



THE WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT AND THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE SAPERA COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF VILLAGE KHETAWAS, HARYANA.

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Abstract

The legislation has prohibited the act of catching, trading, or exhibiting wild creatures, specifically snakes, as it is now considered illegal. The observed tendency has led to a decline in the market demand for snake charmers, as individuals have been deprived of the opportunity to observe serpents at public spectacles. As a result of the declining demand for the traditional occupation of snake enchanting, a considerable portion of the Saperas community residing in Khetawas has been driven to explore alternate sources of income. A portion of the population had undergone a shift into the profession of agricultural workers, while another segment had chosen to engage in petty trading as their primary source of income.

Keywords Wildlife Protection Act, Sopera Community, Livelihood

Introduction

In India, the Wildlife Protection Act was passed to save wildlife and their natural habitats. Three main objectives of the Act are - the first step is to create standardised wildlife protection laws. Second, to set up a system of protected areas for native plants and animals. Third, to control the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife. However, such conservation laws can have both positive and negative effects on dependent communities. This paper examines the interactions between the Wildlife Protection Act and dependent communities, focusing on the implementation-related challenges and opportunities. Throughout history, a great number of groups have obtained their sustenance, maintained their cultural traditions, and supported themselves economically by depending on these natural resources and wild life. The Wildlife Protection Act, in its efforts to promote conservation, has the potential to unintentionally disrupt long-established traditional livelihood practises, resulting in socioeconomic repercussions for communities that depend on them. Communities that depend on natural



resources and wild life for their livelihoods may face several difficulties as a result of the Wildlife Protection Act's implementation. The following are some of the challenges:

- ❧ **Displacement:** In certain instances, the establishment of protected areas can result in the involuntary relocation of communities residing within or near the designated areas, disrupting their social structure and traditional means of subsistence.
- ❧ **Resource Access Restrictions:** The legislation frequently imposes prohibitions or restrictions on customary activities such as hunting, fishing, and harvesting of non-timber forest resources, which can have significant ramifications for the sustenance of indigenous communities.
- ❧ **Restricted Economic Opportunities:** The restrictions imposed on the extraction of resources from protected areas may reduce the potential for generating income for communities that rely on such activities, which could lead to poverty and marginalisation.
- ❧ **Conflict with wildlife:** The Act restricts the number of animals that can be used in performances and makes it illegal to capture, buy, or sell a variety of wildlife species to preserve them; this is a significant concern for communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihood.

Numerous communities in India have been impacted by this Act since they depend on this wildlife for their survival, for upholding their cultural traditions, and for economic assistance. The Act has affected the semi-nomadic Van Gujjar population in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh, as well as the Jogi Nath Sapera in Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh. Haryana's separatist community has encountered significant difficulties as a consequence of the implementation of the ordinance. There has been a significant reduction in the availability of snakes used by snake charmers as a direct result of law enforcement's efforts to crack down on the illegal acquisition and exhibition of snakes. Numerous individuals who formerly engaged in the centuries-old practise of snake-charming have consequently been compelled to seek alternative means of subsistence or abandon it entirely.



History and Culture of Sapera Community

The name "Sapera" is derived from the Hindi word "saper," which translates literally to "snake." A substantial number of centuries have passed since the region of Sapera was first settled. They are believed to be descended from numerous nomadic communities that once migrated across the Indian subcontinent. Throughout their history, the Sapera have developed several distinctive practises, one of which is snake-charming, which has become an integral part of both their culture and means of subsistence. In Haryana, the Sapera community, also known as Sapera Nath, has been recognised. There are ten distinct subgroups within the community, including the *Brahmin Sapera*, *Jhinwar Sapera*, *Soggar Sapera*, *Bihal Sapera*, *Nakphule Sapera*, and *Sandenath Sapera*. The divisions are believed to be indicative of the heterogeneous origins of this community, in which people from diverse caste backgrounds engaged in the practise of snake-charming, eventually establishing a distinct and distinct community over time. This community is recognised in Haryana as a Scheduled Caste.

The sapera community's historical trajectory is characterised by its extensive duration and complexity. As indicated by the earliest available evidence, the practise of snake-charming in India dates to the second century BCE. As evidenced by the discovery of terracotta figurines depicting snake charmers, this practise is widely believed to have originated in the Indus Valley Civilization. Hinduism has historically regarded snakes as sacrosanct, and saperas have historically been regarded as the protectors of snakes and keepers of the knowledge of venom. The practise of snake-charming has its origins in ancient religious rituals and beliefs, where it was believed to pacify snakes and protect humans from their venomous nature. Throughout the 19th century, paintings and photographs from the colonial period frequently depicted the practise of snake-charming as a representation of India's distinctive and captivating culture. Over the course of its evolution, the practise of snake-charming has evolved into a form of performance art that is frequently employed to enliven and entertain audiences at cultural events such as fairs and festivals. Members of the Sapera community have practised snake-charming for many generations. Participants in this art form use song and dance to enchant and obtain control over poisonous snakes, particularly cobras.

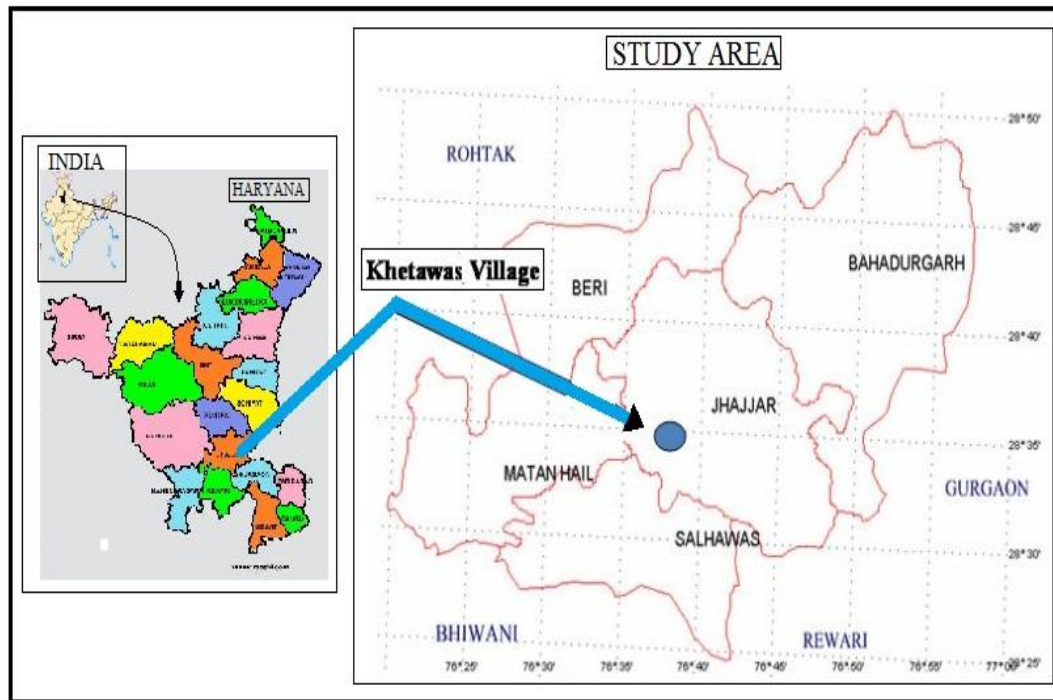


Historically, snake charmers performed at public events such as festivals and fairs, as well as private parties, to showcase their talents and entertain the audience.

Study Area

Village Khetawas is situated approximately 20 kilometres away from Jhajjar, a district administrative headquarter of Rohtak Division. Khetawas is geographically situated at latitude 28.5483389 and longitude 76.51777514, denoting its approximate location on the map. Village Khetawas is situated in Matenhail Tehsil of Jhajjar district, Haryana. It is of medium size village and have 346 households. According to the Census 2011, the village Khetawas has a total population of 1710. Out of this total, 911 are males and 799 are females. The children population of aged 0-6 in Khetawas village is 274, which is 16.02% of the total village population. The sex ratio of Khetawas village is 877, which is slightly lower than the state average sex ratio of 879. The literacy rate of Khetawas village in 2011 was 70.06%, which was lower than 75.55%, the literacy rate of Haryana. About 80 households in the village of Khetawas are Sapera households. Most of these households were working in various types of traditional occupations.

They used the snake to put on street shows, which was their main source of income. With their snakes, they travelled through villages, regions, and even whole countries. Because of their skill in capturing snakes, they have earned a reputation as experts in their field. Some people take part in international competitions, such as those featuring snake-themed activities or contests focused on music shows



Data and Methodology:

This research aims to provide insight into the relationship between the Wildlife Protection Act and the livelihoods of dependent communities. By understanding the problems these people face, policymakers can come up with more targeted ways to protect animals and help people live well. The dependent communities of the village were profiled with respect to their occupations, sources of income, household demographics, levels of education, and access to essential amenities such as healthcare and education. Using surveys and questionnaires to capture quantitative data from the dependent communities, a Comparative Analysis was conducted to determine the effects on the sapera community prior to and after the enforcement of the Act.

Objectives

- ❧ To investigate the effects of the Wildlife Protection Act on the Sapera Community of Khetawas.
- ❧ To analyse changes in income, employment, and cultural norms of the sapera community as a result of the act.



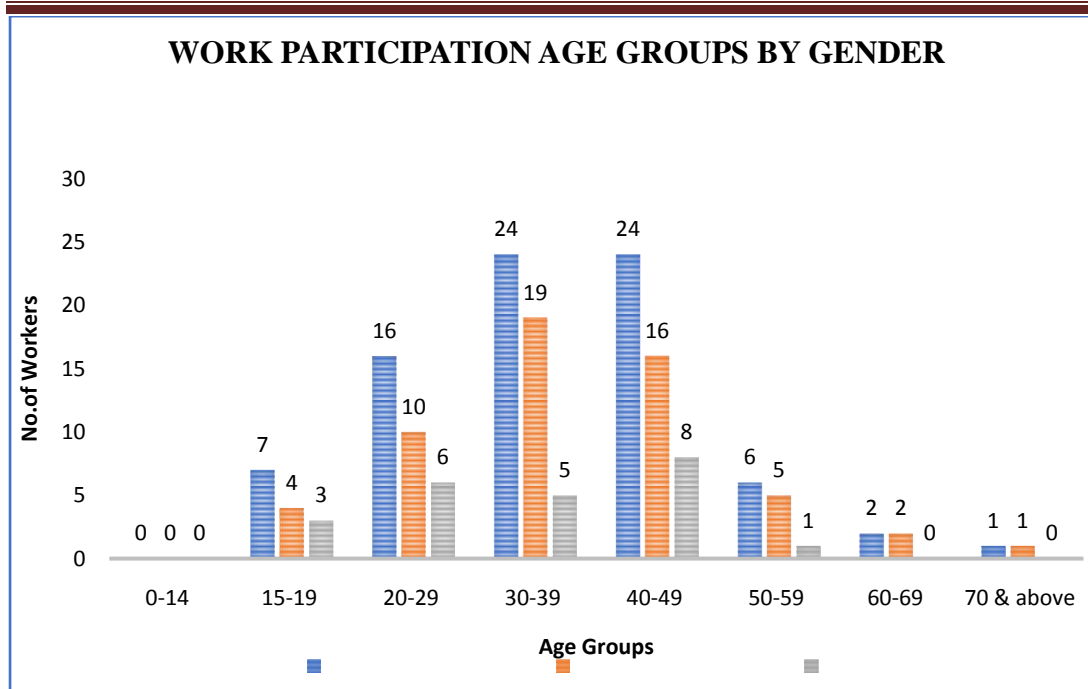
Result and Discussion

Occupational Structure of Households of Sapera Community

<i>Sr. No</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>No of Households</i>	<i>% of Households</i>
1	Snake Been Players	23	28.75
2	Agricultural Labour	18	22.50
3	Open Labour	21	26.25
4	Hawkers	04	05.00
5	Driver	04	05.00
6	Govt. Job	04	05.00
7	Shopkeeper	02	02.50
8	Snake bite Herbal Medicine Practitioner	04	05.00

Level of Education Number

<i>Sr. No</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>No of Members</i>	<i>% of members</i>
1	None	67	28.27
2	Primary Level	64	27.00
3	Middle Level	66	27.84
4	High Level	37	15.61
5	Higher Level	03	01.26



Researchers always find it vital to comprehend the occupational structure of a community. Through an examination of the occupational structure within the separate community households, useful insights can be obtained regarding the composition of the workforce and its potential significance for the socio-economic development of the community. In Khetawas village, the separate community consists of 80 adult members who are actively involved in various work activities. This represents approximately 33.8% of the total population of 237. Based on the data, it can be observed that around 12.7% of the members categorise their work as main work. This classification suggests that these members are either employed or receive a stable income for a duration exceeding 6 months. In contrast, it is worth noting that approximately 87.3% of individuals belonging to the separate community are involved in marginal activities, indicating that their means of subsistence last for a period of less than 6 months.

The three dominant occupations in the village, are snake been players, agricultural labour, and open labour, collectively represent near 77.50% of households. Furthermore, snake been players and open labourers emerge as the two dominant occupations, accounting for 28.75% and 26.25% of households, respectively. Following the enactment of the legislation that banned snake exhibitions, the male members of the community started incorporating snake-



themed musical performances into marriage ceremonies and cultural events. These results highlight the important contribution that manual labour makes to the local economy and offer insight on the community's main sources of livelihood. The prevalence of labour-intensive occupations such as snake been players, agricultural labour, and open labour demonstrates the community's reliance on manual labour for livelihood. The prevalence of these occupations suggests a reliance on traditional, physically demanding labour, which implies a restricted diversification of economic activities within the community.

Out of the total working population of 80, 57 are males and 23 are females. The data suggests that there is an imbalance in gender representation, with a higher percentage of males in the workforce. The data presented in the analysis highlights the distribution of working individuals across different age groups. It also sheds light on the gender disparity, particularly among older age groups. Based on the data, there is a noticeable trend towards the working population decreasing as individuals age. The age groups of 30-39 and 40-49 exhibit the highest working populations, whereas the age groups of 60-69 and 70 and above display the lowest working populations.

Findings

- ❧ The study revealed that the Wildlife Protection Act has had a significant impact on the culture and way of life of the sapera community of village Khetawas. The Act now prohibits the capture and public display of wild animals such as snakes. Therefore, street snake shows, which are the primary source of income for the Sapera community, became prohibited.
- ❧ The Sapera community has faced challenges in accessing opportunities to enhance their skill sets due to their low literacy rate. They continue to depend on physical labour as their primary source of income at the present time.
- ❧ The community members used to make their living by participating in the celebration of bean music that took place at wedding ceremonies; however, this practise is becoming outdated because to the increasing prevalence of the usage of modern DJ music systems at wedding ceremonies.



☞ In the village, it has been observed that youths from the Sapera community engage in excessive alcohol consumption. The recognition of beggars in the form of Naat Sadhu is not common, but it is a subject of discussion among some members.

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