

## Implications of hiring diverse faculty for higher education in India

High quality research and education are necessary for a country's economic growth and prosperity in competitive global markets. India is severely affected by scarcity of people engaged in academic and industrial research<sup>1</sup>. A serious concern has been expressed about the current method of research scientist/faculty recruitment by academic institutes of higher education in India; why only Indian nationals can be appointed in this age of globalized science and technology<sup>2,3</sup> when the top institutions of the world are quite open to hiring talented people without any race, colour or nationality bias. However, there was a recent controversy in one of the best universities (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) regarding gender bias in faculty hiring at the institute<sup>4</sup>. A detailed study also showed the low representation of coloured staff in US universities<sup>5</sup>. A report on US national academies claims that there is no gender bias in faculty hiring processes and gender does not appear to be a factor in career transitions and outcomes<sup>6</sup>.

There are several strategies being suggested to maintain high quality faculties in higher education and research institutes such as consideration of early retirement programmes and recruiting younger faculties<sup>7</sup>, implementation of interdisciplinary and cross-institutional study in the universities<sup>8,9</sup>. Sa<sup>9</sup> discussed, based on the reports from the US national academies of sciences and the Association of American Universities,

that universities reshaped themselves to hire researchers from interdisciplinary background and increased collaboration from multidisciplinary research. It has been found that institutions with interdisciplinary culture gain an edge in getting more funding from the research market<sup>8</sup>. However, the interdisciplinary research trend in India is not very common in most of the sectors excluding few areas of environmental science and technology.

Several initiatives have been taken recently in India to strengthen the standard of education and academic research in collaboration with industries. The National Knowledge Commission (a high-level advisory board of the Prime Minister of India for maintenance and passing recommendations about educational standard) has recently published a report and submitted an open letter to the Prime Minister of India regarding the current situation of higher education and research institutes, urgent requirement of talented young faculty of international standard, and creation of better research environment for talented PhDs for motivation of undergraduate students towards research in science and technology<sup>1</sup>. Currently, top research and higher education institutions of India are not allowed to hire talented people from all over the world. The research facilities and start-up salary packages are not on par with international organizations and do not attract even Indian nationals pursuing

research in globally recognized institutions. The higher education faculty hiring policy of the government is based on nationality, race, gender, colour and religion which has resulted in diluting the quality of research and development in India.

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## Relocation of villages in Sariska Tiger Reserve

The Sariska Tiger Reserve, one of the important tiger habitats of Central India, came into limelight because of the disappearance of tigers from the area. It exemplifies another 'protected area' in the country facing immense threats and complexities due to the local communities residing within the protected areas. With 10 villages located within the core zone I, i.e. the notified national park area, a total of 31 villages are located in the entire Tiger Reserve in addition to

more than 200 villages present in the contiguous area. The local communities inhabiting these villages mainly belong to the Gujjar community who practice animal husbandry as their main source of livelihood. Heavy dependence of these villages on the forest resources of Sariska for a long time is posing a severe threat to wildlife and wildlands.

Since 1982, some unsuccessful attempts have been made to relocate villages of the national park. However, successful

relocation of the village Bhagani in November 2007 and village Kankwari recently was possible after reintroduction of tigers into the area. The fate of these tigers however depends upon the behaviour of the local communities. It is a well-known fact that the villagers located in the national park are entirely dependent on the forest resources for their daily requirements since time immemorial. But the question that arises is, will the relocation of just ten villages be enough

whereas the remaining 21 villages in the reserve and those situated outside it are still posing serious threats to the natural resources of the Sariska forests?

The villages located in the national park, are less populated compared to those outside the park. The national park inhabitants with more awareness and concern about their surroundings like the dwindling population of tigers, destructive impacts of forest resource collection, importance of forest and wildlife, have a positive approach towards the reintroduction of tigers in the area and other conservation issues despite their dependence on the forests. Also, they show a healthier perception towards the Forest Department and concerned authorities and play an active role in various conservation programmes. Though the communities residing in the park are allowed to

collect wood and other materials from the forest, the sale of the forest products is strictly prohibited. Education plays a crucial role in conservation programmes and all the national park villages are provided with primary schools, thus having a much higher literacy rate among the population below 14 years than the outside villages. But, the lack of proper infrastructure restricts their education to primary level, which if continued can be used for better conservation and development of the area.

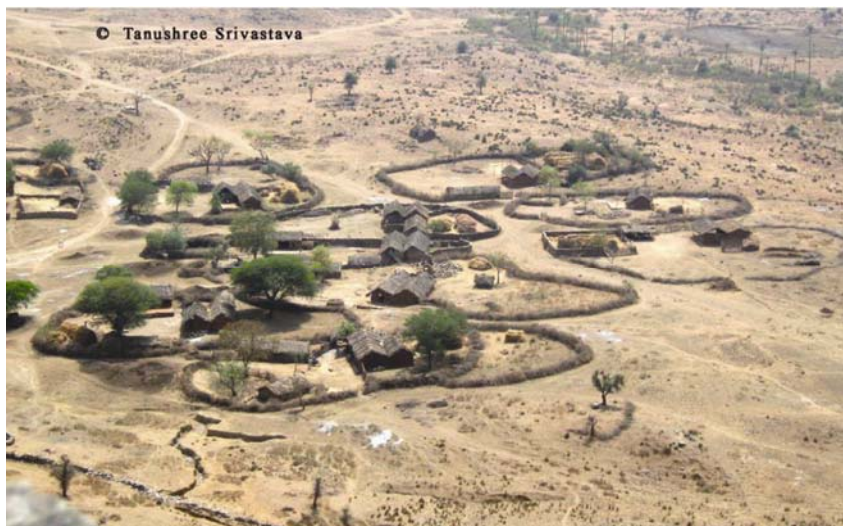
Thus the national park villages are not that big a threat to the tiger reserve as the villages located outside it. The relocation of all the national park villages, though not an easy task, can be accomplished in a given time span. But, even if all the villages are relocated, what about the villages located in the sanctuary and even

outside the tiger reserve who will continue to exploit the forest resources? Lack of viable alternatives compels the people to rely heavily on the park resources for their livelihood. Also, the illiteracy among them makes them unequipped to look for alternative sources of income.

Thus efforts should to be made to look for alternatives both for the national park villages and the outside villages, specifically those of the sanctuary, to reduce their reliance on the forest resources for their livelihood requirements. Therefore, better education facilities up to higher levels should be provided to the local communities, so that their dependency on forests resources is reduced. Also, eco-development programmes must be initiated, including educational programmes, awareness towards major conservation issues and importance of wildlife training programmes for alternative livelihood sources both for men and women. The forest benefits should be shared with the local communities and preference in forest employment should be given to them. This may inculcate in the local communities the awareness, enthusiasm and courage to look for other alternatives of earning their livelihood with a positive approach, thus resulting in successful conservation with due support and cooperation of the local people.

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Village Kankwari located in Core zone I (National Park) of Sariska Tiger Reserve.

## Endangered Asiatic wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*) needs conservation in eastern India

Asiatic wild dog or dhole (*Cuon alpinus*) is one of the top predators in the wild. In spite of being a predator it has so far got poor attention from ecologists and conservationists. Due to the severe anthropogenic pressure and habitat fragmentation, it has lost much of its range all over the world, especially northeast India. So far globally 11 subspecies have

been described. Among these, four are thought to be occurring in India. Earlier, this species was widespread across the Americas, Europe and Asia. Later it was restricted to only Asia after the mass extinction during the Pleistocene period<sup>1</sup>. Due to habitat fragmentation, decline in prey species and increased human activities, this species currently occurs in south

and southeastern countries like India, Indonesia, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Vietnam.

The world conservation union estimated dhole population at less than 2500 individuals and has accorded it endangered status<sup>2</sup>. In India, dhole is classified under Schedule II animals and also