Origin of Conservation Refugees

The Downside of Environment Protection in India

Anju Lis Kurian, C Vinodan

The conservation of biodiversity and natural resources can help offer a sustainable supply of goods and services to fulfil the right of people to development and livelihood. However, the conservation record is not inspiring in India and across the world, when its social, economic, and cultural impacts on local people are considered. Conservation projects that exclude local people may conserve natural resources to an extent but not people's access to livelihoods. By being a densely populated country, India cannot encourage the strategy of "pristine nature" in its conservation initiatives.

Anju Lis Kurian (*liskurian@gmail.com*) is a UGC postdoctoral fellow and C Vinodan (*vinodan.c@gmail.com*) teaches at the School of International Relations, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

The global North's vision of untouched wilderness regarding the protection of natural ecosystems and the conservation of protected areas has permeated global policies and politics. The central strategy of conservationists and institutions with transnational conservation agendas is largely based on the preservation of undisturbed natural areas. They look upon national governments as the guardians of biodiversity, though the international conservation agencies have only nominal control over the areas set aside for conservation. In developing countries, conservation policies and the creation of protected areas with a wilderness approach have led to conflict between governments, institutions, and the local population. This approach has also catalysed the expulsion and marginalisation of people living in these regions, ignored the issue of the dependence of inhabitants on natural resources, and has disregarded the knowledge and traditions of local population in the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity (Torri 2011).

Over the last few years, the significance of protected areas with expanding institutional structures has been constantly highlighted by committees and scholars in discussions about climate change. Protected areas have been understood as regions notified by the national governments for wildlife conservation, as a means of reducing pressures on wildlife and biodiversity. But, they are now being viewed as avenues for afforestation and reforestation, along with curbing deforestation as a cost-effective approach to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Ghate and Ghate 2011; Lasgorceix and Kothari 2009).

National and international conservation efforts in the form of "protected areas" emerged in the context of 19th century colonialism. The first "modern" protected areas with an understanding of "pristine nature" devoid of human intervention and occupation began in the United States with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The creation of protected areas, accompanied by the expropriation of people's land, evictions of local populations and restrictions on their access to, and the use of, vital resources, as well as restrictions on access to cultural and sacred sites, have led to the impoverishment of inhabitants and the loss of traditional cultures (Springer and Almeida 2015). On the one hand, the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources can facilitate the creation of environments that offer a sustainable supply of goods and services to fulfil people's right to development, and to life and livelihood. However, on the other hand, conservation may negatively affect people's rights in the concerned area through various ways (Thomas 2011).

The flow of global conservation funds over the last 20 years has been motivated by the priorities of donor institutions and governments. Their priorities include satisfying green and scientific lobbies in the West, enhancing economic growth through big business, and rebranding international institutions like the World Bank to deal with new agendas, especially climate change and biodiversity conservation (Young 2010). In recent years, financial support for international conservation has extended beyond individuals and family foundations, to include very large foundations such as the Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Global Environment Facility of the World Bank, foreign governments, United States Agency for International Development, a host of bilateral and multilateral banks, and transnational corporations. Through a well-backed financial and political power, branches in almost all countries of the globe, millions of devoted associates, and with massive, nine-figure budgets, BINGOs (Biggest International Non-governmental Organisations)—Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and even the more culturally sensitive International Union for Conservation of Nature—have commenced a vastly expanded global push to increase the number of protected areas, parks, reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, and corridors to safeguard biological diversity. In almost all cases, local communities became mere spectators and receive none of the benefits from these financial investments. All these BINGOs are increasingly functioning in a corporate style (Dowie 2006).

In the last decades of the 20th century, Africa witnessed the impact of conservationists and international environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which excluded local communities based on the concept of wilderness and pristine nature (Kurian 2016b). The state control of protected areas and the total exclusion of local communities and indigenous people from protected wildlife and forest areas not only disrupted socio-economic systems, but also the age-old and time-tested practices that are known to be beneficial to natural ecosystems (Njogu 2004: 5). In Africa, numerous parks and reserves have been created with very high rates of the eviction of indigenous populations, but 90% of the continent's biodiversity lies outside of protected areas. Conservationists have now found that even after setting aside protected areas equal in size to a landmass the size of Africa, global biodiversity continues to show degradation (Dowie 2005). History is showing that there might be something terribly wrong with the wilderness approach. Wrecking the lives of millions of poor and powerless people and socially deprived agrarian communities has been an enormous blunder not only in moral, social, philosophical, and economic terms, but is also an ecological misestimation (Dowie 2005).

The debate over the exclusion of local people in conservation initiatives emerged in the early 21st century during the gathering of representatives of major foundations. Their massive contributions totalling millions of dollars go in supporting non-profit conservation organisations whose programmes have been denounced due to growing conflicts of interest with local people and because of neglecting inhabitants whose land they are in the business to protect (Chapin 2004).

By the beginning of the 21st century, with the emphasis on climate change and due to the flow of international funding for mitigation and adaptation, the playground of these conservationists and organisations has shifted to Asia (Kurian 2016b). In this scenario, India's significance lies in the fact that it is home to 1.3 billion people and represents a wide spectrum of biological, cultural, and geographic diversity, and with a confluence of three major biogeographic zones, the Indo–Malayan, the Eurasian, and the Afro-tropical (Bhatt et al 2012). India ranks as one of the 12 most megadiverse countries in the world, based on the species richness and levels of endemism recorded. India's ecosystems are divided into 10 biogeographic zones—the Trans Himalaya, the Himalaya, Desert, Semi-Arid, Western Ghats, Deccan Peninsula, Gangetic Plain, Coasts, North East, and the Islands, which are further subdivided into 26 biotic provinces (Damayanti 2008). On the other hand, the densely populated, poverty-ridden country has nearly 20% of the world's population packed into less than 10% of the country's land (Karanth and Karanth 2007), and most of whom suffer from severe economic deprivation. Thus, any conservation initiative in India is not sustainable if it further aggravates the marginalisation and impoverishment of the local population and dismisses their development aspirations.

Origins of Conservation Refugees

There are not less than 1,10,000 protected areas worldwide, with more being added every month to the list. Nowadays, the success of conservation worldwide is measured with the common benchmark of the size and number of protected areas. The land area under conservation throughout the world has doubled since 1990, and has reached over 12% of the earth's landmass. A total area of 18.8 million square kilometres is now under conservation, an area equal to half the planet's cultivated land (Dowie 2009). This magnitude of land under conservation appears undeniably good, an enormous achievement of the conservationists doing the right thing for our planet. However, if the social, economic, and cultural impact on local people is considered, this conservation record is not very inspiring (Dowie 2009). An increase in protected areas has meant a rise in the number of people displaced to generate space for protected areas. Such displaced people are "conservation refugees." One can define them as "the people who are displaced by the creation of protected areas; actually they are the victims of ecological expropriation." Once they leave their traditional land without compensation, they move into the realms of subsistence, migrating to informal sectors of towns and villages with no land or house ownership. They end up in the ranks of wage labour when they manage to find work. In addition, the involuntary displacement of indigenous and other people also occurs due to the restriction of access in and around protected areas; even physical displacement and relocation are not necessary (Awuh 2011).

At the international level, conservation has led to the displacement of tens of millions of people who formerly lived,

hunted, fished, and farmed in lands now reserved for wildlife, watersheds, reefs, forests, or rare ecosystems. There are several routinely used words to denote the physical dispossession of peoples from their lands, such as displacement, dislocation, eviction, exclusion, and involuntary resettlement (Agrawal and Redford 2009). Wildlife and forest conservation approaches based on "protectionism" have denied local communities their entitlement rights. In certain cases, coercion is used to evict local populations from these areas, a process that leads to their social disarticulation and political disempowerment.

A grave, long-recognised consequence of the creation of protected areas is regarding the loss of income of those who are displaced, even if they live within, or in the vicinity of, newly formed protected areas. Various studies have documented the considerable loss of livelihood and agricultural incomes, and indirect losses due to the restriction of access to areas reserved for conservation. While some of those who face conservation-induced displacement have been compensated, it often takes place through the use of extralegal force, and without legal recognition, thereby creating a group of conservation refugees in the process (Agrawal and Redford 2009).

Field studies in different protected areas worldwide have unearthed that conservation refugees are confronted with eight major threats based on the model of impoverished risks and reconstruction, used in the concept of development-induced displacement and resettlement of populations. These are: (i) landlessness (expropriation of land assets and loss of access to land); (ii) joblessness (even when the resettlement creates some temporary jobs); (iii) homelessness (loss of physical houses, and cultural space); (iv) marginalisation (social, psychological, and economic); (v) food insecurity; (vi) increased morbidity and mortality; (vii) loss of access to the commons (forests, water, wasteland, cultural sites); and (viii) social disarticulation (disempowerment, and disruption of social institutions) (Brockington and Jim 2006: 451).

Under any circumstances, forced evictions are brutal and displacing and turning its citizens into conservation refugees is the most drastic edict that a law-abiding state can inflict on them (Brockington and Jim 2006). Conservation projects with displacement effects are generating anger and bitterness among displaced people. Ultimately, these lead to the failure of environmental governance and conservation. In developing countries, most governments have limited capacities in terms of environmental governance to enforce existing regulations, especially in peripheral locations where many important protected areas are located. Thus, the success of conservation initiatives is likely to be dependent on the acceptance or resistance of the inhabitants. It is, therefore, important for serious conservationists to investigate two issues: first, the consequences of displacement on human welfare (which is difficult to state with precision even though they can be inferred), and second, to know exactly how much the setting aside of protected areas has contributed to biodiversity conservation. It is notable that none of the main international conservation organisations has insisted on any coherent, systematic or effective set of guidelines to tackle the problem of conservation refugees (Agrawal and Redford 2009). Further, not even a single United Nations (UN) Convention has been adopted by the international community to protect the interests and livelihoods of the involuntarily displaced populations or conservation refugees parallel to or that compared with the UN Biodiversity Convention. Also, no powerful worldwide institution compared to, or mirroring the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been formulated to deal with the socio-economic aspects of the issue of conservation refugees (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003).

Resettlement of Conservation Refugees

The declaration of protected areas and the ensuing resettlement is rarely preceded by discussions with the communities likely to be affected (Ghate and Ghate 2011). A variety of disabling factors—historical, political and socio-economic—prevent local communities living inside protected areas in exercising their rights effectively in order to resist forced displacement, for proper compensation, and to receive rehabilitation benefits after relocation. In India or elsewhere, models of successful resettlement and rehabilitation of households affected by conservation-induced displacement are rare (Kabra 2009).

Moreover, the process of resettlement of conservation refugees oftentimes results in a transition in lifestyle from forest-dependent to agricultural livelihoods. Most resettlement programmes adversely affect conservation refugees primarily due to the lack of attention to socio-economic and cultural constraints that the latter face in re-establishing safe livelihoods in an alien environment. These constraints are heightened depending on the situation in each resettlement site, such as the absence of full-fledged basic infrastructure, low and inadequate compensatory packages, and lack of proper attention to the needs and aspirations of the conservation refugees (Ghate and Ghate 2011). For example, a field study conducted among the displaced people in Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh, reveals that displacement caused their incomes to fall and poverty to intensify suddenly and sharply. Wage labour replaced farming and the collection of forest produce as a source of income and livelihood. The average income of resettled people is drastically lower than the minimum subsistence income level indicated by the official calorie-based poverty line in India. To sum up, relocation resulted in the breakdown of the entire system of their livelihood. Added to this is the problem of weak governance in remote and neglected resettled regions, which is marked by substantial inefficiencies in the delivery of basic services like education and health (Kabra 2009).

The compensation package of the resettlement, when provided, provides greater access to liquidity in the form of grants for house construction, transport of household equipment, and wage employment for land-clearing activities to the displaced families. In the initial stages, this may help some people briefly rise above their below poverty line status. But, in reality, displaced households use most of this money on consumption needs, including food and alcohol instead of converting it into productive assets or investment in land or in other income-generating activities. They, therefore, usually relapse into a situation of chronic poverty (Kabra 2009). It follows that the creation of protected

areas should be carried out with the utmost attention to the livelihood and cultural needs of the displaced people, and whenever relocation is carried out, it should be accompanied by adequate rehabilitation packages (Ghate and Ghate 2011).

Nobody besides the inhabitants of protected areas is forced to change their lifestyles for the survival of mankind and start a sustainable life from scratch as a result of these conservation drives. The legitimate claims of the conservation refugees to share the benefits of development always remain unanswered by many conservationists. Globally, forestry departments control and govern most protected areas around the world. For forest officials, the displacement of poor local communities is much easier than to institute and financially support a good governance system (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003). Several studies suggest that resettlement processes have a number of degrading ecological effects on ecosystems. So, trade-offs must be done, between the cost of human presence in protected areas, and the ecological and biological effects inside and outside protected areas due to the creation of conservation refugees (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003; Kurian 2016a).

Conservation Refugees in the Indian Context

About 70% of India's population relies on land-based occupations, forests, wetlands, and marine habitats for their fundamental subsistence requirements. This dependence is widespread across the country and they look upon natural resources as a means to satisfy their basic needs such as water, housing material, fuelwood, fodder, pasture, medicinal plants, non-timber forest produce (NTFP), timber, aquatic resources, as well as spiritual and cultural sustenance (Wani and Kothari 2007).

In developing countries like India, villagers reside in and around the forest areas. These communities coexist with the environment; their systems of production and reproduction are largely dependent on the biodiversity of forest ecosystems. These local communities comprise more than 200 million people who constitute 15% of India's population. For them, forests represent an important source of life because 60% of their food supply comes from forests. Forests satisfy close to 80% of the energy requirements in rural areas. Yet, the ongoing conservation approach in India believes that the needs of local communities are incompatible with the interests of conservation. Therefore, the creation of protected areas by means of policies for eviction and dislocation of people from the targeted areas are difficult to execute without incurring high human and social costs (Torri 2011).

However, currently, more than 5% of India's land surface is governed under the protected area system. Protected areas are categorised into national parks, tiger reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, and others (Lasgorceix and Kothari 2009). The Government of India had passed the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA) as a result of the intense pressure from conservationists and conservation NGOs, mainly from abroad. From this juncture onwards, international conservation politics played a crucial role in conservation initiatives in India. Millions of dollars from Indian as well as international sources flow into the conservation initiatives of the country (Rice 2012).

Over the last few decades, several hundred protected areas have been notified under the WLPA and if one includes protected areas declared prior to 1972 under mostly colonial-era laws, the country has 764 protected areas, including around 103 parks, 543 wildlife sanctuaries, 73 conservation reserves, and 45 community reserves (Wildlife Institute of India 2017). Till 2003, protected areas generally belonged to two categories: national parks, in which all human activities are strictly prohibited, and wildlife sanctuaries, in which some activities are allowed and rights granted. Conservation reserves and community reserves are the two other kinds added that fall under the protected area category. Subsequently, there have been a number of additional legal and non-legal categories of protected areas, namely, protected and reserved forests (under the Indian Forest Act, 1927), biosphere reserves, elephant reserves, heritage sites (none of these with legal backing), tiger reserves (declared since 1973 but given legal backing only in 2006 with the enactment of the Wildlife [Protection] Amendment Act 2006), and ecologically sensitive areas (under the Environment Protection Act, 1986), which were introduced to provide varying degrees of conservation coverage to protect the biodiversity of specific sites across the country (Wani and Kothari 2007).

Immediately after the WLPA was passed, a trustee of the WWF offered a million dollars to Indira Gandhi's government for a special project to save tigers. The Indian government committed an equal amount of money for the project. With these funds, the government initiated Project Tiger in 1973. The project began with nine tiger reserves, a number that has now reached 50 (Rice 2012). Since the 1970s, the involvement of WWF along with other such NGOs has been obvious in India's conservation enterprises. After the enactment of WLPA, the WWF has lobbied consistently for wildlife conservation and protected area management through government enactments and court orders that compromise the rights of people within the boundaries of protected areas, including national parks and sanctuaries. They seek the omission of people from protected areas through the strict implementation of WLPA (Upadhyay and Sane 2009).

The WLPA has played a considerable role in reducing the devastation of biodiversity but it has also upheld the colonial legacy of placing the management of natural resources in the hands of centralised bureaucracies, and wresting governance and control from local communities (Wani and Kothari 2007). Traditionally, local communities have unclear or unregistered rights over natural resources and land, but human habitation and the use of natural resources are forbidden or strictly controlled within most protected areas. So, local communities in protected areas live in a state of deprivation, and in conflict with protected area managers, who usually perceive them as being responsible for the loss of wildlife. Many development facilities like access to basic amenities, transport, health and education facilities and land development do not reach them adequately. In addition, man–animal conflict is a commonplace in these areas, causing crop and livestock damage, human injury or death, and the retaliatory killings of animals (Lasgorceix and Kothari 2009).

Generally, creating protected areas imposes restrictions on people that over time makes them more vulnerable. Such is the situation of people living in and around national parks across India. Most of them are economically and culturally displaced (partial conservation refugees) and this will force them to gradually and involuntarily leave their land, and become full-fledged conservation refugees. For example, several communities in Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand, Little Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, Dhauladhar Wildlife Sanctuary, Great Himalaya and Pin Valley National Parks in Himachal Pradesh, the Sundarbans in West Bengal and forest areas in Gajapati, Ganjam, Koraput and Rayagada districts are conservation refugees under this category (Jitendra 2016).

The inhabitants of protected areas living under restrictions are also considered as conservation refugees for the reason that limited access to resources in protected areas is also a form of population displacement even if affected groups are not physically evicted or relocated. So citing the number of conservation refugees based only on eviction would be misleading due to the fact that it ignores refugees who are victims of occupational and economic displacement. Hence there is no universally acceptable methodology for estimating the number of people displaced from protected areas in India or abroad (Awuh 2011). The numbers are also not precisely known. For instance, the Tiger Task Force report put forward two arguments in relation to tiger conservation efforts in India: first, there is virtually no compilation of the number of habitations within the tiger reserves or on the fringes of the reserves, and second, the data relating to the impact of these habitations on the tiger population is also absent (Agrawal and Redford 2009).

The actual records of displaced people from all protected areas in India are calculated to go up drastically in the near future as numerous relocation projects are being considered by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Absence of Consent

Both the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA) and WLPA have stressed the need to obtain free prior informed consent from the gram sabhas and written assent from individual families for proposed resettlement packages. Most of the case studies conducted among the displaced people reveal that due process in obtaining consent is not followed. And the process of obtaining consent is extremely problematic: people were made to sign agreements without official disclosure of project-related information. In Melghat in Maharashtra, villagers were forced to sign consent notes. In Sariska in Rajasthan, in Nagarhole, and in Achanakmar in Chhattisgarh, consent was obtained from individual families rather than through discussions with the entire gram sabha (Shahabuddin and Bhamidipati 2014). The experience of the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Alwar district shows that the local authorities have had the intention of displacing villagers out of the reserve area for several years. Even after mass evictions, about 3,000 villagers live inside and at the periphery of the reserve. The remaining villagers exercise their traditional rights of use over the forest but living under the constant threat of displacement which means that they face numerous hardships.

Due to the risk of possible future displacement, many villagers do not make long-term infrastructural investments in their homes, such as building a well or a house using cement or stone. The eviction or the threat of displacement of local communities from protected areas will surely contribute to their pauperisation, and the disappearance of their traditional culture, which links them with forest biodiversity (Torri 2011).

Tiger Reserves

While the issue of inhabitants' rights in Indian protected areas is incredibly complex, the people in tiger reserves need even greater attention because of the ever-growing significance of tiger reserves at the global level. Tiger reserves involve a burgeoning tourism industry; hence the livelihoods of millions, and a well-publicised tiger conservation project in which the Government of India has invested billions of rupees (Rice 2012). As it is, during the 1990s, India officially admitted having 1.6 million conservation refugees. In 1995, WWF filed a lawsuit which demanded the government increase the size of protected areas by 8% largely in order to protect tiger habitats. One hundred thousand rural people, mainly Adivasis in Assam, were evicted between April and July 2002, and approximately 2–3 million more will be displaced over the coming decades (Dowie 2005; Upadhyay and Sane 2009).

In 2008, the World Bank and Global Environment Facility formed the Global Tiger Initiative (GTI), with the intention to combat the decline in tiger numbers through international consultation and market-based funding. The GTI's members are multilateral funding agencies, governments of nations with tiger populations, and NGOs from various countries. The GTI's vision of the initiative is based on the argument that conserving tiger habitats will facilitate economic growth by protecting valuable ecosystem services and promoting tiger tourism. It is notable that the GTI has claimed India's tigers as part of a global heritage. This exposes the danger of the influence of foreign NGOs and international funding in the Indian tiger conservation programmes now and in the coming years. The final outcome is the ongoing struggle among local people, NGOs, and the government to claim rights over India's forest resources (Rice 2012).

Local Resistance to Conservation Projects

Conflict has been visible at numerous places: one such is the identified GTI site in Idukki and Ernakulum districts in Kerala (Paxton 2016; UNDP 2014), where people are well aware about the upcoming project and its consequences. A civil society movement called the High Range Samrakshana Samithi has played an active role in the discussions with people about the implementation of the project. The locals oppose the project because they know that if it is implemented, they will become conservation refugees.[1] In this complex situation, the actions of officials, right from the MOEFCC to the lowly forest department functionary depend not on what they know about tigers and people but on what they think about the project. The

implementation of laws in tiger reserves is not only dictated from national level but also from international level that will determine the destiny of local people for global good (Rice 2012).

The notification of Mathikettan Shola National Park (MSNP) in Idukki district states that the western portion of the boundary will be handed over after eviction (Government of Kerala 2003) because that portion of Mathikettan Shola is part of Cardamom Hills Reserve. People with title deeds issued by the then Maharaja of Travancore, were also summarily evicted without paying any compensation and without giving them an opportunity of being heard. It should be noted that many of these evicted people are still living as conservation refugees.[2]

The management plan of MSNP prepared by the Department of Forests and Wildlife says that the park assumes special significance as a "stepping stone" for any future corridor connectivity between Periyar Tiger Reserve and Munnar Forest Division (Government of Kerala 2009–18). The government claims that the land is revenue land. For the smooth transferring of this revenue land into forestland, the forest officials purportedly trademarked the inhabitants, including people with title deeds, as encroachers. Even though the population density of Cardamom Hills Reserve is very high, procedures such as determining rights, issuing proclamation, carrying out an inquiry, surveys, demarcation, mapping, and the acquisition of rights were not implemented. Forest officers were summarily placed in the park (Damayanti and Masuda 2008). Local people were evicted without being given any compensation and virtually became conservation refugees overnight despite having title deeds (Kurian 2017).

A number of civil society movements have emerged locally in Kerala. More than 20 movements are identified regionally comprising people who are either partially, or completely, or on the verge of becoming conservation refugees due to conservation initiatives and its enforcement. This includes the declaration of new protected areas, buffer zones, ecologically sensitive areas, and ecologically fragile land laws. The striking feature of these movements is that local movements are connected to regional movements, and that each of these movements has interconnections and is able to organise at the state level.[3]

One of the recent endeavours in a series of conservation efforts is the declaration of the Kodaikanal Wildlife Sanctuary in 2013. This initiative has faced stiff resistance from affected communities even though the successful management of the sanctuary needs cooperation between state agencies, citizens and civil society (Lockwood 2015).

The Western Ghats are another focus point of the conservation discourse today. Two studies commissioned by the central government—the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) report, headed by Madhav Gadgil, in 2011, and the High Level Working Group (HLWG) report, chaired by Kasturirangan, in 2013—have drawn attention to the conservation agenda in the area. The findings and suggested remedies of both reports have become the subject of a vicious political debate in several states (Lockwood 2015). Finally, on 13 November 2013, the erstwhile MoEF notified 4,156 villages as ecologically sensitive areas (ESAs) under Section 5 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986 (MoEF 2013). This move resulted in intense opposition from the local people, especially from the agrarian community. They know that the implementation of the reports and the ESA notification will confer on them the status of "encroachers" and that they too will become conservation refugees following a gradual but eventual eviction from their homeland. The affected people from different civil society movements are of the opinion that they are extremely intolerant, restless and struggle to make both ends meet (Kochupura 2017). It has been said that the fraught situation will lead to social coercion and extremist activities, such as in Kudremukh national park in Karnataka (Sridhar 2015) if government officials and policymakers do not address the bourgeoning problem of conservation refugees at the national level. States exercise the right to forcibly evict people from their homes and using their power of eminent domain, one of the defining powers of states exercised by governments all over the world for diverse purposes (Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington 2007). But, in a democratic country people with fundamental rights are in a position to organise and protest for their rights; nobody can suppress them, neither the politicians nor the conservationists.

Conclusions

The Supreme Court of India upheld in its judgment on the protection of endangered species that anthropocentrism means that the non-human has only instrumental value to humans.[4] In other words, humans take precedence and human responsibilities to the non-human are merely based on benefits they confer on the human species. In contrast, ecocentrism is nature-centred, a world view in which humans are part of nature and non-humans have an intrinsic value. Ecocentrism is, therefore, life-centred and nature-centred, which includes both humans and non-humans (Radhakrishnan 2013). Human beings have value in both anthropocentrist and ecocentrist viewpoints. In the first, humans are dominant, and in the second argument, humans are not below non-humans. So, nobody can evict people from a region, neither in the name of conservation, nor based on ecocentric perceptions.

Recent climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts have been an added factor in the issue of environmental conservation. As a result, there has been a tenfold increase in the financial packages for conservation in India (Ghate and Ghate 2011). In the case of developing countries (including India), financial considerations seem to be the driving force behind the inability of governments to resist conservation-induced displacements because conservation is a source of income for government officials, especially the forest departments. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa alone, international conservation NGOs have an annual budget of over $100 million for conservation projects. That means that these big conservation NGOs wield financial hegemony in their initiatives and project areas. Therefore, in the confrontations between conservationists and indigenous peoples, the former have an advantage. In addition, large-scale conservation strategies always get the support of science, and purposefully ignore the social realities in determining conservation policies (Awuh 2011).

These trends are alarming for India with a densely populated landscape and this will lead to the growth of conservation refugees that will create social disorder and anarchy in every nook and corner of the country.

At present, conservation initiatives are not promising for the local people, so they regard conservation and conservationists as just another colonisation and coloniser, an extension of the forces of economic and cultural hegemony. Research inputs from the fields of anthropology, conservation biology, ethnobiology and ethnoecology have corroborated that the world's biodiversity will only be effectively conserved by preserving the diversity of culture, and vice versa (Kurian 2016b). Protected areas that are surrounded by angry and hungry people who describe themselves as "enemies of conservation" are generally doomed to fail (Dowie 2006). Experience shows that a bottom-up approach has proved to be really effective in conservation instances around the globe. For example, the High Range Mountain Landscape project in Idukki district, Kerala, witnessed stiff opposition from stakeholders. The government has convened several meetings and discussions. Finally the project was reworked and reframed with stakeholder consultation and the inputs of people's representatives (Ayyappan 2016). This bottom-up approach gives local people a sense of responsibility and increases community participation, as opposed to the top-down approach, which makes local people feel excluded from conservation efforts. Conservation projects that exclude local people may conserve natural resources to an extent, but do not conserve human resources, which means peoples' access to livelihood. In order to achieve a double sustainability in conservation, it is wise to involve local people in environmental governance (Kurian 2017).

The new conservation agendas in India are the brain child of large NGOs and other institutions in developed nations, now made more acute by climate change agendas. First, we became refugees because of empires and wars, and later due to economic "development" and neo-liberalism, and today, in the 21st century, we are on the verge of becoming refugees due to conservationists and environmental NGOs. India has the tradition of philosophical and spiritual environment protection. In a country with such a tradition, having conservation refugees will be a curse on the nation, on its culture, and on its people. More realistic, participatory, and interactive conservation models are the need of the hour to cope with the challenges of voracious and treacherous international finance, carbon trading, and allied agreements. In the global arena of significantly ethical and rights-based sustainable development, conservation refugees pose a challenge to third-generation human rights concerns.

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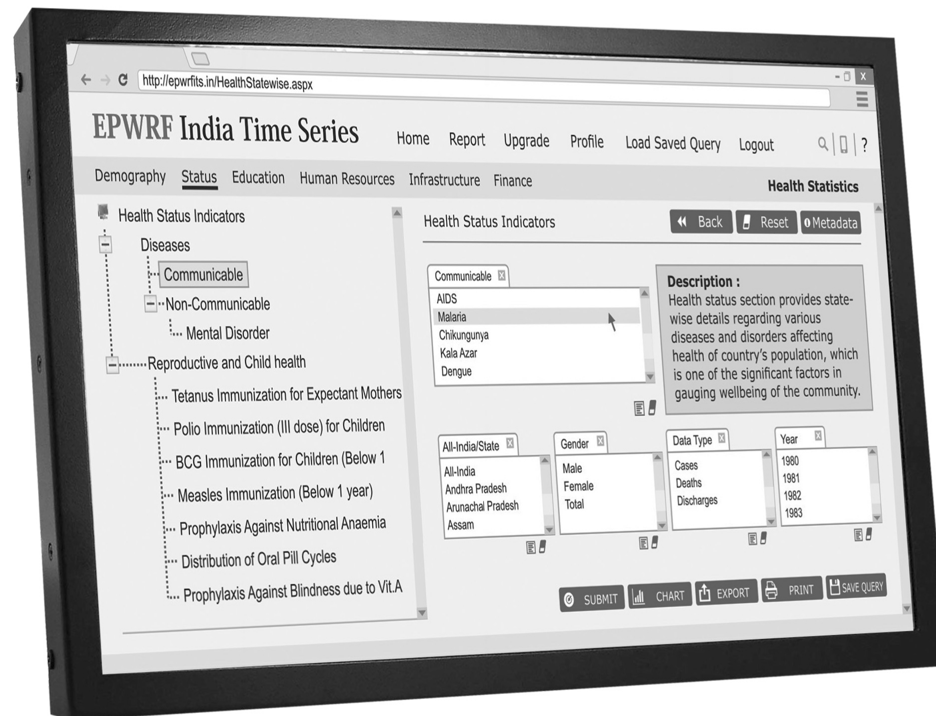

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India follows the current strategy of excluding people, its environmental governance will contribute to the heaping of conservation refugees in every nook and corner of the nation. In India, conservation refugees are the product of unscientific and poorly planned declarations of protected areas, which will ultimately damage the backbone of its agrarian system and its dependent and socially deprived poor. So peoples' participation in conservation programmes across India is the need of the hour that will drive the country towards the vision of inclusive growth in its national development.

NOTES

1 Personal interview with Sebastian Kochupura, Convenor, Highrange Samrakshana Samiti, 29 June 2017.

2 Personal interview with Joice George, Member of Parliament, Idukki Lok Sabha Constituency, 5 July 2018.

3 Personal interview with V C Sebastian, National Secretary, INFAM, 24 February 2017.

4 WP(C) No 337 of 1995 with IA No 3452 in WP(C) No 202 of 1995.

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