

Tourism, Trade, and Globalisation

Impacts on Biodiversity - A One Act Play

EQUATIONS
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An overview of tourism, trade and globalisation and its impacts on biodiversity is presented in four parts. The first part interrogates the assumptions, myths and realities of globalisation. The second explores the trends in conservation ideology and its implications. The third examines how tourism - which is emblematic of globalisation - plays its part in this drama - the implication of its overt and covert agendas on biodiversity and people's rights. The final part raises some of the dilemmas, questions and challenges for conservation researchers, policy makers, global institutions, civil society and the industry.

We present this overview in three parts:

Scene 1: Setting the Stage: interrogating the assumptions, myths and realities of globalisation

Scene 2: Writing the Script: exploring the trends in conservation ideology and its implications

Scene 3: Enter Tourism: examining how tourism - which is emblematic of globalisation - plays its part in this drama - its overt and covert agendas and their implications on biodiversity and people's rights

Finally, Curtains: raises some of the dilemmas, questions and challenges for conservation researchers, policy makers, international financial and other global institutions, international and national NGOs and the industry.

Scene 1- Setting the Stage: interrogating the assumptions, myths and realities of globalisation

Globalisation is by no means a recent phenomenon or idea - but what is worth focussing on is its modern avatar - the advance of neo-liberal capitalism or corporate globalisation. Naomi Klein¹ a vocal and articulate critic of globalisation observed that "the past 30 years has been witness to the most extraordinarily successful liberation movement of our time - the global movement of the elite and wealthy to liberate themselves of all constraints and shackles in order to accumulate unprecedented levels of wealth". These shackles have been of taxes, environmental regulations, trade unions and other forms of organisation, capital controls, trade barriers, and publicly owned and controlled services.

This liberation project, she says, has relied on some core ideas (myths) that have been propagated with remarkable dexterity and efficiency to serve their purpose:

1. That capitalism and democracy are inseparable - in fact two faces of a coin
2. That the private sector is inherently more efficient/effective than government/publicly managed
3. Wealth created /accumulated at the top does trickle down
4. (Even if all the above fail) Anyway, there is no alternative!

Neo-liberal theory best exemplified by the economist Milton Friedman takes the view that individual liberty and freedom can best be protected and achieved by an institutional structure, made up of strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The implication of that is that the state should not be involved in the economy too much, but it should use its power to preserve private property rights and the institutions of the market and promote those on the global stage if necessary. The well known Marxist geographer David Harvey described how neo-liberalism functions by redistributing wealth through a process of "capital accumulation by dispossession", rather than generating wealth through processes of accumulation such as by the expansion of wage labour. In India as well, with the steady increase in business's economic and political power over the past 30 years we can see how this neoliberal (market-can-do-it-all) ideology has become firmly entrenched in establishment thought and practice - in thinktanks, the Planning Commission, academic institutions and in global bodies.

Classical free trade theory goes like this: when an economy opens up to the rest of the world it gets the opportunity to specialise in areas in which it has a comparative advantage. Needs that are not efficiently met through domestic production activity are satisfied through imports. The question however is what the consequences are for economic, social and environmental sustainability - do economic, social and environmental indicators improve over time in a sustainable manner along with growth in trade?

That “free trade is good” is at the heart of neo-liberal economics and one of its best sold myths. Ha-Joon Chang, the articulate heterodox economist in his book “Bad Samaritans²”, provides persuasive arguments about the damage that myths about free trade have and continue to do to developing country economies. He notes that virtually all successful developed countries since the Second World War, initially succeeded through nationalistic policies using protection, subsidies and government intervention. A process he describes as “kicking away the ladder they climbed on” they now impose free trade and neoliberal policies on developing countries, while this is not the method by which they reached developed status themselves!

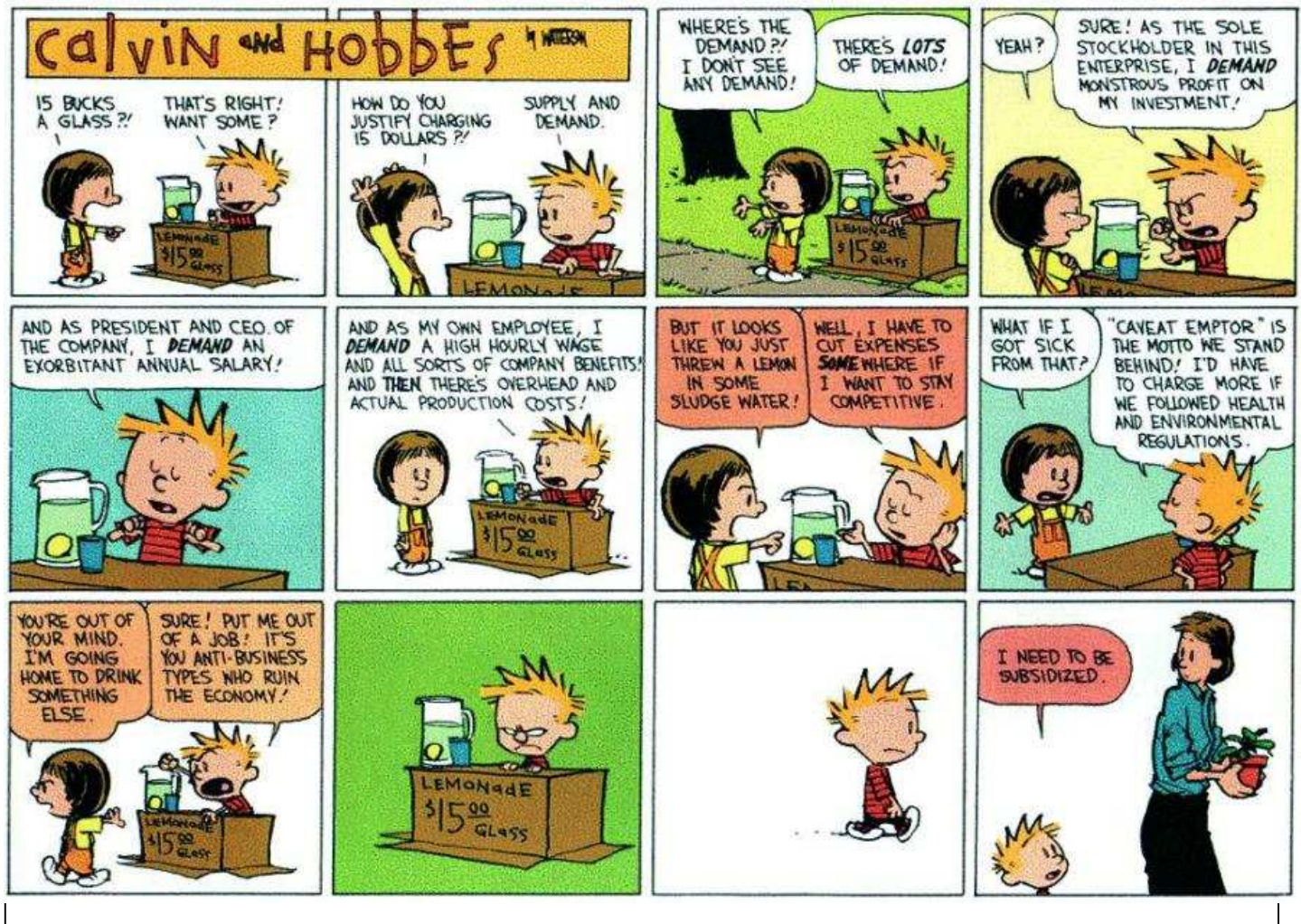
Furthermore, it must be recognised that free trade theory is about economic efficiency of resources in the short run and does not really base itself on or promise to deliver economic development. This is a rather fundamental drawback. It may therefore maximise consumption in the short run – but is not the best way to develop a countries economy in the long run. The developing countries, on the other hand, are being persuaded that they should specialise in labour-intensive production (because that is where their comparative advantage lies) without any concrete proposals on how to increase capital, skills and technology, which is the basis for their real and continued growth which is distributive in terms of increase living standards. Chang argues, for instance, that the current emphasis to get rich countries to liberalise their agriculture as a way to help poorer countries, is faulty as it fails to see that the quid pro quo is for the poor countries to dismantle foreign investment controls, reduce tariffs, and dismantle protection and subsidies and domestic regulation. These policy instruments are far more core and strategic for poor countries long term development and should not be bartered away.

So what has all this to do with the topic at hand – conservation and biodiversity? With the advance of neoliberal corporate globalisation the greatest causality has been the shrinking of democratic space to influence domestic policy. In the rush for greater liberalisation and greater “growth” the key causalities have been environmental deregulation and the indiscriminate use and abuse of use of natural resources for the benefit of a few to the detriment of us all. Furthermore, what has been paid less attention to is the extent to which the neo-liberal project has successfully crept into every aspect of our lives influencing frameworks and ways of thinking about the world.

As an example the Confederation of Indian Industries Sustainability Initiative asserts “The fact that rapid economic growth is the only realistic means to lift the poor out of extreme poverty and the fact that most economic activities depend on product and services provided by the ecosystems, necessitates the ushering of a new business paradigm which enables rapid economic growth without compromising the capacity of the ecosystem to sustain, nurture and fuel economic development and human well-being.” When rapid economic growth is determined as the only realistic means to lift the poor it is no wonder that the winners of the award by the CII ITC Centre for Excellence in Sustainable development for 2008³ for sustainability are Tata Steel, JSW steel Vijayanagar and Vedanta Sterlite in Goa and Tutucorin! All companies indicted for unsustainable practices and gross human rights violations.

It is very interesting that the current global financial crisis is being referred to as a financial tsunami – this is indeed a very revealing metaphor as it tries to propagate the idea that the financial crisis is some kind of natural disaster – (what insurance companies coyly refer to as acts of God). This absolves in one stroke the deliberate actions of greed, exploitation, and complete lack of controls and accountability that have resulted in this and earlier crises and disasters that have been wrecked on the world at large!

The global financial crisis has not shaken these steadfastly held myths. If one examines the responses of our government in the past few months on FDI, on EIA, on bailouts to the banks and private sector, on clearances for development projects, on Satyam, it is life as usual.



Scene 2- Writing the Script: exploring the trends in conservation ideology and its implications

Conservation frameworks and principles are increasingly coming under the scanner for various reasons. The link between conservation and displacement is the first, particularly the displacement of indigenous people or "conservation refugees". Mark Dowie⁴ observes that with the massive political and financial backing that was given to conservation groups, the process of 'conservation' through creation of Protected Areas (PAs), National Parks and Sanctuaries speeded up globally. In 1962, the world had some 1000 official PAs, today the number is close to 110000. The area under protection has doubled since 1990 with 12% of all the earth's land (nearly as much as the entire land mass of Africa) is under 'conservation'. At a first glance, such land and "nature" conservation seems good, but when we consider its impacts on native people of the world, one realises that all land had once been occupied by who now constitute the world's 6 million "conservation refugees". India has a total of 650 Protected Areas⁵ (96 National Parks, 508 wildlife sanctuaries, 29 tiger reserves, 14 existing biosphere reserves and 3 conservation reserves) and an estimated 2 million of the world's conservation refugees.

This kind of conservation has relied on a contested set of principles of "wilderness". Humans have been viewed primarily as an invasive species, encroaching on otherwise pristine areas, their activities leading inexorably to the erosion of biodiversity. This has mandated the exclusion of humans from biologically diverse landscapes, or the restriction of livelihoods of local people in such areas. As a result, the role of adivasis in the protection of nature through symbiotic relationships – religious, cultural, economic and social has not been studied enough, their histories not documented and their knowledge and active participation has not been sought to be included in the body of scientific knowledge and project implementation.

Madhya Pradesh's Baiga tribals fight forest officials to save jungles

For hundreds of years, Baiga tribals living in 52 forest villages of the Baigachak region, spread over Samnapur, Karanjia and Bajag blocks of the Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, had never consciously bothered to conserve forests. For this community of 30,000-35,000 people, it was the forest that protected people, not the other way round. Non-felling of sacred trees and rules about harvesting of forest products were ingrained as religious rituals rather than understood as conservation methods.

Then came forest officials. The department paid villagers to clear forests for commercially valuable Sal plantations, and traders paid them to extract fruits like gooseberry (amla) and char or chiraunji, and medicinal herbs. "We were told the forests belonged to the government," said Nanki Bai, octogenarian matriarch of Pondi village.

With the disappearance of beneficial vines and herbs, the community began to grow impoverished. "We were getting increasingly dependent on the wages paid by the forest department and traders" said elderly Fagu Gholu Baiga of Ranjra village. The simmering discontent reached a head during the Sal borer epidemic of 1995. According to forest department records, the epidemic destroyed one-third of the area's forests. The Baigas, however, tell a different story. "We were asked to cut healthy trees as well. Twice as many healthy trees were felled as infested ones," said Gondi Singh Rathuria of Ajar village "We had never seen felling on that huge scale." Protests flared up in many villages, but in most places they were easily suppressed.

The villagers became cautious. They began discussing the extent and causes of forest degradation. Soon they realized what loss disappearance of vines had caused. "Vines conserve moisture in the soil and air, provide hideouts to animals, make it difficult to fell trees by covering them, and most important, they make forests impenetrable," said Bir Singh Sarodia, an elder vaid (village doctor) of Ajar, named after pythons found in the dense, vine-covered forests. Vines like sinhar, kaniyakand, geeth and kirchi provide fruits, seeds, fibre and tubers, a nutritious substitute for grain. Sinhar leaves are used in plate-making and roofing.

Disappearance of vines also led to the drying up of swamps in the region. These swamps were reservoirs of important medicinal plants like tejraj, bhograj, kamraj, bada sukhra, hata jodi, aithi, telia kand, kali haldi, kali bhoolan, satvaar and musli. There was a cure for every ailment available here. Of the 61 varieties of medicinal herbs once available in the region, only 10-12 are left.

Other useful plants and trees like gooseberry, harra, surei, doomar, apple stone, mango and bamboo also nearly disappeared, so did some vegetables. "Ours were mixed forests," said Dhansingh Kusram, sarpanch of Serajhar. "There were about 50 varieties of large trees, of which just 23 are left. Of every 1,000 trees, 920 are now Sal."

The next step was framing rules for conservation. No felling of live trees or vines, no harvesting of forest produce until it is mature, patrolling to stop forest fires and pilferage. Traders were forbidden from bringing outside labourers and harvesting was done carefully by villagers, who also planted gooseberry, mango, bamboo and char in the forest.

The results were encouraging. Dhaba, Kanheri and Rajani Sarai villages saw their water bodies revive within three years of the conservation drive that started in 12 villages in 2001-2002. Disappearing species are reported to be regenerating in patches of forest, totalling 3,200 hectares, protected by villagers. "We now find lac, char, tendu fruits, musli and kanda in jungles," said Charu Singh Nandia of Dhaba. It will take at least two decades of undisturbed protection for the forests to regain full health.

But disturbance there is. In the past few years, several villages have had a faceoff with forest officials over coupe felling—routine tree felling by the forest department to encourage re-growth that villagers say is more of a timber-extraction exercise. In Dhaba, some 4,000 trees were marked out for felling in 2004. When villagers demanded they be allowed to select trees for felling, the department brought labourers from Rajani Sarai, 25 km away. A revenue official intervened and 200 trees were felled. In Rajani Sarai, only half the marked trees were allowed to be felled last year. In Ranjra when the felling of 3,000 trees was announced in 2007, people objected. After long and tense negotiations, very few trees were allowed to be felled. "The timber came to half a truck," said Lalla Singh of Ranjra. Another conflict is on the cards. Ranjra residents report that in October-November 2008 officials quietly marked a coupe close by. Ajar, Pondi, Chapra tola, Kandawani, Tumatola and Kanhar also reported clashes over felling.

According to Anil Garg, a lawyer who has studied forest land records and coupe felling in the region, the department is continuing with the colonial way of forest management by concentrating on timber extraction. "The working plans of all districts of Madhya Pradesh have over the years referred to mixed forests as 'inferior forests'," he said. Officials admit their working plan has no provision for the protection of vines and other "inferior" species so crucial to biodiversity and the Baiga's livelihood. Except in a few biodiversity compartments, the working plan recommends destroying vines and "useless" bushes that obstruct the growth of Sal and teak.

Villagers and forest officials also differ on the merits and methods of coupe felling. Officials say it is a scientific activity aimed at inducing growth in the forest and has nothing to do with timber extraction. "Felling is carried out using silvicultural methods and a detailed follow-up, including dressing of trunks to ensure regeneration," said P G Fulzele, Dindori's divisional forest officer. The Baigas say coupe felling is highly damaging. "When a tree is felled, vines on it die. Falling trees crush herbs and seedlings. It disturbs birds and wildlife and forest regeneration is delayed. Trucks carting timber damage small plants," said Juglal Ningunia, sarpanch of Ranjra and head of its forest study group.

Villagers also contest the criteria for tree felling, one of them being a 120 cm girth for Sal trees. According to officials, at this stage the tree stops growing and is no more useful. Villagers say Sal trees, which reach this size in 25 years, live much longer. "Old trees shelter birds, vines and wildlife," said Lalla Singh of Ranjra. Sunil Bakshi, director of the forest department's human resource centre at Chhindwada and a botanist by training, said a Sal tree lives for over 100 years but after it reaches the girth of 120 cm (35-40 years), its heartwood grows hollow, bringing down its timber value.

Afraid of backlash, the Baigas have not challenged coupe felling in toto, but insist that felling be done according to rules and in consultation with them.

Tree is not timber, Aparna Pallavi, Down To Earth Vol 17, No 18, 03rd February 2009 (part extract)

The tiger vs. tribal debates exemplify this kind of dysfunctional thinking in silos. Even more dysfunctional has been the "activism" of conservation organisations (and the BNHS being one of them)) to challenge the Forest Rights Act through Public Interest Litigations in various courts in India including 2 cases in the Supreme Court. A study of the petitions will show that many of the arguments emerge from the "pure wilderness" assumption and, even more sadly, from a rather elitist and arrogant mindset that it is conservation scientists and high officials who know best. The issues of rights and of ethics largely go unaddressed, as well as the mandate and legitimacy of conservation scientists to take exclusive positions on these issues.

The erosion of credibility is another issue. Conservation has always involved big money and is increasingly becoming big business quite literally. There is an increasing trend of large conservation organisations in partnership with big business which is seriously eroding their credibility among grassroots actors⁶. Executive officers of corporations that are major polluters serve on the boards of many environmental organizations. Friends of the Earth International the world's largest environmental grassroots movement has recently withdrawn from its membership of the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN) in protest against IUCN's partnership with Shell and Rio Tinto both notorious for their unsustainable business practices and human rights violations in several countries⁷. In the IUCN case, it is reported that when confronted with its ethical choices IUCN did not even put on the veneer of defending its ability to influence big businesses to reform. "The core funding (of some 1.2 million US dollars) would be lost", an internal IUCN paper reportedly says, should Shell take legal action. "The financial consequences (for IUCN) are unforeseeable." WWF more recently under the scanner for its role in the Round Table for Responsible Soy, Monsanto and Syngenta have been accepted as full members in the Round Table on Responsible Soy, which anti GMO activists say, makes this forum an oxymoron.

Neither money nor science can claim to be ideologically neutral. The politics of funding and the potential influence of those providing the money for research and advocacy to direct positions, is not a concern that should be dismissed easily. E.g. While many conservationists in India have been agitated about the forest rights act and its implications, they have not demonstrated agitation about the ease with which the Ministry of Environment and Forests has handed over vast tracts of critical ecosystems to mining, petro chemical, plantations and a variety of other big business.

Central government clearance for forest diversion became mandatory under the Forest Conservation Act 1980. Data⁸ about Forest Land Diversion for non Forest Purposes since 1981 (in hectares)

1981-1990	270991	24%
1991-2000	243245	21%
2001-2007	625941	55%
1981-2007	1140236	

The last 10 years has seen 73% of the diversion for mining. Diversion of industries has also been high in this period. If this is combined with the recent chilling statistics (see box below) about the rush of mining projects cleared by the

MoEF following the National Mineral Policy in 2008 the situation indeed looks very bleak for the future of conservation in the country.

A record 441 mining projects cleared in 2008; a rise of 63.94%

Even as agitations over the land for mining and other infrastructure projects are gaining momentum; Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra continue to be the major destinations for mining projects. Ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) has cleared 441 mining projects in the calendar year 2008 compared to 269 mining projects approved in the calendar year 2007, an increase of a record 63.94%.

Of 441 projects, nearly 369 have been proposed in the above given eight states. These approvals were granted as per the environment impact assessment notification of 2006. The rise in mining approvals is especially due to the Centre's move, which has allowed private sector in mining of thirteen minerals like iron ore, manganese ore, chrome ore, sulphur, gold, diamond, copper, lead, zinc, molybdenum, tungsten, nickel and platinum group of minerals. Earlier, these minerals were reserved exclusively for public sector earlier.

Informed sources told FE "The rise in mining approvals is also largely because of the National Mineral Policy announced by the Centre in 2008. Besides, the Centre, based on the high power committee's report, also plans to revise royalty. Mining is an eligible activity for obtaining financial support from financial institutions. However, so far only those mining projects which have a substantial component of mining machinery, equipment and buildings are being financed.

The government proposes to take steps to facilitate financing of mine development and also of exploration integral to the mining project. Moreover, the Centre has proposed slew of incentives. Mining being a high-risk venture, access to "risk funds" from capital markets and venture funds will be facilitated. Early stage exploration and mining companies will be encouraged and differential-listing requirements through segmented exchanges will be explored. Induction of foreign technology and foreign participation in exploration and mining for high value and scarce minerals will be pursued.

Foreign equity investment in joint ventures for exploration and mining promoted by Indian Companies will be encouraged.

Sanjay Jog Financial Express: Feb 05, 2009 Mumbai, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/a-record-441-mining-projects-cleared-in-2008-a-rise-of-63.94/419414/0>

In addition to the legitimacy and credibility issues highlighted above, current conservation frameworks and values seem to be increasingly embedded in the neoliberal ethic. The credence and weight given to market based conservation whether it is ecotourism, the economic valuing of environmental services, carbon sequestration, carbon trading and now REDD⁹ – the fundamental belief seems to be that once these are embedded in market terms the logic of the free market should take over to solve environmental problems. This is evident in World Bank supported projects like Joint Forest Management and India Eco Development Project and is pushed by several conservation organisations as a means to fund conservation efforts. We believe that the consequence of such embedded frameworks by the conservation scientist fraternity needs some significant and honest soul searching.

Scene 3 - Enter Tourism: current tourism models & policies and their implications on biodiversity and people's rights

Over the past six decades, tourism has grown to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. From 1950 to 2007, international tourist arrivals grew from 25 million to 903 million. By 2010 international arrivals are expected to reach 1 billion, and grow 1.6 billion by 2020. While, in 1950, the top 15 destinations absorbed 98% of all international tourist arrivals, in 1970 the proportion was 75%, and this fell to 57% in 2007, reflecting the emergence of new destinations, many of them in developing countries.

Tourism has become one of the major international trade categories. Today, the export income generated by international tourism ranks fourth after fuels, chemicals and automotive products.

The overall export income generated by these arrivals (international tourism receipts and passenger transport) grew at a similar pace, outgrowing the world economy, exceeding US\$ 1 trillion in 2007, or almost US\$ 3 billion a day. The

corresponding figures for India are 5.37 million international arrivals in 2008 and forex earnings of 11457 million USD (INR 50730 crores)¹⁰.

While its growth in global economic terms has undeniably been impressive, the tourism industry's claims have been pretentious at best, and misleading (if not downright untrue), when it comes to the vulnerability of the sector, its contribution to stable jobs, its capacity for poverty alleviation and its green credentials.

There is virtually no ecosystem on our living planet that has not felt tourism's footprints. While the fact that tourism has negative impacts on the environment and on indigenous & local communities is widely acknowledged, practically nothing is being done to check these undesirable impacts. Furthermore, tourism is increasingly being located in natural areas that are frontier, inaccessible, ecologically fragile and critical in terms of their biodiversity.

In India, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries have been assiduously promoted as ecotourism attractions. The National Tourism Policy of 2002 clearly states – *"wildlife sanctuaries and national parks need to be integrated as an integral part of the India tourism product, and priority needs to be given to the preparation of site and visitor management plans for key parks, after a prioritization of parks."*

While the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 does allow tourists into Protected Areas, it clearly disallows commercial establishments. The Indian Board for Wildlife, the apex advisory body in the field of Wildlife Conservation in the country, in its XXI meeting in January 2002 resolved "lands falling within 10 km. of the boundaries of National Parks and Sanctuaries should be notified as eco-fragile zones under section 3(v) of the Environment (Protection) Act and Rule 5 Sub-rule 5(viii) & (x) of the Environment (Protection) Rules". Despite this, a rash of tourism establishments are found cheek by jowl in the immediate periphery of every Protected Area of repute like Corbett, Ranthombore, Bandhavgarh, Kanha, Rajiv Gandhi – Nagarhole, Bandipura, Mudumalai and Periyar.

Under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, section 2(d), non-forestry activity is prohibited in a forest area, except with the approval of the Central Government. Thus, tourism enters the forests through a devious route! In this case, a proviso on explanation of "non-forest purpose" lays down that it does not include any work relating to or ancillary to conservation. Using the argument that revenues from tourism could potentially be used for conservation, tourism has pushed itself into forest areas, though it is clearly a non-forest purpose. A growing trend is of forest departments promoting and implementing tourism – many have eco-tourism cells but very few have clear strategies or plans for impact assessments of tourism's implications on conservation or biodiversity. The National Environment Policy 2006 in fact promotes ecotourism in many fragile ecosystems and glosses over negative impacts that tourism brings in.

Tiger declared man-eater in Corbett, forest dept blames tourist pressure

In Corbett National Park, the repercussions of constant tourism activity are beginning to show, with a tiger being declared a "man-eater". The Uttarakhand forest department has admitted that the north Indian Terai stretch, with the densest tiger population in the world, is reeling under a man-animal conflict on a scale that is unprecedented. "The tiger was declared a man-eater after it killed a woman who had entered the buffer zone of the reserve three days ago. It has also attacked two people who were riding a motorbike. We have all options open to deal with this now. It may be eliminated if it cannot be caught," says Vinod Singhal, director, Corbett Tiger Reserve. But the problem, he admits, is man-made. "This particular tiger did not tolerate the presence of elephants (carrying tourists) and used to charge at them. He gradually lost his fear of humans. Tourism around the park is a problem. Ideally, it has to be checked," he says.

The Indian Express had earlier reported how tiger conservation in Corbett is taking a hit with the mushrooming of private resorts around what can arguably be called the most famous tiger reserve in the world.

Neha Sinha, Feb 09, 2009, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/tiger-declared-man-eater-in-corbett-forest-dept-blames-tourist-pressure/420907/>

Creation of 'tourism zones' inside PAs further intensifies the seeming contradiction between the aims of conservation and the rights of displaced communities. This has led to the process of legitimising the functioning of presence of a global industry inside an ecologically sensitive region, while indigenous people and local communities have been aggressively ejected from their forests. This ejection continues as data from EQUATIONS research in Uttarakhand (Corbett), Madhya Pradesh (Bandhavgarh, Pench, Kanha) Karnataka (Nagarhole) and several PAs in Chhattisgarh.

Tourism is a sector that is built and relies on natural capital (both human and ecological) and this makes issues of sustainability very critical. Globally, the new interest in tourism-environment interrelations is particularly notable with rising concerns on the links between tourism and climate change. In this context, an interesting trend is evident when the notions of sustainability lead to the phenomenon of the class dimensions of tourism. Under the banner of sustainability, policy makers clamour for “high-value low-volume” tourists. This is a recurrent theme in several tourism policy and planning documents in India. This suggests a form of neo-colonialism disguised as green, as it links who deserves to travel solely with their ability to spend. In the light of environmental degradation also being a reality, it will be important to deconstruct the implications of these terms and nuance how we use them.

On a more global stage, tourism promotion and industry bodies like the World Travel and Tourism Council and the UN World Tourism Organisation (now a UN body – so the UNWTO) have constantly fallen back on global guidelines and agreements to showcase their commitment to sustainability and to the environment. It is important we take a closer look at these documents as they are quite educative. The key “global documents” linked to tourism have two core ideas running consistently

- That they promote the principle of free market, and protectionism in trade and investment is to be dismantled.
- That the initiatives should be voluntary and industry led

These core principles are at the heart of the Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry 1992 (an offshoot response to the Rio Declaration). They are also at the heart of the UNWTO’s global code of ethics (2001)! This is also the case with the Commission on Biological Diversity (CBD) and tourism. The CBD guidelines on Tourism and Biodiversity approved in the COP IN KL in 2004 overruling protests from grassroots linked NGOs and indigenous people’s formations and movements. The guidelines continue to view people as threats to biodiversity. They suggest that generating revenues from tourism would reduce poverty and therefore threats to biodiversity. Restriction of, prevention and management of tourism especially in fragile ecosystems has not been considered. The role of the private sector and of corporations has been privileged at the expense of indigenous and local communities that inhabit biodiversity rich areas.

Closer home, the Ministry of Tourism has abdicated completely any regulatory role and sees itself as organiser of road shows and promotion/advertisement campaigns. The Ministry of Environment and Forests’ reputation as a protector and regulator is not very credible either. Example after example has shown that voluntary initiatives and self-regulation by corporations does not work as they are guided by a self serving bottom line morality and little else. The tourism industry has used an image of relatively green in comparison to extractives like mining and oil and gas and is the least regulated industry in the country today. It is a documented fact that the first push for dilution of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification (CRZ), 1991 (issued under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986) came from the tourism industry, with repeated demands for the relaxation of the “no development zone”. Subsequently, with over 21 amendments (read dilutions), in the battle between development and the coastal ecology, development won hands down.

CRZ norms have been flouted blatantly by the tourism industry in all coastal states including in ecologically fragile ecosystems like the Andaman Islands. In Kerala, the vigilance wing of the Local Self-Government Department detected 1,500 cases of unauthorized constructions and CRZ violations in Vizhinjam Panchayat where the beach destination – Kovalam is located. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India’s Report on the country’s tsunami relief and rehabilitation plans have clearly implicated the Ministry of Environment and Forests for failing to ensure the strict implementation of this regulation and allowing considerable expansion of industrial activity on the country’s coastline which led to increased losses of life and property as a result of the disaster (CAG, 2006). However, the push to “allow” tourism infrastructure to be built in violation of coastal zoning regulations continues to receive overt support from policy makers and planners at the state and centre, with regulations seen as archaic and “anti-development”.

A classic case of the holiday from accountability is tourism’s exemption from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification (also under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986). EIA for projects was made mandatory in India in 1994 with the objective to predict environment impact of projects, find ways and means to reduce adverse impacts, and if these impacts were too high, to disallow such projects. The Ministry of Environment and Forest’s Notification in 2006, removed tourism projects from the mandatory list requiring the conduct of EIA and clearance from the Central Government. This is a retrograde step, as the negative impacts environmental, social, economic and political of tourism projects has been established conclusively. Subsequent to this move trends are visible where

international financial institutions like the ADB are sneaking in large infrastructure projects for e.g. in the North eastern region which will invite less scrutiny because they are termed as tourism projects. This is indeed a dangerous trend and needs to be watched.

Curtains

The frameworks and ideological underpinnings of neoliberal globalisation that inform much of current conservation thinking and action sideline issues of ethics and rights of vast sections of society who are protectors and dependent on natural resources and biodiversity. They also sideline actual impacts on conservation and biodiversity.

Are conservation scientists ready to walk across the “barriers” of scientific knowledge, listen to, learn from and dialogue with the original stakeholders of these resources?

Similarly, are tourism policy planners, regulators and implementers willing to do likewise? If not the possibility of sustainable futures seems dimmer.

Equating sustainability with green concerns is not sufficient. It is critical to move from the dominant orientation of environmental sustainability towards the idea of a just sustainability - an approach that will focus explicitly on justice, equity and environment together.

Keynote presentation for the session on Tourism Trade Globalisation: Impacts on Biodiversity, at the International Conference "Conserving Biodiversity in a Globalising India 17-19 February 2009 Bangalore on the occasion of BNHS 125th year

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End Notes

1 Naomi Klein is a Canadian journalist, author and activist well known for her political analyses and critique of corporate globalization

2 Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism, Bloomsbury Press, 2007

3 http://www.sustainabledevelopment.in/sustainability_awards/winner08.htm

4 Mark Dowie, "Conservation Refugees", Chapter 14, *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples Resistance to Economic Globalization*, International Forum on Globalization, 2005.

5 EQUATIONS, 2007b

6 An increasing number of environmental groups are working closely with the businesses and industries whose practices they claim they are trying to reform. (<http://www.multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1990/03/donahue.html>)

7 In October 2007, IUCN signed an agreement with oil giant Royal Dutch Shell with the aim of enhancing the company's biodiversity conservation performance and strengthening IUCN's capacity to influence large corporations into a greater environmental commitment. Similar partnerships were signed with Holcim, the leading global supplier of cement, and Total, the French oil giant. In the pipeline is an agreement with Rio Tinto, the world's largest coal extractor. IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network. It is a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. The partnership with Dutch company Shell was highly controversial from the beginning. A coalition of NGOs including Friends of the Earth International, the Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment, the Sierra Club and Dutch-based environmental and development service Both ENDS opposed it. According to these NGOs, Shell's operations have huge negative social and environmental impacts. Moreover, Shell has a highly controversial reputation in dealing with communities affected by oil exploitation, for example in the Niger delta, where Shell continues flaring gas, despite several promises to phase out the process. Shell also rejected plans of the European Union to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by European companies, is increasingly its investments in highly-polluting oil sands in Canada and is planning oil explorations in the Arctic.

8 The environmental NGO Kalpavriksh applied the Right to Information Act to get this data from MoEF

9 policymakers, conservationists and scientists have high hopes that REDD, a mechanism for compensating countries for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, will spur a massive flow of funds to tropical countries, helping preserve rainforests and delivering economic benefits to impoverished rural communities

10 Source UNWTO and Ministry of Tourism, GOI