachment (cf. Candea et al. 2015). “Such theoretical heterogeneity may strengthen rather than weaken the force of relations as a general concept” (Strathern 2018). So, we must ask, what does the term ‘relations’ do in this context for the analysis of ‘village-forest relations’?

The Hyphen

I do not aspire to offer a new definition to the word ‘relations’, nor develop it independently as an analytical concept, but rather, in using the expression ‘village-forest relations’, I attempt to capture the interconnected and interdependent character of ‘village’ and ‘forest’ within the context of life on the border of Panna Tiger Reserve. I want to draw attention to what I feel

is often missed in discussions about local community relations in conservation: the interpersonal, mundane, emergent and provisional character of those relations between the persons involved therein, local villagers and forest staff, and what this tells us about the relations between villages and the Forest Department as larger, collective entities.

This is not to say that local people and the Forest Department are one and the same or that their distinction is not locally salient. 'The village' and 'the forest' are clearly two separate entities and referred to as such by my interlocutors. However, this does not mean that relations 'within' each entity do not affect the relations 'between'. In fact, I argue that it is quite the opposite. One key point of this thesis is that the relations 'between' and 'within' are mutually co-constituted. The local Forest Department and local communities each have an indelible effect on the other. Thus, understanding local socio-political dynamics is crucial to understand village-forest relations, and the different forms they can take. If we are to understand the impact of conservation on local communities beyond blanket statements about benefits and costs (cf. Brockington et al. 2009), we have to analyse in detail local relationships within and between 'forest' and 'village'.

The current literature on Indian conservation too often characterises these relations as 'bad', 'distrustful' or 'conflictual' and takes this conflict as a starting point for analysis. This fails to capture their interdependent, emergent and contingent qualities, whose recognition provides a clearer roadmap towards potential for improvement. It also fails to emphasise the variant forms that village-forest relations take as actors negotiate and

participate politically within their unfolding. I draw partial inspiration for this understanding of relations from the work of Tim Ingold (2000), who emphasises the emergent, interdependent and contingent character of socio-environmental relations, writing

The identities and characteristics of persons are not bestowed on them in advance of their involvement with others but are the condensations of histories of growth and maturation within fields of social relationships. Thus every person emerges as a locus of development within such a field, which is in turn carried and transformed through their own actions (Ingold 2000: 3)

While for Ingold, ‘relations’ challenge the boundaries of human and environment, I find his language useful to think through the ways in which people negotiate within unfolding and emergent village-forest relations to variant ends. I argue that dynamics and mechanisms of familiarity and ‘informality’ are particularly important in such negotiations, whose recognition as something not distinct from more ‘formal’ institutional relationships or mechanisms of community engagement (cf. Bejamisen and Lund 2002) is crucial to properly understand village-forest relations. This emphasises the locally situated character of these relations, the interconnection of the actors involved, and the potential for them to take multiple, emergent forms.

However, to avoid “dissolving” ‘village-forest relations’ into a “processual-relational haze” (Humphrey 2008: 358), I seek to move beyond simply describing their character or tracing their emergence by attempting to elucidate the political effects of village-forest relations (something Ingold under-emphasises). Village-forest relations are ultimately a form of environmental politics (cf. Choy 2011), and I argue that, as a form of

environmental politics, village-forest relations articulate two antagonistic forms of vulnerability, the vulnerability of tigers and *jungles* and the vulnerability of local people, and demonstrate the state's prioritization of the former over the latter. Here, it is necessary to outline the particular use and meaning of 'vulnerability' and 'articulation' as analytical terms.

Vulnerability and Articulation

In this section, I explain the relevant dimensions of vulnerability and articulation as analytical terms from within and outside anthropology and how they contribute to the analysis in the following chapters.

Vulnerability

Across different disciplines, vulnerability has multiple meanings and analytical usages. Here I focus on two and develop them throughout the thesis. Firstly, vulnerability, in the sense of precariousness, refers to the ontological condition of precarious life. It denotes a sense of both dependence on others and a risk of harm from a particular transformation of conditions or hazard. Secondly, vulnerability can also be mobilised as a discursive category or label, motivating action to a political end.

Vulnerability discourses can label particular individuals or groups as 'vulnerable' and legitimise interventions in fields like conservation and development. Conversely, individuals or groups can identify as 'vulnerable' to their own ends.

Vulnerability in Anthropology

A focus on what has been variously termed precarity, precariousness, vulnerability or indeterminacy has grown in anthropology in

recent years. Hann (2018), Millar (2017) and Alexander & Sanchez (2018) all identify common foci in recent ethnographic work. Hann argues that the use of the concept of 'precarity' centres on two separate but related poles: labour and the welfare state and 'the common ontological condition' of precariousness or vulnerability. Regarding the former, both Hann and Millar explain the historic linking of precarity to labour in the Global North in late capitalism/post-Fordism (Hardt & Negri 2004). As this thesis is not concerned only with labour conditions, I will not use precarity as an analytical term.

The second pole Hann (2018) delineates is "the common ontological condition of precariousness" (Hann 2018: 337). Precarity or precariousness in this case is the condition of being vulnerable to others (Tsing 2015: 20). Many have taken Butler's (2016; 2011; 2004) work on 'precarious life' as a starting point for analysis. She links precarious life to a common human vulnerability, to our embodied interdependency. This emphasises "that humans are fundamentally constituted through relations and thus, through exposure to the other" (Hann 2018: 337). Here precariousness "emerges with life itself" and is a result of result of our sociality; it is relational. (Butler 2009: 31; Millar 2017).

Millar argues that "if precarity is merely synonymous with vulnerability and can be found anywhere and everywhere we look, then it loses its analytical purchase" (Millar 2017: 2). For her, the concept of precarity, if used uncritically, can produce unintended political effects, uphold normative ideas about work, and obscure inequalities. She argues for a recognition that "precarity is originary to capitalism" (Millar 2017: 6)

and in her own work (2014) has argued for an analysis of the link between precarity as a labour condition and precariousness as an ontological condition. Alexander and Sanchez (2018) similarly write that “precarity...can lead to a crumbling of previously clear identities” (Alexander and Sanchez 2018: 4) and indeterminacy can be a necessary space for cultural improvisation. They seek to move beyond discussions of precarity and precariousness to looking at ‘indeterminacy’ and the production of waste and excess in modernity.

Vulnerability beyond Anthropology

These authors resist the uncritical elision of precarity, precariousness, indeterminacy and vulnerability as it dilutes their attempts to focus on conditions of labour or the exclusion and expulsion of certain groups from projects of modernity or capital. However, by dismissing vulnerability in favour of precarity or indeterminacy, they fail to engage with the prevalence of vulnerability as an analytical concept and category in other disciplines, which may have useful insights. Moreover, treating vulnerability as something ubiquitous to the human experience or as just another word for ‘precariousness’ has two limitations. Firstly, it obscures any recognition of the term’s political mobilisation within fields like conservation or development as a normative category or discursive term. Secondly, it fails to elucidate the presence of multiple forms, registers or degrees of vulnerability and its assessment in the same context.

In geography and development, vulnerability is a central concept to the literature on risks and hazards (see Birkman 2006 for a synopsis and list of definitions), and it is worth signposting some relevant ideas for the

present analysis. In their seminal work, Wisner and colleagues (2004[1994]) highlight that vulnerability is variable between and within populations, and in assessing vulnerability in relation to hazards, they argue that it is important to look at both 'external' (e.g. drought and climate change) and 'internal' factors (e.g. politics and class dynamics). Importantly, they emphasise the "rooted character of vulnerability" (Wisner et al. 2004: 9), how the underlying causes of vulnerability "reflect the exercise and distribution of power in a society" (Wisner et al. 2004: 53), and the ability of vulnerable actors to adapt and respond to hazards.

Of particular relevance for the present analysis are the observations that underlie their 'Access' model, which shows how vulnerability relates to the variable access of particular individuals or groups to information, opportunities and resources that help them to better cope with a particular hazard and maintain a livelihood. In particular, they highlight the importance of social networks to mobilise those resources to decrease vulnerability. This relates to arguments in peasant studies and political economy about how particular peasant communities have developed livelihoods centred around the ability of their broader social network to help offset subsistence risks (see Robbins 2012: 57-63). These observations resonate with the present analysis, in which livelihood precariousness and risk associated with changes like village relocation is socially diffused and managed through broader interpersonal networks.

The risk literature has influenced more recent understandings of vulnerability in ecology and conservation, where it is often defined as "the susceptibility of a system to a negative impact" (Williams et al. 2008: 2621),

or the likelihood of biodiversity loss to threatening processes, and its measurement often incorporates factors like exposure, intensity and impact (Wilson et al. 2005). Scholars have argued that reliable vulnerability assessments ought to be fundamental to any conservation planning in order to maximise the efficiency of resource allocation and are increasingly important in the face of climate change (Abbit et al. 2000; Smit & Wandel 2006; Williams et al. 2008; Wilson et al. 2005).

However, the discursive dimensions of vulnerability and the normative effects of vulnerability discourses remain under-explored in the risks and hazard literature. Feminist philosophers like MacKenzie, Rodgers and Dodds (2013) have identified vulnerability's normative use in discussions related to dependency and the ethics of care, in bioethics and in particular medical interventions (cf. Held 1987; Kittay 1999). This resonates with Butler's (2016; 2011) later work, in which she distinguishes between precariousness as a condition of human sociality and precarity as the economic or socio-political institutions that distribute vulnerability unequally. Brown et al. (2017) discuss vulnerability's normative use in welfare and social policy, emphasising the political work performed by the concept and the risks of uncritical usage. They argue that the use of vulnerability may inadvertently contribute to normative ideas about groups or individuals, detracting from attention to specific harms or hazards. This suggests that who counts as 'vulnerable' is a political and ethical question rather than something assumed to be ubiquitous part of the human experience or something to be only measured or assessed. Extending this insight to fields like conservation and development, we can see how the

categorisation of particular populations, species or environments as 'vulnerable' constitute particular normative discourses that motivate intervention.

Vulnerability Discourses in Conservation

In her ethnography of conservation practice in Papua New Guinea, Paige West (2006) cites Brosius's (1999) assertion that "environmentally focused discourses in their constitutiveness define various forms of agency, administer certain silences, and prescribe various forms of intervention" (Brosius 1999: 277-278). She explains that "imaginings of the environment and society work in combination with political economies and historical trajectories to produce imaginaries...that come to be taken as real and that direct and filter the production of space" (West 2006: 151).

Conservation narratives employed by conservation-related actors describe local people and the environment as well as the 'threats' of those local people. This discursively produces a kind of conservation reality as the basis for interventions. In Crater Mountain Wildlife Management Area, "land [is] discursively produced as 'remote' and without 'human disturbance'" (West 2006: 179) and both conservation scientists and local people "strive for an 'other' that is imaginary and a future that is beyond" (West 2006: 216).

Vulnerability is familiar to conservation discourses in its adjectival form as one of the IUCN's (2012) categories on its Red List, used to categorise the level of threat to a species. Thus, 'vulnerability' as a discourse mobilises action to particular ends by prescribing certain species as 'vulnerable' and thus motivating conservation intervention. Tim Choy

(2011) addresses such conservation discourses in his ethnography of environmentalism in Hong Kong focusing on endangerment instead of vulnerability. He writes,

Endangerment is a key trope in environmental politics. It structures images of simultaneous tenuousness, rarity and value. To speak of an endangered species is to speak of a form of life that threatens to become extinct in the near future; it is to raise the stakes in a controversy so that certain actions carry the consequences of destroying the possibility of life's continued existence... [D]iscourses of endangerment have come to structure not only narrowly construed environmental politics, but also politics of cultural survival (Choy 2011: 26-27)

Choy analyses the “technical and affective production of endangerment” and the politics of endangerment as “an *anticipatory nostalgia*” (Choy 2011: 28, emphasis original). Drawing on Science and Technology Studies (STS) work on knowledge making practices, he describes discourses of endangerment of both environments and species (pink dolphins) and the culture of Hong Kong (village of Tai O). I find his analysis of environmental politics useful in guiding my own work, particularly as it demonstrates the colliding of competing discourses of vulnerable life (of dolphins or of Tai O Village). ¹⁴

Along these lines, I argue here that discourses of vulnerable people and vulnerable *jungles* collide and clash in the conservation context of Panna Tiger Reserve, mobilised by different actors to often contradictory

¹⁴ This is similar to scholars across anthropology, geography and science and technology studies (STS) who have looked at multi-species vulnerabilities. For example, Tsing (2015) “tak[es] up the story of precariousness livelihoods and precarious environments” (Tsing 2015: 14) and Ginn et al. (2014) explore “awkward flourishing” (Ginn et al. 2014: 114), the recognition that humans and non-humans are entangled awkwardly in relationships that expose shared vulnerabilities.

ends. However, this is not to say that vulnerability is merely a discursive term and that *jungles* and people are not 'really' vulnerable. That would fail to recognise the other dimension of vulnerability I have highlighted here- vulnerability as an ontological condition of precarious life. This tension between both dimensions or registers is the strength and challenge of vulnerability as an analytical term. Vulnerability- or in Choy's (2011) case, endangerment- is both a narrative and an ontological condition, a discourse mobilised to political ends and a description of precarious life. So, how might we link these two dimensions or registers of 'vulnerability' while also recognising that multiple vulnerabilities may exist in the same context? What language is useful to this end?

Articulation and Antagonism

Choy (2011) also recognises the ontological character of endangerment- or vulnerability- in his field site, as both pink dolphins and the cultural heritage of Tai O are 'at risk', vulnerable to particular politics and in danger of disappearing. To explore the production of that endangerment, Choy (2011) turns to the analytical term 'articulation'. Following Choy (2011), I would like to explore the potential of 'articulation' as an analytical language to describe the recursive relationship between these two forms of vulnerability. I argue that it helps to link multiple dimensions or registers of vulnerability and describe how they unfold, operate, collide and are mobilised in the same spaces.

Articulation

In his use of articulation to explore the production of endangerment, Choy explains that he means "a linking together and enunciation of

relevance between disparate elements” (Choy 2011: 93). He references Stuart Hall’s (1996) explanation of articulation’s two forms: being able to explain well and creating contingent connections between different elements. That is to say, it shows how the discursive production and ontological condition of endangerment- or vulnerability- relies on “contingent political assemblages of institutions, apparatuses, practices and discourses” (Moore, Kosek and Pandian 2003: 4). It is thus particularly useful in the analysis of ‘global formations’ like capitalism or conservation (cf. Tsing 2005) or the production of indigenous identity (cf. Li 2007).

Choy is concerned primarily with how articulation ‘happens’: how the production of knowledge is expressed and emerges from contingent political assemblages. To this end, he uses the concept of ‘translation’ (Choy 2011: 76). However, I am not as interested in how ‘articulation’ happens as in the political effects or consequences of articulation and of multiple, contradictory or oppositional articulations in conservation contexts. I contend that village-forest relations articulate multiple vulnerabilities (both ontological and discursive) of *jungles* and people that clash and compete in the same context. To describe this, I find the concept of ‘antagonism’ within discourse and articulation theory useful (de Luca 1999; Howarth 2000; Laclau Mouffe 1985).

Antagonism

Discourse and articulation theory deal fundamentally with the relationship between meaning (language) and practices (action) and the political and contingent formation of subjects and assemblages of people, institutions and rules (Howarth 2000: 8-9). In his introduction to discourse,

Howarth (2000) covers multiple approaches to the concept (structuralist, Foucauldian and Marxist) culminating with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Laclau and Mouffe offer some useful ways to think with articulation in relation to the presence of multiple and colliding vulnerabilities, of people and of *jungles*, particularly through the concept of 'antagonism'. In his reading of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), DeLuca (1999) explains that they "move the conception of articulation from being a way of explaining contingency in the Marxist theory of historical necessity to a way of understanding social struggle...a world without guarantees and foundational truths" (DeLuca 1999: 135).

Laclau and Mouffe argue that discursive structures are the result of articulatory practice, "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified" (DeLuca 1999: 105). They argue against conceiving of social conflict where antagonisms are understood as "the clash of social agents with fully constituted identities and interests" (Howarth 2000 105). In their conception, "antagonisms make possible the investigation, disarticulation and re-articulation of hegemonic discourse. Antagonisms point to the limit of a discourse...and shows the impossibility of the discourse constituting a permanently closed or sutured totality" (DeLuca 1999: 336). The concept of antagonism between and against particular articulations usefully highlights the presence of multiple contingent political assemblages and their potential to collide in particular ways that might lead to disarticulation.

Conceptual Development through the Chapters

This analytical language of vulnerability, articulation and antagonism is useful for the present analysis in a number of ways. Firstly, the term ‘articulation’ captures the awkward, recursive relationship between the rhetorical and the ontological, what is said and what is (lived). It helps to link both registers. Vulnerability is both a discourse and an ontological condition of precarious life of both *jungles* and people living around conservation areas. The focus of Chapter 4 is the simultaneous separation and specification (cf. Choy 2011) of ‘village’ and ‘forest’ as both vulnerable and threatening. Throughout the thesis, I explore how local people express and assert their own vulnerability in contradistinction to conservation vulnerability, in livelihood (Chapter 5), labour (Chapter 6) or citizenship (Chapter 7). I also attempt to incorporate insights from beyond anthropology on the relationship between resilience and vulnerability through concepts like *jugaad* and the social distribution and mitigation of livelihood risk and precarity (Chapter 6).

Secondly, the use of articulation in this way highlights the subordination of particular discourses to others as well as the emergent qualities and contingency of political assemblages. Throughout the thesis, I highlight how these discourses articulate through village-forest relations in their contingent forms, demonstrating the state’s prioritization of vulnerable tigers and *jungles* over villagers, through the enforcement of conservation rules (Chapter 5), in the exploitation of forest workers (Chapter 6) or in village displacement (Chapter 7).

Finally, the concept of antagonism is useful to think through the ways these vulnerabilities collide and conflict. It also helps to explore the potential disarticulation of hegemonic discourses, leaving room for negotiation around and against them by recognising the contingency of their emergence. In each instance, I highlight how local people negotiate and deal with 'the forest', whether in the exploitation of authority's situational ambiguity (Chapter 5), the importance of *jugaad* (Chapter 6) or the use of 'alternative governments' to mitigate their own vulnerability and make claims on 'the state' in its multiple guises (Chapter 7).

However, a question remains as to what we might offer towards the practical improvement of village-forest relations and what concepts might we utilise that communicate to practitioners and academics across disciplines. How can we address the practical questions posed above about improving village-forest relations? This project has always been intended to contribute to growing attempts to work across the academy to communicate better with practitioners, and to draw attention to the potential contribution of the social sciences towards equitable biodiversity conservation (Bennett et al. 2017). While it may be uncomfortable at times, social scientists ought to try and use terms which are familiar and comfortable to practitioners and across disciplines, allowing them to critically interrogate particular concepts and still work to practical or applied ends. In this final section, I offer engagement as one such potential contributor and guiding concept.

Engagement

A clear aim of the thesis is not only to conduct an academic investigation of village-forest relations but also to communicate across disciplines and outside of the academy to suggest steps towards improving village-forest relations in Indian conservation. It is for this reason that I find 'engagement' useful as a critical concept. The language of 'engagement' is common to discussions about public outreach and participation in everything from conservation to development and education. It works well to describe two groups coming together towards some particular end, whether it be distributing information, improving access to institutions or encouraging participation in particular programmes (e.g. Dempsey 2010; Jolibert et al. 2012; Simmons 2010; Phillipson et al. 2012; Poncian et al. 2019).

Engagement helps to describe the coming together of 'village' and 'forest', and here I intend to use it as a 'mode of attention' and a heuristic that emphasises the multiple forms 'village-forest relations' can take. I prefer the term 'engagement' to other terms like 'encounter' or 'entanglement' but not because they would be inappropriate. Quite the opposite- those terms have proved analytically productive for similar scenarios, leading to conclusions that resonate well with my findings (see Barua 2015; Faier and Rofel 2014; Tsing 2015; 2005). However, its prevalence in conservation, development and policy discourse and as a counterpoint to terms like 'conflict' and 'exclusion', from which I hope to redirect discussion about village-forest relations, make a better case to think with 'engagement'.

By using it, I hope to politicise the term and expand its usage, highlighting that different modalities of engagement between forest and village can lead to divergent and occasionally harmful ends.¹⁵ In this way, the need to understand ‘engagement’ between village and forest beyond public outreach and community programmes is vital. Moreover, as a mode of attention, it helps guide methodologically, drawing focus to the programmes, moments and processes of engagement between local communities and Forest Department in which village-forest relations unfold. Engagement here fits well as a multi-valent and multi-modal concept that allows for an emphasis on the interpersonal networks between conservation authorities and local communities as well as their contingency and variability. Each chapter focuses on a different modality of engagement, each of which affords different opportunities to incorporate relevant theoretical discussions.

Methodological and Ethical Considerations

In this section, I will outline the methodology for the research and discuss some of the considerations I had to make during fieldwork. This included how to employ different methodologies while taking the concerns and suspicions of my interlocutors into account in a context where survey and interview techniques were most closely associated with government and NGO work. In my attempts to differentiate and ‘de-governmentalise’ myself,

¹⁵ Cf. Agrawal (2001); Cooke and Kothari (2009); Mosse (1994) on ‘participatory development’.

my methodology and subject matter changed considerably. This led to my interests shaping and changing throughout the course of fieldwork to accommodate these concerns. Ultimately, it redirected the research most accurately towards my interlocutors' challenges, thus in keeping with a central ethic of ethnographic research- prioritising the perspective of one's interlocutors.

I will also describe the institutional negotiations I had to employ to understand the context from the perspective not only of local communities but also Forest Department staff, the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) and those involved with tourism. To understand all of these perspectives was not only an aim of the research but also a necessity to conduct my research in an environment of prevailing suspicion and mistrust. Maintaining good relationships that allowed access and trust with each different stakeholder was both limited and partially enabled by my positionality as a white European male researcher with family ties to India and local political connections, but it was also a continual process of negotiation and adjustment that I took seriously and incorporated into my fieldwork. Thus, this section is concerned with elucidating the methodologies I employed (participant observation, life histories and semi-structured interviews) and situating the research within its ethical and political context.

Choosing Field Sites

Panna Tiger Reserve is spread over 543 square kilometres and has 42 villages in its buffer zone and only a handful in its core (Kolipaka 2018). I

knew that I would be unable to access the villages inside the reserve, as research inside Protected Areas (PAs) requires various government permissions, which would require me to spend time and resources beyond the limit of my fieldwork period. Moreover, I knew that any access to villages in the buffer which depended on the Forest Department would be difficult to negotiate, particularly if they were zones known historically for poaching, or communities that were in the process of village relocation. I also anticipated that any access granted through the Forest Department may create the impression that I was working with them, particularly if I arrived in one of their vehicles or with one of their members of staff. This would have aroused suspicion from local communities and convincing them of my independence and building rapport would have proved more difficult.

Therefore, I needed to choose field sites which were accessible without the help or expressed permission of the Forest Department, where the community was large and diverse enough that the varying impacts of the tiger reserve on local life were observable and where I could feasibly stay for the length of my fieldwork. However, in order to study the relationships between the Forest Department and local people, there also needed to be a substantial Forest Department presence to allow for the possibility of regular interaction as well as, I presumed, local employment. This narrowed the possible field sites, leading me to choose Madla and Hinauta as my main study villages, the bases from which I would explore other surrounding villages. Both villages are found along roads which I could access on public transport from the main town (Panna), but both also are the entry points into the tiger reserve for tourism, and have Forest

Department field offices, tourist accommodation, housing for forest staff and even an elephant camp at Hinauta.

However, both were also the site of one other major stakeholder in the landscape, the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) directly opposite Hinauta, and the tourism industry, based in Madla. Ultimately it was these two institutions, which played the decisive role in making Hinauta the primary field site, where I kept a permanent room during fieldwork. The NMDC not only provided a bus service to and from Panna throughout the day, but the attached township also contained a restaurant, tailor, bank, post office, hospital, school and ATM, all of which allowed me to live 20km inside the outer boundaries of the tiger reserve with access to amenities that I couldn't find in Madla. Moreover, as the centre of the tourism industry, I was much more like to be seen primarily as a tourist in Madla at first, whereas Hinauta's lack of hotels meant that people became familiar with my 'researcher' position relatively quickly. Still, the large presence of the Forest Department as well as the tourism industry and NMDC meant that my stay in Hinauta, and visits to Madla, were not without their challenges and negotiations.

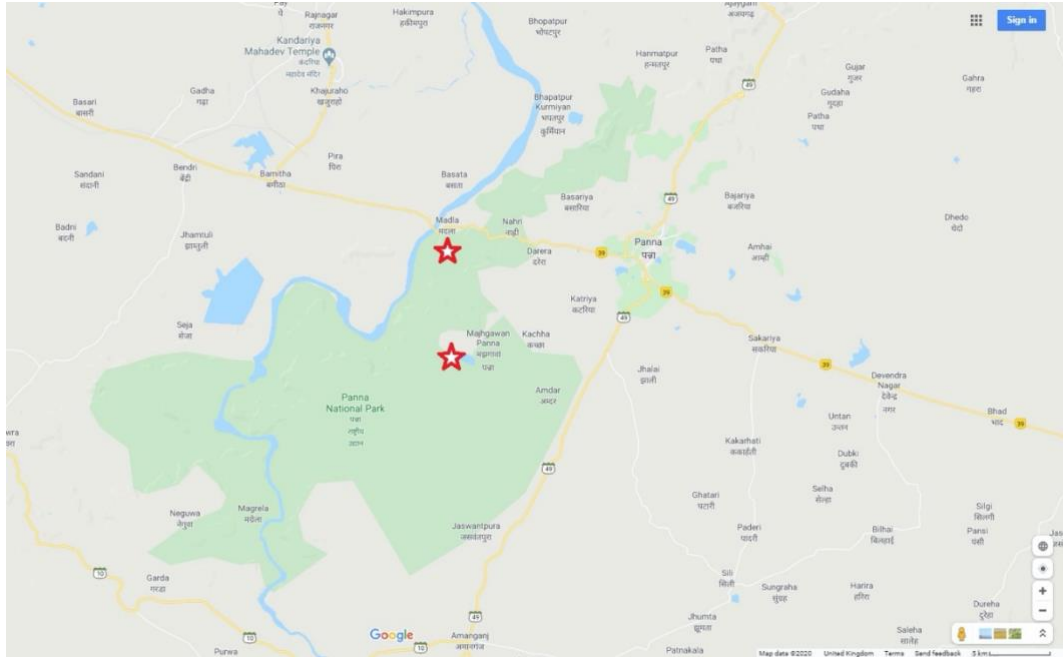


Figure 5: Map of Panna with Hinauta (lower) and Madla (above) villages starred. Scale (5km) in bottom right.

Institutional Considerations and Positionality

My original association with Panna Tiger Reserve is through tourism, as I worked between school and university at a lodge in Madla as a trainee naturalist. Fortuitously for me, the lodge owner voiced his support for my project, and as a member of the royal family in the neighbouring district, he was well respected and connected into local politics. This gave me a way to explain my choice of Panna as a field site to interlocutors and Forestry officials and his patronage gave me a local sense of legitimacy and connectedness that minimised my exposure and reduced risk in the field.

While all of this did aid my initial explanations of my research in Panna, I made an effort to distance myself from the lodge and the tourism industry when I arrived for my pilot research, not visiting the lodge for the first two months of fieldwork and spending my time mostly in Hinauta and

the surrounding villages. This was in order to manage any expectation that my research was somehow 'for tourism' or 'for the lodge'. I also wanted to forge my own relationships outside of my connection to the tourism industry and didn't want to risk pigeon-holing my interest in the reserve in the eyes of my interlocutors. This way my conversations were not automatically about tourism and addressed the broader conditions of village life. The same was true with the way I approached the Forest Department and the NMDC. I never wanted my interlocutors, nor any other stakeholders, to think that my research was 'for the Forest Department' or 'for the government'. However, I did need to maintain good relationships with each stakeholder to gain insights on their various roles and interrelationships in the landscape. These relationships in the field did risk my association with elites and government officials, creating distance between myself and local people, whose lives I intended to study. This converged with the limitations of my own positionality while in the field and clearly affected the research.

My positionality as an unmarried, white, foreign male researcher did undoubtedly affect the interactions I had with locals and officials in Panna, influencing and limiting the research. In particular, conversations about government processes were sensitive, I was unable to communicate well with women without male relatives present, spent almost no time with unmarried women and children, and people were often suspicious about my intentions. This meant that my initial understanding of particular dynamics and my ability to converse fluently about particular cultural nuances were limited. These both improved over time, but I have to admit the persistently limited acceptance by some local people and the distance they kept

between my research gaze and some intimate cultural practices, particularly amongst women and in the household. My understanding of those spaces and the information shared by interlocutors about them is minimal and does not feature often in the thesis.

The local perception of foreigners as merely 'visiting', uninformed about cultural norms, particularly around relationships, sex and marriage, as well as wealthy and a potential link to 'abroad' all raised issues during fieldwork. My position as a white, unmarried man most definitely opened up numerous doubts and concerns in the local community about their personal information and when, where and with whom I would share my 'research'. It also meant that conversations tended towards how life was abroad, and young and older men were curious to explore whether I drank, smoked, watched pornography or had sexual relationships. I worked hard against these stereotypes in the field, but there is no doubt that my identity as a 'foreign, male researcher' placed constraints on my research process and distance between me and my interlocutors.

Overall, the Forest Department did not interfere in my research, but this was partially due to my own initiative to meet with the Field Director regularly. I was invited to public events such as the Global Tiger Day and the safari guide training and welcomed at the Forest Department Division Headquarters. I volunteered in any possible way, whether with foreign tourists staying at the Hinauta accommodation or school children participating in outreach activities. This maintained my positive profile in their eyes, aided considerably by my own positionality as a British, white male researcher doing a PhD with the proper permissions, research

affiliations and visas in Delhi as well as a multi-generational association with India and an affinity for wildlife conservation.

The acceptance by the Forest Department officials of my position as a researcher stemmed from their own civil service background and familiarity with research of different kinds, my position at a reputable university in London and my ability to produce the relevant documentation when asked. I also made sure not to interfere with the affairs of the department by advocating on behalf of my interlocutors. I was careful not to be seen as an 'activist' or 'social worker', who was working to help the forest border communities to 'rebel' or 'resist' against the Forest Department. The same was true of the NMDC. I never tried to visit the mines or speak with the mining officials. I was careful to stay in the areas that were open to the public, building rapport with the security guards, restaurant, and shop staff in order to move about freely there.

I do regret that I did not do more to help my interlocutors deal with the various challenges they faced in dealing with either the Forest Department, local tourism or the NMDC. However, I was continuously conscious of the precarity of my position as a researcher in a village surrounded by well-guarded and controlled government areas in the tiger reserve and the diamond mine. Thus, any suggestion that I was working against the wishes of the government or that local management did not approve would have placed my ability to conduct research there at risk (not to mention any future work for myself or others). My research was shaped by these institutional negotiations between tourism, the Forest Department, the NMDC and local communities. I often moved between these

stakeholders in order to gain multiple perspectives on issues and maintain good rapport with what are often conflicting groups. Ultimately, I aimed to align myself with local communities, as it was their lives I sought to understand. Thus, my fieldwork was characterised by simultaneous attempts to build rapport and create distance between myself and the tourism industry, the Forest Department and the NMDC.

Again, I remain regretful that my stance was less political and therefore achieved less immediate impact that someone advocating for local people might have. However, I remained aware that any underinformed or presumptuous campaigning on behalf of local communities also risked reinforcing colonial hierarchies of 'white men' speaking on behalf of 'poor villagers' in resistance against 'Indian elites', something which I worked hard to avoid. My own colonial family history and the continued privileged place of Euro-American visitors to India already made these attempts challenging. My interlocutors occasionally characterised the British Raj as a time of proper governance and perceived my outsider status as occasionally equivalent to some sort of authoritative privilege in my relationships with the government. Making sure that I was not reinforcing these long-established dynamics of power and authority in my positionality was central to my methodological adjustments throughout fieldwork. I also made a decision not to advocate in case I exacerbated tensions between communities within villages. I did not want to appear to favour one particular caste group over another, one particular family over another, ultimately trying to visit each group equally and gather their views.

These political and institutional realities were not apparent until I arrived, though I must give my supervisors in Delhi and London as well as my local contacts in the tourism industry and wildlife community credit for forewarning me. The process of fieldwork and the formation of my methodology throughout was a delicate balance of creating familiarity and comfort with the research endeavour for each stakeholder while creating my own identity as someone simply there on my own for my own personal research. Part of what made this effort successful was my decision not to adopt many aspects of 'conducting research' that were familiar in the local context, mostly through NGO or government work.



Figure 6: My room in Hinauta

De-Governmentalising the Research

As I attempted to differentiate myself from other types of research, I had to become familiar with what expectations my interlocutors held through their experience of other research, mostly government or NGOs. For example, staying in the NMDC Township were Wildlife Institute of India

researchers. They enquired about my methodology and I explained that I would be simply spending time in the community, building rapport and developing relationships while observing daily life. They asked to see my survey or questionnaire and were confused when I didn't have one. They had been conducting surveys on human-wildlife conflict and described to me the processes of village settlement in which surveying household wealth and composition was a central component. I decided that I would try to avoid these methodologies to minimise the perception that my research was for the government. Thus, 'de-governmentalising' my methodologies was key.

The result was that I employed participant-observation, semi-structured interviews and the collection of oral life histories as primary methodologies, but I did not record any audio, have a set questionnaire at any point, carry a clip board, dress particularly formally, use my tablet to take notes or pointedly ask about people's personal details (name, date of birth, income, household composition etc). This contradicted many of my interlocutors' expectations of 'research'. During government interventions like village relocation, government surveyors assess the value of assets in each household and record people's names and dates of birth. As I discuss in Chapter 7 my research position often inadvertently implicated me in such processes in the eyes of my interlocutors. Additionally, I did not use a research assistant or translator during the first year of fieldwork or travel by private vehicle, mostly going by bus and with a friend or resident of a particular community when visiting for the first time. This was consciously to remove any impression that the research was 'governmental'. Again, my

position as a foreigner helped, as I would explain that there is no reason for the Indian government to ask a foreigner who speaks Hindi without fluency to do their work.

Only during the last stage of fieldwork when I visited communities to gather information on particular topics did I have a research assistant and occasionally travelled by private vehicle. My research assistant was someone I had known for the year before this stage of fieldwork and my closest friend in Panna. He knew people in each place and was therefore able to make introductions. His own positionality as a non-village resident (he lived in town) but familiar with each community, a Brahmin and a safari guide, made it easier for him to travel where he wanted with me and not be too imbricated in local village politics in each place while being well aware of the dynamics. As a Hindi-speaker myself, I did not rely on him for translation per se, but more communicating to unfamiliar parties the purposes of the research, explaining that it was not government or NGO work. My own positionality as a male foreigner meant that I was able to travel where I wanted to (outside of any areas such as the Park itself where special permission was required) and welcomed in almost every place. This is not to say that Indian or female researchers would not be welcomed, but I did not face questions about my caste, religion, family background or marital status that I observed villagers bring up in with Indian wildlife researchers and about which I had heard from female researchers working in similar contexts. This position did bring up a variety of ethical and positionality issues with regards to data collection, some of which I have addressed above.

Data Collection

During the first stage of data collection, from the monsoon to the early winter of 2017, along with settling in, I decided to focus on the situation of 'forest-employed villagers'. I collected oral life histories of 64 forest workers and guides, asking them how they got into forest work, what the work entailed, how much they were paid, etc. I coded all of my notes for the purposes of anonymity and began to build a general picture of life as a forest worker. To conduct interviews and observe forest work, I frequented places where I could spend time speaking with forest workers, such as the range office, entry gate and local teashop. I began to develop relationships with key interlocutors who were experienced forest workers, using my interest in the tigers and wildlife to ask about their work.

Moreover, the monsoon rains and stifling heat and humidity restricted the level of village activity overall, allowing me to spend time with particular groups in public spaces, or if invited, in their homes, to learn what I could about village life and history. During this period, agricultural activity was minimal and the predominance of religious festivals between August and November meant that many migrant labourers returned to celebrate. It was a fruitful time to familiarise myself with the village community in Hinauta by being present at festivals. During this time, the Forest Department held a number of public events and provided training for safari guides, where I assisted upon the request of the Field Director.

During the second stage of fieldwork, at the start of the winter until Christmas, agricultural activity began to increase as the rains ended and the

weather cooled. Agriculture and the problems faced by farmers became important topics and I began to explore particular types of conflict between villagers and forest staff, including instances of human-wildlife conflict (crop and livestock depredation), the curtailment of traditional livelihoods and the possibility of village relocation. These interests continued into the third stage of fieldwork, from the New Year until summer, when harvest and spring festivals approached, as did the summer wedding season. Across these two stages, I also volunteered with the Panna Tiger Reserve Nature Camps, a public outreach initiative that I analyse in Chapter 4. The third stage of fieldwork involved a particular interest in village relocation, and I interviewed resettled villagers. As the summer started, the weather grew warm again and having observed summer life during pilot fieldwork, I returned to Delhi until monsoon. During this break, I assessed exactly what I would need to gather in the final stage and anticipated the occasional need for a field assistant and vehicle. I waited until this final stage to do this,

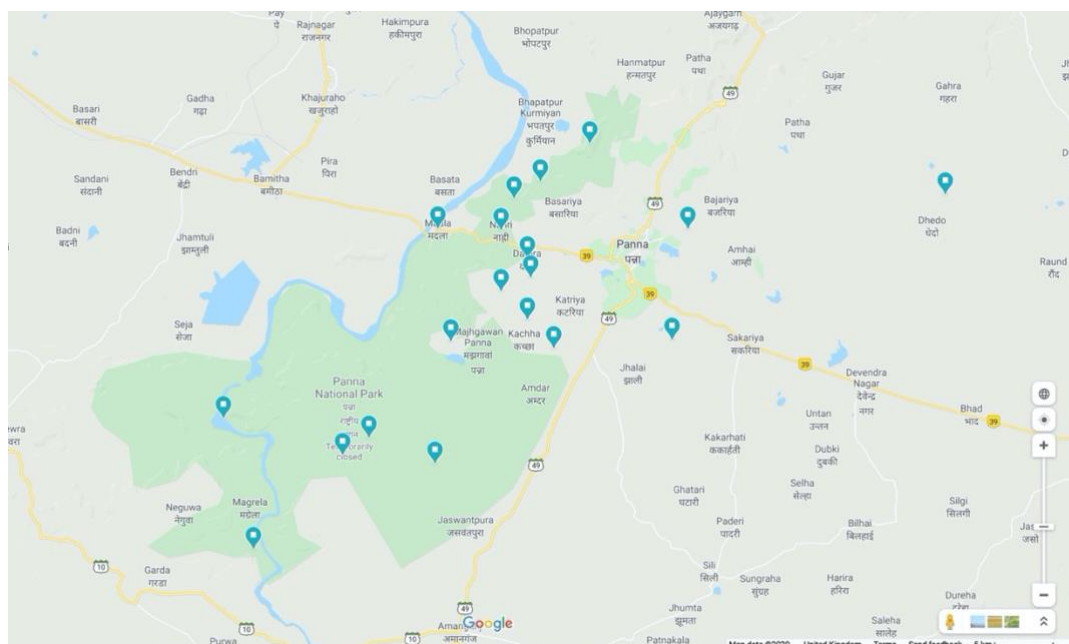


Figure 7: Map of all visited villages (blue pins) with scale in bottom right

as I had developed relationships with people in multiple communities and felt confident in my Hindi-language and explanatory skills.

The final stage of fieldwork involved a concerted effort to gather information about specific topics including conservation rules and authority, livestock depredation, eco-development committees, relationships with tigers and village relocation. In total, I conducted 87 interviews, visiting 19 villages (see Figure 7), including people from seven relocated villages. I found it important to structure this part of data collection more formally in order to consolidate the knowledge I had collected over the previous 12 months.¹⁶ During the monsoon, the same religious festivals took place, allowing me to make further notes on them, and with tiger tourism on hold until October, I set up my own dedicated English classes for safari guides as a way to further develop relationships with them.

Further Ethical Considerations and Limitations

I have already mentioned a number of ethical considerations, but there are some outstanding issues to address. One considerable limitation of the data is the predominance of male and the lack of female perspectives. This is partially due to a sensitivity to cultural norms around interaction between women and unrelated, unfamiliar men in this context. That is to say, in many cases, it would have been inappropriate to speak

¹⁶ The selected participants cannot be considered a representative sample of any statistical significance. However, I made sure to ask the same set of questions on each topic across as many caste groups as possible, interview women and speak with people of different ages. This was in order to balance what I perceived as a potential collection bias towards middle-aged, middle-to-upper-caste men, as described below.

with or interview a woman on her own or in her home without an older male relative or husband present. This difficulty was enhanced by the predominance of men in public spaces where I could easily approach a group to ask about a particular topic. Women in my field site were far more likely to stay within homes and often disappear into the back rooms of homes whenever I entered. This was particularly true when I travelled, as I often did, with close friends, many of whom were middle aged, middle-to-upper caste men. Additionally, women were far more likely to speak Bundelkhandi and far less likely to understand my Hindi, which made communication difficult.

This does not mean that there are no results pertaining to women, nor that women do not feature in the ethnography. In each chapter, I attempt to address the situation of women in relation to the particular topic, as I found that the impacts of the conservation area sometimes had a greater bearing on their activity (cf. Ogra and Badola 2008). I have worked hard to ensure that the ethnography does not appear lop-sided or ignorant of the female perspective on conservation in the area, particularly as women's activities are central to the village economy and its former and continued relationship to the surrounding forests. However, in terms of regular conversation and information gathered from interviews, the data is skewed in favour of male perspectives. Much of the information that I gathered, particularly pertaining to the topics discussed in Chapter 5 (rules and authority), describe moments of potential illegality and many of the accounts gathered were through informal conversations, though all parties

were aware that I was conducting research during the time of the conversation.

Throughout fieldwork, I followed standard UCL and departmental procedures for ethics, based on the ASA and ESRC¹⁷ guidelines for fieldwork and data collection, receiving departmental ethics and data protection approval before fieldwork began (No. Z6364106/2017/01/58 social research). The nature of the information required that I follow ethical protocols exactly in order to protect my interlocutors from the potential consequences of sharing. All interviews and the data collected were anonymised and collected with verbal consent and no vulnerable groups (children, refugees, medical patients etc.) were part of the research process. Data was stored either in handwritten notebooks (where names were omitted) or on encrypted files on a tablet. There were no recordings of interviews made, and any requests from particular individuals to remove information were honoured. All photographs within the thesis have faces blurred or blacked out in order to maintain anonymity. I also returned to Hinauta, Madla and Bador villages one year after leaving the field to share my major findings, providing the heads of the village council with a Hindi-language report to read, discuss and keep. Their feedback has been incorporated into the thesis. The English and Hindi copies of the feedback report are found in Appendix B.

¹⁷ Association of Social Anthropologists and Economic and Social Research Council

Chapter Contents

In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review of conservation social science in India, looking both at the historical development of forestry and conservation in India and at contemporary issues that are popular in the literature. I cover a range of theoretical approaches from within and outside anthropology. It is worth noting that I do not address the broader development literature in relation to these issues as it falls beyond a manageable scope for the thesis. Where relevant, insights from writing on development India are incorporated, though the main focus of the literature review is the social science of conservation. Chapter 3 follows, where I describe the ethnographic setting of the main study village, Hinauta, its organisation, economics, and local political dynamics as a context for the main data chapters on ‘village-forest relations’ and the different modalities of ‘engagement’ between Forest Department and local people.

In Chapter 4, I look at the historical development of conservation in Panna. I demonstrate how historically ‘village’ and ‘forest’ have been simultaneously constructed as vulnerable and wild, each in need of both ‘taming’ and protection from the other by the state. I argue that these discriminations are continuously reproduced in the first modality of engagement, public outreach in the form of nature camps and eco-development committees. In Chapter 5, I look at the consequences of establishing the national park and its restrictions on forest-based livelihoods and ‘moments of engagement’ between forest staff and local people. I explore how to rethink the notion of conservation rules and authority more

broadly, drawing on anthropologies of events, exploring the vulnerability of both local people and forest staff. In Chapter 6, I describe the vulnerability of forest workers in detail, explaining the discrimination they face despite their centrality to the conservation operation as a form of engagement through employment. Guided by an analysis of the emic term *jugaad*, I look at the negotiation and adaptability of forest work and what that can tell us about the significance of kinship and interpersonal networks for employment.

In Chapter 7, I analyse the process of village relocation and address ‘the state’, which looms throughout the thesis as a central actor in this conversation. I show how local people engage the state’s multiple guises and make use of ‘alternative governments’ to assert their own vulnerability. The state acts here as both patron and evictor and favours the vulnerability of *jungles* over that of its own citizens, engaging them in long processes of resettlement and bureaucracy, to which they are unsuited.

In each body chapter (4-7), I describe how my understanding of the particular topic, whether it be public outreach, forest rules, forest employment or village relocation, shifted and changed during fieldwork, helping to guide the reader to a more nuanced, critical and grounded understanding of each. Finally, in the discussion and conclusion, I revisit my research questions, explain the substantive and theoretical contributions of the thesis, and offer some practical suggestions for the improvement of village-forest relations.

Chapter 2

History of Indian Conservation and Its Study

Introduction

This chapter serves as a background and introduction to Indian forestry and wildlife conservation and its critical study in the social sciences as well as an explanation of where this study sits in relation to that literature and its specific contributions. As many authors have done, I will start with the British foundation of colonial scientific forestry in the mid-19th century as a way to emphasise the institutional continuities observable in pre and post-Independence periods well into the present day (Grove 1995; Grove et al. 1998; Rangarajan 1996; Gadgil and Guha 1993; Sivaramakrishnan 1999; Guha 1989).

There is of course a rich pre-colonial history of forest and game protection in India. One only need look at the extensive literature on sacred groves (see Chandran & Hughes 2000 or Kent 2013 for good overviews) or pre-British hunting (Hughes 2013; Mandala 2018; Pandian 2001) to understand the deep historical environmentalism and the dynamic political ecology of different populations across South Asia before the arrival of the British¹⁸.

¹⁸ Also see Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan (eds) (2011) for a comprehensive look at India's environmental history, going back before colonialism. Grove, Damodaran and Sangwan (1998) also look in depth at pre-colonial environmentalism and forestry in South and South-east Asia.

In the present study, however, my interest in wildlife conservation lies in the relationships between local communities and forestry staff, who perform and carry with them the institutional, scientific and technical legacies of Indian forestry from its foundation as a state bureaucracy in 1860s British India (Fleischmann 2012; 2015, Wangel 2018; Vasan 2002). This institutional and cultural context is most appropriate here, as forestry programmes that disadvantage local people most immediately originate in colonial policies of exclusion and criminalisation of forest-dependent populations and their livelihoods (Guha 1983; Peluso 1994; Rangarajan 1996). This chapter serves as both literature review and historical background to wildlife conservation in India, as social science critiques have developed alongside conservation practice over the last fifty years or so.

My guides for this review and history come from a diverse range of backgrounds, including geography, political ecology, public administration and institutional analysis, political science, environmental history and occasionally social anthropology. I seek to situate this study within the broader field of the 'social science of Indian conservation', the relevant contours of which are outlined here. I often had to look outside my own discipline, social anthropology, for material and analysis on Indian conservation that illuminated different aspects of its historical and social life. Moreover, I observed that social scientific studies of Indian conservation increasingly are strongest in their fine-tuned analysis of on-the-ground dynamics with an attention to the specificities of context (Nagendra et al. 2010; Read 2015) - a strength of ethnographic techniques and anthropological analysis.

Those writing outside of social anthropology, although usually not in reference to the more theoretical discussions presented here, often appear more accessible to practitioners, natural scientists or non-academic readers. As one explicit aim of this thesis is to be in conversation with non-academic spheres and present findings in a hopefully clear and coherent manner, I found it useful while formulating, researching and writing the thesis to sit among different disciplines with whom conservationists, foresters and 'wildlifers' may be more familiar than social anthropology. Therefore, this chapter sets up the attempted and necessary inter/multi-disciplinary character of this research, and its necessary contributions from outside social anthropology. My 'home discipline' figures here as the source of my methodological and theoretical orientations rather than my overarching 'framework' or foundation, a type of compass rather than a blueprint or map.

Thus, the thesis is an anthropological contribution to the social science of conservation, an attempt to incorporate ethnographic insights into analyses of conservation issues. While there is plenty of relevant material for the discussion of development and its relationship with biodiversity conservation in India, there is no scope within this thesis to examine the state of 'development' in the local context. Notions of 'development' and the role of the state do feature sparsely throughout but not as analytical concepts nor in order to speak to the wider development literature. Thus, there is limited reference to the development literature as it falls beyond the main scope of the thesis. The primary interest lies in the

historical and contemporary relationships between conservation and forest staff and local people in and around Panna Tiger Reserve.

I will start with a brief history of the Indian Forest Department and British colonial forestry from the 1860s onwards. Then I will look at the development of wildlife conservation in India post-Independence as situated within a global movement to create protected areas and save endangered species. I cannot provide a comprehensive review of global conservation, but it is important to situate the development of wildlife conservation in India within such a context. Developments in conservation policy and practice in India have been, since colonial forestry's inception, part of an international conversation about protected areas and endangered species. As Annu Jalais (2010) has argued, tiger conservation (and tigers) can be quite cosmopolitan. After detailing the development of wildlife conservation in India, I will look at a few contemporary issues in Indian conservation relevant to this study, including participatory conservation, human-animal conflict, and conservation-induced displacement (village relocation). Finally, I will make a case for ethnographic approaches to contemporary conservation issues as I identify gaps in other theoretical approaches where anthropology may help move the conversation towards more nuanced and situated understandings of 'engagement' between local people and forest staff around protected areas in India.

Colonial Roots and Communities in Indian Forestry

The history of the Indian Forest Department, forestry and conservation, in their contemporary processes and institutional structures,

have their roots in British colonial projects of state control and exploitation of natural resources and people across India's forested areas. Before the establishment of state forestry, administrators were keen to clear forests, to supply imperial industrial and military ambitions, and also to sedentarise forest-dependent or migratory populations, establish settled agriculture and create more legible and therefore taxable populations (cf. Scott 1998). Having consumed forests across Europe and at home to fuel industry and military ambitions throughout the 16th and 17th century, Britain turned to India in particular to supply teak for the Royal Navy. In addition, the timber demands of the early years of the Indian railways (1840s-1850s) led to the rapid devastation of many forested areas by private contractors, particularly as only a few tree species were strong enough to use for the railway sleepers (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Rangarajan 1996)¹⁹.

Concern grew about the degradation of India's forest resources and Lord Dalhousie (Governor-General from 1848 to 1856) issued a memorandum on the topic, but the 1857 Mutiny (also known as the Sepoy Rebellion) put these plans on hold and led to more investment in the Indian railways to create quicker communication and faster transport links between colonial outposts. As a result, forests degraded further until 1862 when concerns arose again, and Governor-General Canning called for the creation of a Forest Department in order to conserve a certain number of forested areas to "safeguard long-term imperial interests" and enforce state

¹⁹ Sal (*Shorea robusta*), deodar (*Cedurs deodara*) and teak (Sagon in Hindi) (*Tectona grandis*)

control (Guha 1983: 1884). As the creation of a centralised bureaucracy of institutional scientific forest management in the 1860s was unfamiliar to British administrators, they collaborated with Prussian foresters to establish the British Imperial Forest Department in 1864 (Rangarajan 1996). German forester and botanist Dietrich Brandis was appointed the first Inspector General of Forests and head of the newly formed Imperial Forest Service.

Concerned with the extent of felling and the need to assert a state monopoly over timber resources, the colonial government hastily passed the Indian Forest Act 1865 to curtail local and private rights to forest resources and make space for the centralised bureaucratic control of the newly formed Department. Local forest livelihood practices were in large part criminalised, considered indiscriminate, uneconomic and unscientific use of natural resources, with the colonial administration enforcing a more 'modern' way of managing natural resources and human-environmental relations (Sivaramakrishnan 1999). Almost immediately, the place of local communities and their user rights arose as a point of contention. While administrator and ethnologist Henry Maine stated that the government had no intention of curtailing local user rights, hoping to quell the concerns of local landowners and princes about the possibility of state control over forestry land, others like Brandis and Chief of Forests in Punjab Baden-Powell favoured annexation and absolute state control respectively.

Local governments like the Madras Presidency, community groups like the Pune Sarvanjanik Sabha and other activists opposed the language and consequences of the Forest Act. The Act declared all forested land the exclusive property of the state and established an institutional and legal

framework for its management and control to the exclusion of local populations and user rights. This had drastic consequences for not only the relationship between local people and the resources on which they depended and their broader environments, but also the relationship between local people and the colonial state at large (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Guha 1983; Rangarajan 1996).

Although there was much debate about the role of local users, the updated Forest Act of 1878 widened the executive powers of foresters. With no specific definition of “forest land”, essentially any non-cultivated land without a single proprietor could be expropriated by the Indian Forest Department under the Act. This meant that any commonly held grazing lands, plots managed by communities or what forest officers considered “wasteland” fell under the reach of the colonial government; land grabs legitimised by narratives of long-term sustainability, scientific progress and economic development (Arnold and Guha 1995; Sivramakrishnan 1999). Local users of newly designated “forest lands” now became encroachers on government property and livelihoods that involved the use of natural resources on non-privately held lands became ‘illegal extraction’.

Rangarajan (1996) writes,

The creation of extensive government forests had been 'not so much for purposes of forestry', as for the alienation of property rights to land. Many areas were annexed because there was 'no one' whom the government wished to recognise as proprietor. The Department had thus gained control of vast areas with little or no potential for commercial forestry. However, foresters were now in a powerful position within the government. They had de jure control over the very lands which the Revenue Department hoped to open up for cultivation. The control of cultivable wastes made the Forest Department a key player in the process of colonisation of land (Rangarajan 1996: 74).

Local users were granted *nistar* (local use) rights, which only the Forest Department could grant on the sole condition that anything gathered was for non-commercial (domestic/agricultural) reasons. Most forest land was declared “Reserved”, the highest form of protection. This reified a distinction and separation of ‘village’ and *jungle* in a way that justified state intervention and control over both.²⁰ The Forest Act was updated again in 1927 to “consolidate the law related to forest, the between transit of forest produce, and the duty liable on timber and other forest produce” (GoI 1927), increasing the number of forest offences and detailing their punishment further. This helped to clarify and establish the role of the forest official. With the Government of India Act 1935, “forests were included in the provincial list and forestry administration came under the authority and control of provincial legislatures”, though most provincial legislation was in line with the 1927 Act (Haeuber 1993: 57). This legal framework laid the foundation for Indian forestry law and management into the present day (Flesichmann 2012; Wangel 2018).

National Interest and Wildlife Conservation in Independent India

At Indian Independence in 1947, the Forest Department had declared and taken control of 31 million hectares of Reserve Forests and 15 million hectares of Protected Forests. Following the abolition of princely

²⁰ The Indian Forest Act 1878 (updated 1927) designates three types of forest: Reserved (complete government control and user rights granted only by Forest Officer), Protected (minimal user rights, granted specifically by Forest Officer), Village (adjacent to village lands). In effect, most designations were Reserved, leading to local conflict.

states and feudal systems of land tenure, uncultivated land held therein became the property of the state. This combined with the acquisition of private forests by different state governments to increase the power of the Forest Department within the Government of India. A National Forestry Policy in 1952 established forests mainly for timber and the 'national interest', further ignoring community rights to village commons and emphasising the importance of forest resources to projects of national economic progress. People living in forest-border villages were not allowed to use Forests to the detriment of this national interest (Saxena 1997). The policy leaned heavily on the colonial 1894 Forest Policy, upholding its fundamental concepts and authority (Haeuber 1993).

However, while the government pursued forestry strategies centred on timber extraction and the safeguarding of natural resources in the national interest, public awareness and activism concerning environmental degradation and the loss of wildlife grew alongside global environmentalist movements. In the 1960s and 1970s, elite, urban environmentalists and wildlife enthusiasts began to campaign for greater protection of India's wildlife. This campaign was in line with global conservation movements as the creation of protected areas with inviolate zones set aside exclusively for 'wild nature' proliferated across the world after the end of the Second World War. Led by Salim Ali, the famous ornithologist, this group of Indian conservation 'vanguards' garnered the support of Prime Minister Indira

Gandhi²¹, leading to the passing of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) in 1972, which banned hunting and the 'commercial' exploitation of timber and forest products in newly designated 'Protected Areas' (Rangarajan 2003). This led to the launch of Project Tiger in 1973 under which nine reserves were created and placed under the special care of a national body on conservation (now the National Tiger Conservation Authority). The WPA prescribes many categories of protected areas: tiger reserves, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, which together comprise around 5% of India's geographic area. The laws concerning property and ownership of the forests did not change, with villagers inside and around these protected areas treated not only as encroachers on government forests, but now threats to conservation and biodiversity (Karanth et al. 2008; Rastogi et al. 2012).

The rapid expansion of the protected area model into former colonies and the Global South (the number of PAs globally doubling in the 1970s alone) drew attention to the social impacts of PAs however, and conservation paradigms shifted in the 1980s to begin including local communities and encourage community participation, theoretically making forest-dependent people part of conservation planning (Adams and Hutton 2007). As the global establishment rate of protected areas peaked between 1985 and 1995, projects that aimed to interlink sustainable development

²¹ Authors within the conservation literature (Karanth et al. 2008; Rangarajan 2003) and outside (Khilnani 2001) see Indira Gandhi's support for the Wildlife Protection Act and Project Tiger as part of a political strategy to distract from her autocratic regime during the Emergency (Rastogi et al. 2012). The move not only helped her create a strong lobby in India, but garnered international recognition and praise for her 'environmentalism'.

and environmental conservation grew in popularity. Undoubtedly the World Bank and IMF's emphasis on structural adjustment programmes generated a pragmatic need for conservationists to engage with local communities (Miller et al. 2011; Igoe and Brockington 2007; IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991; 1980; WCED 1987). In India, the move towards Joint Forest Management (JFM) in the 1988 National Forest Policy followed this trend, pledging more equitable and inclusive management of forest areas (Saxena 1997). Ultimately, this led to a shift towards integrated conservation and development projects and community-based natural resource management from the 1990s on (Adams and Hutton 2007).

Emerging Critiques of Conservation

As the social impacts of conservation and the role of local communities started to draw attention in conservation circles, a critical social science of conservation also began to emerge, particularly in the fields of environmental history, geography and political ecology (Adams and Hutton 2007; Robbins 2012). Central to various trends in different fields and empirically based around different locations is what has been termed the 'parks versus people debate', an exploration into the inherent tensions between the demands of sustainable development and poverty alleviation on the one hand and conservation biology and biodiversity on the other. The emergence of this critical social science pointed to the ideological incompatibility and contradictions of projects that combined development and conservation, particularly in postcolonial contexts, examining the colonial and ideological roots of conservation in its prevalent

forms²². In addition, it began to accumulate evidence that these supposed shifts to community-based conservation and local participation were more rhetorical maneuvers than actualized outcomes (Adams et al. 2004; Adams and Hutton 2007; Brockington et al. 2006; McShane et al. 2011; West, Igoe and Brockington 2006).

Foundational texts in the environmental history and ethnography of Indian forestry and conservation began to appear in the 1980s and 1990s, mostly taking what Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan (2014) describe as postcolonial stances on 'nature, the Orient and colonialism' (Agrawal 1999; Arnold and Guha 1995; Baviskar 1995; Gadgil and Guha 1993; Guha 1989; Rangarajan 1996; Saberwal 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 1999). These authors describe in detail the various effects of colonial forestry on different regions of India and different groups of people, highlighting continuities between colonial policy and post-independence forestry and conservation, particularly the exclusionary approach to the management of forestlands and the persecution of forest-dependent people²³. Influence from the subaltern studies and social revisionist history of the time (see Guha and Spivak 1988) is clear in the ways the authors focus on the legacy of colonialism and the violence inflicted on forest-dependent peoples as well as their resistance and mobilisation²⁴. Early ethnographic accounts of

²² It was also around this time that postcolonial critiques of development also emerged in the academy (Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995)

²³ The usefulness of thinking in terms of continuities or ruptures between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods is the topic of debate in the environmental history of South Asia (see Hauber 1993; Sivaramakrishnan 2008).

²⁴ Rangarajan's (1996) account of the Baiga tribe in the Central Provinces and Guha's (1989) account of the famed Chipko movement in the Himalayan foothills are two key

forest-dependent people were also key to understanding the impacts of colonial forestry on disadvantaged groups and their resistance to them (Elwin 1992; von Fürer-Haimendorf 1943; 1945; 1990, von Fürer-Haimendorf and von Fürer-Haimendorf 1948). This literature on 'the mixed conservation legacy' of colonialism in India emerged in step with changing environmental consciousness at the time and the broader emergence of this social science critique of conservation (Read 2015; Karanth et al., 2008; Rangarajan 2000; 1996)²⁵.

This broader critical social science of conservation noted that the protected area model emerged both from Western ideas about pristine nature and wilderness and in continuation with colonial civilizing missions about 'developing' nature and people by controlling both (Argyrou 2005; Cronon 1995; Iggoe 2004; MacKenzie 1988; Neumann 1998). The desire for national parks as inviolate zones free from human disturbance and habitation originated in Euro-American histories of enclosing commons and frontier expansion (Cronon 1995; Hardin 1968; Ostrom 2000) and ideological and literary traditions of romantic nature (exemplified by writers like John Muir and Thoreau). This trend towards what Brockington (2002) has termed 'fortress conservation' landed in India through what Baviskar

examples. Increased interest in resistance also stemmed from works like Scott's (1985) *Weapons of the Weak*.

²⁵ This period was also a landmark for campaigns of resistance conducted by forest-dependent peoples since the British Raj. One of the major achievements of the most famous, the Chipko Movement (1973-1980), was the ban on tree-cutting for 15 years in Uttar Pradesh and its successful conduct through non-violent resistance (Sarker 2011; Guha 1989). Major episodes of forest resistance include the Chur Rebellion (1767-1805), the Naik Revolt (1806-16), the Hul Rebellion (1767-1805), the Chipko Movement (1973-80) and the Appilo Chalewali Movement (September to November 1983) (Sarker 2011).

(2002) identifies correctly as 'bourgeois environmentalism' (cf. Rangarajan 2003). This is not to say that an exclusionary model of natural resource management arrived in India via such environmentalism, since it is clearly rooted in a much longer history, but rather that wildlife conservation and bourgeois environmentalism became another mechanism through which this exclusionary model perpetuated.

In this vein of environmentalism, the 'tragedy of commons', environmental degradation and the extinction of species are often blamed on the poor, the marginalized and forest-dependent rather than large-scale industrial and development projects driven by capitalist expansion and state control. This perpetuates the exclusion of forest-dependent peoples from the sources of their traditional livelihoods and re-configures colonial concerns with resource use and hunting as national and international interest in conserving wildlife and 'nature'. While global conservation trends pointed to more community-based or participatory efforts, these critical contributions signaled the continued negative social impacts of conservation-protected areas worldwide (Adams et al. 2004; Adams and Hutton 2007; Tsing 2005; West 2006).

This has led critical social scientists, notably political ecologists and geographers, to argue that contests between 'parks and people', between the demands of sustainable development and conservation, ought to be seen not as conflicts between indigenous inhabitants and wild animals over resources and territory but as conflicts primarily between different groups of humans whose relationships are deeply political and situated in particular socio-historical contexts. The conflicts are the result of political and

historical processes that are shaped by and lead to the creation of protected areas (Adams et al. 2004; Adams and Hutton 2007; Brockington et al. 2006; West, Igoe and Brockington 2006). In India, Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan (2014) describe the emergence of these views alongside a more nuanced treatment of the colonial state in the literature, a critical view of local contexts and an emphasis on the multiple layers and internal fissures within the relationships between state, society and environment, building on the rich foundation of revisionist environmental history. This critical view of conservation helped set the tone for the study of contemporary issues in Indian conservation by both natural and social scientists.

Contemporary Issues in Indian Conservation

Academic and popular concerns with the social impacts of conservation emerged in India over the last few decades in relation to some key issues. Here I have chosen to focus on a few relevant to this study: 1) Joint Forest Management, 2) Human-Wildlife Conflict and 3) Conservation-Induced Displacement (Village Relocation). These short explorations here ought to serve, for readers, as small summaries of relevant literature to situate the ethnographic descriptions found in the corresponding chapters. Each of these summaries cannot cover the topic in its entirety, especially as the thesis is not focused on any one in particular. However, in each case, literatures point to a need to better understand the nuances and complexities of relationships between different stakeholders in conservation

landscapes, particularly in reference to what is often glossed as ‘village-forest relations’ (which I have unpacked in the introduction)- the relationships between Forest Department and local communities and the different modalities of engagement between the two.

Joint Forest Management

First, there has been a concern with Joint Forest Management and community-based conservation initiatives since their launch in India in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As stated above, forest management structures and regulations embodied in a succession of Forest Acts (1927) and National Forest Policies (1894; 1952) emphasised centralised control and expert, technical administration during the colonial and post-Independence eras, purposefully excluding local communities and prohibiting certain livelihoods in favour of others (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Rangarajan 1996)²⁶. For the first few decades following Independence, Indian forestry continued to be revenue-oriented; timber and other resources seen as a crucial part of the natural resource base exploited in ‘the national interest’ to drive India’s emerging economic development. However, by the early 1970s, the ineffectiveness of revenue-based forestry was increasingly difficult to ignore. Mounting public pressure and research pointed to the acceleration of forest degradation, and increased conflicts with forest-dependent

²⁶ Technically the central administration of forests in India existed only until 1935 when they became the responsibility of state governments. However, forests have been on the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution since 1976, allowing the Government of India to legislate on forestry issues centrally (Saxena 1997: 3)

communities across the country made life difficult for Forest Departments and politicians (Nayak 2003; Saigal 2000; Saxena 1997).

The National Commission on Agriculture (1976) continued to see commercial interest as the purpose of India's forests, but pressures from degradation and local conflict encouraged social forestry programmes intended to lessen the pressure on industrial production. Funding for social and farm forestry on private and non-forest lands increased. However, social forestry failed to match the growing needs of forest-dependent populations and did not lead to greater or more equitable participation from community groups. Planting trees in industrial plantations showed some success whereas planting on village lands to supply local communities failed across the board. Social forestry and industrial plantations did manage to halt the degradation of India's forests but to the benefit of the timber industry, who had little stake in sustainable regeneration or the needs of forest-dependent peoples.

Saxena (1997) points to the failures of social forestry in its planning; the failure of foresters and foreign experts to understand rural power dynamics and resource use properly, the selection of species and the availability of land. He also highlights issues with implementation such as the neglect of grasses and fodder as priorities for rural communities and fundamental issues with rights and distribution. He writes that the Government of India's Seventh Five-Year Plan (1985-1990), "for the first time, recognised the importance of non-market and ecological benefits from forests. It did not explicitly mention producing timber for commercial purposes as one of the objectives of forest policy. It also stated that raw

material for forest-based industries would be provided only after meeting the needs of local people” (Saxena 1997: 44-45). In addition, a combination of studies from institutions like the World Bank and USAID and initiatives from state governments pointed to the continued degradation of forests even under social forestry. This matched an international shift in forestry towards improving local economy alongside social goods and new ideas of sustainability (Saxena 1997).

The result was a radical shift in policy for Indian forestry in the 1988 National Forest Policy, where for the first time; national legislation expressed a desire for local participation in forest and natural resource management in India. The policy sets out guidelines for what would become known as Joint Forest Management (JFM). A Government Order on the 1st of June 1990 officially launched JFM and placed emphasis on sharing responsibilities, control and decision-making authority with local user groups. This involved setting up village forest committees and placing their responsibility jointly under the Forest Department and local village councils with the aim that forestry could also aid in village development. It also involved arranging for a share of revenue from forest lands to be distributed to local communities, both for timber and non-timber forest products. JFM in India proved very attractive to international donors (many initiatives were funded by the World Bank), and it undoubtedly increased the number of stakeholders and active participants in forest management across India, involving NGOs, local communities and academic and research organisations (Ota et al. 2014; Saigal 2000). Following the national policy,

22 state governments issued their own notifications with guidelines to implement JFM (Nayak 2003).

This shift to participatory forest management was met with enthusiasm, and while the initial phase of experimentation and implementation did result in some early reports of success in forest regeneration and increased employment for villagers, often as a result of self-initiated forest groups (Bhattacharya et al. 2010), criticisms began to mount. Literature points to key issues that continue to plague JFM and expose its shortcomings across the country.²⁷

Nayak (2003) argues that the policies of JFM have yet to yield significant results, particularly as the issue of tenurial rights has yet to be settled across different forested areas. While community forestry groups were keen to manage their village forestlands, the right to do so is granted by the Forest Department, leading to harassment and demands for bribes in many cases. These groups see the formalisation of community-based management through JFM as a type of sanctioned interference by the Forest Department where previously regulations around access or resource use may have been less strict. The institution of JFM led to an increase in bureaucratic processes and further exclusion from governance and

²⁷ There is no scope here to analyse the entirety of the literature on JFM but see Bhattacharya et al. (2010) and Saigal (2000) for good summaries of emerging issues in Joint Forest Management during its two early phases. The former summarises a number of independent studies conducted by organisations like DFID, the World Food Programme and the Indian Institute of Forest Management into the shortcomings of JFM across India. Nayak (2003) importantly draws attention to the most central issue in JFM, tenure. Saxena's (1997) view is also well-informed and provides an excellent background to the launch of JFM. As a senior civil servant from the elite Indian Administrative Service, he has a policy and experience-based perspective on JFM in its early years, which is unmatched in its scope.

management of forests of those unable to navigate those processes.

Ultimately, Nayak argues, “community forestry has been hampered through uncertainty regarding the level, nature and type of local institutions that should be assigned the responsibility for forest management and control” (Nayak 2003: 151).

Nayak and Berkes (2008) note that JFM can co-opt pre-existing forest protection regimes. This shifts power dynamics and deprives local users of agency. The result is often worse relations with neighbouring communities, as the formalisation of who manages what land makes previously fluid boundaries rigid. It also can result in relations between different groups within village communities worsening as one group’s participation and institutionalised management authority creates inequitable participation in JFM (cf. Agarwal 2001; Cooke and Kothari 2009). Often attempts at material benefit provision in JFM can lead to the same, through a lack of communication and facilitation. Ota et al. (2014) point to the lack of technical assistance for maintaining materials distributed in JFM initiatives, which they suggest may be mitigated by training appointed village development specialists within the communities.

This resonates with Rishi’s (2007) observation that changing the mind-sets of forestry officials and officers, trained for years through programmes with aims antithetical to that of JFM, will take more than simply a policy change. He argues that for JFM to succeed, a continuous training programme is needed to build new professional expertise amongst forest staff. Common to these critiques is the failure to properly understand and manage relationships between forest staff and local communities as well as

within communities and accordingly design interventions that are suited to local context. Instead, JFM initiatives tend to create even more bureaucracy, solidify or even create new divisions between foresters and communities and within communities between different groups.

These studies do well to point out these shortcomings and make recommendations for improved forester understanding and better understandings of community relationships and participation, but rarely take any steps towards situating initiatives within broader socio-cultural contexts or nuanced descriptions of village-forest relations. The economics-inspired language of benefits, outcomes and losses dominates, lacking a critical lens on the discourses and institutional structures, which motivate JFM initiatives and often ultimately undermine their desired aims. Three exceptions to this trend come to mind. The first is the recent surge in interest from political science and public administration in its analysis of forester behaviour and the forest bureaucracy (Fleischman 2012; 2015; Wangel 2018; Vasan 2002). These studies provide in-depth analyses of the motivations, strategies and behaviours of these actors, to study the forest bureaucracy and provide a new perspective on Indian forestry by 'studying up' through institutional analysis and organisational ethnography. Many of them address community-based forestry initiatives.

Another is the excellent volume by Jeffrey and Sundar (1999), with contributions from political ecologists, geographers, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. Different case studies look variously at the deployment of community as a multi-valent concept (Agrawal 1999), the mobilisation of 'participation' in ecodevelopment (Baviskar 1999- also see

Baviskar 2003a, b and Cooke and Kothari 2009), the membership of multiple committees (Vasavada, Mishra and Bates 1999) and the community-bureaucracy interface (Vira 1999). These concerns resonate with many of the issues found across the JFM literature and add a critical analysis of discourses and politics²⁸. Finally, a volume edited by Springate-Baginski and Blaikie (2007) addresses a wide range of concerns in JFM across India and Nepal, looking both at the formation of narratives around participation and the resultant policy processes as well as the realities of JFM 'in the field'; its impact on livelihoods across a variety of contexts.

It is in this vein that the fourth chapter of this thesis seeks to make a contribution to the understanding of forestry's attempts at 'public engagement'. As I will explain, JFM initiatives are limited in Panna due to the designation of the forest as a critical tiger habitat, leaving no room for use or tenurial rights in the core area of the park and thus no co-management of forest land or resources. However, there are community-based institutions, such as Eco-Development Committees, that were founded because of JFM, and programmes of community outreach such as the Panna Nature Camps. I explore how these forms of public engagement continue to propagate discourses which legitimise the state separation and control of 'wild and vulnerable' villagers and 'wild and vulnerable' *jungle* whose origin I trace from colonial records to Chundawat's (2018) account and government reports on the disappearance of Panna's tigers in the

²⁸ See Berkes (2007; 2004) for reviews of community-based conservation and Agrawal and Gibson (2001); Brosius et al. (2005) and Kothari et al. (2000) and for a selection of case studies that address similar issues in the Indian context and beyond.

2000s. These are the foci of my analysis of the first form of engagement between forest department and local communities, looking at its more ‘official form’, as public engagement and community outreach.

Human-Wildlife Conflict

The second contemporary conservation issue relevant here is “human-wildlife conflict”, a topic that has drawn attention across disciplines in an attempt to understand and mitigate harm to both animals and people living within and near protected areas. There is no scope here to summarise the vast literature on human-wildlife conflict. Thus, I will limit the discussion here to the current trend towards understanding human-wildlife conflicts through a more nuanced socio-political lens and the relevance of this trend in an Indian context. Conflicts between humans and wild animals have been significant for Indian forestry and conservation for centuries. The heroics of hunting and taming India’s wild beasts were crucial to colonial discourses of paternal protection and control by the colonial government. Hunter-cum-conservationists like Jim Corbett ²⁹ became fabled icons in Indian forestry, their accounts describing and performing the conquest and control of both wild Indian animals and wild Indian people (Skaria 1998; Mathur 2015; Pandian 2001; Read 2015). Managing conflicts between humans and animals became an important mechanism of control as the colonial

²⁹ See Bond (1975) and Corbett (1947; 1944). Jim Corbett National Park was founded at India’s first Protected Area in a modern conservation style in 1936 and remains a high-profile park to this day.

government's crusade against wild 'pests and vermin' legitimised and established hunting as an elite governance mechanism (Rangarajan 2000).

As colonial or state forestry and wildlife governance gave way to international conservation concerns, traditional methods of mitigating wildlife threats to human life changed. Hunting or other forms of lethal retaliation became illegal or unacceptable. Human-wildlife conflict fell under the purview of conservation, and efforts turned to managing losses to both humans and wildlife within a preservation and protection paradigm (Naughton-Treves et al. 2005; Treves and Naughton-Treves 2005; Woodroff et al. 2005). Accordingly, conservationists across the world are often preoccupied with managing human-wildlife conflict in its multiple forms- crop raiding/depredation, livestock depredation, retaliation against animals by people, animal-caused human deaths, damage to property etc. However, increasingly these conflicts are seen as part of a political process of institutional negotiation between conservationists and local communities, rather than simply cases of harmful interaction between people and animals (Hill 2004; Treves et al. 2006; Knight 2000).

This is particularly true in the case of charismatic megafauna and carnivores, where conservation efforts and protections are strongest and the potential conflicts with local communities often appear most dramatic (Madhusudan and Mishra 2003). Governments have traditionally used different strategies to manage wild carnivores, mainly eradication, regulated harvest and preservation. Each of these strategies has their own drawbacks, proving harmful or unsatisfactory for animals and local human populations. Other suggestions to modify human and animal habits or

prevent the intersection of human and animal activity have grown in popularity instead. However, these require an understanding of the political landscape of conservation and the engagement of local communities as much as the understanding of animal behaviour (Goodrich 2010; Treves and Karanth 2003; Woodroffe et al. 2005). This has led to calls to incorporate local stakeholders into conversations about managing conflict with wild animals (Nyhus et al. 2005; Treves et al. 2006). It has also led to analyses of perception and attitudes across human-wildlife conflict scenarios (for a good example see Suryawanshi et al. 2013).

In cases of human-tiger conflict, Goodrich (2010) identifies a number of different strategies and measures implemented across different habitats. For example, he cites changes in livestock management, improving wild prey stock and zoning as key strategies to manage the depredation of livestock and reviews a number of different programs, including compensation and insurance, incentives, tiger translocation and education or awareness programmes. In each case, “the decision-making process for dealing with [human-tiger conflict] events is complex and involves a variety of biological, social and political considerations” (Goodrich 2010: 307).

However, in many studies of such issues in India, there remains a focus on the biological and economic costs associated with human-wildlife conflict, rather than an analysis of social, political or institutional dynamics. This is despite years of experts on Indian conservation stating that “carnivore management is as much a political challenge as a scientific one...Successful conservation of carnivores depends on tolerant sociopolitical landscapes and favorable ecological conditions...[Carnivore]

managers must now invest in intense and prolonged public outreach and engage social scientists to study public approval” (Treves and Karanth 2003: 1496).

Madhusudan (2003), in his widely cited study of damage by wild elephants and tigers in Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, reports on the limitations and ineffectiveness of compensation mechanisms. Compensation mechanisms are critiqued, as are local livelihood practices, however they restrict their discussion to the economic and material losses and the inevitability of human-wildlife conflict in India’s forests. Karanth et al. (2012) surveyed households in Kanha National Park and reported their results in relation to crop loss and compensation. Out of 735 households, 73% reported crop loss and 33% livestock loss. They modeled their results in relation to the proximity of the park and detailed the most commonly cited crop raiding species. Crucially, they reported that out of those that experienced crop loss, only 26% reported losses to authorities and only 22% of those reporting received compensation, but they failed to be critical in any detail of the compensation mechanisms or to elucidate why so few people claimed and received compensation. Similarly, Manral et al. (2016) reported on the economic losses to human wildlife conflict by summarizing a wide range of literature on diverse conflicts across India but fail to mention the political and institutional landscape of the summarized studies (also see Karanth et al. 2013a,b; Ragothaman & Chirukandoth 2012; Madhusudan and Mishra 2003; Mishra 1997).

While these studies usefully provide data on the amount of losses incurred in terms of crop damage or livestock depredation, they do not

highlight what others have called the ‘hidden’ or ‘invisible’ costs of human-wildlife conflict (Ogra 2008; Ogra and Badola 2009; Barua et al. 2013). A series of studies on Bhalalogpur village in forest corridor between Rajaji and Corbett National Parks have effectively demonstrated some of the hidden costs of human-elephant conflict. Researchers have shown that conflict leads to decreased food security, changes in workload, decreased physical and psychological well-being, as well as economic hardship and an increase in ‘dangerous activities’. They also found that women bear a disproportionate burden of these effects in the village, as they are centrally involved in agriculture and the extraction of forest resources while men commonly leave the village to find work in larger towns. These hidden costs, unlike crop and livestock depredation, are uncompensated and temporally delayed. In one important passage, the researchers describe an interview in which a woman from Bhalalogpur said, “in the forest, there is also danger of the *two-legged* animals”, making reference to the harassment they face by forest guards and park management (Ogra 2008; Ogra and Badola 2009; Ogra 2009).

Barua et al. (2013) explicitly address this issue of ‘hidden costs’ in relation to a broader conceptualisation of ‘well-being’. Importantly, they call for a recognition that ecosystems are indispensable for the well-being of many people and exclusionary principles that worsen relationships between different groups of people and between people and wildlife often lead to the development of further hidden costs when it comes to conflict and its resolution. This is in line with calls to shift the discussion of human-wildlife conflict beyond a conflict-based paradigm towards understanding

coexistence and tolerance as well as cultural and political factors (Dickman 2010; Hill 2018; 2015; Madden 2004; Peterson et al. 2010; Redpath et al. 2014).

Dickman argues that “human-wildlife conflicts are often manifestations of underlying human-human conflicts, such as between authorities and local people, or between people of different cultural backgrounds” (Dickman 2010: 458). Peterson et al. (2010) ask that we ‘rearticulate the myth of human-wildlife conflict’ by rephrasing or incorporating it into a broader understanding of human-wildlife relationships. They look at the ‘terministic screen’ of ‘human-wildlife conflict’, providing a broad review of what exactly is meant by the term across a selection of literature. They conclude that “direct conflict of any type was rare in cases referred to as human-wildlife conflict, and when it did exist, it reflected human-human conflicts regarding how wildlife should be managed...[supporting] the assertion that human-human conflict is the primary type of conflict being labelled as human-wildlife conflict” (Peterson et al. 2010: 78-79). Redpath et al. (2014) suggests conservationists stop “hiding behind the wildlife” and reframe conflicts as usually between “conservation and other human activities” (Redpath et al 2014: 224). So, where does this leave the study of human-wildlife conflict in India and elsewhere? And what tools are at researchers’ disposal to analyse the socio-political and economic-biological issues within the paradigm of human-wildlife conflict?

In a comprehensive and detailed socio-political analysis, Rastogi et al. (2014) attempt to explore processes of decision making and action in

Corbett Tiger Reserve. Recognising the lack of detailed analysis of socio-political interactions in the literature around human-wildlife conflict in India, they employ an Institutional Analysis and Development Framework to understand what actions are made by which local-stakeholder groups and how that elicits desirable or undesirable outcomes. They demonstrate how the rules for managing Corbett arise out of various levels of governance: constitutional (legislative), collective (management and local stakeholders) and operative (decision-makers within these groups). They explain the articulation of the socio-political process in three phases: initiation, mobilisation and action. Within these phases, they demonstrate the important role of public pressure and local stakeholders. They also acknowledge a tolerance of local wildlife, quoting the villagers as saying, “*usne bhi yahin rehna hai, humne bhi yahin rehna hai*”, meaning, “as they (the wildlife) live here, we live here too”. Geographers and political ecologists have also readily used the language of Institutional Analysis concerning rules and authority, conversations around which are often prompted by instances of human-wildlife conflict (Gururani 2000; Robbins 1998). Another important trend is exploring local understandings of animals and the importance of cultural taboos and indigenous practices around the management of conflict (McKay et al. 2018; Kolipaka 2018a, b; Kolipaka et al. 2015; Nijahawan 2019; 2018).

Finally, anthropologists of India have also looked at instances of human-wildlife conflict, situating human-animal histories within particular socio-cultural contexts and understandings of ‘the state’. Jalais’ (2010) work on the Sunderbans highlights the complexity of local honey-collectors’

relationships to tigers, labelled as man-eating for generations, but treated almost like kin by local people. She shows how local people associate themselves with tigers through a shared migratory history and recognise a mutual persecution as part explanation for the big cat's aggression. Mathur's (2015) book on the Indian state and bureaucracy in a village in Himachal Pradesh ends with a chapter on a leopard's two month 'reign of terror'. She argues that the leopard's appearance in the village not only fuels an intensely negative view of the local state, but also manifests a new temporal order in which life is dramatically different in the face of such danger. Govindarajan (2018) addresses interspecies relationships and relatedness in the Himalayas, looking at the ways in which discourses of wildness refract understandings of animals in local folklore and perceptions of state management. These works draw attention to the intensely complex set of relations involved and implicated within human-wildlife conflict. They add an important ethnographic component that demonstrates how in the face of human-wildlife conflict, not only are we able to see the interrelations between different stakeholders, but we often can see the emergence of entirely new socio-political dynamics.

In this brief summary, we have seen responses to calls for new understandings of human-wildlife conflict from different disciplines, all recognising the importance of human-human conflict and increasingly the politics of relationships between conservationists or conservation authorities and local people affected by wildlife. It is along these lines that this thesis contributes to the discussion in the fifth chapter, moving beyond Kolipaka's (2018) conclusions on the costs of livestock and crop depredation and

strategies of coexistence in the Panna landscape to highlight the broader institutional and socio-political context. To do so, I draw on anthropologies of events and reflections on authority to comment on the relationships between local people and conservation staff in moments of law enforcement or in bureaucratic processes for conflict compensation as they engage with one another- the second modality of engagement between village and forest. Within these moments, dynamics of familiarity and negotiation to the understanding of 'village-forest relations' become crucial. Recognising these dynamics helps to move us away from languages of criminality or corruption in discussing forest rules to a more nuanced and situated understanding of different forms of conflict between foresters and villagers. It also illuminates the variant vulnerabilities of actors in both groups in the enforcement of forest rules and their impact on livelihoods.

The Forest Rights Act and Conservation-Induced Displacement

The third relevant contemporary issue that has preoccupied scholars of Indian conservation in recent years is the implementation and implications of the Forest Rights Act (2006) and a broader concern with conservation-induced displacement. The thesis does not address the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in depth, as it was relatively unknown and unimplemented in the villages I visited during fieldwork- symptomatic of its critiques in the literature. However, the debate around the FRA is an important context for conservation-induced displacement in India, a reality my interlocutors did face. Moreover, the FRA is a framing issue for many debates about 'parks

and people' in India and merits attention, if only here in this literature review chapter.

The Forest Rights Act emerged from years of campaigning on behalf of forest-dependent peoples to recognize their claims to use and tenure rights in India's forested areas, following a rich tradition of rebellion and protest against forest policy since colonial times (Sarker 2011). As previously described, forest policy up until the 1980s in India strengthened the centralized governance of forestry and the state expropriation of lands for 'public use'. From the 1980s on, with the advent of Joint Forest Management in India, the grievances and aspirations of forest peoples slowly gained recognition. However, for many stakeholders, this failed to dismiss the legal restrictions on use and tenurial rights on forest land (Saxena 1997).

A Supreme Court Order in February 2002 asked Forest Departments to regularize illegal encroachments on forest land and settled any disputed rights. This led to an eviction drive between May 2002 and 2004 in which villagers living near or within forested areas were displaced. The publicity around this eviction elicited an outcry and political mobilization against the failed promises of JFM and the continued marginalization and disenfranchisement of forest-dependent populations. Evictions became an important election issue during the lead up to the general election in 2004 as major parties competed for the "tribal vote". In January 2005, the Prime Minister tasked the Ministry of Tribal Affairs with the creation of a bill to address the evictions and the rights of tribal communities to forest products. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) was passed in December 2006, coming into

effect in January 2008, further amended in 2012, following reviews of the issue due to its enormous scale. The FRA recognizes land rights, rights to use and collect and rights to protect and conserve, outlining the procedural steps and eligibility criteria to claim these rights from the state (Bandi 2014; Sarker 2011).

Sekhsharia (2007) argues that the paradigm of ‘tiger versus tribal’, so prevalent in conservation in India, had prevented any earlier developments of legislation like the FRA. He states that we must recognize that both the state of tiger conservation and the identities, value systems and traditions of tribal people are in flux. It is not merely a question of tradition versus conservation. In line with proponents of the FRA, Sekhsaria sees tribal populations as key to conservation success, particularly in their growing political agency. However, the growing critical literature on the FRA since points to the shortcomings of the bill but particularly its implementation, citing the lack of claims made, widespread corruption and lack of communication alongside bureaucratic complexity and lack of training or dissemination of information (Bandi 2014; Jha 2010; Kumar and Kerr 2015; 2012; Sarker 2011). These critiques resonate with the broader literature on conservation-induced displacement in India and elsewhere.³⁰

³⁰ In recent years, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been slowly attempting to dismantle the rights and allowances afforded to forest-dependent populations in the FRA by trying to update the Forest Act of 1927. This would give the Forest Department even stricter powers to enforce regulations and prosecute local populations for activities like grazing or collecting and would give priority to commercial plantations as well as absolve officials of any wrongdoing in conflict with local communities (Pal 2019; Sethi 2019; Sethi and Srivastava 2019)

Two key models underlie much research on the impacts of displacement: Scudder's (2005) four-stage framework and Cernea's (1997) impoverishment risks and reconstruction model. The former is predictive and behavioural and theorises how displaced persons may act during different stages of resettlement, and the latter directly addressed the problems they face, such as joblessness, homelessness, landlessness and food insecurity. While research on development-induced displacement, particularly through dam-building, has been around since the 1960s, research on those displaced by protected areas, conservation-induced displacement, has only really gained momentum since the 1990s (Beazley 2009). The current standards set by the World Bank, OECD, AfDB and other multilateral organisations define 'development-caused displacement' as a compulsory removal process when a project's need to 'right of way' overrides people's 'right to stay'. In response to these recognitions, models like Cernea's and Scudder's are meant to be theoretically predictive (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006).

Some estimates place the number of 'conservation refugees' at over 8.5 million across the world, and India is no exception, with 'resettlement' a key feature of colonial and post-Independence forestry policies (Beazley 2009; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006). Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau (2006) argue that forced displacement is an instrument of establishing protected areas, and as Cernea's model highlights in great depth, the impoverishment risks associated with any displacement are severe and impact all dimensions of human life, from economic to cultural and psychological. Two main events have been

touchstones for increasing investigation into displacement and resettlement: the 2004-2005 Sariska Tiger Crisis, and the mass evictions of tribal populations leading to the passing of the FRA.

Following the loss of its tigers in 2004-2005, Sariska Tiger Reserve was the first site of intervention for the then-newly created Tiger Task Force. In a show of state power and authority, paramilitary troops were brought into the reserve, and long-since dormant relocation and resettlement plans for villagers living inside the PA were revived and fast-tracked. Rangarajan and Shahabuddin (2006) point to Sariska as a continuation of 'fortress conservation' (Brockington 2002) park policy with no transparency, public participation or scientific involvement, all of which could have pointed to the degradation of the biodiversity years before the crisis. They argue that plenty hinges on *who* is being displaced. With legislation like the FRA, members of tribal communities may have more legal claims to remain on their 'traditional lands', as opposed to other customary users such as pastoralist Gujjars displaced from Sariska. Ultimately, they argue for an historical and biological synthesis, a growing awareness of the complexities of human disturbance and village resettlement and a recognition that "hierarchies at the local level may be as critical as those between government bureaucracies and villages", a point I hope to emphasise in this thesis as well (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006: 371).

In partial response to Rangarajan and Shahabuddin, Ghate and Beazley (2007) challenge the notion that all villages are averse to relocation. Based on over a decade of research in Tadoba Andhari Tiger

Reserve (TATR), they conclude that displacement overall has a detrimental effect, but villagers were not openly averse to the idea of relocating. “The main reason why many of the villages want to relocate is the bleak future associated with living within a protected area in an extremely remote location” (Ghate and Beazley 2007: 332). Refusing displacement as an option can be as problematic as involuntary displacement. They therefore question how ‘voluntary’ the displacement was (see Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007). The article complicates the picture of resettlement as processual and involving villagers’ own participation and agency.

Beazley’s (2011; 2009) work continues in this vein, taking the relocation of Botezari village in TATR as a case study. She argues that existing work on village displacement points to the rarity of participation in the process, highlighting the paternalistic government authorities and their infliction of trauma on ‘oustees’ and subscribes to a theory of the powerless oustee.³¹ Her analysis illuminates how certain legal, behavioural and socio-cultural contexts coalesced for Botezari that challenge this theory. Due to the work of particular officers involved in the pre-relocation process, the pressure of two different NGOs and press as well as a strong legal basis for just displacement in the Maharashtra Project Affected Persons Rehabilitation Act (1999), she demonstrates how villagers were able to negotiate for a better deal. She links this to wider changes resulting from

³¹ Judge’s (1997) work on dam-induced displacement in Punjab says that decision-makers and oustees seem to be from separate worlds and Thukral (1992) calls the ability of people to play a part in their own destiny in displacement as ‘almost non-existent’. To complement this literature, there is inevitably scholarship on resistance and movements against development projects (Baviskar 1995; Dwivedi 1999)

India's 'second democratic upsurge' where state-poor encounters restructure, driven by a more engaged civil society (cf. Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006.). In a follow-up article post-relocation (2011) she describes a decline in the proactive capacity of villagers, highlighting a decreased ability to 'manoeuvre and negotiate' with the Forest Department.

Recent resettlements from Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary are also seen as 'model voluntary relocations' (Kabra 2013; 2009). Kabra (2009) compares them to Adivasi communities in Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary, concluding that the relative disadvantage and marginalisation of groups prior to relocation affects the outcome of displacement. For Bhadra households, who hail from less marginalised groups and occupy prominent positions in local politics, their relocation package and process were more effective at mitigating potential risks. In Kuno, households had to wait 10 years for their compensation, whereas for Bhadra oustees, government officials ensured a "speedily delivered and legally watertight" award. In a post-relocation follow-up article Kabra (2013) notes that for the Bhadra households, following the relocation, the quality of housing improved, with better private assets, infrastructure, access to bank credit and education for children. Part of this was due to conditions before the relocation. She argues that "prior connections to the mainstream economy and society and strong optical networks reduced the risk of social disarticulation" (Kabra 2013: 540). She challenges the literature on "successful displacements" by focusing on the politics behind the state response and emphasising the activity of local people, in order to draw attention away from the credit given to 'benevolent officers' or 'sympathetic bureaucrats'.

It is clear that the relationships between villagers and officials are crucial for ensuring 'successful resettlement', however studies often fail to explain clearly how exactly bureaucratic procedures for displacement move forward. Sekar (2016) looks at village relocations from Melghat Tiger Reserve and clearly documents the various processes involved in displacement and how they are informed by policy, particularly following the passing of the Forest Rights Act.³² In order to be in accordance with the FRA, protocols had to ensure that any relocation of Adivasis was conditional upon the recognition and vesting of rights outlined in the act³³ and the 'free informed consent' of the Gram Sabha (village council). Sekar argues that consent can only be informed if individuals can realistically picture life as it would be with and without relocation. In Melghat, there were clear cases of misinformation, and the timing of relocation did not account for inflation decreasing the value of the compensation. Sekar's argues that meaningful free prior informed consent ought to be a key element in resettlement, rather than a bureaucratic box to tick.

³² Following the FRA, the Ministry of Environment and Forests produced a new protocol which describe two possible compensation packages. In the first, villagers are offered 10 lakh (1 million rupees) per family, defined as a man over 18, his spouse and all their children, their unmarried daughters and dependent senior citizens. At least 3 of the 10 lakh are placed in a fixed deposit account which matures in 5 years, during which the family can collect monthly interest payments. To buy land or another permanent asset, families can withdraw money early. The rest of the money is provided in instalments of 1-2 lakh over the course of relocation. The second option is slightly less complicated, also allocating 10 lakh per family but supposed to provide comprehensive relocation, including housing, land, infrastructure etc. Often, it would appear, the choice of the offered package is made by the bureaucracy rather than the villagers (Sekar 2016).

³³ They could claim individual rights to occupy and cultivate forest land that they had occupied before 2006 and formally claim community forest rights in forest areas to be customarily used (including gathering non-timber forest products, grazing cattle and gathering firewood).

The importance of the forest bureaucracy and its behaviour throughout resettlement is a theme common to many studies, but rarely highlighted as a topic worthy of its own unpacking or consideration. Even in Sekar's study, which documents the in-depth policy procedures and provides an overview of pre- and post-relocation socioeconomic conditions, only a brief comment at the end about NGO leaders addresses specific bureaucrats and their behaviour. The strength of Beazley's (2011; 2009) work is her focus on the particularities of the relationships between the forest bureaucracy and the villagers and the complexity of the bureaucracy itself. Fleischman's (2015) review of the Indian forest bureaucracy is a start to this nascent field of study. Through an Institutional Analysis and Development Framework, he confirms that forester behaviour has strong influence on the outcome of programs developed at the policy level, arguing that "rather than a monolithic forest department, local contexts are important in driving forester behaviour" (Fleischman 2015: S153-S154). While interventions with negative consequences, such as village resettlement, are often blamed on forest officers' behaviour, Fleischman exposes a much wider set of issues concerning policy contradictions, corruption within the broader political system, professional motivations and the techniques for rewarding forester behaviour.

I will address village relocation in the communities where I conducted research in chapter seven of the thesis. As in the case of JFM and human-wildlife conflict, research increasingly points to the need to understand the relationships between conservation authorities and local people involved in the negotiations in anticipation of and leading to relocation and

resettlement. To do so, placing politics and socio-cultural context at the forefront of analysis is essential, and in my chapter, I explore how this final modality of engagement between forest staff and villagers through the processes involved in village relocation can help us to understand their relationships with the state more broadly and its conservation aims.

Drawing on anthropologies of the Indian state and insights on themes like doubt, rumour, mockery, and legibility, I show how the process of village relocation exposes the multiple guises of the state as both evictor and patron. Local people make use of contradictions within the bureaucracy through dynamics and mechanisms of familiarity and informality, asserting their vulnerability to make claims on a state which appears to prioritise vulnerable tigers and *jungles* in this context.

Common Themes and Theoretical Approaches

In these three areas of concern- JFM, human-wildlife conflict, and village relocation, which comprise a significant proportion of the critical academic interest in the social impacts of Indian conservation, there are some common trends. Increasingly, studies point to the need to understand the specific socio-political dynamics of particular conservation landscapes, in line with the recognition that conflicts between parks and people are most often conflicts between different groups of people. The 'gridlock' of tiger conservation and politics- the widespread antagonism between local communities and conservation- requires acknowledging that saving the tiger does not operate in a political vacuum and inputs from the social and

political sciences are necessary to illuminate the social and political processes at the heart of conservation practice (Rastogi et al. 2012).

As we have seen, scholars have focused often on the risks and rewards of different conservation initiatives, the costs and benefits to both wildlife and local communities and conflicts and difficulties arising in life near protected areas. They tend to frame the relationships between local communities and conservation officials in terms of this conflict, usually commenting or concluding that ‘local relationships need to improve’ or ‘there is distrust and antagonism between local people and forest staff’. However, I argue that we need to move beyond such a focus on ‘exclusion and conflict’ in the social study of conservation towards understanding those relationships in all their socio-political and historical complexity, asking first what comprises them and what dynamics are at play before concluding on conflict or exclusion.

This does not preclude the possibility of exclusion or conflict but rather broadens and ethnographically situates the analysis and resists pre-defining the content of relationships between local people and conservation authorities. In each summary above, I have provided examples that move towards this more nuanced understanding of exactly what comprises those relationships. These include looking at forester motivations and behaviours (Fleischman 2015; 2012) and the community-bureaucracy interface (Vira 1999), how human-leopard conflict provides insight on the local development state (Mathur 2015) or how villagers’ agency intersects with sympathetic officials and bureaucratic negotiation to lessen the negative experience of village relocation (Beazley 2011; 2009).

This moves beyond treating parks and people as homogenous monoliths always already in opposition, but instead treats conservation landscapes as “mosaics of localities” (Read 2015) each with its own socio-historical context from which and within which village-forest relations emerge and unfold. This appreciates not only that relationships between local communities and conservation officials are complicated and locally situated but that both ‘village’ and ‘forest’ are also internally diverse and require their own examination as such (Fleischman 2012; 2015; Nagendra et al. 2010; Read 2015; Wangel 2018; Vasan 2002). In each chapter, therefore, I address not only the relationship between ‘village’ and ‘forest’ but also the politics of internal differentiation within those groups: the relations ‘within’ affect the relations ‘between’. This is by no means a novel approach, as demonstrated above. A range of disciplines have brought their perspectives to bear on these social and political processes and relationships in Indian conservation landscapes.

Environmental historians have demonstrated the historical legacy of colonialism and the continuation of institutional structures, discourses and attitudes into the present day. They have looked at resistance by local communities to forestry policy and traced the precedents for landmarks like the Wildlife Protection Act or the launch of JFM. They provide an important context for situating contemporary conservation within particular local histories which emphasizing the interlinkages between conservation movements across the world. Political ecologists, as well as geographers, have sought to politicize environmental change and bring the tools of political economy into conversations about natural resources, analyzing

relationships between nature and society through the lens of politicised access to resources and differential power relationships. This has been particularly influential in the analysis of socio-ecological systems and livelihoods in order to recognize the centrality of politics in environmental management and conservation in India (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Robbins 2012).

Scholars of public administration have provided in-depth analyses of bureaucratic behavior and common pool resource management to challenge the oversimplification of common property governance and the functioning of different institutions through institutional analysis and organizational ethnography (cf. Ostrom 1990). This has led to studies of how rules and authority operate in conservation areas (Gururani 2000; 2002; Robbins 1998) or the internal functioning of bureaucracies in Indian forestry (Fleischman 2012; 2015; Wangel 2015; Vasan 2000).

Finally, anthropologists who address Indian conservation have examined more broadly the relationship between state, society and environment through ethnographic analyses of particular dynamics between local communities and the developmental state bureaucracy (Mathur 2015) or the relationships between local people and wild animals (Govindarajan 2018; Jalais 2010). They incorporate anthropological theories of the state and politics, often bringing social theory or political philosophy into

conversation with ethnographic descriptions of particular environmental politics (Agrawal 2005; Shah 2010).³⁴

Each chapter in the thesis deals specifically with at least one of these other approaches, just as each chapter deals with one particular contemporary issue in Indian conservation, in order to situate the ethnography in relation to other disciplinary approaches and demonstrate the necessity of multiple disciplines to illuminate different aspects of the issues addressed. The fourth chapter draws inspiration from environmental history to set out the history of forestry and conservation in Panna and how current JFM-inspired programmes reproduce the disenfranchisement of forest-border communities. The fifth chapter engages with political ecology and institutional analysis approaches to rules and authority to address human-wildlife conflict and its consequences. The sixth chapter seeks to complement analyses of forestry bureaucracy from political science and institutional analysis by illuminating the situation of locally employed forest workers. Finally, the seventh chapter engages with the literature on conservation-induced displacement and anthropologies of the Indian state through an ethnographic exploration of village relocation.

The analytical language of vulnerability and articulation and the guiding concept of engagement, as outlined in the introduction, thread through each chapter, making distinct contributions to each discussion. These concepts help to illuminate the situated character of village-forest

³⁴ These are clearly gross over-simplifications of each of these approaches but serve here to clarify the ways in which the thesis engages with different disciplines and how necessary a multi-disciplinary approach is to a study of this kind.

relations in Panna and the socio-political dimensions of the contemporary conservation issues described above.

Conclusion: The Case for Engagement

My argument for focusing on 'engagement', for hanging my hat, so to speak, on such a multi-modal and multi-valent concept, is that it directs our attention to the programmes, moments, people and processes that evidence the complex inter-personal networks, inter-dependencies and inter-linkages between local communities and Forest Departments. Each of these hold the potential to improve so-called 'village-forest relations' to work with local context and social relations rather than create new committees, build new institutional relationships or launch new initiatives. This is an attempt to work with what is observable and already present, from an acknowledgment of the complexity of these relationships rather than start from a conclusion that they are broken or even irreparable. This is what a focus on engagement allows while the language of vulnerability and articulation help to keep the imbalance of power and the persistence of exploitation in view at the same time. What follows is a history and description of the field site to provide context for the diversity and politics of the communities in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

Ethnographic Setting

Introduction

In the preceding literature review chapter, I described trends within the social science of Indian conservation that point to an increasing desire to develop a detailed understanding of local socio-political context around conservation areas. The primary aim of this chapter is to describe the ethnographic context for this research and its findings, with a focus on the social composition and livelihoods of Hinauta, the main study village.

Another aim is to signpost a number of important themes that emerge from the context as consequential for the analysis of village-forest relations.

These include status and authority, livelihoods and labour, ‘doing politics’, bureaucracy and government. This chapter also touches on long-standing debates and traditions within the anthropology of India about caste, status and power in village politics as well as agriculture and livelihoods. However, it does not attempt to elaborate, contribute to or innovate approaches to such debates. Instead it emphasises their relevance to ‘village-forest relations’ and the social landscape of Indian conservation. This is not because my research cannot contribute to those debates but rather that they are beyond the scope of the thesis’s main focus. I draw on insights from them as relevant.

Ultimately, this chapter provides a context for village-forest relations, allowing me to situate the analysis of the various modalities of engagement

in the chapters that follow. It emphasises the point that the relationships between Forest Department and local villagers involve and refract internal village dynamics and vice-versa. This helps to explain and situate the differential impacts of conservation within local communities and emphasise the internal heterogeneity of both 'village' and 'forest'. Understanding particular local socio-political dynamics is crucial for a proper analysis of village-forest relations and their impact on local people living in and around conservation areas. This is because one cannot simply make a blanket statement as to whether conservation benefits or disadvantages any particular local community when seen as a homogeneous, bounded entity. Rather the effects of conservation are variable and tend to distribute fortune or misfortune within those communities at the same time along lines shaped by local power dynamics and heterogeneous socio-political structures and practices (Brockington et al. 2009).

Village Profile: Hinauta

Hinauta, also referred to as Hinauta-Majhgawan or Majhgawan, is found at the end of a road that turns off of National Highway 39, which runs from Chhatarpur to Satna through the northern part of Madhya Pradesh. The road turns into the jungle and is lined by forest land and a number of smaller villages before leading to the NMDC diamond mining project at Majghawan, directly opposite Hinauta village. The road continues for another kilometre or so until the Hinauta entry gate to Panna Tiger Reserve. Hinauta Village thus shares three borders with Panna Tiger Reserve and

one with a National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) Diamond Mining Project, both of which have had dramatic effects on the village.

This chapter addresses the NMDC as part of the local context while still acknowledging that the critical focus of the thesis is conservation and the Forest Department. I do not aim to diminish the relevance of the NMDC and diamond mining to Panna or Hinauta but rather admit the limitations of the research in its scope. This means that the NMDC appears throughout the thesis as an important but mainly contextual character in the story of engagement(s) between Forest Department and local communities. This is partly because of the minimal impact of the NMDC outside of Hinauta, and partly due to the associated risk and inaccessibility of the mining operations



Figure 8: Sign at the bus stop in Hinauta

in comparison to the Forest Department.³⁵ In describing my field site, I do not intend to describe ‘how the village was’ and ‘how the village is’, reifying ‘the village’ in any traditionalist or essentialist manner. Rather, this is an attempt to provide a brief sketch of who lives in Hinauta, how they came to live there, what kind of livelihoods have been or are currently prevalent while also making central the assertion that these external institutions have drastically changed each of those aspects of life there in the last few decades.



Figure 9: Satellite image showing location of Old Hinauta, Hinauta and agricultural fields (red), the PTR entry gate and core area (green) and NMDC mine, township and lake (blue)

³⁵ As I have discussed in the Introduction, much of fieldwork was spent managing relationships with both the Forest Department and the NMDC, and I was never granted access beyond the township, even as a tourist (whereas Indian nationals could have full tours). Nor was I able to speak with NMDC employees without fear of raising suspicions with both mining officials and CISF. In contrast, I found that the original aim of understanding village-forest relations held much less personal and professional risk.

From Old Hinauta to Hinauta-Majghawan

Residents recounted that Hinauta and Majhgawan were originally two separate villages, neither of which were located where Hinauta currently sits. Old Hinauta was a few kilometres west of present-day Hinauta at a site that is now just within the boundary wall of Panna Tiger Reserve. This site is near to a shrine to Kher Mata where residents still worship during the monsoon to bring about good rains. When a road was built towards Panna town, Old Hinauta moved to the western side of the road and the village Majhgawan was on the other side. Behind Majhgawan to the east was a stream and agricultural fields, some of which belonged to the wealthier Hinauta residents. Older residents estimated that the villages had shifted to their present location close to 100 years ago.

When the NMDC arrived in the 1960s, the mine built its residential township on land belonging to Majhgawan residents, who subsequently moved across to Hinauta. The mine built a dam to create a lake to supply



Figure 10: The NMDC lake in winter

water for the mine, flooding their agricultural fields. Of the old families³⁶ in Hinauta, one family from the Yadav caste and one family from the Raj-Gond caste claim to have lost land when the dam was built. The former is still referred to as *zamindaar* (landowner) and the latter is descended from D. Jit Singh, a Gond man listed as the *jagirdath* (feudal landlord) of 'Hinota Village, Panna' in revenue records I found in India Office records dating to 1907-8 in the British Library. To this day, these families are among the largest landholders in Hinauta.



Figure 11: The NMDC lake in summer

³⁶ Here I refer to family in a broad, extended sense, not necessarily a nuclear family. Family is not exactly synonymous to caste or kin group but refers most clearly to a line of patrilineal descent, meaning a man, his brothers and their spouses and children.

Caste Groups and Neighbourhoods in Hinauta

Hinauta continues to be dominated by three main communities defined principally by caste³⁷: Gonds (Scheduled Tribe), Kondars (Scheduled Tribe) and Yadavs (Other Backward Castes). These groups are the original inhabitants of the area, and live within their own *mohalla* (neighbourhood), thus determining the basic layout and organisation of the village. The original Hinauta Yadavs are found mostly in the centre of the village and are comprised of three or four *purane parivar* (old/original families). Gonds (Raj-Gond, Sur-Gond and Nau-Gond³⁸) are found to the north with two 'old families' and Kondars to the south with two or three 'old families'. The boundaries between the groups are not demarcated or signposted and other castes live between and amongst the groups, but each area is referred to according to the predominant group there. Behind the village to the west are the agricultural fields, where there appeared to be no specific demarcation of Gond, Kondar or Yadav areas. The boundary wall of Panna Tiger Reserve delineates the edge of village agricultural land.

³⁷ Here I have chosen to refer to caste in relation to both the *jati* sense- "the actual social units, or the concrete endogamous social groupings" (Jodhka 2012: 9) related closely to livelihoods and socioeconomic organisation (Vaid 2014) as well as the Indian constitutional and government designation of Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) or Other Backward Caste (OBC)(these designations entitle members to certain benefits and reservations for government jobs). This is due to the ways in which caste was addressed in Hinauta. People both identified themselves by a caste name and their reservation status (if they had one) and generally used the word *jati* to mean caste when asked about traditional work or ritual practices. The exception to this were Brahmins who identified as Brahmins (the name of their ritual rank in the *varna* system) first, rather than by their specific group name (e.g. Nayak, Tiwari, Sharma, Garg).

³⁸ These are three sub-castes of Gond found throughout Panna (Yadav 2018), with Raj-Gond the highest ranked and often referred to as Thakurs, a title associated with Rajput Kshatriya (warrior/ruling) castes in other parts of North and Central India. The distinctions between these groups were described as stronger in the past, mostly relating to specific ritual practice and endogamous marriage rules did still occasionally apply within these sub-castes, though other titles like Scheduled Tribe and Adivasi group them together. The social positioning of Raj-Gonds is further elaborated below.

In addition to the three main *mohallas*, there are three more named *mohallas*. One is the Batiya *mohalla* whose residents formerly lived in an NMDC worker colony, granted pieces of land by the *panchayat* after the colony was demolished. The second is the Talgaon *mohalla* where families from the relocated village of Talgaon settled in 2014. Sixteen families (15 Yadav and 1 Scheduled Caste) decided to move to Hinauta after they received their compensation from the Forest Department, a process I discuss in detail in Chapter 7. Some of the Talgaon Yadavs are related to Hinauta Yadavs through marriage and saw their move to Hinauta as essentially joining affines, from whom they purchased the land at a discounted rate to build their properties. Finally, there is the Forest *mohalla*, comprised of the Forest Department range offices, guesthouse and officer



Figure 12: A Gond household in Hinauta

quarters along the road leading to the reserve entry gate. The forest colony has grown since the founding of the national park in 1981 from one *chowki* (outpost/station) to a series of offices and houses on the southern edge of

the village, similarly on land previously belonging to the village *panchayat*. It was unclear to me whether the forest housing is on land that the Forest Department has purchased or leased or simply occupied. The current *sarpanch* (head of village council) was of the opinion that it was the latter, having confronted the Forest Department multiple times about their *kabza* (illegal occupation or encroachment) of *panchayat* land. I discuss the arrival of the National Park in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Living alongside the three original groups are families from over 25 other castes and communities, most of which migrated to the village when the NMDC and National Park arrived or have come from other villages due to resettlement by the Forest Department, marriage or other opportunities related to the mine or Forest Department. These include members of Scheduled Castes (Ahirvar, Basur, Khatik), Other Backward Castes (Kuswaha, Patel, Pal/Gadariya, Sahu, Sen), Bania³⁹ castes (Agarawal, Das, Gupta, Jain), Brahmin⁴⁰ castes (Dwidevi, Garg, Pandey, Nayak, Sharma, Tiwari) and a handful of Muslim (Khan) families as well. The majority of these families live mixed in the Batiya *mohalla*, but some are also interspersed between and within the Yadav, Kondar and Gond *mohallas*. The *gram panchayat* village population survey counted 2880 residents in 2018, making Hinauta a relatively large village in the local area.

³⁹ Bania castes refer to the business castes and while neither strictly a *jati* nor a reservation status, it was a grouping used commonly in reference to castes traditionally associated with some form of business or trading.

⁴⁰ Brahmin castes were also referred to as Brahmar throughout my fieldwork.

Caste Complications and their Salience

My aim in listing the castes found in Hinauta is not to paint a picture of a traditional Indian village, organised politically and socially according to the hierarchical ritual status ascribed by caste or economically by the traditional *jajmani* system of reciprocal patron-client relations. As I will describe in the following sections, the majority of families no longer engage in what they described to me as their 'traditional work'. Moreover, the economic or political status of any particular family did not depend solely on caste but also on a variety of other factors. Most notably, these include the association of any particular family to external institutions such as the NMDC, the Forest Department or government agencies at the *tehsil* (block) or *zila* (district) level and the resultant afforded opportunities.

While the complexity of caste relations is not a focus within the thesis, I find it important here to explain the relevance of caste to the relationships between different villagers and the Forest Department. Furthermore, the unique situation and complicated recent history of Hinauta due to the NMDC and the Forest Department mean that some explanation of recent changes to intra-village relationships due to these two institutions is necessary, and caste is relevant therein. I do not have the space to summarise the entirety of the literature on caste within the social anthropology of India but make reference to relevant recent observations in contemporary ethnography.

The Salience of Caste

As observed by other contemporary ethnographers in India, caste in Hinauta played a varied role mostly in relation to group identity, marriage,

household organisation within the village as well as political association and availability of opportunities for employment and social mobility outside of it (Jodhka 2012; Mosse 2018; Vaid 2014). It is this last aspect which is most relevant to the main points made in this thesis about the relationships between Forest Department and local people. Central to this is the importance of kinship and kin networks, which can be claimed via caste but not exclusively so. Caste and kinship are intertwined with economic and political provision in this context (Deshpande 2011; Mosse 2018). Affiliations made with regard to opportunities for political or economic mobility, such as finding work, aligned most immediately with kinship rather than caste, relating as well to residency/place of origin, historical ties between families and the reputations of particular persons. Caste was not *the* determinant of intimacy or obligation, and it is important to make this distinction between caste and kinship.

A Yadav family from outside the village that was unrelated by kinship and unknown to Yadav villagers would not be afforded connections and opportunities simply because of their caste background- by the fact of 'being Yadav'. Those connections and opportunities were afforded first on the basis on kinship and co-residency. Caste did play a role, but it was not a determinant one. The role of caste and kinship in economic and political provisioning is central to understanding the operation on the ground of village-forest relations in this context, relating directly to livelihoods and village politics and the differential impacts of conservation on forest-border communities.

Other Aspects of Caste

Distinctions within castes based on other categories, such as clan (*vansh*) or sub-caste (*bek*⁴¹) arose rarely during research and only really via prompting. However, it is likely that within particular spaces or in relation to particular events (e.g. marriage and religious rituals within the household) that these distinctions were discussed, and I was simply not privy to those discussions. This is a limitation of the research, particularly with regards to my inability to speak the local dialect fluently, the limited interactions I had with women and the limited time I spent inside households relative to public spaces, something I discuss in the Introduction to the thesis.

As noted by other scholars, it was within domestic spaces and in relation to food and drink within those spaces that caste and attendant notions of propriety and pollution held the most salience in everyday life. In public spaces, commensality and caste mixing was ubiquitous and interlocutors described how such mixing did not occur in the past (see Fuller 1996; Mayer 1996 for similar observations and discussion). However, these practices continued in relation to domestic spaces, and this meant that my Brahmin friends were unlikely to accept tea or water from a Scheduled Caste household, and I rarely saw people from the lowest castes at upper and middle caste homes, except on particular public occasions, like a

⁴¹ *Bek* was a local term used to describe what I could only discern as sub-caste, describing a particular group within a caste that did not have an everyday material effect on marriage rules or ritual status, but did allude to particular folk histories and historical ritual practices. They were numerous and treated with humour and minor interest. For example, one *bek* mentioned for Yadavs was *bhaagele*, referring to the verb *bhaagna* (to run away). My interlocutors explained that those people would have fled or run away from something in the past.

wedding or a funeral. Each caste group had a separate site on the outskirts of village land for funerary rites, and lower caste families sometimes struggled to invite Brahmins to perform particular ritual duties, such as accepting gifts and the first food at the *teheri* ceremony thirteen days after someone's death⁴².

Group Identity

Caste was also important for group identity, both in terms of self-identification of particular personality traits and identification or generalisations about other groups. My interlocutors often explained particular behaviour in terms of caste, and in their explanations, they would relay common stereotypes about that caste group.

This meant that caste names were sometimes used in a derogatory way. On my first day in the field, when I asked a young boy within a large group what family and caste he came from, he responded, "Adivasi". The entire group of mostly Yadav boys around him burst out laughing. Upper caste interlocutors would refer to negative stereotypes about Yadavs and middle-caste interlocutors would also speak regularly about Brahmin arrogance. These stereotypes and group markers played a role in both how people described their own village community but also how they perceived particular outside persons, including officials in the NMDC and the Forest Department. This meant that caste identity emerged regularly, though not

⁴² Thirteen days after someone's death, the mourning family host a ritual ceremony and meal to which they invite members of the community and the family. A *puja* is performed after which 13 Brahmins are given gifts and invited to eat before everyone else. This is the final rite immediately after someone's death and the end of the abstinence from cooking or eating inside the house or from inviting guests. If Brahmins wouldn't attend the *teheri*, young girls would take their place, and this was called *kanya bhoj* (young girl/virgin food).

exclusively, as an explanation for particular attitudes or behaviours in conversation. This is not to say that caste explained everything about a particular person or a particular group. Rather, it was one amongst many initial reference points for many discussions I had during fieldwork about social dynamics in Hinauta.

Livelihoods and Work Past and Present

The economic organisation and livelihoods present in Hinauta have changed dramatically in recent generations with the introduction of the mine and the founding of the tiger reserve. Much of this is to do with the curtailing of traditional livelihoods by the Forest Department but also the availability of wage labour and other opportunities through the mine. Along with the demographic expansion of the village, the NMDC has undoubtedly had an enormous impact on the types of business and variety of sources of income found in Hinauta.

“Traditional Work”

Hinauta has long-term economic and political links throughout the region, owing to the supply of various resources from the forests and small-scale stone mines as well as the high numbers of livestock found in the villages neighbouring and within the jungle. Members of the old Hinauta families described their livelihoods in the past, before the NMDC and PTR, in relation to agriculture and land as well as their ‘traditional work’, variously

described as their *jati*⁴³ *ka kam* (caste work) or *poorvaj ka danda* (ancestral business). For the original families, the Adivasis and Yadavs, their traditional work stemmed mostly from the spaces and resources of the forest, the former as collectors of timber and minor forest produce and the latter as herders, earning primarily from the dairy business. Both Adivasis and Yadavs engaged in farming. As traditionally the largest landholders though, Adivasis relied much more heavily on agriculture for their income, through both tenant rents and the sale of crops.

Adivasi Livelihoods

To supplement farming, Adivasi families engaged in widespread collection of timber as well as various non-timber forest products (NTFP) and minor forest produce (MFP)⁴⁴. These included *tendu* leaves for making Indian cigarettes or *bidis*, *mahua* fruit and flowers for making oil and local liquor as well as *bel* and *kaitha* fruit for eating or making pickles and chutneys. The collection of *tendu* or *mahua* continued to occupy entire communities in Panna during particular seasons up until quite recently (Chundawat 2018). In terms of timber, the vast teak forests in Panna provided a supply of sturdy wood to make furniture, doors and a variety of

⁴³ Caste in the *jati* sense is often associated with a specific livelihood and older anthropologists of Indian villages emphasised the compatibility of these livelihoods in a local village context through the reciprocal interdependency and complementarity of the *jajmani* system of patron-client relations. In such a system, lower caste persons would do certain types of work that upper castes would not due to their associated ritual pollution and the lower castes would receive upper caste patronage. A particular profession therefore indicated status within the ritual hierarchy of caste and the economic hierarchy of the *jajmani* system as well. Anthropologists have long since argued that the economic organisation of a particular village or caste is not reducible to the *jajmani* system and such a portrayal often inaccurately reified villages as bounded, static and self-contained entities (Jodhka 2012; 1998; Vaid 2014).

⁴⁴ The difference between these two terms depends on the legislation within each Indian state since their collection is now highly regulated within forest areas.

different objects, which could easily be supplied to Panna town. In particular, I found that Kondar Adivasis were known for their wood working ability. This was related to their traditional work of making *kattha*, a red paste used in making *paan*⁴⁵, from the *kher* tree (*Acacia catechu*), also plentiful in Panna.

It is for this reason that Kondars are also known as Kheruwa in Panna, and older Kondar residents claimed that the nearby former village site of Kheriya draws its name from the Kher tree and Kheruwa people as well. Both Kondars and Gonds in Hinauta and neighbouring villages are also known for their stonemasonry, often employed as quarrymen and builders to use the large supplies of *safed pattar* (white stone) found on the rocky Hinauta plateau (further discussion in Chapter 5)



Figure 13: The *khadaan* (mine) in Hinauta

⁴⁵ A preparation of betel leaf and other stimulants to be chewed and spit out.

Yadav Livelihoods

In the past, wealthy Yadav families owned herds of cattle and buffalo often numbering in the hundreds. With open space to graze and the ability to migrate to various grazing areas throughout the forest during different seasons, the *jungles* near to Hinauta suited Yadav pastoralist livelihoods well. Yadavs developed extensive supply networks for milk, ghee and other dairy products that stretched from the *jungles* of Panna to surrounding towns and cities. One Bador man recounted regular 30km round trips by bicycle from Bador to the since-relocated village of Pipartola to collect milk for distribution to surrounding villages and the NMDC.



Figure 14: Livestock next to a Yadav household (Hinauta)

For the Yadav residents of Hinauta and Bador villages, the arrival of the NMDC meant that a whole new market of worker, official, military, hospital, school and police households opened up for milk supply. In addition to Adivasi and Yadav traditional livelihoods, other caste groups such as Gadariya/Pals (goat herding) and Dhimar/Rakwar (fishing) depended on the forests and Ken River in Panna. All of these traditional

livelihoods have been since severely curtailed following the founding of the National Park, but it is important to note that these traditional livelihoods existed, as they still do, alongside a variety of other livelihood activities, the most significant of which for all caste groups was agriculture.

Agriculture

Since Hinauta and the other villages along the NMDC road are found on a rocky plateau made of hard stone, agriculture has traditionally been concentrated around a few major *nalas* (streams) running from the upper plateau down through the *jungle* to the villages and a number of old man-made lakes. These include the two *nalas* on either side of Bador village and the Kemasn *nala*, which originally connected with the stream in Majhgawan before it was dammed to create the lake for the mine. There are also a number of small lakes dotted around the edges of the fields. In villages within what is now Panna Tiger Reserve, agriculture was similarly river- or lake-fed.

With the flooding of Majhgawan fields and the expropriation of water resources by the NMDC, villagers started farming more intensively west of the village where the soil is less productive. The older and wealthier landowning Yadav and Adivasi families built wells to supply water for drinking and agriculture, some of which are still in use today. In recent years, attempts to drill bore wells to supply water have mostly failed. The current *sarpanch* estimated that they have tried over 30 times to bore and each time been unsuccessful. Thus, many of the fields are reliant on the increasingly unpredictable rains. The variability of and dependency on rains

affects what crops are planted each year, and the entire region of Bundelkhand has suffered from repeated droughts due to failed rains (NITI Aayog & UNDP 2012).

Crops and Tenant Farming

The majority of the agricultural activity in Hinauta was concentrated in the dry, winter season, focusing mainly on *rabi* crops (sown in winter, harvested in spring) such as *gehoon* (wheat), *sarson* (mustard) and *chana* (chickpeas). There was a small amount farming during the wet season of *kharif* crops (sown in monsoon, harvested in autumn) like *til* (sesame), *moong* (lentil) and soya, and in other places with better irrigation, *dhaan*



Figure 15: Green chickpeas (Hinauta)

(rice). During fieldwork, poor rains in Hinauta meant that chickpeas were preferred to wheat, but in nearby areas with better irrigation, including Madla, wheat and mustard were the crops of choice. No one I spoke with

relied on the sale of crops for the majority of their income, since crop losses to wild animals and poor weather were often significant, meaning that crops were grown primarily to supply staples to households.

When people farmed their own land, this meant that harvested crops were distributed to the landowners' extended family and then to tenant farmers or agricultural labourers, often as a supplement to or replacement

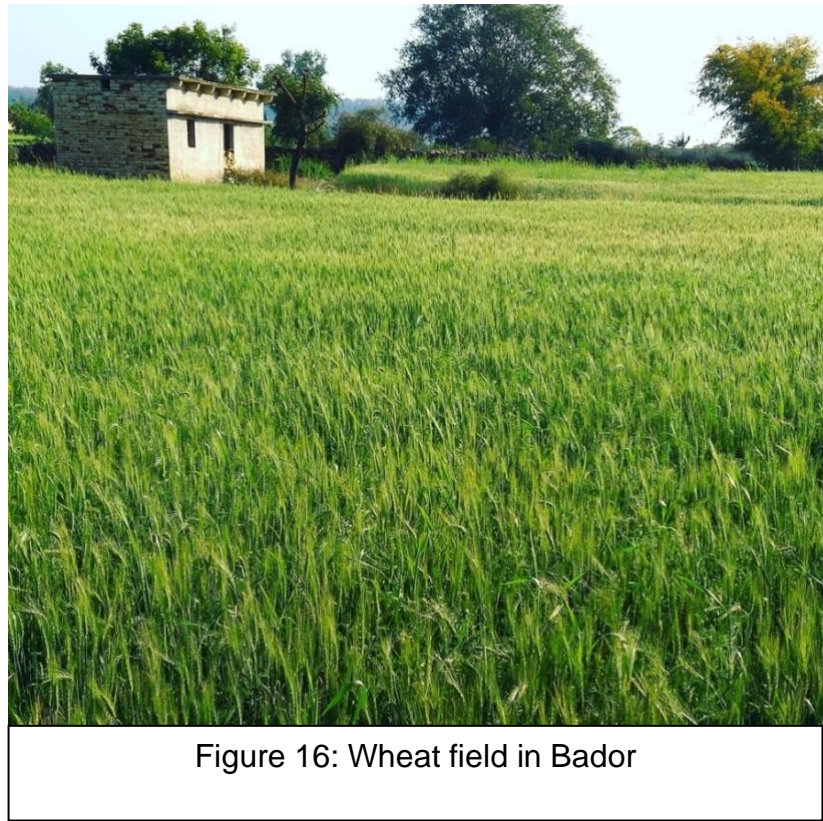


Figure 16: Wheat field in Bador

for cash, and then the rest sold on the market. When land was leased to tenant farmers, usually a portion of the harvest was paid to the landowner along with cash as a form of sharecropping. Wealthier tenant farmers often paid cash to landowners along with a promise of a certain amount of crop. Poorer villagers offered their labour and the protection of the field from wild animals in return for some of the crop. This meant that their payment depended on their ability to defend the field, since the landowner took his share no matter the extent of the damage. In cases of severe damage, this

could mean that those exchanging their labour ended up with very little when it came time to harvest. In these cases, entire families would live in the field in order to maximise the number of people chasing away animals, moving their households to *jhopris* (makeshift huts) for a few months.

During my conversations with farmers, the minimum amount of investment to plant a field of around three or four hectares amounted to INR 50,000⁴⁶ and land was leased for a minimum of INR 10,000 or a certain number of quintals⁴⁷, based on a mutual agreement between tenant and landlord. I observed that the majority of tenant farmers were from Adivasi families, despite the fact that many also had their own land. In such cases where they farmed their own land, the extended family would be split across different fields, some guarding their own crop and others working on someone else's. Occasionally people would opt to not plant their own land and work solely as tenant farmers in cases where they did not have the capital to invest.

It appeared that Yadavs tended to lease their land to Adivasis or others in the village, engaging in a variety of other livelihood activities and obtaining mostly crops and a small sum of cash from agriculture. The greater wealth of the Yadav community despite owning less land points to the unprofitability of agriculture in Hinauta. One Raj-Gond family, descended from the former *jagirdath* D. Jit Singh had largest amount of agricultural land (52 hectares) but were relatively poor in comparison to

⁴⁶ INR 10,000 = £110

⁴⁷ 1 quintal=100 kg of crop

Yadav, and other, families. This is not because the profitability of animal husbandry was any greater in Hinauta. Rather it was due to the changes brought by the NMDC and National Park and the entrance of certain families into politics and other work like transportation and contracting (cf. Michelutti 2008a; 2004)⁴⁸. Thus, it is not simply a case of caste relations in which upper castes owned land and lower castes worked or rented it, nor is it the case that wealth and status were measured in terms of land or livestock. In Hinauta, it would appear that recent developments, namely the arrival of the NMDC and the National Park, have significantly changed the economics and politics of the village.



Figure 17: The road separating Hinauta (right) and the NMDC (left)

⁴⁸ See Lanjouw and Shariff (2004) and Jatav and Sen (2013) for discussions about the shift towards rural non-farm employment in India.

The NMDC and the National Park

When the NMDC arrived in 1966, it moved from its original site in Ram Khiriyia in north Panna and replaced a private company, the Panna Diamond Mining Syndicate, which had attempted to mine the Hinota-Majhgawan kimberlite pipe until 1959 (Babu 2015). When the NMDC moved, it brought its employees from Ram Khiriyia and brought in labour from across the region to build a large worker and officer colony next to the mine, known locally at the 'township'. Many poor families migrated to Hinauta to find work and due to the scale of the project, few people were turned away. Entire families began to settle around Hinauta, building and then filling the township, making use of the school, hospital, post office, bank, bus and other facilities built for the mine. The Central Industrial Security Forces (CISF) and a police *chowki* (station/post) also arrived with the NMDC, as well as a bus service and a newly built road that joined the



Figure 18: Public Awareness Boards in NMDC township

National Highway through Jaruvapur village. This increased access to town and the surrounding area and expanded economic opportunities around Hinauta and for its residents.

The work provided by the mine in those early days for local Hinauta residents was little more than labouring. However, early employees had the chance to learn new skills, earn promotions and secure a permanent government job, with attendant benefits (housing, medical, education, pension, and lifetime employment). Salaries at the NMDC were relatively high in comparison to what villagers earned from their agricultural or forest-based livelihoods, and thus the NMDC led to certain families becoming economically prosperous relatively quickly and expanded the possible opportunities for social mobility throughout the village. People began to open shops and run *dhabas* (roadside cafés), and those who could provide other services like milk delivery, clothes-washing, hair-cutting, and bicycle repair benefitted from the hundreds of new NMDC, CISF, Police, hospital, school, post office, bus and bank employees.

In this way, Hinauta's population and prosperity grew, and the impact of the NMDC on local life is impossible to underestimate. However, once the township and the mine were built, and the mining became more mechanised, the need for hundreds of manual labourers decreased and many low-skilled employment opportunities dried up. Hinauta's population continued to expand, and families built houses and settled. The company had always imported its officers through a centralised hiring system, based at the NMDC headquarters in Hyderabad, and over time, those jobs which were inaccessible to poorly educated villagers living in Hinauta, became the

only ones available. The select few who stayed in jobs until they retired were unable to secure employment for their children since the company decided against automatic inheritance of positions sometime in the 1980s.

Now only a handful of people living in Hinauta work at the NMDC, and the high-skilled employees from outside live in the housing inside the township. They are mostly contract labourers, not full-time employees as their parents and grandparents had been. While they earn more than they would elsewhere as labourers and receive 'coupons' for discounted goods and staples at the township stores, compared with the high salaries of the current and past permanent employees (INR 80,000+ per month) and permanent government employment with associated benefits, they remain dissatisfied with the work and its remuneration. This is not to say that the NMDC has not made a significant contribution to the local economy, since it is responsible for the expansion of many services and facilities, the influx of more wealth and access to opportunities for local people. However, these opportunities appear to be decreasing and the expansion of the local economy has been severely limited by the arrival of the National Park in 1981.

With the National Park came an increase in restrictions and punishments regarding access and use of resources, a curtailment of traditional livelihoods and decreased profitability in agriculture and animal husbandry, as described above. This means that as opportunities from the NMDC dry up, local people are unable to fall back on traditional livelihoods to support growing families. The Forest Department's curtailment of traditional livelihoods is the focus of Chapter 5, and the undesirability of the

available employment within the Forest Department is the focus of Chapter 6. Additionally, the prospect of village relocation has only added to the decreasing attractiveness of Hinauta as a place to find work and build a settled life, although the prospect of compensation has maintained the need to remain in Hinauta in some way. I explore these dynamics in detail in Chapter 7, particularly around the politics of residency and documentation in processes of claims-making on the state. Undoubtedly, the National Park has prevented the arrival of more industrial projects and government investment that would lead to employment for villages unable to find work through commercial or political connections in Panna or elsewhere.

This has meant that the poorest families in Hinauta are increasingly reliant on out-migration to cities across North India to work as labourers, with at least one member of most Adivasi families and Batiya *mohalla* families engaging in labour migration. This is a trend observed across the region, where rural employment is desperately low, and something that Yadav (2018) has addressed in greater detail in her ethnography of Adivasi labourers in Panna. Many villages migrate almost in their entirety to Delhi and elsewhere on a seasonal and sometimes permanent basis, mostly due to poor rains and crop failure (NITI Aayog & UNDP 2012). This was the case for many villages I visited, and it was only slightly reduced in Hinauta because of the NMDC. This trend appeared to affect Adivasi families much more than Yadavs. This is partly due to the Yadav villagers' more successful exploitation of opportunities afforded through the NMDC, but mainly due to the involvement of Yadav families in government work and politics (cf. Jeffrey 2010; Michelutti 2004).

The Dominant Castes, Status and External Institutions

Despite the influx of people following the arrival of the NMDC and the founding of the National Park, Yadavs, Kondars and Gonds continue to dominate the village in terms of population, wealth and politics. The relationships between these groups and, in turn, with the local external institutions (NMDC, PTR and others) have a clear impact on local socio-political dynamics and are crucial to understand both 'village-forest relations' and how engagement between Forest Department and local people differentially disadvantages particular communities within PTR border villages. I observed that status and influence in Hinauta, both in terms of economic wealth and political clout, was tied closely to the ability of particular individuals or families to develop relationships with these external institutions that would afford them and their wider interpersonal networks access to resources and opportunities for work.

A Shift in Power

The recent past in Hinauta has been, put simply, marked by the increasing power and status of Yadav villagers through their engagement in politics and relationships with institutions like the NMDC and Forest Department. This has usurped the historical dominance of Adivasi groups in the village, who continue to hold the most land and have the greatest number of people. The historical dominance of Adivasi kingdoms across Central India was continuously marginalised through the expansion of agriculture by various empires. The Mughal, Maratha and British empires

drove groups like the Gonds deeper into forests where they ruled over large kingdoms (Bhukya 2017). Panna is one such area, where Gonds ruled until the 14th century, after which Bundela Rajputs took power (Jain 2002). However, Bhukya (2017) notes that, across Central India, despite losing power, Gond chiefs still enjoyed traditional powers as revenue collectors and heads of villages and that one key strategy of Rajput expansion in the region was to inter-marry with Gond chiefs' families to gain local influence and forge alliances. Both of these trends were observable in my field site.

During fieldwork, interlocutors recounted the practice of Rajput-Gond intermarriage, asserting that the title Raj-Gond referred occasionally to families that had intermarried with Rajputs arriving from the north and west in the distant past. Consequently, certain Thakur (Kshatriya) individuals were distinguished as either 'pure Thakur' or 'Gond-Thakur', alluding to their history of marriage alliances. Furthermore, I observed that Adivasis, usually Gonds, owned the most land in each village I visited around the border of the National Park. As previously mentioned, in revenue records for Panna at the British Library, a Gond man, D. Jit Singh, is listed as *jagirdath* for Hinauta village for the year 1907-8, and his name appeared repeatedly in conversations about village history. His descendants are still the largest landowners in Hinauta. While they described themselves as *gareeb log* (poor people), older Adivasi residents asserted that it was their community who had been *bade log* (big, powerful people) in the not too recent past. One older Gond man explained, "Yeh Yadav *abhi*...These Yadavs have only just now become *bare log*. Before, we, Adivasi people, were *bade log*". When I asked when this shift happened, he said that, "*Abhi abhi ho gao*...It

only happened just now. During my childhood, they were nothing”, ascribing their recent rise as the dominant caste to the last thirty years or so. On the way back from an engagement party with my Yadav neighbours during fieldwork, which was attended by a number of important local political figures, they remarked, “*Hum log...* We people are now in everything. Yadavs in business, politics, government, everything”.

Yadavs and Politics

Michelutti’s (2008a & b; 2004) extensive work on Yadav politics in western Uttar Pradesh has examined the ways in which Yadav folk history and caste identity are crucial to their rise as a political force in recent decades. She explained that her Yadav interlocutors say that they are a caste of ‘natural politicians’ with a perceived innate ability for ‘doing politics’. Their claims to descent from Lord Krishna as members of a pastoral caste as well as Kshatriyas supported claims to be predisposed to fight and govern. “The ancestor-god Krishna was not only used as a symbol of *kshatriyahood*, and thus of high ritual status, but as a *unifying symbol* common to hundreds of herder castes scattered all over India” (Michelutti 2004: 49, emphasis original). Michelutti traces the specific ways in which the emergence of an All India Yadav Mahasabha helped to unite the Yadav community across India through its use of folk history and the creation of a culture of political participation. This included the fusing of former *vansh* (clan) divisions under one Krishnavanshi Yadav tradition, supported by new publications on Yadav history and culture, and an emphasis on traditional sources of employment in the army and police.

While my own research does not concern caste-based politics in the same way, it is important to acknowledge that many of Michelutti's observations about political practice and the Yadav community ring true in my own field site albeit with some key distinctions. Although the most politically active Yadavs in Hinauta did not align with any of the Yadav dominant parties on which Michelutti focuses (Samajwadi Party and Rashtritya Janata Dal), and instead aligned with either Congress or BJP, they did similarly claim membership of the Kshatriya Yaduvanshi clan within the Yadav community. When I asked about their connections to the Yadavs in the Braj area of UP, they did not state any immediate relation, except through distant ancestral links leading ultimately to Lord Krishna. They distinguished between Goall and Yaduvanshi Yadavs, though which group the local Yadavs belonged to was unclear.⁴⁹



Figure 19: Indian Independence Day at the Hinauta *panchayat*

⁴⁹ It is of course possible that all clans were present in the same site, but since my research did not centrally concern these distinctions, I did not gather adequate data to make a definitive conclusion about caste, clan and lineage in this context, nor did it arise as an important distinction within Hinauta and its surrounds amongst the Yadav community.

The more politically minded Yadavs in Hinauta said they were Yaduvanshi and that there were more Goallvanshi Yadavs in UP, whereas Yadavs in neighbouring villages claimed the opposite.⁵⁰ In addition, they made a clear distinction between Ahirs and Yadavs, claiming to be higher in status and courage, unlike Michelutti's account of the Yadav community, in which the two groups' histories are interlinked. The Yadav community also appeared to be divided politically, which they blamed for the failure to elect district-level Yadav representatives despite Yadav visibility at the *tehsil* level and population numbers.

Livelihood Diversification and Opportunity Distribution

Similarly to Michelutti's ethnography, interlocutors described the recently improved economic status of the Yadav community through the diversification of their livelihoods into transportation and construction, and most recently, government and politics, where many of the younger generations looked to find work following secondary and tertiary education. In Hinauta, the wealthiest and most influential Yadav family was the one most involved in the politics for the longest time, led by the former *sarpanch*. He was in power for over twenty years, only losing his seat to the current *sarpanch*, a formidable Kondar Adivasi, when the seat was reserved for Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste candidates in 2015. The former *sarpanch*'s son is now the *panchayat* secretary in Bador village, and his

⁵⁰ It would appear that these groups did not therefore function as endogamous social units in the same way as Michelutti recounts, although when pressed elder Yadavs clarified the distinction in terms of particular practices, such as nose-piercing and tattooing

son-in-law is *sarpanch* there. His cousin and his wife both sit on the *zila panchayat*, though he effectively acts in her place. His brother works as a successful contractor and they have relatives involved in a variety of businesses including transportation and banking. He unsuccessfully attempted to secure an MLA ticket for the Congress Party in the recent 2018 state assembly elections.

When I asked whom the most successful family was in the village, most often people pointed to them, emphasising their material wealth and political influence. By being in power for so long, the Yadav community was able to manage the relationships between Hinauta and the NMDC and Forest Department as well as the infrastructure and development in the area. This has led to greater opportunities for financial gain and employment opportunities for their immediate kin network. Michelutti (2004: 56). writes that “kinship ties are viewed as important channels through which political power and economic resources are controlled and distributed. By being ‘close’ to the centre of Yadav power, the Yadavs of Ahir Para are said to be in a position where they could get more benefits from the new redistribution of state resources than the other Yadavs of Mathura town”. I would argue that this tendency operated in a similar way in Hinauta and its surrounds, though the ‘centres’ of importance would be the NMDC and the Forest Department, and the ‘other Yadavs’ in this case would be Adivasis and other less powerful communities.

Crucial to this is the fact that in addition to Hinauta residents, NMDC township residents (many of whom are wealthy government officers from across India) and Forest Department officers living in Hinauta can all vote in

the Gram Panchayat elections. This means that 'doing politics' in Hinauta and the surrounding area is as much about managing the relationships within the village and between village and local government as it is about managing the relationships between village, NMDC and the Forest Department in all their complexity and heterogeneity.

Village Development

While the Forest Department does very little for village development despite Eco-Development Committees (see Chapter 4), the NMDC has contributed greatly to infrastructural development in Hinauta in addition to the bus service, school, hospital, bank, shops and ATM in the township, all of which villagers can use freely or at very little cost. However, the distribution of this infrastructural contribution varies between different *mohallas* and communities within Hinauta. Thus, *panchayat* negotiations with the NMDC and Forest Department about village development can often allude to divisions based on caste. The older families in the village often claimed status based on their own historic contributions to village infrastructure such as wells and employment through agricultural or manual labour. However, since the arrival of the NMDC and the national park, the locus of that provision and patronage has shifted from particular influential families to these external institutions. Thus, village infrastructural development and the ability to provide resources and opportunities via the NMDC, Forest Department or other government or private agencies, was a way that particular leaders claimed status and success; a shift from provider and patron to distributor and fixer (cf. Bereschot 2010; Corbridge et al.

2005; Gupta 2012; Jeffrey and Lerche 2001; also see Piliavsky's edited volume [2014] on patronage and politics).

Both the former and current Sarpanch repeatedly told me about what they had achieved in their village during their tenure, pointing to roads, electricity, wells and toilets. The current Kondar Sarpanch boasted about how many roads he had built for 'everyone' in the short time that he had



Figure 20: New cement road in Bador

been in power, disparaging the Yadavs' decades-long tenure during which “*sirf aapne ko...* they only looked after themselves”. On the other hand, the Yadavs routinely dismissed the Kondar *sarpanch* as incompetent and “zero”. In the context of Hinauta, the ability of the NMDC or other agencies to provide village development and regular work was hampered by the Forest Department and the restrictions of the national park. These various trends are clearest in relation to the two most pressing issues facing Hinauta, and the region as a whole: water and work and their inconsistent supply.

Water and Work

While roads and electricity fell under the purview of the District Collector, the NMDC supplied water directly to Hinauta through a series of pipelines where water ran twice a day at various points throughout the village for a limited time. The distribution of pipelines in Hinauta was a repeated source of contention. The Yadav *mohalla* had the only functioning handpump and four distribution points which they shared with the Kondar *mohalla*. The Gond *mohalla* and Batiya *mohalla* relied almost entirely on wells since no pipes reached them directly, and Yadavs and other families usually crowded the closest access points before Gonds had a chance to fill their buckets. The same principle applied during the dry summer months when water tankers replaced the pipe supply, and to repairs for broken pipes and drains.

These issues arose regularly at village meetings and various public events. The current Kondar *sarpanch* listed water supply to his community and the Gond *mohalla* as his top priorities, although he was ultimately

reliant on the NMDC to change the pipeline system. All villagers regularly complained that while there was enough water for personal and domestic use, it did not begin to cover the need for agricultural irrigation, particularly since boring for water had been so unsuccessful. Petitions to run pipelines directly from the dam to Hinauta's fields were repeatedly rejected by the Forest Department, and the Forest Department also prohibited villagers from drawing water from a series of small lakes near to the national park boundary wall.

In relation to work, it was clear that powerful Yadav families were more able to find employment for their children in the NMDC, where salaries were high, and work was regular. Many of my Yadav contemporaries in the village during fieldwork were unemployed or finishing school during fieldwork. When I returned one year after fieldwork, some were working for the NMDC, having failed to secure government work in a variety of sectors. The Kondar *sarpanch*'s eldest son also started working at the NMDC partway through his tenure, and he explained to me that other people within the village asked him regularly to fix them up with a job there too. He complained that he was unable to find work for everyone and would do so if he could, explaining that the Yadav community only fix jobs for themselves and no one else, discriminating against Adivasi families who desperately needed work. Through village development such as road building and schemes like NREGA⁵¹, the Kondar *sarpanch* also boasted that he was

⁵¹ National Rural Employment Guarantee Act- See Mathur (2015) for a full explanation of this scheme and how it works.

doing more for solving the employment crisis in the village than the Yadavs had ever done, removing at least three secretaries since his election over related disagreements.

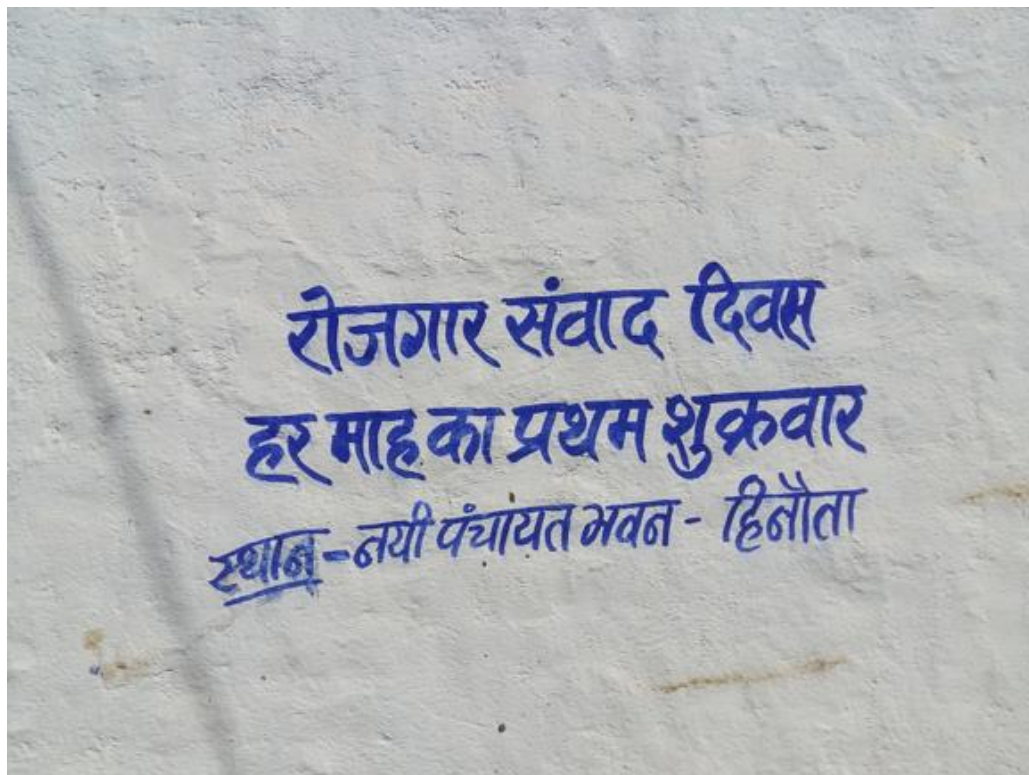


Figure 20: Notice painted on walls in Hinauta (employment discussion every first Friday of the month)



Figures 21 & 22: People waiting to fill water in Panna during summer (left), a water filling point in Hinauta (right)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the history, social composition and livelihoods of Hinauta, the main study village. In doing so, this chapter provides a context for the forthcoming analysis of village-forest relations and alludes to important themes that thread throughout the thesis. These include the importance of understanding internal power dynamics within villages living in and around protected areas as well as the close relationship between kinship, caste, power, status, politics and access to political and economic opportunities through external institutions. These themes are crucial in the following chapters which examine changes in the livelihoods and labour in greater detail as well as economic opportunity from the Forest Department and negotiations with the state. By describing internal dynamics of inequality and relative disadvantage within forest-border villages, we can get a better sense of how the imposition of conservation differentially impacts groups of local people. This manifests in their ability to negotiate the ambiguity of forest rules (Chapter 5), the relative opportunities afforded through forest employment (Chapter 6) and the negotiation of state processes such as village relocation (Chapter 7). The chapter also alludes to the different dimensions of vulnerability that the thesis addresses, namely in livelihoods (Chapter 5), labour (Chapter 6) and citizenship (Chapter 7).

This chapter did not aim to reify 'the village' or any particular 'community' in any way but rather draw attention to the specific histories that have led to the social dynamics that are affected and that affect

relationships with the Forest Department. This highlights the key point that 'village-forest relations' ought not to be understood merely in terms of 'relations between' but also in terms of the 'relations within' both 'forest' and 'village' as heterogeneous groups. In the following chapter, I describe accounts of Panna's forests and diamonds from colonial times to the present to demonstrate how contemporary practices propagate colonial articulations of 'village' and *jungle* as vulnerable and wild and in need of separation and state control.

Chapter 4

Engagement as Programme: Eco-Development

Committees and Nature Camps

“Jan samarthan se baagh sanrakshan (Tiger conservation/protection from/with the people’s support)”

– Panna Tiger Reserve Forest Department Slogan (2009- present)

“...a conflict-ridden landscape with...trigger-happy fringe villages and poaching by local communities”

– Special Investigation Report on the Disappearance of Panna’s Tigers (2009)

On my first visit to Panna, the Field Director recommended that I speak with a teacher who had been involved with the Department’s recent efforts at community engagement. As he had only arrived three months prior himself, he explained that this teacher would be able to tell me all about the tiger reserve’s recent history and the work that it was doing to engage local people now. After speaking with the teacher on the phone, I took an auto-rickshaw to the school that he ran and entered the gate, asking the first person I saw whether he was there. I was told to wait in a small room just off the main courtyard, so took off my shoes and sat down. After a few moments, an elderly man appeared, wearing all white, smiling from ear to ear. He shook my hand and greeted me warmly. He spoke in plain English

and asked me to sit down and whether I would like a cup of cold coffee. It was April and the weather outside was stiflingly hot. I accepted and we started chatting.

He had been a teacher in Panna for over fifty years and had run the school where we met for most of that time. He told me about his son in Delhi, who was a lawyer, and asked me about my research. I explained that I was there to research the tiger reserve and its recent history, and he smiled widely saying, “How nice, wonderful, how nice”, a phrase I came to learn was his favourite. I asked him what he could tell me about the recent revival of the tiger population and the efforts to engage the community, and he told me all about the success of the previous field director and his innumerable virtues. “Most of all, [the previous Field Director] loved nature and loved the tigers. They were able to sense this love and they loved him back”. He explained that there was a deep bond between this former field director and ‘nature’, using the English word, and that the love between them was palpable. When I asked how he could ‘sense’ or ‘feel’ this love, he told me about a science competition in the state capital that he had read about a few years before. During that competition, the fourth-place entry was a student from a technical college who had designed a machine that could translate tree’s feelings. It worked like this: you attach the machine to the tree and the machine then tells you when the tree is hurt, loved, hungry or thirsty on a screen. Apparently, during the competition, this student demonstrated by cutting a branch of a tree only to have the machine make noise and display a sad face on the screen.

For this elderly man sitting in front of me, this was scientific proof that trees have feelings. Although the machine was only in a prototype stage, he estimated that within the next three or four years, a proper device would be developed that they could use all over the world. He was insistent that when this happened, the Forest Department procure one for Panna. Over the next two years, I visited him regularly and as a volunteer with one of his community outreach programmes, I heard the story of this magical machine repeatedly as he told local students about the power of loving nature. He would explain to the students that it was the former Field Directors' love for nature and its love for him that led to Panna's tiger recovery from such a dramatic crisis.

Introduction

This chapter has two aims. First, I provide a contextual analysis of Panna's conservation history, starting from historical and colonial accounts of its forest and mineral resources before looking at its recent conservation history since its founding as a National Park in 1981 and the drama of its tiger reintroduction project from 2009 onwards. This helps situate contemporary conservation practices and their impact on local people. The second aim is to analyse two particular forms of community 'engagement': eco-development committees and Panna Nature Camps. I argue that these contemporary outreach practices propagate colonial articulations of *jungles*, tigers and local people as wild, unruly and vulnerable, simultaneously in need of taming, controlling and protecting by 'the state'. In doing so, they

continue to separate *jungle* and 'village' as well as disfavours and disenfranchising formerly forest-dependent people living around PTR.

Wild India and Wild Indians: Separating 'Village' and *Jungle*

During the British Raj in India, hunting, forestry and conservation became important mechanisms through which colonialists established control over large areas of land and different groups of people. Colonial forest legislation expressed and enforced the separation of 'village' and *jungle* by creating a distinction between 'village land' and 'forest land', forcefully restructuring the relationship of local users to their environment through their exclusion from natural resource management (Gadgil and Guha 1995; Rangarajan 1996). Hunting, forestry and conservation also came to express or symbolise various forms of masculinity, civilization, patronage, benevolence and gentlemanliness, discursively legitimising state intervention and control (Pandian 2001; Mandala 2018; Schell 2007; Skaria 1998a; Sramek 2006; Thompsell 2015)⁵². Thus, hunting, forestry and conservation were about taming and protecting 'wild and vulnerable India' in the sense of a particular understanding of nature and wilderness (cf. Cronon 1995) and taming and protecting 'wild and vulnerable' Indians, discursively legitimising the separation one from the other. Contemporary

⁵² The relationships between imperialism, the environment, conservation, hunting and notions of wildness, wilderness and civilization have been subject to much scholarly attention across many parts of the world, in particular India and Africa during British rule (Arnold and Guha 1995; Beinart 2003; Boomgaard 2001; Drayton 2000; Grove 1995; Hughes 2013; MacKenzie 1988; Mandala 2018; Pandian 2001; Rangarajan 2004; 2001; 1996; Skaria 1999; Storey 1991; Thompsell 2015).

conservation practices continue to articulate these discourses and the separation they create despite efforts to make conservation more participatory through local community 'engagement'.

Of Tribals and Tigers

Skaria (1997) argues that the British colonial construction of 'wild tribes' relied on an anachronistic relationship with time which ranked societies in relation to one another, situating Europeans above all and relegating forest peoples to the lower rungs of 'primitive' and 'wild', the conceptual opposite to 'the modern' or 'civilisation' (Fabian 1983; Kuper 1988).⁵³ Due to hierarchies based on modes of subsistence, and the association of forests with 'wildness' and 'wilderness', many forest-dependent and hunting-dependent groups automatically became 'wild tribes'. Therefore, the civilising mission of the colonial government found an appropriate expression in colonial forestry programmes and the curtailment of forest-dependent livelihoods in favour of more 'civilised' sedentary agriculture. As Pandian writes, "projects of regulated resource extraction were a feature of colonial governmentality, premised on the management of natural resources and the cultivation of disciplined and industrious subjects" (Skaria 1997:85).

⁵³ British notions of 'wildness' at the time could easily map onto the lifestyles and livelihoods of such people through conceptualisations of 'primitive tribespeople' and 'wild men'. For exploration into conceptions of the 'wild man' in European culture, see Dudley and Novak 1972; Bartra 1994.

This rang true both for conceptions of wild tribes but also for colonial views of local landowning elites and rulers. Through forestry and hunting, colonial officials “appropriated the figure of the Oriental despot [...], depicting themselves as more caring and responsible sovereigns” (Pandian 2001: 81). Hunting also became a way of “policing and subjugating rebel or troublesome territories” (Mandala 2018: 11) or forging political alliances with submissive local rulers (Hughes 2013). Sramek (2006) argues that in hunting tigers, the British both sought to emulate other rulers and symbolically stage their defeat, pointing to the discursive comparisons that colonial rulers made between ‘savage beasts’ like tigers and ‘wild Indians’ and how instrumental hunting and forestry were to ‘taming’ and protecting both under imperial control. However, the comparison between tigers and colonial subjects also extended to the admiration expressed by hunters for both.

Noble and Vulnerable

Skaria (1997) notes the emphasis that colonial officials place on wild tribes as noble, independent, truthful and fearlessly masculine, particularly in comparison with “castes” in the plains who were often feminised and considered deceptive and dishonest. The Enlightenment ideal of the ‘noble savage’ with its implications of egalitarianism and harmony with nature in existing ‘before’ or ‘outside’ civilisation encouraged the occasional excusing of misdemeanours since ‘they didn’t know any better’. Colonial officers, he argues, saw themselves and their characteristics of public schoolboy mischief and inherent nobility reflected in so-called ‘wild tribesmen’. As self-appointed superiors, they saw their job as colonisers to guide them, and

“[p]aternalistic protection was needed because simple, straightforward men like the wild tribes were lamentably prone to being deceived by plains merchants and traders, as well as by plains powers like the Rajput states” (Skaria 1997: 736). This does not mean that tribal people were free from oppression but rather that colonial officials justified their rule through tribals’ discursive infantilization and through admiration of qualities the rulers saw in themselves.

Similarly, scholars have noted later British hunter-cum-conservationists’ admiration for tigers as a noble and royal beast, equating their own masculinity with the tiger’s power. Schell (2007) writes, “The hunters’ sense of kinship with tigers was infused with a nascent conviction that masculinity itself was essentially predatory” (Schell 2007: 230), and hunters regularly described tigers as intelligent, discriminatory and even gentlemanly. This was often in comparison to themselves, but along the same discursive lines as descriptions of ‘noble wild tribes’. They even went so far as to suggest that tigers shunned rotting meat and held noble taste, with an appreciation for beef (cattle), something they shared with Englishmen and perhaps the ‘wild tribes’, but not with Hindu villagers in the plains. Famous hunters like Jim Corbett described a hunt as a kind of boxing match, a face-off between intelligent and noble foes.⁵⁴ Thus, discourses that suggested the need to for colonial foresters and hunters to

⁵⁴ These preoccupations with the hunt as a gentleman’s and ‘gentleman-making’ sport alongside growing concerns about depleting wildlife, blamed on reckless, uncivilised and indiscriminate shooting by villagers and local rulers and fuelled by animal welfare activism back in Britain and in the colonies, led to early conservation efforts. This was mostly in the form of stricter rules on hunting; yet another way to control and limit the sovereignty of local rulers as well as a way to preserve game for colonialists to hunt (Mandala 2018)

tame a noble but lesser animal in a tiger resonated with the ways officials spoke about the need to civilise and protect vulnerable, noble forest-dependent peoples. Heavily forested areas far from large administrative centres like Panna were clear examples of areas considered wild and 'in need' of British administration, forming a constructed 'lawless' periphery to the mainland under British control (Bhukya 2017; 2013; Kasturi 1999). These kinds of discursive articulations are evident in accounts of Bundelkhand and Panna from colonial times to the present, helping to legitimise state separation and control of wild and vulnerable 'village' and *jungle*.

Accounts of Panna's Forests and Diamonds

It would appear that the history of the exploitation of forests and diamonds in Panna, during pre-colonial and British times as well as post-Independence points to the systematic disenfranchisement and exclusion of local communities as resource users and managers through increasing state control over those resources, legitimised along lines similar to those described above. In his account of lineage and status among Bundelkhand Rajputs, Jain (2002) claims that at the inception of British paramountcy, law substituted custom and caste substituted kinship as regulating principles of the indigenous political system and the post-mutiny period (1857 onwards) was witness to the growth of a money economy and increasing stratification within the ruling classes. He effectively argues that categories of caste, attendant notions of status and power, as well as conditions of land

ownership were much more flexible in pre-British Bundelkhand, where people claimed particular descent and legitimised such claims through land ownership and marriage alliances. In British Bundelkhand, with the advent of property law and civil administration, stratification was bureaucratically reified, and agrarian classes began to emerge in new ways. It appears that this shift was also central to the association of the area with criminality, which continues to this day.

Kasturi (1999) argues that the association of Bundelkhand with Rajput 'banditry' led to its neglect by the colonial government and its characterisation as criminal and 'backward'. Colonial officers saw *dakaiti* (banditry) as a law and order problem and a direct threat to British rule, but Kasturi argues that, instead of a form of rebellion, practices labelled as 'banditry' have a long pre-colonial history, as a way to assert and reinforce status and power politically through ties of patronage and kinship. Diverging from traditions of alliance between rulers and bandits, the colonial government sought dacoits' extermination as so-called 'outbreaks' were fairly common in British Bundelkhand. She explains that Bundelkhand became a "political and economic backwater under British rule" (Kasturi 1999: 80), since the government failed to invest in regional industries and changes to land tenure and taxation sought to strip Rajputs of their status and prosperity. Rarely recruited into the army due to prejudice against their 'undisciplined manner', many turned to banditry, and this increased alongside famines throughout the middle and latter parts of the 19th century.

Attempts to control criminal groups increased in British Bundelkhand after the areas' involvement in the 1857 Mutiny⁵⁵, but the rugged, forested terrain of the area made it challenging. This meant that despite the centralisation of power and the increasingly strict criminal codes in the second part of the 19th century, 'paramount' British political power failed to take hold in large parts of Bundelkhand. Kasturi writes, "the bandit reigned as king in Bundelkhand and the Chambal Valley well into the twentieth century in Independent India" (Kasturi 1999: 108).⁵⁶ The discursive association of Panna and Bundelkhand with criminality, economic 'backwardness' and wild, unruly subjects helped to legitimise the imposition of bureaucratic management systems and systematic state control over land, resources and people which continued post-Independence. Such conceptualisations are evident in colonial accounts of both mineral and forest resources, which articulate the need to exploit the resources 'properly' to the exclusion of local users, reifying and separating 'village' and *jungle*.

Panna's Diamond Resources

There are accounts of Panna's diamonds from the 17th century, and they have been associated with notable religious and royal figures for centuries (Babu 2015). According to folklore, Swami Prannath, the foremost

⁵⁵ See Singh (2014) for an account of the Rani of Jhansi's role in the mutiny.

⁵⁶ This popular association of Bundelkhand with banditry has even been portrayed in popular films like *Bandit Queen* (1994) the true story of a poor lower caste woman who becomes a bandit and eventually a Member of Parliament.

disciple of the Pranami faith whose temple is found in Panna today, led Maharaja Chhatrasal to diamonds in Panna after encouraging him to move his capital from Mahewa. A local saying goes, “Chhatrasal, the land of our kingdom vibrates with the glow of your diamonds, whichever way your stallion turns, in that very direction will your kingdom spread” (Jain 2002: 78). This refers to a popular myth that wherever Chhatrasal would ride with his cavalry they would find diamonds, as foretold by Swami Prannath who saw that Chhatrasal’s control of vast diamonds fields through the conquest of Gond kings was essential to establishing a strong state in Panna. Chhatrasal was a devoted follower of Swami Prannath and patronized the holy man, establishing Panna as a centre of Pranami pilgrimage.⁵⁷ The growth of both Chhatrasal’s kingdom and Swami Prannath’s following in the last eleven years of the latter’s life (spent living in Panna under the patronage of Chhatrasal) indicate the contributions that diamonds made to Panna’s state wealth (Jain 2002; Lahiri-Dutt and Chowdhury 2018; Sinor 1930).

The earliest record of colonial British interest in the mines and their workings is found in a letter from Captain William Buckley reporting on the mines to the colonial government in India in 1820, though there are earlier individual accounts of Panna’s diamond mines from Dalrymple (1791) and

⁵⁷ The exact timeline for the meeting between Swami Prannath and Chhatrasal and the systematic excavation of diamonds is unclear, as some accounts appear to suggest that systematic excavation of diamonds did not begin until the reign of Raja Sabha Singh in 1739, after Chhatrasal’s death in 1731, and that Swami Prannath and Chhatrasal did not meet until after Panna was established as the centre of his Bundela kingdom in 1683 which would refute any claim that it was Swami Prannath who encouraged Chhatrasal to shift his capital to Panna.

Hamilton (1819). Buckley's letter details his observations and inquires as to whether the government would have interest in a systematic excavation of the mines. He reports that locals are unhappy with the local Bundela royal family's tax on private findings and suggests that private prospecting would increase under British administration. The reply from the central office is succinct and informs Captain Buckley of the minimal interest the government held in excavating the diamonds in Panna at the time. Captain James Franklin (1833; 1831) visited Panna's diamond mines in 1827, and he mentions the 'Majgoha' mines which refers to what are now the mines at Majghawan, the earliest British record of mines there (Babu 2015). He writes that mining revenue was divided between the Panna, Banda, Chirkari and Jatipur Rajas, with the largest share going to the Raja of Panna based on a tax on all diamonds found below a certain weight⁵⁸.

A commissioned report on the Panna Diamond Mines in 1904 and a series of letters between various authorities in 1905 and 1906 demonstrate a renewed British interest in Panna's diamonds. In the report, there is a concern about local activity regarding the diamonds, Mr. Holland stating in a letter dated 28 May 1904, "I am glad Mr. Streeter is not to be let loose among the small states which touch on the Bundelkhand diamond tract. With a mineral so liable to tempt people's cupidity, a dove-tailed complication of small states and Mr. Streeter, the chances of mischief would be rather serious". The report includes a full geological survey of the mines,

⁵⁸ The current system of taxation is similar to this, with the government levying a tax on diamonds through a specific bureaucracy (see Lahiri-Dutt and Chowdhury 2018).

the different methods for extraction, a list of sites and description of the sale process in Panna, many of which reiterate what Franklin had noted 80 years earlier. It details the indigenous diamond mining practices, and the mines at Majhgawan are listed, suggesting that, if the British were to begin exploiting the resources, operations must be systematised and supervised in order to minimise loss to the state.



Figure 23: A member of the Panna royal family after a successful hunt

The Emerald Forest

Along similar lines, British accounts of Panna's forests emphasise the little effort made to 'extract full value' before British administration and focus heavily on the 'working' of the forests for their timber value. The 1907

Eastern States (Bundelkhand) Gazetteer reads,

Besides affording a supply of wood for agricultural implements and building to villages adjacent to them the forests are of economic value in providing labour for the poorer classes and many edible plants and roots are useful in famine time. A trained forest officer, lent by Government, has now examined and reported on the forests and their administration has been placed under a trained official. This is the first

attempt at systematic forestry, although certain trees...have always been protected. The forest revenue ... will rapidly increase under proper management (*Eastern States Gazetteer*: 184-185)

There have been plenty of local laws regarding working the forests and restrictions on hunting during and after Indian Independence in 1947, including the Ajaigarh Forests Act 1937 and the Panna State Forest Act and Shikar Rules 1945. Through this, the former princely states enforced a rigid ban on shooting by the general public.

Government accounts of Panna's forests and diamonds disparage the 'unsystematic regulation and management' of the princely states and local people. Local people and indigenous systems of management are set aside in favour of centralized administration and the 'scientific' and systematic exploitation of natural resources. This not only leads to the disenfranchisement of local people through their increasing exclusion from natural resource management but also concentrates control over those resources in the hands of an increasingly powerful and often distant state. These accounts reify and separate 'village' from *jungle* in Panna, describing their vulnerability and unruliness, legitimising the control and 'protection' of the colonial and post-Independence state. As environmental historians of South Asia have long argued, many of these approaches to natural resource management continued after Independence through the bureaucratic, legal and discursive continuities between colonial and post-Independence forestry (Gadgil and Guha 1995; Rangarajan 2000; 1996). For example, the *Indian Gazetteer* (1994) states that in post-Independence Bundelkhand, "after the abolition of Princely States, the villages indulged in

rampant shooting and destroyed the fauna, taking advantage of the transition period” (*Indian Gazetteer*: 25), until the official Ban on Shooting in 1975.

With the advent of wildlife conservation from the 1970s onwards, people local to conservation areas became a specific ‘threat’ (Choy 2011) to charismatic species now infused with nationalist and cosmopolitan sentiment (cf. Jalais 2010; Rangarajan 2003), and such discourses of vulnerability and ‘threat’ began to prescribe particular conservation interventions (Brosius 1999). This continued to propagate the discursive legitimization of “benevolent control” (Pandian 2001) by the state over people and ‘wilderness’, and these discourses are evident in the recent history and current conservation practice of Panna Tiger Reserve. The following section describes this turbulent history, and highlights the continued associations of Panna with wild, unruly subjects as well as how distant, yet powerful management and local disenfranchisement led to conservation tragedy.

Panna Tiger Reserve: Turbulence, Tragedy and Triumph

Some of Panna’s forests, before their founding as a National Park in 1981 and Project Tiger Reserve in 1994, were previously protected as hunting grounds for the royal families of the erstwhile princely states of Panna, Ajaygarh, Bijawar and Chhatarpur, a history common to many now protected areas across India⁵⁹. A large area was designated by the

⁵⁹ Panna’s forests were known for light-coloured leopards and cheetahs, known locally as *sandela* cheetahs for their sandalwood colour (Chundawat 2018).

Government of India as 'Protected Forest'⁶⁰ in 1948 following Independence, parts of which became the Gangau Wildlife Sanctuary in 1975 and 1979 before becoming Panna National Park (PNP) in 1981 at the recommendation of Shri Lokendra Singh, the brother of the then-Maharaja of Panna and Member of Parliament. PNP was re-notified as India's 22nd Project Tiger Reserve in 1994, placing it under the care and recommendations of the National Tiger Conservation Authority as well as the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in coordination with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department.

Chundawat (2018) writes that Gangau Sanctuary was forgotten in records for a long time before the notification of Panna National Park, only being notified as part of the park by chance in 1981. Some areas were left out of the park territory while others were partially included. The Forest Department only found the lost sanctuary in their records and re-notified them as part of Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) in 2004, handing over their management to the appropriate authorities. Those areas now form part of the 'core' or 'Critical Tiger Habitat' section of the reserve⁶¹ (Chundawat 2018).

At his home in Panna, Lokendra Singh, now in his mid-70s, proudly displays photographs from his family's old hunting days, including visits from British dignitaries and members of larger and wealthier royal families

⁶⁰ See Indian Forest Act 1927 for designation of 'Protected Forest'

⁶¹ The 2006 amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) required all tiger reserves to have a buffer and a core/critical tiger habitat. The buffer is a multiple use area, where locals are able to use resources in accordance with the Forest Conservation Act (1980). The core is considered an inviolate space for tigers and other wildlife, free from human disturbance (Chundawat 2018).

across India. When I visited his house during fieldwork, he was particularly keen to show me a photograph of the Maharaja of Jaipur disembarking from his private plane to come hunting in Panna, an event for which a private airstrip was constructed to the East at Sakariya. Along the wall on the veranda, the black and white photographs of hunting scenes slowly give way to colour photographs of Panna's current tigers, printed, framed and presented to Lokendra Singh as gifts from the Panna Forest Department as the founder of the national park; a visual representation of the transformation of not only the purpose of forest protection and governance but also its organising structures. Rajas and hunting have given way to bureaucrats and conservation.



Figure 24: A Young Raja with his first kill (a young tiger cub)



Figure 25: Members of the Panna Royal Family and visiting dignitaries with hunt

Lokendra Singh is still invited to Forest Department events as a respected guest but no longer involved in the management of Panna's flora and fauna, and while he claims he has permission to do as he likes, at 75 years old he ventures into the reserve rarely. Towering above these displays are the dusty and cobweb covered mounted heads of enormous sambhar deer with full antlers, elegant blackbuck antelopes with their twisted horns and sandy *chinkara*, their horns grooved and ringed and bending backwards⁶². Above the door on the inside of the sitting room that leads onto the veranda is a tiger's head, its colours considerably faded, and its face stuck in a snarl.

⁶² Sambar deer (*Rusa unicolour*) and *chinkara* antelopes (also known as Indian gazelle) (*Gazella bennettii*) are common across Panna's forests whereas blackbuck antelopes (*Antelope cervicapra*) are not. Local royal family members explained that they were found in the past in the plain areas of Ajaigarh, north of Panna, but had been hunted from the areas around Panna's dense forests.

Tracking Success

When Panna Tiger Reserve was founded in 1994, it was a minor project in the landscape of Indian tiger conservation, and it remains a relatively unknown park in comparison to the more famous reserves, such as Ranthambore, Bandhavgarh and Kanha (the inspiration for Kipling's *The Jungle Book*). Chundawat writes, "When I decided on Panna as my study site, friends threw up their hands in horror, believing it was not the best place since the tiger population was so low. Though I understood their concern, I also knew that my objective was to study tigers where they were most threatened. This would allow us to understand the reasons for their decline". Chundawat and his team of local assistants, students and fellow researchers radio-collared a number of individual tigers in Panna starting in 1995-1996. In his memoir, he describes the challenges of Panna's hilly terrain and the difficulties it posed for radio telemetry. He was reliant on local villagers to help navigate the forests, one of whom came to be known as 'GPS' for his incredible sense of direction and orientation.

The first research period spanned three years (1996-1999) and phase two began in 1999 in which they collared more tigers and key prey species. The monitoring continued intensively for eight years, from 1996 to 2004, accumulating a vast amount of information about collared and un-collared tigers, recording data for a total of 41 different individuals⁶⁴. The

⁶³ This is an ode to Chundawat's memoir titled *The Rise and Fall of the Emerald Tigers: Ten Years of Research in Panna National Park*.

⁶⁴ Chundawat et al. (1999); Chundawat et al. (2016); Karanth et al. (2004)

majority of their results were based on five adult male tigers (two of which were radio-collared), eight breeding females (five of which were radio-collared) and fourteen litters. Simply by being able to conduct this research successfully, Chundawat and his team were able to clearly demonstrate the suitability of the Panna landscape to tigers and the need for their protection and conservation in the Vindhya hills. They tracked an increase Panna's tiger population, contrary to the widely reported trend of decline countrywide. At its then-peak, in early 2002, the tiger population in Panna included nine breeding tigers (seven females and two males) and their cubs as well as a handful of other adult tigers, totalling 28 individuals in a 400 square kilometre area. This growth was a success story in a relatively unknown corner of the tiger conservation world.

This led to a BBC documentary about Panna's tiger population, *Tigers of the Emerald Forest*, released in 2003. In the film, Chundawat and his partner Joanna star as they track the drama of tiger life in Panna's forests, presented as dense in both natural abundance and human population. Scenes of since-relocated villages are interspersed with frames of tigers stalking prey and images of Chundawat atop cliffs with his radio antennae, searching and listening for the big cats' signal. The film tells the story of a new male, Madla, named after the range where he was first sighted, and his attempts to take over from Hairy Foot, the park's dominant male with pugmarks so large one could see the imprint of individual hairs in the tracks. It is an excellent showcase of Panna's natural habitat and the ground-breaking research that Chundawat and his team conducted, providing an excellent sense of the challenges of Panna's landscape and

the threats posed to the tiger population. The climax features a sad moment for the researchers, when the local team alert Chundawat to the remnants of a tiger body found trapped in a snare and one of their radio-collars cut and thrown to the side. It is one of their favourite females, Sayani, whose young family they have been tracking throughout. Her body was dismembered, and carcass stripped of bones, only her head and parts of her limbs remaining. Chundawat narrates, "I cannot be a dispassionate scientist, Sayani's death affects me deeply". At the time of filming, they could not have known how clearly this moment would foreshadow what was to come.

Conservation Crisis

PTR's decline started in 2002. The tiger population rapidly decreased from 35 to eight or nine in three years. Chundawat situates this within the context of increased demands for tiger products in Chinese traditional medicine and the arrival of a new Field Director in Panna. The male that starred in the documentary, Hairy Foot, was found dead in an abandoned well on a former village site and a number of other mortalities led to a population crisis. Many of the breeding females at the centre of Chundawat's research were found in snares and by March 2005, over twenty of the tigers they had known were missing. The researchers compiled a report on 'The Missing Tigers of Panna' in 2005 and sent it to Project Tiger authorities. However, the authorities did everything in their power to privately and publicly dismiss the report, conducting a 'special census' to discredit it, declaring the population to be 34 tigers before it was even complete. The Wildlife Institute of India conducted their own survey in

2006 reporting between 15 and 35 tigers, estimated from camera trap photography and pugmarks.

Following the change in senior management in Panna in 2002, the research team's access became increasingly restricted, unable to monitor using park elephants due to claimed increase in 'tourist disturbance' to the tigers. After observing a number of snares in the park, Chundawat expressed his concern to the management only to be told to not interfere and mind his own business. When the research team removed snares themselves, this triggered a shift in the relationship between research and management in the park and the beginning of the end of Chundawat's research project. Despite their movements and ability to track and monitor being increasingly restricted, the team began to find more and more evidence of poaching and tigers continued to disappear. When Sayani died in 2002 near Koni village, a known risk area for poaching, Chundawat was in Delhi and informed the head of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) instead of the local Field Director in Panna, handing over a brief report to express how concerning her death was for the overall prospects of Panna's tiger population. An intervention from authorities in Delhi led to increased hostility between the research team and the Field Director, resulting in tighter sanctions on monitoring and yet no change in patrolling or management from local officials. After a visit from the head of the NTCA and noted biologist George Schaller, the Panna Forest Department seized Chundawat's equipment and jeep, alleging that they had entered the park illegally outside of permitted times. After negotiating with state officials in

Bhopal, the equipment and jeep were released and permission re-granted, albeit with severe restrictions.

Visits by notable figures in Indian tiger conservation led to further public alarm about the disappearance of Panna's tigers and slowly the crisis became public knowledge with officials framed as negligent and inactive in the face of poaching, snares and declining numbers of tigers. After an NGO submitted a petition to the Indian Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) in May 2004, the Field Director in Panna stopped all of Chundawat's research activities, accused him of violating numerous regulations and presented him with a bill for the use of elephants in research totalling INR 170,000. The Central Empowered Committee visited Panna and, in their report, found the management to be 'woefully lacking' and suggested all projects be put on hold until better coordination could be managed between authorities and researchers. Chundawat's project was officially suspended on the 24th of May 2004 by state authorities while other wildlife research continued unaffected. He continued his attempts to alert authorities and contact numerous officials at all levels, only gaining permission to enter the park for two months in 2005 (the end of the original agreement for permission at the start of Phase II of the project).

Following another CEC visit and more expressed concern, an immediate assessment was requested to prevent any further decline. Sariska Tiger Reserve, in the Western state of Rajasthan, was also in crisis and its tiger population had been declared locally extinct at the end of

2004.⁶⁵ The subsequent report from the Forest Department claimed that not only were Panna's tigers not in decline, but in fact, there was an extra tiger that had previously not been known. Forest officials publicly ridiculed Chundawat and his allies as attention-seeking troublemakers while the media continued to put pressure on them to uncover the real story of Panna's disappearing tigers, particularly in the wake of Sariska. Authorities at all levels simply refused to accept there were any issues at all. From Principal Chief Conservator of Forests in Bhopal to Field Director in Panna, they had closed ranks.

Over the next few years, Chundawat and Joanna visited Panna occasionally as tourists and continued to try to create pressure through the media to instigate action on what was becoming a very serious decline. They kept in touch with tourist guides to informally monitor and while more reports were commissioned, nothing conclusive resulted. By 2008, Chundawat was sure that only male tigers survived in the reserve. Worried by the crisis and unable to deny it any further, the Chief Wildlife Warden requested permission to translocate two tigresses from other reserves in the state from the Government of India. The NTCA considered the translocation in late 2008 and while Chundawat's name was offered as part of the management committee, he was denied permission. Although they had requested a transfer, the authorities continued to deny any decline up until early 2009, when the park was finally acknowledged devoid of tigers. Despite repeated visits and surveys, the pleas of researchers, NGOs and

⁶⁵ For an account of the crisis see Shahabuddin et al. (2007).

the media, negligence and denial had led to the loss of yet another healthy tiger population in Panna by 2009.

In the final government report titled “Report on the Disappearance of Tigers from Panna Tiger Reserve” (2009), the Special Investigation Team writes “From 2001 April to March 2009 different Field Directors have given priority to different things forgetting the basics of management of [a] tiger reserve, that security was the most important item...Panna was a very special case because the management received so many cautions and warning letter from different agencies. It has been observed by the team that [the] Government of Madhya Pradesh was always in denial mode that there was a crisis in Panna” (Special Investigation Team 2009: 3).

The report states that Panna is a “conflict-ridden landscape with...trigger happy fringe villages and poaching by local communities” (Special Investigation Team 2009: 9) and writes that there were dacoits operating and taking shelter in the forests between April 2006 and July 2008. Crucially, it says, “Poaching was a major cause of tiger extinction in Panna TR” (Special Investigation Team 2009: 13), listing all the wildlife crime incidents recorded from 1995-2009. Minority, nomadic tribal groups such as Pardhis and Bahelias are blamed throughout alongside organised crime networks stretching across the region. At the end, the report reads, “No tiger, even male has been sighted by anyone within the reserve after January 2009. Claim of official of the park couldn’t be substantiated by anyone; therefore it is certain that there is no tiger left in the park.” (Special Investigation Team 2009: 27).

Multiple Versions, Same Outcome

The account above is drawn mostly from Chundawat's (2018) memoir on his research in the park, so here I would like to add a few more of the observations I gathered during fieldwork about the decline and the reasons behind it. This is not to dispute his account but to situate it with a broader context and range of perspectives that I encountered. I was aware of the political fallout that had resulted from the decline and therefore hesitant to bring it up regularly for fear of alienating interlocutors or being seen as taking sides. Instead, whenever I felt comfortable, I would try to ask casually about what happened with people I knew well, as a minor point or question rather than the subject of an interview. Those close to the Forest Department were often uncomfortable discussing the loss of Panna's tigers and most local villagers simply shrugged and said that it had something to do with the Forest Department but nothing to do with them.

A handful of *chowkidaars* (forest watchmen) and even a few tourist guides were convinced, as the officials had been, that it was Dr. Chundawat's fault that the tigers had disappeared. One man involved with the department through outreach activities placed the blame squarely on Chundawat's shoulders, explaining to me that it was his guests who had been running amok in the reserve during the decline and breaking all the regulations, staying inside the park overnight and disturbing the tigers. He said to me that it was Chundawat's friends that had been involved with the poaching, pointing to his Rajasthani Rajput roots as evidence of his 'hunting background'. This echoes the historical association of Rajputs and banditry in the region and the historical 'lawlessness' of forested Bundelkhandi

landscapes (Kasturi 1999), just as the characterisation of fringe villages as 'trigger-happy' and the landscape as 'conflict-ridden' in the final government report discursively prescribes state intervention.

Others spoke about the historic presence of organised criminal gangs in Panna's forests, relocated villagers describing how gangs used to demand food from them and frequently pillage larger and wealthier communities like Badagadi (the first village to be relocated from the park in the 1980s). Former Badagadi residents I spoke with explained that they always built their homes with multiple exits and escape routes in case the gangs appeared at night whereas others described how they would simply make food for the gangs and leave them to go on their way. These supposed gangs came from outside of Panna and roamed the jungles around the Southern and Eastern edges of the park, away from the tourist zone and outside of the gaze of officials and even Dr. Chundawat during his research, who some told me was under threat until the gang leaders were persuaded otherwise.

Concerning the poaching that led to the crisis, I heard multiple times about a dispute between a prominent landowning family and the Forest Department in which the family had planted crops on land that the foresters claimed was inside the boundaries of the park. Rumour has it that instead of allowing their harvest, the Forest Department set fire to the crops, prompting the landowners to retaliate through hunting. One young boy described seeing a line of hunters walking through the passage beneath the Gangau Dam, which leads directly into the core of the tiger reserve, two guns each draped across their shoulders. "They were definitely Thakurs

[Rajputs]”, he said, “They had big earrings and large moustaches that curled up like this [twisting his fingers as if to turn up the oiled ends of a moustache]”.

In all of these accounts, we can find echoes of the views expressed in the colonial descriptions of Panna’s forests and diamonds and the purported lawlessness of this part of India, cultural prejudices against Rajput or tribal bandits or the poor management of natural resources. The local agents of the state (the Madhya Pradesh and Panna Forest Departments) appear incompetent, shifting blame and accusations of mismanagement to local people and those that know the area best, all cloaked in a climate of generalised, constructed criminality and mistrust. This crisis helped to reinforce the articulation of tigers’ vulnerability to the ‘threat’ of humans and prescribe particular interventions to prevent something so drastic ever happening again by increasing the control of the Forest Department over both tigers and local people.

It is interesting to note that neither the final report by the Special Investigation Team nor Dr. Chundawat’s book explicitly mention corruption within the Forest Department in Panna during the crisis. In the former, the words ‘corrupt’ and ‘corruption’ do not feature at all, and in the latter, ‘corruption’ is only used as a general comment about some flaws within the Indian forest bureaucracy as a whole. There are no mentions of bribery or the involvement of forest officials in poaching specific to the Panna crisis, though the level of wildlife crimes reported by the Special Investigation Team (not to mention those that have gone unreported) suggests that local officers were at best negligent and at worst actively involved. This thesis

does not have the evidence to relay any accusations or place blame for corruption where experts, even those vehemently opposed to the Forest Department, have not. However, during my conversations with local forest workers, even in the earliest days of fieldwork, a few told me that following the local extinction of the tiger population and a change in management, numerous officers were disciplined for their engagement in hunting, poaching and trafficking, ending up suspended or in court on specific charges. These changes took effect with the arrival of a new Field Director and the beginning of the 'Panna Revival'. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, I did not attempt to substantiate these claims or seek their elaboration. Still, the atmosphere of mistrust and negligence surrounding the loss of Panna's tigers to poaching, the explicit refusal to engage with concerned scientists, and the level of wildlife crime in the area at the time suggests that forest officers may have been much worse than simply 'incompetent' over an extended period of time.

The Panna Revival

An ambitious project to repopulate Panna with tigers began in early 2009 under the guidance of the new Field Director R.S. Murthy. Following the previous request for translocation, two parks were nominated to send tigresses to Panna. The first tigress, T1, came from Bandhavgarh National Park after the then-Field Director in Bandhavgarh commissioned a three-month behavioural study to determine her suitability for translocation. The proposed translocation was met with resistance locally, particularly from members of the tourism industry who did not see why Bandhavgarh should

have to pay for Panna's mistakes. However, the study continued and T1 was translocated to Panna in March 2009 along with T2 from Kanha Tiger Reserve, whose move was also protested⁶⁶. With Panna declared officially devoid of tigers only just before this translocation, the comprehensive project plans were drawn up in September 2009 to relocate four females and two males in total to re-build Panna's tiger population.

A male tiger, T3, was translocated from Pench Tiger Reserve in November 2009 and placed in a large enclosure in the centre of the park. Despite being provided food (both dead and alive), T3 did not adapt well to his new circumstances, and upon being released from the enclosure, headed directly south at the start of what would become an epic month-long trial for Mr. Murthy and his staff. Moving at a brisk pace, and all the while tracked via radio-collar, T3 headed towards the southern border of the core area, coming eventually to the Ken River near Patori village. He crossed the river with ease, dropping in and out of range for days at a time, causing concern amongst the staff that this would spell the end for the revival of Panna Tiger Reserve. With a team of five elephants, 70 staff and numerous local villagers, Mr. Murthy followed T3 as he headed across the South Panna landscape, setting up stationary and mobile camps to feed and pay villagers for their assistance in recovering the big cat. After losing, finding, attempting to trap T3 and push him back into the reserve, he would not stop. T3 was eventually spotted near Ramna village, 200km from Panna,

⁶⁶ Anon (2009). Tiger translocated to Panna tiger reserve. *Economic Times Online*.

only 300km from his home in Panna after a winding 450 km journey lasting over a month into the dead of winter. The tiger was re-tranquilised and loaded into a truck on Christmas Day 2009 and returned to Panna, where they had covered the enclosure with female feline urine and where he eventually settled, breeding with T1 and fathering the first new litter of Panna cubs, born on April 16, 2010. T2 delivered her own litter in October that year.

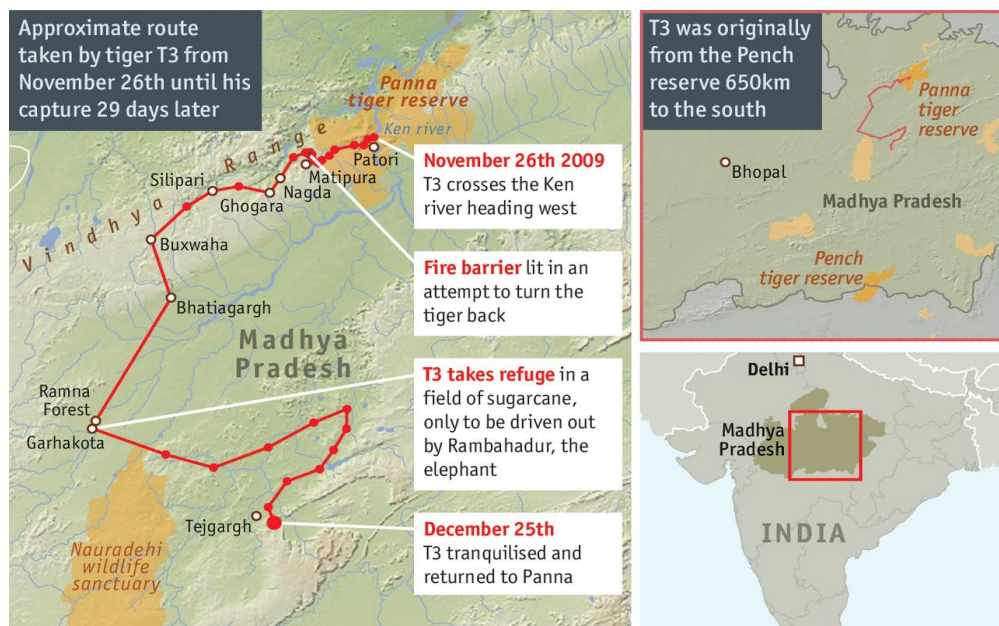


Figure 26: T3's epic journey (Source: The Economist, December 2018)

As part of the second phase of the project, in March 2011, two orphaned cubs, T4 and T5, were hand-reared by park staff in Kanha and successfully re-wilded in Panna. Another tigress, T6, was relocated from Panna in November 2014 and a male caught near a university campus on the outskirts of the state capital, Bhopal, was released in Panna as T7 in November 2015. Each of these translocated tigers were radio-collared, as

were many of their offspring, allowing newly established tracking teams to monitor their movements around the clock. Over time, the population recovered, and the tiger population is now back to its pre-crisis levels. Wildlife Institute of India researchers last counted 24 tigers in the core area of the park, although estimates for the buffer were yet unclear at the time of research.⁶⁷

Tourist guides and officials alike regularly claim that there are over 40 tigers in Panna and its surrounds, although as Chundawat (2018) explains, there are always a few transient individuals who roam between large areas of forest, particularly in landscapes like Eastern Madhya Pradesh, making it difficult to estimate exactly how many animals are in the park at any given time. In any case, the success of the reintroduction project is undeniable, and its story has been widely recognised nationally and in the popular press⁶⁸. Field Director R.S. Murthy was awarded the WWF-PATA 'Bagh Mitra Award' in 2011, numerous staff members were recognised with awards by the state government of Madhya Pradesh and Panna was issued an NTCA Award for Excellence for 'Active Management' in 2010-11.

Mr. Murthy: The Man behind the Success

By all accounts, the key figure throughout the reintroduction project was the Field Director, Mr. Murthy, an inspiring and dedicated leader whose patience and compassion was only matched by his determination and

⁶⁷ Personal communication from WII researchers to author (20/06/2018).

⁶⁸ Anon. (2014); Mitra, P. (2019); <https://www.panna-national-park.com/blog/success-story-tigers-panna/>; <http://www.mptourism.com/blog/panna.html>;

discipline. He simultaneously managed to build a spirit of cooperation amongst his staff and even the lower level officers and workers, while regaining tight control over the park. Members of staff described their fear of Mr. Murthy both as a stickler for the rules but also their desire not to disappoint him as a charismatic leader. The educator involved with the tiger reserve's outreach programmes explained clearly that it was Murthy's ability to execute this dual personality which made him such a successful leader, exuding love and dedication as well as tireless effort and unwavering discipline. This proved even more remarkable in the atmosphere of mistrust and negligence that had led to the crisis in the first place.

He suspended officers contravening the rules, sought out criminals in the forest himself, often patrolling through the night by jeep, on elephant back and even occasionally on foot, met with communities who were being relocated, and rewarded members of his team. He had a deep desire to protect Panna's new tigers, and crucially he understood that it was not only the dedication of the senior staff that mattered but that of the junior officers and daily wage workers from surrounding villages. Workers and officers would remark to me that he was never egotistical, a simple man who would sit on the floor and fraternize with the *chowkidaars* (forest watchmen) and *mahawats* (elephant handlers) while at the same time welcoming officials from all over to his bungalow in town and working hard to publicise Panna's growing success story to the outside world.

Mr. Murthy set up programs for public outreach, founding the Panna Nature Camps in 2009 and continuing work with the Pardhi and Bahelia communities stereotypically blamed for poaching. When a member of the public approached him to write a children's storybook about the Panna revival, he worked tirelessly to make it a reality, and *Our Tigers Return* was published in Hindi and English (Sekhsaria 2016). The birth of T1's first litter on April 16th, 2010 is celebrated as a tiger birthday and Global Tiger Day (July 29th) is held each year in the monsoon heat where local schoolchildren meet officials, take part in quizzes and see demonstrations from Panna's K9 unit.



Figures 27 & 28: Scenes from Global Tiger Day

All of these initiatives are driven by a slogan that Mr. Murthy instituted- *Jan samarthan se baagh sanrakshan* (Tiger Conservation from/with the people's support). This slogan is found on poster boards at the PTR Division Headquarters in Panna town and on the grounds of the

Department accommodation at the Hinauta entry gate. Both signs were erected at the start of the reintroduction project and sadly are in need of repair. Some of the words are difficult to read as holes have formed in the canvas of the posters, some of the intact areas stained with bird droppings or peeling from the edges of its metal frame. Alongside these slogans stands a poster for the Panna Nature Camps that continue each winter from November to February.



Figure 29: Sign at Forest Division Headquarters (tiger conservation with/from the people's support)



Figure 30: Panna Nature Camp sign at Forest offices

Engaged Communities? Eco-Vikas Simitis and Panna Nature Camps

The story of Panna's tigers is remarkable. From a conservation perspective, it has been a success to recover the population. Tourism is growing, and the park staff continue to monitor a number of tigers via radio-collar around the clock. Incidents of poaching have decreased, though not disappeared entirely.⁶⁹ This was the success story I had originally intended to research, the bare bones of which I knew before I started. So, I arrived in Panna hoping to explore the impact of the conservation success on local communities, aiming to see how these outreach programmes may change local people's perspectives on the conservation effort and what opportunities they may be afforded through employment in the project or tourism. I discovered quickly that the local reception of the conservation success was, put simply, indifferent or unfavourable in the majority of cases. In the communities I visited first, in those early weeks of pilot fieldwork, my interlocutors were not interested in discussing the 'Panna Revival'. Instead, they explained the adverse impacts of the tiger reserve on their lives, their inability to pursue traditional livelihoods and the difficulties they faced from crop and livestock depredation. They lamented the need for water and work and the lack of help from the Forest Department.

Having planned to discuss opinions regarding the revival, I brought a copy of *Our Tigers Return* as a fieldwork tool to start conversations, and

⁶⁹ See Pandey, P. (2018).

while most had an interest in the photographs of villagers that had worked on the project, few cared about the story of Panna's tigers. They had admiration for Mr. Murthy and his work, but their reality remained the same, an atmosphere of mistrust and strict regulations around the borders of the tiger reserve where they had lived for generations. Mr. Murthy had been promoted and transferred to Bhopal, and a new Field Director had just started only three months before. So, I began to ask, where was all the community engagement I had heard about? Where was the *jan samarthan se baagh samrakshan* spirit?

I had observed that there were points of regular interaction between forest officers and local villagers and had been introduced to the chairman of an *Eco-Vikas Simiti* (Eco-Development Committee) on the very first day of fieldwork in Hinauta. Educators in Panna involved with the Forest Department had described the success of the Panna Nature Camps, and researchers working in the area, as well as those involved in the tourism industry, had spoken to me about the need to engage local communities and the positive impacts of increased tourist traffic to the park. However, these narratives contradicted what I had heard in my early conversations with people living along the border of the reserve. So, I set out to explore these forms of engagement in greater depth and see what exactly I could gather about 'community outreach' around PTR.

Why Engage at All? Joint Forest Management in India

The notion of community involvement or local participation has not been central to policy in Indian government forestry since its inception

during British colonial rule. Management structures and regulations embodied in a succession of Forest Acts (1927) and National Forest Policies (1894; 1952) emphasised centralised control and expert, technical administration, purposefully excluding local communities and prohibiting certain mode of livelihoods in favour of others (Gadgil and Guha 1993; Rangarajan 1996)⁷⁰. However, with critiques and shortcomings mounting throughout the 1970s, the 1988 National Forest Policy laid out terms for Joint Forest Management (JFM), encouraging local participation in forest and natural resource management. The critical literature on the shortcomings of JFM notes that key issues included tenure (Nayak 2003), the co-opting of pre-existing indigenous forest protection regimes and institutions (Nayak and Berkes 2008), the top-down dispensation of material benefits (Ota et al. 2014) and the lack of formal training to help foresters (Rishi et al. 2007)⁷¹.

JFM and Eco-Development Committees in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh (MP) has one of the highest rates of participation in JFM initiatives across India with the Madhya Pradesh State Government issuing its own regulations following the launch of JFM in 1990. The latest figures available from the Forest Research Institute in Dehradun (2011) have Madhya Pradesh as the state with the nation's highest number of JFM committees (15,228) covering 6,687,390 ha of forest area, suggesting the

⁷⁰ Technically the central administration of forests in India existed only until 1935 when they became the responsibility of state governments. However, forests have been on the concurrent list of the Indian Constitution since 1976, allowing the Government of India to legislate on forestry issues centrally (Saxena 1997: 3)

highest participation of local villagers in forest management anywhere in India⁷². State resolutions dating back to the early 1980s attempt to tackle the issue of forest degradation through village cooperation and the formation of different Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs). The third resolution (07/02/2000) divides forest areas in three zones: First Zone (National Parks and Sanctuaries), Second Zone (Other dense forest areas where forest products are being extracted) and Third Zone (Depleted forest areas).

Each zone qualifies for different forms of JFMC and village cooperation towards the goals of JFM. For example, Forest Protection Committees exist to protect well-stocked forests and Village Forest Committees help to rehabilitate degraded forest areas, however they cannot be involved in the management of a First Zone forest area, which is under the direct management of the Forest Department and subject to the strictest regulations regarding wildlife conservation and biodiversity. Eco-Development Committees can be formed in villages within a five kilometres radius of a First Zone forest area to ensure biodiversity conservation and assist with village development, and they can be involved with rehabilitating forestlands and extraction of certain resources in the buffer zone of a National Park⁷³.

⁷² http://www.frienviis.nic.in/Database/JFM-Committees-and-Forest_Area_2243.aspx. This number is now likely to be higher. This does not necessarily include traditional village-managed forest lands in certain states, such as Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand (Agrawal 2005) or Gramya jungles in Orissa (Nayak 2003) or the allowances made for areas governed under the Schedule Five of the Indian Constitution.

⁷³ JPS Associates Ltd. (2015). *Joint Forest Management Handbook: Capacity Development for Forest Management and Training of Personnel*. Submitted to SPMU,

A handbook published by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (2013) on JFM for Front Line Forest Department Staff, reads, “An Eco-Development Committee (EDC) is similar to JFMCs but meant for villages in Protected Areas and their buffer zones. Their set-up, working, role and responsibilities, powers, funds etc. are as per the state level orders. Their area of operation is restricted to Protected Areas, and forest and non-forest areas near protected areas. EDCs are set up with twin objectives- to protect wildlife and other biodiversity, and also undertake eco-development activities” (MoEF 2013: 4). These committees are meant to be formed jointly by Forest Departments and local communities. However, their structure and management are the responsibility of forest officers and each of their requests for funds must be approved by the area’s most senior forest official.

The Madhya Pradesh JFM handbook (2015) details the different responsibilities of officers of different ranks towards the management of these committees, providing clear information about monitoring activities, taking minutes, electing members and managing funds. Central to this are the regular meetings of the committees and the creation of micro plans in accordance with Working Plans and forest regulations, both recurring shortcomings of JFM across India (Bhattacharya et al. 2009; Saigal 2000; Vasavada et al. 1999). Panna Tiger Reserve falls into the category of a First Zone forest, and surrounding the core of the tiger reserve, an inviolate

space solely for the purposes of biodiversity conservation, there is a multiple-use buffer zone for limited JFM activities. There are an estimated 43,125 people living in 42 villages within the buffer zone and many more along the periphery of the buffer (Kolipaka 2018a: 31). My research took me to 19 of these villages to interview people on a variety of topics, one of which was village development. I sought to understand what role the Forest Department played in village development, in an area where the existence of the National Park has hindered the improvement of infrastructure and the establishment of large-scale industry, and where the Department was often the most present form of state authority or government for kilometres around (Yadav 2018).

“Just a Name”

On my first visit to Panna, I met with the PTR Joint Director (JD), who was quick to explain the efforts the Forest Department was making to engage with local communities. He told me that there were over 400 people locally employed and paid on daily wages and there were 18,000 Eco-Development Committees across Madhya Pradesh. A few weeks later, tourist visitors from Pune, accompanied by the leaders of an NGO, met with the JD at the Hinauta Gate where they were staying for their safari holiday. As he had with me, he told them about the ways the park engages with local communities through EDCs and the visitors applauded their efforts.

I had heard about EDCs from my very first day and yet saw no evidence of their work, nor did I hear about their meetings. I knew that they were required to meet regularly and that a large sum of money was set

aside for a budget decided by the state government. They were comprised of members from across different communities within the village, as mandated by the regulations, and forest officers, up to the rank of Forest Ranger, were responsible for their running. Yet, I did not notice anything happening. While the village council (*Gram Sabha*) met regularly, I was unsure about the *Eco-Vikas Simiti* (EDC). During interviews with villagers about village development in Hinauta, Jardhoba, Bador, Madla, Madaiyan and Kudan, it became clear that the EDCs did exist, had elections for chairman and secretary positions, held meetings and had members and that there were funds available for eco-development activities. Some proposed projects included wells and water tanks, building pipelines, clearing invasive species and cultivating fodder plantations.

However, in every community I visited, villagers considered the EDC ineffective and it did nothing to lessen the grievances about the Forest Department. While a few projects were funded in the early days of the EDC, most communities could only point to one or two actual results from this type of engagement. More often than not, they included water tanks or wells, all of which turned out to be unsuccessful and unmaintained. Others spoke about the distribution of a few gas cylinders, but villagers refused to use them either out of fear of explosion or because they preferred cooking with firewood. Moreover, none of the villagers could afford to refill them and did not have any refill stations nearby (cf. Ota et al. 2014 on material benefit provisioning).

The EDC chairmen in Hinauta and Bador explained to me that there was a budget of INR 25 *lakh*⁷⁴ set aside for a range of possible development projects, and although there were records of meetings, the committee often did not actually meet as a group. Instead, the Chairman or Secretary visited each committee member's house to gather signatures as proof on paper that a meeting had taken place.⁷⁵ In Bador, the chairman complained that he has repeatedly applied for funds for development projects through the proper channels but has never been successful. Either there are no officials at the Division Headquarters if he goes in person, or the officials turn him away to speak with the Forest Ranger in charge managing the committee, or the Forest Ranger dismisses any proposals out of hand. The Hinauta chairman explained that in the past a number of 'schemes' had been funded through the EDC, including poultry and goat rearing in place of cattle and buffalo, meant to lessen pressure on forest lands for grazing and fodder. However, the previous chairman had falsely requested these funds, deceiving the Forest Department and pocketing the money himself while no one reared poultry or goats. The result has been that the rangers and senior officials are reluctant to release funds now, and easily able to dismiss requests. This supports arguments made by Savyasaachi (1999) and Vira (1999) to understand the actual dynamics of cooperation between foresters and villagers before assuming they approach JFM with the same perspective.

⁷⁴ 1 *lakh* = 100,000

⁷⁵ cf. Das 2011; Mathur 2015; Tarlo 2003 on the importance of paper in Indian state bureaucracies.

When I asked other villagers, some pointed to the current EDC chairman's tribal caste as evidence of why nothing was getting done, and others simply said that the Forest Department doesn't exist to help the village so don't expect the EDC to be anything more than 'just a name'⁷⁶. It would appear that the Forest Department refuses to meet any EDC requests seen to infringe on the vulnerable well-being of the *jungle* and its animals. Moreover, the creation of EDCs further reifies and bounds individual villages as separate and disconnected from neighbouring communities. This isolates communities and inefficiently channels resources for village development.

Jeffrey and Sundar (1999) and Agrawal (1999) highlight that issues often emerge in JFM from contradictory or uncritical conceptualisations of 'community'. They critique the tendency to treat villages as homogeneous groups who share common interests and self-organise harmoniously (cf. Leach et al. 1997). Instead, recognising the internal heterogeneity, dynamics of conflict and local power relations are key to the successful implementation of JFM. Agrawal (1999) argues that the appeal of 'community' for conservation is its romanticised evocation of a tightly knit group working together with shared beliefs that happen to coincide with conservation ethics of biodiversity preservation. Ultimately, he explains, participatory programmes create committees to encourage and foster this

⁷⁶ This resonates with what Agarwal (2001) has extensively written about participation and rural development and the failure to recognise local power dynamics in the rigidity of 'capacity-building' or 'participatory' initiatives. Throughout the thesis, I will draw attention to the importance of understanding local dynamics between village groups (often along lines of kinship and caste) to fully grasp the relationship between Forest Department and local people.

type of 'community'. However, this encouragement is based on a different understanding of community- as a consistent, structured and organised group. Programmes try to create or encourage the 'community' they want to see rather than understand the dynamics present in the groups themselves (Agrawal 1999).

In the case of Hinauta, the organisation of the EDC did not reflect the internal dynamics within the village, nor did it actively lead to any recognisable form of consensus or initiative on the part of the villagers. The disinterest from the lower level forest officers to attend meetings or communicate about any form of 'eco-development' demonstrate JFM's status as a minor concern within the forest bureaucracy, something they are not trained well to implement (Rishi et al. 2007; Vira 1999). Moreover, as Vasavada et al. (1999) argue, the proliferation of different committees through government schemes like JFM often fail to involve certain villagers (particularly women and the extremely poor- cf. Agarwal 2001), can concentrate power in the hands of particular individuals and confuse both residents and bureaucrats when different government agencies set up committees to opposing and contradictory ends (cf. Cooke and Kothari 2009).

I returned to the JD to ask about this inactivity in the EDCs towards the end of my fieldwork, and he simply stated that there were plenty of schemes out there, but no one approached them to apply. He dismissed the villagers as ignorant and uneducated, wanting a handout, stating, "Why should the Forest Department help them on its own? They should come to us with ideas and we can help them then, but no one comes, so what can

we do?” He assumed a level of passiveness and disinterest on the part of villagers when in fact; it was more likely villagers’ sense of frustration with the endless bureaucracy and lack of information that prevented any further applications from EDC committees.

As Baviskar (1999) and Savyasaachi (1999) explain, ‘participation’ does not automatically align community interests with those of conservation (also see Agrawal 2005), and ‘eco-development’ often assumes a false level of convergence between the priorities of the Forest Department and those of village development. It can fail to acknowledge the variety and specific character of relationships between local communities and their environment and their desire for infrastructural improvements or economic mobility. Instead, participatory processes often simply seek to encourage an entire new type of relationship with the surrounding environment as something vulnerable and precious to preserve as ‘wild nature’, reinforced by the wider wildlife and conservation community in India and abroad (Brockington et al. 2009; Jalais 2010). This is often at odds with the multiple ways in which people living in and around forested areas relate to their surrounds (see Baviskar 1995; 1999a; Savyasaachi 1999).

I argue that forms of ‘community engagement’ do the same in Panna by propagating colonial articulations of wild and vulnerable people and *jungles* in Panna in need of state separation and control. They encourage a particular type of relationship with the surrounding *jungle* in reference to other forms of ‘community’ markedly different from local ‘communities’ of villagers formerly dependent on the *jungle* for their livelihoods. One of these other ‘communities’ is known to supporters of the Panna conservation

efforts as 'the Panna family'. Creating a 'Panna family' was part of Mr. Murthy's valiant and well-intentioned efforts to include local people in supporting tiger conservation and build a 'family' to protect Panna's tigers within the ranks of the forest staff, expressed in the slogan '*Jan samarthan se baagh sanrakshan*'.

In social media posts, posters and statements by Forest officials and conservationists, local villagers in Panna are often lumped unknowingly into the 'Panna Family' as part of a prevailing narrative of local support for tiger conservation. However, the underlying assumptions that define its membership are based on a discourse of vulnerable and precious tigers and *jungles* to the exclusion of vulnerable local resource users. Nowhere is this very particular relationship to the *jungle* as a vulnerable wilderness more clearly expressed and encouraged than in the Panna Nature Camps.

The Panna Nature Camps

The Panna Nature Camps (PNCs) run every Sunday from November to February and are an educational outreach initiative started during Mr. Murthy's time as Field Director. Originally, the PNCs were co-funded by WWF India, however they are now fully funded by the Forest Department with a little help from fees paid by participants (INR 150 per child and INR 300 per adult). Each PNC day involves taking schoolchildren and teachers from the region and exposing them to a range of different activities and information regarding PTR. I was fortunate enough to be accepted to volunteer at the nature camps for the 2017-2018 season, leaving Hinauta every Sunday morning on the PNC bus at 5:00am with my neighbour, who

happened to be the driver. I had met the teachers who ran the Nature Camps during my pilot fieldwork and had asked permission from them and the Field Director before joining.

Each Nature Camp started with a presentation at the Department Headquarters, where teachers would explain the founding of the park, its flora and fauna and show video clips of the reintroduction project. They would ask the students about their relationships with *prakriti* ('nature') often focusing on the contemporary disconnection with *jungles*, repeating every week how humans depend on nature for clean air and water and food and yet are disconnected from it. They explained that the purpose of the Nature Camp was for them to learn about nature so they could care for it. They often spoke in terms of 'balance', something that existed in the past, when both humans and nature thrived together, and one that has been disrupted, leading to more human illness, shorter lives and the destruction of the *jungle*. In these presentations, environmental discourses of threatened, vulnerable nature mixed with scientific explanations of homeostasis and interdependency between humans and *jungles*. This echoes conceptualisations of vulnerability in conservation and ecology as "the susceptibility of a system to a negative impact" (Williams et al. 2008: 2621), with contemporary ways of living 'specified' (cf. Choy 2011) as the source of such negative impact.

After photos in front of the PNC billboard, the students filled the bus, which drove out of town. Turning down the NMDC road towards the forest, the bus took a sharp left after Kemas Village to cross into the core area of the tiger reserve, over the Kemas *nala* (stream) and up towards the

first destination, the HN1 watchtower. After a session of birdwatching and drawing, the group enjoyed breakfast and the resource persons led a 'nature walk' during which they quizzed the students about the different trees in Panna's forests. After a quick stop at the Kemas Falls camp to look at bee nests and maybe some vultures, the bus would take the students to the Hinauta Gate grounds to play games and get more information about the value of Panna's forests, see a demonstration about rope tying and sometimes perform their own songs. Lunch and a rest followed after which the students would line up for a photograph in front of the small museum at the gate before a quick visit to learn more about the park.

In the Museum, there were maps of the park and displays about the animals inside, with various interactive boards about feeding habits or mating behaviour. One of the kids' favourite displays was a comparison between Sambhar antlers and Chinkara horns, which the resource persons used to explain the difference between deer and antelopes. Opposite this display, in the corner of the small room, was a board about forest livelihoods and fires. On this board, photos of villagers carrying bundles of wood accompanied text which described the use of the forest for fuel in local villages and the need to avoid overuse. Directly next to these images of chopped wood and villagers' 'extracting it' were photographs of forest fires, described as "the greatest threat to Indian jungles".

This small board and the Museum as a whole articulated the simultaneous dependence on and threat of local people to a precious and vulnerable *jungle*. The *jungle*, in its vulnerability, was something to be

cherished for the services it provides (clean air, clean water) but not depended upon for fuel or extractive livelihoods. The museum, and the Nature Camps as a whole, propagated an articulation of the vulnerability of the *jungle* and its animals, emphasising potential loss of biodiversity to the negative impacts of “threatening processes” like human resource extraction (Williams et al. 2008: Wilson et al. 2005). This discursively legitimises the intervention of the state and wider civil society to care for it as a ‘Panna family’ by supporting the continued control of the Forest Department in its separation of ‘village’ and *jungle*.



Figure 31: The Author and PNC resource person in PTR

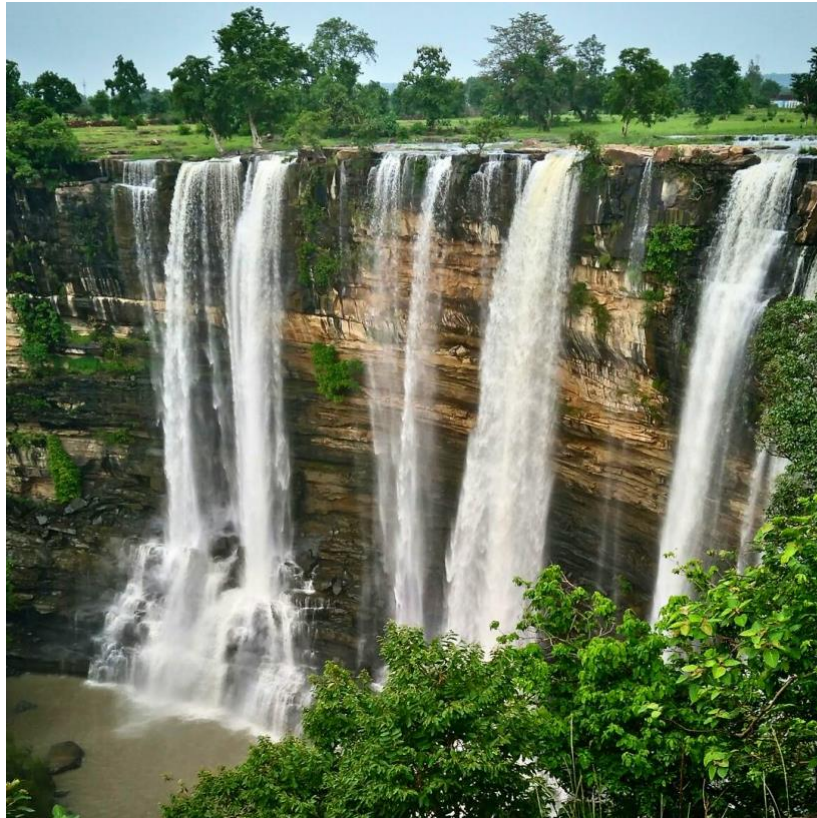


Figure 32: Kemasan Falls



Figure 33: The Badagadi Guesthouse



Figure 34: The Hinauta gate museum (used as accommodation for visiting guides)

Finally, after the museum, the group got back into the minibus and went into the park for a safari, easily the most exciting part of the experience. This final activity helped to encourage a very particular type of sanctioned relationship between people and their environment, one in which a distant non-extractive appreciation of 'nature' is idealised in the figure of the 'eco-tourist', the conceptual opposite of the 'threatening' villagers displayed in the museum and the disconnected members of the public discussed in the morning's presentation. During the safari, we would stop at the Badagadi guest house, near to the enclosure where the tigers were released during the reintroduction project and where Shivraj Singh Chouhan, former Chief Minister of MP had stayed, for the students to complete a feedback form and quiz on the day.

This was the culmination of a particular articulation of a vulnerable and threatened *jungle* controlled and protected by the state and only

admired by a separated and distant public.⁷⁷ The group would then drive back out of the park and to Panna.



Figures 35 & 36: Students at the Hinauta gate (left) and on a nature walk (right) during a PNC

For Whom and To What End?

Undoubtedly, the Panna Nature Camps promote PTR well and help make conservation more accessible in the region. The low rates, amount of resources and activities available are excellent. The students are actively engaged, and the teachers and parents enjoy it, as did I. However, I noticed that all of the schools who participated in the programme during the year I volunteered came from non-forest affected, urban areas. The students had

⁷⁷ Scholars like Lorimer and Driessen (2015) have argued that for rewilding projects in Europe, people are largely “urban, postproductivist observers: scientists, tourists and a few local publics who will supply their needs” (Lorimer and Driessen 2015: 639). This draws on the long tradition of seeing post-productivist rural landscapes as amenable to tourism (See Kordel 2016).

very little understanding of *prakriti* or the *jungle* before the camps, not knowing the names of the trees or any of their uses. They were unaware of any basic facts to do with wildlife or the Forest Department. They had perhaps learned something minimal in science class but really lived a life distant from the forest and its inhabitants. The programme had been designed around this particular group: middle class urban schoolchildren.

This was clearest when, one week, a hostel from West Panna participated. The hostel was set up for poor village children of academic ability to attend school closer to town and thus many of the children were boarders from tribal villages elsewhere. During the nature walk, they were able to answer every single one of the resource persons' questions, identifying tree and grass species, providing lists of uses and even pointing out features that the resource persons (themselves urban-based middle-class people) did not know. The resource persons faltered, and the students felt uncomfortable when lectured about the problems with using the forest for fuel and other resources, something they clearly did in their home villages, livelihood activities central to their family lives. The PNCs were clearly not aimed at 'communities' who depended on the forest for their livelihoods or 'communities' who the Forest Department was seeking to displace through village relocation (cf. Agrawal 1999; Savyasaachi 1999). My friends and neighbours in Hinauta would have been less than ideal candidates, through their intimate knowledge and historic relationships with the forest as a place of vast resources and spiritual connections (See Kolipaka 2018a for more detailed understanding of spirituality and forest-dependent villages around PTR).

Throughout the entire season, people in forest-border villages asked me why their children did not get a chance to participate in the PNCs. I responded that they could apply, so they should ask their school. The senior clerks at the Forest Division said, “What can we do if they don’t apply? We are here if they want to come”, repeating what I had heard from the JD about JFM initiatives. It would appear that these forms of ‘community engagement’ required a specific type of ‘community’ whose relationships with forest land and resources did not centre on extracting or depending on those resources to live. Therefore, they did not actively engage the ‘communities’ most immediately local to PTR, though social media and statements by forest officials and conservationists appear to suggest that all local people are part of the ‘Panna family’.

The Panna Nature Camps catered more for a group known on social media platforms as ‘Friends of Panna’: middle-class urban resident ‘wildlifera’⁷⁸ interested in *prakriti* (nature) as something to be preserved and protected through wildlife conservation and tourism, controlled and managed by the State Forest Department and separate from the ‘threat’ of humans. Historically conservation in India has been the purview of urban elites, a group of which lobbied Indira Gandhi to pass the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972. The same group often make up the Indian Forestry Service that manage Protected Areas as well as the visitors, like the tourists from Pune, who come to see the flora and fauna within (Fleischmann 2015; Rangarajan

⁷⁸ An Indian English colloquialism used to refer to people who broadly support wildlife conservation and celebrate India’s natural heritage.

2003). This is what Jalais (2010) draws attention to in labelling tiger conservation in India as 'cosmopolitan', and this is the relationship to the *jungle* encouraged by the PNCs.

Thus, while the PNCs make PTR more accessible to students and engage local people, they fail to actively engage groups whose livelihoods and traditions have been intimately tied to the forests and who therefore do not qualify for membership to the target 'community' for such outreach. Instead, the Forest Department appears to 'engage' local people in more mundane, everyday ways that are often harmful and intrusive, as the following chapters explicate. Despite working towards more community participation in forestry and conservation, programmes like the Panna Nature Camps only serve to further the articulation and separation of threatening 'village' and vulnerable *jungle*, whose relationship is dictated by the Forest Department, a discursive legitimisation of state control whose colonial origins I have traced in this chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at the history of Panna Tiger Reserve, following the success of its early years through the crisis and the revival to current attempts from the Forest Department to engage local communities. In colonial and post-Independence accounts of Panna's diamonds and forests, it is apparent that state management of natural resources has carried prejudice against local resource users and imposed a bureaucracy which excludes them to the benefit of state control. The story of Panna's

tiger crisis and subsequent revival reveals the challenges that can arise when state management ignores local knowledge and fails to include critical voices from academia and research. Situating this in a broader history of purported lawlessness in the area and the accounts of local people points to further prejudice against “trigger happy villagers” and “criminal tribes” when in reality, the decline of the tiger population happened due to active ignorance and negligence on the part of state employees and officials. The colonial articulation of ‘wild India’ and ‘wild Indians’ is evident in these accounts and it continues to unfold in contemporary conservation practice.

The inability of the Forest Department to address criticisms and the paramount role of individual personalities points to deeper structural issues in the management of wildlife in India conservation, brought into stark relief by Mr. Murthy whom many consider single-handedly responsible for Panna’s revival. A look at Joint Forest Management and efforts at ‘local community engagement’ revealed flaws in certain initiatives, how programmes target urban-based middle-class supporters of wildlife conservation as opposed to those most impacted by the reserve, local villagers previously dependent on the forest for their livelihoods. This reveals how the engagement of local communities (or lack thereof) continues to disfavour forest-dependent peoples, continuing to propagate colonial articulations of ‘village’ and *jungle* as wild, unruly and vulnerable, in need of separation and control by the state.

What does this tell us about ‘engagement’ between the Forest Department and local communities? And how do we go about analysing or evaluating it? Firstly, it is important to clarify which communities the Forest

Department engages and what form that engagement takes. Instead of analysing initiatives such as the Panna Nature Camps on the basis of number of participants or content, it is crucial to examine the participants and their backgrounds relative to that content. Secondly, it is also important to see what the effects of that engagement on the practices of the participants and the Forest Department.

For Panna Nature Camp participants living in urban areas, they may become more environmentally aware and work towards wildlife conservation, but their lives will remain relatively unaffected by PTR, as it always has been. The camps do nothing to disrupt the current practices of forest management in their area and in fact increase the support for the Forest Department among influential urban residents. This does nothing to change the way the Forest Department approaches forest-dependent people. It instead demonstrates that they are subject to a different, more harmful and disenfranchising form of engagement. It is this latter type of engagement which merits further attention in the context of conflict and forest degradation that motivated JFM to begin with. Engagement with local people that have adverse outcomes for their communities such as the enforcement of regulations that curtail traditional livelihoods, the recruitment of villagers into forest labour and processes of village relocation, are the foci of the following chapters. These forms of engagement tend to further disenfranchise those communities and expose the paltry efforts of the Forest Department to provide any form of development in areas where they are often the only recognisable agent of the state, as well as their continual articulation of the antagonistic vulnerabilities of people and *jungle*.

Chapter 5

Engagement as Event: Rules and Authority along the Border of PTR

‘Our laws are such of a kind that every villager breaks one forest law every day of his life’

- Elwin Verrier (1964: 115)

‘The rules were only made for the poor’

- Scheduled Caste Former Forest Worker, Hinauta Village (September 2018)

Less than one kilometre from inside the Hinauta Gate to Panna Tiger Reserve, there is a small shrine to *Kheriya Mata*, a local goddess. The shrine is marked by tall multi-coloured flags, their poles made from bamboo, a series of bells hung above an altar, populated by stone figurines and the remnants of the last *pujas* (rituals) conducted there by local villagers; coconuts and pieces of fruit, flowers and clay *dias*⁷⁹ whose wicks have long since stopped burning like the incense sticks, only their smell lingering. Kheriya was once a neighbouring village to Hinauta where Yadav herders would bring their cattle, buffaloes and goats in the monsoon to graze and

⁷⁹ Cup-shaped oil lamp.

Kondar (Kheruwa) and Gond Adivasis would farm and collect forest products. *Kheriya Mata*'s stacked slabs of sandstone resembling a former temple is the only structure remaining.

The shrine for *Kheriya Mata* is an active *sthaan* (place of worship). Villagers from Hinauta and sometimes neighbouring villages like Kemasari and Bador visit the site, particularly on Mondays, an auspicious day for *Shiv Bhagwan*, and during the festival of *Nau Durga* (also known as *Navratri*), when young girls and women walk to the shrine barefoot from home to make offerings and pray. I used to pass them on my daily morning walks to and from the Hinauta gate, me in my trainers, shorts and T-shirt and them barefoot, in their sarees with ritual offerings in hand. I became aware of *Kheriya Mata* during my pilot stay at the Forest Department accommodation at the Hinauta Gate, the point of entry into the tiger reserve. I was surprised to see women from Hinauta, and very occasionally men, exiting the park gate early in the morning and when I asked the on-duty *chowkidaar* (forest guard/watchman), he told me about the shrine. When I pointed out that it was inside the core of the reserve, an area with strict rules around access and entry, he simply shrugged and explained that people were allowed to go to the shrine and back.

I wanted to see the shrine, particularly as one of the last remaining material vestiges of the relationships between former villages and grazing grounds such as Kheriya and Hinauta. During my doctoral fieldwork, a large Yadav family living at the end of the road were originally from Kheriya and my neighbour visited every Monday. The safari guides, *chowkidaars*, drivers and trackers always said a small prayer if they ever passed the *sthaan*. I

was curious to see for myself. However, I knew the rules applied differently to me. As an outsider, particularly a foreigner, to be present in the park without having paid an entry fee, moreover on foot and off the designated roads, to visit a temple that would be assumed to be only of a cursory and not legitimate spiritual interest, was a different matter altogether from local women making their weekly pilgrimage.

My closest friend, Maharaj, and I set off to the park gate to visit *Kheriya Mata*, as he was certain that it would be no trouble. We reached the gate and approached the forest guard's desk. The forest guard at the Hinauta gate was well-known to both me and Maharaj and us to him. While he wasn't from Panna and wasn't a particularly competent forest guard, as he couldn't properly make use of the computer to enter tourist details for safari, he was soft-spoken, friendly and understanding. Maharaj asked whether we could go to the shrine and the forest guard said, "*Hao, ja sake...*Yes, you can go, but wait, is he also going?" gesturing at me. Maharaj said, "*Hao, ja rahe...*Yes he is, but I am with him. There is no problem. We are just going to take *darshan*⁸⁰ and return." The guard was hesitant and conflicted. "*Nahi malum...*I don't know. If *bade sahib*⁸¹ comes and sees you, he will chastise me and I'll lose my job", he said. Maharaj said, "*Chinta mat...*Don't worry. We are both known to *bade sahib*".

⁸⁰ Darshan is a complicated concept but refers to seeing and been seen by deities through the worship of icon. It is a crucial part of worship in Hindu religion and forms a fundamental part of any visit to a temple

⁸¹ Literally translated as 'big boss' but refers to the Field Director.



Figure: Kheriya Mata in August

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I traced the history of conservation in Panna in its articulation of vulnerable, wild people and *jungles* and their separation through colonial and post-Independence state forestry and conservation intervention. I argue that contemporary conservation practice continues to propagate these articulations. Here, I explore how that separation between 'village' and *jungle* unfolds on the ground. I describe the founding of the national park through the creation of a boundary wall 'frontier' (Tsing 2005) and its detrimental impact on local livelihoods. The curtailment of forest-dependent livelihoods along with a variety of different forms of human-wildlife conflict create a context for recurring 'encounters' (Faier and Rofel 2014) between forest staff and local people. That is to say, the imposition of conservation regulations that infringe upon everyday livelihood practices and issues like crop and livestock depredation lead to interactions between villagers and foresters both in the restricted areas of *jungle* and the Forest Department offices.

Analysing these interactions within this context helps us to comment on the everyday operation of conservation rules and their enforcement in this second form of 'engagement' between 'village' and 'forest'; engagement as moments of encounter between forester and villager. When treated as a type of 'event' (Kapferer 2015) these moments demonstrate the contingent, emergent and provisional character of 'village-forest relations' and the transformative potential of 'familiarity' and negotiation in encounters. While forest rules severely disadvantage local people and thus increase their

vulnerability, I argue that they operate with a type of situational ambiguity in this context, which blurs and contests the separation of ‘village’ and *jungle*. These encounters also expose the vulnerability of forest guards and junior officers on patrol, unable to draw on broader social networks for support and isolated in remote locations. However, ultimately this type of engagement continues to articulate the antagonistic vulnerabilities of *jungles* and people and the state’s prioritisation of the former.

From Plenty to Prohibited: Changes around the Border of PTR

The border of Panna Tiger Reserve is home to thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods have been dependent on the *jungle* for generations, for either grazing livestock or collecting firewood and non-timber forest products (NTFP) (Kolipaka 2018a). As has been well-documented in and around conservation areas worldwide, the creation of a national park or reserve leads to the erection of boundaries which interrupt and interfere with livelihood activities, often making them impossible and creating conflict between conservation officials and local people (Brockington 2002; Neumann 2005, 1998; Robbins 2012; West 2006). In India, as Rangarajan (1996) explains, the ‘fencing of the forest’ during the British Raj, “equated conservation with the strict exclusion of private [...] users from forests” (Rangarajan 1996: 65) and “the regulation of access to the forests added a new dimension to the interaction between government and land users” (Rangarajan 1996: 95), a legacy which has continued post-Independence (Gadgil and Guha 1993).

Tiger reserves like Panna are a particular type of forest, focused on wildlife conservation, governed by the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) and the Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in consultation with National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and respective State Forest Departments. That is to say, they are not representative or typical of all reserve forests in India. Instead, they are a particular instantiation of Forest Department control, separate from timber, silvicultural or horticultural projects, however “like other natural resource management projects, tiger conservation is an institutionalised way to control resources and people’s access to those resources” (Aiyadurai 2016: viii). This control is evident in the boundary walls made from locally mined sandstone, the patrolling of forest guards and *chowkidaars* (forest watchmen), the watchtowers dotted across the plateaus overlooking the park and the roaming teams of trackers, rangers and officials, all working to prevent encroachment, collection of forest resources, cattle grazing and forest fires.

Thus, the appearance of Panna National Park in 1981 was an abrupt change in the rules governing access and the collection of forest resources, since slowly the presence of the conservation authorities increased and villagers living inside and on the edges of the reserve found their lives increasingly encroached upon by conservation activity⁸². Hundreds of

⁸² People often used the Hindi word *atikraman*, meaning encroachment, to refer to both the settlement of villagers on forest land and the capture of private land by the Forest Department, who will claim that the land is originally theirs. For villagers, encroachment could be perpetrated both ways.

families found themselves surrounded by forest land, their grazing and gathering grounds now increasingly tightly controlled by the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department. From accounts gathered during fieldwork, prior to the founding of the national park, there was little control on livelihood activities in the *jungle*, it was relatively open to grazing, gathering, chopping wood and even hunting⁸³. The presence of forest authorities only increased in earnest once the forests were re-designated and they started to erect the boundary wall. This established a kind of frontier between ‘village’ and *jungle* around which the pursuit of everyday livelihood activities would lead eventually to repeated confrontations with Forest Department staff.

The Boundary Wall

Anthropologists have increasingly conceptualised boundaries and borders as as “historically contingent”, and “continuously emergent through performative making and remaking of difference” (Donnan 2015: 763). Thus, boundaries and borders emerge from and are continuously re-established by processes of socio-political negotiation (Donnan and Wilson 1999). I argue that we can see the boundary wall along the edge of a tiger reserve as a border but also as a type of frontier. This is both in the sense of an imagined ‘nature’ or ‘wilderness’ on one side and the way in which it situates ‘encounters across difference’ as worlds collide and entangle

⁸³ This is not to say that large-scale felling or hunting operations of particular animals took place uncontrolled, since the forests were still controlled by the regional royal families and declared reserve forests after 1948. Any activity of a certain economic scale within the forest would have been monitored by the authorities. Everyday use by villagers and their livestock was never paid much attention and could easily fall under *nistar* rights protected in Forest legislation (Chundawat 2018).

through and around it (Tsing 2005). Anna Tsing (2005) writes, “Frontiers aren’t just discovered at the edge; they are projects in making geographical and temporal experience. Frontiers make wildness, entangling visions and vines and violences; their wildness is *both* material and imaginative...On the frontier, nature goes wild” (Tsing 2005: 16, emphasis original). She draws attention to how frontiers can emerge in the spaces between what is legitimate and illegitimate (Donnan 2015). She also evokes the work of Cronon (1995) on the creation of ‘wilderness’ and its entanglement with the myth of ‘the frontier’. As Brockington (2002) writes about ‘fortress conservation’, “myths work” (Brockington 2002: 126).

In Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) conceptualisation of discourse, articulation and antagonism, the boundary wall could be a ‘nodal point’, something that articulates discourses by fixing meaning. In this way, it both expresses and materialises discourses of antagonistic vulnerabilities and the separation of ‘village’ and *jungle* and is therefore a good place to see how ‘village-forest relations’ have developed around PTR and continue to unfold.⁸⁴ However, as we will see, while the boundaries of the tiger reserve may help to fix meaning and separate ‘village’ and *jungle*, through mechanisms of familiarity and negotiation, encounters within and across it between foresters and villagers indicate the potential disarticulation of the underlying dominant discourses that justify its construction through the contingent and emergent qualities of ‘village-forest relations’.

⁸⁴ For an account of borders and borderlands in the South Asian context, see Gellner’s (2013) edited volume *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia*, particularly the chapter by Piliavsky on Rajasthan and criminality amongst the Kanjar community.

How to Separate Village and *Jungle*

Building the Panna National Park boundary wall around villagers' land to separate village and *jungle* involved varying amounts of discussion with local communities. Senior villagers in Hinauta and Bador described to me how officials had originally planned to have the boundary wall built along a different line than it is today. First, there were plans to build it a few hundred metres into the *jungle* north of the fields in Hinauta and along the edge of the plateau around to Kemasan and Bador, where the cliff drops off down into the Ken River Valley. This would encompass Old Hinauta, as well as another important sacred site for *Kher Mata*, now found within the boundary wall of the tiger reserve⁸⁵. It would also stretch beyond the *amdar*, a section of *jungle* alongside the *nala* (stream) that runs adjacent to Kemasan Village. These original locations were set in order to provide grazing and gathering grounds for villagers. It is likely that poorer villagers would have favoured this arrangement, since they may have depended in larger part on selling NTFP or firewood or not had any of their own land on which to graze their animals. However, political interests in Hinauta intervened.

⁸⁵ *Kher Mata*, like *Kheriya Mata* is also visited by villagers despite being within the core area of the tiger reserve, however only for one day per year during the monsoon for a specific ritual, involving the sacrifice of a goat, to bring good rains.

In the 1970s, a *Thakur*⁸⁶ man from Panna who held a government job, something rare at the time, settled in Hinauta and purchased land along the border of the jungle on the eastern-most side of Hinauta's agricultural fields. Due to his job, he had connections into the district administration in Panna Town and held influence over local political dealings in both the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) Diamond Mine and Township and the village. In the first proposed plan for the boundary wall, his land would have been surrounded by a few hundred metres of *jungle*, and so he opposed it. Along with his sphere of influential Yadavs in the village, he used their political connections to propose that the boundary wall be built directly up against their fields, making the distinction between *jungle* and village clear. They thought that having forest area outside of the boundary wall and adjacent to agricultural fields would invite wild animals to



Figure 38: The first forest *chowki* in Hinauta (left) and junior officer quarters (right)

⁸⁶ Alternative name for a person from a Kshatriya or Rajput caste.

disregard the boundary, while a wall that clearly separated forest land and village land would communicate a clear distinction and keep wild animals away.

The *sarpanch*⁸⁷ at the time was a Raj-Gond man, described by informants as well-meaning, but illiterate and easy to manipulate. The government servant convinced him to agree to a different demarcation, pressing his thumbprint into the proposed Forest Department plans, to build the wall directly up against the road, the Kemasn *nala* and the Hinauta fields, enclosing the forested land entirely within the boundaries of the park. This effectively cut villagers off from forest resources and grazing grounds in the *jungle* encompassing almost the entire border of Hinauta, meaning that they would have to enter the park illegally to access the same resources. Grazing grounds were only left on either side of the road leading from Kemasn to Hinauta and the lands around the lake built by the NMDC to the South.

The presence of forest authorities spread gradually across the landscape. Even at large villages like Hinauta, the early days of the park only involved one forest guard on bicycle and two *chowkidaars* whereas it now has a range office, a fleet of two-wheelers, tracking and transport vehicles, housing for forest staff and even tourist accommodation and an elephant camp at the entry gate. Only villagers from Talgaon and Jhalar, both small villages formerly within the core of the reserve, recalled village-wide meetings with senior forest officials in the early days of the park. In

⁸⁷ Elected head of the local village council or *Gram Panchayat*

larger villages like Hinauta and Madla, both outside the reserve, no one recalled any meetings to notify villagers of the changes. In my conversations with them, some Adivasi villagers suggested that meetings may have taken place, but politically powerful Yadav villagers had not informed them to gain some future advantage. Meetings or no meetings, the boundary wall and newly patrolling forest staff were a sign of change.



Figure 38: Map showing planned and current boundary wall around Hinauta

The Compartment System and the Buffer Zone

Once the boundary wall was erected and access to the *jungle* became increasingly restricted, a distinct difference developed between people living outside the boundary of the reserve and people within it. For those outside the boundary wall, it became much easier to recognise when one was in violation of 'the rules'. There was a clear line where Panna Tiger Reserve began. The *jungle* around these outside villages, although never understood as 'belonging' to villagers who made use of the forested areas for gathering and grazing, had been accessible even after it had been declared reserve forest land in 1948. Once that land became first Sanctuary in 1979 and National Park in 1981 and the boundary wall was erected, what didn't belong to the villagers was now also inaccessible.

For those inside the reserve and on Gangau Sanctuary land, since the Forest Department decided not to enclose them within even more boundary walls, a rotational system of 'compartments' was introduced around village sites, in which certain sections of the *jungle* were set aside for grazing and gathering of certain resources at particular times of the year. However, as one *chowkidaar* from Talgaon (a village relocated in 2014), now living in Hinauta, said, "*Hume malum nahi...* We didn't know what a 'compartment' was. The officers were saying, 'Compartment, compartment', and it didn't mean anything to us".⁸⁸ In the eyes of local villagers, the compartment system was inconsistent and arbitrarily enforced, and when a

⁸⁸ Compartments are the basic units of Indian forest administration, with a typical compartment between 40 and 100 hectares, demarcated according to similar soil and vegetation within a particular area (Fleischmann 2012).

blanket ban on grazing and gathering for commercial purposes was eventually introduced in the core of the reserve, eliminating the compartment system, the majority of key livelihood activities became prohibited. This meant that villagers could gather fallen timber and harvest particular resources within the Sanctuary and buffer for domestic use, but no longer graze their animals or gather to sell. For the villagers inside the reserve, this was particularly difficult, since they relied on merchants from outside the park to buy gathered resources and themselves travelled out of the park to sell milk and other dairy products.

Along the edges of the reserve, despite the end of the compartment system and a blanket ban on grazing and gathering, it remained partially unclear what was prohibited and what was not, due to the confusing combination of land designations that collide around PTR and the number of times they have changed in the last few decades. As described in the previous chapter, land that was originally part of the Gangau Sanctuary in the 1970s inadvertently became part of Panna National Park in 1981, though this was lost/buried in Forest Department records until 2004. In between this, the national park was re-designated as a tiger reserve in 1994, which in line with the 2006 Amendment to the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) needed to have a core/critical habitat and buffer zone around it. A buffer zone is supposed to be delineated on a scientific basis in consultation with local communities to allow wildlife and people to co-exist. This is meant to protect traditional *nistar* (local use) rights to gather timber and non-timber forest products (NTFP) as well as minor forest produce (MFP). With supposedly different regulations for sanctuary, buffer and core land,

villagers can struggle to understand what is and is not allowed. This is also because all villages both in and around Panna National Park remained revenue villages, answerable to the District Collector and *tehsil* (block administration) rather than ‘forest villages’, governed by the Forest Department.⁸⁹

For example, Hinauta is directly up against the boundary wall to the core area of the tiger reserve. However, it is not within the ‘buffer zone’, unlike villages around the southern, western and eastern edges of the tiger reserve. It is officially on Gangau Sanctuary land, even though it is surrounded by ‘the core’, as are the other nine villages on the NMDC road and the NMDC itself. Despite being on Sanctuary land, the forest officers in



Figure 40: Poster at Forest Division headquarters about wildlife crime

⁸⁹ Villages in India can be considered *van gaon* or Forest villages, answering to the Forest Department, rather than the District Collector. Forest villages were often created under the British to provide labour for department activities (Agrawal 1996).

Hinauta are also charged with the responsibility of the entire Hinauta range, which falls within the core. The lack of a buffer zone around Hinauta means that residents are essentially cut-off from any livelihood activities in the surrounding *jungle* area. Forest rules empower forest staff to hold livestock hostage and fine herders, charge villagers for suspected dealing in forest resources without permission and ban outside merchants from coming to villages to purchase resources. When enforced, these rules have harsh punishments, and their contravention can lead to court cases and jail sentences and often lead to lengthy bureaucratic processes for both forester and villager. Thus, in my attempt to understand everyday 'village-forest relations', understanding the impact of conservation rules became important.

An Introduction to Conservation Rules: Set in Stone

In the latter stages of fieldwork in Panna, I conducted interviews with residents in various villages on the topic of conservation rules. I asked about what the rules were, who enforced them, what punishments were enforced if the rules were broken, whether they applied equally to all groups and whether respondents thought about forest rules often. Responses, at first glance, paint a picture of absolute authority, where offenders are punished, and rules are strict. When asked what was banned in the forest, all responded, "*jungle me sub kuch mana hai*" (in the forest, everything is forbidden). When asked about punishments, most suggested that if caught in the *jungle*, one would be sent straight to jail, have to post bail and then

await a court appearance. Many would place their wrists together to signal handcuffs during an arrest, a power enjoyed by the Forest Department as well as the police. When asked directly whether the rules applied equally to all groups, all dismissed any suggestion that the forest staff apply the rules differently to anyone. Interlocutors painted this absolute, simplified picture throughout fieldwork, generalising about the *forestwale*⁹⁰ and how they only cause problems.

Sandstone Mining around PTR

One example offered was the former sandstone mines in Bador, a medium-sized village down the road from Hinauta. The Bador mines, described by one contractor as providing INR 1,500,000 worth of labour payment per week, were shut down unexpectedly in 2000. Unbeknownst to any Bador resident I met, in 1998 the UK-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) worked with wildlife researchers in Panna to document cases of illegal sandstone mining on the edges of the tiger reserve and the dumping of NMDC waste material into the Kemasn *nala*. They found five cases of sandstone mines operating in violation of the Forest Conservation Act (1980) in the Gangau Wildlife Sanctuary. Following a series of meetings, they managed to secure with Sonia Gandhi, the then-Head of the Indian National Congress Party and Digvijay Singh, the then-Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, leases for 18 mines around the reserve

⁹⁰ The term *forestwale* referred to forest staff, using the common Hindi suffix *-wale*, meaning 'the one that does'.

were cancelled. Three were in Bador. An enquiry into the pollution from the NMDC led to plans to clean the water flowing out of the processing plant.

An EIA report from March 2003, three years later, stated that the forest was slowly recovering from the encroachment and pollution.⁹¹

For labourers, contractors, vendors and land-owners dependent on the sandstone mining for income, the shutting of the mines was abrupt and unexplained. Rakesh Gupta, a former *sarpanch* in Bador, described how officials arrived one day and informed all the labourers and contractors that the following day, any mining would be illegal, and anyone found in the mines or extracting stone would be charged. He explained that stone mining (*pattar nikalna*) in the region is considered a particular skill, especially amongst Adivasi groups. He described how stones are cut and extracted in a particular way using only basic tools and how they can predict where a stone will split and crack by just feeling along the surface. In the abandoned wastelands of Bador's former sandstone mines, there are still tools and implements amongst the rubble, and hundreds of stacked slabs of stones sitting and waiting to be used, some already taken out from the *khadaan*⁹². Rakesh's brother, when I asked him about the unused slabs, told me that villagers use it themselves for building houses or boundary walls, but they cannot take it out of the village. If caught by the foresters without a licence,

⁹¹ Banks, D. et al. (2003).

⁹² Mine or quarry. The stone pits were referred to locally as *pattar ka khadaan* (stone mines) and *khadaan* was also used to refer to the diamond mines, *heera ka khadaan*,

something now impossible to secure for stone mined on Sanctuary land, one could be charged with illegal extraction.⁹³

The shut-down of commercial sandstone mining around Panna Tiger Reserve is evidence of what Jalais (2010) has referred to as the ‘cosmopolitan’ character of tiger conservation (and tigers), in which foreign-funded international NGOs, along with teams of international and local



Figure 41: An abandoned stone mine in Bador



Figures 42 & 43: Stacked stone slabs (l), extraction for domestic use (r)

⁹³ For a more complete account of *Adivasi* sandstone labouring in Panna, see Yadav (2018).

researchers and wildlife enthusiasts drive conservation discourse and practice worldwide. These help to alienate local resource users from environments and animals with which they are historically entangled.⁹⁴ Guha (2003) writes that these groups fuel wildlife conservation in the Global South and are united in their hostility towards forest-dependent people. In the case of Bador's stone mines, the coming together of these interests through political connections, something not afforded to the contractors and labourers in Panna, halted livelihoods overnight. This has resulted in more out-migration to cities to find labour work and is one more example of something now banned (*pratibandhit*) or forbidden (*mana*) by the *forestwale*. The irony and unfairness of the continued operation of the NMDC diamond mine, whose scar on the landscape and damage to the waterways far exceeds the sandstone mines, is not lost on villagers living along the road to Hinauta.

Transforming Conservation Rules

The story of Bador's mines appears to parallel the simplified accounts of conservation rules and absolute authority I gathered in the early stages of interviews during fieldwork. However, as the interviews progressed, I began to notice that while the rules were at first described as uniform and absolute, such descriptions were often accompanied by accounts when 'the

⁹⁴ Jalais (2010: 196-199) draws on Descola (1996) and Franklin (1999) to interrogate the 'Western' divide between nature and culture, demonstrating that ideas about nature are intimately connected to those about society, the self and otherness as well as how 'the animal world' is an historically constituted and morally loaded field of meanings within a particular cultural tradition.

rules' were applied unevenly and sometimes entirely disregarded by local forest users. This resonates with what other scholars have found about the unstable ground of authority and rules in similar contexts.

Political Ecology and Institutional Analysis

In a series of studies, political ecologist Paul Robbins and other scholars examine the operation of rules and authority around Kumbalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Southern Rajasthan. Robbins' (2000; 1998a, b) early work on the Sanctuary assesses the role of 'social institutions' and their impact on natural environments as well as the degree to which rules and authority are enforced, respected, resisted or subverted. He argues that "in a world of rules, regulations and restrictions, and resistances, [we] require a more careful consideration of the operation of authority in daily life" (Robbins 1998a: 143). He draws on institutional theory and its approach to the relationship between de jure and de facto rules (Commons 1990; Ostrom 1992; 1990) to argue that they merge in practice to create 'actual operational rules'. In later studies, he and others (2007) found that while the formal management structure of the Rajasthan Forest Department is hierarchical in nature, 'discretionary authority' is central to its functioning, with rules realised often in 'de facto' terms. Interactions between local forest users and lower-level authorities were mostly 'ad hoc', with fines and rules developed on the spot.

In the forests in Kumaon, Northern India, Gururani (2000) similarly argues, "rules are constantly contested, resisted, redefined and reinterpreted in ways that not only highlight the complex interface between rules and practice but show that rules are subject to multistranded power

relations shaped along the lines of caste, class and gender” (Gururani 2000: 175). She also draws on institutional theory and the distinction between *de jure* and *de facto*, the former established by the state over property and the latter exercised by villagers on that same property. Those without formal rights exercise their ability to use property and break the rules. To argue that property is essentially a constructed social relationship, she draws on diverse writers like Li (1996), Berry (1988), Taylor (1993), Sivaramakrishnan (1997) and Agrawal (1994). She exposes the contradictory character of rulemaking and argues that rules lie essentially in practice as structuring structures which reshape during their practice (Bourdieu 1977).

Policing and Provisionality

In her ethnography of policing in Lucknow, Jauregui (2016) seeks to move away from narratives about power, sovereignty and violence towards everyday practices of policing.⁹⁵ She argues that police authority is “not simply an essential mechanism of domination” or a “technique of productive ‘power’” (Jauregui 2016: 13). It is instead a means to an end, a potentiality that relies on and is mobilised in its contingency. “It is a relation and provision of sociocultural order making that is co-constituted with configurations of moral right and instrumental exchange. Police authority...is a contextual and conditional social resource, variously demanded, drawn upon and deployed” (Jauregui 2016: 13). Jauregui

⁹⁵ Studies of policing, criminality and authority have turned recently in the social sciences from a focus on the function of coercion and violence (e.g. Arendt 1951; Benjamin 1978) to processes of discipline and relational power, structures of governmentality and biopower (Foucault 1991) or claims of sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2006) (Jauregui 2016: 12).

conceives of a social field in which various actors navigate and utilise knowledges and capacities they develop through virtuosity. Thus, she reaches the descriptor 'provisionality' in both the sense of variant or impermanent and the sense of its resourcefulness, its ability to provide and meet demands. Authority operates in a field of competing claims and the indeterminacy of the field demands actors to be creative in their approaches to it, since their actions are governed by their social position vis-à-vis other actors.

Rethinking the Field

Each of these approaches illuminates different aspects of authority, enforcement and the nature of 'rules' within their specific context. Robbins does well to make a distinction between different versions of the rules, but the language of institutional analysis doesn't communicate a sense of ambiguity and emergence through its loyalty to descriptors like 'de jure' and 'de facto'. In contrast, Gururani draws attention to the ambiguity of rules and how actors reshape institutions and Jauregui highlights the dynamic ground of authority in terms of the demands placed on various actors and its ultimate provisionality. They both draw useful attention to the creativity of those actors in negotiation, relying on Bourdieu's (1990; 1977) ideas of 'social capital', 'practice' and 'the field'. Bourdieu conceives of a 'field' as an arena in which there is a struggle for 'capitals', with structured positions to which occupants bring strategic, competitive orientations, resources and dispositions, which alter during their experience of it. This would fit well to describe what qualities actors bring to a negotiation of forest rules between forester and villager. However, it does not necessarily help us to answer the

question ‘through what moments and because of what reasons does this field emerge and change’?⁹⁶ How does the character of authority shift from something absolute to something relative and in relation to what specific issues?

I contend that it is more productive in this instance to treat the field as a kind of emergent potentiality in practice, a possibility open to choice and/or action (Taussig et al. 2013), in which ‘familiarity’ plays a transformative role, instead of an arena of strategic action where actors compete according to the logic of capital. This is because the character of conservation authority and rules transforms in the moments of ‘encounter’ between forester and villager, situated within the dual context of prohibited livelihood activities and interpersonal connection. This context leads to recurring encounters between forester and villager in which we can see both the disadvantage faced by local villagers and their negotiation of conservation rules’ situational ambiguity.

Recasting Rules: Events of Encounter and Familiarity

In their proposal for an ethnography of encounter, Faier and Rofel (2014) argue that ethnographies of encounter bring attention to “the interactive and unequal dynamics of power that shape culture making across relationships of difference” (Faier and Rofel 2014: 364). In many ways, this is an ethnography of encounter, an examination of the coming together of and

⁹⁶ Warde (2004) notes that Bourdieu hardly ever addresses distinctive theories of practice and field together, and thus his understanding of field is limited through its loyalty to the language and logic of capital.

relations between 'village' and 'forest' within a specific post-colonial context of Indian conservation and forestry. The encounter between conservation and local livelihoods undoubtedly points to the disadvantage of local people in the curtailment of their forest-dependent livelihoods in favour of state control over people and resources. However, ethnographers have also highlighted that "encounters prompt unexpected responses and improved actions, as well as long-term negotiations with unforeseen outcomes" (Faier and Rofel 2014: 364.). Anthropologies of events help to explore how these dynamics unfold in particular 'moments of encounter', narrowing the definition of encounter in this instance to refer to a specific meeting between a forester and a villager.

Anthropologies of Events

Anthropological preoccupations with events and 'moments of encounter' stretch back a long way (e.g. Gluckman 1958; Sahlins 1985; Turner 1957), and anthropologists have used often them as tools for exemplification or insight into particular problematics within a society (Kapferer 2015) or as microcosmic expressions of a macro symbolic order (Geertz 1980; 1973). However, more recently, anthropology has shifted to focus on events as moments of potential creative and generative change (Hoffman and Lubkemann 2005), or in their traces, affects and aftershocks (Das 2006; 1995). Ethnographers like Humphrey (2008) have drawn on philosophers like Deleuze and Badiou (Adkins 2012) to argue that events bring about the crystallisation of multiplicities inherent to human life and creates subjects, understanding the event as a "pure break with the

becoming of the world” (Humphrey 2008: 360) to explain extraordinary happenings.

This tension between events as either the exemplification and affirmation of cultural structures or ruptures of dramatic change should be resolved ethnographically. This is because treating encounters or events as one or the other prior to a ‘happening’ in the field would be inappropriate. This is partially why I find the language of capital to be unsatisfactory here. To assume that an encounter between a forest officer and someone gathering resources illegally in the *jungle* will be governed by specific ‘capitals’ and be predictable, reproducing a predetermined ‘field’, and thus an event of exemplification, dismisses out of hand the potential for resistance and subversion as well as reifies authority as absolute and unambiguous. However, to assume that the same encounter is entirely unpredictable and an event of rupture is also unrealistic, not accounting for the existence of a field of relations and the carried expectations of each actor and the place of power and inequality ‘crystallised’ (Humphrey 2008) in such a meeting.

This is specifically why I analyse the context and reason for encounters and foreground the transformative potential of familiarity towards their outcome in the following ethnography. Recurring encounters between foresters and villagers are usually the result of curtailed forest livelihoods and forms of human-wildlife conflict like crop and livestock depredation. In the case of PTR border villages, each event of encounter between foresters and villages carries with it the potential of both predictability and unpredictability, dependent on the relationship between

the two people and the reason for the encounter. Here, I propose that familiarity has the potential to make a difference between an event of exemplification and one of rupture, allowing us to recognise ambiguity and provisionality without dismissing the reality of authority and relations of power within that context. It is not so much that rules *are* ambiguous, or that authority *is* provisional, it is that, with familiarity, they have the potential to transform and thus *can be* provisional, depending on the situation.

Their ambiguity is situational, and actors negotiate that ambiguity by using the transformative potential of familiarity in instances of confrontation or conflict around particular prohibited livelihood activities. Here, the term ‘familiarity’ refers both the notion of being ‘familiar’ (*jan pehechan*) to and with forest staff (cf. Jauregui 2016) but also being ‘familiar’ with the forest bureaucracy and its processes and thus able to negotiate it to one’s benefit. Throughout fieldwork, encounters between forest officials and local villagers in both the *jungle* and in Forest Department offices that carried the potential for confrontation or conflict most often involved particular instances of crop or livestock depredation, the ban on grazing, or when people were caught illicitly gathering forest resources.

Livelihoods and Forest Rules

Bijoy Yadav purchased his tractor second-hand from the neighbouring district of Chhatarpur for INR 1.5 *lakh*⁹⁷ and described it with great pride, telling me how in its four years with him it had never let him

⁹⁷ 1 *lakh* = 100,000. INR 1 lakh equals approximately £1100.

down. Owning a tractor not only gave a sense of pride amongst villagers in Hinauta but could fetch significant income as they would rent it out for INR 600⁹⁸ per hour of use. While sitting in his field as he supervised a Kondar man driving the tractor (hired for INR 200 for the day), Bijoy would occasionally rush over to make sure the engine wasn't overheating and to remind the driver to do a good job. He had rented the field that season for INR 5000 on a discount from a Raj-Gond man in the village, whose family collectively owns 52 acres in Hinauta. Almost out of habit, we began to discuss the difficulties of farming next to the *jungle*. Bijoy's field for that season was directly adjacent to the boundary wall. From under the large mango tree where we sat, we could see the outline of the Forest Department's west Hinauta watchtower, a forest outpost that overlooked Hinauta farmers and their fields.

Bijoy grew to be one of my closest friends in Hinauta, and his field a productive place to understand the challenges of farming next to the *jungle*. On that first day in August, he estimated that it would cost around INR 50,000 to plant the whole field, seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, labour and all. As with the other farmers, he and/or other members of his family would spend their nights out in the fields all winter chasing away the wild animals on shifts, with torches, dogs and whooping that one could hear in the village. Due to crop raiding by *jungly* animals, no one described farming as profitable beyond subsistence, the worst perpetrators being *nilgai*⁹⁹ and wild

⁹⁸ INR 100 equals approximately £1.10

⁹⁹ Blue bull antelope (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*)

boar at night and parakeets in the day. Most farmers estimated a minimum of 30% crop loss to wild animals and on any visit to agricultural fields along the border of PTR one would see evidence of crop depredation. Revisiting Bijoy's field in February, six months later, with the field filled with chickpea (*chana*) and mustard (*sarson*) crops, he explained that his actual costs had exceeded INR 60,000. Crop depredation had forced him to replant an entire side of the field, when one night he fell asleep for four hours and awoke to deer and antelopes feasting on the chickpea plants right next to the boundary wall.



Figure 44: Bijoy with his tractor under the mango tree

Crop Depredation

Starting conversations with Hinauta residents about the issues they faced from the Forest Department was straightforward when it came to agriculture. Many residents had decided that they wouldn't farm at all the year of my fieldwork due to their lack of disposable income and the probable loss incurred from depredation.

While there was a procedure for claiming compensation from the Forest Department, no one took advantage of it for two main reasons. The first was that the process was, in their eyes, unnecessarily bureaucratic and *ulta* (upside down). It involved calling the *patwari* (land accountant) for the village, who would bring the land records and assess the damage. The *patwari* would have to be accompanied by the Forest Ranger or Deputy Ranger, the *Sarpanch* and a *panchnama* (five witnesses/names) to verify that wild animals caused the damage. As any *patwari* is responsible for multiple villages and thus hundreds of land records, the procedure can take weeks, if not longer, to sort out. The second reason was that each of these people would have to be compensated themselves, decreasing the already paltry sum of potential money paid out by the Forest Department. When I asked the reserve's Joint Director at the Division headquarters about this, he described it as a very simple procedure, explaining that there was nothing they could do if no one came forward.

This is similar to what he expressed with regards to the Eco-Vikas Simitis and the Panna Nature Camps in the previous chapter. From the perspective of the villagers, it wasn't worth it to embroil oneself in a bureaucratic procedure that may cost them in bribes and label them as a

‘trouble-maker’. To ‘fall into the gaze’ (*nazar me parna*) of the Forest Department could mean being cut off from future temporary work opportunities and could negatively affect any future encounters with the forest officers. For most, maintaining a friendly, disengaged relationship and ‘adjusting’ to crop depredation was the better option.¹⁰⁰



Figure 45: A wheat field damaged by wild boar

¹⁰⁰ The word *adjust* was used in common Hindi parlance, as is common in other parts of Northern India.



Figure 46: A deterrent to discourage crop raiding

Villagers had a variety of solutions to crop raiding. The wealthier would install wire fences or erect boundaries with slabs of mined stone. Those who could not afford that would often gather weeds like Lantana from the village surrounds to build makeshift fences and the poorest would simply try to stay vigilant through the night. One creative solution I observed was hanging strips of old cloth on lines across the edges of the field as villagers believed the human scent would dissuade wild pigs, who would happily dig underneath fencing. The effectiveness of these solutions was

unclear, but sometimes erecting a fence often led to more anxieties besides its cost. A young Thakur man in Madla, who worked at one of the safari lodges, explained to me that once a wild spotted deer (*cheeta*) had been stuck in the wire fence encompassing his family's field and died. As the killing of wild animals anywhere is illegal, they had mixed feelings about what to do. Should they call the forest guard and face a series of questions? Alternatively, should they hope that no one finds out and do nothing? In the end, they called the forest guard and he concluded that the death was accidental.

Our Animals and Their Animals: The Ban on Grazing

In interviews about conservation rules and throughout fieldwork, informants would express frustration at how *jungly* (wild) animals, 'their animals', the Forest Department's animals, were able to enter fields and eat crops, leading to no compensation, but livestock, described as 'our animals', were captured and held hostage when found inside the reserve. The ban on grazing means that any animal found by a forest guard within the park boundary is taken by the Forest Department in that area and placed in the nearest 'livestock pen' (*kanji house*) until the owner comes to pick them up, post bail and await court proceedings to pay a fine. Court visits and cases often continue from several months to over a year, with mandatory appearances every month. From the opening of the park up until very recently, if livestock were caught inside the park, the owner would simply pay a per head fine at the range office where they were being held, be given a receipt of payment and allowed to take their livestock home.

With the courts now involved, livestock owners waste days at a time, losing potential earnings as well as paying fees at each obligatory monthly appearance. These rules particularly affect Yadav villagers, whose traditional livelihoods are livestock and dairy-based. Many expressed to me that with the new system, in which livestock were held until bail was posted, new mother-calf pairs would suffer the most. Calves would be kept at home while cows went off to graze, but when cows were placed in the *kanji house*, their calves would go without milk. Even once they returned, without regular feeding for days, the cows would sometimes stop producing milk entirely.

Interlocutors understood the simultaneous ban on grazing while failure to police crop depredation as a contradiction in rules, a case of ‘two different different rules’ (*do alag alag niyam*). This was not because they didn’t understand the forest rules, but instead it was that they questioned the rationale and were frustrated by simultaneous forest action and inaction. In Hinauta, a group of Kondar men in their 30s and 40s, deep into the farming season in November, expressed that they don’t ask the foresters for help with crop compensation, one man saying, “*Me ek baar...* I went once to the forest to ask, but the ranger said, ‘replant’ and turned away”. Everyone laughed knowingly with resignation. He continued,

Pehele itne janvar... There didn’t used to be these many animals in the fields. They all used to go to the [relocated] villagers’ fields inside the *jungle*. Our animals, if they go to the *jungle* they are kept in lockup, but if their animals come to our land, we can’t do anything. If we capture their animals, they’ll build a case on us. Our animals used to eat all the tough grass in the forest, leaving new shoots for *jungly* animals. Now, some still go, but very few, so the grass has gotten big. [Wild] animals won’t eat the old grass. They need new grass. If they burn the grass, it destroys the seeds. Only the *sambar* deer can eat the tough grass. In

the summer, you will see *cheetal* deer coming to the gate to eat green grass near the well. (22/11/17; Hinauta, field notes)¹⁰¹

This echoed the views of a group of Yadav men, of similar ages, in Bador two months earlier as we sat in the shade outside the *zamindaar's* house, a central gathering place in the village. They explained that they understood why humans were banned from entering the *jungle*, that cutting wood and hunting was damaging, but as one man said, “*Humao janvar...Why can't our animals go? They need to eat somewhere, and it is only a buffalo. It does not do any harm to the jungle. They clean the jungle*”.¹⁰²

Livestock Depredation

Livestock depredation was also a major issue for residents in the border villages of PTR, but the compensatory mechanisms were accessed more often than were those for crops. Firstly, livestock owners would have to locate evidence their animal had been taken by a wild carnivore usually by finding the carcass with pugmarks, scat, bite or scratch marks. Then, a forest officer would take a photograph, fill out the report, gather five witnesses' (*panchnama*) signatures and determine the animal's value.

During my time in Hinauta, livestock owners estimated that the price of a

¹⁰¹ Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*) and cheetal (*Axis axis*) deer are common species across North and Central India.

¹⁰² This idea of livestock cleaning the jungle was often linked to the increase in forest fires since the founding of the park, and thus the increased effort of the Forest Department to create fire lines and manage the dry season. Livestock owners saw very clear links between the ban of grazing, the relocation of villages, the increase in grass only eaten by buffaloes and cows, the outbreaks of fire and the increase in crop depredation. Banning livestock led to an increase in tough grasses which when combined with village relocation led to both a decrease in available food sources for wild animal and an increasing risk of forest fires, both of which drove animals nearer to villagers' field where they would develop crop raiding 'habits'.

newly calved buffalo cow could be as much as INR 50,000 and the Forest Department only compensated up to INR 30,000. The full amount was hardly ever paid but again, amongst poorer caste groups, the impression was that members of more powerful castes with greater influence would be able to increase the value placed on their livestock and thus the pay-out.

One day, I was sitting at the *khadaan* in Hinauta with a group of Adivasi men and a Yadav man, who was one of the few members of the village who had become a forest guard, a permanent Madhya Pradesh Forest Department employee (as his father was and grandfather had been). I discovered that one of the forest guard's buffaloes had been killed by a leopard in the border *jungle*, and he had been struggling for over a week to gather the necessary signatures and get the paperwork filed and was on the verge of giving up entirely. When I asked about why it was taking so long, he simply shrugged and the older Raj-Gond men started to complain about the *forestwale* while he, one of them and yet part of the village too, sat in silence. One Raj-Gond said, "*Dekho...* See, if he can't get payment, what chance will we get?"

There remained some ambiguity about the 'de jure' process of compensating for livestock depredation, since occasionally livestock owners would be required to get a government veterinarian to verify the cause of death. I accompanied a Yadav man from Madla to Panna once on such an errand for his cousin. The vet repeatedly declared that a post-mortem would be impossible (the animal had been dead for two weeks) and loudly refused

to take a bribe¹⁰³, but under the guise of going to see the carcass by motorcycle, stopped my friend and asked him for INR 1000 once outside the boundaries of the district offices. This resulted in an argument between my friend and his cousin, who accused him of taking the money himself.

Variations in Encounter

These prohibitions on livelihood activities did not affect all groups equally within villages, and the consequences of recurring encounters between forester and villager refracted through local socio-political dynamics of caste, gender, wealth and profession. As Humphrey (2008) writes about particular events 'crystallising' identities, in such encounters between foresters and villagers, the degree to which familiarity held transformative potential and the ability of actors to exploit the situational ambiguity of such encounters varied according to the positionality of the actors involved and their relationship. In addition to the significance of interpersonal relationships, the relative comfort with and presence within the forest bureaucracy put upper and middle caste groups at an advantage to benefit from encounters. While there was little evidence of consistent discrimination along caste lines, from the perspectives of Adivasi farmers, Forest Department officers were more likely to forgive Yadav and upper-caste transgressions (a view not shared by the Yadavs themselves). This was tied to the more powerful political position of Yadavs, their ability to influence officers through bribery and throwing 'parties' (cf. Robbins 2000)

¹⁰³ Cf. Herzfeld (1993: 61-62)

as well as the dominant presence of Yadavs among locally-employed forest staff. This increased both the familiarity of Yadav villagers with forest bureaucracy and the overall confidence of the community, compounding their ability to influence the outcome of particular encounters.

One Raj-Gond man said to me on the topic of livestock compensation, “*Agar forestwale kuch...* If the foresters do something wrong, all of the Yadavs would go together to the office and make it right. We [Adivasis] don’t do that”. The concern with unity amongst the community was linked to the application of conservation rules, since information gathering by the Forest Department about transgressions often relied on neighbours informing on each other’s activities, or processes like crop and livestock compensation required community witnesses in the form of the *panchnama* and support from the village *panchayat*. Thus, the position of each villager in relation to their own caste group and others and their relationships with the *panchayat* as well as forest staff could make marginal, but significant differences to their ability to benefit from compensatory mechanisms or avoid harsh punishment for not following the rules. Thus, for the poor and most marginalised, the rules appeared stricter and leniency less likely. I would hear from Adivasis that Yadavs were able to get their animals released from the *kanji house* earlier or avoid going to court by paying bribes or simply being friendly with the forest guards or that they would be able to secure better compensation for livestock that had been preyed on. These perceptions had very real effects on how each person approached encounters with foresters concerning prohibited livelihood activities.

Additionally, the ambiguity of the rules and the degree of leniency varied as encounters between forest officers and local people involved face-to-face confrontation, and thus the potential for familiarity. This applied to different types of encounters (e.g. crop compensation vs. the ban on grazing) and to different parts of the same processes, such as the moment when livestock owners have to post bail to release animals, at which point the interaction changes from one between a forester and livestock to one between the same forester and the owner. Animals are easy to put in a pen and file paperwork for. People not so much. On the other side of the spectrum, rules were most ambiguous and leniency most likely when the chance of familiarity was highest, i.e. during encounters in the *jungle* between foresters and villagers. This resonates with what other authors have noted about the (im)personality of bureaucracy and bureaucrats in Indian contexts and elsewhere (e.g. Gupta 2005; Herzfeld 1993; Heyman 2012; Hoag 2011; Hull 2012; Mathur 2015; 2014), a theme within the anthropology of the state and politics which I expand upon in Chapter 7.

“He’s Afraid of Us!” Women Gathering Forest Resources

During the harvest season, before Holi in the spring, I cycled over to Bijoy’s field to see him again. He had repeatedly invited me to the field, and I felt bad that I hadn’t been for a while, particularly as he had been staying overnight there every night for a few months. I arrived to see a pair of Gond women removing the chickpea bushes with sickles, hunched over in their saris. They stopped to look up and asked me why I was there. I said I was looking for Bijoy and they told me he had just left on his tractor back to the

village. Exasperated to have cycled in the sun fruitlessly, I decided to sit on the *charpoy* (bed) under the mango tree.

I asked them whether they had their own fields, who was tending them and what they had planted, and they predictably asked me about whether I was married and when I was going to be. I was reminded of a similar conversation I had had with a woman outside the NMDC four months earlier in which I had asked whether she went into the *jungle* to gather wood. She responded that she did and when I asked whether she was afraid of wild animals or running into forest officers, she said, “Of course we are afraid of animals, but it is our *majboori* (obligation, necessity, vulnerability). We are not afraid of the forest officers; they are afraid of us!” I asked the women now no longer working in the field and sitting under the mango tree with me whether they go into the *jungle* to harvest resources and collect wood. They said that they did all the time. They had to collect firewood to cook for their families as they didn’t use gas cylinders. Moreover, it was cold at night in the winters. I asked whether they ran into forest guards ever. They said that they did, but whenever they heard a car or motorcycle approaching, they all threw their tools down and lay flat in the grass hoping they wouldn’t be spotted. If they were caught though, the forest guard would only confiscate their tools and send them on their way. They knew that they were stealing, but if they didn’t steal, they wouldn’t be able to feed their families.

Throughout fieldwork, I asked repeatedly about whether women were ever charged for illicit resource gathering or collecting firewood.

Consistently responses pointed to how women were only ever warned and

not charged, and often that was because of the perception that an officer could be accused of misconduct and threatened with a reputation-damaging and, depending on the family and village of the girl or woman, potentially life-threatening situation. In one village, now relocated from inside the Talgaon range of the park, villagers recounted how when a woman was harassed once by a forest guard, all the men in the village dressed up in women's clothes and confronted and assaulted him.

One particular woman whose husband was the chairman of Hinauta's Eco-Development Committee during my fieldwork explained that when she first arrived in Hinauta thirty years ago, something similar happened and all the women in her neighbourhood and others marched over to the range office to explain that 'this is not how things were done'. Women were let go with a warning and even when I asked forest guards about it, they would say, "*Veh sirf...* They are only doing for their families, not for causing problems". Both the risk of being accused and the exercise of 'discretionary authority' (Robbins 2007) due to sympathy increased the chances of leniency in such encounters. One Kondar woman, who claimed to be the 'temporary forest labour organiser' for the village told me with great pride that she could do what she liked in the *jungle* and she told any girls that were ever confronted to say that they were with her. The forest guards wouldn't confront her as she held the key to the labourers in her neighbourhood and could unify the community against a particular officer.

My observations resonate with Gururani's (2002; 2000) work on women gathering forest resources in the Himalayan Kumaon, a landscape where women continue to be disproportionately at risk from wild animals

while entering the forest (Barua et al. 2013; Ogra & Badola 2009; Ogra 2008). Gururani (2002) writes “Women collect fuel wood and fodder from the forest, tend the cattle, fetch water, and work in the agricultural fields to make ends meet...While men tend to undermine women’s contributions to the family, women insist that it is their hard work that keeps the cooking fire lit and children fed” (Gururani 2002: 236). The women in her study see the forest as a social terrain, which is entangled with the village and incorporated into and is incorporated by their identities. They too acknowledged that they stole but had no choice. She quotes one of her informants as saying,

We know we steal wood from the forest. The forest is *sarkari* (government) and we are not allowed to go there but we have no other way of getting fuelwood or fodder. We have to steal wood to live. If we do not steal, we cannot live in this cold, we cannot cook, our cattle cannot live, we will not have any manure... Why should the Sarkar punish us? We never ever sell wood or any other products of the forest. We steal for our families (Gururani 2000: 178).

The women in Gururani’s study are constantly on the lookout for forest guards, and like in Panna, the guards were sympathetic and knowing so, the women “recognise and manipulate the department’s ambivalence” (Gururani 2000: 180). This also illuminates the significance of foresters’ own frustrations with lengthy bureaucratic processes that result from the enforcement of forest rules (cf. Hull 2012; Gupta 2005; Lipsky 1980; Fleischman 2015; Vasan 2002). My interlocutors similarly manipulated the ambivalence of the department and forest staff, making use of the transformative potential of familiarity and their relationships with the Forest Department to negotiate the situational ambiguity of forest rules.

In each of these encounters between foresters and villagers, whether in the *jungle* borders or in Forest Department offices, the outcome of an encounter vis-à-vis livelihoods and forest rules has the potential to transform through the mobilisation of ‘familiarity’ in variant forms. This blurs and contests the distinction between ‘village’ and *jungle*, illuminating interpersonal, emergent and ‘provisional’ (cf. Jauregui 2016) character of ‘village-forest relations’ more broadly and the vulnerability of both forester and villager in such encounters. Its analysis also exposes the ways in which these relations involve local dynamics of gender, caste and profession such that the enforcement of restrictions and rules is inconsistent and contingent on positionality. This challenges any understanding of the impact of conservation regulations on local communities in which both ‘village’ and Forest Department are homogeneous or monolithic.

Chalta Hai: the Ethnographic Encounter

When I asked about conservation rules at the start of fieldwork, as I explained above, my interlocutors offered simplified, blanket explanations about uncompromising and inflexible forest rules. I observed, however, that villagers would often disregard rules and complaints about forest regulations often centred on their consistency and preference towards certain communities. Frustrated by the gap between ‘how the rules were described’ and ‘how they were enforced’, I decided after some time to change my approach to asking about forest rules. I discovered that just as ‘familiarity’ had the potential to transform the encounter between forester and villager, it similarly had the potential to transform the encounter between ethnographer and interlocutor. Instead of asking directly about

what forest rules ‘were’ and treating them as something static and unambiguous, I started to assume an air of familiarity, of being ‘in the know’ about illicit resource use, local power dynamics or livelihood issues and simply asked about people’s everyday practices.¹⁰⁴ This was only something that I could achieve partway through fieldwork as my ‘familiarity’ with the context grew. In doing so, the threads of conservation authority ‘as described’ began to unravel as well. For example, part of a typical interview about conservation rules with a male villager went something like this.

Me: “Do forest rules apply equally to everyone?”

Respondent: “Yes, for all the rules are equal.”

Me: “The foresters don’t cause more problems to *Adivasis* or forgive

Yadavs more?”

Respondent: “No, they cause problems for everyone”.

Me: “Has there ever been a case built against a woman?”

Respondent: “No, cases aren’t built against women.”

Me: “Why is that? I have seen women carrying wood and grass back from
the forest”.

Respondent: “Women can do it. They are only using it for the home.”

Me: “So, for the home it is allowed?”

Respondent: “It is still forbidden, but *chalta hai* (it goes on)”.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Candea (2010) on not addressing interlocutors by name and assuming familiarity.

Jauregui (2016) has also picked up the colloquial phrase *chalta hai* in her study of policy authority in Lucknow. It features first in reference to public responses to police brutality, as a cynical view on the ironic breakdown of law and order amongst those who are there to enforce it.¹⁰⁵ She writes, “Social critics extrapolate from utterances of *chalta hai* the presumption of a widely shared cynical acceptance of something antisocial or inferior as being ‘just the way it is’ or ‘how the system works’” (Jauregui 2016: 8). Jauregui appears undecided on what exactly *chalta hai* is. It transforms in her analysis from a colloquial phrase to a ‘culture’ (52) and then an ‘attitude or action’ (103) and finally a ‘thing’ (144). This analytical imprecision could stem from her translation of the phrase as ‘it moves’ (rather than what I have offered here: ‘it goes on’) or simply its multivalence within her particular ethnographic context.

For Jauregui, *chalta hai* as ‘it moves’ communicates how police officers are often caught unawares as the ground of law and order shifts continually (Jauregui 2016: 148). Whereas, in the context of forest border villages and clandestine and illegal use of forest resources, the use of *chalta hai* as ‘it goes on’ communicates the informalities and familiarities that transform encounters between forest authorities and local people from interactions of absolute authority and into something more ambiguous and relational (cf. Foucault 1991). In expressions like *chalta hai* and through invoking specific moments of encounter and mobilising the potential of

¹⁰⁵ For another perspective on cynicism and the state see Navaro-Yashin’s (2002) *Faces of the State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

familiarity, we can observe and expose the contingent and emergent qualities of conservation authority in this context.

Criminality: An Aside

This is not to assume that all villagers are constantly breaking forest regulations and local forest officers are ‘corrupt’ or enabling criminal behaviour. It was clear that most local people were aware of the strict forest regulations and many followed them strictly. However, discourses which centred on criminality and corruption in such contexts, as anthropologists studying corruption or the intertwining of criminal activity and politics, often reinforces dominant paradigms of state or elite control at the expense or dismissal of already disadvantaged or subaltern populations (Gupta 2005; Michelutti and Hoque, eds. 2019; Muir and Gupta 2017; Piliavsky, ed. 2014; Robbins 2000; Shore and Haller 2005). Such an understanding would ignore the productive potential of understanding village-forest relations as provisional and interdependent to improve lives around or within protected areas.

This is not to depoliticise such encounters, but rather to show their nuance and offer a perspective in which village-forest relations refract and are refracted through local power dynamics of interpersonal relations involving caste, wealth, gender and profession. Here I have highlighted the disadvantage of such regulations and their local negotiation rather than reinforced normative ideas of criminal activity along the borders of state-controlled forest land, as articulated by environmental discourses stretching back to colonial times (Guha and Gadgil 1995; Rangarajan 2000; 1996).

Negotiation and Vulnerability

Around the borders of PTR, forest rules have been severely curtailing traditional livelihoods for decades. The restrictions placed on people's ability to sustain a livelihood and support their families and the enforced changes to their relationship to their local environment have undoubtedly made their lives increasingly precarious unlike in previous generations. However, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, the interpersonal and contingent character of village-forest relations allows for a certain amount of negotiation and flexibility, which local people variously exploit to mitigate the detrimental effects of conservation regulations. In doing so, they contest and blur the separation of 'village' and *jungle* along the border of PTR each time they cross the boundary wall and mobilise the situational ambiguity of the rules in encounters with forest staff. In each event of encounter, one can see the 'crystallisation' (Humphrey 2008) of particular identities and discourses, which articulate the state's disregard for local livelihoods in favour of conservation. However, in villagers' exploitation of this ambiguity one can also see the potential 'disarticulation' of such hegemonic discourses as they assert their own vulnerability in the face of curtailed traditional livelihoods, thus antagonising discourses of vulnerable *jungles* and precious resources (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Howarth 2000).

Various Vulnerabilities

The accounts of encounter around livelihood restrictions demonstrate and link the 'vulnerability' of local people in two senses. The first is the

sense of precariousness and interdependence on others (cf. Hann 2018), particularly the inability to sustain a livelihood due to the restrictions of forest regulations. Within the geography literature on risk and vulnerability, forest regulations might be considered another 'external' factor (Wisner et al. 2004) in addition to seasonal variation, drought, disease and climate change, that makes agriculture and livestock-based livelihoods even more vulnerable and at risk. While villagers could in the past mitigate such factors by the available livelihood opportunities afforded by a large forested area (more grazing grounds, NTFPs, timber, productive agriculture along streams and rivers), with the introduction of forest restrictions, such mitigation strategies have become illegal, and the vulnerability of these populations has increased. If they continue to pursue such strategies, villagers risk ending up in jail or subject to fines, and thus in forest regulations they face another potential external hazard. Scholars in peasant studies have noted the tendency among poor farming communities to develop livelihoods that mitigate risk through strategies that are reliant on broader social networks as a result of living with uncertain environmental or socio-political conditions (see Robbins 2012)¹⁰⁶.

However, the introduction of forest regulations exacerbates the impact of 'internal factors' (e.g. socio-political marginalisation, low skill levels) on vulnerability as well, exposing or creating internal divisions within local communities based on wealth or caste. This is particularly true when reporting rule-breaking to the Forest Department becomes part of intra- and

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Chayanov et al. 1966; Thompson 1963; Wolf 1966

inter-community disputes. As a result, forest rules also weaken any potential resilience to hazards offered by broader social networks.¹⁰⁷

Villagers are reliant on their relationships with forest officers to mitigate the risk of forest rules, and those most 'familiar' and therefore with 'access' (cf. Wisner et al. 2004) to the most economic or political opportunities through the Forest Department and other external institutions (e.g. NMDC) are less vulnerable. As demonstrated in this chapter, in villages like Hinauta this is a source of tension between different caste and family groups. I develop these ideas further in the following chapters, as the intertwining of caste, status and economic and political provision (cf. Deshpande 2011; Mosse 2018) is evident in the processes of forest employment (Chapter 6) and village relocation (Chapter 7).

There is a second dimension to villagers' vulnerability in these encounters. They also provide an opportunity for interlocutors to express their own narratives of vulnerability, in which they justify their contravention of forest rules to gather resources through their particular identification as a type of 'vulnerable person'.¹⁰⁸ I further develop this concept in the following chapters. As the women in Bijoy's field expressed, their *majboori* (obligation/ helplessness/ vulnerability) compels them to break the rules, the fact that they have no other option but to gather forest resources as *gareeb*

¹⁰⁷ Following Leach et al. (1997: 16-17), we can consider the restrictions of forest rules as leading directly to a decrease in local actors' 'capabilities' of sustaining a livelihood, due to a reduction in 'endowments' (rights and resources that social actors have) and thus their ability to access environmental entitlements (alternative sets of utilities derived from environmental goods and services over which social actors have legitimate effective command and which are instrumental in achieving wellbeing).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Brown et al. (2017) on the normative and political mobilisation of categories of 'vulnerable people' particularly in relation to welfare and social policy.

log (poor people). In addition, these accounts illuminate the precarious position of the junior forest staff, whose enforcement of said rules put them at risk. They face potential personal harm or injury, as the forest guard beaten by men dressed up in saris discovered, and they face regular accusations of discrimination, corruption and unfair treatment. Forest staff, as outsiders outnumbered in unfamiliar places, themselves make use of situational ambiguity to mitigate this vulnerability and avoid lengthy bureaucratic processes (cf. Flesichman 2012; Vasan 2002; Wangel 2018).

Again, the transformative potential of familiarity plays a central role. We saw this in the opening vignette to the chapter, in which the forest guard considered bending the rules to allow Maharaja and me to visit *Kheriya Mata* partly because we were both 'known' to superior forest officials. The forest guard, Maharaj and I all knew that we could exploit that familiarity if we were 'caught'. Thus, the chance of the forest guard being reprimanded decreased through potential familiarity. Moreover, more experienced forest staff, familiar with the complexities and contradictions of the forest bureaucracy could better use the system to their own benefit to cut bureaucratic corners (cf. Robbins 2000; 1998a).

Thus, the clash of antagonistic vulnerabilities between *jungle* and village articulated in variant forms of village-forest relations involves processes of negotiation between those vulnerabilities in their various forms. The lines between the two are often blurry and blurred by actors in practice to sometimes-mutual ends- e.g. avoiding fines/jail and avoiding paperwork. It is not simply a case of the state's absolute subordination of people's vulnerability to that of *jungles*, but rather a more contingent and

emergent process observable in particular modalities of engagement between heterogeneous and dynamic Forest Departments and local communities. Ultimately, however, the relative risks and vulnerabilities are much more serious for local people, with potential jail sentences and the inability to feed their families. I elaborate on this negotiated but ultimately unequal dynamic in the following chapters on forest work and village relocation.

Conclusion: Engagement as Event

In this chapter, I have explored how the separation of village and *jungle* unfolds around the border of PTR, starting with the founding of the national park and the creation of the frontier of the boundary wall. I then looked the impacts of forest regulations on local forest-dependent livelihoods, curtailed to the disadvantage of local people. I analysed this curtailment and forms of human-wildlife conflict as contexts for recurring encounters between foresters and villagers. Treating the encounters as ‘events’ allows us to see the situational ambiguity of conservation rules and the transformative potential familiarity, mobilised by both forester and villager to mitigate vulnerability, and utilised by the author to better understand the nuance and complexity of ‘village-forest relations’. In this second modality of engagement, events of encounter between ‘forest’ and ‘village’, we have seen the provisional, emergent and contingent character of village-forest relations and the articulation of vulnerabilities to the disadvantage of local people. This central dynamic of negotiation and familiarity threads into the

next chapter, where the emic concept of *jugaad* helps us understand how villagers 'make do' with the vulnerability caused by conservation in an analysis of different forms of forest work.

Chapter 6

Engagement through Employment: Forest-Employed Villagers

“Forest and wildlife conservation still relies on the exploitation of the worker’s cheap manual labour and on the appropriation of their indigenous environmental knowledge”

- Münster (2014a: 53)

“What can I do? This is my *majboori*”

- Forest worker, Hinauta Village (March 2019)

On the first cool, overcast day of the monsoon in August 2018, Maharaj and I were waiting along the side of the road in Bador, waiting to catch the bus back to Hinauta. In the distance, coming from the opposite direction, appeared a little white *tempo*¹⁰⁹. It wasn’t time for school pick up, so it couldn’t be the bus driver who ferried children to and from the village to the school inside the NMDC. Across the bonnet, ‘**W-P-S-I**’ was written in bold, black letters. I waved down the car and he stopped. WPSI is the acronym for the Wildlife Protection Society of India, a large conservation NGO based in Delhi, known to me, but not to Maharaj. As was always the case though,

¹⁰⁹ Small van

Maharaj knew the driver, a local from Madla, and we started chatting. He explained that he was on his way to drive around different villages and distribute little 'information cards', which he eagerly showed us. The cards listed the rewards offered by the Forest Department for any information about illegal hunting or transporting of wild animals. There were different sections, with big cats fetching big money and ungulates and other smaller fauna less. It declared that all reports were 'anonymised'. He handed us a few cards, told us that the WPSI people would be visiting next month and staying in Madla, and drove off.

Maharaj was impressed by the amount of money offered but suspicious of whether villagers would actually call. He suggested that villagers would be sceptical about the claims of anonymised reporting. In addition, villagers would fear being accused and arrested themselves, the villagers would never get the money, or it would be too difficult to claim. Claiming might negate the anonymous quality of reporting. In a landscape where familiarity and informant networks were key to the operation of the Forest Department and local people's negotiation of conservation, the concept of 'anonymity' seemed awkward and out of place.

I carried the WPSI cards in my wallet for the next few weeks, showing them to all manner of people so that they might gain some financial reward and as a way to prompt conversation about the Forest Department, informant networks and issues of trust and familiarity. While most took a cursory interest, one notable conversation took place at the Manor barrier, while I was, again, waiting for the bus to Hinauta. A member of a tiger tracking team and two *chowkidaars* (forest watchmen) were resting there,

between shifts, awaiting orders from the deputy ranger. I showed them the card and they voiced similar doubts as Maharaj had on that first day. One of the *chowkidaars* said, “*Lekin hum depty...* But why will we not tell the deputy if we know something?”

He expressed that these cards would only land him in trouble. He should report anything illegal he sees to his senior officer immediately. Why would he risk telling these other people? I didn't fully understand the difference. He explained, “*Agar hum...* If we tell these people then *sahib* will ask us why we didn't tell them. They will get angry; they will chastise us”. I explained that it was anonymous so the officers wouldn't know who it was that reported it. The *chowkidaar*, now frustrated at my inability to grasp this, carried on. “*Agar yeh log Bhopal ko bataenge...* If these people tell [the headquarters in] Bhopal, then Bhopal will call FD *sahib* (Field Director) in Panna, then he will call AD *sahib* (Assistant Director), then he will call the ranger who will ask us why we told these people instead of him”. The foresters, reliant on *chowkidaars* and informant networks throughout villages, would assume that the forest workers had discovered and reported the crime and, even if they hadn't, they should have. By reporting it directly to the junior officer, it could be handled. No need to court the wrath of senior officers. He handed the card back to me and said that he had been a *chowkidaar* for twenty years and didn't need another way to slip up and get 'stuck'.

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I focused on the separation of ‘village’ and *jungle* through an analysis of two forms of engagement between forest staff and local people: community outreach and events of encounter between foresters and villagers. These are both situated within the broader socio-historical context of colonial exploitation of forest resources and forest people and contemporary environmental discourses in Panna. Through these two forms of engagement, I illuminated the emergent, provisional and interdependent character of ‘village-forest relations’ more broadly. This showed how these relations, as a form of environmental politics, articulate the antagonistic vulnerabilities of *jungles* and people and demonstrate the state’s prioritisation of the former over the latter. In the previous chapter, I foregrounded the transformative potential of ‘familiarity’ and the importance of negotiation within encounters between foresters and villagers, all the while emphasising the disadvantage faced by local people around PTR.

In this chapter, I develop these ideas further through a focus on whom I describe as ‘forest-employed villagers’: local people who earn their living from ‘the forest’, mostly in the form of daily wages, either through direct employment by the Forest Department or indirect employment via tourism. Dynamics of vulnerability, familiarity and negotiation, but ultimate disadvantage and emplacement within networks of obligation and dependence, characterise forest work in its variant forms. To help explain this I turn to the emic concept of *jugaad*. Vulnerability figures as both a way to describe precarious life along the border of PTR and a way that forest

workers narrate their own experiences of insecurity and exploitation through the emic terms *majboori* and *majdoori*.

I argue that the vulnerability of these forest-employed villagers presents a missed opportunity for improved village-forest relations and for local support for conservation projects. This is because often forest work is only done out of *majboori* (necessity/vulnerability), and the exploitation and insecurity of the work damages the local reputation of the Forest Department. It is also because forest-employed villagers are an excellent example of the existence of interpersonal networks between conservation authorities and local people. In their roles, they are required to navigate and maintain relationships with forest staff and local communities, embroiled simultaneously in the political dramas of both, 'stuck' between 'village' and 'forest'. However, instead of communicating information and facilitating cooperation, they form a central part of informant networks based on mistrust and internal conflict that the Forest Department mobilise to further disadvantage local people. This third modality of engagement continues to articulate the antagonistic vulnerabilities of local villagers and *jungles*, highlighting the ways in which people negotiate and work around dominant discourses and mechanisms of exploitation.

Conservation Employment/Work/Labour: A Review

The topic of conservation-based employment has drawn interest from scholars across multiple disciplines from political ecologists and conservation scientists to scholars of public policy and ethnographers. As

the last two chapters detailed, the curtailment of traditional livelihoods through the imposition of Panna Tiger Reserve has led to a decrease in employment and work options for people living near to the conservation area. This has resulted in widespread seasonal migration to cities outside of Madhya Pradesh to find work should jobseekers fail to find gainful employment closer to home (Yadav 2018).

Alternative Livelihoods in Conservation

The literature on livelihoods and conservation demonstrates that this issue is by no means unique to Panna or even India, and conservation practitioners have recognised the difficulty of sustaining or changing livelihoods in a conservation context. Much of this has resulted in 'alternative livelihood projects' (ALP), part of the push towards integrated conservation and development programmes (ICDPs) and community-based conservation that began in the 1980s (Christensen 2003; Hutton et al. 2005; West, Igoe and Brockington 2006; Wright et al. 2016).

Roe et al. (2015) delineate three types of ALP-type interventions in their review of the current literature: alternative resource, alternative occupation and alternative method of exploitation. They found that alternative occupation interventions are most common and often accompany an alternative resource initiative, such as replacing the use of fuelwood with gas stoves. The aim of these interventions is to change local livelihoods or local resource use towards biodiversity outcomes, however as the review shows, many interventions fail to determine a clear theory of change within the local context before implementation and rarely is there

clarity about the relationship between conservation outcomes and the complexities of local livelihood practices.

Along similar lines, Wright et al. (2016) propose that the term 'alternative livelihood project' contains assumptions that undermine interventions' aims. They write, "The conceptual designs of alternative livelihood projects are often based on inaccurate assumptions about the social systems within which they operate" (Wright et al. 2016: 9). This includes understanding "communities" as homogenous and failing to examine the scalability of the proposed intervention (also see Leach et al. 1997). Instead, they suggest adopting a sustainable livelihoods approach in which the desires of local people are understood within specific socio-economic contexts rather than simply as "monetary benefits and economic substitutes" (Wright et al. 2016: 10). The sustainable livelihoods approach highlights that dynamic livelihood strategies are composed of a range of activities. Therefore, the substitution of one type of activity through an ALP may result in the adoption of that activity by another member of the household, negating the desired conservation outcome. As we will see in what follows, making a living for forest workers must be understood within a context in which different household members participate in a variety of activities, some of which may be contrary to conservation outcomes, made all the more necessary through the unreliable and poor-paying conditions of forest work. This resonates with observations in the risk literature and in peasant studies about the utilisation of broader social networks to mitigate subsistence risks (Birkman 2006; Robbins 2012; Wisner et al. 2004).

In my conversations with forest officials in Panna, they regularly deployed the concept of ‘alternative livelihoods’ when discussing local employment through tourism or forest labour. They often described local employment as an example of the Department’s benevolence or generosity, explaining the workers’ low education levels and the lack of other employment options. This obviously ignored the fact the Forest Department itself had curtailed traditional livelihoods and any industry and ‘development’ that might bring more jobs. Their placement of forest work by local villagers within an ‘alternative livelihoods’ paradigm actively depoliticised forest employment and disregarded the broader historical context of the exploitation of local people and their knowledge for forest labour.

Forest Labour in India and Elsewhere

The coercive use of local labour has been a central practice of various Forest Departments in India since the 1860s. Rangarajan (1996) places the Baiga tribe at the centre of the Forest Department-constructed conflict between swidden cultivation and the protection of timber. Recruited as forest guards and tenants-at-will in forest villages, Baigas became a “source of cheap labour for forestry, rather than settled peasant cultivators” (Rangarajan 1996: 113). Foresters required labourers to clear fire lines and guard crops from wild animals, and Baigas were locally available. Rangarajan explains that this provision of labour was often a bargaining card for Baigas, and they increasingly relied on forest labour for subsistence following the curtailment of their traditional livelihoods (cf. Agrawal 2005 on the *coolie* system).

Studies of contemporary Indian forestry management from public policy, political ecology and anthropology provide detailed analysis of bureaucratic behaviour, motivations and dilemmas amongst lower-level forest officials and officers across different Indian contexts (Fleischman 2012; 2015; Robbins 2000; 2001; 2007; 2009; Vasan 2002; 2006; Wangel 2018), but they have failed to account for forest labourers and forest workers. These studies explore and unpack the constraints and conflicts experienced by lower-level forest staff who are rarely local to where they are posted and regularly negotiate and interact with local communities. They are subject to frequent transfers, interference by local political interests and lack of resources, and faced with the unenviable task of enforcing laws in risky contexts.

There are many resonances between accounts of forest officers and my observations of local forest work, and yet there remains a crucial difference in the conditions of their employment. The forest guard or forest ranger is a figure of (state) authority and while vulnerable to reprimand, suspension and transfer, carries a material and symbolic invulnerability through their permanent government position. Any description of “officers’ work” as difficult often courted a hollow sympathy amongst forest workers in Panna, since they would compare it with their own work, something far more precarious, exploitative and under-recognised.

Local forest workers are the focus of Sodikoff’s (2012) book *Forest and Labour in Madagascar*, in which she situates whom she calls ‘conservation agents’ within the context of colonialism, labour exploitation and forestry in Madagascar from French colonisation onwards. She writes,

“The workers who do all the grunt work...have been virtually invisible in accounts of what has failed and what has worked in conservation efforts” (Sodikoff 2012: 7). These manual conservation workers face dilemmas in their inability to make ends meet, their enforced role as conservation ‘messengers’ and their need to maintain harmonious relationships with both conservationists and their own communities. Marx’s theory of value lies explicitly at the centre of her analysis and thus, for Sodikoff, conservation is productive labour, deploying moral hierarchies and exploiting subaltern workers of their labour and knowledge for something which does little to benefit them. She traces the place of the peasant labourers through paradigms of ‘wilderness’ or ‘uncivilised nature’ imposed on Madagascar and Africa more broadly, which privilege intellectual over manual labour and transnational and urban elite concerns over local livelihood struggles.

Münster (2016; 2014a, b) draws similar attention to this in her ethnographies of human-elephant relations in Kerala showing how “forest and wildlife conservation still relies on the exploitation of the worker’s cheap manual labour and on the appropriation of their indigenous environmental knowledge” (Münster 2014a: 53). She focuses on the former hunter-gatherer tribe Kattunaika who, dispossessed from their land and traditions of shifting cultivation, had little choice but to work for British colonisers as low-wage labourers. Münster describes how the sanctuary has been converted into a conservation landscape, and while outside visitors’ and the state’s relationship to the environment has changed, the Kattunaika’s labour remains strenuous, and their employment insecure. The lack of respect for their work manifests in payment delays, poor political representation for

workers and lack of recognition of their skills and knowledge that the Forest Department has relied on for 130 years. As Locke (2011) has written about elephant handlers in Nepal, “a class of privileged, salaried workers with minimal local environmental knowledge depend on a class of skilled but poorly paid workers who endure insecure working conditions as part of a risk-laden job” (quoted in Münster 2014b: 17).

As this chapter also aims to do, writers like Münster, Locke and Sodikoff draw attention to the labour of local people recruited (or coerced) into forest work that remains essential to maintaining conservation areas worldwide. Although globally there has been a noted shift, at least nominally, to participatory or people-centred approaches in conservation, in many contexts “the marginal position of the conservation labourers on the lowest level of the forest department’s hierarchy has not changed much

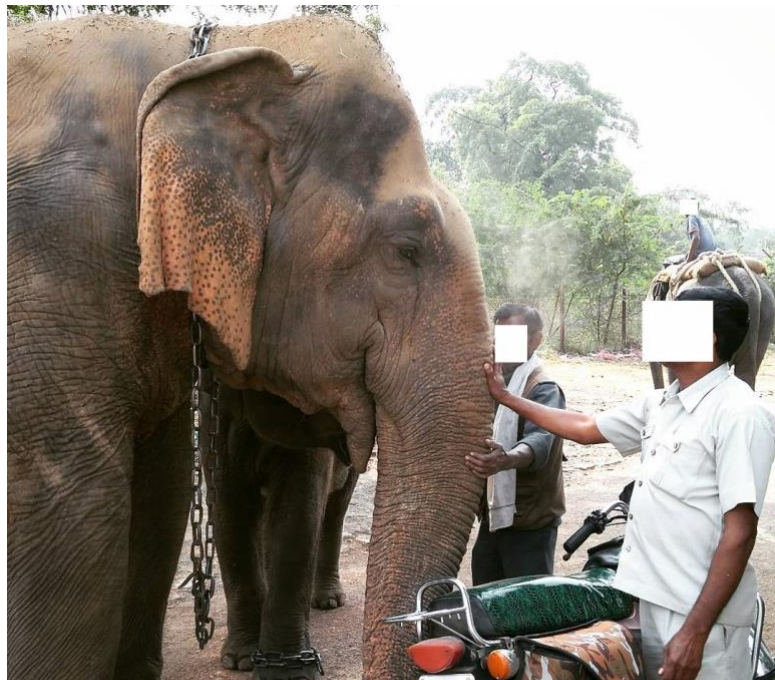


Figure 47: Forest workers with Vatsala, Panna’s 100-year-old elephant icon

since colonial times” (Münster 2014: 56-57). The direct and indirect employment of local people through conservation in Panna ought to be seen as a by-product of state labour needs and the lack of local livelihood opportunities rather than an ‘alternative livelihoods project’.

As I will argue, forest workers view their work mostly through the idiom of *majboori* (necessity/vulnerability), and it is the necessity of labour for forest work in Panna that drives their employment. This chapter adds to this handful of studies that highlight the exploitation of forest labourers across different conservation contexts. However, I will situate this exploitation within the broader context of ‘village-forest relations’ by foregrounding the place of familiarity and negotiation through the emic concepts of *jugaad* and offer an analysis of forest workers’ labour vulnerability through terms like *majboori* and *majdoori*.

Revisiting Familiarity and Negotiation: *Jugaad*

In the previous chapter, ‘familiarity’ and ‘negotiation’ emerged as important factors in encounters between foresters and villagers around PTR. They helped to highlight the emergent, provisional and interdependent character of ‘village-forest relations’ and served to complement and nuance the language of institutional analysis or political ecology to emphasise the ‘situational ambiguity’ of conservation rules. Here, I turn to the emic concept of *jugaad* to help develop these ideas and situate them further within the local context of forest employment. This helps to move their analysis beyond an exposition of exploitation and discrimination, but not with the aim

of depoliticising ‘village-forest relations’ nor suggesting that exploitation and discrimination are in some way absent. Rather, it is to provide a more nuanced view of ‘village-forest relations’ by treating them ethnographically through local descriptors. This emphasises the ability of forest-employed villagers to adapt within these relations and ‘work around’ this disadvantage by simultaneously asserting and mitigating their own vulnerability.

This is *Jugaad*

Jugaad is a multivalent local idiom in the context of forest work and life in the borders of PTR and common to many parts of Hindi-speaking North and Central India in a variety of contexts. In popular and academic writing, *jugaad* has often been understood as do-it-yourself resourcefulness, a type of culturally in-built entrepreneurial spirit, making things work through shortcuts through ingenuity and creative problem-solving, based on the idea that, in South Asia, people cobble together what they have available to fix whatever needs fixing (Nelson 2017; Radjou et al. 2012). When my water bottle handle broke during fieldwork, I used a piece of string I had left over to fashion a new one, and when people asked what it was, I would say, “This is *jugaad*”. People would point out other types of material *jugaad*, the classic example being vehicles made from spare parts. However, entrepreneurial emphases and cobbled-together water bottles fail to capture another sense of *jugaad* that I want to expand upon here: *jugaad* as an intersubjective and political achievement that evidences mutuality¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Cf. Sahlins (2013)

between actors and between groups, “an everyday practice that potentializes relations” (Rai 2019: 6).

The Art of Making Do

Writers like Hoque and Michelutti (2018) highlight the political significance of *jugaad* practices. They describe *jugaad* as ‘the art making do’ in their comparative analysis of young men building political networks in India and Bangladesh, writing that it is a “resourceful way of getting by, as a virtuous practice”, the ability to use politics for upward mobility (Hoque and Michelutti 2018: 993). They reference Jauregui’s (2016; 2014) analysis of *jugaad* both as ‘making do’ and as a “social practice of provision” (Jauregui 2016: 35). In both, *jugaad* comes to express the virtuosity of individuals in their building of influence networks, in their personal ingenuity and inventiveness. *Jugaad* thus is not only about the ability to cobble together



Figure 48: An example of material *jugaad* (Source: Indian Express)

material goods but also the ability to procure, cultivate and maintain social relationships. Their descriptions crucially highlight that *jugaad* also has, to use Jauregui's language, a provisional character (in both senses of providing and precarious), mobilised within demanding relationships of obligation and reciprocation. *Jugaad* leads to something and thus for the *jugaadi* (improviser) and the networks of which he or she is a part, *jugaad* is something achieved, possessed or held with potential future consequences or results for those networks.

This resonates with observations Rai's (2019) makes in his book *Jugaad Time*, in which he emphasises how *jugaad* expresses his interlocutors' pragmatic, ad hoc, networked approach to obstacles. Rai usefully highlights the simultaneous social and political valence of *jugaad*, as something emerging from and through subaltern negotiation of disadvantage. In doing so, he emphasises the convergence of 'individual' strategic action and political practice with collective or intersubjective achievement in the Indian context that '*jugaad* as entrepreneurialism' fails to address. He writes that "in a *jugaad* event the boundaries of what is both possible and necessary become plastic through a more or less pragmatic experimentation in habits, capacities, material processes, collective enunciations, and assemblages" (Rai 2019: xiv). Thus, *jugaad* affords a negotiation of particular situations through its recognition of their potential plasticity.

Doing *Jugaad* and Having *Jugaad*

For the purposes of clarity, a distinction between ‘doing *jugaad*’ (personal virtuosity in building networks) and ‘having *jugaad*’ (holding influence within emergent networks) may be useful here. These are by no means mutually exclusive and are often consecutively emergent in practice. That is to say, doing *jugaad* (*jugaad karna*), creatively ‘making do’, can often lead to having *jugaad*, establishing, holding and reinforcing emergent networks of contact and influence which may result in a future advantage of some kind. One may go so far as to posit the next logical step which is ‘applying *jugaad*’ (*jugaad lagaana*): once one has it, the utilisation or mobilisation of *jugaad*. *Jugaad* does not only advance individual interests but also those of the entirety of their social networks, of which they are a locus. The proper provision, cultivation and utilisation of *jugaad* relies not only on individual creativity but on collective social practices; collectives here more of an assemblage (Michelutti 2017) rather than discrete caste or kin groups. Even when referring to individual virtuosity, *jugaad* makes clear that such virtuosity is often directed towards social ends. One’s *jugaad* is not only one’s own as it carries this provisional valence in both its uncertainty and its ability to provide. Furthermore, *jugaad* is not fixed and can easily disappear, as often the expectation of *jugaad* or its strength in being able to deliver a particular outcome dissipates when one discovers that in fact, one did not have *jugaad* or one’s *jugaad* did not work.

Jugaad is thus not only an expression of individual ingenuity but what, in Bourdieu’s (1990) terms, might be called, a form of social capital, accumulated over time to be deployed or ‘applied’ in certain contexts.

However, this is not to argue for *jugaad* as an individualistic, strategic endeavour, which the language of capital and its suggestion of motivated economic calculation can sometimes imply. While having *jugaad* can result from strategic action, it can also result from mundane practice or forms of relatedness, in which one's position as an employee or a relative of someone else affords one *jugaad*, and it is always situated within a broader social nexus. These networks of influence are not built by virtuosos striving for individual ambition, but are emergent assemblages that often overlap, mirror or criss-cross webs of kin or caste relations not through any specific intention or 'orientation' (Throop 2003) but instead simply through one's interconnectedness with others as a locus of one's own intersubjective network.

Finally, focusing merely on *jugaad* in the sense of 'doing *jugaad*' fails to allow sufficient room for structural inequalities or power relations which may obstruct all shortcuts, thus making one's proposed *jugaad* ultimately fruitless. Despite one's own ingenuity or resourcefulness, sometimes things can't be sorted or adjusted and there are no alternative routes or D-I-Y fixes. All of this is not to diminish the individual ingenuity of *jugaadis* but merely to situate the idiom within its social context such that one doesn't lose sight of the networks within which it operates and is utilised. The importance of one's broader network for employment and mobility is something noted across recent ethnography of the aspirant Indian middle classes (See Fernandes 2000; Jeffrey 2010; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffrey 2008; Nisbett 2007), and key to models of vulnerability and risk which focus

on 'access' and 'internal' socio-political dynamics (Birkmann 2006; Wisner et al. 2004).

As I argued in the context of encounters between forest officials and local people in the previous chapter, what can transform a field of interaction is often familiarities or interpersonal connections between actors. *Jugaad* is another instantiation of these informalities and familiarities. However, *jugaad* can relate more to action towards a certain end; it has a vector-like quality, carrying both magnitude and direction. *Jugaad* in the sense of its application or utilisation, if the actor 'has' it or it exists (*jugaad hona*) already, works best in the encounters between forest officers and local people, in which *jugaad* comes to be activated in that instance. However, as I have already emphasised, its application or use does not come 'for free', it works within relationships of obligation and reciprocation.

I would like to use *jugaad* as a way of discussing the process of getting and negotiating forest work for villagers local to Panna Tiger Reserve. This does not imply that *jugaad* is a catch-all term, but one which is useful to think through forest work, in its multiple senses, one which keeps individual practices situated in provisional sociality and actors as loci of their intersubjective networks. Contributing to the literature on risk and vulnerability, we might also understand *jugaad* as a strategy of material and social resilience that helps to diffuse, spread or distribute risk or vulnerability within and across an actor's broader interpersonal network. In what follows, different senses of *jugaad* help guide understandings of acquiring work, making a living as a forest-employed villager and providing work for others.

Getting Forest Work: Trackers and Chowkidaars

In this chapter, I will discuss and distinguish between two different types of 'direct' forest work: regular and temporary. Regular workers are paid monthly and are semi-permanent (some working for over forty years in various roles), and temporary workers are labourers brought in for short periods of time, a few weeks or months, for a specific activity such as grass clearing, fire-watch, road repairs or construction. Although their roles, responsibilities and relationships with the Forest Department vary, both groups are paid directly by the Department on a daily wage basis, rely entirely on personal contacts with forest officers to find and keep their work and primarily explain and understand their work through the idiom of *majboori* (necessity/vulnerability). In addition to this direct forest work, I will also discuss 'indirect' forest work, work that is the result of conservation activity but for which payment doesn't come from the Forest Department. In particular, this refers to people working in the tourism industry, such as safari guides, hotel workers or shopkeepers.

When I began to ask about forest work in Panna, I discovered that even in villages like Hinauta and Madla, where there was a strong Forest Department presence, the number of regular forest workers from those villages were very few. In Hinauta, at any one time, residents estimated between 15 or 20 regular forest workers. As fieldwork progressed though, it became apparent that these low numbers didn't represent the full extent of forest employment locally. The number of both former and occasional forest

workers was much higher. Many villagers had previously worked in some way for the Forest Department and been fired or were repeatedly caught in a cycle of quitting forest work after becoming dissatisfied with the poor conditions, long hours and low pay only to fail to find other employment options and reluctantly return to forest officers and officials to ask for another job. Another important factor was the employment of villagers from elsewhere, who were offered opportunities through their various connections, however fragile, to particular forest officers and officials. The forest workers described in what follows exemplify these precarious realities of forest work around PTR. All names and some locations and family situations have been changed for the purposes of anonymity.

Having *Jugaad* and Tiger Tracking

I met Kailash Yadav for the first time during my Master's fieldwork at his house in Naheri where he lived with his older brother, wife, sister-in-law, mother and three-year old niece. Their father had died when he and his brother were young and so Kailash's brother stopped school almost immediately and found work as a safari jeep driver at a tourist lodge. Their cousin lived next door and worked as a daily wage worker for the Forest Department in Madla, driving the water tanker used to fill up waterholes during the summer dry season. The land had originally belonged the two families' great-grandfather whose two sons decided to split the family property once married, one taking all the livestock (Kailash's grandfather)

and one taking all the farmland (their cousins' grandfather)¹¹¹. With the founding of the national park, grazing livestock in the forest became illegal and slowly Kailash's father sold most of their animals to support an ever-growing family while their cousins' family held onto their land and continued to farm every year. By the time I arrived, Kailash and his family only had a few buffaloes left and one cow which produced enough milk for the family and some for relatives and neighbours.

On that first day in May, I asked Kailash about his family and whether he was working. Grinning, he was quick to tell me that he had married for love (despite his mother's objections) and his wife was seven months pregnant one year after the wedding. Through his brother's work at the safari lodge, he had worked as an assistant on a wildlife research project for one year and then found work as a member of one of the tiger tracking teams on daily wages from the Forest Department but was about to quit because of the long hours and tough conditions. He said that he had had no time for his family and with his new wife, didn't want to spend twelve hours at a time on duty through the night, leaving only a few hours a day to rest at home.

¹¹¹ This was not described as a typical practice and was quite unusual. Kailash described that the two brothers simply came to an agreement based on what each liked to do.

Being a tracker can be a difficult and monotonous job. Tracking teams follow one of Panna's radio-collared tigers throughout the day or night (often in freezing temperatures during winter), noting the location of the concerned animal regularly and reporting it back to the range office and Forest Division headquarters via mobile radio sets. The teams are comprised of three members usually: two trackers and one driver. The trackers operate an antenna receiver, often having to stand on the tops of cars or on cliff edges to find a signal, a short beep, which quickens when the animal moves and gets louder as the tiger nears the team and weakens as it walks away. The teams work in rotating 12 hour shifts and while most trackers I spoke with said that they were supposed to have 12 hours on and 24 hours off, depending on how far the tigers took them and where their



Figure 49: Watchtower in PTR

family lived, often they spent very little time at home and what seemed like days on end in the *jungle*.

Trackers are provided with very few supplies besides what they themselves bring and rest at various watchtowers or camps throughout the *jungle*, having cups of tea or eating the food their wives, sisters or mothers have packed for them in metal *tiffins*. As their vehicles move between range offices, villages and the core of the *jungle*, trackers are also important for the *chowkidaars* posted at the towers and camps. They can bring food, tobacco, *bidis* or any other supplies from villages as *chowkidars* spend days at a time deep in the park but, unlike the trackers, have no easy transport out.

Besides noting down the location of Panna's precious tigers, the trackers are also crucially responsible for notifying the range office of any unusual activity, such as the presence of an unknown tiger in a particular territory, whether the collar's signal weakens and stops or whether the tiger hasn't moved in a few days. The collar signal getting weaker or the tiger not moving could be interpreted in a variety of ways: the collar needs to be changed or is faulty, a tiger is mating or has given birth, or, in the worst-case scenario, the animal has been injured or died. Trackers are often the first responders in such a situation and place themselves in risky positions to keep track of Panna's tigers. After the collared tigress P521¹¹² died in

¹¹² This unique ID indicates 1) the mother of the tiger (in this case T5), 2) their batch/litter number (in this case T5's 2nd batch) and 3) the number within that batch. Thus, P521 was the first cub of T5's second litter. "P" stands for Panna and "T" indicates an animal relocated from elsewhere.

December 2017¹¹³, villagers in Madla told me that she had been caught in a snare which wrapped around her collar and then her feet when she tried to pry it off. She died of suffocation after a long struggle. For some who I spoke with, blame turned instantly to the trackers. Where were they? Why didn't they hear her struggle? Why didn't they report the signal get weaker? We will return to P521's death later on the chapter and the reactions both of the trackers that lost their jobs after finding her dead and the safari guides in Madla, who would no longer be able to show her to their guests.

Kailash asked me whether I had any work on my project, hoping I would need a driver or research assistant. It was a common request with almost every young unemployed man familiar with research and temporary



Figure 50: P521 after collaring (Courtesy RK Mishra)

¹¹³ Trivedi, V. 2017. Tigress Perishes to Electrified Poaching Snare in Panna, 25 Die in 2017 in MP. *News 18 Online*. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/tigress-perishes-to-electrified-poaching-snare-in-panna-25-die-in-2017-in-mp-1611177.html>. Accessed 26/02/2019.

work because of the Wildlife Institute of India and other independent researchers having run wildlife projects for decades in Panna and relying on daily wage labour for short periods. Sadly, I had to tell Kailash that I wasn't going to use an assistant like that, how I travelled by bus and just simply 'hung out' at people's homes and didn't want to stop him finding work somewhere else. As I will elaborate in what follows, my position as a researcher, foreigner and person seen to have influence would frequently implicate me in people's imagined paths to work and regular employment and I would consistently disappoint with the same answers I gave Kailash (cf. Jeffrey 2010).

When I returned to Panna fifteen months later for doctoral fieldwork, Kailash was in the process of trying to get a job as a tracker again, having quit only one year earlier. He had tried to become a safari guide but failed the interview and exam. He hadn't found any other kind of work and had got by with his brother's help and a few odd jobs around the village, finally doing seasonal work for the summer as a tanker driver like his cousin. With his daughter now thirteen months old, he was visibly stressed about the need to start earning regularly, resigning himself to the only option available, working for the Forest Department again. When I asked him how one got a job like tracking, he said that one had to speak to the ranger and ask for work. When I asked him how he found out about there being a job available, he said that the ranger had told him. "What if the ranger doesn't like you?" I asked. He responded that it was more difficult then. "*Kisi aur senior...* You can ask someone more senior, like the AD (Assistant Director) or the JD (Joint Director)", he said.

Kailash explained that the ranger was the key to everything. If one didn't ask the ranger, nothing would happen. All information and all opportunities started and ended with him. To get any kind of work, becoming known (*jan pehechan*) to the ranger, as someone looking for forest work, was crucial. In this sense, Kailash was in a relatively good position. He had previously worked as a tanker driver and tracker, and thus to get forest work again, being known to the officers and on good terms with them, *koi jugaad tha* (there was some *jugaad*). Moreover, his *jugaad* (in the sense of having *jugaad*) extended to not only the rangers but also even to the more senior forest officials. When we spoke at the start of my doctoral fieldwork, Kailash started by saying that he had got a memo signed by the Assistant Director (Madla) and approval from the Joint Director (the second in charge for the entire park) to become a forest worker again. Thus, for him, the job was all but guaranteed.¹¹⁴ He showed me the slip of paper on which the Assistant Director had scrawled the memo and declared that he was going to be a tracker in the T1 team, but for now he was just waiting for the deputy ranger to assign him. He told me it would only be a matter of days.

A few weeks later, while relaxing at a *dhaba* on the roadside in Madla, I saw Kailash driving a red tractor along the highway out of the village and towards Panna. I turned to the *dhaba* owner's youngest son,

¹¹⁴ The relationship between paper, materiality and certainty in this context will be explored in the next chapter. Other authors, such as Hull (2012) and Tarlo (2003), have analysed the importance of paper as an instantiation of something being *pukka* (sure, certain) in other South Asian contexts.

who himself had been a forest worker, fallen out with a forest officer over pay and lost his job (but was still hoping to get it back at some point). I asked whether he knew if Kailash was now part of the T1 tracking team. He simply shrugged and said that he didn't think so, "*Ab koi kam nahi hai*...there isn't any work at the moment for T1". A few days later, back in Hinauta, I got a knock on my gate in the morning and was pleasantly surprised to open it up and see Kailash. I invited him into my room and offered him a cup of tea, which he politely accepted, and I asked what he was doing in Hinauta so early. He said that he had come on the 8 o'clock bus for work. I said, "I thought you were working in T1's team". He sighed and responded that he was still waiting for the position to become available, but the ranger said he needed someone to drive the tractor, which transports labourers from Hinauta who were repairing roads on the Kheriya beat after the monsoon had washed some of the tracks away.

Unable to refuse work from the ranger for fear of damaging the relationship and thus losing the chance to become a tracker again, he reluctantly had agreed to this stop-gap, still holding out for the chance to work in T1's team. After a while, he excused himself to go and collect all the labourers from the village, pile them into the trolley attached to the tractor and drive them into the *jungle* in the sweaty heat. Kailash returned in the evening to chat and a few mornings and evenings after that. After a week of work in Hinauta, he was finally given the place on one of T1's teams, based in Madla, meaning that he could work closer to home and see his young family more regularly.

Keeping Jugaad in Perspective

Kailash's story is an example of the purchase of 'having *jugaad*' as an idiom to explain getting forest work but also the importance of situating it within the local contexts where it is mobilised and operates, which can be constituted by unequal and sometimes exploitative relationships. While Kailash appeared to have plenty of *jugaad* and ultimately succeeded in joining the T1 team, his inferior position within the relationships through which he activated or 'applied' *jugaad* meant that he had to wait weeks fulfilling a cheaper and less convenient role in the meantime, entirely uncertain whether the purported vacancy in the T1 team would ever materialise. Every forest worker I spoke with explained that they approached a member of the Forest Department personally or through a contact and were then given work. This became so common in my conversations that I began to ask, "Who got you this job [*kisne aapko kaam lagvaya*]?" instead of "How did you get this job [*aapko kaise kaam mila*]?". While people often didn't understand the latter, the former was instantly comprehensible. Having a contact is key for forest workers because there is no formal application process or training and thus, who you know and what that relationship can provide for *both* participants plays a central role in getting work as a forest worker. The demanding, and often unequal character of these relationships is worth highlighting here in light of which it is important to keep *jugaad* in perspective.

Jaugerui (2016) writes, "[*jugaad*] characterises patterns and possibilities of social relationships and interactions that may or may not lead to material gains or a kind of protections. It is thus a *social* practice of

provision” (Jauregui 2016: 35, emphasis original). *Jugaad* rightly forefronts the importance of having a contact and the ability of people like Kailash to mobilise their social connectedness to particular ends. However, their complete dependence on junior officers and the demands that those officers place on forest workers also demonstrate their vulnerability as cheap and subaltern labour (à la Sodikoff) and *jugaad*’s limits when used in a solely individual or entrepreneurial sense. One shopkeeper in Hinauta explained it to me like this,

“*Agar aap*.....if you and I and a third person are up for a position and the ranger needs someone to complete some work, such as washing clothes or getting his alcohol in the middle of the night, and you and I won’t do that, then he [gesturing to an imaginary third person] will get the job. It is all about who will do the work the rangers want”.

Thus, while *jugaad* could be could a strategy to mitigate and socially distribute risk, it does not fully negate the vulnerability of forest workers to exploitation from their superior officers. In their ‘access’ model of vulnerability, Wisner and colleagues (2004) emphasise that while access to resources through social relations are important, and can help to manage risks from hazards, what they term “structures of domination” are crucial to understand any limitations of actors’ ability to “adapt to new and threatening situations” (Wisner et al. 2004: 85). Therefore, any analysis of vulnerability, though cognisant of adaptive strategies to mitigate risk like *jugaad*, must acknowledge “the politics between people at different levels” and how those politics are legitimised, particularly in times of crisis (Wiser et al. 2004: 85-86; also see Leach et al. 1997).

Doing Chowkidaari: Majboori and Majdoori

Of all the forest workers, *chowkidaars* perform the most varied tasks, are the worst paid and often subjected to the most direct abuse by supervising officers. Yet they are essential to the operation of Panna Tiger Reserve. The term *chowkidaar* has historically referred to 'village watchmen', used by police forces to report on the *halchal* (goings on) in their village and patrol their communities at night or protect particular places¹¹⁵. The term has evolved to now also refer to security guards found at posh residences, ATMs or shopping malls in urban India as well as a catch-all term for those who fulfil a variety of different roles across a conservation area like PTR. Now 'the forest watchman', a PTR *chowkidaar* protects the forest from the village, rather than the village itself.

Chowkidaars can work in watchtowers, camps or at park gates for days at a time, visiting border villages like Hinauta or Madla only to purchase food, tobacco and other supplies before resuming their post. They are also often tasked with helping junior officers manage forest labour employed to clear fire lines or repair roads, and two *chowkidaars* accompany Forest Guards on their beats, often in places where they have worked and lived for decades. Experienced *chowkidaars* are expected to help new Department recruits get familiar with the *jungle*, and in many of their roles they spend long stretches of time with the forest staff, the permanent employees of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department. This leaves open the possibility of developing camaraderie between forester and

¹¹⁵ See Gupta (1974) on pre-colonial police organisation.

worker but also, dependent on the persons involved, conflict and disagreements.

During fieldwork in Panna, I heard about plenty of ridiculous tasks asked of *chowkidaars* and how if they refused, they were either severely reprimanded or lost their jobs entirely. Just one example is Rakesh Pal, a *chowkidaar* from Bador whose superior officer in Madla asked him to run home and bring some fresh *chhaachh* (buttermilk)¹¹⁶. Pals traditionally raise goats to sell for meat, and every Pal family I met still kept a few animals, though the restrictions placed on grazing have led to most reducing their herds drastically¹¹⁷. Selling milk was hardly a secondary business, let alone a stable livelihood. At the time, Rakesh was posted at a *chowki* (station/camp) along the National Highway about fifteen minutes from Madla by road and about an hour from Bador by foot (if one went directly through the *jungle*). Like trackers, *chowkidaars* are expected to learn on the job and simply adjust to the tough conditions. So when asked to ‘fetch buttermilk from home’, the officer assumed that Rakesh would simply take his *lathi* (stick), turn around and walk the few kilometres through the jungle, up the river bed of the dry Kemasn *nala* and scale the sharp cliff face on top of which Bador is found.

¹¹⁶ Demanding fresh milk or *ghee* (clarified butter) was described as a common practice by officers or other superiors looking to exploit their subordinate workers as was the supply of milk and *ghee* by guides, villagers or guides to officers to court certain favours.

¹¹⁷ Goats are also considered to be particularly destructive, as they eat leaves and tree shoots as well as grass.

Too scared to risk his job and his family's source of income, Rakesh did just that, though he didn't describe the journey to me as difficult. He had been working as a *chowkidaar* for almost two decades and had no fear of the *jungle* or walking in it. He made it back home after just under an hour's walk and asked his wife to go and milk one of the goats. She suggested that he take a little rest and eat something, as he had been on duty for days and had only just returned home. He took a short rest and made sure to leave Bador, fresh *chhaach* in bottle, so as to reach the *chowki* before dark, making his way down into the gorge, back along the *nala* to Badron (a former village site) and then to the camp along the highway. The ranger was incensed and shouted at him for taking so long, demanding that he explain why he had been gone for three hours when it should have only



Figure 51: Forest workers at event at Hinauta

been a little over two. The ranger suspended him and eventually had him transferred to a different *chowki* further away when Rakesh reported his behaviour to another officer. When I asked Rakesh why he continued to stay in the job, he repeated what most *chowkidaars* said to me when I asked questions after similar stories, “What can I do? This is my *majboori* (vulnerability/compulsion/obligation/helplessness)”.

The language of *majboori* was used often to describe why forest workers stayed in their jobs, out of necessity and compulsion above all else, mired in vulnerability and helpless to the working conditions. One teenage Yadav boy whose father was a *chowkidaar* complained constantly that “*forest me accha kam nahi hai...*there is no good work in the forest [department]”. When I asked him outside the range office in Hinauta one day why his father did it, he responded with another phrase I commonly heard, “*Pet kaisa badega...*How will the stomach be full? How will he feed the family? What else is there?”. I would ask whether the less than INR 8000 rupees per month was enough to feed a family and hear, “*Dal-chawal chalta hai...*we get by [literally lentils-rice continue on]”. This is not unlike how Sodikoff’s interlocutors described their bare minimum payment as “cooked rice wages” (Sodikoff 2012: 161).

Central to Sodikoff’s and my own work is the observation that conservation jobs do little to decrease the vulnerability of forest workers due to the exploitative conditions of their labour. They tolerate precariousness of their position, low pay and poor working conditions only out of *majboori*. Just as the women in Bjoy’s field described in the last chapter, they pursue their forest-based livelihood activities out of compulsion and vulnerability,

out of *majboori*, forest workers stay in their difficult jobs. Those breaking forest rules run the risk of fines and jail and rely on their ability to negotiate in encounters with forest staff to prevent their situation worsening even further. The same is true of forest workers, who enter into forest work out of necessity and vulnerability but have to rely on their ability to negotiate unequal power relationships with forest staff to make sure their situation does not worsen further through discrimination or exploitation.

Cultures of Transfer

During fieldwork, *chowkidaar* Mukesh Sharma (known respectfully as Mukesh Maharaj, owing to his Brahmin caste) had been working at the Hinauta gate for 14 years. This was unusual as gate *chowkidaars* are transferred regularly, especially when a new Field Director or new rangers first arrive. In comparison to Mukesh Maharaj, during my fieldwork, the *chowkidaar* at the Manor barrier changed four times. Scholars of public policy in Indian and other contexts have noted that the frequent transfer of officers and officials in bureaucracies like the Forest Department are common and are meant to serve a number of purposes, such as preventing corruption and weakening loyalty to local political or social connections¹¹⁸. Fleischman (2012) argues in his thesis on forest officers in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh that in the Indian Forest Department, transfers are a matter of routine but have also evolved as way for “politicians and senior officials to control the bureaucracy, both with the ends of achieving policy

¹¹⁸ See Banik 2001; Iyer and Mani 2012; Kaufman 1960; Potter 1987; 1988; 1996; Zwart 1994

goals, and of extracting bribes from bureaucrats” (Fleischman 2012: 131).

He argues ultimately therefore that transfers serve political purposes.

It would appear that in Panna, the frequent transfer of *chowkidaars* and trackers served similar purposes, to prevent corruption and weaken local ties forest workers had where they were posted, especially as transfers did not involve any type of promotion (something else Fleischman discusses). One of my closest friends in Hinauta would constantly refer to Mukesh Maharaj as an ‘honest man’, pointing out that it was his honesty that kept him at the gate for so long. However, instead of a bureaucratic routine or an example of interference by politicians, the transfer of daily wage forest workers happened at the whim of forest officers and officials, and from the perspective of forest workers, for no particular reason, often cruel and entirely arbitrary. One difference between the transfer of government servants and the transfer of forest workers is that in cases of protest or resistance by the transferee, government servants retain their *naukri* (job) and source of *rozgaar* (employment) through its lifetime security.

Forest workers, treated as disposable and only paid on daily wages in an environment without a labour shortage, could simply be without *kaam* (work). Those that did refuse often found themselves without a job (again) and (re)entering the cycle of falling in and out of forest work. Frequent job transfers thus bred discontent amongst forest workers and their families and communities, who rarely saw them if posted far away and amongst whom the same forest officers and officials often had to live. If ever confronted about transfers, junior officers would simply defer to senior officers who

would defer to officials who would state that it was simply policy or that a junior officer had made the request, and thus any forest worker hoping to challenge a transfer decision would waste valuable time visiting Department offices and losing their daily wages. Thus, having worked as a *chowkidaar* in the same place for so long, Mukesh Maharaj was an exception.

When I first started fieldwork, I didn't know anything about how forest workers were paid on daily wages or how little money they earned for the amount of work they did. I assumed that their specialised knowledge and important positions at the park gates or in tiger tracking teams meant that they had found gainful employment in a region where there was little. I went off confidently to ask Mukesh Maharaj about his work. When I asked him to explain how he got his job, what his work involved and whether it was good work, he laughed out loud, his teeth stained red with *gutka*, and said, "*Hum majdoori karte hein...we do majdoori*, what else?" I was confused. *Majdoori* is used most often to refer to manual labour, for people working on construction sites, for the dozens of young men who pack into the free NMDC bus at 8 o'clock every morning, hoping to find a *tekedaar* (contractor) who will pay him INR 300 for the day's work. Many were unsuccessful and returned home on the 13:30 bus. I asked Mukesh Maharaj to repeat, "*Phir se boliye...Please say again, you do majdoori?*". He explained that their work was *majdoori*, labouring, working for daily wages and with no job security. Being a *chowkidaar* was, to him, equivalent to working as an informal labourer: poor pay and conditions, sometimes physically demanding and with plenty of risk. He couldn't tell me when he

would next have a holiday or when I would be able to visit his village with him. Someone had to be at the gate all the time, and that was his job.

Through terms like *majboori* and *majdoori* forest workers like Mukesh Maharaj, Rakesh and Kailash expressed to me how they view their own working conditions, the inherent insecurity of their jobs, how they are subject to abuse and transfer often and simply do their work out of necessity above all else. Of course, this ought not to be seen as a blanket generalisation in all conditions and situations across PTR. Not all officers and officials were abusive, and many had great compassion for their workers. Some were admired for their hard work and *accha svabhav* (good character/attitude/behaviour/nature), and forest workers themselves did sometimes explain what parts of their work they enjoyed and how they were



Figure 52: The Hinota/Hinauta entry gate (December 2019)

happy to have found some form of work. However, following Sodikoff, I have foregrounded the subaltern and exploitative aspects of their work in accordance with how they themselves asked to be described. *Chowkidaars* asked me repeatedly to include them and their hardships in my study. In the next section, we shift to focus slightly to forms of indirect employment, to safari guides and tourism, and examine how they 'make a living' differently.

Making a Living: Safari Guides

In each Indian national park, one is legally required to take a guide on any safari drive. These guides are not employed by the Forest Department but instead earn their money by the drive, are assigned to a particular gate and work via a roster system, meaning that they are placed with certain vehicles in order of their guide number¹¹⁹. While daily wage forest workers, depending on their role, can earn up to INR 350 per day, guides have a much higher earning potential, as two drives per day brings in INR 720, excluding tips, which, for a good drive, can be INR 500 or more. While they earn more in per day terms, their earnings are less consistent than forest workers'. This is because they rely on a certain number of vehicles visiting the park each day and during periods of low tourist activity, guides may only work every other day in Madla, and as little as once or twice a week in

¹¹⁹ At the time of fieldwork (2017-2018), the safari guide fee for PTR was INR 360 per jeep and the guide fee for guests visiting Ranoh Falls or Pandav Falls was INR 75. At the time of fieldwork, there were 7 guides at the Hinauta Gate and 25 at the Madla gate. In 2019, this fee increased to INR 500 per drive.

Hinauta. In addition, the park closes during the monsoon, leaving them with no earnings for three months of the year.

As they can't earn from guiding in the monsoon, many guides have another source of income, either by running a shop, owning a jeep which also earns throughout the year, working on the side as a small-time tour operator or more common sources such as livestock and agriculture. These multiple sources of income made sure that families were able to 'make do', cobbling together resources to invest in their children's education or weddings, pay for new vehicles or medical treatment. This evokes the spirit of 'doing *jugaad*' most commonly referred to in popular media, making the most of limited resources and finding a fix for a difficult situation. Many of the opportunities that guides, and others, improvise when they are temporarily out of work are through interpersonal connections, through family members or others in the village.

One example of this is Kailash's older brother, who works during the season as a driver for a safari lodge in Madla but is out of work, like many dependent on the tourism industry, during the monsoon. Through one of the guides in Madla, he was able to work as a private driver for a car rental company in Panna, in a job where he made significantly more per day than he was at the lodge. I met him one day during the monsoon on the bus from Madla to Panna and asked where he was heading. He told me about his new job and how much he was being paid. I commented that it was much higher than he earned as a driver and he responded that he wanted to quit the jeep driving and do private driving full-time. However, at the start of the park season, he was there driving the lodge jeeps again and explained that

the other job wasn't permanent, and the lodge expected him to return. It was a regular income for at least nine months, and he needed guaranteed money to pay for his sisters' upcoming wedding. He asked me to tell him if I heard about something else that paid better and I told him I would.

The unreliability of tourism as a source of income for guides, and other tourism-employed villagers (hotel workers, drivers, cooks, cleaners etc.) reflected poorly on the Forest Department as villagers understood the Forest Department to be failing in its responsibility to 'develop' tourism and care for its so-called 'brand ambassadors' (a term used by Forest officials) and members of the 'Panna family'. While the ability of people like Panna's safari guides to 'make do' or 'do *jugaad*' to cobble together a living might be understood to reflect their virtuosity (a point made often about *jugaadis*), the necessity of *jugaad* to make a living was not considered virtuous by those same people.

This is unlike Millar's (2014) argument about precarious labour in Brazil, in which precarity¹²⁰ becomes a tool for flexibility, preferred and mobilised by her interlocutors to adapt their lives to changing conditions. It is notably also unlike the argument that Yadav (2018) makes about Gonds in Panna, in which precarity is exploited as a tool of subaltern resistance to work around the state. She argues that her interlocutors actively rejected work that is more permanent in order to remain flexible. Amongst forest-employed villages, I observed that although the precarity of forest work did

¹²⁰ I used precarity here instead of 'vulnerability' as it directly relates to conditions of labour, as clarified in the Introduction.

allow for flexibility and afforded the chance to leave and pursue new opportunities, most did not desire inconsistency or insecurity in their current employment's form. They regularly expressed the need for regular *rozgaar* (employment). That is to say, the reality of precarious labour often led to the mobilisation of mechanisms like *jugaad* to subversive and flexible ends (cf. Rai 2019), but that did not remove the desire for gainful, permanent employment.

Moreover, since employment and economic opportunities are distributed through family and interpersonal networks (cf. Jeffrey 2010), anyone gaining more stable and/or permanent work shifts the entire prospects of that network. This is similar to how precarity in work is managed through the diversification of livelihood activities between different individuals within a family (Wright et al. 2016). Any changes to their work and any possibility of more certainty or even higher pay thus caused both excited and anxious discussion amongst guides and forest workers.



Figure 53: Poster for Panna Tiger Reserve Guide Training

Guide Training: Opportunities and Failure

The Forest Department in Panna provides yearly guide training, and I was fortunate to be involved twice during fieldwork. In both cases, the training was run by an NGO team from Pune, Maharashtra who taught lessons about flora and fauna, personal grooming and communication skills and led games and other team-building activities. I was asked to give lessons on interacting with foreign guests as well as some English expressions and words that they might find useful. The Forest Department provided lunch, snacks and tea daily. The Department has been known to require an interview for someone to be added to the guide roster, and they occasionally hold meetings for the guides to discuss developments in tourism infrastructure, at which the guides have opportunities to address senior officials.

While these meetings don't often result in any changes or requests being met, the safari guides, as a group, are the recipients of much more



Figure 54: PTR Guides during training

communication and investment from the Forest Department officials than forest workers and labourers, despite the fact that they are considered ‘private people’ and are only paid through tourist fees.

I observed that the guides, as recipients of this training and communication, were much clearer about the conservation objectives of the tiger reserve, repeating what they had learned over years of training about what one might term the broader ‘ecosystem services’ of PTR¹²¹. Thus, their understanding of PTR aligned more with the tenets of global tiger conservation. This propagated the articulation of vulnerable *jungles* and ‘threatening people’ that I discussed in Chapter 4 through the Panna Nature Camps, and thus the guides can be considered the most suitable members of the ‘community’ encouraged by the Forest Department in line with groups like ‘Friends of Panna’. I found that guides were hesitant to mention the more ‘human’ aspects of the PTR wild landscape and often became uncomfortable when I spoke to other safari guests about relocated villages or commented on evidence of former livelihood activities in the *jungle*. Through their training, they were encouraged to present PTR and its tigers as precious wild resources. As brokers of that particular form of ‘consuming the tiger’ (Münster & Münster 2012; Vasan 2018), they helped to articulate environmental discourses that prescribed particular identities and relationships to the environment (Brosius 1999). This rested awkwardly in

¹²¹ Guides repeated to me that the reserve was important for water conservation and for clean air, how there were very few *jungles* left in India and the world and the importance of *prakriti* (nature) for human well-being.

contradiction to their own local relationships to the landscape and the curtailment of many family members' livelihoods.

However, the successful education of guides about the importance of PTR in conservation terms and the 'appearance' of a much more formalised type of employment has not resulted in guides being satisfied with their working conditions, which remained impermanent and thus left them entirely vulnerable to the wishes of the Forest Department and the officers controlling tourism. In instances like the death of P521, the guides, who fully understand the severity of losing even one tigress to the plight of Panna's recently recovered population, placed blame on the Forest Department and not the trackers. After speaking to the former trackers who had been following P521, I wrote

"Later on in the afternoon, I sat down at the *zamindar's* shop while two games of cards were happening in the sunlight fading fast behind the houses of the Gond *mohalla*.¹²² With me was the son of the oldest former forest guard, a tracker turned guide and a recently fired tracker who was part of the team that was following P521 when she died in a metal trap by suffocating. I started a conversation about what had happened... There was consensus that the forest doesn't care about its workers and should anything happen to someone in the field or otherwise there would be nothing.... The tracker admitted no guilt and expressed how the rangers never work, so how could they be expected to know what to do [?]" (Field journal, 17/1/2018)

The next day, I spoke with the guides.

"Regarding P521, the guides were clear that she died due to negligence on behalf of the forest [department]. They do not patrol that area well. They do not maintain good relations with villagers in that part of the park. They do not pay attention. One guide suggested regular foot patrols to dissuade all kinds of illegal activities as well as the relocation of these villages inside the jungle. Truly the guides are

¹²² *Zamindar* refers to a feudal landowner but is used casually to show respect. *Mohalla* means neighbourhood.

concerned that the forest department doesn't do enough." (Field journal, 18/1/2018).

Friends and Enemies: G1 and G2

Before the start of guide training in September 2017, there were rumours that the guides would be split into two groups at the end, based on an exam. The guides had been in contact with people working in other parks who had told them that two categories were forming, G1 and G2. The G1 group would be senior guides who performed well on the exam and would be placed in a higher pay bracket, earning INR 500 per drive, and the G2 guides would continue to earn INR 360. Guests would have the option to choose which category of guide to take on safari. This scheme was meant to reward competent guides and motivate younger and less experienced guides to improve.

The guides were all indignant about the possibility of losing their jobs to an exam, since another rumour was that those that failed the exam would suddenly be off the roster entirely. Throughout training, the guides were sceptical about the actual existence of the exam, hoping that it wouldn't occur. When on the final day, the trainers announced that there would in fact be an exam, a quiet hush fell over the room. They took the exam the following day and all of the experienced guides passed, with only a few of the newest recruits failing. They expected an announcement about G1 and G2 based on the results. The trainers and the officials told them to wait until the orders came from Bhopal (the MP Forest Department headquarters) and they would then find out. The guides asked me whether I knew anything, since I had helped with the training. I couldn't give them any

information, and the information never seemed to come (and nothing had happened when I left the field fifteen months later). Throughout the week, the guides had been discussing the importance of forming a union, so they could influence and be united in the face of the Forest Department's negligence. The G1/G2 incident only increased the urgency of their conversation.

One morning before the classes started, I was discussing the training with a guide from Madla, commenting on how the Forest Department makes a lot of effort to bring in such a good team to lead the training. He stood up and said flatly, "Up until the 30th of September, the guides are the Forest Department's best friends but after the 1st of October (when the park opens), we become their enemies". He explained how the Forest officers regularly take their families in without guides, ask guides to help without paying them and ask to use the jeeps that some guides own without so much as offering petrol money. This is why they needed to form a union, to be working collectively to have influence on the Department, prevent favouritism and abrupt changes to the rules. My friend Maharaj, himself a guide from Hinauta, said that this discussion of unions and collective action always lasts until the 30th of September. After that, once the season starts, in-fighting and competing for the favours of the Forest officers dissipates the potential for collective action and each guide returns to applying their own *jugaad* and making their own living in competition with each other.

Safari guides and forest workers are two groups in which the informal and insecure character of their work and their reliance on interpersonal connections and *jugaad* to make a living leads to distrust and competition

between individuals and families. As mentioned in relation to forest rules, the Forest Department often exploits pre-existing conflicts in order to gather information and becomes a way that families in conflict seek to disadvantage one another. Thus, 'the forest' both relies on, exacerbates and becomes a tool within conditions of conflict in the local context. In the next section, I will focus on the place of information, informants and preference by examining the position of the most skilled category of forest worker: the local *babus* (clerks/office workers).

Providing Work for Others: The *Babus*

The best-paid forest workers are clerks and computer technicians that work in the range offices and division headquarters, earning over INR 9000 per month. The place of clerks, peons and office staff in Indian bureaucracies is well-addressed in the growing literature on bureaucracy in South Asia. As familiar faces of the postcolonial Indian state, they are brokers and mediators that can play a crucial role in the access certain groups have to state resources and the relationships between different agencies or administrative units of government (Gupta 2012; Hull 2012; Mathur 2015). The subjects of that literature are often permanent government employees, whereas here, in contrast, I will focus on daily wage workers who hold what are considered *kaushal* (skilled) positions in the Forest Department offices.

These 'worker *babus*' are entirely distinct from what one might call the 'staff *babus*', full-time government employees usually found in permanent positions at offices in the Division headquarters in Panna and

through whom and across whose desks every action of the Forest Department passes. The worker *babus*, on the other hand, are paid poorly on daily wages, subject to the same terms of employment as other forest workers and thus can lose their jobs at any time, and they receive little training or investment from the Forest Department (expected to learn on the job). However, in comparison to *chowkidaars* and trackers, and other types of forest workers, their privileged position in the bureaucratic set-up of the Forest Department as skilled workers affords them more regularised working hours and crucially decreases their potential disposability and thus their chances of losing work. This is partially because they are perceived to possess both skills not widely found in the communities they come from and specialised knowledge of formal bureaucratic processes and systems but also because of their practices of informality and preference exercised at the interface of the Forest Department and local communities (cf. Vira 1999).

The transmission and circulation of information concerning particular Forest Department activity follow a routinized bureaucratic path, which places these *babus* at a crucial interface between Forest Department Division headquarters, Range Offices and local communities. A 'to-be-carried-out' forest order starts usually from being signed off by the Field Director. It is then copied and verified by the Senior Department Clerk, photocopied and registered at the records office in the Division, entered in the dispatch ledger. From there, it is transmitted over radio and in paper copy to the concerned range office or range offices, where the worker *babus* there receive and record the orders, ready to disseminate or circulate

the information to either the officers carrying out the orders, field stations or camps in the *jungle* or local communities.

New Guides, Old Networks

The dissemination of this information is subject to practices of informal preference exercised by the *babus*, who may privilege certain village groups over others, giving them access to the information before anyone else or making sure they have accurate information. This often falls along caste or kinship lines, and sometimes the information can have immediate and real consequences for the persons informed (or not). One example of this is when the Forest Department in Panna decided to open competition for new guides to join the roster at the Hinauta Gate. Before 2016, there were only three guides at the gate, however, when the number of booked tickets exceeded three, untrained young men from Hinauta were recruited to fill the empty places. Under pressure from guests and the young men who wanted to be placed on the regular roster, the Forest Department decided to offer an opportunity for training and to join permanently. Information came to the Hinauta range office first, in the form of an order slip, dispatched over radio and delivered as a letter.

While rumours about such initiatives circulate often in forest-affected villages like Hinauta, locally nothing is considered *pukka* (certain/sure) until a physical order arrives at the range office, until the information is written on a signed paper order (cf. Hull 2012a). I elaborate on this point in the following chapter on processes of village relocation. However formal or material the transmission of the order from Division to Range Office is, the

dissemination of the information to the communities unfolds along informal lines. The information about the guides arrived first to the Hinauta range office, where the *babu* is a Yadav man in his forties, whose family lived down the road from me.

His house was one unit in a large building, which stretched over a sizeable area, where he, his brothers and cousins all lived together with their families, directly opposite the Forest Rest House, used to host visiting officials or researchers. These particular Yadavs were originally from Kheriya, having moved to Hinauta a long time ago, and each family engaged in a range of different livelihood activities. This included farming, cattle and buffalo rearing for dairy products (their traditional livelihood), shop-keeping, car rental, labouring in the NMDC, working in luxury safari lodges (in Panna and elsewhere) and working for the Forest Department (one as a *babu* and a few as *chowkidaars*). Income was not necessarily distributed within the extended family and usually kept within family units (husband, wife and dependents¹²³). However, living in close proximity to each other meant that most of their time, as well as labour towards household activities, public events such as weddings and birthdays and even herding livestock, was often shared (mostly by the women who performed and organised most of these domestic tasks).

¹²³ Dependents can include children as well as parents or other non-working adults that a family may choose/be obliged to support. Family arrangements in this sort of situation do not always map onto 'nuclear family' organisation nor do they imply a system of distribution across all members of the extended family. Instead, brothers and their families live collectively in the same space until they are married after which they usually move into a separate (but attached) unit, and when necessary share resources and labour while retaining their own income as 'theirs' (*apna; khud ka*).

The children of the *babu*'s generation were all a similar age to me, and in particular there were half a dozen or so young men who had recently graduated or were in the final years of college (undergraduate, Panna) and hoping to find work. Many were repeatedly applying for government positions in the police, railways or Forest Department while others were simply 'waiting' (cf. Jeffrey 2010). A few had occasionally filled in as a temporary safari guide when the Hinauta gate was oversubscribed. So, when the Forest Department decided to open the roster to potential new guides, while not the ideal permanent government job, it was an opportunity to earn some money and to do something, not only to pass the time but also to transition towards potential marriageability.

When the order about the opening of the roster came through to the Hinauta Range Office, it became incumbent upon the junior officers and the *babus* to 'inform any interested parties' and to 'communicate and disseminate information'. Without any formal, regular meetings between Forest Department and the village communities of any worth, this information was distributed through interpersonal networks in the village. It shifted and transformed as it travelled from one person to another, stopping and starting in particular places and also failing to reach certain people who may be interested but simply are not prioritised within such communication networks. For the *babu*, his nephews were the first people he contacted. This is how they described the process of getting guiding work to me. They received a phone call from the range office, telling them that applications for guiding were open and they applied. One of the newer guides told me that only nine out of the approximately thirty applicants from Hinauta were

selected. Eight of them were Yadavs and four of them from the *babu's* immediate family. Put simply, those whose number the *babu* didn't have, or those who he didn't call, didn't find out first about the opportunity and thus missed out. The young guide told me, "*Yadav log zyada form dete hein...Yadavs submit more forms*".

This is not just a statement about their access as family members to a particular opportunity, but also a general comment on the relationships between different groups within the village. As the first recipients of information through informal networks of communication set along lines of kinship and caste preference, young Yadav men had a particular advantage in this situation. However, this also highlights a greater caste confidence and position of power in relation to other groups, which is both expressed by and a consequence of these informal networks. Here, Yadavs have more *jugaad* than other caste groups, like Adivasis, and thus they are able to apply it more often and find more ways to cobble together a living through their various interpersonal networks and resources as it involves, in this case, a livelihood such as safari guiding.¹²⁴ Poorer caste groups are not only 'out of the know' but are also considered less confident and capable of asserting their places in these networks.

This is not to say that Adivasis and others do not have *jugaad* of their own, but what that *jugaad* leads to can tend to group along caste lines and

¹²⁴ This importance of this type of *jugaad* was often emphasised in conversations with older Yadavs who lamented the transfer of a Yadav ranger formerly posted to Hinauta, during whose tenure they had even greater influence and connection to the local Forest staff. This is similar to the Rajput-based friendships and connections that Robbins (2000) describes in Kumbalgarh.

correspond to previous positionalities. For example, forest labourers are most often Adivasis, both men and women¹²⁵, and are recruited through similar informal networks. The Kondar woman I described resisting forest officers in the previous chapter considers herself the leader of the Kondar forest labourers and thus holds a position of influence for both communities, able to provide work for other people and able to unite her community to make life difficult for troublesome foresters or *chowkidaars*. Like the *babus*, she exercises practices of informality and preference at the interface of forest and village. However, the opportunities she has to offer other women and men in her community are only temporary and the worst paid. Moreover, her own position is itself precarious, ultimately herself a labourer and not a member of the privileged forest bureaucracy like the *babu*.

In this, we can see how vulnerability in labour and the ability to mitigate that vulnerability through mechanisms like *jugaad* varies according to relative wealth and status within particular institutional relationships with bureaucracies like the Forest Department (Vira 1999). Vulnerability appears again as internally variable within 'villages', whose internal socio-political dynamics are central to understanding village-forest relations. This resonates with arguments in the vulnerability and risk literature on the relative impact of hazards and precariousness in livelihoods on different groups and the ability of those groups to adapt and provide opportunities for

¹²⁵ I mention that both Adivasi men and women work as labourers as Yadav women very rarely worked outside of the home in any capacity, particularly in families like the *babu*'s. It was my impression that it would be exceptionally rare to find a Yadav woman working as a labourer in this context.

their broader social networks, with the added insight of *jugaad* as a specific mechanism or strategy of resilience which socially diffuses risk.

In their access model, Wisner and colleagues (2004) highlight how each household may engage in a variety of different livelihoods or “income opportunities” (cf. Wright et al. 2016), each of which has a set of what they call “access qualifications”: “a set of resources and social attributes (skills, membership of a particular tribe or caste, gender, age) which are required in order to take up an income opportunity” (Wisner et al. 2004: 90). This emphasises the variable ability of different groups or individuals to access particular opportunities in vulnerable situations. They argue that in order to avert the risk of particular events, like drought or crop failure, households make use of “networks of obligations and rights”, situated in the context of local political dynamics (Wisner et al. 2004: 92).

Those in positions of relative advantage before a potentially hazardous event or when faced with a particular “income opportunity” may be better able to cope with or benefit from the situation, something we will also see in the next chapter on village relocation (cf. Kabra 2013; 2009). The accounts of forest workers evidence these dynamics as well, demonstrating that we cannot assume that changes made to their employment or future opportunities will impact all people within each village or even within each caste group in the same way. This further highlights the need for analysis based on local understandings, and properly incorporating emic concepts like *jugaad* is a step forward in the Indian context. Such an explication and incorporation of emic concepts supports and responds to critiques of certain risk and vulnerability models’ limited allowance for

creativity and inventiveness (see Haghebaert 2001). They also help to highlight the important place of mechanisms of informality and familiarity within local power dynamics when discussing the negotiation of vulnerability as something fundamentally embedded within and refracted through local power relations (cf. Birkman 2006; Leach et al. 1997; Gururani 2002; Robbins 1998a).

Position of Privilege

Briefly, I want to reflect on my own participation in these informal networks of information and influence and ethical dilemmas I encountered during fieldwork. As a foreigner and someone who knew, was known to and had good relationships with both the Forest Department and key figures in the tourism industry, often I was understood as having *jugaad* myself and thus different people would ask me to speak with someone towards a particular end, themselves applying their own *jugaad* in their connection to me. For example, Hinauta guides asked regularly whether I could ask the lodges in Madla to send more jeeps to the Hinauta gate, and my neighbour asked me to speak to the Field Director about getting his job back after he was fired. This often presented me with a dilemma, because, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, these networks operate based on preference, often intentionally or unintentionally advantage certain groups over others and can create or exacerbate distrust and conflict between groups. Thus, I was aware that by participating in these informal networks of influence and information I may risk my relationships with certain groups; foresters may become irritated that I was seen to be advocating 'on behalf' of certain

villagers and some caste groups might interpret my actions as a form of discrimination.

To appear more aligned with one group than another might risk or damage my position as a researcher able to negotiate these different relationships with stakeholders within the Panna conservation landscape. This re-emphasises the inherently social (and thus demanding) aspects of an idiom such as *jugaad* and the realities of interpersonal networks that stretch between the Forest Department and local communities, of which I attempted to become a part. To circumvent these dilemmas, I would often dismiss or diminish my perceived *jugaad*, stating that I didn't really know the person of influence in question well or simply state that my asking wouldn't work. Unfortunately, this often left my friends disappointed, my selfish choice of self-preservation as a researcher letting down their expectations of me. While I found this balancing act between stakeholders personally challenging and reflected on it throughout fieldwork, I also came to realise that forest-employed villagers of all kinds constantly faced the same dilemmas, but for them the stakes were much higher, involving both their livelihoods and their integral kin and caste relations. My complaints from a position of privilege, temporarily entangled in these relationships through ethnographic fieldwork, was by no measure, means or stretch of the imagination equivalent or comparable to the vulnerable position of the *chowkidaar*.

The Chowkidaar's Dilemma

About forest workers in Madagascar, Sodikoff (2012) writes, "I knew that the [conservation] salary was a very desirable income and economic buffer for conservation agents, but what embittered them about the job was that during periods of intensive labor for [conservation], their social relations in the village were strained" (Sodikoff 2012: 162). She argues that her interlocutors, whom she calls "conservation agents" epitomise the internal relations of conservation landscapes and are "walking contradictions of the conservation economy", explaining that "instrumental in communicating with and patrolling the erosive actions of peasants, [they] were nevertheless 'stuck' on a low rung of the bureaucratic ladder, receiving far less pay than the alienated experts" (Sodikoff 2012: 163).

The resonances between Sodikoff's context and my own are striking. Forest workers in Panna similarly experience strained relations with other villagers. They are responsible for protecting the *jungle* from 'encroachment' by their kin and neighbours. They occupy a position within the forest bureaucracy with very little chance of advancement, in which they are often at the whim of forest officers whose 'trained' opinions are valued more. They are paid extremely poorly but working out of *majboori* (necessity/vulnerability) in an environment where their employer has drastically reduced opportunities for gainful employment. My interlocutors would also use the word 'stuck', however, in a slightly different way to Sodikoff's. Rather than 'stuck' within the forest bureaucracy, forest workers in Panna considered themselves 'stuck' between the dual obligations of

village and forest, between their communities and friends who relied on their discretion to carry out activities fundamental to their subsistence needs (firewood and fodder collection mostly) and their job which required no tolerance of any resource gathering within the forest.

In the previous chapter, I described how encounters between forest workers or officers and villagers in the *jungle* are suspended in a state of situational ambiguity, where familiarity can play a determining role in the outcome of a chance meeting. In those situations, *chowkidaars* in particular face a dilemma. Do they confiscate the villagers' tools and report them to the Forest Guard? Do they simply turn a blind eye and hope they aren't reprimanded for failing to 'do their job'? It is the vulnerability of their work and the paucity of other livelihood options that exacerbates such a dilemma, since by not 'following the rules' the *chowkidaar* risks his own precarious regular source of income. And yet, they also risk relationships with those local people, who, if they are from the area where they work, may be kin or old friends, or, if they aren't from that area, they still have to live amongst. It would appear that they are destined to lose, to bear the weight of conservation dilemmas, which while also in part borne by forest officers (see Fleischman 2012; Wangel 2018 and Vasan 2006), through the impermanence of their work (unlike that of forest staff), hold greater risks for the *chowkidaar*.

I often made a point of asking forest workers, particularly *chowkidaars* whose job it is to patrol with Forest Guards and be the forest's 'watchmen', and villagers about these dilemmas. Responses pointed again to the idiom of *majboori*, forest workers responding, "*Hum kya...*What can

we do?” and villagers, often with great sympathy and understanding would say, “*Vo kachu nahi kar saka...*there is nothing he can do. That is his work”. Villagers knew that the *chowkidaar* had to feed his family as well, that his job required him to patrol the *jungle* and prevent illegal activities, however understanding had its limits. One elderly Raj-Gond man expressed to me that ‘good’ officers, “*har choti choti cheez* Don’t focus on every little thing” and this extended to *chowkidaars*, since those who were seen to be over-zealous, who didn’t understand the subtleties of occasional discretionary authority and familiarity and unnecessarily hassled local people were not met with sympathy and understanding. Thus, the *chowkidaar*’s own virtuosity in these negotiations of dilemmas between village and forest was important, not to overstep their position in the eyes of locals and yet still correctly perform the tasks required of them by the Forest Department.

Conclusion: Engagement through Employment

Chowkidaars and all forest-employed villagers are caught between the politics of the Forest Department and the needs of their local communities, in the ‘gridlock’ of tiger conservation (Rastogi et al. 2012). They find themselves at the heart of the clash between the antagonistic vulnerabilities of *jungles* and people. They work for the former while included in the latter while having to manage both simultaneously. In doing so, they expose the state’s prioritisation of vulnerable *jungles* in their own positions’ insecurities, expressed well through the idioms of *majboori* and *majdoori*. They are an

excellent demonstration of the inconsistencies and informalities of conservation-based work in the Indian context and elsewhere, and their conditions offer an insight into the continued exploitation and discrimination of local labour in Indian forestry more broadly (Locke 2011; Münster 2014; Rangarajan 1996; Sodikoff 2012).

However, they also represent a missed opportunity for conservation in India, as those people who understand the subtleties, dilemmas and complications of relationships between conservation officials and local people and yet, through the historically exploitative and under-valued qualities of their labour, remain unrecognised and unappreciated. Instead of acting as information-distributors, brand ambassadors or local supporters of the Forest Department, their vulnerability worsens the reputation of forestry and conservation. Their negotiation of the interface between 'village' and 'forest' is a potential pathway to improve 'village-forest relations' and understand the pitfalls of the forest bureaucracy (Fleischman 2012; Vasan 2002; Vira 1999). Instead, the poor conditions of their labour require forest workers to draw on mechanisms like *jugaad* in order to both assert and mitigate their vulnerability within unequal power relations. Through terms like *jugaad*, I want to emphasise the collective character of such assertion and mitigation, situated within broader interpersonal, supportive relationships of obligation and reciprocation (Jauregui 2016: Rai 2019). I posit *jugaad* as a potential contribution to the vulnerability literature as a strategy and mechanism of resilience that can help diffuse risk across broader social networks in line with other livelihood-based strategies formed in the face of continuous precariousness. This is a useful step towards the

explication and incorporation of emic concepts into broader understandings of vulnerability, risk and resilience.

With the high levels of unemployment and livelihood insecurity around conservation areas, engaging local communities through gainful employment could go some way towards improving village-forests relations. However, it does not appear to be in the interest of Forest Departments to improve the conditions of their forest workers, since the exploitation of their labour increases the vulnerability of local people. This highlights that most forms of engagement between 'forest' and 'village' in this context harm local people and lead to the increased precariousness of their lives. Ultimately, this makes living next to a conservation area unattractive and unfeasible for many families, who, left with the option of village relocation and resettlement, accept compensation from the Forest Department to leave (Beazley 2011; 2009). I discuss this process in the following chapter, where I explore the character of the local conservation 'state'.

Chapter 7

Engagement as Process: Village Relocation and the State

“Keeping others misinformed about the roles of the state was key to being able to controls its resources and the way in which they were accessed”

- Alpa Shah (2010: 90).

“*Such me...*Why are you really here?”

- Hinauta resident (January 2017)

Before I left for Panna for the first time, my advisors in Delhi suggested that I send a letter to the Field Director of the tiger reserve before arriving, just to let them know that I would be visiting villages around the edges of the park. They explained that it would be important to be as visible and transparent as possible with local government. Arriving in April at the start of a very dry and hot summer, I found a small hotel in town and checked into a room on the second floor by 9 o'clock that first morning. Unaware of exactly how warm it would get by midday, I decided to walk to the Forest Department headquarters, just near to Diamond Chowk along the National Highway. After a kilometre along a dusty road, I reached a Bank of Baroda ATM where I turned left up a small hill with a copy of the letter and my documents in my bag and my water bottle in hand. People living along the street

watched life pass by from the comfort of their doorways, many fanning themselves or sitting next to a cooler. As I crossed in front of their homes, they seemed confused that anyone, let alone a young English person, should be out in such temperatures.

Entering the gates to the forest offices, I walked over a grate designed to prevent feral cattle from entering the complex and continued past the disused and broken-down collection of jeeps, minibuses and motorcycles collecting dust in the parking lot. Like many government offices, it appeared simultaneously empty and busy. The hallways were deserted, but a look into the offices saw clerks surrounded by stacks of folders and endless pieces of paper, fans whirring slowly, pushing warm air around enough to blow flies off the desks but not fast enough to cool anyone down. Many noticed me briefly and turned back to their work. I walked up to the nearest office worker and asked where the Field Director's office was. Nervous and struggling to understand me, he handed me an appointment slip and pointed to the Senior Clerk's room. "*Steno babu se puchiye*...Please ask Steno babu".

Steno babu was the head clerk for the tiger reserve. He was an imposing man with glasses and a receding hairline, bordering an always prominent *tilak*, a marking on his forehead of three horizontal white stripes crossed by a vertical red mark, indicating his Brahmin caste and worship of Lord Shiva. Sitting at his desk, also surrounded by papers, when I entered, he smiled and asked me what I wanted before returning to the document he was editing. I explained in my stumbling Hindi that I was researcher from England and had sent a letter to the Field Director. Steno babu said,

“*Haan...* Yes, your letter arrived”. He paused. Filling the silence, I asked whether the Field Director was in the office today, and Steno babu said, “*Ab nahi...* Not now, but he might come later. Just wait outside”. I explained that it was quite warm, so I couldn’t wait too long. I asked, “*Kal kitne baje...* tomorrow, what time will he come?” Steno babu explained, “*Koi nischit nahi hai...* it is uncertain, but come after 11am”. I returned to the hotel and returned over the next three days hoping to meet the Field Director.

For those few days spent waiting at the forest offices, I passed the time with the office workers, chatting to them about their lives and mine, asking every ten minutes or so when *FD sahib* would arrive. Each time, they explained that they did not know any more than I did. I read my book and wrote in my journal, noting the photographs of the Panna Revival proudly displayed along the walls. Finally, *FD sahib* arrived in the early afternoon on the third day and welcomed me into his air-conditioned office. He explained that he knew my letter had arrived, but he had not read it.

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have explored how ‘village-forest relations’ as a form of environmental politics, articulates the antagonistic vulnerabilities of *jungles* and people and the state’s prioritisation of the former over the latter. I started by showing how forestry and conservation seek to separate ‘village’ and *jungle*, legitimising state intervention by treating both as wild and vulnerable in conservation discourse and practice. I then looked at how that separation unfolds on the ground through the imposition of forest rules,

whose situational ambiguity local people negotiate before I turned to emic concepts like *jugaad* and *majboori* in accounts of forest-employed villagers to emphasise the emergent, interdependent but ultimately unequal character of village-forest relations. Each chapter has focused on different modalities of engagement between ‘forest’ and ‘village’ that articulate the vulnerability of Panna’s *jungles*, expressed clearly in public events and outreach, the enforcement of forest rules and the exploitation of local forest workers. However, each chapter has also demonstrated how villagers express their own vulnerability and seek to mitigate it, pushing back against discrimination and exploitation through mechanisms like familiarity and negotiation.

Choy (2011) argues that the language of articulation works well to analyse environmental politics through its double meaning- explaining well and the contingent assembly of disparate elements.¹²⁶ I have sought to develop this slightly further by turning to Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) use of articulation and discourse and the concept of ‘antagonism’ to argue that the language of articulation also emphasises the fractured and contested character of particular discourses and the possibilities for dis-articulation through social struggle. It helps to unify both the discursive and ontological character of vulnerability in this context while making politics and power relations central. This is important because, as we have seen, in each modality of engagement, vulnerability figures as both a description of precarious life and a narrative or mode of identification that interlocutors

¹²⁶ For this, he draws on Stuart Hall’s (1996) use of articulation.

mobilise to negotiate and mitigate the disadvantage and exploitation of village-forest relations.

In this chapter, I analyse the ways in which local people assert their own vulnerability as a way to make claims on 'the state' by using what I call 'alternative governments', hoping to mitigate the precariousness of life around PTR. To do so, I analyse the process of village relocation and resettlement, as the fourth and final modality of engagement between 'forest' and 'village'. These assertions antagonise and help to disarticulate hegemonic discourses of 'vulnerable *jungles* threatened by local people' as villagers exploit and expose the contradictions within local bureaucracies (cf. Mathur 2015: 344) through the use of familiarity and negotiation within what Hull (2008: 413) calls the "murky transactional arenas" of bureaucratic processes. The state, in its multiple guises, acts as both evictor and patron, and leaves both foresters and villagers 'waiting' for a change in the legislation on village relocation across India.

Dealing with 'the State'

Unlike anthropologists who have made 'the state' or politics in South Asia their object of study, during fieldwork I did not embed myself in government offices (Gupta 2012; Hull 2012; Mathur 2015; Tarlo 2003) or work among activists or political workers (Agrawal 2005; Das 2004; Shah 2010), nor have I sought out politicians or mafia bosses (see Michelutti et al. 2018; Michelutti 2008; Piliavksy 2014). Instead, I simply set out to explore the relationships between conservation authorities and local people, positioning

myself in a village where I anticipated interaction between the two groups and various modalities of 'engagement'. Thus, this was not designed as an 'ethnography of the state' or an ethnography of citizenship and politics.

However, as Sivaramakrishnan (1999) argues in his study of colonial Bengal, forestry in India has always been part of processes of 'statemaking', in which the relationship between society, the state and the environment shift and transform towards particular political ends, (re)inscribing different divisions between 'state' and 'society'. Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan (2014) note that in the social science literature on Indian conservation and forestry, since the mid-1990s there has been a more nuanced treatment of the colonial and postcolonial state, a critical view of local societal contexts and an emphasis on the multiple layers and internal fissures within the relationships between state, society and environment. One good example is Agrawal's (2005) study of colonial and contemporary forestry in Kumaon of what he calls the 'governmentalisation' of the environment and the development of not only new understandings of 'nature' for local resource users but also new subject positions those users come to inhabit.

Therefore, the context of my research demands some kind of analysis of the state and government, both known locally as *sarkar*, since it is *sarkar* which intervenes in people's lives in dramatic ways and with whom those same people actively engage in order to comply with, work around or negotiate interventions like village relocation. Furthermore, throughout the thesis, I have been addressing topics relevant to an analysis of the state and government, such as authority and rules, state employment of various

kinds and the character of the forest bureaucracy. Thus, I here address the 'the state' as a crucial actor that looms in the programmes, moments and processes I have described throughout the thesis.

Rather than providing a definition or claiming to have a comprehensive understanding of 'the state' or 'citizenship' though, I treat the state as it appears locally: mainly through its presence as multiple bureaucracies, government employees and regulatory processes. I analyse the ways in which local people deal with and negotiate its multiplicity, making use of 'alternative governments' to assert their vulnerability in order to mitigate the precariousness of life lived in anticipation of village relocation. *Sarkar* sits awkwardly in its ubiquity and multiple guises and its often-conflicting aims as both the source and solution to the vulnerability of people and *jungles* in this context, both evictor and patron. Citizenship then becomes about these negotiated processes of claims-making, something asserted rather than given (cf. Das 2011).¹²⁷

Political Ecology and the State

In the field of political ecology, Robertson (2015) writes that scholars have often had an ambivalent relationship to 'the state' despite the widespread recognition that many places political ecologists study are state-owned or state-managed environments. Part of this is due to the attempt to prioritise the scale of the 'land manager' instead of the scale of

¹²⁷ This is not an ethnography of citizenship, but there is a vast and growing literature on that topic. See Lazar's edited (2014) reader for a good summary and set of examples.

‘governments’ and ‘capital’, leading to the sense that a focus on the state and a ‘top-down’ perspective was precisely the problem political ecologists were attempting to overcome through empirical, site-based analysis (Robertson 2015). Over time, first through the incorporation of Marxist theorists like Miliband (1969), scholars started to address ‘the state’ (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987) and expand the study of political ecology simply beyond ‘the local’ to questions of government, acknowledging the importance of government processes in environmental contexts (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Peet and Watts 1996). Yet, Robertson (2015) argues, it is only in the turn to Foucauldian understandings of politics and power through concepts like governmentality and ‘ethnographies of the state’ that political ecologists started to unpack ‘the state’ as an essential part of understanding environmental change.

Anthropologies of the Indian State

Ethnographies of the state have grown in popularity from the 1990s onwards in anthropology¹²⁸. India has been a productive place in which scholars have sought to engage with the question of ‘the state’ and its processes, particularly in its ubiquity and multiplicity in many contexts. Fuller and Benei (2001) famously point out that the modern Indian state plays an important part in most people’s daily lives and is not a “discrete,

¹²⁸ See Vincent (1990); Gledhill (2000); Das and Poole (2004); Gupta and Sharma (2006) for good summaries of the emergence of ‘the anthropology of the state’. Sian Lazar’s (2014) reader on the anthropology of citizenship provides an excellent summary of anthropological approaches to citizenship, particularly her introduction therein.

monolithic entity 'acting' impersonally above or outside society. Rather *sarkar*- the indifferently 'state' and 'government' in the commonest Indian vernacular term for them- appears on many levels and in many centres, and its lower echelons at least are always staffed by people with whom some kind of social relationship can or could exist" (Fuller and Benei 2001: 15). Corbridge and others (2005) argue that "states are best thought of as bundles of everyday institutions and forms of rule" (Corbridge et al. 2005: 5) and that scholars ought to attend to the diverse understandings and experiences of different people in India as they encounter the state in its multiple and seemingly ubiquitous forms.

Such premises have undergirded studies that followed, particularly those which deal directly with state bureaucracies. These include Gupta's (2012) exploration of structural violence inflicted on the poor through the bureaucratic production of arbitrariness or Mathur's (2015) ethnography of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Uttarakhand. Such works attempt to tackle 'the everyday state' through an attention to bureaucrats and everyday bureaucratic mechanisms of governance. They show the "fundamentally fragmented nature of *sarkar*" (Mathur 2015: 23) and how the state is best understood as "relational set of practices" (Mathur 2015: 5) through an attention to the "everyday practices of specific bureaucracies" (Gupta 2012: 33). Gupta explains that "government bureaucracies are now ubiquitous in the lives of poor Indians, regulating citizens' access to many essential and commonplace goods" (Gupta 2012: 33). Rather than a unitary 'state', they encounter particular bureaucrats and agencies in their daily lives. Local people living around Panna Tiger

Reserve most regularly encounter *sarkar* as multiple government agencies, departments or bureaucracies and their employees, not necessarily acting in coordination with each other and whose lack of coordination they seek to use to variant ends (cf. Fuller and Benei 2001; Gupta 2012). I want to emphasise this aspect of ‘the state’, in the ways that my interlocutors ‘deal with’ its bureaucracies, employees, materials and interventions.

From the broader literature on the anthropology of the Indian state, a number of relevant themes emerge that aid my analysis of state interventions like village relocation. First is the opacity of state processes and pervasive atmospheres of mistrust and suspicion (Hull 2012; 2008; Shah 2010; Mathur 2015). Second is the place of gossip, humour and mockery, as well as the politics of legibility (Das 2011; 2007; 2004; Das and Poole 2004; Scott 1998). This relates to the final theme: the Indian state’s labyrinth of documentary and material bureaucratic practices (Cody 2009; Hull 2012a, b; 2008; Mathur 2015; Tarlo 2003). During processes like village relocation, these aspects of my interlocutors’ dealings with ‘the state’ were evident. How successfully local people assert their own vulnerability as a claim on the state relies on their individual and immediate interpersonal networks’ *jugaad* and familiarity with both bureaucratic processes and state employees. We can observe how this varies between groups within relocating villages, emphasising the importance of understanding internal politics and power relations when discussing engagement between ‘forest’ and ‘village’.

Surveys, Schemes and Relocation

Based on the 2007 National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, in 2008, the NTCA outlined guidance on a centrally sponsored scheme whereby people living in or around protected areas could receive compensation to relocate elsewhere (Ministry of Rural Development 2007; NTCA 2008). This gave villagers two options, both based on a budget of INR 10 lakh per person. In the first option, the Forest Department relocates and resettles a village in its entirety, as a whole. Each adult (defined as someone over the age of 18) receives a plot of five hectares on the new site and the Forest Department is required to build housing, wells, roads, electricity, a medical clinic and school at the new site. In the second option, each adult receives a cash payment 'package' of INR 10 lakh and the Forest Department provides no land or infrastructure wherever they decide to settle. In this option, villagers are free to resettle wherever they like, provided it is not on forest land, and therefore 'the village' is often split up. If villagers would like to be compensated for their land or any other property, the total amount of each compensation package can be reduced to free up funds. Each household's property is then assessed, and the 'extra' money is distributed proportionally. This process is the ultimate expression of the state's reification and separation of 'village' and *jungle*, displacing the former to make space for the latter.

Recent literature on conservation-induced displacement as an instrument of establishing protected areas highlights the importance of understanding local context in order to properly assess the impact of

relocation on communities (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007). Studies looking at the Indian context draw attention to the fact that “hierarchies at the local level may be as critical as those between government bureaucracies and villages” (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006: 371). However, “the bleak future associated with living within a protected area in an extremely remote location” (Ghate and Beazley 2007: 332) can make resettlement seem a favourable option. Scholars like Beazley (2011; 2009) and Kabra (2013; 2009) have argued effectively that the relative disadvantage of particular groups within relocated villages affects the outcome of displacement, as does the role of involved forest officials and officers, local NGOs and the media. This adds to the emerging literature on the forest bureaucracy (see Fleischmann 2015). Here, I focus on village relocation as a way to address how people around PTR negotiate with the multiple guises of the state. This final modality of engagement between ‘forest’ and ‘village’ articulates and enforces their continued reification, control and separation by the state. The process of village relocation is therefore the most drastic intervention motivated by the environmental discourses described throughout the thesis.

This entire process involves a series of surveys from different government agencies to determine the number of adults and total population, take a list of everyone’s names and information, as well as value land or property within each household. It also involves village meetings to distribute information on each package and determine which option the village decides to take by way of a vote. Although I did not witness a village relocation during fieldwork, residents in Hinauta were

planning to be relocated at some point. There was even a meeting in Hinauta about the prospect of relocation in the first June of my fieldwork. Additionally, some residents had settled there after being relocated from villages like Talgaon, Jhalar or Pipartola. The anticipation of relocation was common in all of the 19 villages I visited, since the Forest Department considered communities along the border of PTR as 'in need of relocation'. People living in each were familiar with the processes of relocation as well as with villagers who had been relocated, often through kin relations, and the forest staff who had done the 'relocating'. This anticipation of potential relocation deeply influenced local people's dealings with the multiple guises of the state, in which they negotiated with and commented on different bureaucratic processes. This had a significant effect on my own research methodology during fieldwork and resonated with many of observations in the extant literature mentioned above.

Doubt, Suspicion and Being *Sarkari*

Throughout fieldwork, I was wary of bringing up the topic of village relocation. I anticipated that it might be a sensitive issue, and that people might be worried to speak about it. In the introduction, I laid out the steps I took to ensure anonymity and follow the correct ethical protocols in accordance with UCL, the ASA and the ESRC. These were particularly important when discussing village relocation. The prospect of leaving their homes and moving elsewhere might be troubling and therefore bringing it up might cause offence, upset or discourage particular people from speaking with me further. Moreover, I was aware that any discussion I

initiated about village relocation would create doubt and suspicion about the purposes of my research. As I have explained in previous chapters, government interventions such as village relocation, as well as job opportunities and access to various 'schemes' are filtered through particular information networks within village communities, in which certain groups do, and are perceived to have, more information. I observed that these groups often formed along caste, gender or kinship lines. In the case of Hinauta, this would mean that higher and middle caste groups, such as Brahmins, Thakurs and Yadavs would be more involved in and informed about government processes, and Scheduled Caste and Adivasi groups to a lesser extent.

By bringing up the topic of village relocation, my interlocutors often assumed that I had some extra information to share about the possibility of their village being compensated to leave. This was most likely because I was an outsider and had good relationships with the Forest Department, and because my interlocutors associated certain research practices with 'government work'. For many, 'research' meant surveys and surveys could mean village relocation. Local communities around PTR were familiar with survey work conducted by a variety of different government agencies, various *panchayat* (village council) initiatives to register residents for particular government schemes like building toilets or creating *Aadhaar* cards¹²⁹, registration of voters, and the work of the Wildlife Institute of India,

¹²⁹ The recent push in India to build toilets and make India 'open-defecation free' has resulted in basic toilets being built across the country, including in Panna. At the time of

who have surveyed occasionally about human-wildlife conflict. This survey modality of research was so familiar in the area that more educated villagers and urban residents I spoke with would occasionally ask to see my survey or questionnaire, using the English terms amongst a mix of Hindi and Bundelkhandi. For those less familiar with 'research' in these ways though, conducting surveys was government work and therefore, it could be about the prospect of village relocation.

The fractured participation of different caste and family groups in official discussions about village relocation and in other government schemes meant that more disadvantaged groups often felt they had simply 'missed out' on a particularly important meeting or other groups had withheld crucial information. It was possible therefore that others knew something they didn't, and it was possible that, as someone potentially connected to *sarkar*- someone potentially *sarkari*- I was sharing pertinent information with certain people and not with others. Mathur (2015) discusses how the term *sarkari*, meaning of or from the government or simply governmental, can be applied to a range of different actors, both human and non-human. In her context, as in mine, laws and schemes, particular modes of intervention, material practices as well as documents and animals (in both cases large carnivores like tigers and leopards) could all assume the description *sakari*, as well as the employees and volunteers

fieldwork, the majority of village households in Hinauta had built toilets through the scheme, although the use of the facilities varied greatly. *Aadhaar* cards are quickly becoming the national form of identification across India as one's *Aadhaar* card is linked to almost all government processes, including school and bank registration, property ownership and voting.

involved with government work. This demonstrates the ubiquitous and yet fractured, often indiscernible, deceptive and hidden character of *sarkar* in these rural contexts of government intervention. Suspicions about me and my purported 'survey' being secretly *sarkari* led often to ethical challenges and awkward situations.

“Really, what are you doing here?”

Occasionally during the early days of fieldwork, villagers would approach me on their own and quietly ask me to include them in my research. I would ask them what they meant, particularly as my research didn't target any particular group and sought to explore as many aspects of village life as possible. Some would offer me a list of their family members, with dates of birth and ID card numbers. Others would ask, “*Sach me...really, what are you doing here?*” When I explained that I was doing ‘research for a degree in social science about village culture’¹³⁰, they would often be sceptical and say that someone else had told them that I was there on behalf of the government to help with village relocation. When I explained that I was not there for *sarkari* work, some weren't convinced. They would point out that I know the senior officials in the Forest Department and had connections to local politicians through the tourism industry, which was true, and even if I wasn't involved in relocation from the

¹³⁰ I chose this description as it was recommended to me by my co-supervisors. at TERI School of Advanced Studies in Delhi. While ‘social science’ is generally well-known as a university subject across India, anthropology is not, and generalising my work as a ‘study of village life and culture’ allowed me to observe what my interlocutors considered important for me to understand in their lives and keep private the more political and potentially controversial topics I was investigating. Discussing those topics outright would have potentially closed doors and caused even more suspicion, jeopardising the research.

government's side, I could help them by finding out information or getting their name on 'the list'¹³¹. This type of interaction decreased throughout fieldwork as people began to realise that I was simply there to live and spend time. Moreover, I argued throughout fieldwork with sceptics that if the government was going to send someone, why would they send me? Why would the Indian government send a foreigner who is not fluent in the language? Why would I stay here for so long? Mildly successful, these questions appeared to soften opinions about my 'real purpose' for some people. Others remained unconvinced.¹³²

My findings resonate with Shah's (2010) account of activists, state actors and Adivasis in Jharkhand. She argues that while her informants were afraid of the state, "they were also unclear about what the state really was. For instance, there was a lack of clarity about who exactly was included in the category of *sarkar*, since it contained not only forest officers and police, but often also labor or building contractors as well as NGO workers" (Shah 2010: 55)¹³³. She writes,

I have often seen *adivasis* try to get land revenue documents, caste certificates, or signatures from officers, and being given the endless run-around until they are eventually convinced that they need their village patron to get the job done....Keeping others misinformed about the roles of the state was key to being able to control its resources and the way in which they were accessed" (Shah 2010: 90).

¹³¹ The importance of 'lists' is well-explored Matthew Hull's work (2008; 2012) on urban settlement and the materiality of bureaucracy in Pakistan, Das's (2011) work in Delhi and Talo's (2003) work on the Emergency.

¹³² As I outlined in the introduction to the thesis, I didn't employ a survey methodology for these, among other, reasons, and I left any structured interviews to the end of fieldwork when I had developed a network of contacts in a range of communities some of whom understood that I wasn't acting on behalf of the government.

¹³³ Mathur (2015: 24) also expresses the multivalence of the adjective *sarkari* and the category of *sarkar*, as it could be applied to a range of different persons and objects, giving them with authority while simultaneously opening them up to mockery and derision

Her use of the expression “shadows of the state” evokes a sense of being ‘in the dark’, or ‘out of the know’ as well as being intimidated by and outside of the state’s gaze (cf. Scott 1998). This implies that certain citizens appear to be deliberately kept in the dark about more beneficial state processes and fall out of its occasionally benevolent gaze while others actually benefit from what Shah terms ‘the twilight zone’, manipulating the opaque quality of state practices to further individual and collective interests. This is reminiscent of the forest *babus*’ practices of preference and informality in the distribution of employment information, and we will return to this internal dynamic later on in the chapter.

Doubt and suspicion cloaked the topic of village relocation throughout my time in the field, not only as an opaque process that favoured particular groups, but also as something approaching at uncertain speed on an unpredictable trajectory, on an unclear and unknown horizon. Thus, initiating conversations about village relocation was challenging. I never wanted to mislead my interlocutors by confirming suspicions that I was there to participate in village relocation and so chose very particular moments in which to enquire about the process, taking advantage when discussions arose in the course of village life, during more ‘routine’ government practices.

Relocation Rumours, Humour and Mockery

In particular, I noticed that *panchayat* work, in the form of birth and death registration, the rolling-out of particular schemes and village meetings were fodder for relocation discussions. Additionally, any particular

appearance of *sarkar* in the village prompted conversation. Over a few weeks in October during fieldwork, the *panchayat* had been collecting information from households in order to update the village register of births and deaths, conducting what they described as a *jan sankhya* (population) survey. Along with births and deaths, they were updating each resident's mobile numbers and their *Aadhaar* card numbers. I observed villagers approach the *panchayat* volunteers with their and their families' *Aadhaar* cards in hand, or with photocopies, in order to get their name correctly placed on the register. Only once did I see someone refuse to give their information, to the exasperation of the volunteer. One shopkeeper shouted, “*Tume humao jankari kyun chahane...*Why do you need my information? Go away!”. The shopkeeper was frustrated with the constant questioning and registration, indignant that he should be asked at all. He had been living in Hinauta for over forty years.



Figure 55: The Hinauta *gram panchayat* building

Within a few weeks, the *panchayat* had completed its work, registering and updating the phone and *Aadhaar* card number of 2880 residents. Of those 2880 people, many hundreds were not living in the village at the time, away to work as labourers elsewhere, and relied on their family members to do their registration. Families often kept copies of their identification at home or sent pictures from where they were through Whatsapp. During this time, I kept my fieldwork routine, visiting the same few gathering places; however, I began to notice that conversations about relocation increased. The ‘buzz’, so to speak, about when relocation would happen, in what way, how much they would be compensated, other villages in the process of going and gone already became more and more common.

The Computer Literacy Scheme

A few weeks later, three young men arrived in Hinauta and sat at the main *chaurai* (intersection) in the Yadav *mohalla*. They opened a laptop and began to speak with people sitting there. Although they were dressed casually and didn’t have any noticeable form of government identification, something that didn’t seem to bother anyone, they explained that they were part of the Prime Minister’s new computer literacy scheme, whereby a select number of villagers across the area would be able to take basic computer courses. I asked where this would happen and they explained that the classes might take place in Panna or if possible, in the village itself. On the computer, they opened up an *Aadhaar*-based interface for registering details and attached a fingerprint scanner, a common piece of equipment used to instantly access anyone’s personal details, familiar to most people in India when purchasing a new SIM card. A number of

villagers sitting around at the time started to shuffle near and hearing it was a government scheme, returned home to fetch their *Aadhaar* cards.

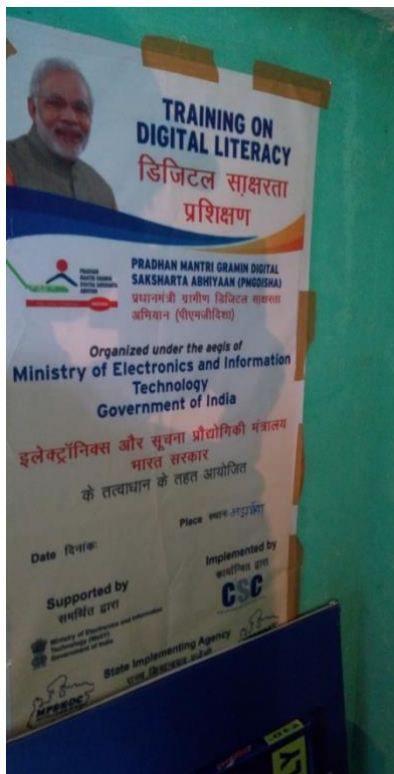
A number of people registered for the scheme, and I noticed that, as tended to be the case in these types of public spaces, it was mostly middle-aged men, many of whom were educated to a basic standard. I questioned how they were going to learn how to operate a computer at their age and whether they were going to attend the classes. They said that they were signing up for their children. One man explained, “*Humara samay chala gaya...* Our time has gone, but our children could get some benefit from this. We should sign up for anything we can”. They explained that they would do anything they could to give their children and their family an advantage, and if this scheme resulted in a qualification or diploma of some kind, it might lead to an opportunity to find work in the future¹³⁴.

As people were signing up for the computer scheme, an elderly man from the relocated village Talgaon approached to ask about what they were doing. Hearing that it was a government scheme, he rushed home to get his *Aadhaar* card and tell his family. As he left, others began to snicker. I asked what was so funny. One said, “*Usko lagta hai...* It seems to him that he is going to get a [compensation] package from this”. The others broke out laughing, mimicking this poor, illiterate man wandering back to the intersection to sign up for the computer literacy scheme. When they

¹³⁴ Jeffrey (2010) explores this strategy amongst his interlocutors, many of whom collect qualifications and degrees as they engage in *timepass*. This also might be considered a strategy to increase “access qualifications” for “income opportunities” in Wisner and colleagues’ (2004) ‘access model’ of vulnerability and hazards.

recounted the story over the next few days, it was met with laughter, others remarking that the elderly man clearly did not understand anything.

While this may seem cruel to mock an elderly, disadvantaged man, it was by no means an isolated incident. In fact, villagers often mocked one another's lack of knowledge or misdirection about government processes, particularly village relocation. I would find that I was implicated in mockery too, since those that approached me to help them get compensation, as I describe above, were often the target of jokes, having had others tell them facetiously that I was from the government. Even when I earnestly enquired about particular incidents in which I was approached, my friends would often laugh and explain that those particular people did not understand 'how it worked'. Groups of young men would tease a 'less-informed' person to



Figures 56 & 57: The poster for the computer literacy scheme (left) and the Hinauta tea shop (right)

ask me to put their name down in my notebook, finding it hilarious when they started listing their family names in the village teashop. Realising their mistake most simply smiled and cursed at the young men. Of course, this did not mean that those young men were more informed, and I often found that they would approach me privately themselves, also unsure exactly about the process of village relocation.

“Why would they help you?”

My own dealings with various bureaucracies, time spent waiting for forest officials or mistakes I made with reference to government processes were also often met with exasperated humour and sympathetic jokes about my incompetence in ‘dealing with *sarkar*’. This was particularly true when I hoped to find accommodation inside the NMDC Township during my pilot study and failed miserably, frustrating the villagers who had told me I was going about it the wrong way. Many simply shrugged, smiled and said, “*Vaise hai...* That is how it is. They won’t help us, so why would they help you?” My repeated failures to meet forest officials after days of waiting provoked similar reactions, a cynical view of designated ‘visiting hours’ as farcical, frustrating and yet the status quo. The opacity of government processes like village relocation, dealing with bureaucracies and the doubt and rumour surrounding them did not fade through mockery and humour but worked alongside it.

Das (2004) argues that the everyday state can be brought into life through rumour, gossip, mockery and mimetic representation, and as a resource for seeking rights, the state often works to manufacture its own illegibility through the “unreadability of its rules and regulations” (Das 2004:

234). In the opacity of these processes, my interlocutors grew frustrated and cynical, and they pursued strategies to make themselves more 'legible' to the state when they themselves couldn't 'read' its processes. About struggles over housing among the Delhi poor, Das (2011) argues that citizenship is a claim rather than a status, where precariousness is central to the experience of the poor in their belonging to a polity. For her interlocutors, their claims to citizenship are only achievable through their ability to materialise it in documentary practices, due to the 'illegibility' of the state to them and them to the state. She argues that the poor's claims are crafted through their labour in marginal, informal places and processes. This evokes Hull's description of the "murky transactional arenas" in which money, favours, friendship and kinship can play a decisive role in the negotiation of state documentary and material practices (Hull 2008: 413). It is along this line of argument that I demonstrate the ways in which my interlocutors asserted themselves as vulnerable, worthy recipients of a relocation package in order to mitigate the uncertainty of potential relocation. The politics of being recognised as a worthy recipient of compensation was something to be negotiated, not simply given or assumed.

Residency, Legibility and Documents

Amongst my interlocutors, there were various conceptions of who was going to be compensated in the event of a relocation and how to guarantee that you would be one of those people. One common opinion was that only 'old residents' would be compensated. That is to say, only

long-term, multi-generational, 'original' inhabitants would count. This category was difficult to delineate though. While the original communities in Hinauta are Kondar, Gond and Yadav, many of the older, established families, with properties in the centre of the village, plenty of land and prominent roles in local politics had moved from nearby villages, such as Bador and Majhgawan (before it was flooded by the NMDC's creation of a lake to use for mining). Many had married into families originally from Hinauta, so the five or six families that were considered 'the old original families' had expanded greatly.

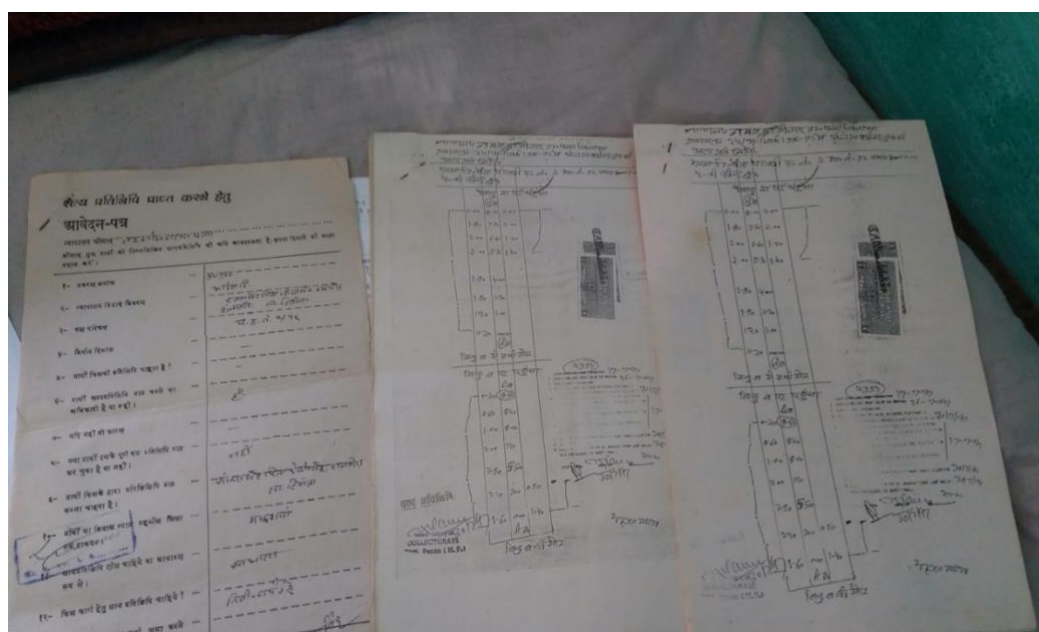


Figure 58: Land documents for Old Majhgawan

The complications arising from the notion that only the 'old residents' would be compensated were brought into relief by the fact that a large proportion of Hinauta residents moved to the village because of the NMDC, either to work as labourers or set up businesses. Some of the descendants

of NMDC labourers and employees settled in Hinauta, their children attended the school inside the township and some continued to work in the mine themselves. They (and their children) were born in the village, owned a small plot of land, had built a house and were fully integrated into many aspects of village life. Therefore, another common criterion mentioned was land ownership. In previous relocations such as of Talgaon, Jhalar or Pipartola, some Hinauta residents had purchased plots of land in the village and been successfully compensated for their property. While they did not receive a compensatory package that residents had, they were paid for the property they lost. In Hinauta though, many people owned land and did not reside there.

For example, one man called Pramod had purchased a plot of land ten years ago and yet fallen on hard times, failing to build a house. Pramod purchased the land as an insurance, knowing that Hinauta would be relocated one day and therefore he and his entire family would be eligible to

Sl. No.	Item	Quantity	Unit
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

Figure 59: List of household materials from village relocation

bureaucrats and the *panchayat* as well as with the bureaucratic processes involved in relocation. However, the ambiguity about his residency status meant that he had to make use of documentary practices that operated in “murky transactional arenas” that mobilised this familiarity and his own *jugaad*.

Schemes and Identification

Some older residents repeatedly told Pramod that he must build a house soon, since relocation might be fast approaching. In an attempt to bolster his claim to residency, similar to those that signed up for the computer literacy scheme, he made sure to register his entire family’s identification, school certificates, voting details and any other form of ‘proof’ to his plot of land. He also made sure to have good relationships with the senior, politically-active and well-connected members of the village, so that, when the time came, they could vouch for him, reassuring government



Figure 62: House in Hinauta built through housing scheme

surveyors that he was, on paper *and* in reality, resident in Hinauta and thus entitled to compensation. The confusion about how exactly one qualified for compensation or qualified as a resident points to the importance of material objects like voter registration documents, one's name on the village register, identification cards and school certificates and, crucially, a standing and lived-in property in processes of government and citizenship in this context.

This echoes the work of other scholars, such as Tarlo (2003), Cody (2009), Hull (2008; 2012a; 2012b) and Mathur (2015; 2014; 2012) who have foregrounded documentary and material practices in the assertion of citizenship claims and state processes. They explore the materiality of government processes and its importance for poor citizens in their claims on the state. Similar to my context, their interlocutors have to negotiate a variety of different forms of identification and documentation in order to construct a legible identity in state terms, and yet the verity and reliability of documents are themselves thrown into question. As in the cases discussed above, simply having what might be called 'proof of address' in the form of an *Aadhaar* card or having one's name on the voter registration list did not always qualify one for residency and thus any government benefit arising from it. The opacity of government processes meant that a seemingly unknown constellation of various identifications or proofs, resulting in an as-yet-undiscernible form of legibility, was required for citizens in this context to make successful claims on the state and become the recipients of the innumerable schemes launched by the Indian government (cf. Das 2011; Hull 2012; Mathur 2015).

As was the case with the forest order disseminated by the *babus* in the last chapter, in government processes and claims to compensation, documents help make things *pukka* (certain/sure), establishing legitimacy and certainty to a particular claim or status. The *pukka* qualities of such documents offer their owners' more resilience to hazards like relocation as evidence of particular identification as 'vulnerable' persons, as I explain in the following sections. Moreover, from a risk and hazard perspective, documents can be crucial "access qualifications" that help multiply "income opportunities" as my interlocutors believed might emerge from the computer literacy scheme (cf. Wisner et al. 2004).

This has been well noted by the literature on bureaucracy and employment in South Asia, though it ought to be emphasised that while documents' power is clear in their ability to make things *pukka*, their transmission, circulation, implementation and recognition still rely on people and interpersonal connections. Just as we ought to keep the limits of *jugaad* in perspective, the impact of documents is still filtered through the relative connection, status and influence of their owners, signatories and recipients. Understanding what documents, in what order, with what information, to give to which bureaucrat are all forms of knowledge unevenly distributed within particular communities where mechanisms of informality and familiarity play key roles. Documents are key to processes of state legibility, but they do not automatically lead to more equitable, transparent or democratic processes (cf. Mathur 2015). Keeping the bureaucrats and their wider interpersonal network in view remains important.

The importance of being seen or legible was acutely expressed one week when I sat with a group of Yadav men at the *churai* intersection, discussing politics and *Aadhaar* cards. This was the same week when news broke in Delhi about the hacking of thousands of citizens' personal details through *Aadhaar* card-linked schemes.¹³⁵ I asked whether they considered 'invasion of privacy' an issue and they replied that they didn't. One man expressed that he was happy for the government to see everything. He exclaimed, "*Humara bank account dekhiye...* Please look at my bank account! See how poor we are!"

For him, the legibility provided by schemes like *Aadhaar* was a means for the government to see exactly how impoverished certain citizens were and thus help them. They similarly voiced support for legibility and transparency as the anti-corruption measure promoted by the government in order to check 'black money' and scrutinise the wealthy. For my neighbours in Hinauta, 'being seen' by the government was part of the process of receiving help either through more schemes or by providing better compensation packages for village relocation. In each case, signing up to as many schemes as possible meant that they were able to continually reaffirm and prove their status as a resident and therefore increase their ability to, when the time came, properly receive compensation for relocating.

¹³⁵ BBC News (2018). Aadhaar data leak: Edward Snowden backs India reporter over exposé.

Labour Cards and Signatures

One scheme that Pramod attempted to register for was the 'Labour Card' provided to labourers and daily wage workers by the Department of Labour.¹³⁶ It entitled recipients to financial assistance with healthcare, weddings, funerals, insurance and other benefits. On the sign-up form, one had to choose a labouring profession from a list and gather the signatures of the *panchayat* secretary and *Sarpanch*. The Secretary then would take the signed forms to an office in town and the cards are delivered after some time. After his card did not arrive, Pramod went to enquire at the office and discovered that the secretary had not signed any of the forms he submitted that day, though all of the secretary's family and caste members had received their cards weeks ago. Luckily for Pramod, he knew a senior official in the department and was able to fix the situation.

One of the secretary's issues with Pramod was his insistence on signing up for schemes without having a property in Hinauta, which placed the *panchayat* in a difficult situation if ever caught. These internal dynamics were also clear in accounts of village relocation, where villagers that are more influential were able to 'adjust' their property value in surveys and thus receive more money. These practices did not always fall along caste lines, since there were significant discrepancies between, for example, Yadav families relocated from Talgaon; one man apparently receiving INR 14 lakh and another INR 7.5 lakh only.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ <http://labour.mp.gov.in/MPBOCWWB/Default.aspx?g=10>

¹³⁷ These figures were speculative and suggested by Hinauta residents. It was their impression that the wealthier you were, the more value you could have 'adjusted'.

It is thus not only a question of how particular citizens make claims on the state but also how state processes are filtered through local micro-politics. The (in)actions of a particular bureaucrat or active discrimination within and between communities plays an important part of the ways in which many of my neighbours and friends in Panna dealt with *sarkar*. This resonates well with what Shah (2010) has said about the mediation of state benefits through local elites and what Beazley (2011; 2009) and Kabra (2013; 2009) have highlighted in their studies of ‘successful’ relocations. In their processes of establishing residency, signing up for innumerable schemes, discussing, doubting and joking about the process of village relocation, residents in Hinauta express their vulnerability as both needful, infrequent recipients of government assistance and persons about to be displaced by the Forest Department without fair compensation nor clarity about how that would unfold.

Articulating Vulnerability

In this engagement between local people and the Forest Department, as well as other government agencies, we can see the articulation of antagonistic vulnerabilities of both *jungles* and people as well as the state’s prioritisation of the former. Attempts to relocate villages through opaque bureaucratic processes clearly expresses this prioritisation of vulnerable *jungles* over people. However, the need for villagers’ skilled negotiation of the state to assert their own vulnerability also exposes the failures of the state in its role as a patron or provider of services. In her ethnography of failed action by the state in a village in the Himalayas when

a leopard held a reign of terror over her field site, attacking and killing multiple people, Mathur (2015; 2014) makes a similar argument using different analytical language. Drawing on analyses of risk and anticipation (Adams et al. 2009; Lakoff 2006), she looks at how “conservationist regimes, that seek to manage the specific risk of the extinction of big cats in the future, effect the responses of the bureaucracy” and how “orientations to risk- the future of big cats as species, and the present of the human residents of a marginal Himalayan town located on the Indian borderland- were operating simultaneously, leading to severe contradictions within the district bureaucracy” (Mathur 2015: 144).

She makes the key point that the state in its multiplicity can serve variant and contradictory aims and fuel contradictory discourses. Regimes (partially) governing state action, conservation being one in her analysis and mine, can privilege certain groups, animals or environments over others. In their non-action in the face of a man-eating leopard, the state not only acted in favour of vulnerable big cats instead of vulnerable people, but also exposed its own vulnerability in its internal contradictions, leading her informants to express how the state is like a ‘paper tiger’. In the following section, I explore how villagers turn to ‘alternative governments’ in their dealings with the state to minimise their vulnerability in the face of relocation by the Forest Department, making use of the multiple guises of the state within their local context. In this way, they assert their own vulnerability, exposing these internal contradictions, antagonising and helping to disarticulate the dominant discourses that drive interventions like village relocation.

The NMDC and the River-Link: Alternative Governments

Many discussions I had with villagers in Hinauta regarding village relocation, whether they would agree to leave or why they had not left already, revolved around the role and future of the NMDC. In the anticipation of displacement, the township and mine had a large influence over my interlocutors' perspectives on the prospect of leaving their homes and accepting a compensation package. In interviews conducted at the end of fieldwork about village development and about village relocation, most respondents in Hinauta pointed to the NMDC as a main source of *vikas* (development). For them, this meant not only infrastructural development, like roads, water and electricity, but also the development of their communities through the provision of work and the education of their children. In this section, I look at the presence of multiple government agencies in this context and its effects on processes like village relocation and village development, demonstrating the multiplicity of *sarkar* and the skilful negotiation of this multiplicity by those living in PTR-border villages to assert and mitigate their own vulnerability.

In doing so, they turn to what I term 'alternative governments', engaging with the 'face' of *sarkar* (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2002) from which they seek to benefit the most and actively working against or turning away from the interventions of others. This is not to say that governments are meant to display consistency with all agencies maintaining a certain level of

coordination, nor that local people conceptualise *sarkar* in that way.¹³⁸

Rather, it is to demonstrate that the assertion of vulnerability as a way to make claims on the state requires a specific knowledge of such inconsistencies and contradictions and an ability to exploit them in order to mitigate the potential precariousness of processes like village relocation. This can contribute to the disarticulation of hegemonic discourses which justify such interventions by making villagers' vulnerability more visible to the state in contradistinction to vulnerability of *jungles* or tigers, which in places like Panna it appears to prioritise.

"We Won't Find a Place Like This"

Besides being a former source of employment to thousands of labourers, the NMDC also provides many services and facilities that would otherwise be unavailable to thousands of villagers over 20 kilometres inside the boundaries of a tiger reserve. This includes the water filtration and distribution system, regular bus service, hospital and good quality school, bank and ATM, a place to separate and grind wheat, post office, cooking gas cylinder refilling and distribution centre, and even a photo studio and an Indian Coffee House. Many consider the school inside the township the best school in the district and many children from Panna take buses to the mine every day to attend. Moreover, as a government industrial project, the mine has Indian Army Central Industrial Security Forces (CISF) soldiers

¹³⁸ See Vasavada et al. (1999) for an excellent analysis of multiple committees, agencies and schemes in the context of community forestry in India.

protecting and patrolling it, a police *chowki* and contracted private security at the gates, increasing the general safety of the area. No other village so far inside of the boundaries of Panna's *jungles* has access to these sorts of facilities.

Doing *Sarkar's* Job

In these numerous ways, the NMDC is a boon for the villagers living in Hinauta. What is interesting in this context though is how local people understand the NMDC as it relates to *sarkar*, particularly the contribution of the mine to village development. The NMDC mine is responsible for multiple infrastructural improvements in Hinauta and Bador, including funding a water pipeline from a natural spring to supply the entirety of Bador, the maintenance of a filtered water supply to Hinauta through pipes that stretch,



Figure 63: The NMDC bus in Hinauta

albeit unevenly, to all communities, and the repairing of the road leading to the mine. Senior villagers and the village *panchayat* regularly lobby NMDC officials to help with the improvement of roads or the extension of pipelines, and the mine often sends a minor officer to attend village events.

Villagers who claim to be politically connected count NMDC officers as friends and NMDC residents even submit votes on local village council elections. My interlocutors were keenly aware of these benefits, leading many of them to express to me, “*Kahin aur...* Somewhere else, we won’t find a place like this”. The head of the village Eco-Development Committee laid it out in clear terms that the *panchayat* and the NMDC are thus far responsible for any ‘*vikas*’ in the village. His anxieties about the possibility of village relocation centred around the reality that such numerous and nearby facilities would be almost impossible to find in other rural parts of the region. The NMDC also remains a source of work for some people, either as employees, short or long-term contractors. Crucially, the NMDC’s contribution to and participation in village life contrasts starkly with the other non-local governmental agency present in Hinauta and the one pursuing village relocation: the Forest Department.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ This provision of public services by government corporations or industrial projects is increasingly rare across the Global North, as Ferguson (2005) notes in his account of copper mining in Zambia, where similar townships as in Hinauta with hospitals, schools and other services have appeared for local residents. He observes that the spread of these benefits often generates political support in targeted regions and are therefore fragmented across landscapes and increasingly outsourced to private enterprises or NGOs. Public services therefore become bargaining chips or ways to gain allegiance or maintain local support in areas where ‘the state’ has surrendered its duty of care for citizens to private enterprise or the charity sector.

One day, while sitting at the bus stand with two senior safari guides, one asked me whether I would be able to find the address of the Chairman of the NMDC in Hyderabad on my phone. He wanted to write a letter to demand that village children pay only the same fees as township children, as the school had asked the villagers for more. The other guide piped up and said that we should also list another set of demands including fixing the road (which had yet to happen) and the electricity supply (which is separate from the NMDC). They felt entitled to various amenities as the mine was *sarkari* and it was *sarkar's* responsibility to provide services for village residents. I asked whether we should also ask the Forest Department. They abruptly responded, “*Nahin...*No, the Forest Department does nothing”. They were correct. Despite having an Eco-Vikas Committee and regularly promising to hear the numerous complaints villagers had, the Forest Department was not interested in village *vikas*, and as I have covered thus far, worked actively to make life difficult for residents in PTR border villages. However, both were *sarkari* and both were *sarkar*, and although from different sections of the government with variant aims, in the context of Hinauta, both the NMDC and the Forest Department were conceptualised as potential sources of opportunity and disadvantage, depending on villagers’ ability to exploit the former and avoid the latter.

My interlocutors made claims on each depending on what type of issue they had, taking advantage of alternative routes, contacts and strategies and applying their *jugaad* in order to assert and mitigate their vulnerability as a form of claims-making on the multiple guises of *sarkar*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ability to apply *jugaad* and the

availability of “access qualifications” or “income opportunities” (cf. Wisner et al. 2004) is highly variable between individuals and groups within such communities. The capacity for skilful negotiation of *sarkar*’s multiplicity also plays a key role in the prominence of particular individuals in village politics and the ability to provide for his or her family, caste group, and the village as a whole (see Piliavsky’s edited volume [2014] on patronage and politics).

For example, one major issue for villagers in Hinauta is the lack of water resources during the summer months and the toll this takes on their crops if rains are poor. With a large body of water such as the lake created by the NMDC, villagers often expressed the desire to build a pipeline from the dam to the village for irrigation, for which they would need a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Forest Department. As they expected the Forest Department to deny their request, they would turn to the NMDC for help, hoping the NMDC might not only put pressure on the Department but fund the project as well. The NMDC not only becomes a way to work around the impediments the Forest Department creates to village development, but it also creates issues for processes like village relocation through its provision of services to Hinauta.

In the Way

In previous cases of village relocation, villagers were increasingly cut off from livelihood opportunities through the imposition of forest rules and Forest Department’s prevention of any services, facilities and infrastructure improvement, making life increasingly unliveable. As I will elaborate in the following section, this continues in parts of the landscape today, often justified as a waste of resources and time for communities that will relocate

eventually. In time, under pressure from the Forest Department and facing slightly more *viksit* (developed) lives outside of the *jungle*, many communities agreed to relocate. However, in the case of Hinauta, the NMDC stands in the way, a source of government services and facilities that can even rival those found in town. My interlocutors were clear that if the NMDC closes, they will have no choice but to relocate, but for now, they will not leave unless offered significantly more money.

The relationship between the NMDC and the Forest Department is complicated with the mine being forced to shut for five years recently (2004-2009) after failing to get environmental clearance, being reprimanded for forest-unfriendly practices and even gifting the Department a vehicle for the death of a wild animal inside the mine complex. There are not only multiple guises of the state in this context, but each 'alternative government' presents a new range of possible negotiations for citizens in order to make claims on the state or elicit amenities and each guise can get in the other's way. As people often considered 'in the way' themselves, villagers living within and around conservation areas in India make use of this multiplicity to their advantage. They assert their vulnerability as a claim on the state through the use of alternative governments and the negotiation of bureaucratic processes. However, sometimes the promise of a better deal can leave communities 'stuck' between these governments and in the blind spots of their variant aims, ultimately reinstating and prolonging the precariousness of their conditions.

‘Stuck’ between Conservation and Development

In the final few weeks of fieldwork, I visited a village called Barwani¹⁴⁰ in the buffer zone of PTR that falls within the affected area of the Ken-Betwa River Link project. The project, as proposed, would flood the village fields and cut off villages from the main road by flooding their only way out of the *jungle*, an old, unmaintained stone track, traversed by over-packed taxis carrying villagers to and from the nearest market town. The Ken-Betwa Link is a controversial and ambitious proposal under the BJP government to link the Ken and Betwa rivers. Environmentalists and activists have challenged the link, since it would flood thousands of hectares of the core area of PTR. Justifications for the project include hydropower and employment, framed as a form of *vikas* for an area with few large infrastructural or industrial projects. Reports created for the project also estimate that it would displace 10 villages who would receive compensation for relocating.¹⁴¹ The village I visited was one such community.

To reach Barwani, one has to cross through a Forest gate and travel for over half an hour on a difficult road, leading eventually to fields and houses along the banks of a tributary leading to the Ken. The houses are made from slate stone unlike the sandstone found in Hinauta and even to an inexperienced person like me, the fields are evidently very fertile ground

¹⁴⁰ I have changed the name of the village for the purposes of anonymity.

¹⁴¹ I have included a more extensive background to the river link in an Appendix to the thesis.

for growing *quintals*¹⁴² of mustard. Speaking to people in the village, I asked why the road was so bad and why they haven't used the Prime Minister's Village Road Scheme to start construction. They explained that the Forest Department wouldn't allow them to build the road as it would disturb wildlife, and any requests they make to the Department meet the same reply, "Relocate". Their lives were difficult so cut off from other communities. The *sarpanch* said, "*Shaadi ke liye*...For weddings, no one comes. Who will send their daughters? All of our boys are unmarried".¹⁴³ A few years ago, the Forest Department managed to persuade the village to relocate, conduct a survey and request funds to PTR for packages. Villagers told me that they were ready to go and had made plans about where they would stay temporarily. At the last minute though, the village cancelled.

Officials from the National Water Development Agency had visited Barwani to survey it for the river link. They met with the *sarpanch* and explained the project, offering them compensation that was higher than the Forest Department's. The villagers decided to wait for the river-link and manage for the intervening years. In the end, they would get a better deal, more of them would have turned 18 and be able to claim a package and some of them might find work during construction.

However, there have been severe delays to the start of the project. Foundation stones were laid in another village for the first of four proposed

¹⁴² 1 quintal = 100 kg

¹⁴³ This phenomenon of unmarried young men was common in other villages deep inside Panna Tiger Reserve before relocation, particularly Jhalar, as people would not send their daughters there.

dams years ago and nothing had yet happened. The project has been mired in court cases with some reports stating that it has come to a complete standstill.¹⁴⁴ The villagers in Barwani were still waiting, and the Forest Department still refused to allow the road to be built, since it may yet be flooded. The money for village relocation meanwhile sits with the Forest Department, and the situation hasn't changed for villagers there. Barwani is caught in the blindspot of both conservation and development, the better deal of the river link failing to materialise, the Forest Department increasing pressure on communities and villagers unable to turn to an 'alternative government' so far into the *jungle*.

Waiting for the State and Anticipating Change

Expressing their frustration with simply waiting for a better deal and their failed negotiations with multiple governments, the residents of Barwani repeated what I heard throughout fieldwork. They said, "*Hum gareeb log hai...* We are poor people, what can we do? How can we know what to do?". This refrain was repeated by villagers everywhere I visited, emphasising a sense of both not knowing and of generalised helplessness and vulnerability. As Corbridge writes, "waiting [in India] is something that poorer people do" (Corbridge 2005: 184). For my interlocutors, waiting and the anticipation of their displacement through village relocation further articulated villagers' vulnerability and dismissal by 'the state'.

¹⁴⁴ Aggarwal (2019); Anon. (2019). Fatal setback for Ken Betwa Link Project from CEC. South Asian Network for Dams, Rivers and People. <https://sandrp.in/2019/09/11/fatal-setback-for-ken-betwa-link-project-from-cec/>

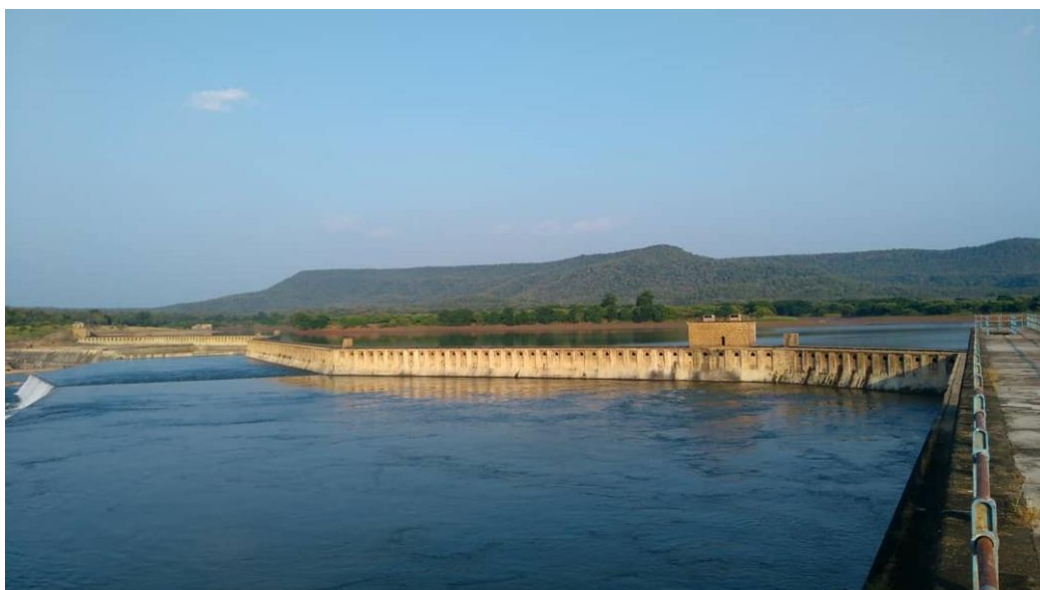


Figure 64: The Gangau Dam (built in 1910s, downstream of KBL site)

In the case of Hinauta and many other villages around Panna Tiger Reserve, both Forest Department and communities, both foresters and villagers, are simply waiting. Residents of PTR border villages are waiting for ‘a better deal’ and department officials are waiting for villagers to agree to move elsewhere. Both groups are waiting for legislation from the Central Government to change and a new scheme to be released. It has been over 10 years since the terms for conservation-induced displacement have been updated. For my friends and neighbours in Hinauta, they are also waiting on the NMDC, whose future remains uncertain and those in Barwani are waiting for the river-link. As a leopard terrorised her field site in the Himalayas, Mathur (2015) observed that in the multiple and conflicting temporalities of waiting for action, her interlocutors became eloquent critics of the state rather than submissive to it. “An anxious waiting, for a future in which the big cat had gone away or been killed, was very much in evidence, but again, this was not the only affect generated by waiting. Anger, fear,

dark humour, politicized commentaries on the value of life and on the structural inequalities embedded in the space of the Himalayas, along with, even a grudging respect for the big cat were all voiced” (Mathur 2015: 142).

In the anticipation of the disappearance of the big cat, Mathur observed the multiple temporalities of various bureaucracies and new modes of interaction between state and citizens. In waiting for their relocation, villagers in Panna assert their vulnerability, positioning themselves in anticipation of change. This ‘anxious waiting’, as Mathur puts it, characterises the antagonism of vulnerabilities in this landscape well, since both articulations build towards a future in which the opposing subjects of articulation do not exist in the same space. That is to say, the state imagined future of the conservation area does not involve villages like Hinauta, nor does it involve interventions like the NMDC and the River-Link, and the imagined future of villagers in Hinauta does not involve the restrictions and problems of living near a conservation area. For now, however, all groups are left simply ‘waiting’ in anticipation of change and the disappearance of the people from Panna Tiger Reserve instead of the repeated disappearance of tigers.

The future is unclear for each, but according to my friends in Hinauta, *sarkar* is there first for tigers and then for them. They have to make claims on *sarkar* to assert their vulnerability but simultaneously observe first-hand the great lengths to which the Forest Department goes to protect the new generation of Panna’s tigers. The articulation of vulnerable *jungles* in Panna through the state’s intervention for tigers to displace people contrasts with those same people’s expression and assertion of their own vulnerability in

claims they make on the state. Thus, the state, in its multiple forms, acts on behalf of tigers and *jungles* and yet has to be called into action and 'dealt with' with great skill and complexity to work for people living in the same space.

Conclusion: Engagement as Process

In this chapter, I have explored the character of 'the state' in this context through an analysis of village relocation and other government processes. In this final form of engagement between 'forest' and 'village', we can see the most drastic expression of the state's prioritisation of vulnerable *jungles* over vulnerable people through the latter's displacement to make more space for the former. This continues the separation of village and *jungle*, reifying both and legitimising state control. However, I have also argued that through their familiarity with bureaucratic processes and bureaucrats, local people are able to deal with and negotiate with the state's multiple guises and exploit its internal contradictions. In this way, they assert their vulnerability as a form of claims-making on the state by making use of 'alternative governments'.

The state figures here in multiple, contradictory forms as both evictor and patron, but primarily for my interlocutors, something or someone who is there first for tigers and only second for them. So, while their negotiation of the state's internal contradictions points to the potential disarticulation of hegemonic discourses, local people are still disadvantaged in anticipation of village relocation and both 'forest' and 'village' are left waiting for some

change in its legislation. This chapter has attempted to apply insights from anthropologies of the state and politics in India to the conservation context to nuance the socio-political realities of life next to conservation areas, highlighting the place of doubt, suspicion, mockery, humour and documentary practices. It situates an understanding of 'village-forest relations' through an attention the state and its local understanding, while incorporating the shifting character of multiple vulnerabilities coming together in the same space. In many ways, 'the state' is a centrepiece for the clashing of vulnerabilities, as the source and solution to vulnerable tigers and vulnerable people in conservation landscapes.

Finally, this chapter has pointed to another place of potential productive engagement between Forest Department and local people towards improved village-forest relations. The opacity of processes around village relocation makes life difficult for villagers living around and within protected areas. Many of my interlocutors have been 'about to be relocated' for their entire lives. They have witnessed the pitfalls and disadvantages that result from improper relocation and the Forest Department continues to make life difficult for them through increasingly strict forest regulations. The resistance to relocation by local communities is the result of frustration with the process and the need for updated terms and legislation. Often, relocations can result in a worsening of relations, and the reputation of the Forest Department suffers locally, placing junior officers at risk and leaving forest officials frustrated. Due to the suspicious and informal character of many of these processes, unfolding in "murky transactional arenas", stories of exploitation and corruption were innumerable when it came to relocation.

Inevitably, the most impoverished villagers suffered further. This re-emphasises my argument that the term 'engagement' can also encompass harmful processes that expose the unequal power relations between 'forest' and 'village' while also highlighting their interdependent, contingent and processual character.

Chapter 8- Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I will revisit my main research questions and interests, address the main arguments of the thesis and tie together the themes and insights that run throughout. In doing so, I will also address the theoretical and substantive contributions of the thesis. Then, I will make a number of practical recommendations for the improvement of ‘village-forest relations’ around conservation areas in India as they relate to my main findings. Finally, the chapter will look at the future of ‘forest’ and ‘village’ in Panna.

Revisiting the Research Questions and Methodology

The main topic of this thesis has been the relationships between the Forest Department and local communities around Panna Tiger Reserve, looking at what different modalities of ‘engagement’ can tell us about their character and effects on local people. The research was based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork dedicated to observing, participating within and analysing the moments at which these two groups interact and ‘engage’ with one another in daily life. This design emerged from the initial observation that the social science literature on Indian conservation overwhelmingly focuses on dynamics of conflict, exploitation and exclusion and increasingly points to a desire for fine-tuned, nuanced analysis of local socio-political context (see Chapter 2). While those dynamics of conflict and exclusion are prevalent in my field site, I sought to investigate the everyday

relationships between 'forest' and 'village' and the differential impacts of conservation within communities in and around protected areas. To investigate 'village-forest relations' in its mundane and variable forms, ethnographic fieldwork proved an important and useful tool, thus leading me to the main research questions and data collection strategies that I employed.

The central question that this thesis addresses is.

- What might be gained by looking at 'engagement' alongside exclusion in the social analysis of conservation landscapes?

To answer this, the thesis analysed the political dynamics between Forest Department and local communities through particular topics like forest employment and village relocation. I situated each topic within the broader context and gathered this specific data alongside observations about daily life in the village communities. In doing so, I aimed to demonstrate the potential contributions of an anthropological approach to the field of conservation social science, bringing insights from anthropological theory and anthropologies of Indian politics to the study of Indian conservation.

Main Findings and Argument: Articulating Antagonistic

Vulnerabilities

The main theoretical arguments in the thesis were initially inspired by Choy's (2011) ethnography of environmental politics and his emphasis on multiple competing environmental and cultural discourses. In particular, I found his use of the word 'articulation' instructive and compelling to describe and analyse what I observed in my field site. Choy (2011) considers articulation 'good to think with' in its double meaning: explaining well and the contingent assemblage of different parts. This is because, for Choy, articulation helps to describe the interlinking and mobilisation of different scales and discourses within an unfolding field of environmental political relations which different actors attempt negotiate to often-contradictory ends. It moves beyond a discursive analysis of environmentalism and simplified conclusions about conflict to emphasise contingency and local negotiation within a specific ethnographic context. I have sought to develop this insight in three ways.

First, I have turned to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) use of 'articulation' alongside 'discourse' and 'antagonism' to analyse the possible disarticulation of the hegemonic discourses driving conservation interventions in local contexts. Secondly, I have incorporated the language of 'vulnerability', recognising the potential of articulation to link vulnerability's dimensions as both a description of precarious life and a form of self-identification and narrative mobilised by actors. Finally, I have sought to make the negotiability of village-forest relations central while still

emphasising the ultimate disadvantage and disenfranchisement of local people. The thesis ultimately argues that, 'village-forest relations' as a form of environmental politics articulates the antagonistic vulnerabilities of *jungles* and people around Panna Tiger Reserve and the state's prioritisation of the former over the latter.

Forestry and conservation in Panna, and India more broadly, has been concerned with separating and controlling both *jungles* and people since colonial times. State forestry and conservation in India has constructed both *jungles* and people as wild and in need of taming and control as well as vulnerable to local rulers and local exploitation and in need of protection and care (cf. Mandala 2018; Pandian 2001; Skaria 1997). This discursive construction has helped to legitimise state intervention in and control over the lives of *jungles* and people. These articulations of vulnerable *jungles* and vulnerable people as something necessarily separated and controlled by the state continue in contemporary conservation practice, in each form of 'engagement' analysed here. The tiger population crisis and revival in Panna have exposed familiar narratives and depictions of local people as threats to vulnerable tigers, justifying increased state control, separation and 'rehabilitation' of both. These articulations are evident in public outreach programmes as well, which emphasise a loving but distant and non-extractive relationship with a constructed 'nature' and exclude and demonise local resource users.

Joint Forest Management initiatives and public 'engagement' like Eco-Development Committees and Panna Nature Camps do nothing to contradict these discourses and exclusions, all under the guises of 'local

participation' or 'co-management'. These official forms of engagement continue to articulate the antagonistic vulnerabilities of *jungles* and people and target urban-based middle-class students rather than those formerly dependent on the *jungle* for their livelihoods. Excluded from these official forms of engagement, local people's more everyday engagement with the Forest Department often involves disadvantage and discrimination, exposing and exacerbating the vulnerability of life along the border of PTR.

This vulnerability is evident in the curtailment of forest-dependent livelihoods and the failure of the Forest Department to mitigate various forms of human-wildlife conflict. Forest rules which criminalise traditional livelihoods and opaque bureaucratic processes that confuse and frustrate villagers express the state's clear prioritisation of vulnerable *jungles* over vulnerable people in this context. However, due to the contingent and interdependent character of village-forest relations and the everyday interactions between villagers and foresters living and working in the same space, both make use of forest rules' situational ambiguity to mitigate personal vulnerability. In this conflictual context, both foresters and villagers are vulnerable in different ways: foresters as non-locals confronting frustrated villagers and villagers contravening forest rules and risking criminal prosecution. Both negotiate and mitigate this vulnerability by mobilising local mechanisms of familiarity and informality. In events of encounter between forester and villager, we can see these dynamics at play, since different livelihoods issues afford opportunities for the two to engage. The vulnerability of local people varies in relation to their own positionality within particular interpersonal networks as members of different

groups defined by gender, caste, kinship, residence or profession. Their positionality directly influences their ability to exploit the transformative potential of familiarity and informality. Instead of focusing on these encounters through the language of criminality or corruption, propagating portrayals of forest-dependent criminals, it is important to focus on what they tell us about the character of village-forest relations and their negotiability.

Forest-employed villagers are clear examples of local people who have to negotiate these village-forest relations as persons simultaneously implicated in the dramas of conservation practice and village life. Their own accounts of their work expose the deeply interpersonal and interdependent, but ultimately exploitative character of village-forest relations. The conditions of their work demonstrate the exploitation of their labour by the Forest Department; forest employment ironically exacerbating the local reputation of conservation and contributing to the vulnerability of village life. They express this disadvantage and frustration through emic concepts like *majboori* and *majdoori*. However, in their employment, and through idioms like *jugaad*, we can continue to see the negotiation of this vulnerability and forms of resilience to it. These efforts are most often collective and draw on the provisional power of broader interpersonal networks. *Jugaad*, not only as a strategy of “making do” (Hoque and Michelutti 2018: 993) but also as a “practice that potentializes relations” (Rai 2019:6), highlights the emergent, interdependent, political and socially situated character of village-forest relations. Its necessity within forms of engagement between the heterogeneous groups of ‘village’ and ‘forest’ demonstrates how

articulations of vulnerable people can antagonise dominant discourses that drive conservation interventions, leaving open the possibility of their disarticulation.

The most drastic form of intervention in the lives of those living around protected areas is village displacement and resettlement. During such processes, the local confusion around and understanding of the state and its bureaucratic processes is evident, since *sarkar*, its multiple guises, appears as both evictor and patron, the source of and solution to the vulnerability of *jungles* and people in this context. The relative ability of local people to negotiate opaque bureaucratic processes, make themselves legible and wade through atmospheres of suspicion, doubt, rumour, mockery and humour, relies on familiarity with both bureaucrats and those processes. However, the pace of village relocation in contexts like Panna is slowing, while legislation ages and both 'forest' and 'village' are left waiting for a distant central government to make changes. In this waiting, local people around PTR make use of 'alternative governments' to assert their vulnerability as a way to make claims on the state. They mobilise their familiarity with "murky transactional arenas" (Hull 2008: 413) involving documentary practices or exploit the ambiguous and contested politics of residency (cf. Das 2010) to prepare for relocation and to gain benefits through government schemes. This assertion of vulnerability antagonises environmental exclusionary discourses that both motivate village relocation and legitimise the state's separation and control of *jungles* and people, and it leaves open the possibility of their disarticulation. Ultimately, however, it demonstrates the state's prioritisation of vulnerable *jungles* over vulnerable

people and the disadvantage and disenfranchisement villagers face in their engagement with the Forest Department.

Emergent Themes and Contributions of this Research

The chapters in this thesis are linked not only in terms of topic and context but also through theoretical development and themes that stretch throughout. Each demonstrates the harmful and disenfranchising character of village-forest relations and how internal politics within village communities refract and are refracted within these relations, leading to the differential impact of conservation. The important dynamics of familiarity, negotiation and the intertwining of kinship, caste and economic and political opportunity also stretch throughout all chapters. Each contains a reflection on how practices like *jugaad* and expressions like *chalta hai* emphasise the political and social consequence of individual action within village-forest relations.

In particular, the thesis attempts to show how, in each modality of engagement, local people are able make use of these dynamics in their familiarity with conservation regulations, practices and processes and other actors in this context, often successfully resisting conservation interventions that seek to disadvantage or exclude them further. The chapters build on one another, making specific substantive, theoretical and practical contributions to the study and practice Indian conservation.

Substantive Contributions

In order to speak to the broader literature within the social science of Indian conservation, each chapter addressed a contemporary issue in Indian conservation through the lens of a different modality of 'engagement'. This thesis therefore works well as a potential case study for each of these issues, and there are clear resonances between my findings and those highlighted in the literature. However, each chapter can only be considered a limited and partial example for each issue as there was no scope to address each in its entirety.

Joint Forest Management and Community Outreach

On the topic of Joint Forest Management and community outreach (Chapter 4) the critical literature highlights the increasing number of stakeholders in conservation through JFM and the limitations of such initiatives as they fail to address fundamental local concerns (Jeffrey and Sundar eds. 1999; Nayak 2003; Nayak and Berkes 2008; Ota et al. 2014; Rishi 2007; Saigal 2000; Saxena 1997). My research found that these concerns were improperly addressed in the public outreach and community engagement that I observed in Panna. I outlined the specific failures of Eco-Development Committees and Panna Nature Camps to include people formerly dependent on the *jungle* for their livelihoods. Chapter 4 emphasises the ways in which these programmes continue to privilege a group of urban middle-class elites to the exclusion of local resource users, a practice with a long historical legacy in Indian conservation (cf. Jalais 2010; Rangarajan 2003).

I have to acknowledge the fact that my experience of the tiger reserve's community outreach was incomplete, and I was aware of numerous 'nature experience' initiatives that took place across the edges of the tiger reserve with local communities. Similarly, the NGO Last Wilderness Foundation was heavily involved with the Pardhi community, setting up a hostel and school and training some young Pardhi men to lead walking safaris. However, I was present for the instructor training session for the *anubhuti* camps and the walking safari guides. Both involved similar discourses and encouraged similar behaviours as I observed in the Panna Nature Camps. This is not to say that the motivations behind these initiatives are malicious, but rather to highlight that they do nothing to change the disadvantage inherent in village-forest relations in this context. The same limitation is true of my observations of Eco-Development Committees, where I cannot claim to know all the pitfalls or shortcomings of the dozens of EDCs across the Panna landscape. I can only draw on my own observations of the villages along the NMDC road and Madla, and the short visits to communities I made during fieldwork.

Human-Wildlife Conflict

On the topic of human-wildlife conflict and the implementation of conservation rules, covered in Chapter 5, the literature highlights how increasingly human-wildlife conflict is understood in terms of human-human conflict, pointing to a desire to understand local socio-political context. This suggests a need to analyse the relationships between conservation authorities and local people and between different local groups (Dickman 2010; Goodrich 2010; Treves and Karanth 2003; Woodroffe et al. 2005).

My findings on human-wildlife conflict such as crop and livestock depredation resonate, particularly as my interlocutors saw these conflicts primarily in terms of their interactions with forest staff rather than with wild animals. To them, the imposition of conservation rules and authority disrupts their livelihoods and creates unnecessary bureaucratic procedures and regulations which place them into conflicts with the Forest Department. This type of conflict and encounter between 'forest' and 'village' is much newer and more disadvantageous for local people, when combined with forest rules, in comparison to the losses they have incurred and managed historically from both predators and herbivores. Anthropologists writing about human-wildlife conflict have looked at discourses of wildness, contradictions with the bureaucracy and convergent animal and human histories (Govindarajan 2018; Jalais 2010; Mathur 2015).

Instead of commenting on human-animal relationships or addressing 'the state' in the same way, in Chapter 5, I describe encounters between forester and villager instead, drawing attention to the importance of those moments when village-forest relations unfold as a way to comment on the character of conservation authority and rules in that context. I also move the conversation beyond a simplified analysis of villagers' vulnerability by illuminating the vulnerability of forest staff and the differential ability of villagers to negotiate in such encounters. Limitations are also evident concerning this topic, since I did not venture into the *jungles* with my interlocutors, nor did I encounter forest officers or officials in the same way.

Forest Employment

On the topic of forest employment and labour, my research contributes to the small but growing literature on the forest bureaucracy and work in conservation areas in Chapter 6. Work by Fleischman (2015; 2012), Wangel (2018) and Vasan (2002; 2000) has addressed the dilemmas and difficulties faced by lower-level forest officers and officials. Their findings resonate with my own writing about forest workers who find themselves caught between ‘forest’ and ‘village’, though the relatively powerful position of forest staff in comparison makes their livelihoods less precarious. I turned to writers like Sodikoff (2012) to emphasise the subaltern experience of forest work and labour for local people and contribute to growing discussions about the emic idiom of *jugaad*. Chapter 6 in particular is central to the thesis, as this research project has, from its inception, sought to highlight the plight of Indian conservation’s most ignored and unsung heroes: the *chowkidaars*, trackers, drivers and *babus* working for little money in poor conditions, central to the success and longevity of conservation efforts across the country.

Village Relocation and Resettlement

Finally, on the topic of village relocation and conservation-induced displacement in Chapter 7, my findings resonate with the broader literature on the negative impacts of displacement and the differential outcomes for groups within relocated villagers. The literature highlights the long history of eviction as a conservation strategy, placing already marginalised groups at a further disadvantage (cf. Agrawal and Redford 2009; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2006; Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007). Scholars

have questioned the 'voluntary' character of displacement, noting that "the many reason why many villages want to relocate is the bleak future associated with living within a protected area in an extremely remote location" (Ghate and Beazley 2007: 332), and therefore refusing displacement can be as problematic as forced eviction.

In different Indian contexts, scholars like Beazley (2011; 2009); Kabra (2013; 2011) and Sekar (2016) have all demonstrated the importance of understanding internal political dynamics within relocating communities. They highlight the important effects of prior inequalities on the outcome of displacement, as well as the importance of relationships with forest staff and external stakeholders and their understanding of particular regulations. "Hierarchies at the local level may be as critical as those between government bureaucracies and villages" (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006: 371). Although I did not witness or participate in a village relocation, the anticipation of potential relocation and collective memory of previous relocations deeply affected not only local people's relationships with the Forest Department but also how they approached government and 'the state' more broadly. As the literature notes, those in advantageous positions with "prior connections to the mainstream economy and society and strong optical networks" (Kabra 2013: 540) were least at risk from negative outcomes.

However, in the case of Hinauta, the distinct services and opportunities afforded by the NMDC helped to offset the remoteness of the village and increased certain wealthy residents' desire to stay. By moving or dispersing through village relocation, they risked the potential "social

disarticulation” (Kabra 2013: 540) of their status and influence. This was a crucial factor in determining whether they were willing to accept compensation to leave. The desire for greater compensation motivated most people I spoke with to reject the possibility of relocation, but this did vary between different groups. Those with the most to lose were the most adamant that they would wait for better compensation, whereas the poorest insisted that they could manage with the current offer. The need for consensus and internal village politics prevented relocation though, with the elite and wealthy often dictating terms and running negotiations. My chapter doesn’t address these outcomes in particular, since it attempts to use village relocation to comment on the character of ‘the state’. There is a need to examine the role of other government agencies and way they are involved in negotiations leading to village relocation to better understand the anticipation of displacement and its effects on those living in and around protected areas. It would appear that the literature is heading in such a direction, but could use insights from the anthropology of government, the state or politics, as I have done here.

Theoretical Contributions

In addition to addressing a contemporary conservation issue, each chapter critically engaged with literature from different disciplines, arguing for the productivity of an ethnographic approach and the insights of anthropological theory. I drew inspiration from analyses in environmental history in my accounts of forests and diamonds in Panna in Chapter 4 and critiqued political ecology and institutional analysis while looking at forest

rules in Chapter 5, turning to anthropologies of events and encounter. I turned to anthropologies of labour and the growing literature on the forest bureaucracy in Chapter 6 to analyse the situation of forest employed villagers, contributing to discussions about *jugaad* and moving away from individualistic and economic assumptions inherent in the oft-used language of 'capital'. In Chapter 7, I drew insights from anthropologies of the Indian state and politics to look at village relocation, offering a view of 'the state' as evictor and patron, making forest and village both wait in the context of delayed displacement.

Village-Forest Relations, Familiarity and Negotiation

The topic of the thesis is 'village-forest relations'. However, a central argument is that these relations are variable and involve not only relations between local communities and Forest Department, but also relations within both as heterogeneous groups. This manifests the differential impacts of conservation within particular villages and the relative disadvantage of certain groups within 'village-forest relations'. I have sought to emphasise the interdependent, emergent and contingent character of these relations, demonstrating the interconnections between what are often groups portrayed as in constant conflict. This does not dismiss the realities of conflict or exclusion but rather encompasses them within an approach that asks first about the composition and dynamics of 'village-forest relations' and how they unfold in particular contexts. This draws on the long-standing anthropological technique of 'situating' certain practices and actors within a broader socio-cultural context, with its own specific politics and history.

I observed that familiarity and negotiation were essential in how local actors approached 'village-forest relations', emphasising the social and political valence of individual action. Rather than turning to the concept of capital (Bourdieu 1990), familiar to many anthropological studies in India (see Fernandes 2000; Jeffrey 2010; Nisbett 2007), to emphasise these dynamics I made use of emic expressions or idioms such as *jan pehenchan*, *chalta hai*, or *jugaad*, in order to treat the mobilisation of familiarity and practices of negotiation ethnographically. This is not because the language of capital is wholly inappropriate. Rather, it can tend to individualise such practices and strategies, potentially obscuring how, at least in my context, individual action was never divorced from broader interpersonal relationships, actors considered loci of their intersubjective networks of kinship, caste, friendship, profession and co-habitation.

Each chapter also demonstrated how my own understanding of these issues developed during fieldwork since I became more familiar with the context. I learned about the particular character of public engagement and of forest rules, how forest workers understood their own labour and the complexity of processes like village relocation. I found myself at different times stuck and caught between 'forest' and 'village', aware of my own privileged positionality and ability to negotiate those relations successfully. Thus, the thesis is also about the challenges I faced as I participated within village-forest relations in Panna.

Discourse and Articulation

The critical social science of conservation has interrogated and critiqued environmentalist discourses from a range of disciplinary

perspectives, including environmental history, geography and political ecology (Adams and Hutton 2007; Robbins 2012). The discursive legitimisation of state intervention has been a feature of the encounter between coloniser and colonised across the world. This has led to the discursive portrayal of an opposition between ‘parks and people’ as “imaginings of the environment and society work in combination with political economies and historical trajectories to produce imaginaries... that come to be taken as real” (West 2007: 151). As critical social scientists have challenged the conceptualisation of parks and people, they have increasingly acknowledged how these conflicts are the result of particular historical and political processes (Adams et al. 2004; McShane et al. 2011; Brockington et al. 2006; West, Igoe and Brockington 2006).

My specific contribution to these debates is the incorporation of the analytical language of articulation and antagonism, drawing on Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and inspired by Choy (2011). I demonstrate how, within conservation spaces, there are not only particular environmental discourses that prescribe subjectivities (cf. Agrawal 2005), but there are multiple discourses which oppose one another, what we might term antagonistic discourses. Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) concept of ‘the nodal point’ which fixes meaning within particular articulations draws attention to actors, concepts or objects where these antagonistic discourses are evident. In this thesis, things like ‘the boundary wall’, the display in the interpretation museum and the documents needed in village relocation are all examples of nodal points that fix meaning for particular discourses. The importance of antagonism as an analytical concept is evident in its ability to demonstrate

the resistance of local actors to hegemonic discourses and the potential for that resistance to dis-articulate those discourses. The language of articulation is also helpful to emphasise the contingent political assemblages from which these discourses emerge, and it helps to link different dimensions of vulnerability throughout the thesis.

Vulnerability

The thesis has addressed multiple dimensions of vulnerability, exploring the construction, separation and assertion of vulnerable *jungles* and vulnerable people. In doing so, it builds on the growing work on vulnerability within anthropology and beyond, contributing a recognition that vulnerability acts as both a descriptor of precarious life and a mode of identification or discursive term mobilised by actors to certain ends. These ontological and discursive aspects of vulnerability link through the concept of articulation. In village-forest relations, the precariousness of local lives near a protected area is evident. However, villagers simultaneously express and assert themselves as ‘vulnerable people’, mobilising particular discourses as a way to make claims on the state, resist conservation impositions and mitigate the same precariousness. Similarly, tigers and *jungles* are ‘really’ vulnerable to specific threats and live precariously in diminishing habitats, but the normative categorisation of particular areas and animals as ‘vulnerable’ is what motivates particular conservation interventions. These articulations of vulnerable *jungles* and vulnerable people are at odds in this context. The thesis has also demonstrated strategies of resilience and mitigation that rely on actors’ embeddedness and participation within broader social networks. Emic idioms like *jugaad*

express this well and *jugaad* could be a potentially useful concept to further understanding dynamics of vulnerability, resilience and adaptability in different north Indian contexts.

Moreover, through the incorporation of insights from the anthropology of the state and politics, the thesis has demonstrated the central role that government processes and the multiple guises of 'the state' play in the local understanding and experience of 'vulnerability'. The state, in this context, is both the solution and the source of 'vulnerability' for *jungles* and people. It is the state to which local people turn to make claims based on their own identification as 'vulnerable persons', but it is also the state that perceives those same vulnerable people as threats to a constructed precious and vulnerable *jungle*. This thesis has demonstrated the range of insights gained from sitting at the intersection of the anthropology of the state and politics, the language of vulnerability and articulation and the social science of conservation. In doing so, it illuminates the nuance and complexity of village-forest relations and speaks to a range of audiences concerned with the state of conservation and development in India today.

Engagement

Finally, I have offered the concept of engagement as a contribution to the analysis of conservation areas that directs our attention to the programmes, moments, people and processes that demonstrate the inter-linkages between local communities and Forest Departments. I found that each modality of 'engagement' encompassed dynamics of both conflict and cooperation, separation and interdependency, refracted through local socio-

political dynamics within village communities. The contingent, emergent, interdependent but ultimately unequal character of village-forest relations was clear in each modality and central to the ethnography in every chapter. This helped to expand and politicise the term 'engagement' beyond discussions of public outreach or community engagement, or as something opposing or antithetical to 'exclusion'. In my understanding, many different forms of engagement have harmful and disenfranchising outcomes for people living in and around protected areas.

Practical Contributions and Recommendations

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted how conservation actively demonstrates the Indian state's prioritisation of vulnerable tigers over vulnerable people in the context of Panna Tiger Reserve. It is in the interest of the Forest Department to exclude local resource users and make their lives increasingly difficult, driven by conservation discourses and funding which adheres to a specific separation of and control over both people and *jungles*. At the heart of the increasingly difficult life around and inside conservation areas is the inability to make a living in line with forest regulations. Local development is curtailed, traditional livelihoods destroyed, and forest-dependent communities persecuted. As the thesis has demonstrated, when life simply becomes too difficult to manage near conservation areas and the precariousness of life overwhelms strategies for resilience and 'making do', there are few options left except village relocation. This suggests that conservation and forestry in India need

rethinking, that the Indian forest bureaucracy is entrenched in colonial ideas of exclusionary natural resource management, now cloaked in the cosmopolitan righteousness of 'wildlife conservation', praised as international conservation heroes.

This criticism is common to the extant conservation social science literature and rightly so. This thesis is yet another example of the severe disadvantages faced by local people in connection with conservation and forestry across the Global South. However, one of the reasons that I have focused in this thesis on engagement and 'village-forest relations' is to properly direct attention to the points, people and processes of potential intervention of these relations and to highlight that viewing 'forest' as villain and 'village' as victim is too simple a characterisation to make effective changes. This is a thesis about everyday relationships between local people and the Forest Department and therefore, it is from there that practical recommendations can emerge. I argue that each modality of engagement directs attention to points of potential intervention within village-forest relations towards their practical improvement. While a complete rethinking of the principles driving conservation intervention in places like Panna Tiger Reserve is warranted as the odds are stacked against good village-forest relations in favour of local exclusion and disenfranchisement, there are two arenas in which more immediate, moderate steps can be taken to improve the everyday relationships between local people and Forest Department staff.

The first is forest employment and personnel management. While human resource management is a part of the curriculum for Forest

Department staff from the level of Forest Range Officer and above, I observed that the majority of local relationships are managed by lower level forest officers. These lower level officers oversee teams of local labourers and forest workers, and they are often the most visible face of the Forest Department in local communities. Their low level of support, resources and recognition by the senior management and bureaucracy make any attempt at good community relations even more difficult. Local people rely on them for information and job opportunities, and they are often the most sympathetic forest staff, witnessing the difficulties faced by local people every day. Their understandings ought to be incorporated into any initiatives involving local communities. Their ability to work with their forest workers and labourers beyond coercive means that exploit vulnerability shouldn't depend on their own personality and individual traits. It ought to be a product of their professional training and the ethos of the organisation of which they are a part. Personnel management principles found in forestry training already ought to be applied to understanding not only how to manage junior forest officers, but also how to manage local forest workers and labourers with dignity and respect. This may be an uphill battle due to prejudices and discriminations against poorly educated, poor villagers, but there ought to be institutional support in that direction.

Key to the potential improvement of village-forest relations are forest-employed villagers: the unsung heroes of forestry and conservation across India. They are the backbone of all protected areas and have critical local knowledge that supports the protection of India's natural heritage every day. Yet, they remain exploited and unhappy with their working conditions,

worsening the local reputation of the Forest Department and discouraging people from following forest rules. This is the exact opposite of their potential. As people living and working at the interface of Forest Department and local communities, forest workers understand village, forest and *jungle* better than almost anyone else and ought to have a more prominent role in village-forest relations. Forest work isn't considered good work, and this is an enormous missed opportunity in areas of the country where livelihoods and future opportunities have been diminished, curtailed or destroyed. Forest workers ought to receive better wages, more reasonable working conditions, job security and additional benefits, including pensions, healthcare and insurance. Workers often complained that if they were injured or killed from a wild animal attack, fell from an elephant or got sick and injured alone in the *jungle* on duty, there was nothing in place to protect their family and mitigate their loss. They place themselves at great risk for conservation in India and yet are exploited, disillusioned and under-recognised. Providing gainful employment for local people and a sense of security and inclusion within conservation efforts is an obvious and necessary change to improve relationships with local people in Indian conservation as well as a step towards basic decency for the rural poor.

The second arena in which I wish to make recommendations is village relocation and resettlement. This thesis has shown that village relocation remains a confusing experience in its implementation and anticipation. The lack of updated terms for resettlement since 2008 increases the tension between forest staff and local people as both are stuck waiting for the central government to pass new legislation. I

repeatedly heard that a relocation package of INR 15 lakhs would be acceptable to most people, however, the single largest issue was collusion and corruption amongst the mid-level forest officers managing the relocations with wealthy members of the relocating community.

In each case of resettlement, interlocutors described how forest range officers and assistant directors would take bribes to 'adjust' the amount of money divided to certain families, charge everyone for imaginary 'transport costs' and place the poorest at an even greater disadvantage. Transparency and accountability during village relocation will be crucial if the relocation package amount increases at all. The efforts of civil society and NGOs in maintaining pressure for transparency and accountability during processes like resettlement are crucial, as has been clearly demonstrated in the rolling out of the Forest Rights Act and in activism against development-induced displacement. The press and NGOs, supported by civil society at large, can help inform and protect already disadvantaged populations from further exploitation in processes like village relocation (cf. Beazley 2011; 2009). This ought to include anti-corruption measures within the Forest Department and real consequences (suspension, fines, prison) for officers found to be acting improperly. Closing ranks and admitting no fault did not save Panna's tigers from the incompetencies of the Forest Department and it will not help exploited populations, left with no other option than to leave their ancestral homes.

However, as scholars like Mathur (2015; 2012) have argued, transparency procedures often end up achieving the opposite of their intentions. This is where the role of NGOs and the media is so crucial.

Rather than creating more formalised documentary practices, procedures or committees internally, external pressure from other stakeholders could more effectively police and reduce corrupt behaviours and empower local communities during processes like village relocation. Thus, while both forest and village are waiting for a change in legislation, ultimately the behaviour of the forest bureaucracy will have to change to prevent a larger compensation package from becoming even more divided up amongst local elites and forest officers. Part of this could involve forest-employed villagers, those who could both facilitate and benefit most from improved village-forest relations.

Conclusion: The Future of Forest and Village

This thesis has been about the Forest Department and local communities around Panna Tiger Reserve and attempted to speak across interests and disciplines to anyone interested in the social dimensions of Indian conservation. The story of Panna Tiger Reserve from a conservation perspective is remarkable, and the area of Bundelkhand remains an understudied and under-acknowledged cultural region in India in need of solutions to its crises of unemployment and failing agriculture. The future of both vulnerable *jungles* and vulnerable people in and around PTR is unclear. The prospect of a river-linking project that may flood thousands of hectares of *jungle*, displace thousands of animals and people lies in the balance of negotiations between different stakeholders, activists, politicians, developers, conservationists and local people. The future of the NMDC is

also uncertain, since its permission to mine extends only until 2024, when it will have to apply for environmental clearance from the central government again. According to my interlocutors, the unprofitability of the NMDC has been known in the area for years and combined with the decreasing government stake in the mine and the rapid success of tiger conservation in PTR, it is possible that the mine will close. If the NMDC leaves or the river-link goes ahead, what will happen to my friends and neighbours in Hinauta and those living along the NMDC road and those living along the Ken River? They cannot know until either of these things occur.

If the NMDC ceases operation, the school, hospital, bank, bus service and other amenities that have made Hinauta such a convenient place to live will certainly disappear, following which the stark disadvantage of living 20kms inside PTR will be felt much more strongly. Moreover, if the NMDC shuts, the livelihoods, economic opportunities and businesses that have developed over decades and rely on the connections between villages like Hinauta and the NMDC township will dissipate. Undoubtedly, this will make the case for village relocation more attractive, although villagers remain hopeful about the prospect of a new compensation package. If the river-link goes ahead, all of the conservation work and effort in Panna until now may be nullified, and animals may start to roam closer and closer to communities in the buffer zone. This will drive further relocations and squeeze the space left for vulnerable people and vulnerable *jungles* in this landscape. These possibilities preoccupied me in my initial designs for this project, but I found during fieldwork, and when I returned last winter, that my friends in Panna have been living with these uncertainties on their horizon

for their entire lives. As they cannot know when or if these things will happen, in the meantime, they carry on with their daily lives, making do with what they can, drawing on their skills of negotiation and familiarity with what are increasingly changing contexts to build a life for themselves and their families.

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Appendix A: The Indian Interstate River Link Project

This appendix concerns the Indian Interlinking of Rivers Project (IRP), and more specifically the Ken-Betwa link. It will outline the history of the interlinking project, as described in media, government reports and academic articles. There are three parts to this history: the original plans for the national project, dreamt up in the 1980s, the project's revival under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government¹⁴⁵ of the early 2000s, analysed in depth by a number of social and natural scientific writings, and lastly, the most recent media reports and opinion pieces regarding the link project.

It will take a particular interest in the Ken-Betwa link, since it pertains directly to Panna Tiger Reserve. Therefore, it will look briefly (through an analysis of the executive summaries) at a number of studies conducted by the Central Indian Government (the Centre) and more specifically the National Water Development Agency (NWDA). It will examine the Feasibility Report (1995), the Project Report Phases I and II (2008; 2013) and the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan (2015) regarding the Ken-Betwa Link Project. It is thus clear that the recent media frenzy surrounding India's interstate river linking project is but the most recent addition to a long-standing debate about its feasibility and desirability. It is important to situate the contemporary interest within this wider history.

¹⁴⁵ The BJP acts under the coalition banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)

Not only does the Ken river run directly through Panna National Park, but the Daudhan Dam proposed to create the reservoir to feed the canal link would flood a significant portion of the core area. The proposed links will significantly impact human populations along and between these two rivers and directly affect the protected species and biodiversity within the Forest Department-managed area of PTR. This has been a point of great contention and debate surrounding the lead up to the project's implementation (an effort 35 years in the making).

Historical Outline

The current Interlinking of Rivers Project has a history which some analysts stretch back to the ambitions of British colonialists. Both Bandyopadhyay & Perveen (2004) and Alley (2004) argue that this enormous initiative has its roots in late 19th and early 20th century canal projects to irrigate land in the Indus, Ganga and Yamuna river valleys. They argue that this laid the foundation for state control over water and that the centralisation of decision-making on water resources continued post-independence. The idea of linking rivers across the Indian subcontinent was revived in 1972 by Dr. K.L. Rao, with a proposal to transfer water for irrigation in South India, where demand was quickly outstripping availability. The resultant idea was the Ganga-Cauvery Link Canal. In 1977, Captain Dastur, a pilot and politician, proposed the construction of a pair of canals. Named the Garland canal scheme, Dastur proposed the construction of a 4200 km long Himalayan canal and a 9300 km long southern garland canal. These two early proposals were found to be unworthy of serious

consideration by the Central Water Commission (CWC) due to technical infeasibility and huge costs. However, in August 1980, the Ministry of Water Resources (then the Ministry of Irrigation) and the CWC prepared the National Perspective Plan for Water Resources Development, to investigate the possibility of inter-basin transfer through river links (Lakra et al. 2011).

This led to the establishment of the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) in 1982, whose responsibility it became to conduct feasibility studies and publish reports concerning the interlinking of rivers and inter-basin water transfers. It is this agency which has been at the heart of the IRP since the 1980s (Alley 2004). Over the decades that followed, the NWDA carried out numerous studies. This includes a Feasibility Report published on the Ken-Betwa Link in 1995 (NWDA 1995). The National Perspective Plan had two major components: Himalayan river development and Peninsular river development, identifying 14 and 16 potential links respectively. These remain the two major components to this day. Articles and historical summaries in the NWDA reports seem to suggest that enthusiasm for an inter-linking project was low in the 1990s and little public attention was paid to the work of the NWDA. However, it is clear the the NWDA continued to carry out feasibility studies throughout this period, under the auspices of the Central Water Commission and and the Ministry of Water Resources. Some writers (e.g Alley 2004) cynically suggest that some of NWDA “studies” conducted in this period were falsely constructed. This claim fits well with the critical tone of the academic writing on the topic, which appeared following increased public interest in the early 2000s.

A National Commission was set up in 1999 to review the first set of reports. The commission concluded that it saw ‘no imperative necessary for massive water transfers in the peninsular component’ of the study, while the Himalayan component required further study (Lakra et al. 2011). Despite this apparent setback, the prospect of an interlinking project that would both irrigate drought-stricken lands and mitigate flooding while providing hydropower and increased agricultural yield (NWDA 1995; 2008; 2012; 2015) once again caught public interest when President Abdul Kalam mentioned the need to link rivers in his Independence day speech on August 15th, 2002 (Lakra et al. 2011). Supposedly inspired by this speech, the Supreme Court Lawyer Ranjit Kumar asked the court to consider the river-linking scheme (see Alley 2004 for an in-depth analysis of this legal process, its historical roots and contemporary utilisations). In December 2002, the Government of India issued a resolution that constituted a Task Force on the Interlinking of Rivers. A brief survey of available online and text publications regarding the inter-linking of rivers in India has revealed an increase in publications from 2003-2004 onwards about the revived interest in this project within the government.

Comments on the Project in the 2000s

Bandyopadhyay and Perveen (2004) published a political and scientific critique of the interlinking proposal in *Economic and Political Weekly*. Their paper disagrees with politicians who hail the project as a ‘must’ for the nation. They challenge the scientific, economic, social, environmental and political grounds for the IRP. The major idea on which

the IRP rests is the recognition of certain water basins as ‘surplus’ and others as ‘deficit’ (NWDA 1995). Those that back the project offer a combination of storage dams and transfer canals as a way of solving the imbalance of water distribution and improving lives across the subcontinent. Bandyopadhyay and Perveen are particularly critical of the fact that none of the feasibility studies and scientific reports had been made available to the public at the time of their paper. They call for greater transparency and a non-governmental expert analysis and scrutiny of the studies. They make reference to a number of changing paradigms in the field of Water Management, noting that the IRP functions under an outdated ‘reductionist’ paradigm which has since been shown to be flawed. They suggest a number of alternative solutions, such as rainwater harvesting and improvement of local water management. They end by saying, “Thus while inter-basin transfer is not being ruled out in principle, the manner in which the proposed interlinking of rivers has been put forward is unprofessional. In the absence of an open professional assessment of the proposals right from the stage of permissibility studies, it will be unacceptable on social, economic and ecological grounds” (Bandyopadhyay and Perveen 2004: 5136).

Alley’s (2004) article looks at how the River-Linking Plan can inform theoretical understandings of expertise, knowledge exchange and production, as well as the notion of an ‘epistemic community’, common to social studies of science and technology. She argues that the IRP follows from an official interest within Indian politics to pursue big projects for big solutions. This canal-dam/food-power paradigm, she argues, began in the

British Raj but has been carried forward into post-independence development projects. According to her analysis, the unstated vision behind this initiative is to gather up all the surface water before it reaches the sea, a Water Management paradigm alluded to and disparaged in Bandyopadhyay and Perveen (2004).

She takes a similar stance to the above authors in criticising the classified status of the feasibility reports, making reference to the numerous movements against the initiative. Alley lists increased salinity, waterlogging, further pollution of surface waters, loss of water to evaporation by channeling, impracticality of coursing water across the country, anticipated and unanticipated ecological and human consequences, inaccurate and non-existent data on which to substantiate classification of rivers into surplus and deficit, classified status of all government reports and documents related to river linking among the points of contention. Without access to the feasibility reports, the knowledge exchange is “truncated”, according to Alley, and the nongovernmental expert is left suspicious that there may be no data at all. This feeds her argument about broken spheres of expert debate and epistemic communities.

Misra et al. (2007) published their assessment of the IRP in *Environmental Geology*, posing the question as to whether the river-linking project was a boon or bane to nature. They emphasise the positive aspects of the project, including the following points, also made by the NWDA in all reports: the mitigation of flooding, the prevention of water wastage, increased availability of water to dry areas, the generation of 34,000MW of hydropower and the further irrigation of 35 million hectares of land. They

state, “though linking of rivers may initially appear to be a costly proposition [in] ecological, geological, hydrological and economical terms, in the long run the benefits coming from it will far outweigh these costs or losses” (Misra et al. 2007: 1361). They note, as did Alley (2004), that Bangladesh immediately raised objections to the IRP, due to their dependence on rivers that run into the country from India. The authors note one major threat in the form of cross-contamination of river water bodies through the links. They are critical of the concept of ‘surplus water’, warn that salinity may increase through evapotranspiration, and call for the education of the ‘common man’ as well as detailed Environmental Impact Assessments. Overall though, they are supportive of the unique benefits the project brings to both region and nation, including employment, power, irrigation and food security.

Lakra et al. (2011) explore the issues surrounding freshwater aquatic resources and biology in relation to the inter-linking of rivers in India. They make reference to the Centre’s approval of the first river interlinking, Ken-Betwa, following a Memorandum of Understanding signed by MP and UP governments on August 25, 2005 (NWDA 2008). By the publication of the article, most the feasibility studies on the links had been completed by the NWDA and the Ken-Betwa link was in the process of completing phase II of Project Report (NWDA 2014). Therefore, the article focuses clearly on the Ken-Betwa Link, detailing the presence of threatened fish species in the Betwa and calling for earnest management of these populations. Citing McAllister et al. (2001) they list the following potential effects of dams and their associated reservoir impact on freshwater biodiversity: blocking the movement of migratory species, changing sediment level, trapping

maintenance silt needed downstream, filtering out of woody debris for habitat use and food, depositing silt and fostering of exotic species which displace indigenous biodiversity. Lakra et al.'s study does not reach any major conclusion on whether the Ken-Betwa link should go ahead or not, merely suggesting strongly that further attention be paid to the aquatic biodiversity and its management through future studies.

These four articles have a variety of positions (for, against and neutral) with regards to the IRP and specifically the Ken-Betwa Interlink. They cover, in their short analyses and explanations, a variety of fields and thus indicate the multidisciplinary interest in this matter. As the following sections show, all of these considerations came into play as the current BJP government began to implement this initiative with serious intent as soon as they were elected in 2014.

The Modi Promise: A Second Revival

The IRP became popular during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government of the early 2000s, under Prime Minister Vajpayee. The government elected in 2004 placed such an enormous undertaking on the back-burner, until it was resurrected by Modi's own election platform in 2013-2014 (Bakshi 2015; infochangeindia.org). Chakraborty (2015) reports that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government which was in power from 2004-2014 was not too keen on the project, challenging the IRP in the Supreme Court until it was finally given the go-ahead in 2013. Under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), the necessary group of ministers never met.

For Modi and the BJP, this mammoth project formed a key part of their efforts to deliver what is widely called their ‘development promise’ to the nation. Furthermore, as made clear above, agencies like the NWDA carried on with their work despite oscillations in government interest or public intrigue. This allowed the IRP to be ready to partially implement less than two years after the 2014 General Election; an explanation for some of the surprise and alarm in the media at the time about the project’s rapid progress. The following section details a number of media reports that document various descriptions and oppositions to the IRP and specifically the Ken-Betwa link. The Ken-Betwa Link (hereafter the KBL) will be the first of the river interlinks, since it is the proposed shortest, but it is also among the most controversial, due to the plans to flood a protected Tiger Reserve, adding to the human displacement involved in the project (infochangeindia.org).

Opposition and Critique

Articles published on the topic of the KBL and IRP in the mid 2010s have focused on the contentious nature of both the link and the overall project. Unlike the critics from the early to mid 2000s, due to the Right to Information Movement, all project reports are available to the public online. This has allowed critics to scrutinise the project unlike ever before and take issue with specific data points and project proposals. Furthermore, since the BJP’s election in 2014, the necessary political and bureaucratic measures have been fast-tracked including the establishment of a special committee to monitor the IRP’s execution in September 2014, the convening of a

separate task force in April 2015 and the allotment of approximately Rs.100 crore¹⁴⁶ to the Water Resources Ministry to expedite the completion of detailed project reports (Uttam 2015; Chakraborty 2015).

On July 13, 2015 Union Minister of State for Water Resources, Sanwar Lal Jat declared that work on the KBL is expected to start by the year's end, as the model link project for the entire IRP. All of this has been made possible by the continual work of the NWDA to create the necessary feasibility and detailed project reports and the various waves of interest during the 1980s and the early 2000s, such that Memorandums of Understanding have been signed between the necessary states and Environment Impact Assessments have been submitted (NWDA 2015). Those backing the project invoke a "spirit of goodwill and cooperation" among the states involved, evoking statements made by President Kalam in 2003, when he spoke of "emotional integration" fostered by such a project (Bandyopadhyay & Perveen 2004; *Economic Times Online* 2015).

There is strong opposition to the IRP as a whole, but as the KBL is the first of the links and it involves a Protected Forest Area, environmental activists have been openly critical of the project. Opposition to the project has not been met with understanding by the Centre, with the Hindustan Times reporting in May of this year that Panna Tiger Reserve Field Director R Srinivas Murthy, credited with the famously successful 'Panna Revival' has been transferred to another reserve. The article suggests that this transfer could be seen as a move to counter opposition to the KBL,

¹⁴⁶ 1 crore=10 million

although Forest Minister Gauri Shankar Shejwar denies this claim, citing administrative process as the reason behind the transfer. Environmental activists have been vocal about their opposition to the IRP, demanding a fresh assessment of the project and citing faulty public hearings and massive displacement of families and animals among their many complaints (livemint.com 2015). One major opponent of the IRP is the activist Himanshu Thakkar who works for the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP). In an article on catchnews.com blogger Devika Bakshi recounts her conversation with Thakkar on the IRP.

Thakkar claims that there is no scientific basis for the transfer of water through river links, arguing that the water balance studies have been manipulated to justify the initiative. Furthermore, the Feasibility Report on Panna was published 20 years ago and the cost estimates in Phase I of the Detailed Project Report are based on 2008 prices. In sum, according to Thakkar and many other opponents, the IRP is not an optimal, desirable or beneficial option to answer India's water problems. The interview ends with the following statement. "Our government is not even concerned about the effects dams and hydropower projects have on our own people in downstream areas. We don't assess the impacts, we don't consult, we don't compensate, resettle, rehabilitate the affected."

The Ken-Betwa Link

These opponents are critical of every component of this project. In this section, it is worth outlining the most important points found in the NWDA reports themselves regarding KBL. The Feasibility Report for the KBL was

completed in 1995 by the NWDA. It outlines the plans for a dam along the Ken at Daudhan and the division of water between the states involved based on a 1981 agreement on the river Ken. It cites the total cost of the link project, based on 1994-1995 prices as Rs. 1988.74 crore, with a construction period planned for 9 years. Irrigation, power generation, municipal water supply and tourism are cited as the main benefits.

Phase I of the NWDA's Detailed Project Report on the KBL was completed either in or after 2008; the document provided online does not have a date listed at any point. I have estimated that the report was finished in 2008 based on their use of 2007-2008 prices. Points of interest in the report include the documentation of survey teams and studies conducted between 1995 and 2008 as well as the description of the topography, geology, climate, physiography and population of the area. The Phase I reports the involuntary displacement of 4298 families through the construction of the Daudhan and Makodia reservoirs. There are plans within the report for rehabilitation and compensation, with the report detailing exactly the number of cattle sheds, productive trees and farmhouses that will have to be compensated. Directly following this detailed economic breakdown of the displacement, the report states the following. "No major adverse impacts are anticipated due to the link project on the socio-economic front. In fact, positive impacts due to provision of assured water supply for irrigation to the fields will increase the production of crops which in turn will improve the social set up of farmers/cultivators, etc. The impact on occupational pattern will be low to medium. Tourism will develop in the

project area”. Phase I of the KBL, as per the NWDA report from 2008 is estimated to cost Rs. 7614.63 crore.

Phase II of the NWDA’s Detailed Project Report on KBL was completed in 2014, although the foreword was signed by the supervising officer in 2012. It outlines the construction of the Lower Orr dam and the construction of four barrages. The Impact Assessments in this and the previous report were carried out by the same organisation; M/s AFC Limited, Hyderabad. The Lower Orr dam will involve the involuntary displacement of 944 families as their houses are submerged under the reservoir. Using the same exact line from the Phase I report six years earlier, the Phase II report states “socio-economic condition of the people living in command areas as well as in near vicinity of the projects will improve in general”. The report estimates revenues of Rs. 42548.52 lakh¹⁴⁷ with the total cost (at 2012-2013 price level) being Rs. 2282.94 crore.

The most important report regarding the Ken-Betwa Link is the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environment Management Plan published by the NWDA in August 2015. The report outlines the anticipated environmental hazards and impact of the project. The report states that the Daudhan reservoir will submerge 4141 hectares of the Reserve. It recognises the possible cultural impacts of rehabilitation and land loss for the people affected and totals the number of Project Affected Families with regards only to the Daudhan dam at 1913. Interestingly, it describes the caste distribution of these PAFs, with the following categories: 33.9%

¹⁴⁷ 1 lakh=100,000

Scheduled Tribes, 14.2% Scheduled Castes, 38.4% Backward Castes and 13.5% Other Castes. It states that there are plans in place for the relocation of these villages, with sites identified. This resettlement cost is expected to reach Rs.1256.25 crore. Finally, the report has photocopies of the public hearings and the executive summary lists the dates on which these hearings were conducted and seeks to counter any claims that the NWDA did not follow due process. Two public hearings were held, one in Hinauta village. The report states that the public hearings were organised with good public participation, with an overall enthusiasm for the outstanding benefits of the project.

Current Situation

In the years since these most recent reports were published, political and activist groups continue to oppose the river-linking project on a number of grounds and the project has been mired in numerous court cases. While the project has received wildlife clearance (2016), environmental activists and those involved in wildlife conservation have cited the loss of habitat and damage to wildlife in a national park as valid reasons for the project to be scrapped. On this point, a Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has questioned the clearance in the last year after activists filed a petition to challenge it. The CEC stated that other options for the achievement of the project's purported irrigation benefits have not been explored sufficiently and a new assessment ought to take place.

Additionally, all of the details regarding water sharing between UP and MP have yet to reach a conclusion, as the last Memorandum of Understanding

was signed 15 years ago in 2005. Activists and environmentalists remain hopeful that the project will be indefinitely postponed and eventually dismissed, though the central government under PM Modi is still pushing for it to start soon (Aggarwal 2019; Deep 2020; Dixit 2019; Gupta 2020; Naveen 2019; Rao 2020).

During my fieldwork, there was considerable confusion about the Ken-Betwa link, particularly in Hinauta, where an explanatory meeting was held. Local people had been hearing about the project for years and the Wildlife Institute of India research team was involved with surveys. However, the link remains unbuilt and as described in the final chapter and conclusion, in its waiting communities in the proposed flood site continue to suffer. Whether the project will continue or not is unknown, but for the moment, only four foundation stones of one of the proposed dams have been laid.

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Appendix B: Community Report

This community report was translated by Ritansh Pandey (see below). I presented the Hindi copy to the *sarpanches* in Hinauta, Madla and Bador in December 2019.

Presented to the Sarpanch and Gram Sabha of the following villages with great thanks and continued friendship.

- Hinauta Village, Panna
- Madla Village, Panna
- Bador Village, Panna

This document is intended as a form of collaboration between researcher and respondents in order to certify that the main findings of the research are accurate and appropriate. Following conversations with the communities, any mistakes or incorrect findings within this document will be corrected in the final submission. This document is not intended to be part of any advocacy or legal process. It is only a set of observations analysed from the researcher's individual perspective.

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Subject: Social Science (Social Anthropology)

Study Topic: Life of Villagers Living near Panna Tiger Reserve

Primary Study Sites: Hinauta Village, Madla Village, Bador Village

Research Synopsis

My research explored the life of villagers living around Panna Tiger Reserve. The research was the main component of my PhD degree at University College London. I conducted extended fieldwork between July 2017 and October 2018. The research examined many aspects of life in villages bordering Panna Tiger Reserve, and it focused particularly on the challenges faced by villagers in their livelihoods and politics. The villages in the study are home to people who were previously dependent on the forest for their livelihoods. The key issues faced by communities in the area are as follows: the loss of traditional livelihoods, the loss of livestock and crops to wild animals, and the possibility of village relocation. Many of these issues are affected by the relationships between government agencies and local people, particularly between the staff of the Forest Department and villagers. Those relationships are important for them to help solve these issues.

Main Findings

The Loss of Traditional Livelihoods

Villagers living around Panna Tiger Reserve have been historically dependent on the forest for their livelihoods and lifestyles. The main groups living in these villages had traditional livelihoods involving the land or resources of the forest. Previously, their livelihoods involved a range of different activities across the year, using the resources of the forest

alongside farming or herding. For Adivasi groups, such as Gond, Raj-Gond and Kondar, people previously collected forest resources and timber and farmed inside the forest. They gathered all variety of plants and fruits including *tendu* leaves for making bidi cigarettes, *mahua* and *amla* fruit for eating, making oil and producing local liquor, and *kher* wood for creating *kattha* to use in *paan*. Each of these resources is widely available in Panna's forests. Entire communities have been, up until recently, dependent on the collection and sale of these resources at different parts of the year. In recent years, access to these resources and ability to earn has been limited. They are also unable to hunt or fish, a previous sources of subsistence for Adivasi groups. This is also true of other groups, such as Rakwars, who are traditionally fishermen. Adivasi groups have also traditionally been large landholders in the villages around and inside Panna's forests. This is because of there were Gond kingdoms in the area in the past, and the more settled lifestyle of Adivasis in comparison to other groups.

The other main group in the villages around Panna Tiger Reserve whose livelihoods have been dependent on the forest are Yadavs. Yadavs are traditionally semi-nomadic pastoralists and herders. They raise buffaloes and cattle and have traditionally been dairy producers, selling milk, ghee, buttermilk (chach) and paneer all over the region and particularly in the cities. In recent years, the size of their herds has decreased drastically. Previously, they were dependent on the large open grasslands in the forest to graze their livestock. Now, those areas are restricted. Yadav herders used to travel great distances to collect and sell

their milk in villages inside the forests. Now they keep fewer animals and do not rely as much on their livestock for their livelihoods. Therefore, many Yadavs only keep enough livestock to sell milk locally and for their family. This is also true for other groups who may also keep animals such as Pals, Sahus, Rajputs or Brahmins.

These groups adapt and change their livelihoods. In the villages I visited, all groups do farming. Rajputs, Brahmins, Adivasis and Yadavs are the major landholders. The main crops I observed were wheat, mustard and chickpeas, grown over the winter. For groups living near or inside the forest, farming was only one livelihood activity among many. Farming was done alongside gathering and selling timber and forest resources or herding across the year. So when forest-based livelihoods were restricted, farming could not become enough to provide for a family. The result is that many people now work as labourers and migrate to other cities to find work.

Labouring (Majdooori) and Migration to Cities

Labouring has become a major livelihood activity for villages living near Panna Tiger Reserve. As the population increased and traditional livelihoods became restricted, labouring became the only option for many families. There is a tradition of labouring in Panna for diamonds and sandstone. However, there is not enough construction, mining, industry or development to provide local labour work for everyone. The only major industrial project in the area is the NMDC diamond mine at Majhgawan. So, many people travel to different parts of India to work as labourers. This is particularly true for Adivasi groups. They return for major festivals like Diwali

and Holi and, sometimes, smaller ones like Makar Sankranti and Shivratri. Labourers also often return during wedding season and the monsoon as there is very little work during those times due to weather. Migrant labourers usually follow other members of their family or village to particular projects and live in difficult conditions. They earn money and send it back to their families. Bank accounts have made money transfers easier. Because of labour migration, villages are often partially empty for large parts of the year. It is mainly the elderly, women and children who stay all year as well as a few family members who farm.

Agriculture and Livestock

In villages that border Panna Tiger Reserve, farming can be difficult. There are a few reasons for this. The first is that the soil can be difficult to farm, as there is a lot of hard rock in Panna. This is why the area is well known for sandstone mining. The hard rock means that farming away from rivers requires good irrigation. It is also dependent on good rain and monsoons are increasingly unpredictable. Farming next to rivers is very productive. Examples of this are Palkoha and Karyani. Another reason is the lack of awareness and education about good farming practices. Villagers repeatedly told me that they do not know how to farm like people in other states, and there is little awareness of how to increase agricultural productivity. The final reason that farming is difficult is wild animals eating crops. According to local people, animals did not eat many crops in the past because there was a lot of food in the jungle. Also, villagers were allowed to hunt. Now, hunting is banned. The main animals who cause problems are

nilgai, wild pig and parakeets. Villagers stay up all night chasing away animals and very few fields have good fences. This is because villagers don't have money to buy or build fences every year and they are afraid of wild animals getting caught in the fence. Most villagers told me that they lose at least 30% of their crops to wild animals, though I do not have exact numbers. When farming was only one livelihood activity among many, this kind of loss was manageable. Now, with other livelihood activities banned, the loss is more significant. Wild animals also eat livestock regularly in these villages. In the past, villagers would not mind too much if wild animals ate livestock, but now their herds are smaller and it has a bigger effect.

There are compensation processes for both livestock and crops. However, villagers find both processes unsatisfactory. They say that the amount of money offered for livestock is too low. The process involves a lot of time and paperwork. People often have to travel between many different government offices, and the processes sometimes change. This means that families who rely on daily wage labour lose both property and wages. Many villagers do not bother with claiming compensation for crops.

The Situation of Forest Daily Wage Workers (Shramik Workers) and Guides

One form of available local work is daily wage work for the Forest Department and jobs in the tourism industry. There are two different types of forest work. One is temporary work for a few weeks, like road construction and cutting grass. The second type of forest work is as a srmik worker. There are different positions, but the most common are chowkidaars, drivers and trackers. Srmik workers are paid according to their

job, and there are three different levels. To get a job, one must ask the ranger. Knowing the ranger is very important to getting a job and staying in that job. Almost all forest workers receive daily wage payment with no pension or job security. Transfers to different posts are also very common. A few long-term forest workers have been made permanent. To enjoy the work, having a good relationship with the forest guards and forest rangers is important. Forest rangers and forest guards are also often transferred, so building good relationships is difficult. Forest work is unpopular with younger generations. This is disappointing, because srmi workers are very important for the tiger reserve and perform many essential duties. They protect the forests and the animals. They know the most about the tiger reserve. They have good knowledge about animal behaviour and plants.

In Panna Tiger Reserve, the tourism industry is based in Madla village. Many families in the village have benefitted from the tourism industry. There are jeep owners and safari guides. There is work available in the hotels. However, the tourist season only lasts from October to June. Panna is less known than other national parks, so the numbers of visitors is less. The safari guides are a knowledgeable group and receive training from the Forest Department, but they also have no job security, insurance or pension. During the season, they have no time to do other jobs. Some guides have another business, but they depend on family members to run them. Most tourism comes from Khajuraho and the benefits in Panna are limited mostly to Madla village. However, Madla lacks some development for tourism.

Village Relocation and Compensation

There is a history of village relocation in Panna dating back decades.

Village relocation often takes a long time and involves negotiation with the community. The Forest Department staff are involved in the process.

Communities vote on whether to accept compensation and leave. There are two options available: land and money. Many people simply take money so they can decide their own path. Sometimes this leads to village communities separating, but many villagers join their families in other parts of the region. Some families do not accept compensation because they believe it is too little. Both Forest Department and villagers are under pressure from village relocation, but until laws change, they both wait. The process of village relocation involves many procedures that are complicated for villagers, and some rely on good relationships with the Forest Department to understand. Their understanding of the process is informed by the experience of already relocated communities.

Concluding Statement

This study is about the life of villagers living around Panna Tiger Reserve and the challenges they face. Among these are the change from traditional livelihoods to labour, the difficulties of agriculture and raising livestock and the prospect of village relocation. I do not raise these concerns to place blame, but rather to start a conversation that builds towards solutions. I want to thank everyone for their hospitality and generosity during my research. I will forever remain in your debt.

पी एच डी अध्ययन की जाँच और निष्कर्ष

हिनौता गाँव (पन्ना), माडला गाँव(पन्ना) और बारोर गाँव (पन्ना) के सरपंचों और ग्राम सभा को धन्यवाद देते हुए और हमारी दोस्ती को कायम रखते हुए मैं उन्हें ये प्रस्तुत करता हूँ ।

इस दस्तावेज़ का मकसद शोधकर्ता और उत्तरदाताओं के बीच एक तरह का सहयोग कायम करना है जिससे ये प्रमाणित किया जा सके कि इस अध्ययन के मुख्य निष्कर्ष सही हैं ।

समुदाय के लोगों से बात करने के बाद अगर इस दस्तावेज़ में कोई भी गलती रह जाती है या गलत निष्कर्ष सामने आते हैं तो उन्हें अंतिम प्रस्तुति में ठीक कर दिया जाएगा । इस दस्तावेज़ का इरादा किसी भी चीज़ की वकालत करना या किसी कानूनी प्रक्रिया का हिस्सा बनना नहीं है । यह शोधकर्ता के व्यक्तिगत नज़रिये से देखी गयी कुछ चीज़ों का विश्लेषण मात्र है ।

शोधकर्ता: एडम रनएकर्स

यूनिवर्सिटी: यूनिवर्सिटी कॉलेज लंदन (लंदन, यूनाइटेड किंगडम)

विषय : सामाजिक विज्ञान (सामाजिक मानवशास्त्र)

अध्ययन विषय : पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व के पास गाँव के लोगों की ज़िंदगी ।

मुख्य अध्ययन स्थल : हिनौता गाँव , माडला गाँव, बारोर गाँव

अध्ययन का सार

मेरे शोध के दौरान मैंने पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व के आस पास रह रहे गाँव के लोगों के जीवन के बारे में जानकारीयाँ हासिल कीं। यह शोध यूनिवर्सिटी कॉलेज लंदन से मेरी पीएचडी डिग्री का मुख्य अंग था। मैंने जुलाई 2017 और अक्टूबर 2018 के बीच सघन फील्डवर्क किया। मेरा शोध पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व से सटे हुए गांवों के जीवन के कई पहलुओं का अध्ययन करता है। यह गाँव वालों की आजीविका कमाने में आ रही दिक्कतों और उनकी राजनीतिक परेशानियों पर केन्द्रित है। इस अध्ययन में शामिल गाँव के लोग अपनी आजीविका के लिए पहले जंगल पर निर्भर थे। इस इलाके के लोगों की मुख्य समस्याएँ इस प्रकार हैं : पारंपरिक आजीविकाओं का खात्मा, जंगली जानवरों द्वारा मवेशियों और फसलों का नुकसान और गाँव के पुनर्वास की संभावनाएं। इनमें से कई सारे मुद्दे सरकारी एजेंसियों और स्थानीय लोगों के रिश्ते से प्रभावित होते हैं - खासकर वन विभाग और गाँव वालों के बीच के रिश्तों से इन मुद्दों पर असर पड़ता है। ये रिश्ते उनके लिए, इन मुद्दों को सुलझाने में ज़रूरी भूमिका निभाते हैं।

मुख्य निष्कर्ष

पारंपरिक आजीविकाओं का नुकसान

पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व के आस पास रह रहे लोग ऐतिहासिक तौर पर अपने जन जीवन और आजीविका के लिए जंगल पर निर्भर रहे हैं। इन गाँवों में रहने वाले मुख्य समूह पारंपरिक तौर पर जंगल की ज़मीन या प्राकृतिक संसाधनों के ज़रिये आजीविका कमाते थे। पहले उनकी आजीविका के अंतर्गत विभिन्न काम शामिल थे जो साल भर चलते थे। इन कामों में जंगल के प्राकृतिक संसाधनों के इस्तेमाल के साथ साथ खेती और पशुपालन भी शामिल था।

गोंड, राज-गोंड और कोंडार आदिवासी समूहों के लोग पहले जंगल के संसाधन और लकड़ी इकट्ठा करते थे और जंगल के अंदर ही खेती करते थे ।

वे विभिन्न प्रकार के पौधे और फल इकट्ठा करते थे - जिनमें बीड़ी बनाने के लिए तेंदू पत्ते, खाने और तेल निकालने हेतु आंवला फल और देसी शराब बनाने के लिए महुआ, तथा पान के कत्थे के लिए खैर की लकड़ी आदि शामिल थे । पन्ना के जंगलों में ये सभी प्राकृतिक संसाधन बड़ी मात्रा में मौजूद हैं । कुछ समय पहले तक ये समुदाय पूरे साल के दौरान इनको इकट्ठा करने और बेचने पर निर्भर रहते थे । लेकिन पिछले कुछ समय से इन संसाधनों तक पहुँच और इनके ज़रिये कमाने के अवसर कम हो गए हैं । वह लोग अब शिकार नहीं कर पाते हैं और न ही मछली पकड़ पाते हैं , जबकि पहले ये आदिवासी जीवन निर्वाह के ज़रिये थे ।

ये कुछ दूसरे समूहों जैसे रैकवार समाज की सच्चाई भी है जो पारंपरिक तौर पर मछुआरे थे । आदिवासी समूह पन्ना जंगल के अंदर और इसके आस पास काफी बड़ी ज़मीनों के मालिक भी रहे हैं । ऐसा इसीलिए क्योंकि इस इलाके में ऐतिहासिक तौर पर गोंड साम्राज्य रहे हैं और इसीलिए यहाँ दूसरे समूहों से आदिवासी ज़्यादा स्थिर हालातों में रहे हैं ।

एक दूसरा समूह जो कि पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व पर अपनी आजीविका के लिए आश्रित है वो है यादव समुदाय । यादव पारंपरिक रूप से पशुपालक और चरवाहे रहे हैं । वे भैंसों और गायों पालते हैं और पारंपरिक तौर पर दूध, घी , छाछ और पनीर जैसी डेरी की चीज़ों का उत्पादन करते हैं और उन्हें पूरे इलाके में, खासकर शहरों में बेचते हैं । हाल के सालों में मवेशियों की संख्या काफी कम हो गई है । पहले वे मवेशियों को चराने के लिए जंगल के खुले मैदानों पर निर्भर रहते थे । लेकिन अब ये इलाके प्रतिबंधित हो गए हैं । यादव चरवाहे दूध जमा करने

और उसे जंगलों के भीतर स्थित गांवों में बेचने के लिए लंबे सफर तय करते थे । अब वे कम मवेशी रखते हैं और अपनी आजीविका के लिये अब इनपर उतने निर्भर नहीं हैं । इसीलिए अब बहुत से यादव समुदाय के लोग सिर्फ उतने ही पशु रखते हैं जिनके दूध को स्थानीय स्तर पर बेचा जा सके और जिनका दूध उनके परिवारों के लिए इस्तेमाल हो सके । यह बात दूसरे समूहों जैसे पाल , साहू , राजपूत और ब्राह्मण समाज के लोगों के लिए भी सच है, जिनके पास मवेशी हो सकते हैं ।

ये समूह परिस्थितियों के अनुसार अपनी आजीविका बदलते हैं । जिस गाँव में मैं गया था वहाँ सभी समूह खेती करते हैं । राजपूत , ब्राह्मण , आदिवासी और यादव ज़्यादातर ज़मीनों के मालिक हैं । मैंने जो फसलें देखी वे मुख्यतः गेहूँ , सरसों और चने की थीं , जिन्हें सर्दियों में उगाया जाता है । जो समूह जंगल या उसके आस पास रहते थे उनके लिए खेती आजीविका कमाने के बहुत से कामों में से सिर्फ एक काम था । खेती , लड़की और दूसरे वन संसाधनों को इकट्ठा करने और बेचने या फिर साल भर के दौरान पशुपालन के साथ ही की जाती थी । इसलिए जब जंगल से आजीविका कम हो गयी , तो खेती घर चलाने के लिए काफी नहीं रही । इससे हुआ यह है कि बहुत से लोग अब शहरों में जाकर मज़दूरी करने लगे हैं ।

मज़दूरी और शहरों में पलायन

मज़दूरी करना अब पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व के आस पास के गांवों में आजीविका का एक मुख्य स्रोत बन गया है । जिस तरह यहाँ जनसंख्या वृद्धि हुई है और पारंपरिक व्यवसाय कम हुए हैं , मज़दूरी करना घर चलाने का एक मात्र ज़रिया बन गया है । पन्ना में हीरा और बलुआ पत्थर की खुदाई की मज़दूरी पारंपरिक काम है । लेकिन यहाँ ज़्यादा निर्माण कार्य, खनन , उद्योग

या विकास कार्य होता नहीं है, जिससे सबको काम मिले। यहाँ सबसे मुख्य औद्योगिक परियोजना मझगावां में एनएमडीसी की हीरे की खान है।

इसीलिए बहुत से लोगों को मज़दूरी करने के लिए भारत के विभिन्न इलाकों में जाना पड़ता है। ऐसा सबसे ज़्यादा आदिवासी लोगों को करना पड़ता है। वे दिवाली, होली और कई बार मकर संक्रांति और शिवरात्रि जैसे त्योहारों पर घर वापस आते हैं। मज़दूर अक्सर बरसात के महीने में भी वापस आते हैं क्योंकि उस समय मौसम की वजह से काम कम होता है। प्रवासी मज़दूर अपने परिवार वालों के या गाँव वालों के पीछे – पीछे कुछ विशेष परियोजनाओं के लिए जाते हैं और वहाँ बुरे हालातों में रहते हैं। वे पैसे कमाते हैं और अपने घर वालों को भेज देते हैं। बैंक खातों ने अब पैसे भेजना आसान कर दिया है। प्रवासी मज़दूरों के पलायन की वजह से ही साल के ज़्यादातर समय गाँव के बड़े हिस्से खाली रहते हैं। साल के ज़्यादातर समय महिलाएं, बूढ़े, बच्चे और खेतों में काम करने वाले कुछ परिवार के सदस्य ही गाँवों में रहते हैं।

खेती और पशुपालन

पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व के आस पास खेती मुश्किल हो सकती है। इसके कई कारण हैं। पहला कारण है कि यहाँ की ज़मीन पर खेती करना मुश्किल है क्योंकि पन्ना की ज़मीन पथरीली है। यही वजह है कि यह इलाका बलुआ पत्थर के खनन के लिए जाना जाता है। चट्टानों की वजह से नदी से दूर खेती करने के लिए अच्छी सिंचाई की ज़रूरत होती है। यह बारिश पर भी निर्भर रहती है और बारिश लगातार अप्रत्याशित होती जा रही है। नदियों के पास खेती बहुत उपजाऊ होती है। इसके उदाहरण हैं पलोहा और कारयानी। एक और कारण है खेती की

उपज को बढ़ाने के बारे में जागरूकता और शिक्षा की कमी। गाँव वालों ने बार बार मुझे बताया की उन्हें दूसरे राज्यों के लोगों की तरह से खेती करना नहीं आता है और खेती की उत्पादकता बढ़ाने के बारे में उनमें जागरूकता की कमी है। खेती मुश्किल होने की आखरी वजह है कि जंगली जानवर फसल को खा जाते हैं। स्थानीय लोगों के अनुसार जानवर पहले ज़्यादा फसलें नहीं खाते थे क्योंकि पहले जंगल में उनके लिए काफी खाना उपलब्ध था। गाँव वालों के शिकार करने पर पाबंदी है। अब शिकार करना वर्जित है। जो मुख्य जानवर उनके लिए परेशानी खड़ी करते हैं वो हैं – नीलगाय, जंगली सूअर और तोते।

गाँव वाले सारी रात जागकर जानवरों को भगाते हैं और बहुत ही कम खेतों में अच्छी बाड़ें हैं। ऐसा इसीलिए क्योंकि गाँव वालों के पास हर साल बाड़ बनाने के पैसे नहीं होते और उन्हें यह डर रहता है कि कहीं कोई जंगली जानवर बाड़ में फंस न जाए। ज़्यादातर गाँव वालों ने मुझे बताया कि उनकी करीब 30% फसल जंगली जानवर खा जाते हैं, हालांकि मेरे पास इसका कोई ठोस आंकड़ा नहीं है। जब खेती आजीविका के लिए किए गए कई कार्यों में से सिर्फ एक कार्य था तब इस नुकसान की भरपाई हो जाती थी। लेकिन जबकी आजीविका के बाकी कार्यों पर पाबंदी है तो यह नुकसान बहुत बड़ा है। जंगली जानवर अक्सर इन गांवों के मवेशियों को खा जाते हैं। पहले इस बात से गाँव वालों को ज़्यादा फर्क नहीं पड़ता था लेकिन अब क्योंकि मवेशी कम हैं, इसीलिए इसका उनपर काफी असर पड़ता है।

मवेशियों और फसलों दोनों के लिए मुआवज़ा देने की प्रक्रियाएँ हैं। लेकिन गाँव वालों का कहना है कि दोनों ही प्रक्रियाएं असंतोषजनक हैं। वे कहते हैं कि जो पैसा मवेशियों के बदले मिलता है वो बहुत कम है। इस प्रक्रिया में बहुत समय लगता है और बहुत कागज़ी कार्यवाही करनी पड़ती है। लोगों को बहुत से सरकारी ऑफिसों में जाना पड़ता है और कई बार तो

प्रक्रियाएं ही बदल दी जाती हैं। इसका मतलब है कि जो परिवार रोज़ की दिहाड़ी कमाते हैं उन्हें संपत्ति और दिहाड़ी दोनों का नुकसान होता है। इसीलिए बहुत से गाँव वाले फसलों के मुआवज़े लेने की कोशिश ही नहीं करते।

वन विभाग के लिए दिहाड़ी का काम (श्रमिक मज़दूर) और गाइडों की स्थिति

एक प्रकार का काम, जो लोगों को मिलता है, वो है वन विभाग और पर्यटन उद्योग के लिए रोज़ की दिहाड़ी का काम। यहाँ वनों में दो प्रकार के काम होते हैं। एक है कुछ हफ्तों के लिए मिलने वाला अस्थायी काम जैसे सड़क निर्माण और घास काटने का काम। वन में दूसरे तरीके का काम है श्रमिक मज़दूर का काम। यहाँ कई तरह के पद हैं जिनमें से आम हैं - चौकीदार, ड्राइवर और ट्रैकर के पद। श्रमिक मज़दूरों को उनके काम के अनुसार पैसे मिलते हैं और इनके तीन अलग अलग स्तर होते हैं। काम पाने के लिए रेंजर से विनती करनी पड़ती है। काम पाने के लिए और उसमें बने रहने के लिए रेंजर से जान पहचान बहुत ज़रूरी है। लगभग सभी वन कर्मियों को दिहाड़ी पर काम करना पड़ता है और उन्हें न तो पेंशन मिलती है और न ही उनकी नौकरी सुरक्षित होती है। दूसरे केन्द्रों पर स्थानांतरण एक आम बात है।

लंबे समय से काम कर रहे कुछ वन कर्मियों को स्थायी बना दिया गया है। इस काम को पाने के लिए वन रक्षकों और रेंजरों से अच्छे संबंध बनाने ज़रूरी हैं। वन रक्षकों और रेंजरों का भी अक्सर स्थानांतरण होता रहता है इसीलिए इनके साथ अच्छे संबंध बनाना मुश्किल होता है। युवाओं के बीच में वन में मिलने वाला काम लोकप्रिय नहीं है। यह निराशाजनक बात है, क्योंकि श्रमिक मज़दूर टाइगर रिज़र्व के लिए बहुत ज़रूरी हैं और वे बहुत महत्वपूर्ण जिम्मेदारियाँ निभाते हैं। वह जंगलों और जानवरों की रक्षा करते हैं। वे टाइगर रिज़र्व के बारे

में सबसे ज़्यादा जानते हैं । वे जानवरों और पेड़ पौधों के बारे में अच्छी खासी जानकारी रखते हैं ।

पन्ना टाइगर रिजर्व का पर्यटन उद्योग मालदा गाँव पर आधारित है । इस पर्यटन उद्योग से गाँव के बहुत से परिवारों को लाभ होता है । वे जीपों के मालिक हैं और सफारी गाइड हैं । होटलों में भी काम मिलता है । लेकिन टूरिस्ट सीज़न अक्टूबर से जून तक ही चलता है । पन्ना दूसरे राष्ट्रीय उद्यानों से कम प्रसिद्ध है इसीलिए यहाँ कम सैलानी आते हैं । सफारी गाइड काफी जानकार हैं और उनको वन विभाग द्वारा ट्रेनिंग दी जाती है । लेकिन उनकी भी नौकरी स्थायी नहीं होती , उनका न तो बीमा होता है और न ही उन्हें पेंशन मिलती है । सीज़न के दौरान उनके पास और कोई काम करने का समय नहीं होता है । कुछ गाइड कुछ और व्यवसाय भी करते हैं लेकिन इन्हें चलाने के लिए घर वालों पर निर्भर रहना पड़ता है । ज़्यादातर सैलानी खजुराहो से आते हैं और पन्ना से मिलने वाले लाभ सिर्फ मालदा गाँव तक सीमित हैं । हालांकि मालदा में पर्यटन के लिए ज़रूरी विकास की कमी है ।

गाँव का पुनर्वास और मुआवज़ा

पन्ना में गाँव के पुनर्वास का इतिहास रहा है जो कि दशकों से चलता आ रहा है । गाँवों के पुनर्वास में अक्सर काफी समय लगता है और उसमें स्थानीय लोगों से बातचीत करनी पड़ती है । वन विभाग के कर्मचारी इस प्रक्रिया में शामिल होते हैं । समुदाय के लोगों को यह निर्णय लेना होता है कि क्या वह मुआवज़ा लेकर चले जाएँ या नहीं । यहाँ दो विकल्प होते हैं ज़मीन या पैसा । बहुत से लोग पैसा ले लेते हैं जिससे वो अपनी आगे की राह खुद चुन सकें । कई बार इससे गाँव के समुदाय टूट जाते हैं, पर कई गाँव वाले दूसरे इलाकों में बसे अपने परिवारों

से मिल जाते हैं। कई परिवार मुआवज़े की रकम को स्वीकार नहीं करते क्योंकि उन्हें लगता है कि यह बहुत कम है। वन विभाग और गाँव वाले दोनों पर ग्राम पुनर्वास का दबाव रहता है लेकिन जब तक कानून नहीं बदलता वे इंतज़ार करते हैं। गाँव के पुनर्वास की प्रक्रिया गाँव वालों के लिए बहुत ही जटिल है और इसीलिए उनमें से कुछ इसे समझने के लिए वन विभाग से अच्छे सम्बन्धों पर निर्भर रहते हैं। इस प्रक्रिया की उनकी समझ पहले के समुदायों के पुनर्वास के अनुभवों से बनती है।

समापन टिप्पणी

वह अध्ययन पत्रा टाइगर रिसर्व के आस पास रह रहे गाँव के लोगों के जीवन के बारे में है और उनकी चुनौतियों को दर्शाती है। इसमें पारंपरिक व्यवसायों के बदलाव से लेकर दिहाड़ी मजदूरी, मवेशी पालने और खेती करने में आने वाली परेशानियों के साथ साथ गाँव के पुनर्वास के मुद्दे की बात भी की गयी है। मैं यह मुद्दे किसी पर दोषारोपण करने के लिए नहीं, बल्कि एक समाधानों की तरफ ले जाने वाला संवाद शुरू किया जाए, इसलिए उठा रहा हूँ। मैं अध्ययन के दौरान मिली मेहमाननवाज़ी और उदारता के लिए शुक्रगुज़ार हूँ। मैं हमेशा आपका ऋणी रहूँगा।

एडम रनएकर्स