

Misuse of Forest Tourism: A Case study on the unused Forest land at the “Vasona Lion Safari” of the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli

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Abstract: In an in-descript area of the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli (Vasona) there lies a Lion Safari with approximately 101 hectares of land. The earmarked land is divided into two due to an essential main road passing through and hence only 62 hectares of the land is being used as a real time Lion Safari (south end). The other half of the reserved forest land 39 hectares (river end) has been earmarked for purposes of afforestation, floral research, recreation, and tourism. The case of study for this research is this 39 hectares of Forest Land which is not being directly used (river end) for the Lion's Habitat / Safari but is meant for afforestation, floral research, recreation, and tourism, and to be maintained by the forest department. After a detailed research on factual data, satellite imagery and physical verification it is revealed that in a period of 12 years, most of the Forest Land of the 39 hectares in question has been grabbed for farming and personal use.

Keywords: Silvassa, Forest, Tourism, Land grab, agriculture, misuse, neglect.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Resolution No.13/52/F, dated the 12th May, 1952, the Government of India in the erstwhile Ministry of Food and Agriculture enunciated a Forest Policy to be followed in the management of State Forests in the country. However, over the years, forests in the country have suffered serious depletion. This is attributable to relentless pressures arising from ever-increasing demand for fuel-wood, fodder and timber; inadequacy of protection measures; diversion of forest lands to non-forest uses without ensuring compensatory afforestation and essential environmental safeguards; and the tendency to look upon forests as revenue earning resource.

The need to review the situation and to evolve, for the future, a new strategy of forest conservation has become imperative. Conservation includes preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilisation, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment. Thus the National Forest Policy 1988 came into existence.

The basic objectives that governs the National Forest Policy – 1988:

- Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and, where necessary, restoration of the ecological balance that has been adversely disturbed by serious depletion of the forests of the country.
- Conserving the natural heritage of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests with the vast variety of flora and fauna, which represent the remarkable biological diversity and genetic resources of the country.
- Checking soil erosion and denudation in the catchment areas of rivers, lakes, reservoirs in the "interest of soil and water conservation, for mitigating floods and droughts and for the retardation of siltation of reservoirs.
- Checking the extension of sand-dunes in the desert areas of Rajasthan and along the coastal tracts.
- Increasing substantially the forest/tree cover in the country through massive afforestation and social forestry programmes, especially on all denuded, degraded and unproductive lands.

- Meeting the requirements of fuel-wood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber of the rural and tribal populations.
- Increasing the productivity of forests to meet essential national needs.
- Encouraging efficient utilisation of forest produce and maximising substitution of wood.
- Creating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives and to minimise pressure on existing forests.

2. FACTS BASED ON GROUND RESEARCH

However, in the case of Dadra & Nagar Haveli (D&NH), 42% of the total land is said to be under forest cover and out of which 40% is reserved forest.

The Vasona Lion Safari's river end land has been grossly misused by local farmers by the help of influential people probably as they were not checked effectively.

The satellite data variation of the forest land in question from 2003 to 2014 is huge. The total of 39 hectare of land which was under the direct control of the forest department is now reduced to a mere 40% of the original land.

Now 60% of the concerned forest land is under agriculture. A large pond as seen in the 2003 satellite picture is completely missing from the latest satellite pictures. Missing of a large pond is a serious issue as it directly indicates at indiscriminate farming where the water meant for forest animals was diverted towards agriculture and then the due course the pond land also came under cultivation.

This all kept on happening in the gross neglect of the National Forest Policy 1988. The UT of the D&NH is having its independent Forest Department, whereas the territory is having its 40% land under forest on paper.

The demographics of the D&NH territory are having 60% tribal people and are dependent on the forests of the territory for their very basic consumption. With the increase in de-forestation and land grabbing the actual Forest cover is shrinking dramatically. The tribes who are mostly dependent on the forest land and are the real protector of the forest, are actually at the end of the queue when it comes to the fair share of Forest Land produce.

If the case of this study is taken as a thumb rule of de-forestation in the territory then we can safely assume that only 20% land of the U.T. of D&NH is actually under real forest cover. This is way below the national average of 33%.

Sufficient funds are provided by the Government of India to preserve the Forests and ensure that the National Forest Policy 1988 is enforced in letter and spirit.

However, the scenario on the ground is completely different to what the true stakeholders the forests would like to believe.

3. PHYSICAL PROOFS FOR THE ABOVE CONCLUSIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS

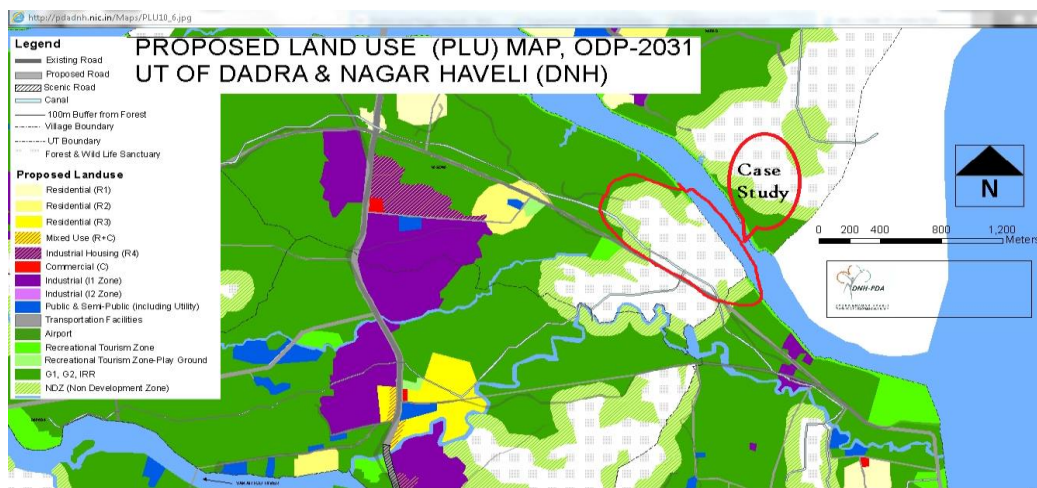
- 1.1 The signage placed at the forest department's concerned land as shown in picture 1 says that 39 hectare of land is under that concerned survey.



1.2 The satellite image of the concerned land as shown in picture 2 verifies the stand of the forest department as on the year 2003.



1.3 The Land details of the Planning and Development Authority (PDA) of the UT of D&NH have similarly earmarked the Forest land as shown in Picture 3.



1.4 However, the satellite imagery of the year 2014 is very disturbing. The Picture 4 very clearly shows that over 60 % of the said forest land is directly under illegal encroachment and farming is done here. It goes without saying that thousands of fully grown Khair and Teek wood trees must have been fallen to make space for farming.



4. CONCLUSION

Act no 4.8.1 of the NFP 1988, Says: “Encroachment on forest lands has been on the increase. This trend has to be arrested and effective action taken to prevent its continuance. **“There, should be no regularisation of existing encroachments”**”.

Hence, with the emergence of satellite data and physical evidences of de-forestation the Forest department of the affected areas can immediately take corrective action and undo the damages by perseverance and faithful dedication.

Forestry should be recognised both as a scientific discipline as well as a profession. Agriculture universities and institutions, dedicated to the development of forestry education should formulate curricula and courses for imparting academic education and promoting postgraduate research and professional excellence, keeping in view the manpower needs of the country. Academic and professional qualifications – in forestry should be kept in view for recruitment to the Indian Forest Service and the State Forest Service. Specialised and orientation courses for developing better management skills by inservice training need to be encouraged, taking into account the latest development in forestry and related disciplines.

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