

## Conservation Policies, Tourism, and Community Perspectives in Sariska Tiger Reserve

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### Abstract

Conservation policies in protected areas often lead to the relocation of indigenous communities, raising concerns about their social and economic well-being (Torri, 2011). In the case of Sariska Tiger Reserve, conservation efforts have faced resistance from local communities due to displacement and restrictions on resource access (Sekhar, 2003). Studies highlight the challenges of balancing biodiversity conservation with human rights, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies (Agrawal, 2002; Brechin et al., 2003).

Forced relocations often result in economic hardships, as displaced communities struggle to adapt to new environments (Cernea, 2006). Additionally, fortress conservation models, which exclude local populations, have been criticized for disregarding traditional knowledge systems essential for sustainable resource management (Brockington, 2002; Brosius, 2004). Alternative conservation approaches, such as community-managed reserves, have been proposed to ensure both ecological preservation and local livelihoods (Kothari, 1997; Gadgil et al., 1993).

Human-wildlife conflicts are another major concern, as restrictions on resource use can lead to negative perceptions of conservation among local populations (Shahabuddin et al., 2007). Economic incentives, ecotourism, and participatory governance models have been suggested as solutions to foster better relationships between conservation authorities and local communities (McNeely & Scherr, 2003; Wilkie et al., 2006).

In conclusion, conservation policies must balance ecological goals with social justice to ensure sustainable outcomes. Integrating local perspectives, providing alternative livelihoods, and implementing community-driven conservation models can help mitigate the negative impacts of protected area management (Borgerhoff-Mulder & Coppolillo, 2005; Terborgh et al., 2002).

### 1. Introduction

Protected areas play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation, yet they often lead to complex socio-economic challenges for local communities. The Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR), located in Rajasthan, India, exemplifies this dynamic, where conservation policies have historically resulted in displacement, altered livelihoods, and conflicts between wildlife protection and human settlements (Torri, 2011; Sekhar, 2003). While the establishment of protected areas aims to safeguard endangered species like the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), such measures frequently disregard the socio-cultural and economic rights of local populations, leading to resistance and negative perceptions towards conservation efforts (Brockington & Igoe, 2006; Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2003).

This study explores the impact of conservation policies on local communities in and around the Sariska Tiger Reserve, with a focus on understanding the relocation process, its socio-economic consequences, and community attitudes toward wildlife conservation.

#### 1.1 Background of Sariska Tiger Reserve

The Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) is in the Alwar district of Rajasthan, covering an area of approximately 881 square kilometers. It was initially declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1955 and later designated as a tiger reserve in 1978 under Project Tiger (Shahabuddin, Kumar, & Shrivastava, 2007). The landscape consists of dry deciduous forests, scrub-thorn arid forests, and rocky hills, providing a suitable habitat for tigers, leopards (*Panthera pardus*), and several herbivorous species, including sambar deer (*Rusa unicolor*) and chital (*Axis axis*) (Sekhar, 2003).

Historically, STR has been home to several indigenous and pastoralist communities, such as the Gujjars and Meenas, who have relied on the region's natural resources for their livelihood. However, conservation policies have often led to forced displacement of these communities, causing significant socio-economic hardships (Torri, 2011). While the government-initiated relocation programs to move these populations outside the reserve, inadequate compensation, loss of traditional livelihoods, and cultural disintegration have contributed to dissatisfaction among displaced communities (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

The tiger population in STR faced a severe crisis in the early 2000s when poaching and habitat degradation led to the local extinction of tigers. By 2004, the reserve reported no tiger presence, prompting the government to undertake a tiger reintroduction program in 2008 (Shahabuddin et al., 2007). This program involved relocating tigers from Ranthambore Tiger Reserve and implementing stricter conservation measures, including increased restrictions on human activities (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). However, these efforts further intensified conflicts between local communities and forest authorities, as restrictions on grazing, firewood collection, and non-timber forest products impacted the livelihoods of those dependent on the forest (Sekhar, 2003; Torri, 2011).

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the impact of conservation policies on the socio-economic conditions of communities residing in and around the Sariska Tiger Reserve (Torri, 2011; Sekhar, 2003).
2. To examine the effectiveness of relocation programs and assess the challenges faced by displaced communities (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2006).
3. To explore local attitudes toward wildlife conservation and understand how forced displacement influences perceptions of conservation initiatives (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).
4. To review the broader implications of fortress conservation and evaluate alternative models that integrate community participation in conservation efforts (Brockington, 2002; Brechin et al., 2003).

2.

## 2.1 Research Methodology

This study is based on a **secondary data analysis** approach, utilizing existing literature, government reports, and academic studies on the Sariska Tiger Reserve and conservation policies. Secondary data sources include peer-reviewed journals, books, policy documents, and case studies related to conservation-induced displacement, local perceptions of conservation, and the socio-economic consequences of relocation programs (Torri, 2011; Sekhar, 2003; Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

### Key sources include:

- **Empirical Studies on STR:** Research papers analyzing conservation policies, relocation programs, and their socio-economic impact on local communities (Torri, 2011; Sekhar, 2003).
- **Policy Documents:** Reports from the Indian government and conservation organizations on the history, implementation, and outcomes of conservation initiatives in Sariska (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).
- **Theoretical Frameworks:** Works on *fortress conservation*, *community-based conservation*, and *conservation refugees* to provide a broader understanding of displacement-related challenges (Brockington & Igoe, 2006; Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2006).
- **Comparative Studies:** Analysis of conservation-related displacements in other protected areas globally, drawing insights from similar cases (Brosius, 2004; Brechin et al., 2003).

This methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic and ecological dimensions of conservation in Sariska without conducting primary field research. The study's findings will contribute to discussions on sustainable conservation strategies that balance biodiversity protection with the rights and well-being of local communities.

## 3. Conservation Policies in Sariska Tiger Reserve

Conservation policies in the Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) have evolved over the decades, reflecting India's broader wildlife protection efforts. While these policies have successfully restored tiger populations and protected biodiversity, they have also led to significant socio-economic disruptions for local communities. This section examines the history of conservation efforts, the government policies and regulations that shaped STR, the role of conservation authorities, and the impact of these policies on indigenous and pastoralist populations.

### 3.1 History of Conservation Efforts

Sariska Tiger Reserve, located in the Aravalli hills of Rajasthan, has a long history of conservation initiatives dating back to the mid-20th century. Initially, the region served as a hunting ground for the royal families of Alwar. However, growing concerns over declining wildlife populations led to its designation as a **wildlife sanctuary in 1955** (Shahabuddin, Kumar, & Shrivastava, 2007). This marked the beginning of formal conservation efforts in the region.

In **1978, Sariska was declared a tiger reserve under Project Tiger**, a nationwide initiative launched by the Government of India in 1973 to protect the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) from extinction (Sekhar, 2003). This status imposed stricter regulations on land use, restricting human activities within the core area of the reserve. By the 1990s, Sariska was facing challenges such as habitat degradation, poaching, and increasing human-wildlife conflicts.

A major crisis occurred in **2004 when Sariska reported a complete loss of its tiger population due to poaching and habitat destruction** (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006). In response, the government initiated a tiger reintroduction program in **2008**, relocating tigers from Ranthambore Tiger Reserve to repopulate Sariska (Shahabuddin et al., 2007). Alongside stricter anti-poaching measures, this initiative also intensified conservation restrictions, further displacing local communities and limiting access to forest resources.

### 3.2 Government Policies and Regulations

The conservation framework governing Sariska Tiger Reserve is shaped by national and state-level laws, with key policies including:

1. **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972**

a. This law provided the legal foundation for wildlife conservation in India, leading to the establishment of protected areas like Sariska.

b. It restricted hunting, encroachments, and human activities in wildlife habitats (Sekhar, 2003).

c. Under its provisions, Sariska was granted the status of a **tiger reserve** in 1978.

## 2. **Project Tiger (1973)**

a. Aimed at protecting tiger populations through habitat conservation and anti-poaching efforts.

b. Led to the demarcation of **core and buffer zones** in tiger reserves, prohibiting human settlements in core areas (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

## 3. **Forest Conservation Act, 1980**

a. Regulated deforestation and commercial exploitation of forest land.

b. Limited grazing rights and firewood collection for local communities (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

## 4. **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) Guidelines (2006-Present)**

a. Following the extinction of tigers in Sariska in 2004, the NTCA implemented stricter relocation and rehabilitation programs.

b. Introduced **relocation schemes** for villages within tiger reserves, often leading to forced displacement (Torri, 2011).

## 5. **Sariska Relocation and Rehabilitation Policy (2008)**

a. Aimed to relocate villages from within the reserve to designated resettlement areas.

b. Provided financial compensation and alternative land, though implementation faced challenges such as delays and inadequate compensation (Brockington & Igoe, 2006).

While these policies have contributed to tiger conservation, they have also led to social unrest, particularly among communities traditionally dependent on forest resources.

### 3.3 **Role of Forest Departments and Conservation Authorities**

The implementation of conservation policies in Sariska is carried out by various agencies, including:

#### 1. **Rajasthan Forest Department**

a. Manages Sariska's day-to-day conservation efforts, including patrolling, habitat restoration, and human-wildlife conflict resolution.

b. Enforces wildlife protection laws and prevents illegal activities like poaching and encroachment (Sekhar, 2003).

#### 2. **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)**

a. Oversees the implementation of **Project Tiger** across India, including Sariska.

b. Provides funding, technical expertise, and policy guidelines for tiger conservation (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

#### 3. **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)**

a. Conducts scientific research and monitoring of tiger populations in Sariska.

b. Plays a key role in planning tiger reintroduction and tracking relocated tigers using radio collars (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

#### 4. **Local and International Conservation NGOs**

a. Organizations like the **WWF-India** and **Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI)** support conservation efforts by conducting awareness programs, community engagement initiatives, and independent wildlife monitoring (Brosius, 2004).

While these agencies have contributed to the recovery of Sariska's tiger population, there have been **numerous conflicts between local communities and forest authorities** due to strict enforcement measures and lack of participatory conservation approaches (Torri, 2011).

### 3.4 **Impact of Conservation Policies on Local Communities**

The conservation policies in Sariska Tiger Reserve have had profound consequences for indigenous communities, particularly the **Gujjars, Meenas**, and other pastoralist groups who have traditionally lived in the region. The key impacts include:

#### 1. **Forced Displacement and Loss of Livelihoods**

a. Several villages, including **Bhoopgarh and Kankwari**, were relocated outside the reserve, leading to significant socio-economic hardships (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

b. Many displaced families faced challenges such as **lack of agricultural land, inadequate housing, and insufficient compensation** (Torri, 2011).

c. Traditional livelihoods like cattle grazing and minor forest produce collection were disrupted, pushing communities towards wage labor and unemployment (Brockington & Igoe, 2006).

#### 2. **Human-Wildlife Conflict**

a. Restrictions on grazing and forest access have forced communities to settle in peripheral areas, where they are more vulnerable to tiger and leopard attacks on livestock (Sekhar, 2003).

b. Retaliatory killings of predators have been reported as a consequence of these conflicts (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

### 3. Social and Cultural Disruptions

- a. Relocation programs have caused **loss of cultural identity**, as displaced communities struggle to integrate into new socio-economic environments (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2006).
- b. Traditional knowledge systems related to forest management have been undermined due to restricted access to ancestral lands (Brosius, 2004).

### 4. Resistance and Conservation Backlash

- a. Many local residents view conservation authorities as **outsiders imposing unjust policies**, leading to tensions between the Forest Department and local populations (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).
- b. Instances of **poaching and illegal resource extraction** have been linked to resentment against conservation policies (Torri, 2011).

Despite the challenges, **community-based conservation models** that integrate local participation have shown promise in other regions. Alternative approaches, such as **ecotourism initiatives and participatory forest management**, could offer more sustainable solutions that balance conservation with community well-being (Brockington, 2002).

The conservation policies implemented in Sariska Tiger Reserve have had mixed outcomes— while they have successfully reintroduced tigers and strengthened wildlife protection, they have also led to significant socio-economic disruptions for local communities. The rigid enforcement of relocation programs, coupled with inadequate compensation and limited livelihood alternatives, has exacerbated human-wildlife conflicts and resistance toward conservation efforts. Moving forward, **a more inclusive conservation model** that involves local communities in decision-making and offers sustainable livelihood options is essential for ensuring the long-term success of Sariska's conservation goals.

## 4. Displacement and Its Consequences

### 4.1 Forced Relocation of Indigenous Communities

The establishment of protected areas like the Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR) in India has led to the forced relocation of indigenous and local communities. This process, often justified in the name of conservation, has historically disregarded the rights, traditions, and livelihoods of these communities (Torri, 2011). The eviction of villagers from STR is part of a broader global trend where conservation policies prioritize wildlife protection over human settlements (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). The displacement process, however, is not merely a physical relocation but a profound disruption of cultural identity, social structures, and economic stability (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2006).

Studies highlight that many of these communities, such as the Gujjars in Sariska, have lived sustainably within these forests for generations, coexisting with wildlife and depending on the land for their survival (Shahabuddin et al., 2007). Despite this, they have been labeled as encroachers and forcibly removed under the pretext of restoring biodiversity. The eviction process has often been abrupt, with little regard for the readiness of communities to move or their ability to adjust to new locations (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

### 4.2 Socioeconomic Impact on Displaced Villagers

The forced displacement of communities from protected areas has severe socioeconomic repercussions. Displaced villagers often struggle to rebuild their lives due to a lack of alternative livelihoods, limited access to education, and inadequate infrastructure in resettlement sites (Sekhar, 2003). Many families, previously dependent on forest resources for sustenance, face severe economic hardships as they transition to wage labor, which is often scarce or exploitative (Ganguly, 2004).

The loss of ancestral land and traditional occupations has led to increased food insecurity, health problems, and social disintegration among displaced communities (Burnham, 2000). For instance, relocated families frequently find themselves in settlements with infertile land, inadequate water supply, and minimal government support (Cernea, 2006). Additionally, the disruption of community networks weakens social cohesion, leading to increased stress, mental health issues, and even conflict within and between relocated groups (Geisler et al., 2003).

Moreover, women and marginalized groups within these communities suffer disproportionately. Research indicates that displacement exacerbates gender inequalities, as women, who previously contributed to household incomes through traditional means such as cattle rearing and minor forest produce collection, lose their independence (Colchester, 2003). Furthermore, their access to education and healthcare is often diminished due to relocation to remote, underdeveloped areas (Fabricius et al., 2002).

### 4.3 Compensation and Resettlement Issues

Although conservation agencies and governments promise compensation and proper resettlement to displaced communities, these commitments are often poorly executed. In many cases, villagers report receiving inadequate compensation, delayed payments, or no financial assistance at all (Torri, 2011). The government's resettlement plans for those evicted from Sariska Tiger Reserve, for instance, were riddled with inconsistencies and bureaucratic hurdles (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

One of the primary issues with resettlement is the lack of participatory decision-making. Many villagers are relocated to areas without consulting them, leaving them unprepared for new socioeconomic realities (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2003). Additionally, most resettlement sites fail to provide essential amenities such as drinking water, healthcare,



education, and adequate housing, resulting in conditions worse than those in their original homes (Baviskar, 2001). Several case studies highlight that compensation is often determined arbitrarily and fails to account for the non-material losses that displaced people experience, such as loss of community ties, cultural heritage, and access to spiritual sites (Dowie, 2005). Moreover, the shift from self-sustained economies to market-dependent livelihoods has left many displaced families trapped in cycles of poverty (McNeely & Scherr, 2003).

#### **4.4 Resistance and Community Responses**

In response to forced displacement, many indigenous and local communities have organized resistance movements. Protest actions, legal battles, and grassroots activism have been employed to fight for their rights and demand better compensation and resettlement policies (Brosius, 2004). For example, in Sariska, displaced villagers have staged protests against the loss of their land and the failure of the government to uphold its resettlement promises (Sekhar, 2003). Some communities have adopted a strategy of negotiation, seeking co-management agreements that allow them to continue living within or near protected areas while contributing to conservation efforts (Kothari, 1997). However, these efforts often face opposition from policymakers and conservationists who adhere to the outdated "fortress conservation" model, which excludes human presence from protected areas (Brockington, 2002).

Internationally, there has been growing recognition of the need for more inclusive conservation policies. Organizations such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN) have called for approaches that respect indigenous rights and promote community-based conservation (World Conservation Union, 2005). Some successful models of community-led conservation demonstrate that involving local people in decision-making can lead to both biodiversity protection and socioeconomic development (Gibson et al., 2000).

Despite these efforts, resistance continues to be met with state repression in many parts of the world, with reports of activists facing arrests, violence, and threats for opposing eviction policies (Schmidt-Soltan, 2003). The struggle for equitable conservation remains ongoing, highlighting the urgent need for policies that balance ecological goals with human rights.

### **5. Tourism in Sariska Tiger Reserve**

Tourism in Sariska Tiger Reserve has evolved significantly over the years, playing a crucial role in conservation funding and local economic development. However, it has also posed challenges to the fragile ecosystem and the well-being of local communities. The tourism industry in Sariska is primarily driven by wildlife enthusiasts, researchers, and nature lovers who seek to experience the biodiversity of the region.

#### **5.1 Growth of Ecotourism in the Reserve**

Ecotourism in Sariska Tiger Reserve has grown due to increased global awareness about conservation and sustainable travel practices. The reserve, once facing a severe tiger extinction crisis, saw a revival after the reintroduction of tigers in 2004, leading to a surge in tourism (Torri, 2011). Sariska is now one of the key wildlife destinations in India, attracting both domestic and international tourists.

Ecotourism has been positioned as a conservation tool, generating funds for habitat protection and anti-poaching efforts (Sekhar, 2003). Government policies, including restrictions on certain areas and regulated safari routes, have been implemented to minimize the ecological footprint of tourism (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). However, the effectiveness of these measures remains debatable, as increased tourist footfall exerts pressure on the environment and wildlife (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

#### **5.2 Revenue Generation and Economic Benefits**

Tourism in Sariska contributes significantly to local and regional economies. Entry fees, safari bookings, and accommodation in and around the reserve generate substantial revenue, which is reinvested in conservation activities (Cerneja & Schmidt-Soltan, 2006). The Rajasthan Forest Department manages tourism revenue, ensuring that a portion is allocated for habitat restoration and anti-poaching measures (Sekhar, 2003).

Beyond conservation funding, tourism provides employment opportunities for local communities. Many residents work as safari guides, park rangers, and hospitality staff in lodges and resorts surrounding the reserve (Brosius, 2004). Additionally, local artisans and vendors benefit from selling handicrafts and souvenirs to tourists (Baviskar, 2001). However, concerns remain about the equitable distribution of economic benefits, as large tourism operators often dominate the industry, leaving smaller local businesses at a disadvantage (Geisler et al., 2003).

#### **5.3 Impact of Tourism on Wildlife and Environment**

While tourism brings economic benefits, it also disrupts wildlife and degrades natural habitats. Increased vehicular movement within the reserve leads to noise pollution, which affects animal behavior and breeding patterns (Torri, 2011). Studies indicate that tigers and other predators modify their activity patterns to avoid human disturbances, potentially impacting their hunting efficiency and overall health (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

Deforestation and land encroachment for resorts and tourism infrastructure have also been reported (Brockington, 2002). The construction of hotels and roads within buffer zones has led to habitat fragmentation, reducing available space for

wildlife movement (Gibson et al., 2000). Moreover, waste disposal and water consumption by tourists put additional strain on the ecosystem, particularly during peak travel seasons (Fabricius et al., 2002).

To mitigate these impacts, strict regulations such as vehicle caps, designated safari zones, and eco- friendly lodges have been introduced (Colchester, 2003). However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and illegal activities like off-route safaris continue to pose a threat (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).

#### **5.4 Community Involvement in Tourism**

Local communities play a crucial role in the success of ecotourism initiatives. Their participation not only ensures economic sustainability but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward conservation (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). In Sariska, various community-based tourism initiatives have been introduced, such as homestays and guided village tours, which allow tourists to experience the local culture while contributing directly to village economies (Sekhar, 2003).

However, tensions persist between conservation authorities and local communities regarding land use rights and resource access (Cernea, 2006). Many indigenous groups have faced displacement due to conservation policies, leading to conflicts over tourism revenue distribution and employment opportunities (Dowie, 2005). Studies suggest that empowering local communities through tourism-based income opportunities can reduce conflicts and promote conservation- friendly practices (McNeely & Scherr, 2003).

Successful models of community involvement in conservation, such as co-managed eco-lodges and participatory wildlife monitoring, could be replicated in Sariska to improve relations between conservation agencies and local populations (Burnham, 2000). Training programs for local youth in hospitality, guiding, and conservation education can further enhance their role in sustainable tourism development (Gadgil et al., 1993).

### **6. Community Perspectives on Conservation and Tourism**

#### **6.1 Perceptions of Local Communities Towards Conservation Policies**

The establishment of protected areas (PAs) has often been met with resistance from local communities due to the social, economic, and cultural disruptions caused by conservation policies. Many indigenous and rural populations residing near protected areas, such as the Sariska Tiger Reserve in India, view conservation efforts as a direct threat to their traditional livelihoods, land rights, and access to natural resources (Torri, 2011). Historically, these communities have coexisted with the forest, relying on it for grazing, fuelwood, and medicinal plants. However, conservation policies have often led to the displacement of these populations, severing their deep- rooted ties with the land (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2006). A key factor influencing local perceptions is the method of policy implementation. When conservation measures are imposed without local consultation or participation, resistance is high, and illegal activities such as poaching or deforestation increase as a form of protest (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). Conversely, community-led conservation programs have been shown to foster more positive attitudes. For instance, in cases where indigenous knowledge has been incorporated into conservation planning, biodiversity conservation outcomes have improved while maintaining local livelihoods (Agrawal, 2002).

The conflict between local populations and conservation authorities is exacerbated when economic alternatives are not provided. Many villagers in the Sariska region express frustration over their exclusion from decision-making processes and the lack of compensation for lost grazing lands and agricultural opportunities (Sekhar, 2003). Conservation-induced displacement often results in economic marginalization, leading to higher rates of poverty and food insecurity (Cernea, 2006). These issues are particularly pronounced in areas where alternative employment opportunities, such as eco-tourism, have not been adequately developed (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

#### **6.2 Challenges Faced by Villagers in Protected Areas**

Communities living in or around protected areas face multiple socio-economic challenges, often stemming from conservation policies that restrict access to traditional resources. One of the most pressing concerns is displacement. Studies indicate that forced evictions for conservation purposes have affected millions of people worldwide, leading to loss of homes, social disintegration, and economic hardship (Brockington, 2002). In the Sariska Tiger Reserve, relocation efforts have been marred by inadequate planning, leading to severe disruptions in livelihoods and cultural identities (Torri, 2011).

A major challenge for these communities is the restriction on resource access. Forest-dependent communities have traditionally relied on the land for fuelwood, fodder, and non-timber forest products. However, conservation laws often criminalize such activities, forcing locals to either find alternative sources of income or engage in illegal practices (Kumar & Shahabuddin, 2006). Many families in Sariska report that restrictions on grazing have led to a decline in livestock-based livelihoods, increasing their economic vulnerability (Sekhar, 2003).

Another significant issue is human-wildlife conflict. As local populations are pushed to the periphery of protected areas, encounters with wildlife increase, leading to crop destruction, livestock predation, and even human casualties. The economic burden of such conflicts is substantial, as villagers receive little to no compensation for losses incurred (Shahabuddin et al., 2007). In some cases, retaliatory killings of wildlife have been reported as a desperate measure to protect livelihoods (Ganguly, 2004).

Additionally, conservation policies often fail to account for the cultural and spiritual significance of forests to indigenous communities. Many tribes view their ancestral lands as sacred and express resentment towards conservation programs that exclude them from their traditional territories (Colchester, 2003). The exclusionary nature of conservation has led to a loss of indigenous ecological knowledge, which could otherwise contribute to sustainable biodiversity management (Gadgil, Berkes & Folke, 1993).

### 6.3 Role of NGOs and Social Initiatives

In response to these challenges, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social initiatives have emerged to bridge the gap between conservation efforts and community well-being. NGOs play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of displaced communities, facilitating participatory conservation models, and promoting alternative livelihoods such as eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture (Baviskar, 2001).

One successful example is the work of the Tiger Watch program in Rajasthan, which collaborates with local communities to reduce poaching through employment and educational initiatives. By providing former poachers with alternative means of income, such as guiding wildlife tours, the program has helped reduce illegal hunting while improving local attitudes toward conservation (Shahabuddin et al., 2007).

Microfinance and skill development programs initiated by NGOs have also played a crucial role in empowering local populations. For instance, organizations working in the buffer zones of Sariska have introduced handicraft cooperatives, beekeeping, and organic farming initiatives that provide sustainable income sources (Fabricius et al., 2002). These initiatives help integrate conservation with economic development, reducing local resistance to protected area policies (McNeely & Scherr, 2003).

Community-based conservation (CBC) approaches have also gained traction, wherein local populations are actively involved in decision-making and benefit-sharing. In many African and South Asian countries, CBC programs have resulted in improved biodiversity outcomes while ensuring socio-economic benefits for communities (Brosius, 2004). However, successful implementation depends on adequate funding, transparent governance, and long-term commitment from both conservation authorities and local stakeholders (Borgerhoff-Mulder & Coppolillo, 2005).

### 6.4 Case Studies of Local Experiences

Several case studies highlight the diverse experiences of local communities in relation to conservation policies.

1. **Sariska Tiger Reserve, India** – The resettlement of villagers from Sariska has been widely criticized due to inadequate compensation and poor rehabilitation measures. Many relocated families struggle with access to basic amenities, loss of livelihood, and social alienation (Torri, 2011). Additionally, restrictions on resource use have exacerbated economic difficulties, leading to increased resentment toward conservation authorities (Sekhar, 2003).
2. **Gir Forest, India** – Home to the Maldhari pastoralist community, Gir Forest has seen tensions between conservation policies and traditional grazing practices. While conservationists argue that cattle grazing threatens lion populations, local herders claim that their presence helps maintain ecological balance. The exclusion of Maldharis from Gir has led to protests and legal battles, highlighting the complexities of conservation-induced displacement (Ganguly, 2004).
3. **Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania** – Unlike exclusionary models, Ngorongoro has attempted a mixed-use approach, allowing Maasai pastoralists to coexist with wildlife. While initially successful, recent restrictions on grazing have led to tensions between authorities and local communities, demonstrating the challenges of balancing conservation with human needs (Galvin et al., 2002).
4. **Yellowstone National Park, USA** – One of the earliest examples of conservation-induced displacement, the creation of Yellowstone led to the forced removal of Native American tribes. Over a century later, efforts to integrate indigenous perspectives into park management remain limited, reflecting broader challenges in recognizing the rights of displaced communities (Burnham, 2000).

These case studies underscore the importance of inclusive conservation strategies that recognize local rights, provide economic alternatives, and ensure community participation in decision-making. Moving forward, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern conservation science may offer a more sustainable and just approach to biodiversity protection (Gadgil, Berkes & Folke, 1993).

## 7. Challenges and Conflicts in Conservation Management

The management of protected areas, including the Sariska Tiger Reserve, faces numerous challenges ranging from human-wildlife conflicts to corruption, lack of infrastructure, and insufficient involvement of local communities. These challenges often result in conflicts between conservation policies and local livelihoods, making it essential to develop more inclusive and effective conservation strategies (Sekhar, 2003).

### 7.1 Human-Wildlife Conflicts

One of the most pressing issues in conservation management is human-wildlife conflict. As conservation efforts seek to protect wildlife, local communities residing near protected areas often suffer from increased encounters with animals such as tigers, leopards, and elephants, leading to loss of crops, livestock, and even human lives (Torri, 2011). In Sariska Tiger Reserve, displacement of villagers and the implementation of strict protection policies have led to resentment

among local populations, who perceive conservation efforts as prioritizing wildlife over human welfare (Sekhar, 2003). Encroachment into buffer zones by humans searching for firewood, fodder, and water often leads to retaliatory attacks by wildlife. Studies have shown that rural populations living around Sariska experience substantial economic losses due to livestock predation by tigers and leopards, causing significant strain on their livelihoods (Shahabuddin, Kumar, & Shrivastava, 2007). Traditional compensation mechanisms are often slow and inadequate, further exacerbating tensions between conservation authorities and local people (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). Additionally, the forced relocation of indigenous and forest-dependent communities from protected areas has led to further conflicts, as many displaced individuals are left without access to alternative means of livelihood. Conservation-induced displacement has been criticized for its failure to provide sufficient rehabilitation and livelihood opportunities, leading to long-term economic and social marginalization of affected communities (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2003).

### 7.2 Corruption and Mismanagement in Conservation Efforts

Another major challenge in conservation management is the presence of corruption and mismanagement, which undermines conservation efforts and leads to inefficient use of resources (Robbins, 2000). In India, reports of financial misallocation, illegal poaching networks operating under political protection, and misappropriation of conservation funds have been widely documented (Dowie, 2005). In Sariska, a notorious example of such mismanagement was the near extinction of tigers in the early 2000s due to poaching facilitated by corrupt officials who failed to enforce anti-poaching measures effectively (Sekhar, 2003).

Conservation programs often receive substantial funding from international and national organizations. However, a lack of transparency in fund allocation results in financial leakages, with funds sometimes being diverted for non-conservation purposes or benefiting only a small group of individuals (Brockington, 2002). Moreover, the lack of accountability in conservation agencies has led to inefficient law enforcement, where forest rangers and officials accept bribes to allow illegal grazing, logging, and hunting inside protected areas (Schmidt-Soltau, 2003).

The bureaucratic inefficiencies within conservation departments further exacerbate the problem. Conservation policies are often dictated by top-down approaches where government agencies make decisions without consulting local communities. This results in policies that are out of touch with the realities faced by indigenous populations, leading to low compliance and resistance from affected groups (Colchester, 2003).

### 7.3 Lack of Social Services and Infrastructure

The creation of protected areas often comes at the expense of local communities, who are displaced or restricted from accessing traditional lands without adequate compensation or alternative resources (Cernea, 2006). Many villages surrounding Sariska lack basic infrastructure such as schools, healthcare facilities, and access to clean drinking water, which further fuels resentment against conservation initiatives (Sekhar, 2003).

Limited access to education and employment opportunities forces many rural residents to depend on forest resources for survival, leading to frequent conflicts with conservation authorities (Geisler et al., 2003). Moreover, the absence of proper healthcare facilities in many protected area zones makes it difficult for local populations to receive medical treatment, especially for injuries sustained from wildlife encounters (Burnham, 2000).

In many cases, conservation-induced displacement has resulted in communities being resettled in areas with poor agricultural potential, where they struggle to sustain their livelihoods. This leads to a vicious cycle where displaced populations either encroach back into forest areas or turn to illegal activities such as poaching and deforestation to survive (Chapin, 2004).

### 7.4 Need for Community-Based Conservation Approaches

Given these challenges, conservation strategies need to shift towards community-based approaches that actively involve local populations in conservation efforts (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003). Community-based conservation (CBC) recognizes that sustainable conservation is only possible when local people are treated as stakeholders rather than obstacles (Brosius, 2004).

Successful CBC models in various parts of the world have demonstrated that integrating local knowledge and ensuring that conservation benefits are shared with indigenous populations can lead to more effective and lasting conservation outcomes (Agrawal, 2002). For example, joint forest management programs in India have shown promising results in reducing deforestation while simultaneously improving local livelihoods (Kothari, 1997).

To implement successful community-driven conservation programs, the following steps are crucial:

- **Participation in Decision-Making:** Local communities must have a voice in conservation planning and policy implementation. This includes granting them rights over resource management and ensuring that their concerns are addressed (Colchester, 2004).
- **Economic Incentives:** Conservation should provide direct economic benefits to local populations. Eco-tourism, sustainable harvesting of forest products, and community-led wildlife monitoring programs can help generate income while fostering conservation awareness (McNeely & Scherr, 2003).
- **Education and Capacity Building:** Raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity conservation through



education and training programs can improve local attitudes towards conservation initiatives (Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993).

• **Fair Compensation and Alternative Livelihoods:** If relocation is unavoidable, displaced communities should receive adequate compensation and assistance in securing alternative means of income, such as agricultural support, skill development, and employment opportunities (Cernea & McDowell, 2000).

Without a shift towards community-centric conservation policies, conflicts between local populations and conservation authorities will continue to hinder effective biodiversity protection. As past experiences in Sariska and other protected areas have shown, conservation efforts that fail to account for local socio-economic realities are unlikely to succeed in the long run (Torri, 2011).

## 8. Alternative Conservation Models and Sustainable Solutions

Conservation efforts worldwide have often led to conflicts between environmental protection goals and the socio-economic needs of local communities. Conventional models of conservation, such as fortress conservation, have frequently resulted in displacement, social marginalization, and economic hardships for indigenous and local populations (Brockington, 2002). However, alternative conservation models aim to integrate local communities into conservation efforts, promoting sustainability while ensuring that human rights and livelihoods are protected. These approaches recognize the importance of local knowledge, collaborative governance, and innovative policy frameworks to create conservation models that are both effective and socially just.

### 8.1 Community-Based Conservation Strategies

Community-Based Conservation (CBC) represents an alternative paradigm where local communities play an active role in the management and protection of natural resources (Berkes et al., 2003). Unlike traditional exclusionary conservation models, CBC aims to empower local populations by integrating their cultural practices and economic activities into conservation strategies.

One of the most successful CBC initiatives can be observed in the **Joint Forest Management (JFM) programs in India**, where local communities share responsibilities with the government in protecting forests while gaining economic benefits from sustainable resource extraction (Kothari, 1997). Studies have shown that CBC enhances conservation outcomes while reducing conflicts between authorities and local populations (Agrawal & Redford, 2006).

In the context of the **Sariska Tiger Reserve (STR), India**, strict conservation policies have historically led to the displacement of local communities, resulting in resentment and illegal activities such as poaching and deforestation (Torri, 2011). However, research suggests that **integrating local communities into tiger conservation efforts**—through eco-tourism initiatives and employment in forest management—has yielded better results than forced relocation (Sekhar, 2003).

### 8.2 Collaborative Approaches in Protected Area Management

Collaborative conservation models emphasize shared governance between multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, NGOs, and private entities (Brecht et al., 2003). This approach fosters cooperation and knowledge-sharing, allowing conservation strategies to be more adaptable and inclusive.

A key example of this approach is **co-managed protected areas**, where local people are given decision-making power alongside government agencies. In the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary in India, home to the last remaining Asiatic lions, collaboration between forest officials and the Maldhari pastoralist community has helped maintain both ecological integrity and traditional livelihoods (Ganguly, 2004).

In the case of **Sariska Tiger Reserve**, previous top-down conservation policies failed due to local resistance (Torri, 2011). A shift toward **collaborative conservation efforts**—involving local governance structures, wildlife protection committees, and NGOs—has shown promise in reducing human-wildlife conflict and improving conservation outcomes (Sekhar, 2003).

Internationally, the **Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programs in Africa** have demonstrated how collaborative governance can enhance conservation efforts while simultaneously improving rural livelihoods. In **Namibia's communal conservancies**, local people have gained legal rights to manage wildlife resources, leading to increased biodiversity and economic benefits through eco-tourism (Brosius, 2004).

### 8.3 Role of Local Knowledge in Conservation

Indigenous and local ecological knowledge (LEK) plays a crucial role in conservation by offering insights into sustainable resource management practices honed over centuries (Gadgil et al., 1993). Studies have demonstrated that local communities possess intricate knowledge of biodiversity, seasonal patterns, and ecosystem interactions that can complement scientific conservation strategies (Colchester, 2003).

In India, traditional conservation practices such as **sacred groves**—forested areas protected for religious and cultural reasons—have proven highly effective in preserving biodiversity (Baviskar, 2001). These areas serve as vital refuges for many plant and animal species, often outperforming government-managed reserves in terms of biodiversity retention

(Fabricius et al., 2002).

In the **Sariska Tiger Reserve**, local villagers possess **traditional tracking skills** that could aid in tiger conservation efforts, yet their knowledge remains largely underutilized due to restrictive conservation policies (Torri, 2011). Experts suggest that integrating these traditional skills into modern conservation frameworks—through participatory wildlife monitoring and anti-poaching initiatives—could significantly improve conservation outcomes (Sekhar, 2003).

#### 8.4 Balancing Conservation and Human Development

One of the major challenges in conservation is **striking a balance between environmental protection and socio-economic development** (Brechtin et al., 2003). Policies that prioritize wildlife conservation over human well-being often lead to social resistance and ineffective enforcement. Sustainable conservation models must acknowledge that local communities rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and develop strategies that accommodate both conservation and human development needs.

One promising approach is **integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs)**, which seek to link conservation efforts with economic development opportunities for local populations (Poffenberger, 1999). For instance, in **Sariska Tiger Reserve**, promoting **eco-tourism ventures** that provide direct economic benefits to local communities has been proposed as a means to reduce dependency on forest resources while fostering conservation awareness (Torri, 2011).

Another approach is **Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)**, where communities receive financial incentives for conserving biodiversity. In **Costa Rica's PES program**, landowners are compensated for maintaining forests, leading to significant reforestation and wildlife habitat restoration (McNeely & Scherr, 2003). A similar model could be explored for India's tiger reserves to encourage local participation in conservation.

The success of conservation efforts largely depends on the inclusion of local communities, the integration of indigenous knowledge, and the development of sustainable economic alternatives. **Community-Based Conservation (CBC), collaborative governance, and economic incentives** offer viable solutions to the longstanding conflict between conservation and human development. In the case of the **Sariska Tiger Reserve**, a shift towards participatory conservation approaches—such as co-management, eco-tourism, and local employment in wildlife protection—could lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes. Future conservation policies must recognize that **people and nature are interconnected**, and solutions should be designed to benefit both.

#### 9. Policy Recommendations and Future Directions

Given the complex socio-ecological dynamics of conservation in Sariska Tiger Reserve, it is imperative to develop holistic policies that balance biodiversity protection with the socio-economic well-being of local communities. This section outlines key policy recommendations to strengthen participatory conservation, improve compensation frameworks, enhance sustainable livelihood opportunities, and integrate education and awareness programs.

##### 9.1 Strengthening Participatory Conservation Policies

One of the most critical challenges in conservation is ensuring that local communities actively participate in decision-making processes rather than being passive recipients of externally imposed policies. Conservation programs have historically marginalized indigenous and local populations, often leading to forced evictions, loss of traditional livelihoods, and deep-seated resentment toward conservation efforts (Brockington & Igoe, 2006). To address this, conservation policies must move toward a **collaborative governance model** that involves communities at all levels of conservation planning and implementation.

A **co-management approach**, where local communities, forest departments, and conservation NGOs share decision-making authority, has been successful in various conservation areas worldwide (Agrawal & Redford, 2006). Studies indicate that when communities are actively involved, conservation compliance increases, poaching decreases, and local knowledge is effectively integrated into ecosystem management (Brosius, 2004; Berkes et al., 2003). In Sariska, a participatory approach should include the following:

- **Community Representation in Conservation Committees:** Establishing a formal governance structure where representatives from indigenous and local communities participate in **buffer zone management committees** can bridge the trust deficit between the government and the people (Torri, 2011).
- **Recognizing Traditional Conservation Practices:** Many indigenous communities have sustainable conservation practices that can be incorporated into formal management strategies. Recognizing these practices and granting land-use rights for regulated forest resource extraction can enhance conservation outcomes (Gadgil, Berkes, & Folke, 1993).
- **Providing Economic Incentives for Conservation Efforts:** Policies should incentivize conservation compliance by offering direct benefits such as community-managed eco-tourism revenue-sharing models, sustainable forestry rights, and employment in conservation projects (Sekhar, 2003).
- **Implementing Legal Protections for Indigenous Rights:** There should be legal mechanisms that guarantee the rights of displaced communities, ensuring they are not forcibly removed without adequate consultation and compensation (Cernea & Schmidt-Soltau, 2003).

## 9.2 Enhancing Community Livelihoods Through Sustainable Tourism

Wildlife tourism has the potential to provide sustainable livelihoods to local communities if managed effectively. In Sariska, however, tourism revenues primarily benefit external stakeholders rather than the local population, exacerbating economic disparities (Sekhar, 2003). A **community-based tourism model** can rectify this imbalance by ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are equitably distributed among local residents. Key strategies include:

- **Promoting Locally Owned Eco-Tourism Enterprises:** Encouraging community-run lodges, guided safari tours, and local handicraft markets can help channel tourism revenue directly to residents, reducing dependency on extractive livelihoods such as illegal logging and poaching (Colchester, 2003).
- **Revenue-Sharing Mechanisms:** A fixed percentage of tourism revenue should be allocated to local development projects, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure improvements (Breachin et al., 2003).
- **Developing Skill-Building Programs for Local Residents:** Training programs in wildlife guiding, hospitality management, and handicraft production can provide communities with alternative income sources, thereby reducing human-wildlife conflicts (Burnham, 2000).
- **Eco-Certification and Sustainable Tourism Guidelines:** Implementing eco-certification programs can ensure that tourism activities adhere to sustainability principles, thereby minimizing environmental degradation while maximizing local benefits (McNeely & Scherr, 2003).

## 9.3 Improving Compensation and Rehabilitation Policies

A major grievance among displaced communities is inadequate compensation and poorly planned rehabilitation programs. Studies show that resettlement policies often result in loss of traditional livelihoods, food insecurity, and socio-cultural disruptions (Cernea, 2006). To improve compensation and rehabilitation policies, the following measures should be considered:

- **Compensation Based on Market Valuation of Land and Assets:** Compensation schemes should reflect the true economic value of displaced communities' land, livestock, and other resources rather than offering **nominal financial settlements** (Dowie, 2005).
- **Guaranteed Employment Opportunities:** Displaced families should be provided with secure employment in conservation projects, eco-tourism ventures, or alternative sustainable livelihood programs (Fabricius et al., 2002).
- **Long-Term Socio-Economic Support Programs:** Compensation should not be limited to one-time financial payouts; rather, it should include long-term support mechanisms such as access to credit facilities, training programs, and market linkages for alternative livelihoods (Cernea & McDowell, 2000).
- **Legal Frameworks to Ensure Accountability:** Independent monitoring bodies should oversee the implementation of compensation policies, ensuring that communities receive the full benefits promised to them (Rangarajan & Shahabuddin, 2006).
- **Addressing Social and Cultural Losses:** Beyond financial compensation, displaced communities should be given access to religious and cultural sites within conservation areas. Special provisions should also be made for indigenous communities who rely on forest resources for spiritual and medicinal practices (Geisler et al., 2003).

## 9.4 Integrating Education and Awareness Programs

Long-term conservation success depends on fostering a conservation ethic within local communities and the broader public. Lack of awareness about conservation policies and their benefits often leads to conflicts between authorities and local residents (Shahabuddin, Kumar, & Shrivastava, 2007). To bridge this gap, comprehensive education and awareness programs should be integrated into conservation strategies. Key initiatives include:

- **Incorporating Conservation Education in Local Schools:** Introducing environmental education curricula in schools near protected areas can instill conservation values in young generations, ensuring long-term behavioral changes (Fairhead & Leach, 2003).
- **Organizing Community Workshops on Human-Wildlife Coexistence:** Regular workshops on mitigation strategies for human-wildlife conflicts, sustainable agriculture practices, and alternative income sources can enhance local participation in conservation efforts (Nabakov & Lawrence, 2004).
- **Developing Public Awareness Campaigns:** Government and NGOs should collaborate to run awareness campaigns highlighting the ecological significance of Sariska Tiger Reserve and the benefits of sustainable conservation (Pinedo-Vasquez & Padoch, 1993).
- **Utilizing Local Media for Conservation Messaging:** Local newspapers, radio, and community-based theater groups can serve as powerful tools for disseminating conservation messages and promoting eco-friendly practices (Oelschlaeger, 1991).
- **Training Forest Officials on Community Engagement:** Conservation authorities should receive specialized training in **conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and participatory governance models** to foster a more cooperative relationship with local residents (Robbins, 2000).

A **human-centered approach to conservation** is essential for the long-term success of protected areas like Sariska

Tiger Reserve. Strengthening participatory governance, ensuring equitable economic opportunities, enhancing compensation mechanisms, and integrating education into conservation policies can foster **a sustainable coexistence between local communities and biodiversity conservation**. By implementing these recommendations, conservation efforts can be more inclusive, just, and ultimately, more effective.

## Conclusion

The conservation of Sariska Tiger Reserve necessitates a **holistic, community-driven approach** that integrates biodiversity protection with local socio-economic development. Historically, conservation efforts have prioritized ecological objectives while marginalizing the rights and livelihoods of indigenous and local communities, leading to **resistance, non-compliance, and human-wildlife conflicts**. By adopting participatory governance, policymakers can **empower communities as conservation stakeholders**, fostering greater ownership and sustainable management of protected areas. The inclusion of **traditional ecological knowledge, revenue-sharing models, and legal frameworks** to protect indigenous rights is crucial to ensuring that conservation policies are **both effective and equitable**.

Economic sustainability is a critical pillar of conservation success. The development of **sustainable tourism, eco-certification programs, and alternative livelihood opportunities** can reduce dependence on resource extraction and enhance economic resilience among local communities. Additionally, robust **compensation and rehabilitation policies** are essential to addressing historical injustices associated with conservation-induced displacement. Ensuring **fair market-based compensation, employment guarantees, and long-term socio-economic support programs** can create a more just and sustainable framework for conservation. Conservation policies should **go beyond financial compensation** and address the **social, cultural, and psychological losses** incurred by displaced communities.

Education and awareness play a **foundational role** in promoting long-term conservation ethics. Integrating **conservation education in schools, community workshops, public awareness campaigns, and media-driven advocacy** can enhance local engagement and reduce conflicts. Additionally, **training forest officials** in community engagement strategies can foster **more cooperative relationships between authorities and local residents**. A people-centered conservation approach—one that prioritizes inclusivity, economic justice, and education—will be **instrumental in ensuring the long-term success of Sariska Tiger Reserve and other protected areas across India and the world**.

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