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## **ENCLOSING THE PRISTINE MYTH: THE CASE OF MADHAV NATIONAL PARK, INDIA**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Indian national park (NP) policy is largely exclusionary. It seeks to preserve nature from the ‘ravages’ of human use by delineating an administratively controlled, ‘empty’ and ‘pristine’ space that denies any significant place for local people in the landscape. State governments are required ‘to...prevent [park] exploitation or occupation’.<sup>1</sup> Considerable restrictions on local access have been imposed, extending in some cases to village relocation.

This exclusionary policy increasingly faces widespread opposition, primarily from local people living on the peripheries of NPs. By the late 1980s, according to an Indian Institute of Public Administration survey, the majority of protected area (PA) authorities in India were filing cases against local people for various illegal activities such as hunting and setting reserves on fire, whilst also having to deal with ever more physical confrontations between such local communities and PA staff.<sup>2</sup> Since then the scale and intensity of such local opposition has continued to escalate. In 1998, Lisu tribals attacked forest camps and injured foresters in Namdapha, Arunachal. In July 2000 police fired seventeen rounds to disperse villagers agitating over grazing rights in Ranthambhore, Rajasthan, and in August 2002, in the same reserve, villagers assaulted police personnel, resulting in retaliation through open fire. Exclusion has become a ‘hated term’<sup>3</sup> that precipitates severe and relentless local animosity.

Such problems came to a head earlier this year when reports emerged that the tiger had been totally exterminated from the well-known Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. Local hostility to ‘fortress’<sup>4</sup> conservation had manifested itself there in a dramatic way. In July 2005, the Tiger Task Force (TTF), set up by the Indian government in response to this crisis, produced its final report. In contrast to the strict exclusionary approach that dominates official conservation policy in India, the TTF report promoted an alternative, much more participatory, inclusive strategy, sensitive to local people and their concerns. It advocated the need to generate an ‘understanding of the impact a PA has on the lives of people’<sup>5</sup> and the need to ascertain local people’s ‘customary and traditional rights [that at present have] remained unrecorded’.<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge, the report suggested, had to be incorporated into future conservation policy.

At the time of writing, the TTF report had already generated severe criticism<sup>7</sup> from advocates of strict exclusion who remain, at least in part, blind to the idea that ‘pristine’ PA land in fact contains within it longstanding histories of human occupation and use that cannot continue to be ignored. Exclusion advocates typically conceptualise local hostility to strict exclusion in Indian PAs as contemporary, and merely the product of either material livelihood deficiencies or cultural value differences between conservationists and local people. Local resentment of PAs is supposedly linked to lack of alternative material resources or local ‘ignorance’ with regard to the benefits of ‘pristine wilderness’.

This paper seeks to challenge such conceptions. Through a historical account of the emergence, progression and politics of exclusion in what is now Madhav National Park (MNP or Madhav), Madhya Pradesh (MP), I attempt to build upon the position advanced in the recent TTF report. I track the development of exclusion at Madhav from the Mughal period (sixteenth century to early eighteenth century) to the mid-late twentieth century, and use this to challenge the perspectives held by proponents of the ‘fortress’ approach. Countering their view that prevailing local hostility to PAs is recent and merely the product of local ‘irrationality’ or refusal to value biodiversity, the paper positions present value-orientated tensions at Madhav within the context of long-standing local use of the park’s nature as a material asset and, furthermore, within a deep-seated history of relentless elite/peasant material struggles over control of the Madhav land, and ever-expanding restrictions upon local people’s traditional uses of that land since at least the sixteenth century.

Avoiding the prevailing tendency to situate agency only at a culture or value-based level then, attending to a risk of attempting to comprehend contemporary exclusion and the hostility that it creates without considering issues of historic access to and control over material resources, I ground Madhav’s contemporary exclusionary policy in its historical-material context.

Park management legitimises its strict exclusionary approach by portraying Madhav as a ‘pristine’ landscape that faces ‘illegitimate’ intrusion by ‘ignorant’ local people who must be educated about the value of ‘wilderness’. The exclusionary policy is premised upon this reification of the park’s nature as emphatically ‘empty’. Yet positioning this exclusionary policy and the antagonisms associated with it in their historical-material context reveals that such a depiction of nature as ‘empty’ land is an illusion. Therefore any conservation policy that is based upon this illusion can only be inadequate. It obliterates the social memory of production and labour so integral to the space’s history, and in doing so creates a controversial, dehumanised and residual nature. By reifying nature in this way, by concealing its history as the object of material transformation and material struggle and as the setting within which complex social relationships have always been played out; by disregarding the historical-material context within which today’s hostility is grounded, ‘fortress’ conservationists can more easily re-establish the age-old constitution of local people as ‘intruders’ in their own land. They can more easily de-contextualise, irrationalise and thereby de-legitimise local hostility to the prevailing round of exclusion in a way that this paper’s account of the area’s history indicates is inadequate.

Rather, prevailing hostility to contemporary exclusion is far more deep-set. It is a reaction to a new selection of enclosure tactics, but a new selection that is nothing more than a replication of multiple past sets of land restrictions that have persistently been introduced and re-introduced at Madhav throughout history. Today’s exclusionary approach is so contested then, not because local people lack knowledge or even merely find it hard to fulfill their basic material needs, but rather because the policy is so blind to the complex and poignant history of Madhav’s nature as the enduring object of, and context for, social and material struggle and the location of persistent elite violation of local land claims.

## 2. BACKGROUND

MNP is one of the oldest PAs in MP and by Indian standards is fairly typical in size (listed as covering 325.97km<sup>2</sup>). However, in contrast to other parks in the state such as Kanha<sup>8</sup> and Panna<sup>9</sup> very little research has been conducted there.

Madhav (longitude - 77°38`E to 77°55`E, latitude - 25°23`N to 35°33`N) forms part of the Upper Vindhyan Hills, Central Highlands, Shivpuri district, MP. Altitude ranges from 360-490m. The park contains two artificial lakes, Sakhya Sagar and Madhav Sagar and one main perennial river Sindh that runs along its eastern boundary. Temperatures vary between 3°C and 48°C. Seasonally dry, the monsoon is July to September, with annual precipitation of 800mm.

The park is in biogeographic zone 04B (semi-arid Gujarat-Rajputana) and has low tree densities and biomass averages.<sup>10</sup> Zone 04B is unusual for PAs in MP and also has low all-India coverage under PAs (2.8 per cent). Northern tropical dry deciduous mixed forests dominate, while flat grasslands surround the artificial lakes. Principal flora consists of khair (acacia catechu), teak (*tectona grandis*), salai (*boswellia serrata*), tendu (*diospyros melanoxylon*) and palash (*butea monosperma*). Pre-independence, Madhav supported a diverse range of mammals including leopards and sloth bears. In particular, 'tigers abound[ed]'<sup>11</sup> there as the area was 'very good tiger country'.<sup>12</sup> Now, however, fauna is more limited, but includes chital, nilgai, chinkara, sambar, and a large variety of birds, including pond herons, white-breasted kingfishers, migratory geese and paradise flycatchers.

Surrounding population levels are rapidly increasing. Shivpuri town (c.1,131,900 people) and 130 villages, each of around 600 people, lie within a 10km radius of park boundaries and one village (Gatwaya) remains within.<sup>13</sup> Adjacent village birth rates and those in Shivpuri town are relatively high: in 1999 amounting to 34.3 per 1000 persons and 28.1 per 1000 persons respectively. Approximately 50per cent of village people are Adivasi (Scheduled Tribe (ST)), and approximately 10 per cent are Dalit (Scheduled Caste (SC)). Other local village castes include Sardar, Brahmin, Baniya, Thakur, Gujar, Kushwaha and Dhakar. Despite an escalating presence of the exchange economy in these villages, subsistence-based occupations still remain central. Around 50 per cent of village populations combine mixed subsistence, fairly marginal, rain-fed sedentary agriculture with timber, and non-timber, forest produce collection. Other village occupations include wage labour (c.25 per cent), grazing of livestock for milk sale (c.20 per cent) and private/government services (c.5 per cent). Nearly 60 per cent of village people below the age of thirty are unemployed and about 50 per cent are landless.<sup>14</sup>

## 3. CONTEXT

Official park policy at Madhav, as in all NPs in India, is characterised by strict exclusionary controls on local access to and use of the land. Park management is driven by this 'national park ideal'<sup>15</sup> of a 'pristine wilderness'<sup>16</sup> that is 'untouched' and that conceives of nature as an entity almost devoid of local human use or habitation. For example, the park's 1989-90 to 93-94 management plan suggests that 'since...MNP's...very creation (1958) park management has...maintain[ed] it as a *wilderness* area trying to *insulate* it from the people'<sup>17</sup> and a recent park director's report asserts that 'the park must provide the visitor with a good *wilderness* experience'.<sup>18</sup> Official park rules support this, suggesting that 'nothing can be removed from the park...No one can collect firewood, grasses or any other forest produce as it is an offence...The park must remain...*untouched*'.<sup>19</sup> As a member of the park's governing body

said, 'I went to Happy Days [a school not far from the park boundary] during 'Wildlife Week'...The aim was to teach the students about how important it is to keep the park free from humans and their activities'.<sup>20</sup> Figure 1, drawn by students during Wildlife Week, clearly reflects this official message that Madhav's nature must be 'pristine'.

In 1972, MNP's long-standing exclusionary policy was officially codified, the park now came under India's national Wild Life (Protection) Act (WPA).<sup>21</sup> Since then, local hostility to Madhav's exclusionary policy has become increasingly severe. On 23 June 1987 three men from villages adjacent to Madhav were killed while demonstrating against exclusion, and over a hundred local people blockaded a main park road to make their resentment heard.<sup>22</sup> Previous research<sup>23</sup> (2002) suggests that such resentment towards Madhav's policies still remains. As park boundary residents proclaimed: 'We hate the NP...Get rid of...[its]...regulations'.<sup>24</sup>

So, why do local people oppose the park, the ideal of 'pristine wilderness' and the exclusion which underpins it?

Although since the 1980s, research in Indian NPs,<sup>25</sup> and elsewhere,<sup>26</sup> has started to address such issues, many parks, including MNP, remain largely unstudied in this way. Moreover, Indian park-people studies that do exist, and that have note-worthy influence upon government and the conceptions held by park managers, typically provide one of two narratives, both of which, in my view, only relay part of the story. These 'truths' are as follows: (1) Exclusion creates hostility because it removes local access to critical subsistence resources causing the demise of local people's basic material livelihoods. Local people cannot afford to care about 'nature' and 'wilderness'. Their lack of material assets and thus lack of ability to fulfil their basic livelihood requirements prevents any capacity to care.<sup>27</sup> (2) Exclusion creates hostility because local people do not care about or value 'nature' and in particular 'wilderness' in the same way that conservationists do. They have different cultural associations with and understandings of nature, understandings that conflict with conventional notions. They are 'ignorant' of the 'benefits' of 'pristine' conditions and have no interest in sustaining an 'untouched' nature for its own sake.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst valuable, both the former (material-based) and latter (value-based) narratives remain relatively detached from one another, the latter tending to focus almost solely upon ontological cultural differences rather than embedding these sufficiently in the earlier accounts emphasising lack of material resources. Moreover, neither narrative considers to any significant extent the historical context of today's local antagonism to park policy.<sup>29</sup>

This project addresses both these deficiencies. I argue that local animosity towards Madhav's current exclusionary policy must be understood at a much more deep-seated, historical-material level than claimed in either of these fairly one-dimensional arguments, so commonly put forward by park managers and advocates of exclusion. Responding to Castree et al.'s contention that nature is simultaneously constructed materially and semiotically,<sup>30</sup> and challenging the apparent dichotomy between nature as a commodity and nature as 'wilderness', I situate contemporary cultural antagonisms towards Madhav's exclusionary policy in the context of intricate historical struggles between diverse, and sometimes internally divided, class groups over control and access to material resources. I show how today's cultural conflicts over Madhav's nature are grounded in a deeply-rooted set of ideas about nature as a

set of commodity values. Contemporary cultural controversies over the Madhav land echo and reproduce a long history of intricate, elite claims to access and control over this nature as a material asset. They relate to a long-standing history of material uses of the Madhav land, and of entrenched and persistent tensions over local access to and control of that land.

Through a detailed analysis of the politics of exclusion at Madhav from the Mughal period to India's independence (1947) and its aftermath, this paper brings to the fore the long-ignored historical and material context for prevailing local antagonism at Madhav. In doing so it shows that this antagonism is not just a contemporary phenomenon fuelled by local 'irrationality' or 'ignorance' about the non-material value of 'wilderness'. Rather local opposition to the park is grounded in, and mimics, previous age-old tussles over material use of the Madhav area. It is an echo and reproduction of highly controversial deep-seated historical conflicts over this area as a material resource. For generations, this nature, far from being 'pristine', has been the object of material transformations and complicated disputes between fractured class groups, all leading to a progressive erosion of local use rights. The imposition of the contemporary 'pristine wilderness' ideal there is just the latest example of many rounds of local exclusion experienced in that location. Viewing today's hostility in the context of this area's long-standing and controversial history of ever-strengthening elite land control, and the imposition of ever-stricter limits on local material use, reveals such hostility as far less 'irrational' and far more legitimate than is so often claimed. It avoids the common, faintly elitist, tendency to simplify present opposition as a recent phenomenon, and as a clash of values or ideas alone, and rather grounds this opposition in long-standing struggles over access rights that are deeply historical and material.

The paper traces the long history of the Madhav area as a space of passionate struggle between competing claims to the land. It tracks ever-evolving and growing resentment and tension, as local people, through the generations, had their traditional land rights threatened and progressively removed by a range of different fractured elite groups. In doing so, it helps to demystify why the recent re-invention of exclusion in the form of a conservationist policy is so contentious: it has reified the Madhav area as 'empty', 'pristine' space, when in fact inscribed upon this 'empty' space is an invisible history of deep-seated and harsh local conflicts over this land; land which, for generations, has been viewed locally as a set of material assets. I attempt to show that prevailing opposition must be understood within this framework of a whole series of age-old and repetitive material struggles over the Madhav area, struggles in which different local material uses of the land have persistently been violated and compromised by elite fractions, themselves internally tussling over control. I try to unravel the historical-material context in which local people view the current exclusionary policy, and in doing so, to contradict the widely-held value-based view that local people are 'intruders' in this 'pristine' land, and that their resentment of the park is the product of 'irrationality' or lack of education about the value of 'wilderness'. Rather, I argue that local opposition is grounded in the Madhav area's long-standing history of exclusionary dynamics that have always, to a greater or lesser extent through time, excluded local people and breached their claims on, and material uses of, the land. I thereby challenge attempts to explain prevailing conflicts without recourse to issues of material access to and control over the park's nature in the past. I suggest that it is this history of progressive local exclusion from an area historically imbued with use values, and the object of multiple historical material transformations, that is now a main basis for contemporary local moral claims.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This largely qualitative research sought to examine critically Madhav's exclusionary policy, and the antagonism associated with it, historically and politically.

Initial exposure to local people and the park's operations was obtained whilst teaching in a nearby school in 2000. In 2002 I conducted a first round of research in the area over a 2½ month period. The fieldwork specifically for this study spanned 2½ months during the summer of 2004.

Using archival material (current and historic official local, state, national and international NP documentation and wider documentary/textual records), 24 semi-structured interviews (for informants with some sort of 'professional' link to NP policy and/or practice), and 60 activity-based focus groups (FGs) (for local 'lay' informants), I attempted to unravel the social and material politics of exclusion at Madhav from the Mughal period to the present day.<sup>31</sup> I explored the different social contexts in which policies of exclusion emerged and developed. I scrutinised the range of official and dissident meanings that have been attached to the resource and their origins, and material use of and conflict over the resource through time, viewing what is now MNP as a highly contested landscape.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The remainder of this article provides a historical account of exclusionary politics at Madhav since the Mughal period. In doing so, I show that today's local antagonisms towards park policy are not merely contemporary or 'irrational' but rather must be situated in relation to complex pre-colonial, colonial and early post-colonial historical struggles between different class fractions over control of the Madhav land as a material resource. I thereby ground contemporary exclusion and the local antagonism associated with it within older practices of the exercise of power over territorial claims and of the 'production' of nature. I suggest that animosity towards Madhav's current exclusionary policy must be understood not merely as a contemporary phenomenon and the result of lack of local education about the 'value' of 'wilderness', but rather at much a deeper-rooted level. Present park management reifies Madhav's nature as an 'empty', 'pristine wilderness' and in doing so, conceals an invisible realm of historical, material relations that are integral to, yet hidden within this nature. Prevailing policy erases from view the park's origins as a 'produced' space, thereby eschewing a deep-seated local history of different material claims on, uses of and transformations of the Madhav landscape, at least since the Mughal period. The severity of today's local hostility is grounded in prevailing park management's official negation of the area's past, a past of material struggles over resource access that engenders in the present a feeling among local people that they have a moral right the Madhav land.

### 5.1 *Mughals*

While strict exclusion at Madhav was first imposed during the colonial period, restrictions were evident in the Mughal period.<sup>32</sup> Most of the area was designated as a hunting reserve directly claimed by the *Padshah*,<sup>33</sup> with control and rights assigned to him.<sup>34</sup> Local people's use of the forests was limited, albeit lightly (a hierarchy of user rights prevailed).<sup>35</sup> Hunting certain game such as the tiger<sup>36</sup> was forbidden. In reserves near Agra and Delhi local inhabitants could only net quail, hare and rabbits. No one was allowed to 'disturb

the...[royal]...game',<sup>37</sup> which was therefore abundant. In the Madhav area, rules were similar.<sup>38</sup>

Hunting was a pastime of the Mughal elite. Justification of exclusion thus lay in the area's use value for the ruling classes. Under its old name 'Sipri', records relay the area's use by Emperor Akbar for this purpose. In 1564, he stayed there to trap wild elephants for sport:

'Elephants were met with in great numbers in the forests between Narwar, Chanderi and Sipri. Abu 'l Farzal<sup>39</sup> mentions how they were trapped in *khedas*, pits called *gadda* or enclosures called *bari*. In 1564 Emperor Akbar, while returning from Malwa, captured a large herd of elephants near Sipri, which included one animal of unusual size'.<sup>40</sup>

Simultaneously, exclusion had symbolic value for the elite. Hunting was used to enforce power. The Mughals had a large department called the *shikarkhana* to organise royal hunts and keep a tally of the number of animals killed. For example, during the first twelve years of Jahangir's reign he is reported to have killed over 17,000 animals.<sup>41</sup> The *qumargah*<sup>42</sup> often involved thousands of troops who beat the forests for animals that were driven towards a central tower to be killed by the *Padshah* and the nobles to illustrate their strength.<sup>43</sup> The Mughals developed hunting into a ritualised activity, laden with political meaning and to symbolise authority. Numerous paintings and memoirs exist about particular hunting events and the political prestige that being a good hunter brought. For example, on 26 February 1634 Shah Jahan chose to hunt at Palam hunting grounds. The *padshahnamah*<sup>44</sup> recorded what happened in celebratory detail:

'The procession left Nurgadh and reached the hunting grounds of Palam, where descent was made to the imperial buildings that had been built in that area. For four days in that delightful spot the *Padshah* indulged in hunting and bagged much game. In one day, he himself shot forty black antelope...and not one needed a second shot. This of course occasioned astonishment in all'.<sup>45</sup>

The hunt denoted ruler ability to overcome 'noxious animals': a term used by Jahangir for a huge lion he killed near the fort of Mandu. The success or failure of a hunt on the eve of a major military expedition was taken as an omen of what lay ahead.<sup>46</sup>

## 5.2 Marathas

Post Mughal rule, there is little subsequent record of the area's use until the early-mid nineteenth century. However, as evidence from other regions indicates, most successor rulers sustained and enhanced control of forest utilisation to preserve locations for elite *shikars*:<sup>47</sup> for example, from 1783 the Talpur Mirs of Sindh undertook a programme of afforestation near the Indus to serve as hunting reserves, and many, such as those near Karachi, had walls around them to keep out intruders.<sup>48</sup>

Certainly after 1804, when the Madhav area was captured by a Maratha chief, *Maharaja*<sup>49</sup> Daulat Rao Scindia,<sup>50</sup> and constituted as part of the Gwalior Residency, it quickly became the new ruling dynasty's most popular hunting reserve. Evidence also indicates the hunt's increasing appropriation to entrench the dynasty's strength, and thus legitimacy to rule. For example, the British Viceroy Lord Hardinge, in a speech delivered on his visit to Gwalior in 1915, talks about the late Maharaja Jayavi Rao Scindia<sup>51</sup> as militaristic and obsessed with

‘strength of rule’.<sup>52</sup> He also elaborates on his hunting ability and in doing so points to the perceived relationship between hunting and power:

‘His [the late Maharaja] love for military display and the hunt grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength...The feeling of order and security which pervades...is a substance – a silent working of power never attained under any previous rule’.<sup>53</sup>

The Scindias became increasingly renowned for their enthusiasm for exclusionary *shikargahs*.<sup>54</sup> In 1908, a British official, in a working plan for the Central Provinces, describes a Scindia *shikargah* in Sagar and comments more generally on the enthusiasm that the Scindias in particular had for the hunt.<sup>55</sup>

Thus from at least the early nineteenth century, the Madhav area will have been subject to exclusionary measures that limited peasant access, concurrently facilitating elite-only leisure and the exertion of Maratha political authority.

### **5.3 British colonial period**

Strict imposition of exclusion at Madhav, however, began with colonial influence in Gwalior state, and the related promulgation of liberal politico-economic policy which the British brought.

In 1854, 11 princely states (including Gwalior), formerly members of the Central India Agency, entered into direct treaty engagement with the British.<sup>56</sup> While domestic colonial legislation did not apply directly in Gwalior, evidence suggests that western politico-economic policy and the presence of a new alien elite had considerable impact on meaning and use of nature at Madhav.

Soon after Gwalior entered into this treaty engagement with the British, the Madhav area (under Maharaja Madhav Rao Scindia)<sup>57</sup> was put under a much stricter exclusionary regime than ever before. This was so central to Madhav Rao’s rule that he instructed it be continued after his death: ‘Allowances to be paid to experts on forest lands for the safe and strict custody of the forests and hunting grounds of the Gwalior state’.<sup>58</sup> Madhav Rao and his son George Jiwaji Rao’s<sup>59</sup> stringent strategies were also noted by British officials elsewhere in India: in 1934 a former British Conservator of the Forests noted the state’s rigorous protection tendencies and the way in which ‘laws or rules for the protection of wild animals are effectively enforced’.<sup>60</sup> The post-independence decision to name the area after Madhav Rao when it was constituted as a NP commemorates this severity.<sup>61</sup>

The next section considers the politics of such strict exclusion at Madhav during the colonial period, and in doing so, provides further evidence to challenge the common tendency among today’s proponents of exclusion to view NP land simply as a ‘pristine wilderness’ that is now being ‘irrationally’ encroached upon by ‘ignorant’ local people who are oblivious to the value of ‘wilderness’. The Madhav area was not only widely used in the pre-colonial era, but also during the colonial period. As the next section will show, it was increasingly materially transformed, and struggles over access to and control of it continued. British rule complicated and exacerbated these pre-existing struggles. Firstly, the British provided new justifications for exclusion (profit and rebellion prevention) and rejuvenated the elite enjoyment of the hunt. Secondly, they constituted a new racially distinct elite group potentially threatening to Scindia

rule. Absolute control over and access to the land thus became important not only for the Scindias to entrench their power over the peasantry but also to deal with the new alien elite.

***The influence of the British: new and rejuvenated justifications for exclusion:***

Gwalior state was increasingly influenced by rigid notions of absolute property brought by colonial rule.<sup>62</sup> Whilst limits to forest use by peasants characterised Mughal and pre-colonial Maratha operations, no forest appears ever to have been completely closed to local people. Rather, hierarchies of user rights prevailed: an English merchant, Edward Terry, travelling in India during Mughal period found property in game exercised very lightly: 'The whole kingdom as it were a forest', he wrote, 'for a man can travel in no direction but see them, and except it be within a small distance of the king, they be every man's game'.<sup>63</sup> Compared with deer forests in Terry's native England, Mughal regulations both at Madhav and elsewhere in India were fairly fluid. Similarly, pre-colonial Maratha notions of property accommodated some local access, with Gwalior's villagers being allowed to 'cut or burn wood or grass...[almost]...as they pleased'.<sup>64</sup>

By contrast, colonial rule induced ever more private ownership and control of nature by the elite. For example, in 1865 the (first) Indian Forest Act granted the *Raj*<sup>65</sup> formal monopoly over forests in British India, and was later (1878) replaced by even more comprehensive legislation. The ensuing debate during the period between the Acts clearly illustrates the absolutist notions of property that many of the British held: concern lay in the ambiguity about the 'absolute proprietary right of the state'<sup>66</sup> in the first Act, with various members of the colonial bureaucracy deploring the 'unfortunate but irrevocable action of ...[authorities]...in days past' which had allowed forest areas to be open access. Even forests where the state in theory had absolute proprietorship were 'everywhere used by all classes to get what they wanted'.<sup>67</sup> As Dietrich Brandis (then the Inspector-General of Forests to the Government of India) put it 'Act VIII of 1865 is incomplete in many respects, the most important omission being the absence of all provisions regarding the definition, regulation, commutation and extinction of customary rights...[by the state]'.<sup>68</sup> 'The right of conquest', claimed one forester, 'is the strongest of all rights - it is a right against which there is no appeal'.<sup>69</sup>

The 1878 Act imposed almost complete state control over forested nature in British India, vesting the Forest Department with full power to regulate access to government woodlands. Strictly annexationist, the Act obliterated centuries of customary use by rural populations and greatly enhanced the punitive sanctions available to the forest administration, closely regulating the extraction of forest produce and prescribing a detailed set of penalties for law transgression.<sup>70</sup> According to Wilhelm Schlich, (then the Inspector-General of Forests to the Government of India), the boundaries of 'Reserved Forests' (one of three forest categories designated by the Act) were to be 'kept properly demarcated, in order to prevent encroachments and, in the case of forest villages, this is essential to prevent unnecessary damage to the surrounding forest'.<sup>71</sup> The British created a whole legal and governmental apparatus that extended to the state ever greater control over large stretches of forest in *Raj* territories. By the end of the colonial rule, one fifth of this land area was under such absolutist jurisdictional forms.<sup>72</sup>

The colonial Game Regulations of the later nineteenth century further exemplify the increasing prevalence of absolutist notions of property in British India. These created exclusionary game

reserves, institutionalised licensed hunts and outlawed local forms of killing.<sup>73</sup> Some shooting was permitted, but weapons available to, and methods used by, the peasantry, such as trapping, snaring and use of a bow and arrow or muzzle-loader were banned.

In addition, newly emergent colonial conservationist attitudes instigated introduction of wildlife sanctuaries into British India. By 1910, a rhino refuge had been set up in Assam.<sup>74</sup> In 1920 E.P. Stebbing, (an imperial forest officer) proposed the official creation of inviolate sanctuaries for wildlife.<sup>75</sup> In 1935 the first 'All India Conference for the Preservation of Wildlife' was held, advocating the importance of protecting endangered species and formulating controlled sanctuary areas. The first NP was set up in the Ramganga-Dhikala forests in the United Provinces in 1936.<sup>76</sup>

Justifications for colonial exclusionary policies were multiple: the Forest Acts were largely motivated by profit. Nature was to be commodified:<sup>77</sup> privatised, 'produced' for the purposes of sale, and used in a profit-inducing process of exchange. For example, according to Brandis, strict protection of timber forests was to 'manipulate the cycles of regeneration to maximise the reproduction of commercially-valuable species'.<sup>78</sup> The Game Laws and Reserve creations, while in part<sup>79</sup> to conserve wildlife, were largely to sustain hunting as an elite colonial sport. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most British officials, such as the eminent forest officers Stebbing<sup>80</sup> and Eardley-Wilmot,<sup>81</sup> cast their accounts of life in India in the form of sporting memoirs, indicating the popularity of the hunt: Lieutenant Colonel E.G. Phythian-Adams recalls his days of tiger shooting on foot as 'the greatest thrill of all'.<sup>82</sup> Finally, all *Raj* imposed exclusionary policies were to entrench imperial strength and immutability. Exclusion gave British officials greater control over local people: regarding the 1879 debate over additions to the draft General Forest Bill, J. McKee, Assistant Conservator of the Forests in the Central Division, was glad that animals, birds and fish had been included under the term 'forest produce' as this would enable the Department to prosecute *shikaris*<sup>83</sup> when entering the woodlands.<sup>84</sup> Exclusion was also perceived as a tool to limit local rebellion. In Britain uncontrolled forests had long been seen as the abode of robbers, 'lawless squatters, poverty-stricken, stubborn and uncivil'.<sup>85</sup> Troops and settlers in seventeenth century Ireland had cleared forests to deny cover to Irish rebels: 'The bogs and woods', an English soldier admitted, 'are a great hindrance to us and a help to the rebels'.<sup>86</sup> Such sentiments were transferred to the colonial context. Thus the transformation of untamed Indian forests into more controlled exclusionary landscapes was motivated in part by the supposed relationship between exclusion and revolt prevention. Moreover, the hunt could be used symbolically to affirm the virility and hyper masculinity of the colonial power, whilst simultaneously labelling the natives as effete and effeminate. It was revered as the perfect 'image of war without its guilt',<sup>87</sup> and promulgated as 'noble and manly'<sup>88</sup> in comparison with indigenous equivalents. Pertinently, MacKenzie<sup>89</sup> relates the hunt to a *darbar*,<sup>90</sup> with the cult-like purpose of imposing authority over the indigenous people. The hunt was used to portray the British as strong and unique, 'the only true sportsmen in the world'.<sup>91</sup> It gave them symbolic strength over Indians who only engaged in poaching, a 'cruel and unmanly sport...in which no true hunter could take pleasure'.<sup>92</sup> Hunts were deeply symbolic of the rhetoric of empire; of brave white men defending and conquering.

Increasingly, then, in British India peasants were forced from their land to create empty areas that expunged prior local access to, and control over, the land. This enabled the alien elite to generate revenue, create space for sport and entrench their power.

Colonial notions of property and related legislation did not directly apply in Gwalior state. However the *Raj* significantly influenced Scindia approaches. From the mid nineteenth century the Madhav area experienced increasingly strict exclusion for Maratha profit and leisure, and to affirm and reaffirm their power.

For the British, Maharaja Madhav Rao's rule (1886-1925) was seen to have ushered in 'a new and even more remarkable era of progress for the state'.<sup>93</sup> This likely, in part, meant wealth generation: H.F. Prevost Battersby, a journalist accompanying the Prince of Wales (later King George V) on his 1903 visit to India, noted with approval that one of Madhav Rao's main concerns was markets, and that he was a 'sound financier',<sup>94</sup> and Madhav Rao's biographers agree.<sup>95</sup> He invested surplus state funds to provide income for new profit-generating undertakings, one of which was forestry management for which he instituted a compulsory saving.<sup>96</sup> Madhav Rao's daughter-in-law also describes his 'remarkable business acumen'<sup>97</sup> and his use of forest management in part to achieve this. In 1896 Madhav Rao set up Gwalior's first Forest Department predicated on the British model.<sup>98</sup> By 1903 a detailed report which advocated strict forest demarcation in Gwalior was produced.<sup>99</sup> In 1905 Gwalior's first Forest Act was passed. This Act severely cut down the rights of local villagers in all state forests and imposed strict penalties for non-compliance.<sup>100</sup> Part of the area now constituting Madhav was designated 'Reserved Forest' under this Act, leading increasingly to the eradication of local use and occupational rights in the area<sup>101</sup> to make way for nature's commodification under elite ownership. In short then, the Scindias began, from the mid nineteenth century, to introduce rigid notions of property in the form of Forest Acts predicated on the British model. As a result, local use rights were increasingly eliminated.

The Scindias were also obsessed with hunting for sport. Consequently, again running parallel to imperial policy, Game Laws were passed, and ever stricter local exclusion from hunting grounds imposed in Gwalior during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The section of Madhav outside Reserved Forest designation was re-invigorated as the Scindia's main hunting ground, with local people also being increasingly shifted from this area. His two biographers talk of tiger shooting in Gwalior as 'strictly forbidden without the personal written permission of the Maharaja, since he regarded his tigers as a social and political asset to the state'.<sup>102</sup> As Mr B.H. Kotwal, first Conservator of the Forests of Gwalior state, wrote:

'His Highness the Maharaja does not want to witness villagers in his private hunting grounds...boundaries are integral to the management of these forests. Without them, the sport will be destroyed and the forests will be overrun by ignorant local people and they will prosper in an unacceptable fashion...The manpower employed to limit illegal felling must be increased. Penalties must also be imposed when regulations are breached. It is only then that local people will learn to respect authority'.<sup>103</sup>

Photographs from this period point to the area's use as an elite-only hunting ground for their leisure (figures 2 and 3). Later the area's recreational use broadened to include elite-only viewing as well as killing of wild animals. The last Maharani of Gwalior's descriptions of her visits to the area during Madhav Rao's rule illustrate this:

‘I can think of few more enchanting places than this park: it had that freshly minted look of a clean landscape. Here the jungle belonged to the animals and plants and no one else. The only houses within its perimeter were the cottages of the gamekeepers and the stone villa which was our hunting lodge, George Castle...Our cabin on the dam was our private Tree-tops...Seeing the expanses of wild forest was a special treat’.<sup>104</sup>

E.P. Gee’s<sup>105</sup> descriptions of the Madhav hunting ground during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is similar. He describes a viewing lodge built for the exclusive recreation of the Maharaja and his guests where they could sit undisturbed, relax under cover and then watch a tiger at kill.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, again in line with British motivations, both forms of exclusion at Madhav (as a Reserved Forest and as a hunting preserve) were used as ways to reinforce Scindia rule during which the population was ‘kept in check...by fear rather than by affection’.<sup>107</sup> The 1850s was a time of general political turmoil and peasant rebellion culminating in the Great Rebellion<sup>108</sup> of 1857, after which direct rule by the crown replaced that of the East India Company in British India. Moreover, from the mid 1800s, the specific social and economic situation in Gwalior began to degenerate for local people, precipitating unrest. The young Madhav Rao’s British tutor was adamant about the problems that Gwalior increasingly faced: ‘During the late Maharaja’s rule, the state of the peasantry had worsened. I think today’s policy makers would have been very worried by it. The state was not doing much to improve the lots of the peasantry’.<sup>109</sup> This reality continued into Madhav Rao’s rule and after: from 1876 to 1925, northern Gwalior (including the Madhav area) experienced ‘pinching scarcity’,<sup>110</sup> and ‘foodless folk’<sup>111</sup> were numerous, with many people ‘on the verge of starvation’.<sup>112</sup> In 1898 such problems forced Madhav Rao to return to Gwalior ‘in haste’<sup>113</sup> from an official visit to Calcutta to organise ‘special measures against dacoity’.<sup>114</sup> By 1935 poverty was still ‘high and economic conditions...not favourable...[there was much local]...resentment and constant disputes’.<sup>115</sup> Strengthening exclusionary policies were used to prevent this resentment threatening Scindia rule: as the arrangements for the administration of the Gwalior state in the event of Madhav Rao’s death emphasised: ‘the threat of rebellion remains...dense areas of forest must be monitored in a strict fashion...Dense forests can help to harbour rebels’.<sup>116</sup> The perceived connection between stricter exclusion and rebellion control was also described in other documents:

‘For the last several decades this district [Shivpuri] has suffered at the hands of rebels. Dense forests around Shivpuri...were an ideal hiding place for rebels operating often as gangs...The solution to this has been to monitor the boundaries of the dense forests. This must continue. It is hoped that this will solve this long pending problem’.<sup>117</sup>

Exclusion created a monitored landscape, supposedly vital to limit space for social uprising. Moreover, the hunt, which exclusion also facilitated, continued to be appropriated symbolically by the Scindias to impose their power.

Running parallel to policies in British India then, leisure, profit and the desire to solidify Scindia rule over an increasingly resentful peasantry, motivated ever stricter exclusion at Madhav during the colonial period: ever increasing enclosure of the formerly public environment. Part of the area was transformed into a Reserved Forest and the other part

remained an ever more strictly regulated elite hunting reserve. Local people were increasingly erased from the area and were progressively deprived of their land.

***The presence of an alien elite: strengthening exclusion:***

The politics of exclusion during the *Raj* did not only revolve around struggles between the peasantry and the princes over nature's uses. Exclusion was also intricately bound up in Scindia desire to assert independence from the colonial power.

British influence in Gwalior was simultaneously attractive and threatening. The princely rulers partially embraced British presence and its more liberal politico-economic system. However the new alien elite was also a potential threat to princely rule. Preserving well-stocked hunting grounds was increasingly used to dissipate this threat, providing the princes with a tool to negotiate with the British, and in doing so strengthen their control.

The Indian hinterland was rich in game, and Europeans were keen to experience the thrills of chase and hunt. Encounters with big animals like the 'savage tiger' and the 'noble lion' were far more attractive than the routine business of 'expending small shot' on birds.<sup>118</sup> For James Forsyth in 1857, the main attraction of a posting in India 'lay in the splendid field it offered for the highest and noblest order of sport, in the pursuit of the wild and savage denizens of its forests and jungles, its mountains and groves'. It would, he hoped, be 'a welcome change' from the boredom of 'shooting seals in the Shetland Isles'.<sup>119</sup> However, large game rapidly became scarce in British India. Imperial officials then increasingly vied with one another for an invitation to the sportsman's paradise that lay in princely India: 'Tigers were what Gwalior was known for...[in British India]...[all wanted] to come to Gwalior to hunt'.<sup>120</sup> 'For its big game and especially its tigers Gwalior is famous'.<sup>121</sup> *Shikar* seemed often to be the main purpose of British visits to the state. Maintaining strictly exclusionary hunting reserves like Madhav thus gave the Scindias a bargaining tool with which to exert power and authority over high *Raj* officials.

Further, as mentioned above, in this imperial context, hunting was perceived by colonials as intensely related to racial and social status: natives killed for gain, the British shot for glory, with a care for the future.<sup>122</sup> Indigenous hunting without fire arms was cruel and vilified as destructive, while European trophy hunting was a virtuous sport, an affirmation of elite status and a mark of sophistication: 'The country I was in was too civilised for jungle tribes...rather...the Europeanised *shikar* is developed here'.<sup>123</sup> However, when princes retained control over hunting locations, the British were compelled to forge *shikar* relationships, dubbed by MacKenzie as 'social bridges',<sup>124</sup> with these princes if they wanted to use them. In doing so princes retained some measure of social status which may otherwise have dwindled. In 1934, A.A. Dunbar-Brander, a former Conservator of the Forests wrote in an article on the Central Provinces 'As regards the European *and Indian* sportsmen who enter the forest to shoot...the rules are absolutely efficacious, and this type of sportsman does no harm'.<sup>125</sup> As can be deduced from Dunbar-Brander, princely sustenance of strict exclusion in their hunting grounds bought them, from the British perspective, a certain social status that was somewhat higher than that held by other Indians; a status which in turn may have helped to hinder these indigenous princes' rapidly diminishing influence.

Evidence from Gwalior points clearly to this reality: Madhav Rao's British tutor denied ever being able to go tiger shooting at Madhav during the young Maharaja's minority. Why? Because 'tiger shooting in Gwalior increasingly became very much reserved for the great and influential. It wasn't the young men's shoot, it was the Commander-in-Chief's shoot...Tiger shooting in Gwalior was only available to the highest of British officials'.<sup>126</sup> Strict monitoring of the hunting reserve, such that it was only open to the most prominent members of the *Raj*, and then only rarely, became a princely method to limit the waning of Scindia power.

Trips to Gwalior made by the Prince of Wales, the Viceroy Lord Hardinge and the Viceroy Lord Reading also indicate how important princely maintenance of Madhav as a strictly exclusionary hunting reserve was to sustaining indigenous authority in the presence of a new alien elite. Records document the awe that the Prince of Wales held for Madhav Rao due to the 'excellence of *shikar*' that he experienced on his 1905 and 1906 visits to the Madhav area.<sup>127</sup> Lord Hardinge's April 1914 visit also included an excursion to Madhav during which the Viceroy killed the largest tiger ever recorded to have existed in the area: 'One tiger of the biggest recorded size was shot on 11-4-1914 by Lord Hardinge Viceroy of India near Khubat Ghati. The size was 11 foot 6¾ inches'.<sup>128</sup> Records indicate how grateful Lord Hardinge was to Madhav Rao for his hosting this 'marvellous and unprecedented',<sup>129</sup> excursion. The Viceroy even personally thanked Madhav Rao for making him *Bada Laat* or 'Biggest among the Lords'.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, in April 1923 the Viceroy Lord Reading spent a week at Madhav, during which time he is reported to have experienced great shooting adventures engendering in him a dotting gratitude to the Scindias.<sup>131</sup>

Speeches delivered on another of Lord Hardinge's visits to Gwalior give further indication of the importance of these hunting excursions for preserving princely authority. Referring to Maharaja Madhav Rao, the Viceroy said

'We are grateful for your hospitality and kindness...just ten years ago when His Majesty then Prince of Wales visited Gwalior, he said of him...[Madhav Rao]... 'His goal is strength and stability...and to that goal he is striving with all his characteristic energy''.<sup>132</sup>

Such speeches indicate that Scindia relationships with the British were not completely subservient. Lord Hardinge's personal game diary further illustrates this, stating that Madhav Rao extended 'to me on many occasions the most generous hospitality...and provided me with the most wonderful sport'.<sup>133</sup> Hunting trips and subsequent socialising became a central part of the ritual of alliance forged between the British and the Scindias. As a particular incident that occurred during Hardinge's 1914 trip shows, the hunt gave the Scindias a measure of independence and liberation from complete acquiescence: letters written between Mr H. Wood, then the Foreign Secretary to the Resident at Gwalior, and a Mr W.E. Jardine, record that Madhav Rao was permitted by the Viceroy to remove his turban (usually it was forbidden for a native to be bareheaded in the Viceroy's presence) during a feat following a hunt at Madhav: 'Oh, do remove your *pagri*,<sup>134</sup> Your Highness; we're in the camp after all'.<sup>135</sup>

Increasingly, then, the Scindias<sup>136</sup> developed their relationship with the British, in part at least through the ample supply of tigers to which they controlled access. In the context of colonial onslaught, sustaining strict exclusion at Madhav was integral to preserving princely power and to their ability to stand up to the new elite. A *shikar* outing as the guest of a prince was the

dream of all British sportsmen. The Princes were thus able to play ‘the *shikar* card’<sup>137</sup> to sustain some sort of independence from British rule.

In summary, during the pre-colonial era local people were partially excluded from the Madhav area. It was transformed into a hunting ground and used by a Mughal and then later a Maratha elite to fulfil their leisure demands and to consolidate their rule to the detriment of peasant access. The subsequent colonial period initiated a burgeoning of princely desire for profit, an exacerbated demand for spaces of leisure, and strengthened the perceived relationship between exclusion and control over the peasantry. Consequently exclusion at Madhav became stricter, and local people were further forced to relocate.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the increasing colonial influence in Gwalior complicated land struggles in the area as persistent peasant-prince tussles were supplemented by new prince-British ones. Strengthening exclusion at Madhav also corresponds with and relates to these intra-elite tussles.

Antagonisms over contemporary exclusion at Madhav are then not contemporary or ‘irrational’, but rather deeply-rooted in a pre-colonial and colonial history of long-standing struggle among complex social formations over material control and use of the land. Present NP management reifies local space as ‘empty’ and ‘pristine’, when in fact this ‘emptiness’ is illusory and serves only further to provoke long-standing peasant hostility, as their age-old claims to the land continue to be transgressed and their age-old uses of it restricted.

#### ***5.4 The early days of independence***

This final section considers the early post-colonial politics of exclusion at Madhav. It documents dramatic increases in local activity under Nehru’s less hierarchical political regime and, in doing so, provides further, more recent, grounds for my contention that today’s exclusionary policy effaces the area’s historical geography of local human occupation and work. It gives additional context to today’s hostility to Madhav’s exclusionary conservation policy. Rather than being merely contemporary and an ‘irrational’ emotion held by ‘ignorant’ local people, today’s hostility is in fact grounded in a long-standing history of local material use of the land, use that has persistently been violated by different elite groups. I document the rise in local uses of the land when, for the first time in a long period, elite control temporarily waned in the 1950s and 1960s. This helps further to piece together Madhav’s history as one of a land imbued with a local tradition of material use; however, a material use that has, through time, been subject to an array of different autocratic restrictions, the most of recent of which is today’s conservation policy. As such, this section further supports the paper’s central argument that prevailing antagonisms towards MNP are not ‘irrational’ or the result of local lack of education about the importance of ‘pristine wilderness’, but rather strongly linked to present park management’s inaccurate reification of Madhav’s nature as ‘empty’. Portraying the land in this way is misleading when applied to an area that has a long history of human use, and can hardly be described as ‘pristine’.

Soon after British rule ended (14 August 1947) the Scindias relinquished their powers. Gwalior became part of Madhya Bharat state in a newly independent India, governed by Nehru. In 1956, Madhya Bharat was incorporated into the modern state of MP.

Nehru’s democratic socialism prioritised ‘the ending of poverty...and inequality of opportunity’.<sup>139</sup> Thus efforts to end repression and class dependence, and to promote socialist

values, characterised the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>140</sup> While Nehru's government did not seek to abolish exclusionary areas of nature,<sup>141</sup> its early rule was predicated upon a set of socialist principles that opposed inequity and class differentiation which had existed, and later re-emerged. It was a period in which social organisation was in upheaval and the long-standing power of the princely and colonial elite declined. Concomitantly, stringent exclusionary regulations at Madhav relaxed, and local use significantly increased. While constituted as a NP in 1958,<sup>142</sup> this implied little until the national WPA was passed in 1972.<sup>143</sup> Rather during the 1950s and 1960s, Madhav<sup>144</sup> was open access, invaded by the peasantry who engaged in tree felling, wildlife poaching, agriculture and stone quarrying. According to Maharaja<sup>145</sup> George Jiwaji Rao Scindia Alijah Bahadur's wife,

'not even the most fanatical of conservationists could have done more to protect wild animals and forests than the Maharajas...Twenty years after the Maharajas were shorn of their powers, both the tigers and the jungles had vanished, plundered and been vandalised'.<sup>146</sup>

E.P. Gee also comments on the 'excessive poaching' that took place at independence when 'the protection given to Shivpuri by the former Maharajas of Gwalior suddenly ceased',<sup>147</sup> and all subsequent park management plans relay the 'turn of history...[when animal protection]...was reversed, this territory excised for cultivation under the 'Grow More Food' programme and laxity permitted damage of the habitat by local people'.<sup>148</sup>

Exploitation was partly motivated by the area's use for local subsistence and, to a lesser degree, exchange value concomitant with increasing market penetration of rural areas: 'Of course local people used the area when independence came. They needed it to survive'.<sup>149</sup> 'Our people have always been deprived of land. The time after independence gave local people the land that they had always needed to support their families'.<sup>150</sup> 'My father always talks of Nehru as our 'provider of plenty'. We had enough to live in plenty when he came to power'.<sup>151</sup> 20 of 48 lower socioeconomic group FGs conducted mentioned an early post-independence history of stone mining employment in, and other material use of, the Madhav area, and its importance for local survival: 'Fifty to sixty people here were employed by the mines after independence. We got no compensation when the mines were closed'.<sup>152</sup> 'Mine closure was terrible. For years the mines had supported our people'.<sup>153</sup> 'We used the park to get wood when it was allowed. One head-load of wood sold in the market for fifteen to twenty rupees'.<sup>154</sup>

At the same time, it is crucial to note that Madhav's appropriation by local people was also motivated by revenge for long-standing peasant subjugation by elite groups: at independence many Indian citizens rejected 'shooting regulations as a form of colonial restraint and...shot down wildlife everywhere, including sanctuaries and private estates'.<sup>155</sup> At Madhav poaching emerged 'with vengeance'.<sup>156</sup> 'The main enemy of the forest is village man'.<sup>157</sup>

'Shivpuri district was known for its scenic beauty, thick forests and abundance of wildlife. Nature, in fact had been very bountiful in bestowing its favour. But when independence came local man destroyed all that nature gave in such large measure. He wanted to avenge those over whom he had been ruled'.<sup>158</sup>

17 of 24 interviewees attributed this phase in the park's history to revenge for prior suppression: 'Well the land had been sealed off for generations but after 1947 Scindia power was lost...so local people came onto the land to show the Scindias their new found independence'.<sup>159</sup> Increased use of the park area after independence was indicative of 'liberation from repressive princely rule'.<sup>160</sup> Several village FGs agreed: 'Our relatives needed

food and they wanted to show the government that the land should belong to the people'.<sup>161</sup>  
'After independence we could break off our chains and use the land'.<sup>162</sup>

Such evidence gives more recent support for the contention that Madhav's nature has been falsely represented as 'pristine' when in fact, for generations, it has not been 'empty' space. It places in historical context the resentment that local people now have towards the park, and thus the symbolic meaning and significance of 'wilderness' preservation policies as a violation of local land claims. Contemporary conservation policy effaces a historical geography of material transformations of the Madhav area and struggle over and forcible eradication of local people's claims to the land by authoritarian groups. Today's policy is just the most recent of multiple and persistent disruptions to local customary land uses and claims. In the less authoritarian political context of the 1950s and 1960s when Nehruvian rhetoric promoted eliminating traditional hierarchies of power and influence, historic local uses of, and claims on, the land were, for a short period, given scope to be exercised. Antagonisms over today's strict policy of exclusion at Madhav must thus be understood not as 'irrationality' or 'ignorance', but rather be situated in relation to contemporary park management's reification of the park's nature as 'empty'; that is, in relation to a prevailing 'fortress' conservation policy that conceals complex pre-colonial, colonial and also early post-colonial material struggles over and violations of traditional local land use and control.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper has interrogated a particular NP policy, and provided a history of the politics of exclusion operating there, in an attempt to demystify the local antagonism that the park now faces, and in doing so to challenge the arguments so commonly posed by proponents of exclusion. It has explored how Madhav's nature has been 'produced' and 'reproduced' through time, the purposes of this '(re)production', and the different actors controlling it, through the pre-colonial, colonial and early post-colonial eras.

I have argued that the 'pristine wilderness' ideal which drives the park's prevailing exclusionary policy and the local hostility that this policy causes must be understood in the context of the Madhav area's complex history as a focal point for multiple material transformations, social relations, aspirations and identities. Over time different configurations of exclusion at Madhav have shaped a landscape to serve the varying demands of fractured elite groups, yet consistently in ways that have infringed upon local land use traditions there. Today's park policy is then just the most recent example of a long-standing tendency for diverse elite groups to (re)make Madhav's nature in a way that erases competing local alternatives. It is this sustained and persistent abuse of local land rights throughout Madhav's history that has made the most recent example of exclusion there in the form of a conservation policy so controversial.

Most existing PA conservation narratives are too simplistic, tending to view local hostility to the exclusionary approach as contemporary and linked merely to lack of alternative material resources or local 'ignorance' with regard to the benefits of 'pristine wilderness'. This paper has attempted to add a new dimension to these narratives, setting today's value-based tensions at Madhav within a set of age-old local ideas about nature as a material asset and, moreover, within a long local history of consistent elite restrictions on local land uses there since at least the Mughal period. Attending to a risk of locating agency only at a culture or value-based level

then, to a risk of attempting to understand contemporary exclusion without consideration of historic access to and control over material resources, I have grounded Madhav's contemporary exclusionary policy in its historical-material context. Situating prevailing antagonism within this framework reveals the inadequacy of a park policy that portrays its nature as 'empty' land. Official portrayal of the park as this 'pristine wilderness' hides a complex pre-colonial, colonial and early post-colonial history of different and conflicting material claims on, and uses of, the park area by different groups, erasing the social memory of production and labour integral to the space's history, and thereby creating a severely contested, dehumanised and residual nature. By reifying nature in this way, by dehumanising its past, by rendering invisible the social relations so integral to the Madhav area, by ignoring the historical-material context of today's hostility, contemporary park policy has been able to re-establish the age-old constitution of local people as 'intruders' in their own land and better to portray the struggle as contemporary, and one of 'ignorant' local people who need to be educated about 'wilderness'. As this paper shows, such portrayals are unsophisticated. Rather, local antagonism must be understood as something much more deep-rooted and long-standing. It is a response to a new set of restriction strategies, but a new set that is a reproduction of numerous past configurations of enclosure that have been imposed and re-imposed at Madhav throughout history. It is the regularity with which these enclosures have been instigated that contributes to the severity of today's antagonism.

So, prevailing hostilities towards Madhav's conservation policy relate to the park management's reification of its nature in a way that obscures the area's chequered history of elite/peasant struggle over resource access and control. Today's hostility must be seen in the context of a history at Madhav of multiple and persistent limitations constantly imposed and re-imposed upon local people's long-established uses of the Madhav area as a material asset. For generations, local people have struggled with elite groups over access to this land, land with which they have traditionally had material association. Today, yet again, this association has been impinged upon. Thus, the resultant hostility, far from being 'irrational', in fact flows from yet another limitation imposed upon local land uses. Conservation policy today perpetuates and exacerbates a long-standing, emotional history of relentless elite violation of local land claims.

Whilst all contexts are different and circumstances site-specific, and Madhav has some unusual features for an Indian NP (for example, its regal history and its situation in a highly populated area without a buffer zone), this work helps to illuminate the general. It provides a location-based example of age-old and persistent human intervention in, material use of, and struggle over a supposedly 'untouched' nature. It indicates that in consideration of current PA policy there is a need for much greater understanding, acknowledgment and acceptance of such contextual, material histories.

In consequence, as the recent TTF report so perceptively suggests, PA policies that are based on a false detachment of nature from local people and their activities should be re-evaluated. Recognising that 'pristine wilderness' is a reified notion that conceals a past reality of nature's different material uses, we can begin to develop a 'political theory of nature'<sup>163</sup> focusing upon, rather than concealing, this. This could lead to the formulation of new policies<sup>164</sup> that recognise past uses of the land and perhaps permit some of these, but in a way which properly considers and regulates how they proceed, the consequences that they have and who benefits from them.

Such reflexively constituted policies, rejecting nature as independent of culture, will be more accountable, less implicated in relations of domination, and more sensitive to the diverse desires and concerns of a wider spectrum of social actors. This should result in greater vigilance when ‘producing’ natures in the future, thereby improving environmental, social and material outcomes.<sup>165</sup>

In contending for the re-evaluation of policies that prioritise exclusion, I am not proposing that all forms of regulation of human intervention in nature are necessarily inappropriate in all circumstances. Rather, the re-connection of exclusionary policies to wider questions of history, power, culture and material economics, shows that attempts to preserve a nature which entirely excludes humans are likely to be unrealistic and unworkable. Such attempts erase long-standing traditions of nature’s material transformation, traditions that are integral to its history and how local people today perceive it. Exclusion reifies nature. This transgresses local people’s traditions of land use, causes debilitating antagonisms and is ultimately self-defeating.

## FIGURES

*Figure 1: Reproduction of a poster that two children made jointly for a Wildlife Week competition, indicating their exposure to official promotion of MNP as 'vacant'. No signs of humanity feature within the 'natural' park area.*



Both children aged 13, female.

*Figure 2: Members of the Scindia family and their British visitors after a thrilling hunt at Madhav.*



Source: MNP Information Centre.

*Figure 3: Lord Curzon and Madhav Rao with their tigers posing in court dress.*



Source: Scindia 1985.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> IUCN 1994:no pagination.

<sup>2</sup> Kothari et al. 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Kothari 2002:3.

<sup>4</sup> Brockington 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Government of India 2005:100.

<sup>6</sup> Government of India 2005:101.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Thapar 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Schaller 1967 onwards.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Chundawat et al. 1999.

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- <sup>10</sup> See ISRO 1998 for Madhav's biodiversity characteristics; for biogeographic zone information see Rodgers et al. 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Bull et al. 1926:5.
- <sup>12</sup> Gee 1964:62.
- <sup>13</sup> All the other villages that historically were situated within the park have now either been deserted or formally relocated, and all local use, land and residence rights extinguished. For example, in 1999 Ballarpur was relocated under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Beneficiary Oriented Scheme for Tribal Development, and ninety families (c.70 per cent Adivasi), the majority of whom were historically almost completely dependent upon the park for survival, were moved to 2km outside its boundary.
- <sup>14</sup> For more background statistical information see Shivpuri District Statistical Booklet 1999, MNP Report 2001.
- <sup>15</sup> Neumann 1998:9.
- <sup>16</sup> For biological and social constructivist works on nature that strongly contest this notion of 'pristine wilderness' in terms of its facts and its intricate relationships with society see e.g. Nash 1982, Smith 1984, Gomez-Pompa et al. 1992 cited in Saberwal et al. 2001, Cronon 1995, Grant et al. 1998 et al.
- <sup>17</sup> Management Plan for Madhav National Park, Shivpuri 1989-90 to 93-94:1, emphasis added.
- <sup>18</sup> Madhav National Park Director's Report 2001:37, emphasis added.
- <sup>19</sup> Madhav National Park: A Guide 1990:9, emphasis added.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview 5: Member of MNP Governing Body.
- <sup>21</sup> See chapter IV section 19 to 26A (both inclusive except clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 24) - The WPA 1972 as amended 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> See Jansatta (local newspaper) 23 June 1987.
- <sup>23</sup> See Beazley 2003.
- <sup>24</sup> Focus Group (FG) 31 (part of previous research 2002).
- <sup>25</sup> See e.g. Kothari et al. 2000, Panjwani 2000, Thapar 2000, Karanth 2001, Saberwal et al. 2001, Saberwal et al. 2003 et al.
- <sup>26</sup> At present, the debate over exclusion is far less developed in India than it is in Africa for example. See e.g. McNeely et al. 1984, Turton 1987, West et al. 1991, Kemf 1993, Peluso 1993, Western et al. 1994, Ghimire et al. 1997, Colchester 1998, Neumann 1998, Hulme et al. 1999, Adams et al. 2001 et al.
- <sup>27</sup> For examples of India-focused research see e.g. Agarwal 1985, Kothari et al. 2000, Sarkar 2000, Hiremath 2001, Saberwal et al. 2001. For non-India specific research see e.g. McNeely et al. 1984, Anderson et al. 1987, Hough 1991ab, West et al. 1991, Kemf 1993, Western et al. 1994, Ghimire et al. 1997, Hulme et al. 1999, Brockington 2002, Jeanrenaud 2002, Geisler 2003. For synopsis see e.g. McCarthy 2002.
- <sup>28</sup> See e.g. Anderson et al. 1987, Weismantel 1988, Croll et al. 1992ab, Apffel Marglin et al. 1993, Kemf 1993, Peluso 1993, Redclift et al. 1994ab, Moore 1996, Peet et al. 1996, Rocheleau et al. 1996, Zimmerer 1996, Robbins 2000, Hiremath 2001, Koziell 2001 et al.
- <sup>29</sup> There are a few exceptions to this. See Guha 1983, 1989, Guha et al. 1989, Gadgil et al. 1992, Rangarajan 1996 for historical accounts of material struggle over land access in India.
- <sup>30</sup> Castree et al. 1998.
- <sup>31</sup> More detail on methodology, partiality and research ethics is available from the author on request. This study preserves anonymity by excluding identifying participants' particulars. Time constraints limited the use of more in-depth ethnographic techniques, but the research spanned a sufficient period to construct some relations of 'researcher'/'researched' trust, and to avoid the heavily-criticised 'parachute in' model (see e.g. Adams et al. 1997, Campbell 2001, Kapoor 2001 et al.).
- <sup>32</sup> There is some evidence of exclusionary policies in ancient Indian law: For example, in about 242 B.C. the Emperor Asoka's 5th pillar edict gave protection to fish, animals and forests (see Thapar 1998), and the formation of *abhayaranya* (inner sanctuaries) is mentioned in Kautilya's Arthashastra written around 300 B.C (see Gupta 1998). However analysis of such ancient history in the Madhav area is beyond the scope of this study.
- <sup>33</sup> Emperor.
- <sup>34</sup> Bull et al. 1926.
- <sup>35</sup> Bull et al. 1926.
- <sup>36</sup> Moosvi 1987.
- <sup>37</sup> Bernier 1891:375 cited in Ali 1927 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>38</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89, Bull et al. 1926.
- <sup>39</sup> Akbar's biographer.

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- <sup>40</sup> The Gwalior State Gazetteer cited in Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89:1. See also Bull et al. 1926.
- <sup>41</sup> Cited in Rangarajan 2001.
- <sup>42</sup> Royal hunt.
- <sup>43</sup> Ali 1927 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>44</sup> Official record.
- <sup>45</sup> Cited in Rangarajan 2001:11.
- <sup>46</sup> Rangarajan 2001.
- <sup>47</sup> Hunts.
- <sup>48</sup> Hughes 1876 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>49</sup> Male princely ruler.
- <sup>50</sup> Maharaja Daulat Rao Scindia ruled from 1794-1827.
- <sup>51</sup> Maharaja Jayavi Rao Scindia ruled from 1843-1886.
- <sup>52</sup> Speeches delivered by his Highness the Maharajah Scindia and his Excellency the Viceroy: Gwalior's Tribute to its Illustrious Late Maharaja 1916:2.
- <sup>53</sup> Speeches delivered by his Highness the Maharajah Scindia and his Excellency the Viceroy: Gwalior's Tribute to its Illustrious Late Maharaja 1916:2.
- <sup>54</sup> Hunting reserves.
- <sup>55</sup> Somers Smith 1908 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>56</sup> Government of India Archives Guide to the Records, part X A to K: Residencies, Their Predecessor and Successor Bodies (1756-1954).
- <sup>57</sup> Maharaja Madhav Rao Scindia ruled from 1886-1925.
- <sup>58</sup> His Highness the Maharaja of Scindia Embodying his Aims, Objectives and Instructions in Carrying out the Administration of the State after his Death 1925: no pagination. Madhav Rao was succeeded by a minor: George Jayaji Rao Scindia. Thus detailed arrangements had to be made by Madhav Rao for the administration of the state during his son's minority.
- <sup>59</sup> Maharaja George Jiwaji Rao Scindia ruled from 1925-1961.
- <sup>60</sup> Dunbar-Brander 1934:1.
- <sup>61</sup> MNP Director's Report 2001.
- <sup>62</sup> Detailed research conducted in the Central Provinces supports this proposition that colonial rule brought to India a new notion of absolute property (Rangarajan 1995, 1996).
- <sup>63</sup> Terry cited in Foster 1921:296-297 cited in Rangarajan 2001.
- <sup>64</sup> Bull et al. 1926:130.
- <sup>65</sup> British rule in India (1858-1947).
- <sup>66</sup> Baden-Powell 1875: no pagination cited in Gadgil et al. 1992:124.
- <sup>67</sup> Baden-Powell 1875: no pagination cited in Gadgil et al. 1992:124.
- <sup>68</sup> Brandis 1869: no pagination cited in Gadgil et al. 1992:124.
- <sup>69</sup> Amery 1875:27 cited in Gadgil et al. 1992.
- <sup>70</sup> See Gadgil et al. 1992.
- <sup>71</sup> Schlich 1883:12.
- <sup>72</sup> Rangarajan 2001.
- <sup>73</sup> See e.g. Anon 1888.
- <sup>74</sup> See e.g. Anon 1905 envisaging this.
- <sup>75</sup> Stebbing 1920.
- <sup>76</sup> Saberwal et al. 2001.
- <sup>77</sup> There is no one essential reading of the characteristics that nature takes on when it becomes a capitalist commodity. (For an interesting analysis of the range of different things that contemporary neo-Marxist analysts mean when they refer to nature's commodification see Castree 2003) In this paper, following Polanyi 1944/2001, I use the term commodity to mean an object (nature in this case) that has been 'produced' primarily or exclusively for the purposes of sale for profit. It is a privatised entity that has exchange value and is thus subject to supply and demand.
- <sup>78</sup> Brandis 1876:3-4.
- <sup>79</sup> Increasingly so later.
- <sup>80</sup> Stebbing 1911/2001, 1920.
- <sup>81</sup> Eardley-Wilmot 1910 cited in Rangarajan 1996.

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- <sup>82</sup> Phythian-Adams 1948:125.
- <sup>83</sup> Village-based hunters.
- <sup>84</sup> McKee 1879:3.
- <sup>85</sup> Thomas 1983:194-195 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>86</sup> McCracken 1971:28 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>87</sup> Surtees 1843 cited in MacKenzie 1988:186.
- <sup>88</sup> Johnson 1822:48 cited in MacKenzie 1988.
- <sup>89</sup> MacKenzie 1988.
- <sup>90</sup> A state reception given by an Indian prince for a British visitor or one given for an Indian prince by his subjects.
- <sup>91</sup> Dunlop 1860:2 cited in MacKenzie 1988.
- <sup>92</sup> Armitage Sterndale 1887 cited in Bennett 1984:74 cited in MacKenzie 1988.
- <sup>93</sup> Investiture of His Highness Maharaja of Scindia of Gwalior with Full Powers Her Majesty's Good Wishes Conveyed to the Maharaja 1895:no pagination.
- <sup>94</sup> Prevost 1903:no pagination.
- <sup>95</sup> Bull et al. 1926.
- <sup>96</sup> Maharaja Madhav Rao Scindia policy file.
- <sup>97</sup> Scindia 1985:122.
- <sup>98</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89.
- <sup>99</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89.
- <sup>100</sup> Bull et al. 1926.
- <sup>101</sup> Evidence of peasant resentment of the imposition of such policies at Madhav further points to elite neglect of pre-existing uses of the land: early documents regarding Gwalior state forest policy suggested that 'The Forest Rules have failed with regard to some purposes for which they were intended...partly through an entire misconception of their intention by people in general' (Progress Report of Forest Administration in Gwalior 1908:no pagination). This quote is also similar to others in 1909 and 1910: 'people found the rules unjust and partisan...' (Progress Report of Forest Administration in Gwalior 1911:no pagination). Such reports suggest a growing resentment of elite domination of Gwalior's forests to the detriment of traditional local land uses.
- <sup>102</sup> Bull et al. 1926:241.
- <sup>103</sup> Kotwal 1906:no pagination.
- <sup>104</sup> Scindia 1985:153-154.
- <sup>105</sup> A British born naturalist, an expert in Indian flora and fauna and later an influential advisor to government post independence and a member of the Executive Committee of the Indian Board of Wildlife.
- <sup>106</sup> Gee 1964.
- <sup>107</sup> Bull et al. 1926:11.
- <sup>108</sup> Or, as the British termed it, 'the Indian Mutiny'.
- <sup>109</sup> Robinson no date:43.
- <sup>110</sup> Bull et al. 1926:3.
- <sup>111</sup> Bull et al. 1926:3.
- <sup>112</sup> Bull et al. 1926:3.
- <sup>113</sup> Bull et al. 1926:135.
- <sup>114</sup> 'Dacoit', from the Hindi word 'dakait', means one of a class of murderous robbers who act in gangs. Quotation: Bull et al. 1926:135.
- <sup>115</sup> Gwalior Minority Administration Report 1935:no pagination.
- <sup>116</sup> Arrangements for the Administration of the Gwalior State, in the Event of a Minority on Maharaja Madhav Rao Scindia's Death 1917:no pagination.
- <sup>117</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89:18.
- <sup>118</sup> Spry 1837:216-217 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>119</sup> Forsyth 1876-8:60-61 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>120</sup> Scindia 1985:110.
- <sup>121</sup> Bull et al. 1926:239.
- <sup>122</sup> For examples of British conceptions of *shikar* versus attitudes to indigenous hunting see e.g. Shakespear 1860, Hardinge 1900, Caton Jones 1906, Pitman 1925, Hall 1936, Phythian-Adams 1948, 1951.
- <sup>123</sup> Beecher 1894:560 cited in Rangarajan 1996.
- <sup>124</sup> MacKenzie 1988:169.
- <sup>125</sup> Dunbar-Brander 1934:3, emphasis added.

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- <sup>126</sup> Robinson no date:31.
- <sup>127</sup> See Bull et al. 1926:150. In 1906, the Prince of Wales stayed for over two weeks at ‘Sipri’ (Bull et al. 1926).
- <sup>128</sup> His Excellency Lord Hardinge’s Visit to Gwalior 1914:no pagination.
- <sup>129</sup> Hardinge 1933:52.
- <sup>130</sup> Scindia 1985:110.
- <sup>131</sup> Kesri Singh 1969:160.
- <sup>132</sup> Speeches delivered by his Highness the Maharajah Scindia and his Excellency the Viceroy: Untitled Speech 1916:3.
- <sup>133</sup> Hardinge no date reproduced in Rangarajan 1999:207.
- <sup>134</sup> Turban.
- <sup>135</sup> Correspondence between Wood and Jardine 1916:no pagination.
- <sup>136</sup> This princely use of hunting grounds as a tool in their relations with the British was not limited to the Gwalior rulers. The princes of Kotah and Bundi for example often also refused British officers permission to shoot tigers in the Aravalli hills (Rice 1857 cited in Saberwal et al. 2001). Saberwal et al. 2001 suggest that the ‘struggle over *shikar* rights’ became a ‘surrogate for warfare’ (Saberwal et al. 2001:14).
- <sup>137</sup> Saberwal et al. 2001:34.
- <sup>138</sup> There is little relevant archival data directly representing peasant perceptions in the past.
- <sup>139</sup> Nehru’s historic address to the new Indian nation cited in Das 2002:28.
- <sup>140</sup> Das 2002. While Nehru did not ultimately fulfill his aims, the period was marked by such rhetoric and considerable socio-organisational change (Damodaran et al. 2000).
- <sup>141</sup> In fact he advocated them for the purposes of animal preservation: Nehru’s forward in Gee 1964 called for more refuges for vanishing wildlife as ‘life would become very dull and colourless if we did not have these magnificent animals and birds to look at and to play with’ (Nehru in Gee 1964:no pagination). Further, during his time in office, the Indian Board of Wildlife was set up (1952) and several of its Resolutions were accepted by the Government of India (Gee 1955).
- <sup>142</sup> By the Madhya Bharat National Parks Act (1955).
- <sup>143</sup> See Chapter IV section 19 to 26A (both inclusive except clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 24) - The WPA 1972 as amended 2001.
- <sup>144</sup> This trend through the 1950s and 1960s was not specific to Madhav. It was apparent to varying degrees all over India (see Approach Paper on Wildlife Conservation Programmes for the Seventh Five Year Plan 1985-90:1).
- <sup>145</sup> Maharaja George Jiwaji Rao Scindia Alijah Bahadur was ruling Gwalior when the Scindias relinquished their powers.
- <sup>146</sup> Scindia 1985:152.
- <sup>147</sup> Gee 1964:61.
- <sup>148</sup> Management Plan for MNP, Shivpuri 1989-90 to 93-94:2.
- <sup>149</sup> Interview 17: Senior Shivpuri District Officer.
- <sup>150</sup> Interview 12: Village Head.
- <sup>151</sup> FG 24.
- <sup>152</sup> FG 38.
- <sup>153</sup> FG 41.
- <sup>154</sup> FG 28.
- <sup>155</sup> Schaller 1967:4. Schaller’s research was on Kanha NP but this park, like Madhav is in MP.
- <sup>156</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89:61.
- <sup>157</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89:27.
- <sup>158</sup> Working Plan for the Shivpuri Division 1974-75 to 1988-89:57.
- <sup>159</sup> Interview 17: Senior Shivpuri District Officer.
- <sup>160</sup> Interview 2: Member of MP Forest Department (Wildlife Wing).
- <sup>161</sup> FG 40.
- <sup>162</sup> FG 26.
- <sup>163</sup> Smith 1996:49.
- <sup>164</sup> For an account of such reflexive policies that could be implemented at Madhav see Beazley 2005.
- <sup>165</sup> C.f. Smith 1996.