

Why do humans kill tigers?

Conservationists in Bengaluru respond to the rise in big cat numbers

RAJMOHAN SUDHAKAR
DHNS

The brutal killing of a female tiger in an Uttar Pradesh reserve was widely shared online and played up by the visual media recently. However, a broader consensus on how to curb such savagery was not a priority.

The clip had an uncanny resemblance to the climax of a barbaric tiger hunt from the British Raj, where 'native' trackers helped secure trophies for their masters, especially tigers.

"The death of the female tiger is tragic and unfortunate. As spaces for large iconic wildlife such as tigers and elephants shrink, the retaliation against wildlife for losses of property, crops, livestock and human life will continue to rise in India unless we address it. Our research shows that India is among the highest conflict-prone countries with an average of 80,000-1 lakh incidents a year," reveals Dr Krithi Karanth, chief conservation scientist at the Centre for Wildlife Studies.

The majesty of the national animal was desecrated when the female cat succumbed to the sticks, poles and bludgeoning of villagers in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit.

"With economic growth, social tolerance towards wildlife is drastically changing. Not just with tigers, but with



Tigers and gaurs at a wildlife sanctuary. PIC COURTESY: YATHIN S KRISHNAPPA

leopards, elephants and other wildlife. We are seeing retaliatory killings of leopards with an increase in encounters or at times of perceived conflict. At the mere sighting of a large carnivore, people demand capture. We need to pro-actively work towards mitigating human-wildlife encounters. Otherwise, conservation of conflict-prone species will be a tight-rope walk," says wildlife biologist and author of Second Nature Sanjay Gubbi.

Our treatment of wildlife and the patronising, piggy-backing on the recent cat census that show feeble signs of progress, and primetime programming to flavour it, in fact, does hold a mirror to the hypocrisy and rot.

"Longterm conservation should be the goal. Common man should not be affected. Communities in conflict should be brought to mainstream. It shall be a slow process no doubt. We have worked with three villages inside the Nagarhole reserve. Yet there are settlements inside. We have also worked extensively in the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary," says former

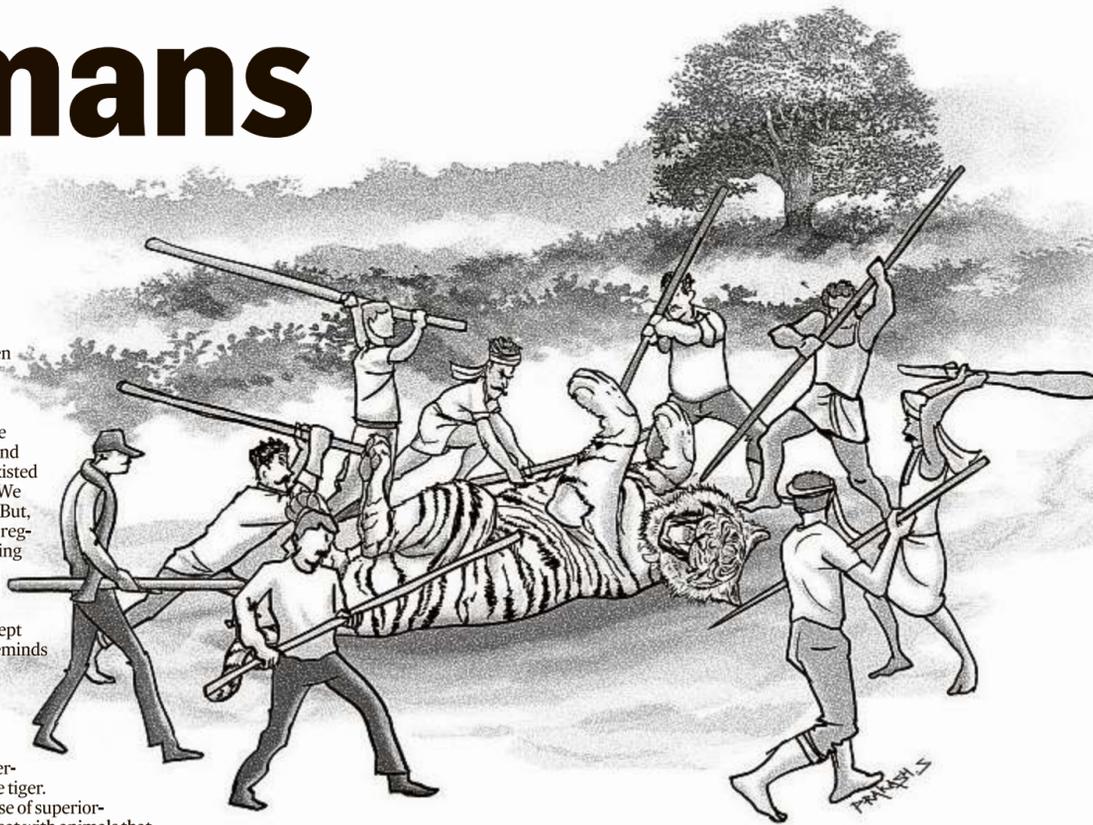
chief wildlife warden C Jayaram.

According to Jayaram, projects should not bifurcate habitats. "Forests and animal corridors existed even before roads. We have the first right. But, animals do too. We regulate traffic traversing Bandipur for at least nine hours everyday. We have to learn to accept inconveniences," reminds Jayaram.

Perhaps the way we see human-animal encounters is wrong. It is only a conflict from our perspective. Not for the tiger. Our contextual sense of superiority must take backseat with animals that play a vital role and have lived for aeons without any help whatsoever from us.

"The government, NGOs and individuals have to play a key role in the recovery of conflict-prone wildlife reserves. The primary challenge is to create space for wildlife which is not impinged upon by infrastructure such as roads and railway. Mitigating conflict on the edges of reserves with human settlements within, through compensation, insurance and other redressal is crucial. Building tolerance among people and reducing retaliation against wildlife is what our Wild Seve programme around Nagarhole and Bandipur reserves has done over the last four years. We have assisted in filing over 14,000 claims for losses of wildlife," adds Dr Krithi.

"Pressures on tiger habitats need to be reduced as it cannot permanently take degradation. India can afford



alternatives to save the national animal. Infrastructure can be at alternative locations, not in wild habitats. There are ecological, legal, economic, and more importantly, ethical reasons to save

tigers or any wildlife," explains Gubbi.

Wildlife is a larger part of our existence and evolution. We have to find a way first, not behave brutally without afterthought like we did in Pilibhit.

"A recent economic evaluation of the Bandipur Tiger Reserve has shown that it can be assigned an annual monetary value of over Rs 6,400 crore. The study also says the value of water it contributes to the Kaveri river is worth over Rs 2,067 crore a year. Is this not an enormous contribution to our farmers? For political leaders who look at wildlife as economic resource, aren't these figures good enough to support conservation?" asks Gubbi.

So what's the way forward here? Whatever it is, communities must not be uprooted from their lands, but integrated to minimise conflict.

"It has to be a combination of approaches. One key problem is poaching

of prey which needs to be addressed through law as it is not a livelihood issue in most parts of the country, except in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. But with issues like firewood gathering, which is a key energy need for many forest-dependent communities, we need alternatives. Besides, we need to evaluate the solutions too," feels Gubbi.

The innate tendency of the moneyed to grab land, that too forest land, must be reined in. We have plundered enough, driving the communities deeper into the forests and large carnivores ever closer.

"Gazetting reserved forests as protected, taking into account existing human settlements, as per law, is one way. Diluting of wildlife and environmental laws has to come to a halt. Economic development should not cost us the country's environmental heritage," notes Gubbi.

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C JAYARAM, FMR WILDLIFE WARDEN

Handlooms need a solid push

Pavithra's museum is among the few institutions struggling to keep alive handloom fabrics

SURUPASREE SARMAH
DHNS

In an attempt to promote the Indian handloom industry and honour weavers across the country, the Union Government is observing August 7 as National Handloom Day since 2015.

But it is not just the government; some individuals are also doing their bit to preserve the country's heritage textiles for the future generation.

Pavithra Muddaya and her mother, late Chimmy Nanjappa, are a good example. They established Vimor in 1974, a brand that has been reviewing, designing and selling South Indian handloom saris for the past 45 years.

Pavithra has now launched Vimor Museum of Living Textiles that has extensive documentation of motifs, techniques and designs that have been forgotten. This initiative helps create employment in the handloom sector and aims to spread knowledge about India's handloom heritage among the public.

Pavithra works with over 2,000 weavers, guiding and mentoring them to create weaves that are close to the now-lost originals.

She cites Karnataka as a state that has lost many of its textile. "I try to re-construct the textile from the memories of senior citizens. They are our knowledge bank. My focus is to record all these stories as we are the last generation that can do so."

She adds, "My work is also about instilling pride in the weavers; it is about respecting the makers."

The demand for handloom products are more than the supply but there are no weavers as they have moved to mainstream, and more lucrative professions, she says.

This is also a reason why weavers are reluctant to pass on their skill to their children. They feel there is no future in



Visitors can have hands-on experience in weaving at the Vimor Museum of Living Textiles.

the industry. Long-time ago, Bengaluru had a huge market for handlooms, especially in the Cubbonpet area, but when the power looms took over, the practice of wearing handlooms faded away.

"Karnataka had some of the most talented weavers, who were sent all around the country to train others in the industry. They had organised societies in areas like Chickpet but moved to areas like Doddabalapur, Kengeri and Yelahanka after the power looms came. They are still there but in small numbers," she points out.

At a time when the country's textile culture is vanishing, Pavithra feels that we should know what we had and have lost. For this awareness should start in schools.

"Learning about it should be a part of the curriculum. Exposing children to handloom is a great tool to re-claim our culture," she notes.

Are youngsters today unaware about the glory of handloom?

K Radharaman of The House of Angadi says the awareness quotient about handloom has come down.

"Earlier,

shopping was typically a family expedition. So an understanding of handlooms (as well as other things like jewellery) was passed down through generations during these shopping trips. The end of such a norm has contributed to the decline in knowledge," he says.

He cites another reason as the lack of popularity of handlooms as compared to big brands. The fact that handloom products are not placed in malls or high-street destinations adds to this.

"Handloom products are made in remote parts of the country, villages and rural areas so people can't identify with the making process. So it's an abstract concept for them. And since practitioners don't actively promote the product, many misconceptions abound," he explains.

What are some of these misconceptions that exists among the consumers?

"Many consumers feel it is difficult to wear or maintain handlooms, some associate it with a par-



A model in a Jamdini sari by The House of Angadi.

ticular garment, like the sari and they feel it can be worn only by people of a certain age. Another thought that people have is that it is not user-friendly. But women in rural India have been wearing this fabric for ages; they even work wearing it. So I feel it is a baseless thought that has entered people's heads," observes Radharaman.

How can we make the common man more knowledgeable about our heritage textiles?

The media can help in this regard of course. Also, we need to ensure that only true and clear information is being put out there. It is sad that people here have knowledge about

things happening thousands of miles away but are not aware of sectors and people engaged in them in India.

We should also take care that when we spread a message about handloom, it doesn't come across as too preachy that will only alienate the younger audience. So we shouldn't tell them to buy handloom to save farmers, we should tell them the fabric (and its bright colours) is a celebration of their individuality.

Most of Radharaman's work has been in the realm of contemporising traditional textile. Innovating and reinventing something that has been around for a long time and presenting it in a new context, is what he specialises in.

"I introduced linen and khadi in kanjeevaram saris. We have also reintroduced the Jamdani on cotton muslin. Initially, people believed that it has to look a certain way or have certain motifs but that has never held me back. I just feel one shouldn't dilute the essence of it," he explains.

Saris and handloom

Pavithra says that handloom doesn't just mean saris. "We are associated with designers like Prasad Bidapa who produce ready-to-wear handloom garments. The fabric has endless possibilities. The younger generation too is doing a good job, they have the courage to experiment," she says.

Designer Neeta Rajendran, Sakhi Fashions, however feels that youngsters should embrace this textile as a sari, instead of looking for fashionable clothes.

"A sari can be worn in many ways. If it is a handloom product, made by local artisan communities, there are no synthetics used. The handloom will feel light and comfortable, making it a good option for youngsters."

Neeta and her team works with weavers from Inkal district, Hubballi, Banaras, Kanchipuram and Chattisgarh.

She rues the fact that only a handful of people understand the value of handloom and are ready to pay the price of original work.

Neeta believes that if a celebrity endorses these products, the awareness could be much higher.

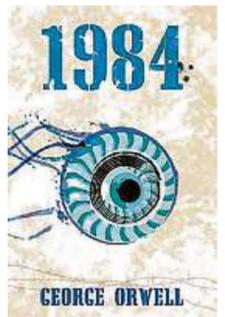
Five books that say the future is a scary place

Dystopian novels and shows have a growing fan base. Dystopia – the opposite of utopia – is the idea of a society in which people are unhappy.

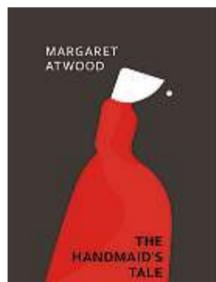
An odd genre, dystopian novels give us a wild imagination of how the world will look in the future.

Here are a few books to read if you are new to the genre.

1984
Written by George Orwell, this book is probably the most popular dystopian novel, which gave rise to new concepts. Published in 1949, the book is Orwell's imagination of a totalitarian state,



1984 by George Orwell

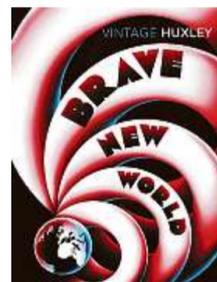


The Handmaid's Tale

where everything is under constant surveillance of the 'Big Brother'. Many schools and colleges also have made the book a part of their curriculum.

The Handmaid's Tale
Also a popular web-series starring Elisabeth Moss, 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Atwood explores the life of Offred, a handmaid, whose only purpose is to breed. The book makes for a spine-chilling read as it revolves around a society where women have no autonomy over their bodies.

Leila
The recent one to be made into a Netflix series is 'Leila' by Prayaag Akbar. The novel explores a dystopian era



Brave New World

where the obsession for purity is escalated. The narrative follows Shalini, a mother who is on the lookout for her daughter Leila.

Brave New World
Written by Aldous Huxley in 1931, the novel is about genetically modified citizens in a futuristic world. It is considered as one of the best literary works of the 20th century.

The Maze Runner
A young-adult book series by James Dashner is about the world which has been devastated by a series of massive social flares. The books are also made into films. (Compiled by Juvieria Fathima)

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