

# Man-animal conflict: It's time for change in outlook



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It was surprising that while there were several problems pressing for immediate attention, the Chief Minister of a state spoke about a particular issue. Yet his speech has been a soothing balm to farmers.

Way back in 1967, the then CM C. N. Annadurai spoke about the issue of siravi, a bird species, damaging crops, at the farmers' conference in Thanjavur. He said, "If the forest officials say siravi is a rare and precious bird, I will say that man is rarer and more precious. Let siravi be extinct; but man must survive." His words hold good even now in Tamil Nadu.

## **Farmers fretting and fuming**

Farmers are complaining that wildlife creatures such as elephant, wild boar, wild bovine, tiger, leopard, monkey, coyote, rat, peacock, crane, duck and so on have been destroying all kinds of their crops such as paddy, sugarcane, plantain, coconut, areca, corn, tomato, ladies' finger, beans, fodder crops and so on. The farmers are demanding measures to give them compensation for the crop loss and also destroy the inimical wildlife.

The M. S. Swaminathan committee had, in one of its recommendations, said that agricultural growth was not merely an arithmetical calculation of production growth and in fact, it meant raising the life standard of the farmers themselves. The farmers have been demanding implementation of this recommendation.

## **Man vs animal**

On the one hand, the farmers have been struggling with natural disasters of drought and fog and on other hand, they feel let down by the wildlife animals and birds making inroads into their crops. If the creatures were able to speak out, they would raise the question whose earth it was, after all. The earth does not merely mean nanjai, punjai and poromboke lands; it also consists of great seas, mountain ranges, plateaus, valleys, deserts, waterfalls and massive forests.

The primitive caveman used to draw portraits of birds on the walls in the caves and enjoy the art. Now, man in Europe complains that agriculture has declined owing to an invasion by skylarks. Specifically, the farmers belonging to several states in India regret that peacocks have been damaging their crops. A peacock whose average life-span is just 20 years starts reproduction at the age of two. To find out its eggs and destroy them is a Herculean task.

Rats have a major role in destroying agriculture. They are responsible for destroying one-third of the world's food production, causing 30 per cent damage in storehouses and 25 per cent damage in harvest. The carnivorous tigers and leopards prey on the cattle-heads that play a vital role in farming. Thus the farmers feel threatened.

## **Life-killing men**

There were times when agriculture was considered as a sin. At the time when Kalidasa wrote about Sakuntala and Dhushyanthan, the society believed that the mother earth should not be split and wounded with a plough. Times were when men considered it as a taboo to dig earth with crowbars as part of mining industry.

Yet over the centuries opinions and beliefs changed.

Some people do not hesitate to destroy other creatures in order to protect crops. In India, 1,300 wildlife creatures were electrocuted in 2010-20. In the past decade, 600 elephants were unjustly killed. In September last, 10 tigers died in the Nilgiris region. The National Tiger Conservation Authority says that two of the 10 tigers had been poisoned and points out other reasons for the death of the remaining tigers. Investigation is going on now.

In Prakasham district in Andhra Pradesh, 12 people consumed the meat of a tiger killed in an electric fence. As there was a tussle among them over sharing the meet, the news came to the knowledge of the forest department which has taken action subsequently.

The man-wildlife relationship cannot be said to have been complicated in all times. During Deepavali celebrations and temple festivals, crackers are not burst for fear that they will frighten away the birds in the areas of Mettupalayam, Pungampadi, Meenakshipuram and Chellappanpalayam. The harmonious kinship that the tribals maintain with wildlife is quite unique.

### **What is to be done**

In an environment that demands co-existence of men and wildlife, it is inevitable that we change our perspectives of wildlife and the government, for its part, should change its forest policy. An agricultural forest concept must be developed. In today's development, forests can be classified into forest farms and reserve forests.

Forests have trees that filter sunlight and walkways drenched in sunlight. A system involving less physical work, fewer instruments and more surveillance can be adopted there. Crops such as beans growing in trees can be cultivated. Select grains and alternate crops can be cultivated in collective farming system. Besides, reserve forests can be established for the wildlife's free movement. Facilities can be created for the wildlife to quench their thirst and hunger in the forests themselves so that they don't step out. An agricultural region should be formed, which abounds in fruits, tubers, streams and forests and which yields a plenty of grains.

There have been court verdicts ordering removal of encroachments from elephant tracks. So, any sort of encroachment should be removed.

In olden days, there used to be a worshipping practice in forests where idols would be installed and worshipped. But big temples should not be allowed to be constructed in the forests.

Similarly, an education system is needed which brings about a change in man's outlook on wildlife and birds. An eco-tourism plan should be drawn up on the lines of the African model, taking into account the opinions of wildlife scientists and environmental experts.

A conflict always spells loss. So, constructive projects are needed to avert confrontations between man and animal, the vital creatures of universe. Let us all draw up the projects with not only governments but also farmers, wildlife activists, environmental activists and industrialists joining hands.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**