

The Tigerland

*Visual Ethnography at
Kanha National Park*

Research Project

Project Report

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CONTENTS

- 1 Why Kanha?
- 2 What is Kanha
- 3 History
- 4 Map
- 5 Experience
- 6 Visual Ethnography
- 7 Methodology
- 8 Subject
- 9 Guides
- 10 No. of days at Kanha
- 11 Tools for study
- 12 Cataloging data
- 13 Fieldwork
- 14 A day in a life of guide

Kanha National Park

**The Kanha National Park is open to visitors
from 1 October to 30 June**

Timings

Morning

Evening

October to 15 February

Sunrise to 12 noon

3 P.M. to sunset

February to 15 April

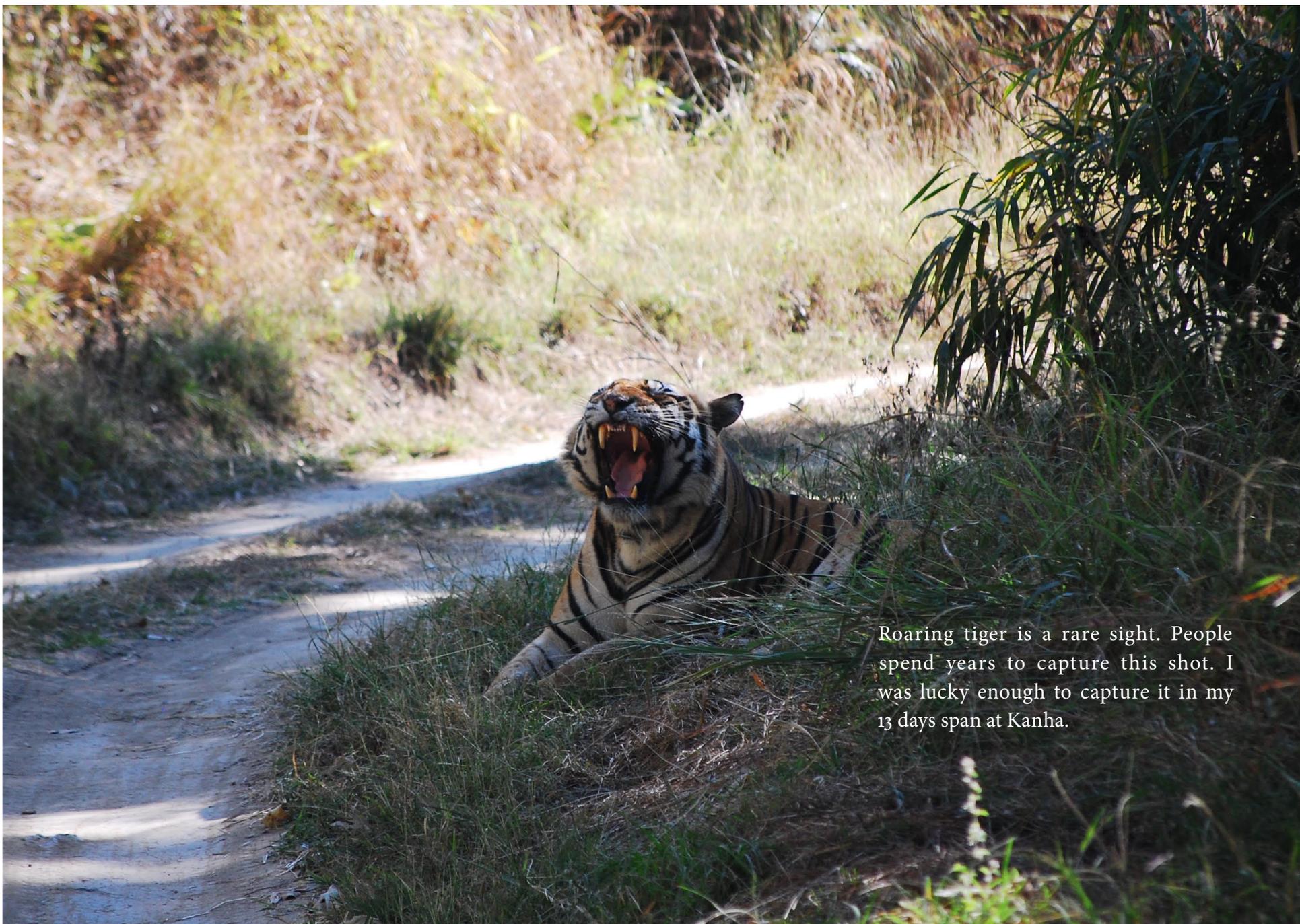
Sunrise to 12 noon

4 P.M. to sunset

April to 30 June

Sunrise to 11 noon

5 P.M. to sunset



Roaring tiger is a rare sight. People spend years to capture this shot. I was lucky enough to capture it in my 13 days span at Kanha.

WHY KANHA?

WHEN I was a kid I saw the movie named “*The Jungle Book*” by Disney. The movie had a character called Sher Khan (Tiger), the king of the jungle. Sherkhan was a villain. He wanted to kill Mowgli, who was living with the wolves in the jungle. Sherkhan believed that humans and animals couldn’t live together. I was so mad at Sherkhan, that I wanted to turn into Mowgli and fight evil Sherkhan with my bare hands and throw him out of the jungle.

I thought that Sherkhan was really a stupid tiger who hated human beings coming into the jungle. After all, that’s what we had read in most of the children’s stories— that humans and animals can live together in peace in harmony. But as I passed my teenage I came to realize that Sherkhan was actually right, not in his motive of killing our nice hero Mowgli, but on the issue of animals and humans living together.

We humans are like termites, wherever we spot a land, we start building our homes. We live on burning sands, we live on the snow covered lands, we live in tropical rain forests. We reside on all the possible space that earth has provided. But humans are not the only existing species on the planet, there’s another world that exists—the world of animals. We are the smarter ones so we can learn to survive anywhere, but it is not same with the animals. Survival is becoming a tough task for them. We are encroaching their lands, poaching their families. Many species of animals are on the verge of extinction and the tiger is one of them.

I selected my topic as visual ethnography on Kanha National Park because I really wanted to find out how people and animals co-existed. For this, I spent 13 days at Kanha, talking to locals, guides, gypsy drivers, villagers around Kanha. I spent time at machan, looking at birds and animals. I spent time walking under the sky full of stars. I spent time riding a gypsy in the jungle. I spent time with the nature.

My study is a collection of the experience, stories, pictures and memories of the park, its people and animals.

WHAT IS KANHA?



KANHA is a breathtaking creation of nature. In the beautiful forest you look up, and the green canopy of the tall sal trees meets your eyes with tiny blue patches of the sky showing through the openings. As your eyes wander downwards, a flitting racket-tailed drongo, a black-headed oriole streaking by like a flash of gold and the cry of a lesser serpent eagle catch your attention. On the ground, grasses and shrubs harbour, half-hidden from your view, chital, gaur and sambar. Even if you do not see a tiger, probably a tiger has seen you as you drive through the forest.

The emerald green meadows, valleys densely wooded with thick stands of sal, hill slopes covered with mixed forests of saja, bija, tendu and bamboo, and the plateaux with grasslands scattered with stunted tree growth are the homes of the spectacular wildlife of Kanha.



Though famous all over the world for the awe-inspiring tiger, Kanha is home to 43 species of mammals, almost 300 species of birds, over 26 species of reptiles, and innumerable species of insects. The amazing diversity of plants includes around 600 flowering species—ranging from the majestic sal trees that shoot up a maximum of 100 feet into the sky, to ground-hugging grasses.

And then there is the tiger! The tiger must be seen to believe why it is the king of the jungle, for its mystique no words can describe, nor can cameras capture.



HISTORY

THE present Kanha National Park is a part of the Central Indian Highlands. It is rich in forest and wildlife. Between the year 1947 and 1951, the Maharaj Kumar of Vijayanagaram shot 30 tigers around Kanha. Large scale hunting of tigers and other animals reduced the number of animals considerably, which led to increasing the area of Kanha Sanctuary and subsequently to the notification of 252 sq km area as a national park on 1 June 1955. The area of Kanha National Park was increased to 318 sq km in 1964, then to 446 sq km in 1970 and finally 940 sq km in 1976.

This park, which is among the first nine tiger reserves launched under Project Tiger, is one of the finest wildlife protected areas not only in India but also in the world. Besides harbouring the majestic tiger, the rare and handsome hard ground barasingha and a wide spectrum of typical floral and faunal species of the Central Indian Highlands, the spell-binding grandeur of the national park has to be seen to be admired. The lush rolling grassy expanses, the spectacular groves of majestic sal trees and the innumerable grazing herbivores amid the soothing sounds of the jungle present a most unforgettable panorama.

A wide range of conservation practices executed by the dedicated foresters over the last four decades have led to exemplary results. Some of the management inputs that need mention are the relocation of villages, the maintenance of grasslands, the initiation of eco development activities and the upgradation of the park's interpretation facilities.



Core Zone

940 sq km

Buffer Zone

1009 sq km

Elevation

450 m to 900

Annual Rainfall

400 mm

Temperature

Summer: 43° C to 11° C

Winter : 29° C to -2° C

EXPERIENCE

As we entered the gate, I realized that my stay in Kanha was going to be one of the most memorable times. I was far away from the city, spending my time in wild. I rented a bicycle for Rs. 30 a day. As visitors were allowed to go inside the park only on government certified gypsies, I used to travel along the outside area of the park on my bicycle. While wandering around the jungle I met many interesting people.



LIKE Farooq and his friends. They have been living in Kanha for the last 18 years and had recently spotted a tiger. Farooq wants to be a forest guide, as he doesn't have any other option. He left school after the 10th class because of the absence of higher secondary schools.



EXPERIENCE



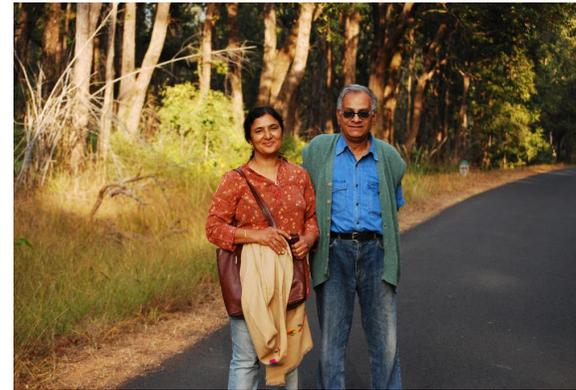
DHAN SINGH works as maintenance worker in the park. His work is to repair bridges in the jungle. Alone in the jungle, he works for 6-8 hrs. He has no fear of wild animals.



A **LADY** from Chapri village, who went to vote in the recent rajya sabha elections. She had pressed all the buttons on the voting ballot.



SHANKAR, a young kid at the tea stall. He has never been to school and has no parents. He lives at the chai stall. He visits his grandmother once in a month. He earns Rs.1000 a month. Shankar wishes to see tiger once in his life.



A **VERY** sweet couple, Mr and Mrs Bhatt. I looked like their son-in-law.

EXPERIENCE



ASHOK is a senior guide in the park, who owns a souvenir shop. He is the only guide who is fluent in English..



I MET the frightened villagers of Sautiya. Some days back a tiger had killed a villager's cow and to take revenge they had mixed poison in his kill. The tiger came back, ate the left-over kill and died. This incident alarmed the forest officials and they were forced to take strict measures. Villagers were arrested on the charge of killing a tiger. Every male member was put in the jail.

EXPERIENCE



MR. KARTHIKEY is a forest guard who was attacked by a bear. This was one of the most tragic incidents of the park. His survival is still believed to be a miracle. He was attacked by a sloth bear while he was patrolling in the park. The bear ripped his chest apart with its paw and bit off his skull. He laid unconscious for one whole night as there was no communication to the authorities. Later he was taken to local Mandla hospital, then to Jabalpur and finally to the Breach Candy hospital in Mumbai. Now he looks after the forest department guest house.



JEEVAN is the gate keeper of Kanha. He is one of the most experienced people at Kanha. He was a guide in his initial days but then took up the government job of a wireless communicator. Some years back he got promoted.

EXPERIENCE



MR. A.P. SINGH is a senior guide. Singhji was a contractor but due to financial crisis he was forced to leave his job. He became a forest guide. His children have come many times to the park but they hate his profession. His wife is a school teacher.



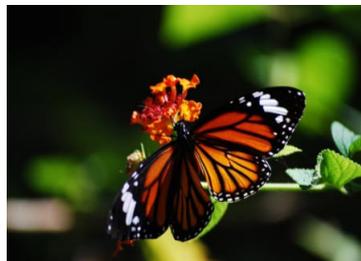
MACHAAN was one of my favorite places to sit and observe the jungle. I used to stare at the vast and lush green jungle around me. I used to watch birds, and sometimes catch a glimpse of some wild animal. The whole experience of sitting at the machaan is beyond explanation.



EXPERIENCE

I went inside the park seven times—five times with the same driver and guide. Each ride was an adventure ride with a thrill of seeing a wild animal sitting at every turn. I saw tiger, gaur, sambhar, barasingha, jackal, wild dog, cheetal, wild boar, elephants and many birds. I went trekking in the buffer area of the park. Once I was accompanied by Kamlesh and twice by Dharampalji. I had a brief encounter with a wild boar and a jackal when I was on foot. I almost bumped into a tiger (that too twice), when I was trekking in the area behind my lodge. I was so frightened that I could actually hear my loud heartbeats. My 13 days in the jungle were as adventurous as the jungle itself.

VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY



VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY explores visual techniques and theories as key elements in the study and representation of culture. Ethnography is a genre of writing that uses fieldwork to provide a descriptive study of human societies. Ethnography is a methodology, an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society. Rather than being a method for the data collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge about society, culture and individuals that is based on the ethnographer's own experience. The visual techniques may be photography, painting, sketching and other media to depict the research visually.

Visual ethnography is not a support for text, it is a text in itself. The term visual ethnography is ambiguous. It relates to both the study and use of visual media and material, but also the incorporation of a visual lens into mainstream ethnography.



METHODOLOGY

It's an approach to experience, interpret and represent people and its culture. It's not a method of data collection; it's a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individual) which is based on the ethnographer's own experiences. Here I have aimed to offer versions of my experience of reality that are as truthful as possible to how the knowledge was produced to me. There is no simple answer or definition of what it is that makes an activity, image, text, idea or piece of information 'ethnographic'. No single action, artifact or representation is essentially in itself 'ethnographic', but will be defined as such through interpretation and context.

After a thorough of study of various subjects at Kanha National Park, my research directed to guides of Kanha. I chose to take 'guides' as my subject of ethnographic research because I found the community of guides very unique and interesting.

SUBJECT



My initial subjects of exploration were Kamlesh (gypsy driver), Shankar (tea stall worker), entrance gate, gatekeeper Jeewan, guides, wildlife, machaan, villages around Kanha, forest guards and maintenance workers in the park.



After 4 days of thorough study of the park and its people, aim of my research became clearer. I directed my research to the guides of Kanha. I started meeting guides on a daily basis. I used to hang around with the guides, sit with them sipping hot tea at bai's stall, talk about politics, sports, and current affairs. I used to listen to their stories of the jungle, their childhood and the families. Many a time they cooked food for me. Since it is a small community there's a special bonding between them. So after spending quality time with the guides, they became friendlier to me and it was easy for me to click pictures of their daily routines.

SUBJECT

I met Dharampal ji, one of the most experienced guides at the park. He has been working as a guide for the last 20 years. Then I spent most of my time with him, studying his daily routine, his skills inside the jungle, his knowledge and his background.

Other than him I met Pandey ji (Dharampalji's roommate), Ashok Ji, Jeewan Ji (Gatekeeper) and Kamlesh, who was a guide before.



Dharampalji, Guide



Kamlesh, Gypsy driver

GUIDES



WE were rushing towards the Nakti Ghati, “I am telling you that we will find tigers at the Lakadghadda road, so just keep moving”, said Dharampalji. There were 40-50 jeeps standing in a line to enter the park, but our's was the 1st in line. Dharampalji had earlier asked me to come a little early so that we would be the 1st to enter the park. “I will take you to the place where I know tiger would be”. Dharampalji is one of the oldest and most experienced guides in Kanha National Park. I trusted him completely. He was excited like a small child, as if he is about to see a tiger for the 1st time. I wondered how this guy has the same excitement as he had 20 years ago when he joined the park as a guide. We were rushing towards the place, and everyone thought we were fools, as that area has run out of tigers, but Dharampalji was eager like a 6 year old kid. We were there at Lakadgaddha road and looking everywhere for the royal cat but there was none. Our enthusiasm came down, turning off my camera; I sat back on the seat.

GUIDES



SUDDENLY Kamlesh (gypsy driver) shouted “tiger!!!... tiger!!!” I jumped off my seat and saw a big male tiger sitting just 10 metres away from me. My heartbeat went up and I felt like shouting loudly “Yes... I have conquered the park... I am in front of the king, looking into his eyes”. After 10 minutes the king got up and went inside the bushes, and adding to our amazement we spotted a tigress far away, coming towards us. She came very near to us and diverted from her path to the king’s path. Both of them disappeared, but gave us the most memorable moment of the park. Dharampalji was so happy, ready to spill tears of joy. I asked him “Why are you so excited? You must have seen hundreds of tigers”, he replied “that is the charm of the tiger, and that is what has kept me for 20 years in the park”.



GUIDES



I HAVE been to many national parks but I always find Kanha's guides more lively and dedicated. Daily they go inside the park with the same happy faces, trying their best to be friends with the tourists and show them the tiger. They keep a tight vigil in the park that no one throws garbage and plastic junk in the park; no one steps down the vehicle as it can be dangerous, and no one makes any noise and disturb the animals. In my opinion guides also play an important role in conservation of wild life. Without good guides there won't be tourism in the park and sadly because of that nobody will care for the park and its animals. They lead a difficult life away from families, with a small salary and with bare minimum resources available to them, but still they are happy and serene, entertaining tourists and enjoying wildlife.



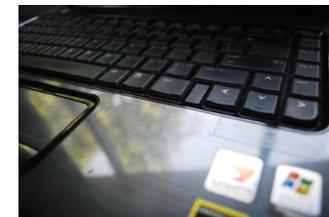
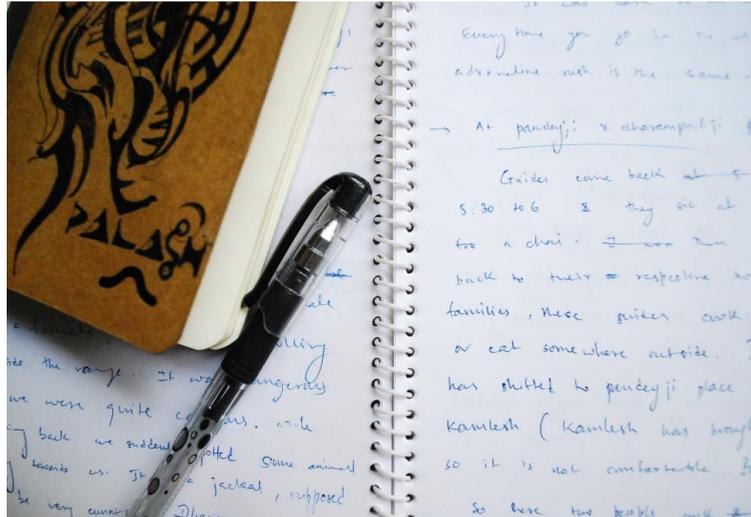
NO. OF DAYS AT KANHA

I REACHED Kanha on 9th December and left back for Raipur on 21st December. My duration of stay at the park was 13 days.

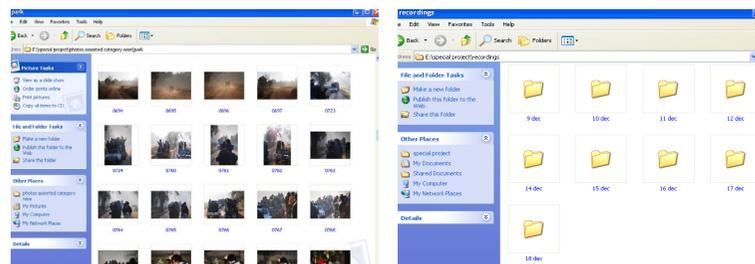
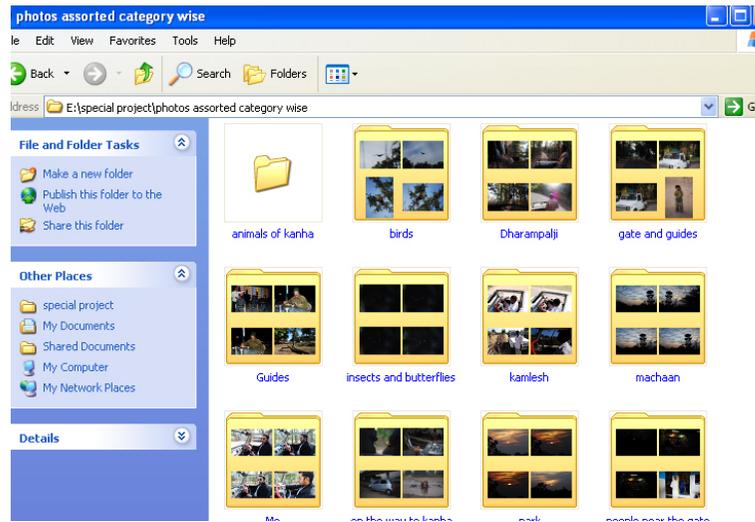
TOOLS FOR STUDY

I HAD my camera Nikon D60 with twin lenses (18-55mm and 55-200mm). For voice recordings I used my cell phone Nokia 5300. I used to transfer files to my laptop. Other than my camera, phone and laptop I had my diary which I used to write on a daily basis. I used to note down the important conversations and sometimes draw the maps of the location.

I clicked lots of pictures of my subjects. At the end of my research I had some 14Gb of photographs with me. I used to sit with people (with the voice recorder in my front pocket) and get involved in their local talks. As time passed, the conversation became friendlier and they started talking without any reservation. So I ended up with a huge collection of voice recordings. My next step was to listen to these recordings and make notes. So daily I used to sit in my room, listening to notes and jotting down the important points in my diary. I also used to carry my diary and make notes then and there itself.



CATALOGING DATA



Morning ride

- Saw a big male tiger, wild dog, jackal, wild boar, barking deer, bison, sambhar, and spotted deer.
- Dharampal told about an incident where he was sitting in a 1st car and how tiger came towards the car as they couldn't move because of the long car of gypsy did not move. He told another incident, how tiger showed away a leopard.
- New director (p Singh) is a good person.

Bhara

- We were traveling in deep woods to get a glimpse of the most marvelous cat species alive "tiger", and suddenly my guide said "Bhara, that must be bhara". I wondered who bhara was. Tiger?, he was a gypsy driver, who was very famous among the tourist. People said that he had god's grace and with him tiger spotting

IMAGES and audio were dumped onto my laptop on a regular basis. Images, sounds and write-ups were categorized according to the date. Then the images were arranged into the following categories:

1. Animals of Kanha

- Barasingha – 126 *photographs*
- Cheetal – 40 *photographs*
- Elephant – 82 *photographs*
- Gaur – 12 *photographs*
- Jackal – 50 *photographs*
- Langoor – 123 *photographs*
- Sambhar – 16 *photographs*
- Tiger – 254 *photographs*
- Wild boar – 5 *photographs*
- Wild Dog – 8 *photographs*

2. Birds – 126 *photographs*

3. Dharampalji – 267 *photographs*

4. Gate and Guides – 155 *photographs*

5. Guides – 26 *photographs*

6. Insects and Butterflies – 92 *photographs*

7. Kamlesh – 70 *photographs*

8. Machaan – 29 *photographs*

9. Me – 89 *photographs*

10. On the way to Kanha – 31 *photographs*

11. Park – 403 *photographs*

12. People near the gate – 55 *photographs*

13. The road – 80 *photographs*

14. Villages – 120 *photographs*

FIELDWORK

My fieldwork includes observation of guides and their daily routine. I spent my time talking to them, taking tour inside the park to understand how they observed the wildlife, clicking pictures of them, recording the important conversations and noting down important points in my diary.

I went to the surrounding villages to observe the people living next to the wild. They told me what they do for living, and when asked about the illegal activities in the jungle they remained silent or tried to change the topic. I met the forest guards and maintenance workers to listen to their interesting stories. I made a friend, Shankar, a kid at the *chai* stall and used to chat with him. I spent time with Kamlesh and Dharampalji, almost like living with them. Kamlesh made me familiar with the people outside park, nearby villages and some inside stories of the jungle. With Dharampalji I experienced the jungle as he experiences it himself every day. He gave me insights on tracing an animal, finding out about the animal by seeing the footprints and finally what to do if an animal attacked. He told me about the birds and the plants of jungle. With him I got to know more about park, its people and animals.

I used to sit at a place and observe the surroundings for a reasonable amount of time and make notes out of it. I spent a good time sitting at *machaan* inside jungle and observing the jungle around me. I could hear the animals—from

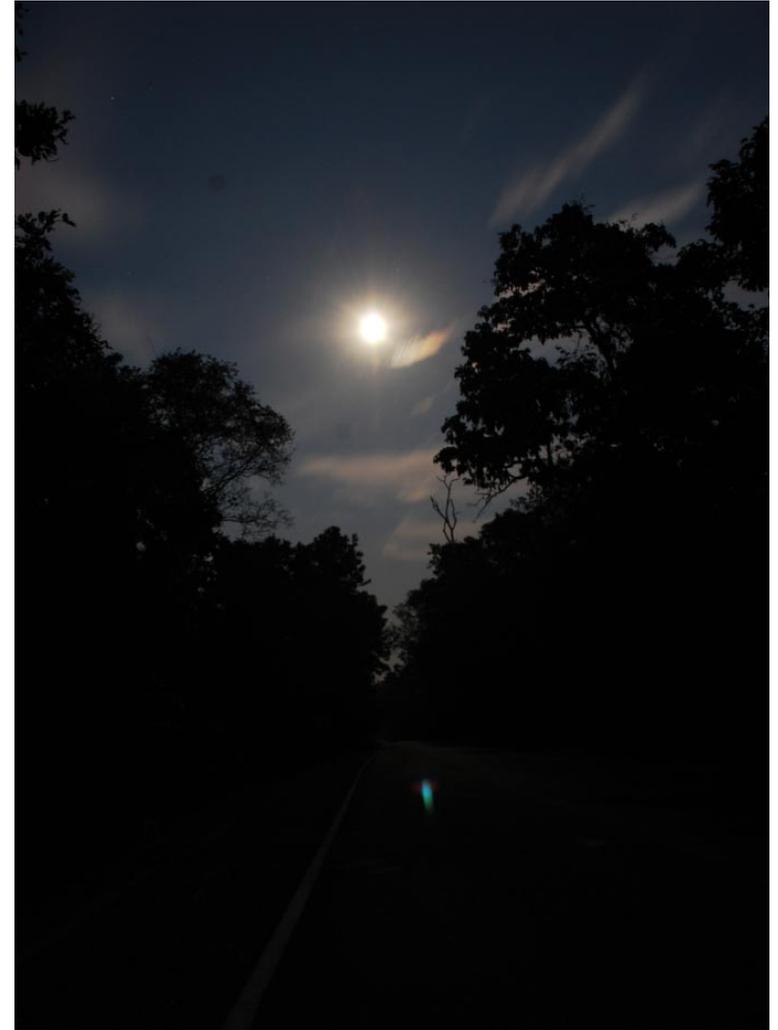
the tiger roar to the cry of the serpent eagle. Every sunset was different from the *machaan*. Till my last day I felt the same thrill sitting there and was always eager to spot a wild animal. Sitting at the park entrance gate was also a nice experience for me, where I met so many guides and people. Sitting there I came to know about many of the interesting stories and incidents that happened with the guides. I came to know about their problems and worries. Listening to their conversations, it felt like I was one of them.

Many a time I went inside the park with guides and gypsy drivers. My aim was to observe the guides and drivers, and their way of observing the jungle. Jungle and its animals were different for me with every trip inside the park. Every time they meant something more.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE

It's **FREEZING** cold outside, moon is still glacial, darkness is still dominating the jungle, and scary howling sounds of animals are audible. Anyone here will prefer to stay in his warm cozy house. But he has to wake up. After all it is his job.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Dharampalji dresses up in his guide uniform and walks 2 kms to the park gate.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



He gets his gypsy token number from the gate (if there are decent amount of tourists). Here starts his journey to the park, an adventure ride for tourists and a daily routine for Dharampalji.

A photograph of a dense forest at dawn or dusk. The scene is characterized by deep shadows and a soft, hazy atmosphere. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating vertical beams of light that illuminate the mist and the trunks of the trees. The foreground is mostly in shadow, with some green foliage and fallen leaves visible. The overall mood is serene and mysterious.

As sun rises up, it brightens the jungle with its golden streaks.
The darkness starts fading away.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



The park looks beautiful, shining golden in color. It is the perfect time to spot wildlife.



A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



As the gypsy passes through the meadows, tourists start looking for the glimpses of wildlife.



An alert *barasighna*, carefully watching out for the predators .



A grown up male gaur.



Wild elephants, playing with dust.

An owlet staring at you.



A photograph of a shrewd jackal standing in a dark, grassy field at night. The jackal is the central focus, with its body angled towards the left but its head turned to look directly at the camera. Its fur is a mix of grey, brown, and tan, with a white patch on its chest. The background is dark and filled with tall grasses and some rocks, creating a sense of a natural, nocturnal habitat. The lighting is low, highlighting the jackal's features against the dark surroundings.

A shrewd jackal trying to hide away from
your camera.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Tourists try to capture a rare moment of the *barasingha* playing in the sun and taking bath on a freezing morning. This specie exists only in the jungles of Kanha.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Tourists start getting familiar with the jungle and its wild animals.



Elephant family is fun to watch.



Crested serpent eagle looking for its prey.



A crane couple.

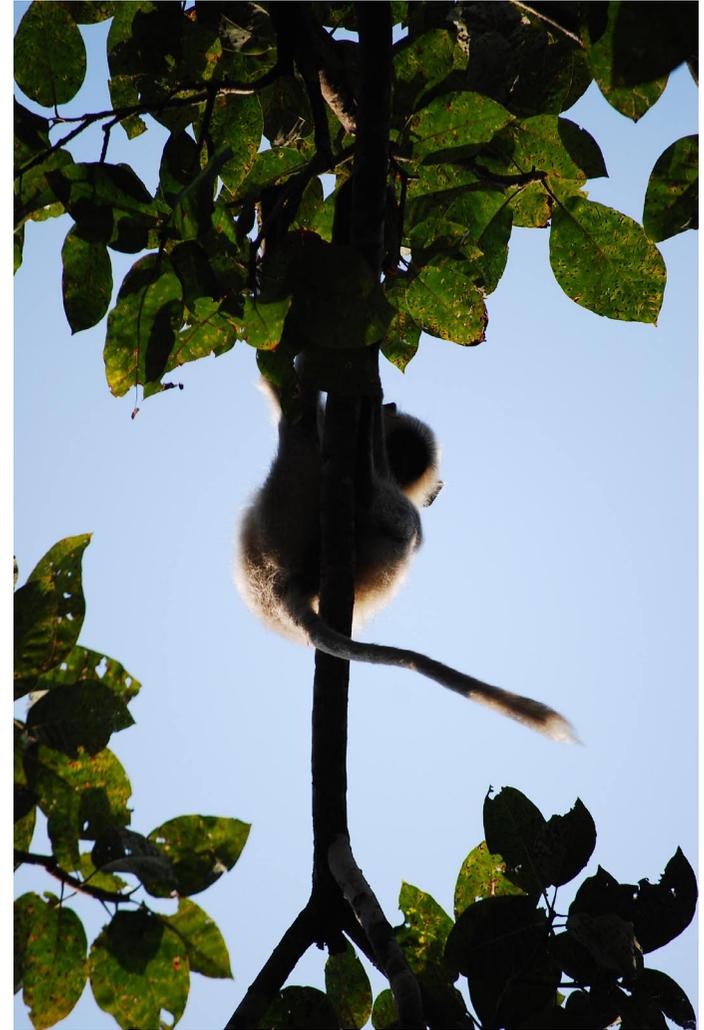
A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Suddenly chitals become alert, start giving alarm calls.



Tiger pug marks are all over the places.



Langoors start giving alarm calls too.

Suddenly there is a silence and the king appears.



A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Tourists as well as dharampalji are awestruck by the magnificent site. Everyone is hypnotized by the beauty of the beast.



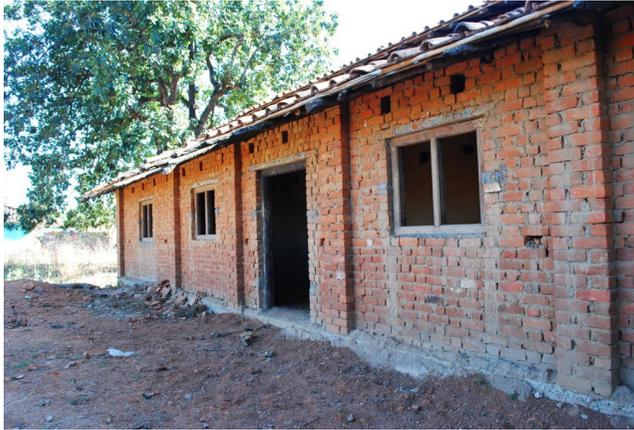
After a while tiger jumps and vanishes into the dense grasses of the meadows.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Show is over, the king has graced the tourists and it is time to go back. In spite of his 20 years experience at the park, Dharampalji is still thrilled about having spotted a tiger. Tourists as well as the guides go back to the gate, satisfied and happy.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



After a wonderful morning he comes home to take rest.



He gets ready to take nap for while.



He cleans his kitchen and floors it by cow dung.

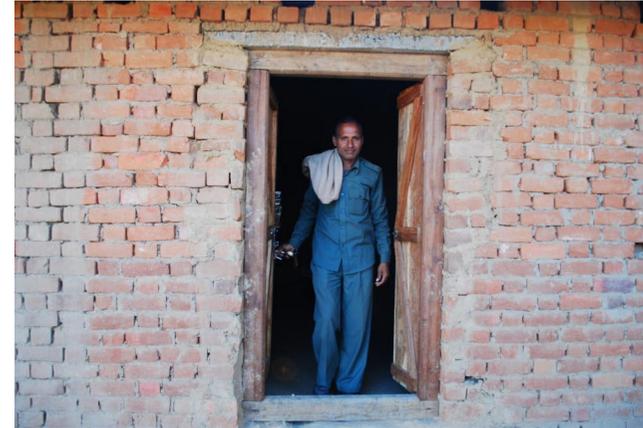


His age old radio plays old Hindi songs.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



He wakes up, eat food and gets ready for the afternoon ride. He prays before leaving the place



Dharampalji is all set for the afternoon.



He takes a lift to the park.



He meets other guides. Everyone discuss about the decline in tourism due the recent Mumbai attacks. Nobody is sure of going into the park this afternoon.

Only a handful of tourists have come to park leaving the guides jobless in the afternoon. They just sit around, chat with each other on politics and play puzzles to kill time.

1 2 3 4 5 6
20 11 18 17 16 15 14 13 12
24 22 23

~~1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11~~
~~24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13~~
~~25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36~~

①	②	③
36	35	34
1	2	3
33	32	31
4	5	6
30	29	28
7	8	9
27	26	25
10	कुमारी मायावती	
24	राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष	
13	बहुजन समाज पार्टी	
21	20	19
16	17	18

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Dharampalji decides to take me for a nature trail as he is free in the afternoon. We say bye to the kids playing near the gate and monkeys sitting on the road. Its time for a nature walk.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Dharampalji shows me the hidden spiders who live inside the earth.



He tells me about how we can differentiate between the male and a female tiger's pug marks.



He explains me the details of the mahua tree and why it is so popular among the villagers.



This plant is used by the diabetes patients. Chewing its leaves before eating the food reduces the effect of sugar in the food.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



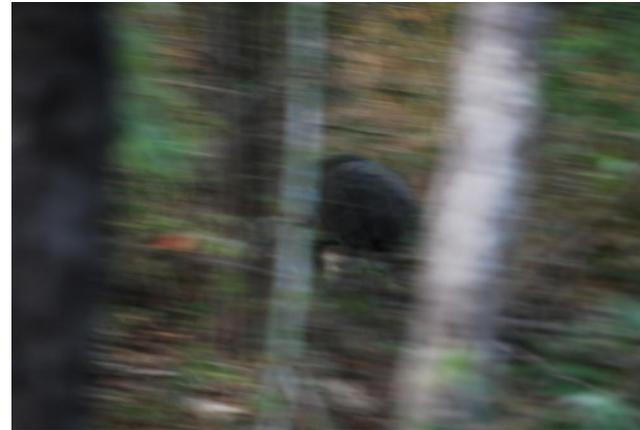
While walking a sambhar crosses our way.



Barn owl looking at us and hooting.



Palm size spiders are everywhere.



Suddenly a wild boar comes on the road. I am scared because it is a very dangerous animal. I think of all the possible escapes. It jumps and disappears into the woods. I stand shocked, drenched in sweat.



A rare sight; the jackal looks at me from the other side of the road. I stop for a while and click his pictures. But Dharampalji has something else in his mind—he wants me to spot a tiger while on foot. I am high on adrenaline.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



There it is, fresh tiger scat and foot prints. And then we hear a grunt. He is very near to us, hiding in the woods and keeping a watch on us. My heartbeats are as audible as the tiger's grunt.



Fresh foot prints are everywhere.



We reached the riverside.



River's sand is full of pug marks. He has been following us since the last 20 mins.



We do not see a tiger but we see a tiger print butterfly resting on the ground. It is time to go back as it is getting dark and is not at all safe for either of us.

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



It is time to go back to his home. He meets pandeyji (his roommate) on his way. They sit for *chai* and then depart for their cottage. Pandeyji tune in the radio to listen to the news

A DAY IN A LIFE OF GUIDE



Dharampalji cooks food for both them. They eat their food talking and listening to the radio. Around 9 pm they doze off hoping that the next morning turns out a little different from the usual ones.



The sky is filled up with millions of stars
sparkling like diamonds.
I surrender myself to the hypnotic beauty
and under which I fall asleep.