

Satkosia Tiger Reserve under threat

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The failure of the Odisha Government to initiate eco-tourism efforts in and around Satkosia Tiger Reserve of Odisha by involving the affected people of the Reserve, has adversely affected its conservation. Situated in close proximity of Angul-Talcher industrial belt comprising 18 coal mines, eight power plants, six sponge iron plants and aluminium company, the Reserve is under severe eco pressure. After declaration of Tiger Reserve and subsequent imposition of restrictions, people of 116 villages of the Reserve have almost lost their livelihood which has added more pressure on it. The forests surrounding the Satkosia gorge of Mahanadi River including the stretch of river flowing through the gorge were notified as Satkosia Gorge sanctuary in the year 1976. The contiguous area to the south of this sanctuary in Nayagarh district was notified as the Baisipali sanctuary in the year 1981.

Later, these two sanctuaries together were notified as Satkosia Tiger Reserve in the year 2007. The Reserve houses various wild animals like tigers, leopards, elephants, gaurs, sloth bears, sambar, spotted deer, barking deer, mouse deer, pangolin, giant squirrel, Malabar pied hornbill, Gharial and Mugger crocodiles, fresh water turtles, freshwater rays, etc. The Reserve has a tremendous genetic and ecological importance as it is the wet portion of Deccan Zone. Apart from significant elephant population in deciduous forests, the 22.4 km-long stretch of Satkosia gorge of Mahanadi River harbours a large population of varied fish and aquatic fauna. Temples of Goddesses Binikei and Kankei, Baigani Parbata, Bhimdhar waterfall and Crocodile Rescue & Rehabilitation Centre at Tikarpada and picturesque view of the gorge attract tourists to the Reserve round the clock. Satkosia is famous for its unique gorge eco-system and it serves also as a major

watershed for the entire region. The magnificent Hinjala, Dhauranjan, Kochila, Arjuna and Phasi forests on the banks of river Mahanadi are typical elements of riverine forests.

Wild animals are frequently sighted in Raigoda, Kuadoli, Halua Nullah, Nandini Nullah, Hatigirija, Tulka, Baghmunda, Katranga, Purunakote, Chhotmunda, Kuru, Labangi, Karadapada, and Majhipara blocks of the reserve. Most of the animals are sighted in game tank areas like Kantarsingha, Hatigirija, Kandhaida, Kadalikhola, Takarsingha, Buchhundabhogra, Nadapathar, Ranibandha, Paintiri

depend on this unique biosphere for picnicking and allied tourism activities. The livelihoods of the local people will improve if more eco tourist spots are developed in the periphery area of the Reserve. This will give way to community development and conservation of biodiversity. Community based eco tourism with proper training and skill development will reduce the dependence of local communities on forest resources. There is a need for participatory, consensus building approaches with communities. It will enable communities to improve their livelihoods in ways that reduce their

Raigoda revenue village is in pipeline. People by and large have volunteered to leave the reserve. "Here we have no work to do. We cannot touch a leaf after the declaration of Tiger Reserve.

The wild animals are destroying our little crops. We have to go at least 12 km to get minimum medical facility. So we have decided to go out of this forest to somewhere else," said Binod Pradhan, President of Eco Development Committee, Raigoda.

The collector of Boudh has given his opinion to relocate another village Marada from the core area of the Reserve. "Rehabilitation of the people from the core area is a very important matter. We are taking sincere efforts with the local administration to relocate the villagers. The people of the village should agree for relocation", said J D Sharma, Chief Wild Life Warden, Odisha. Apart from relocating the people from the core area, it is now important to provide livelihood to the people of 116 villages of the Reserve. The haphazard eco tourism initiative has benefited only 35 people. Community Based Ecotourism was initiated in Satkosia during 2006. A temporary Nature Camp was set up at Tikarpada on the sand of the River Mahanadi and managed by Tikarpada Paribesh Paryatan Samiti (TIPPS). After declaration of Tiger Reserve, the Nature Camp was shifted from the core area to the river bank. However, due to mismanagement, the Camp is almost closed.

"After its shifting, the tourists are not interested to stay in the Camp and thus making the project unviable", said Lasim Chouhan, Vice President of TIPPS. The Second ecotourism initiative in Satkosia is now running at Chhotkei from Dec 2011. Only 14 members and their families are being benefited. Sadly, the tourists used to stay at the camp for five months at Chhotkei as the area experiences severe heat for seven months.

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and Khajurinalia. The Tiger Reserve is now under huge pressure due to intermittent forest fires, frequent livestock grazing, shifting cultivation, poaching, collection of fuel wood, timber and other forest produce. The Reserve with its adjoining areas is surrounded by human habitation that depends on forest for its daily requirements of fuel wood, fodder and timber. This apart, timber mafias have also accounted for large-scale felling of timber. Unless the dependency of the people is reduced by providing them alternative livelihoods, the Reserve will sustain tremendous biotic pressures. People living in the adjoined Industrial region mostly

dependencies on forests and also pave the way for sustainable coexistence of people and wildlife in and around protected areas. The local communities, if provided with alternative livelihood, will make efforts to combat these threats. There are five villages inside the core area of the tiger reserve. These include Raigoda, Marada, Kuturi, Salapagonda and Musuguda. Emphasis should be given to rehabilitate the families in these villages based on the packages prescribed by National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment and Forests as directed by the Supreme Court. Relocation of