FOREST OF LIONS AND MEN: HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE GIR FOREST, INDIA

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I document how interspecies relationships inform and co-constitute social identities in Western India. Informed by ethnographic research conducted in 2012 in the Gir Forest, Gujarat, this work addresses how two different human populations living or working alongside Asiatic lions in a wildlife sanctuary operationalize their ongoing relationships with the lions to construct both collective histories and individual possibilities. For the pastoral Maldhari community, lions occupy an essential role in a socioenvironmental order established during the time of Creation. The maintenance of that order necessitates a proximity to the lions that, if broken through state- or climate-based displacement, the Maldhari believe will result in the disappearance of the Gir lion population. For sanctuary employees, their physical closeness to the lions is alternatively foregrounded as a pathway to accessing a reimagined local social hierarchy that enables, or can possibly enable, temporal inversions of conventional power structures. Such inversions foster an understanding of social re-ordering that exposes an illusory quality, a frailty of social order in which they are oriented. When characterizing the human-lion relationship, both sanctuary employees and the Maldhari do not deny the existence of conflict but instead minimize the role it plays in defining that relationship. In this way, these communities are interpreting the ways of knowing a large predator as potentially comparable to and as complex as knowing another human. Ultimately, in *Forest of Lions and Men*, I argue the value of a multispecies ethnographic approach through an illustration of how nonhuman animals are taken seriously by peoples of the Gir Forest as actors in and co-constructors of the permanent and momentary social world(s) they inhabit.

To Manohar Singh, Ravindra Singh,

and Swadesh Rani Singh

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses environmental changes and challenges in South Asia, and the world at large, through the particular case of human-lion relationships at the Gir Forest in Gujarat, India. The Gir Forest has a dry tropical monsoon climate and the dry deciduous forest vegetation expected in this climate. These conditions support an abundance of herbivores for lions to eat, tracts of open savanna, and naturally occurring water sources. Territorial constraints have required some of the lion population to adapt to atypical environments far outside the periphery of the forest, including the coastal forests of the Arabian Sea, and even the island of Diu, where a lioness and her cubs were spotted in the mid-1990s. Others are scattered throughout the larger territory of the Greater Gir, but the majority remain within the area of the Gir Forest.

The Gir Forest is a place and space coalescing a landscape, peoples, and wildlife. In my research I pursue the immaterial connectivity found only in cultural representations that at my fieldsite occur less in visual arts and imagery, but more through memory, cosmology, and possibility. The land, the lions, and the history of the local community (and its constituent subcommunities) work in particular ways as a localized expression of the variable formations of both Hindu cosmology and South Asian social organization. For the pastoral Maldhari community residing in and around the Gir Forest, animals largely occupy both the domestic and the immediately surrounding external forested landscape. In the Maldhari homestead, called *nes* but hereafter referred to using the anglicized

Figure 1. Map of India with inset of Saurashtra peninsula.

"ness," a tall protective fence of thorns and brambles secure the Maldhari and their livestock within the interior of the homestead. Outside the domestic border of the fence are many animals of a different kind, an assortment of wildlife that, rather than inhabiting a distant, human-less wilderness, are habituated to living *with* the Maldhari in a neighborly sense. Indigenous herbivores including nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) and cheetal (*Axis axis*) share the same grazing lands as the domestic buffalo, all of which serve as prey for the forest's largest carnivores. All occupants of the Gir Forest, human and non-human, are connected materially by their environment by moving through the same spaces, ingesting local waters and food from the same earth, the *quotidien* of hearing and seeing and smelling each other, sometimes even of tasting each other.

Figure 2. Map indicating location of the village of Sasan within the context of the larger protected area.

The singularity of the Maldhari experience in the Gir Forest first drew me to my fieldsite, but upon arrival I recognized that they were not, in fact, the only people in the forest. My research revolves around two major bodies of subjects: lions and humans. My time in Gir brought me into contact with many categories of people and many overlapping categories. While each avenue of possible exploration is worthwhile, for the purposes of this dissertation my body of human subjects consists of the Maldhari, formerly nomadic pastoralists who maintain a semi-nomadic mode of living within (and around) the Protected Area (PA), and also the assortment of people employed by or in the Gir Forest who reside in the nearby village of Sasan. Through details of the relationships between these people and the lions, this dissertation is story about those relationships.

The man who would become my research assistant worked as a tour guide for wildlife sightseeing expeditions. His brother was employed as a driver for the tours. On my daily journeys through the forest we would often stop in our jeep to greet whomever we came across (as long as it was not tourists on safari), and through these meetings I came to know about some of the other workers of the forest: lion trackers, forest guards, rangers. Although they did not sleep a homemade fence away from lions like the Maldhari, these men[1] spent significant periods of their daily lives in pursuit or protection of the lions at Gir; for all the many animals living in its depths, their employment was predicated on the former, present, and continued occupation of the forest by lions. I became interested in hearing of their experiences in and knowledge of the forest as a

[1] There are no female guides or drivers, but there is a very small number of female forest staff.

counterpart to what I was learning from the Maldhari, finding that those conversations more often than not quickly veered away from the forest to their personal histories and aspirations. These interactions greatly impacted my understanding of what precisely constitutes human-lion relationships at the Gir Forest, illuminating alternative models of what it is to live in the world with lions and how local peoples' relationships to the land and animals is mediated by different kinds of knowledge and different exchanges of currency. While the Maldhari follow a model that incorporates lions into the social community, those men working in the forest employ a model that operates outside of the local community structure and instead incorporates the possibility of another social configuration in which they are not bound to the hierarchical limitations that have otherwise guided their lives.

Fieldsites, Populations, and Methods

Following a two-tiered survey strategy, I visited my field site initially in 2010 and returned two years later for a longer field period informed by the original survey. Excluding the monsoon season of June through August, in 2012 I conducted my field research at the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park in southern Saurashtra, home to the singular population of Asiatic lions left in this world. India's most famous national parks including Ranthambore (Rajasthan), Sundarbans (West Bengal), and Kaziranga (Assam) are primarily tiger habitats, whereas Gir is the only protected space for lions.

It is important to note that my time at the Gir Forest was predominantly passed in the Gir West, the smaller of two bureaucratic zones within the Gir

protected area and the primary site of tourism operations. Although there were plans to travel through Gir East, logistical and social entanglements prevented them from coming to fruition. I was told the terrain of Gir East is markedly rougher – and any topographical map of the area supports this description – and the roads are less traveled. Post-monsoon road maintenance in the forest prioritizes the western tourist zone, often reaching the eastern zone as late as November – roads leading to and through Gir East are virtually impassable until maintenance crews address monsoon damage. The people who live there are more dispersed, further from village markets, and less accustomed to visitors than the Maldhari of Gir West. I heard the same description about the lions of Gir East; during many conversations with forest workers I was told the lions in the east were "angrier" than those of the west, and that because they lacked the regularity of human-lion interaction found in Gir West, the eastern lions were "dangerous" and "untrusting." In the Gir Forest, lions too can be outsiders.

In this research I am looking at two human populations: the Maldhari and the workers in and around the Gir Forest. Within each of these populations are further subdivisions including caste, ethnicity, religion, job title, and other intersecting criteria forming the multilayered "amorphous" status groups described by Max Weber as organized and elaborated by connections to honor, lifestyle, and restrictions on social intercourse (1977: 187) I acknowledge the further subdivision of caste groups within a caste proper and the data in this dissertation are localized cases that apply only to the Maldhari community I worked with in the portion of the Sanctuary to the west of the National Park.

The term Maldhari is an occupational classification in western India indicating the ownership, rearing, and husbandry of cattle. In this dissertation I am looking only at the Maldhari communities that settled in the areas that are now the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park within the last few hundred years; however, other Maldhari communities are found throughout Saurashtra and also in Kachchh and other parts of Northern Gujarat. My Maldhari interlocutors are mainly from the Charan and Rabari castes, which make up the majority of the Gir Maldhari alongside other castes including Ahir, Bharwad, and Kshatriya, in addition to a small Muslim Maldhari population. Rabari and Charan communities elsewhere have been studied for and identified by their distinguishing practices: the Rabari for textile embroidery (see Bunting 1980; Frater 1995, 2002; Nanavati 1961) and the Charan for their musicality (see Singer 1972; Thompson 1991). Although these are considered defining features of these castes, the practices vary in intensity and style across locations. In some communities they are not practiced at all. Due to the focus of this dissertation on human-lion relationships, these artistic mediums of historical identity through embroidery and singing do not feature prominently in my research. The language spoken in the Gir Forest is a patois, a unique dialect of the Indo-European state language Gujarati. With increasing education and access to neighboring villages and towns, the language of the younger Maldhari is moving toward a more

standardized Gujarati by eliminating some of the dialect identifiers[2] still used by the elders.

Outside the forest these castes, excluding the Kshatriya, are recognized by the Indian government as Economically Backward Classes, a category indicating social groups that earn a very low income (less than Rs. 1 *lakh*[3] per annum) but do not belong to a federally protected disadvantaged social category such as Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, or Other Backward Classes. Maldhari who reside in the Gir Forest, however, have been classified as Scheduled Tribes since 1956 (Chudasama 2010: 24). In South Asia members of indigenous populations are called *adivasi,* a Sanskritic term that translates to "original inhabitant." *Adivasi* or tribal populations are viewed with mystique and marginalized for living outside the dominant Hindu/Muslim culture of the subcontinent. They are largely regarded as 'primitive' humans living outside of modern civilization, not only geographically but also socially, linguistically, and in terms of lifestyle. In the past, tribal populations were neither producers nor consumers of dairy, and still to this day do not play a significant role in the dairy market. The Maldhari claim an integral role in dairy production as imbued in their existence and, like wider Hindu society, heavily rely on milk products in daily and ritual cuisine.

The Maldhari are a majority Hindu population with little in common with tribal populations except for inhabiting similar environments, that is, being

[2] The most obvious example of how Maldhari Gujarati differs from standard Gujarati is the replacement of the *sa* sound with *ha*. For example, the village of Sasan is often referred to as Hahan, and the term for lion, *sawaj*, becomes *hawaj*.
[3] A *lakh* is a native numerical standard in South Asia equivalent to one hundred thousand.

forest-dwellers, and for living in scattered homesteads rather than the nucleated villages dominating most of rural India. As shown by Alfred Gell[4] in his description of the non-tribal Halba of central India, who "have lived among the tribal population for so long that they are classified as Tribals in the census" (1982: 475), living alongside tribal populations is enough to be classed as one. In the case of the Maldhari, merely living in an environment typically associated with tribal populations has brought about similar reclassification irrespective of religious, linguistic, economic, and lifestyle practices.

Ramachandra Guha avoids the complications of caste-centered misidentification and categorical conflation by using his own general category: 'forest communities' defined as "those people whose existence depends on a close and ecologically sustainable relationship with the forest they inhabit" (1983: 1882). This definition can be applied without reservation to tribal populations, the classic South Asian forest communities, and also leaves enough interpretive room to include communities like the Maldhari of the Gir which, although casted and occupying a traditional role in larger South Asian Hindu society, have situated themselves amidst a forest environment while undertaking predominantly or entirely forest-based economic activities. Their knowledge of the forest as a site of refuge, repose, and resources does not rival but in fact

[4] Unlike the weekly market participants in Gell's study, the movements of people inside the Gir Forest are monitored and restricted by the Forest Department. This regulation of space and people, coupled with the wide dispersal of the Maldhari population across undeveloped terrain, precludes the possibility of observable and regularly-timed public gatherings that could possibly present an alternative vantage point in understanding local social relations.

resembles the same mastery of natural product usages typically ascribed to tribal populations.

In both Charan and Rabari nesses I approached the men occupying the role of learned elders (typically addressed respectfully by name followed by *Aathaa*[5]) to gather oral histories, both the personal or familial, as well as the larger narrative of caste or lineage. Such data from each respective caste can illuminate not only how a caste member might define and identify himself, but also how that caste might define or identify others – whether people, places, or animals. Until a few hundred years ago, the Maldhari were a nomadic people. Today at least in the Gir, they are planted semi-permanently in defined spaces. When possible, I made a record of the families' movements through the area as far as their memories allowed – recognizing that I would often miss the family histories and movements of the women who had married into the families with which I met.

I visited six Rabari nesses with regularity and one, located in the more peripheral Revenue Area, only a single time. I visited a total of five Charan nesses, but spent the majority of my time with Charans at one particular ness. Some nesses are mixed-caste but they are predominantly comprised of a single caste, and sometimes of a single last name. Last names are identifiers of kin members, demarcating those with whom one shares a descent history as off-limits for caste-endogamous marriage. Last-name identity can carry as much historical richness and group-identity narratives as caste identity itself. Beyond

[5] Roughly meaning "learned" or "knowing" one.

the two main castes, the nesses of my field site were either Kshatriya, Siddhi[6] (who are categorized in local censuses as Muslim), or Muslim.

The categories of workers at the Gir Forest are mainly bureaucratic, consisting of tour guides, drivers, and an array of ranked state forest officers. These men are of mixed caste backgrounds living predominantly in Sasan (or, as it is sometimes called, Sasan-Gir), a village of 3235 people living in households numbering between 650 and 700. When I was not in the forest I spent my time in Sasan; however, most of my interactions with those working in the forest happened inside the forest, as most of my informants were preoccupied with their domestic lives and families when not on the job. When I arrived in Sasan it became known quickly throughout the village that my business in the area concerned lions and life in the forest. People were hesitant to delve too deeply into their personal lives with me out of both the social conservatism fostered by sexual segregation and class hierarchies in India, and also the fear of impropriety *vis-à-vis* their employment.

[6] A black community of African origin.

Figure 3. A Hanuman langur monkey (Semnopithecus entellus) *and her infant perched atop the roof of the Sinh Sadhan guesthouse.*

My first few weeks in Sasan were passed in the usual way of a newcomer: trying to secure a place for myself within my social and physical surroundings, whether that be falling into a pre-existing space or forging one on my own. I was given temporary lodging at the Sinh Sadhan Guest House, the official housing for sanctuary visitors that was once a hunting lodge for the for local royalty. There was question among park management as to where I should settle more permanently during my field research, and I was presented the option of renting a room at the village home of Manu Bhai, the chauffeur to the Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF), the federally appointed local head of the forest department. Hesitant to commit to living under the purview of a government official's employee, I suggested I would look at a number of options before

making my final decision. Before any other options were considered the DCF decided that a small cement shack, at the time used as wildlife biology student researcher's quarters, would be the best housing option for me – once some renovations were made to make the quarters more suitable to what the DCF imagined to be a young American woman's needs and preferences. A Western-style toilet with a faulty flushing mechanism was installed, and also a showerhead that was never connected to the bathroom's small water heater. A generously applied fresh coat of paint on the exterior and interior walls caked over the sliding locks on the front and back doors, rendering them at times unusable and more than once resulting in my being stuck inside the premises until someone came to my door to kick it in.

My residence was located in a large lot at the edge of Sasan, abutting the official perimeter of the Gir PA. The lot was mostly empty apart from a small house occupied by the Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF); between our dwellings and under a large tree was a cage used by a previous ACF to protect his dog from a leopard attack at night. Behind our lot, after a small buffer of forested land, was one of the main gates into the PA. Past the gate was a housing colony for Forest Service officers, and in the opposite direction the road led to the DCF's headquarters and administrative office. A little further along past the office, the road dead-ended into the driveway of the Taj Gateway luxury hotel. In between the shack and DCF office was the Crocodile Rearing Center (CRC), a poorly visited reptile enclosure formerly used as a site for breeding marsh crocodiles (*Crocodylus palustris*). The main road, perpendicular to the road of the shack, office, and CRC ran into the forest in one direction and into the village in the

other. Toward the end of my field period the DCF had relocated from Sasan to the same lot as my shack, closer to his office and the forest and physically disconnected from the village.

Figure 4. Map of Sasan.

The location of my residence was beneficial to my fieldwork because it granted me access to the forest without the constant surveillance of my every move, but I was not expecting the amount of restrictions that would be placed on my movements regardless of where I slept. Although the DCF approved a research permit that granted entry into the forest each day from sunrise until sunset, and he had verbally given me permission to stay in the forest after dark if and when I saw fit, my travels through the forest were repeatedly met with

suspicion. My permit was issued through a photo identification card printed with information including the level of access I had to move through the forest, my name, and the title of my research project. At times I would be stopped in the forest by an unfamiliar forest officer who would first question my research assistant, demand to see my research permit, and then ultimately radio call to the administrative office to verify that I was allowed to be where in the forest. My research assistant Ramesh often miscommunicated the purpose of my stay at the forest to my interlocutors, partly because of his unfamiliarity with anthropological research and its aims and partly because he thought it was helpful to me, that he was translating my project into language that people at the forest could understand. The Maldhari dialect proved difficult for me to emulate, and particularly with older Maldhari informants Ramesh would act as an interpreter to facilitate our conversations. He would often entirely reconstruct my statements to the point where they no longer expressed the ideas I had intended. Although I would intervene at these moments, Ramesh assured me that he was asking "better" questions that would produce "better" answers for my project. His mediation of my interactions with the Maldhari significantly impacted the data I was able to collect. The tensions surrounding my data collection has not entirely abated; however, these days it is due less to my aggravation at his interventions and instead more so my own reflections on my linguistic limitations and naivete. I realize I had not learned "how to ask" (Briggs 1986) and lacked the conventions and categories of the Saurashtri dialect that were requisite to one-to-one conversation with the Maldhari. I am grateful to the earnest and invaluable assistance of Ramesh during my field research.

Another frustration that I have come to terms with in my post-field analysis is how my own positionality impacted my data collection, an element that I both took for granted as an anthropologist and also resisted as a budding ethnographer. In my doctoral coursework such reflexivity was an ethnographic standard openly informing the nature of the text. In Piya Chatterjee's *A Time for Tea* (2001) the author acknowledges the limitations her status as a *memsahib* placed on her ability to develop close relationships to the tea plantation laborers she studied. Academically the complexity of the social relationship was articulated and consumable, but in reality, recognizing myself as a present and meaningful actor rather than a denuded observer was an onerous task. In Sasan I was a *Madame*, an umbrella category assigned to wealthy or high-ranking women who are coded as upper-class and commanding of certain public guidelines. The affordances of more familiar researchers at the forest would never be accessible for me in all my otherness as an American, an Indian of distant origins, a young unmarried woman, and as something very strange called an anthropologist.

Literature Review

This dissertation project addresses the growing body of literature concerning human-animal relationships in qualitative terms, with an emphasis on relationships between humans and wildlife as opposed to domestic or companion animals. The setting of my fieldwork is a protected area, a space that encompasses both the material world and the socially constructed meaning of such a world to the point of legal restriction. Rather than simply a site of

environmental and wildlife protection, an anthropological approach recognizes protected areas as "a way of seeing, understanding, and producing nature (environment) and culture (society) and as a way of attempting to manage and control the relationship between the two" (West et al. 2006: 251). Scholarly analyses of national parks and protected areas have demonstrated how the concept of a nature/culture dichotomy acts as a founding principle for the Western model of conservation, often resulting in the displacement and exclusion of indigenous peoples from these areas (see West and Brechin 1991; Igoe 2005). The emphasis on state regulation in protected areas obscures other forms of knowledge and spatial relationships that exist outside the scope of landscape and species-specific conservation projects – a relationship and process that Tracy Heatherington has called "ecological alterity" (2010).

Much academic discourse on human-wildlife relationships has centered on the concept of conflict, often in areas under state protection. In the last twenty years, and particularly during the last ten years, human-wildlife conflict has become an increasingly popular research agenda in anthropology (e.g. Knight 2000; Jalais 2011; Mathur 2015) and across a number of other disciplines (see Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Nyhus 2016: 145). Across a variety of animal species and different continents, human-wildlife conflicts are investigated and interpreted as more often representative of conflicts between people or between people and the state. Human-animal conflict between protected species and communities with which they share a habitat is framed as a byproduct of the state conservation apparatus – how certain animals' rights are prioritized over not just people but specific categories of people. These approaches have since been

critiqued for foregrounding discussion of human-animal relationships within a predetermined framework of negative and problematic associations. These contestations are largely understood to hinge on competition over resources, reducing the more complex socioeconomic factors at play to a materialist masquerade in which, as posited by critical conservation scientists, conservationist groups are "hiding behind the wildlife" (Redpath et al. 2015: 224) in order to avoid questioning power relationships between such groups and the typically underprivileged communities with whom there is 'conflict.' Anthropologist Shafqat Hussain's ethnography of snow leopards and goat herders in the Western Himalayas openly reorients the discussion of conflict from one between humans and wildlife to one between different (and differently privileged) groups of people (2020).

Additionally, the practice of underscoring material and economic damages filters the human-animal relationship to one of victim and aggressor, ignoring or ignorant to the other possible ways of relating that may be at play in a multispecies environment.

Eschewing the term "conflict" does not circumvent the framing of human-animal interactions as inherently negative encounters. As shown by wildlife scientists C.D. Soulsbury and P.C.L. White (2015), positive attributes of human-animal interactions are sometimes sidelined or altogether ignored to allow for a preferred cohesively negative framework. Instead, some scholars have taken to expanding the terminology to encompass greater allowances for meaning; what was 'human-wildlife conflict' becomes 'human-wildlife conflict and coexistence' (see Madden 2004; Woodroffe et al. 2005; Dickman et al. 2011), with some

scholars suggesting a further category of 'co-occurrence' as a clinical alternative to the more dynamic 'coexistence' (see Harihar et al. 2013).

Multispecies studies and ethnographies employ research methodologies fashioned not to reframe studies of human-animal relationships from the pervasive perspective of human-wildlife conflict, but rather to ultimately aid in the *unframing* of conflict-centered analyses. Non-human animals are not *a priori* threats to human health, safety, and security; rather, they are often "scapegoats in conflicts between different human groups" (Srinivasan and Kasturirangan 2017: 87). Encounters between living beings, whether human-animal, human-plant, animal-plant, or any other configuration of encountering 'the other,' are not simply temporal points in which the two "happen to meet each other… rather, their relationship emerges from coevolutionary[7] histories, from rich processes of cobecoming" (van Dooren et al. 2016: 2). Academic inquiries into the social world of humans have been criticized for focusing too heavily on the use of language and verbal communication, an error which sociologists Clinton R. Sanders and Arnold Arluke suggest ignores "interactions between humans and nonhuman animals [that] are central to contemporary social life" (1993: 377). Sanders and Arluke compare the characterization of nonhuman animals as instinctive and thoughtless in social science studies to the way women were often portrayed as passive and silent in classic ethnographies written by

[7] I am grateful to H.H. Shugart for drawing my attention to the potential confusion regarding the usage of the term "coevolutionary" in this citation. In the biological sciences, the concept of "coevolution" involves the genetic changes species impart on one another. In the quote I cite, van Dooren et al. are using this term as it is used by the social sciences (and particularly recently in multispecies studies) as a process of development or growth between two or more parties.

men, a denial of women's personal perspective reflecting the researcher's inability to understand, consider, or access women's lives (1993).

A multispecies approach stresses the concept of *entanglements* in situating analyses and understandings of relationships and encounters – these entanglements are temporal, physical, chemical, and emotional; ecological, semiotic, psychological, and cultural. Donna Haraway's work on cross-species relationships (2007) addresses the shortcomings of both her own past expositions on the human-animal relationships (1991) and also those of other prominent theorists, questioning the overly cerebral nature of the work. Haraway criticizes Deleuze and Guattari's work on "Becoming Animal" (2008) as too distant from real-world relationships to be meaningful in any way outside of the sublime. Similarly, Haraway finds that despite the advancement in subjectivity of Derrida's (2008) recognition of animals as *real* singular beings, his philosophizing borders on ruminant in ways that approach the lofty level of Deleuze and Guattari. Haraway's interest rests on the experiential, positioning humans and nonhuman animals as mutually interactive subjects that change behavior in response to recognized social semiotics (see Peirce 1955); through ongoing engagement comes communication, and through ongoing communication a *relationship* is established (2008: 26).

A multispecies approach posits nonhuman animals[8] as actors in and co-constructors of the social world, as beings with mental and emotional capacities

[8] While my research centers on the relationship between humans and lions, the scope of multispecies studies extends beyond the animal world to what Anna Tsing refers to as the "more-than-human" others, including plants, fungi, and other forms of life.

that both rival and engage with those of humans – and that can be accessed through those humans with whom other animals have relations. In the footsteps of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's work on Amerindian perspectivism (1998), scholars of Amazonia such as Eduardo Kohn (2013; 2018) and Philippe Descola (2013) rethink the concept of animism from its initial nineteenth-century conceptualization by E.B. Tylor as "primitive" misattribution of interiority to nonhuman others (1920 [1871]), to one which recognizes and takes seriously the perspective that interiority is an essential attribute of all beings.[9] This recalibration of how we relate to, know, and understand nonhuman animals is not confined to Amazonian ethnography. What Kohn terms "sylvan thinking" is the thoughtspace or orientation shared by humans and other forms of life which he characterizes as "wild[er]," (2018: 220), but which also opens the door for a concept of multidirectional types of shared thinking – a kind of alternative but simultaneous *Umwelt* (see von Uexküll 1934: 6 for initial definition; 1957 for illustration). In the Sundarbans of southeast India, East Bengali refugees have documented via anthropologist Annu Jalais how tigers have grown aware of their own high status in state-protectionist hierarchies, developing a "self-importan[ce]" that precipitated their habit of eating human beings (2005: 1751). Radhika Govindrajan's ethnography of interspecies relationships (2018) in the Central Himalayas of India incorporates the many nonhuman animals residing in

[9] In *Beyond Nature and Culture* (2013), Philippe Descola operates on the proposition that "every human being perceives himself or herself as a unit that is a mixture of interiority and physicality" (116). The scope of these terms is limited to the "unit" of the individual being as part of a model of how conceptions of similarity and dissimilarity shape the 'modes' by which one identifies and relates to the Other.

the mountainous landscape and the many ways they are known by their human neighbors, characterized by Govindrajan as “knotted” relationships: the inextricable intertwining of humans and animals through shared bilateral experiences that create relationships beyond the symbolic or merely anthropomorphic metaphorizing. Knottedness engenders “intimacies,” thereby allowing a relatedness and close multidirectional bond between animals and humans.

In this dissertation I do not approach the human-lion relationships at the Gir Forest under the framework of human-wildlife conflict, an analytical position which recenters the relationship as predominantly economic. If animal attacks on people or their property is a violation, it is a violation of the local social order, and it is uncovering that social order that drives this research. In my dissertation I employ a model of human-animal relationships that resonates with those followed by scholars who take seriously the variable, layered forms of relatedness between humans and nonhuman animals in a shared social world. In my research on human-lion relationships, I suggest an everyday avenue of intimacy, if it can be called intimacy: a kind of neighborly knowing and tolerance. To study multiple subjects in a shared space, the space in question must be defined by size or location, whether a single home or an urban metropolis. The subjects must similarly be defined, whether individuals or groups. My space is the far western portion of the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park, the village of Sasan Gir – this fieldsite is the neighborhood. My subjects are the community in that neighborhood, and the neighbors are humans and lions. Like neighbors in a village, the relationships between humans and lions are organized by an

architecture of thick knowing. The relationships are sometimes harmonious, sometimes strained, often resentful, but are overall abided.

A NOTE ON CASTE

In *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970) Louis Dumont elaborated beyond the *varna*[10] categorization to the more complex sub-caste system, identifying structural oppositions as the undergirders of social relations – whether within a society's social organization, such as degrees of purity and impurity in the Hindu caste system or the separation between the religious and politico-economic spheres in a casted society, or between societies, such as the holism of the Indian society relative to the individualism of the of the West. Many scholars have analytically and ethnographically challenged Dumont's proposal of purity-hierarchy as the fundamental variable by which in Hindu social systems operate, arguing the multi-dimensionality of caste through examples including reciprocity in acts of service (Das and Uberoi 1971), village ritual roles that do not conform to and in fact subvert Dumont's purity-hierarchy (Raheja 1990), and the caste system itself as a product of colonial rule that replaced the tradition of kingship (Dirks 2001). Others have interrogated the Indic sense of individualism denied by Dumont's assessment (see Nandy 1983; Mines 1988; Khare 2006).

As illustrated in Bhrigupati Singh's ethnography of 'tribal' Sahariyas in southeastern Rajasthan, familiar academic approaches to Indian sociology that foreground the *varna* system are not always productive for understanding social

[10] A *varna* is a category of social ordering first presented in the *Rigveda* (1500-1200 BCE). In the *varna* system people belong to one of four principal categories: Brahmins, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, and Shudras.

hierarchies in marginal populations whose histories and identities are locally defined (2015: 22). With respect to the significant contributions to understanding Indian society by anthropologists and sociologists of caste and caste relations, for the purposes of this dissertation and in an effort to "let the subaltern speak," I intentionally privilege my ethnographic data on caste relationships even when, from a structural perspective, that data is incomplete.

Chapter Outline

I have organized this dissertation around the four major elements at the heart of my research: the Gir Forest; the Asiatic lions; the men of Sasan Gir working in the forest; and the Maldhari.

Chapter 2 foregrounds the place of my fieldsite, accounting for Saurashtra as a place (or non-place) in global geopolitical history and for the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park as a place in both Saurashtra (from a regional perspective) and India (from a national perspective). This chapter introduces the biogeographical landscape of the Gir Forest as a continuum of mountains, hills, rivers, trees, winds, rains, birds, insects, mammals, reptiles, humans, buffalo, grasses – of the many forms of life present and the firmament sustaining them. The field setting is contextualized by a historical survey of the relationship between the Indian state, in its many forms and iterations, and the environment, identifying the category of protected landscapes and wildlife conservation as rooted in South Asian political philosophies. These philosophies are divergent yet interlocutory, informed by Buddhist and Jain doctrines of non-violence and also strategic martial directives, by spiritual and also material potentials of the

environment, by local and global market forces, by sensory and also theoretical valuations.

Outside of state forest management, forests in India have been vital sites of cultural and religious practices. In this chapter, I provide examples of places of worship situated inside the Gir Forest, as well as a profile of how the national holiday Navaratri is celebrated by villagers residing in Sasan. Elements of site design and religious song offer context for how local peoples understand their immediate natural environments.

In Chapter 3, I explore ideas and associations surrounding lions in different arenas. First I examine the role of nonhuman animals in the South Asian religious and literary traditions, as well as popular Western representations of South Asia and its animals, in order to establish a vantage point for consideration of how different populations of people understand the lions of the Gir Forest. The authenticity of the Asiatic lion as native Indian fauna is brought into question by skeptics who rely on archaeological and historical evidence, or lack thereof, as proof of the lions as being "aliens." I describe how my two human population subjects talk about lions in ways that make irrelevant the indigeneity question, one through its meaninglessness to their lived experiences with lions, and one by invoking an alternative model of belonging through cosmology and creation.

In Chapter 4, I describe how residents of the village of Sasan Gir experience working in the forest and the ways they understand their proximity to lions as it shapes their social identities. First, I introduce the village of Sasan Gir as a relatively recent locality within the region hosting a mixed assemblage of

community members. I present profiles of two different local men in order to compose a broader picture of the opportunities and limitations available to men native to the region, regardless of their position in the traditional caste hierarchy. The focus of the chapter is then shifted to a discussion of the body of workers employed in conservation, tourism, and regulatory capacities at the Gir Forest, along with personal histories of three of my main interlocutors.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I describe the lifeways of the Maldhari pastoralists of the Gir Forest. At the heart of this chapter are Maldhari histories, both genealogical and cosmological, representative of the two dominant castes of my fieldsite: the Charan and the Rabari. The Maldhari are explicit in their labeling of relatedness and difference, of belonging and order, and of their rootedness to the land. While in Chapter 3 we see how men incorporated into the neoliberal economy position themselves individually as subjects of the forest and its lions, in this final chapter the Maldhari present a social whole that both foregrounds the community and also posits a community as consisting of more than just human beings.

Chapter 2
THE GIR FOREST

A white man in his late twenties, traveling alone, was a conspicuous presence in the hotel lobby where I read the newspaper from time to time. He told me his name is Bastien and that he is a Swiss biologist specializing in plants and soils. After recently finishing his Master's degree he left Switzerland for a seven-month tour of Asia and Australia, two of which he is spending in India, to see "if things in the world are really as bad as everyone says they are." Bastien learned about the Gir Forest while visiting a tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh. He headed west to Ahmedabad and caught a train to Junagadh and then Sasan in search of a unique wildlife experience. The safari he went on yesterday was a disappointment, "not a real safari" he said; the lion sightings were not "natural" and the guides had only the most basic and simple answers for his questions about the plants and animals of the forest.

I had spent most of the year at the forest and recognized the wealth of knowledge it contains and also the limitations to accessing that knowledge through conventional methods/tourism. I invited Bastien to join me on my afternoon trip into the forest, essentially offering a free, private tour led by someone considered by his peers and superiors to be among the best guides at the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary: my research assistant, Ramesh. Though I was glad to provide this opportunity to an interested wildlife tourist I am simultaneously hopeful that his inclusion on the afternoon leg of today's field trip would also be

beneficial to my research, guessing a biologist trained in Europe will surely think to ask questions about the Indian forest that would not occur to an ethnographer trained in the American tradition of cultural anthropology, and also curious to see how my assistant would interact with a tourist rather than myself. But things started off badly.

"What does biology mean?" asks Ramesh, the man I had just described to Bastien as one of the best sources of knowledge in the area. I was confident that mastery of specialized language was not indicative of superior or even accurate knowledge in any field, and vice versa: Ramesh knows this place in ways and amounts that are not measured and defined by Western scientific standards. I was not confident, however, that Bastien would agree. The conversation was shaky at first, but the situation improved as Bastien questioned the differing landscapes presented on our drive.

"On the hilly areas the land is tight," Ramesh offered, "it is full of rocks so teak trees can't grow there, [the land is] open and grassy with only small acacia and berry trees. Flat areas can be like that as well, it is all depending on the soil." He explained how in areas where the soil is looser, less compact, teak trees are able to root themselves solidly into the ground and grow successfully, creating a denser landscape. Although I had some understanding of how soil composition differs within the forest's biomes, the conversation between Ramesh and Bastien somehow reframes that knowledge within a larger system of ecological relationships occurring and overlapping in the forest. I feel validated in my decision to bring Bastien into my circle of interlocutors, if only for a day.

After a moment of thoughtful silence spent watching the shadow and light move around us on the land, listening to the hum of the jeep's engine and occasional cry of some unseen bird, Bastien asked a question that reorients everything back to why I was here in the first place, the question that essentially illuminates the dark shroud of mystery suspended over the Gir Forest.

"Where are the tigers and elephants?"

This vignette introduces key themes of this dissertation, including both he unfamiliarity of the public, even international wildlife tourists, with the Gir Forest and the existence of Asiatic lions, and also the alternative ways of knowing about the forest that do not conform neatly into the tradition of Western biosciences. In this chapter I introduce the setting of my dissertation fieldwork, the Gir Forest, in both its historical context and present-day legal and geographic configurations. If the Gir Forest remains one of India's remaining sites of human-wildlife co-existence it is because at least some portion of its regional landscape has so far escaped the land-use changes brought about by colonization and the side effects of capitalist expansion.

Locating Saurashtra

In the final years of the 15th century Vasco de Gama navigated an oceanic passageway to India. Dispatched by King Manuel I of Portugal as part of a broader scheme to expand Portuguese maritime presence, de Gama successfully circumnavigated the African continent, reaching India's southwestern Malabar coast and establishing a sea trade route that would hasten European colonial

expansion in Asia. During the following decades Portugal would battle against many local rulers and foreign trading powers for control over territory along the western and eastern coasts of India; by 1524 de Gama was appointed Viceroy of Portuguese India.

In modern memory the Portuguese presence in India is associated with far fewer sites than were held at the height of its power, much of which was eventually lost to other European institutions competing for dominance – England, France, the Dutch Republic, and Denmark-Norway. Portuguese control over these final territories did not cease until nearly fifteen years after India's independence in 1947 when, in the final month of 1961, the Indian army annexed Portuguese India's three remaining strongholds; eight days later the Portuguese governor general signed an instrument of surrender.

Today, Portugal's final three Indian colonies retain some of their colonial identity through the architecture of their buildings and churches, through the ubiquity of Catholic Portuguese names amongst inhabitants and city streets (D'Souza, Pinto, Silva, etc.). The influence extends to city names: the largest city in the former Portuguese India's most famous territory– popular beachy tourist destination Goa – is called Vasco de Gama. Goa was the capitol of Portuguese India and maintains certain westernized, European sensibilities that relatively minimizes culture shock for Western travelers looking to experience their vision of the East (Wilson 1997: 52-4). Roughly seven hundred kilometers up the coast is Daman, situated one hundred-forty kilometers east from the island of Diu. Comprising the union territories of Daman and Diu, these sites are small and

remote enough to stay off the radar of most international tourists. Even during the colonial period Daman and Diu were on the periphery of European empire, marking the northernmost (aside from Surat) point of Portuguese occupation on the coast and the southern edge of an expanse of land that did not particularly concern the British; between the Thar desert marshes of Sindh and the geostrategic archipelago of Bombay, a quiet peninsula nestles between the Gulf of Kutch and the Gulf of Khambat[11], stretching out into the Arabian Sea: Saurashtra.

Figure 5. Map of Saurashtra peninsula.

[11] Variant spellings of Kutch: Kachchh; Kachh; Cutch. Variant name of Khambat: Cambay.

The Saurashtra peninsula is also known as Kathiawar, named for the Kathi Darbar people who once populated the land. The area was comprised of hundreds of princely states during the period of British Imperialism – not officially part of the empire but nevertheless indirectly under British rule and influence. After India's independence the peninsula's many kingdoms were unified under a single name, the United State of Kathiawar. Political reorganization shortly after independence combined Kathiawar with neighboring states, including Junagadh State, into the United State of Saurashtra until, through further political reorganization, it was subsumed into Bombay State. Since 1960, when Indian states were first reconfigured on a linguistic basis, Saurashtra has fallen within the boundaries of Gujarat, a state created to designate the homeland of speakers of the Gujarati language.

Many of the most widely-read works on Indian political and social history detail the *longue durée* of empire-building and withering across the eras of the Indus Valley Civilization (3300BCE – 1300 BCE), the empires of the Maurya (322BCE – 185 BCE) and Gupta (240CE – 590CE), the Mughals (1526CE – 1857CE), the British East India Company (1757CE – 1858CE), the British Crown (1858CE – 1947CE) and the many, many concurrent kingdoms and dynasties working aside and/or against those larger powers. Compiling this unified political chronology of the region was an attempt to place order on a vast and complex interplay of peoples, things, and ideas claiming ownership of places. It is a history orienting the scholar toward periods of "supreme authority" as the documented, rational, and accessible history versus periods of non-imperial rule, described by 19th century Indologist Vincent Smith as "the bewildering annals of Indian petty

states when left to their own devices" (1924:372). Smith's "openly imperial" stance (Inden 1990: 9) continues to echo implicitly in the historical scholarship of pre-Independence South Asia. Critiques of colonialism contribute further to the discussion of and emphasis on empire, simply another angle of interpreting Indian history within the context of imperialist rule. It is inescapable; beyond the enduring empires mentioned above there were the lesser polities, smaller in either size or duration, the invasions of the Persians, Greeks, and Scythians, and other documented or fabled foreign migrations.

Saurashtra is, for the most part, a non-place in scholarly works on Indian history; in many cases, the name does not even appear in book indexes. This could be taken to suggest the region's disengagement or immateriality to the dominant sociopolitical atmospheres in South Asia across changing empires—that nothing "important" happened there. However, the peninsula is in fact home to a number of significant religious and historical sites that readers of Indian history and Hindu mythology will recognize: Somnath, site of the first *jyotirlinga*[12] of Lord Shiva and where the Vedic moon god Soma restored his faded lustrous glow; Dwarka, chosen home of Lord Krishna after he left his natal home of Mathura; Porbandar, birthplace of Indian independence and civil rights activist Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Mahatma. At the height of its maturity the Indus Valley Civilization extended throughout the whole of Saurashtra. During the reign of the Maurya Empire, the great emperor Ashoka chose thirty-three locations across present-day India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan

[12] The Lord Shiva is believed to have appeared as a pillar of light at many sites across India, twelve of which are currently recognized as holy sites of pilgrimage.

to inscribe his philosophies into public monuments; one of these Major Rock Edicts is carved into a boulder at Mount Girnar,[13] deep in the heart of Saurashtra.

As a whole, Saurashtra does not make the cut to become a known or lionized place-name in Indian geopolitical history. Isolated areas within the peninsula receive some recognition but are predominantly recognized for significance during a distant past[14]. Even a relatively recent controversy when, during the India-Pakistan partition, the princely state of Junagadh acceded to Pakistan but was then integrated into India, becomes a minor state-crafting hiccup in the shadow of the colossal and enduring international conflict surrounding Jammu and Kashmir.

Gujarat's capitol, Gandhinagar, and largest city, Ahmedabad, lie east of the peninsula in the more densely populated mainland. The only operational commercial airport in Saurashtra is in Rajkot, Saurashtra's largest city and the fourth largest city in Gujarat. Compared to the larger cities, however, Rajkot is remarkably less equipped to provide the amenities expected by the cosmopolitan clientele of domestic and international tourists, businessmen, or the upper-middle class residents found in Ahmedabad, Surat, and Vadodara. My own experience of Rajkot conjured a nostalgia of visits to India as a young child; aside from the computers and cell phones, Rajkot in 2012 evoked an India of some twenty-five years prior, before the socioeconomic changes of early 1990s

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[13] The Hindi word *giri* refers to a mountain or hill. While *nar* is the Hindi word for 'male,' it is more likely that in this case *-nar* is a shortening of the word *nagar*, meaning 'town' or 'city.'
[14] Of the sites mentioned Somnath has maintained a certain notoriety across the centuries. The temple has been raided and destroyed numerous times by invaders including the Turks, varying Sultanates, Mughals, and the Portuguese. It has been rebuilt by Hindus each time, most recently in the 1950s.

economic liberalization visibly transformed certain aspects of India's cultural landscape.

My intention in framing the Saurashtra peninsula as I have above is to illustrate Saurashtra as an historically peripheral land mass, a place that has always been on the fringes of something or somewhere else. Across hundreds and even thousands of years the area was not contested by competing imperialist factions – it did not offer the rich resources or geopolitically strategic location that attracted ambitious builders of empire, and, aside from the controversy during the transition to nation-statehood, Saurashtra has maintained a history and social atmosphere described by so many as "sleepy." The conditions producing that sleepiness perhaps allowed the peninsula to maintain aspects of local character and native spaces as it was less subjected to the environmental destruction and social division of areas extensively developed for industrial purposes. That is not to suggest Saurashtra is an oasis of antiquity left untouched, or even mostly untouched, by the winds of historical change; rather, the extent to which it has been *less intensively* engaged with, fought over, and used by destructive political powers could help explain, at least in a material aspect, how it came to be that a relic population of lions and a relic population of nomadic pastoralists have managed to live, together, in a shared forest environment in southern Saurashtra to the present day.

Gir Forest: Biogeography and Legal Designations

Bordered by the states of Rajasthan to the north and Maharashtra to the south, the biomes of Gujarat largely – although not exclusively – consist of dry

deserts, forest, and woodlands. The Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park is tucked into southern Saurashtra, about one hundred kilometers inland from the former Portuguese trading outpost of Diu. Although this Protected Area (PA) is often referred to as the Gir Forest, the PA accounts for just over 1400 square kilometers situated within the "Greater Gir," a discontinuous landscape spanning over 5000 square kilometers that includes farmlands, villages, mountains[15], rivers, and even a few large cities. The range of the Gir Forest once extended deep into and beyond what is now the Greater Gir; over time land use and development driven by population growth has increasingly reduced forest cover, untenured lands, and wildlife habitat. These days, the term "Gir Forest" most often refers to the government-sanctioned, monitored, and regulated patch of land demarcated by jural, cartographical boundaries. Another name for the PA is Sasan-Gir, referencing the village of Sasan (also sometimes called Sasan-Gir) where the forest department is headquartered and through which visitors must pass in order to enter the forest.

[15] The land in the sanctuary is a mixed composition of flat and mountainous, much like the geography of the surrounding areas but lacking the intermittent farms and factories one would see while traveling to the Gir. Roughly fifty kilometers to the north is Girnar, the highest point in Gujarat at 3756 feet. The name Girnar is used to reference both the tallest mountain of its range and the range as a whole. The mountains are dotted with mostly Jain, but also some Hindu, temples one can reach while traveling a well-worn path of nearly ten thousand steps up the main hill. This route is routinely traveled during pilgrimages, when visitors ascend to the temples and holy sites of the mountain dating back to the 12th century CE. One of the major historical markers of the area is found at the base of the mountain, pre-dating the religious houses of worship on Girnar by at least 1400 years. As mentioned on page 45, among the major Rock Edicts of Ashoka that have been found throughout South Asia and as far away as present-day Afghanistan, one rests at Girnar.

Figure 6. The Gir Forest in the summer season.

Figure 7. The Gir Forest in early winter.

The state of Gujarat encompasses some of India's most varied terrain and ecosystems. Primarily celebrated as the last home of the Asiatic lion (formerly *Panthera leo persica,* now *Panthera leo leo*), the Gir Forest serves as habitat for leopards, hyenas, and other animals mirroring the faunal composition of Africa's eastern savannas – a testament to the shared climate and vegetation of the two distant neighbors once conjoined in Gondwana. While there are tracts of savanna sprinkled throughout the forest, along with shrublands, wetlands, and assorted hilly terrain, the majority of the area is comprised of dry, deciduous teak and thorn forest. Outside of the monsoon season the surroundings are dry and dense. When one enters the Gir Forest, at least for much of the year the first impression is one of surprise. The forest is golden; the leaves, the scrubby bushes, the grass all dried up and yellowed and covered in dust. Volcanic rocks are embedded in the dirt pathways that wind through low-lying valleys and pass over dried out creek-beds, providing uneven terrain for travel by foot or vehicle. As summer nears an end trimmed branches line the roadways throughout the sanctuary in preparation for the coming monsoon storms. The landscape is vibrant and green during and shortly after monsoon, a period lasting from mid-June through August or September, but most of the year the Gir Forest's tropical monsoon climate[16] and semi-arid biogeography[17] produces a dry and tawny setting. Seven rivers irrigate the forest lands: the Hiran, the Saraswati, the Datardi, the

[16] A tropical monsoon climate consists of three periods or seasons: winter (from late November until early March), summer (mid-March until mid-June), and monsoon (mid-June until September). October is a transitional month.
[17] Based on Champion and Seth's forest classification (1964,1968).

Shingoda, the Machhundri, the Ghodavadi and the Raval[18]. Embankment dams on the Hiran, Shingoda, Machhundri, and Raval rivers form four large reservoirs supplying water to the region during periods of drought.

The varied landscape, with its varied and intersecting ecologies, provides habitat for faunal spectrum of 38 species of mammals, 37 species of reptiles, and over 300 species of birds. These inhabitants include the lion, leopard, jungle cat, civet cat, desert cat, rusty-spotted cat, ratel, hyena, jackal, mongoose, chital, nilgai, sambar, four-horned antelope, chinkara, blackbuck antelope, wild boar, porcupine, black-naped hare, pangolin, marsh crocodile, star tortoise, monitor lizard, crested serpent eagle, changeable hawk eagle, pygmy woodpecker, peafowl, Eurasian eagle owl, jungle bush quail, white-throated kingfisher, migratory birds like the tawny-bellied babble, and over 2,000 species of insects.[19] The rich biodiversity found in the area's hills, riverine patches, savannas, and dense forests fosters a similarly mixed floristic composition of roughly five hundred plant species, including over 80 tree species and 14 species of grasses.

[18] River names taken from the Gir National Park & Sanctuary information booklet published by the Gir Welfare Fund in 2012. Names for some of these rivers vary in other publications.
[19] Information taken from the Gir National Park & Sanctuary information booklet published by the Gir Welfare Fund in 2012.

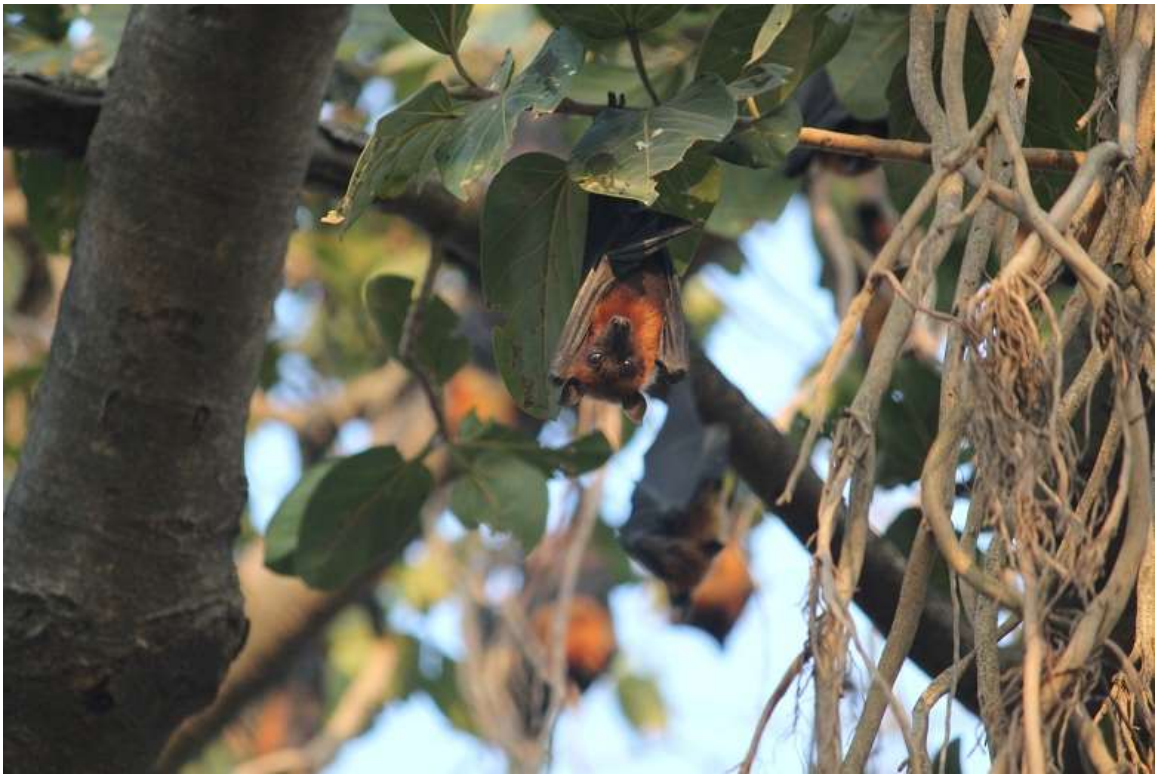

*Figure 8. The Indian flying fox (*Pteropus medius*).*

*Figure 9. A young adult Asiatic lioness (*Panthera leo leo*).*

*Figure 10. An Indian ruddy mongoose (*Herpestes smithii*).*

*Figure 11. A male nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), also known as a 'blue bull.'*

The Gir PA consists of a core area of 259 square kilometers designated as national park and the surrounding 1153 square kilometers designated as sanctuary, each designation signaling different levels of access-restriction as defined by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change[20] (MoEFCC). As a regulatory body, the MoEFCC identifies PA types as distinguishable by the degree of regulation and management of the area's composition of flora, fauna, land, waterways, and/or peoples. Brief descriptions of each category are provided below:[21]

I. *National parks* – an area of ecological significance wherein the interests of wildlife and the environment are prioritized. No human occupational activities are permitted within its boundaries and no individual/familial land rights are recognized.
II. *Sanctuaries* – an area of ecological significance wherein the interests of wildlife and the environment are prioritized. Human occupational activities, including livestock grazing and collection of natural resources, may be permitted and individual/familial land rights may be recognized.
III. *Conservation reserves* – Designated by state governments, these publically-owned areas often make up the periphery outside National Parks and Sanctuaries or geographically link two PAs. Local communities should be consulted prior to designation, but the rights of those living within the PA's borders are not affected.
IV. *Community reserves* – Designated by state governments, these areas are publically- or privately-owned spaces for which an individual or

[20] Founded in 1980 as the Department of Environment, the MoEFCC was rebranded the Ministry of Environment and Forests in 1985 and maintained that title throughout my fieldwork. In 2014, the department transformed into its current iteration.
[21] Information about PAs accessed from http://envfor.nic.in/downloads/public-information/protected-area-network.pdf on 2/15/2016.

> group of people has offered to conserve wildlife and habitats. The rights of those living within the PA's borders are not affected.

In keeping with these provisions, no person, unless employed by or accompanied by proxies of the state government, may enter the national park, let alone use the lands for occupational activities. The area is heavily monitored by forest guards with all roadways entering the national park blocked off by locked gates, policed during daylight hours. Similarly, many of the roadways entering the sanctuary are marked by gates manned by guards who must clear the pathway by manual force before a vehicle may pass through. The sanctuary gates are a barrier predominantly for interloping tourists who wish to catch a glimpse of the Gir's wildlife, but the national park gates block everyone unless their presence is explicitly sanctioned by the government.

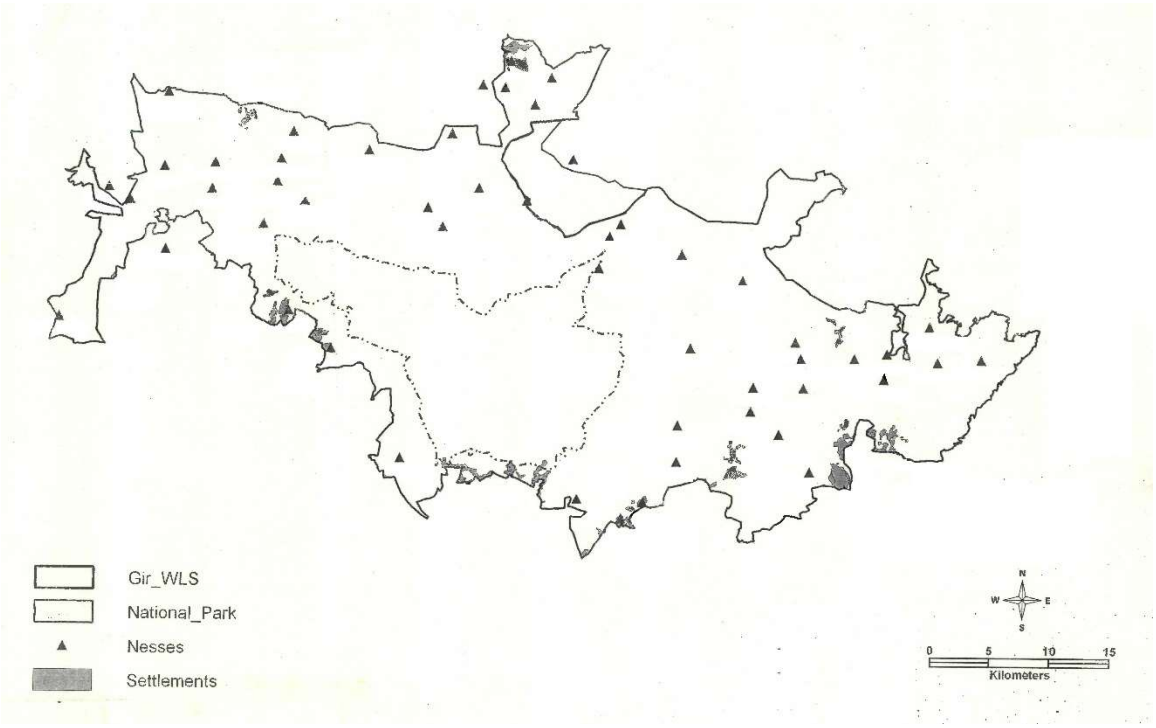

Figure 12. Map of the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park. Provided by the Gujarat Forest Department.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

State and the Protection of Forests in India: A Brief History

Human engagement with the forests in India has been mediated by central and regional authorities for over 2000 years, with often patchy historical records dating back to roughly 500BCE. The duration of Mauryan rule in South Asia (322BCE – 185BCE) brought periods of deforestation via military and agricultural expansion, and, eventually, ushered in a new era of landscape care and protection alongside the spread of Buddhist and Jain doctrines eschewing both hunting and also the Brahminical animal sacrifices which were common at the time (Gupta 2005: 53). The *Arthashastra*, a treatise on effective state-formation and military organization that was composed and continually revised throughout the duration of the empire, outlined the necessity of elephant and elephant-habitat protection in order to maintain a sizeable elephant population for use in warfare. Doing so required the banning of elephant hunting and crafting a holding zone hospitable to elephant breeding. Forests at the borders of the state became protected 'elephant forests' (Gupta 2005; Rangarajan 2001; Trautmann 2015). Other forests became designated hunting grounds for royalty (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Rangarajan 2001), establishing a regional precedent of protected or semi-protected areas, which reduced but did not eliminate hunting practices among tribal communities.

Whether hunting game or extracting resources like timber and metals, a materialist ethos pervaded Mauryan engagement with landscapes. Forested lands were primarily sites of production and material resource extraction toward processes of empire maintenance and expansion. During his reign in the 3rd

century BCE, the emperor Ashoka underwent a dramatic spiritual awakening. While his grandfather, Chandragupta, had left Hinduism for Jainism, Ashoka was strongly influenced by the moralities, gentleness and peacefulness of Buddhism. He integrated many of its religious practices (most notably *ahimsa*, the doctrine of nonviolence that includes vegetarianism) throughout his largely Hindu empire, spreading the message using edicts carved on stone or pillars throughout the subcontinent. Ashoka's edicts were written in numerous languages and scripts, including Greek and Aramaic, across their many locations. In the site at Girnar, for example, the fourteen edicts of Ashoka are carved into a large boulder. These edicts are written in the alphasyllabaric Brahmi script[22] and detail the emperor's call for social and political reform; a number of Ashoka's edicts include commentary on the treatment of animals, with two of the fourteen edicts at Girnar denouncing animal slaughter or sacrifice and detailing the provision of medical treatment and natural medicinal consumables for both animals and humans.

Ashoka's Buddhist philosophical positions ran counter to the violence, both physical and structural, integral to activities of empire expansion. For Ashoka, political and geographical domination were lower priorities than spiritual self-development, resulting in a waning of power which led to the decline and eventual disappearance of the Maurya empire. In the ensuing centuries India was comprised of scattered kingdoms and polities.

[22] Brahmi is the oldest writing system of ancient India that has been deciphered, dating back to the third and fourth centuries BCE. The Indus script of the Indus Valley Civilization was developed three millennia earlier but remains undeciphered.

Figure 13. Major Rock Edict of Ashoka located at the foot of Girnar Mountain.

Figure 14. Closer view of the Major Rock Edict of Ashoka located at the foot of Girnar Mountain. The etched Brahmi text is visible on the face of the rock.

Without a large central authority to implement forest management policies, local peoples regained some control over their relationship with forests, including how they were to be used, and how they were to be understood. Forests were a repository for firewood, fodder, and vegetation used for folk medicinal and nutritional purposes. Additionally, they were also the sites of religious enlightenment, worship, and penance. Ancient and classical Hindu texts delineating the life cycle ending in *moksha*[23] include a stage called *vanaprastha* – literally "retiring to the forest" – during which one transitions from a life of earthly concerns to a life of spirituality. In this model forests are metaphorically linked to spiritual practice, an association of a type of physical space with a temporal life. Communally protected tracts of forest ensured a supply of fruits, honey, or Ayurvedic medicines that could not be destroyed by logging. These 'sacred groves' belong not to the community but to a local deity, and serve not only as sites providing usable articles of nature but as ritual sites honoring the presiding deity. Sacred groves are still found throughout India, a testament to the endurance of religious mythological connections between communities and their lands: as Ramachandra Guha describes institutionalized indigenous systems of conservation in India, social and cultural traditions cemented "a protective ring around the forests… [wherein] there existed a highly sophisticated system of conservancy that took various forms" (1989: 29).

It is important to note that the reality of preservation in and of sacred groves does not correspond with the images of splendor, tranquility, and lush

[23] *Moksha* is the Sanskrit word for the release when one's spirit is liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

beauty that have dominated post-Industrial Western imaginaries of nature. Rather than an untouched wilderness, pristine and prehistoric, sacred grove sites in India are deeply ensconced in the material, political, and social worlds of their respective communities and traditional beliefs espousing sustainable use practices are losing currency (see Tiwari et al. 1998). As historian of religion Eliza Kent has shown in her contemporary study of south Indian sacred groves, these sites are not entirely Durkheimian in their sacredness, nor are they static models of ecologically-minded protected areas. Instead, they are sites of "social, material, and supernatural" resources for the communities with whom they share a symbiotic dependency (2013: 23).

The Mughal period did not foster radical changes to forest management but did see growth in state-managed territories. As the empire expanded so too did the need for forest resources grow. Massive tracts of land were annexed and many local populations were displaced from forest and forest-adjacent lands. Much of the annexation secured timber resources through reafforestation, however, parcels of land became *shikargah*: designated hunting and forest reserves (Grove 1996: 387). The predilection for royal expeditions of hunting large game is widely recorded not only in text sources; the profusion of miniatures artistry at the time has produced many drawings and paintings depicting the Mughals' preferred personal and sporting use of the forest. Agricultural land use increased as the administration implemented major irrigation systems throughout its territories, which incurred a certain further amount of deforestation. It was the period of British Imperial rule through the East India Company and the Raj that redirected human-forest relationships in

India toward a more unified approach to state forestry and empire-building. Large centralized governments and administrations ruling over massive areas of jurisdiction revived the economic approach that forested areas were sites of state-regulated industry and production – and protection – when it served imperial interests (see Grove 1995: 380-473).

Outside of industrial deforestation, British hunting expeditions and the Raj's systematic extermination of India's large carnivores, whether or not they posed a threat to the human population, paved the way toward major declines in wildlife populations. This practice somewhat diminished in the period following World War I, countered by a hunting philosophy valuing the quality of the hunt over the quantity of the kill (see Allen 1975: 115-117), though irreparable damage had already taken place. A notable and unfortunate outcome of overzealous hunting practices is the eradication of the Asiatic cheetah in India in the mid-20th century. Cheetahs are diurnal[24] animals with increased visibility due to their visual presence; because they were not secretive and stealthy like the tiger or leopard, cheetahs were the easiest big cat game for bounty and sport hunters. Formerly abundant, the cheetah was a piece of India's faunal landscape whose numbers were so decimated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that sightings were reported only a few times per decade prior to and for some time following the final 'official' sighting, and shooting, which took place in 1947 (Divyabhanusinh 2006: 108-12).

[24] Active during daylight hours.

Today, protected Areas in India are managed by a cadre of central and state forest officers trained under either the Indian Forest Service (IFS) and/or each state's forest service. The IFS is one of three divisions comprising the current whole of the All India Services, along with the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service. Civil servants of these units are recruited and trained through central government programming but are placed in positions within state-level agencies.[25] Prior to the 1966 establishment of the IFS, forest management was overseen by imperial and local rulers. The British Raj ran the Imperial Forest Service for seventy years until it was dismantled under the provisions of the 1935 Government of India Act, wherein forestry became a provincial, rather than central, government responsibility. During the three decades preceding the creation of the IFS, India's provincial forest services continued to premise the forest as a site of resource extraction, with one notable exception being the 1936 establishment of India's first national park, the Bengal tiger reserve Hailey National Park (now known as Jim Corbett National Park). The reigning powers recognized that the lucrative timber industry, if left unchecked, was capable of exploiting India's forests at an un-sustainable rate. Protection and regulation over the extraction of timber products remained a priority in the first decade of the IFS, but as global concerns shifted toward dwindling wildlife populations so too did the focus of the IFS.

[25] All India Services is the post-Independence iteration of the colonial-era Civil Service of India. Information accessed from http://www.archive.india.gov.in/knowindia/profile.php?id=32 on 3/1/2016.

The Gir Forest fell under varying degrees of documented local protection as far back as the late 19th century, not to protect natural resources, but directly in response to the observed decline in the health of the forest's lion population and the concurrent local extinction of the cheetah. By the 1890s lions were left only in the western Saurashtra peninsula, an area under British control but comprised of princely states. Although lions could have been as vulnerable to hunting as cheetahs, or possibly more vulnerable due to their social, pack nature, India's lions avoided the same fate due in part to two major particularities of their geography: (1) the whole of the Asiatic lion population was concentrated in the remote Saurashtra peninsula, an isolated stretch of land on the far western border of India that juts into the Arabian Sea; (2) prior to India's independence the Gir Forest was under the administration of the Nawab of Junagadh, a local prince whose kingdom operated nominally at the fringes of the Raj. The major contributor to the lion population decrease were royal hunting expeditions for which pride and the thrill of sport, rather than a bounty, were the primary motivation.

Developing transportation infrastructures across the subcontinent in the early 20th century brought a physical, permanent disruption to the environment of the Gir Forest. The implementation of a railway system in India began in the mid-19th century, connecting sites important to British industry first for materials transportation, and later to provide a venue for passenger transport between populated urban areas. Railway construction reached the Gir region of Saurashtra in the 1910s, shortly after the villages of the region were being established.

Number	Date of Train's First Journey	Origin and Destination Stations
1	April 2, 1918	Veraval to Talala
2	March 17, 1920	Talala to Jambur
3	November 13, 1928	Jambur to Pranchi Road
4	December 15, 1932	Visavadhar to Dhari
5	January 10, 1935	Pranchi Road to Dhelavada
6	October 1, 1937	Visavadhar to Sasan to Talala

(taken from Dave "About Gir", originally sourced from *Junagadh Gazetteer*)

PLACING GIR TODAY

"*It was the most beautiful country, not at all as people imagine India, but all up and down like downland with big fields and little villages dotted about… As you went along the edges of the fields you would see a little tiny shrine, or perhaps a little tiny stone, a sort of lingam with red paint on it. I used to ride past these and I always touched my hat the gods of the country as I went by – because they're there*." – Iris Portal, quoted in *Plain Tales of Raj* pg. 111

As a monitored and regulated parcel of land the Gir is largely off-limits, penetrable only by those with proper credentials verified by physical identification cards. My own card featured a photograph of my face, the title of my research project, and the signature of the Gir Deputy Conservator of Forests. Freedom of movement within the forest is contingent on the nature of one's card. A Maldhari, for example, can move through any portion of the forest outside the national park but must carry a photo ID indicating his or her ness to re-enter the sanctuary after leaving for any reason. It is compulsory for park staff to carry

employee badges within the forest but the limitations on movement vary based on one's role: trackers' duties may find them at any location at any time, but guides and drivers have no business in the forest outside business hours or without business clients— that is, tourists, and tourists themselves need to secure permits from tourism office in Sasan. Position-determined forest access reflects both expectations and prescriptions by the Forest Service on the nature of relationship park staff can and should have with the forest and its inhabitants. Trackers occupy the role of the modern-day *shikari*, the historically romanticized hunting guides to the many imperial rulers of India, from the Mughals to the British.

The legal restrictions to entering the sanctuary are physically enforced at roadways. Forest roads are narrow and unpaved pathways of dirt and embedded stone cutting through scrub and teak forest, winding through low-lying areas between hills and mountains, over creekbeds that are dried out most of the year, strategically cleared to avoid interrupting important swaths of open grassland known locally as a *vidi*. With its open canopy allowing sunlight and nutrients to support grasses and ground vegetation, a *vidi* is a favored grazing spot of the Maldhari for their buffalo herds. Come monsoon forest roads may become impassable when the creeks fill and rise above the bridged areas. I traveled through the forest exclusively in a jeep, only encountering other full-sized automobiles when passing near safari tours or the occasional dairy truck. From time to time forest laborers would ride by on bicycles or motorbikes on their way to or from filling water troughs or other assorted forest duties.

In cutting through different patches of the Gir Forest's biogeography, the roadways also guide the traveler through landmark locations for locals and the Maldhari and to or near to Maldhari nesses. Some of these landmarks are visually nearly indistinguishable to the outsider but known well by those who spend time in the forest, with place names providing an orientation to the Gir Forest as a navigable and knowable, navigated and known, place – and not simply the wild, unmanaged space forests and mountainous regions often appear as to the unfamiliar eye. Other locations are identifiable by physical landmarks. For the forest department, the forest is organized into divisions based at an operating center; for example, the wireless radio operating center at Sasan goes by the name *Chandan* (sandalwood), while the center at Kankai close to the Shingaveda river is called *Kulkuliya* (kingfisher).

Temple sites are scattered throughout the forest; some, like the one at Kankai, are more elaborately constructed pilgrimage sites and attract visitors from far and wide. Others are smaller structures built into the natural environment and visited only by local inhabitants of the Gir Forest and nearby areas for variable purposes. One such site is Vadleshwar, a Shiva temple in the forest interior near Kadeli ness and not far from the eastern border of the PA. The temple is constructed of concrete built back onto a line of banyan trees growing closely to the temple's posterior wall. The trunks of the trees provide shade for the structure from behind, while the trees' branches protect from above. Downhill from the temple is a stream and man-made water point for animals[26].

[26] I was unable to determine whether the water point is for use by wildlife or the Maldhari's cattle.

Vadleshwar is a site for performing *puja*[27] in August, when locals cook food and stay overnight at the temple clearing, but it is cleaned and maintained throughout the year regardless by a man living near Gangajaliya ness. His recent presence is communicated through the leaves that have fallen to the ground during winter, swept into neat little piles as visible evidence that the temple site is cared for and manicured. Throughout the year Vadleshwar also sees non-ritual activity from the Maldhari, who often take rest at the site while their buffalo drink water from the stream. Directly facing the temple is a small stone building which advantageously catches shade from the trees and temple's main structure, providing a cooler respite from hot sunny days. The Maldhari know this spot is also favored by other forest inhabitants, regularly encountering lions or leopards napping in its shade.

Further west, approaching the boundary dividing Gir West and Gir East, is Kamleshwar Dam, an irrigation dam built during the 1950s on the Hiran River. A rough and rocky road near the dam leads first to a lagoon and then another Shiva temple that is older but constructed with similar environmental features as Vadleshwar. Built on a shady clearing, the temple site is incorporated into the landscape of trees and waterways while also providing a shelter from the forest. Someone has visited recently, evidenced by the remnants of a fire and a small flower placed atop a water drainage spout fashioned to look like a cow's head.

[27] An act of worship.

Figure 15. Lions napping in the roadway during the cooler hours of the day. Damage to the road from the monsoon rains is visible.

Figure 16. Kamleshwar Dam.

Diagonally behind the temple, leaning like a tablet against a gnarly banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*), is something of a wall-temple monument dedicated to the goddess Mataji.[28] Behind the tree is a steep embankment leading to a stream. The water entering the stream passes under the temple site, trickles out from a group of small holes in the embankment, and then finally flows into the Hiran river. A small wooden hut that is both shielding from the sun and an enclosed space is a particularly attractive resting spot for the solitary leopard. Lions, for the most part social animals, instead lounge in groups haphazardly strewn across the site in the shade of the trees. Next to the hut is a Jasud tree (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), a tropical hibiscus tree that flowers in all seasons. Large termite mounds are scattered throughout the temple grounds between structures and possible grave sites commemorating deceased persons but which may or may not contain actual bodies. I do not know whether the termite mounds developed in response to the religious rituals taking place at the temple in which leftover or remnants of *prasad*[29] are left behind, or if the mounds were at the site when it was chosen. Nowadays when an event takes place at the temple *prasad* is purposefully dropped to the ground surrounding the termite mounds. Statues of Mataji, like the termite mounds, are scattered intermittently through the temple site. Unlike the highly stylized figures and forms found in popular artistic depictions of the Hindu pantheon, including most found in the Gir Forest and its vicinity, Mataji

[28] The name Mataji can be broken down into two Hindi components: the word *mata* (mother) and the honorific suffix *-ji*.
[29] A religious offering of food.

statues are neither ornate nor aesthetically beautiful. In comparison they are crude, plain, and amorphous: simple orange blobs with eyeballs.

Figure 17. Close-up of a tribute to Mataji at the temple near Kamleshwar Dam.

Figure 18. The same tribute from a distance. The monument is erected in the base of the banyan tree.

Three principal temple sites deep in the forest draws pilgrims into the sanctuary while also providing a legal passageway for entering the PA. These visitors are unconcerned with tourism or wildlife. These holy sites are Tulshishyam, Banej, and Kankai, which historically has been the most visited of the three[30]. Kankai, also called Kankeshwari, is situated about 50km to the east of Sasan Gir, toward the central region of the Gir PA on the banks of the Shingavada river in a more tropical, somewhat lush and "jungly" area of the forest. The river's health is apparent even at the height of summer when monsoon waters have long disappeared. Towering palm trees line the riverbank, providing

[30] Between 1987-88 and 1997-98, the number of pilgrims to the Gir Forest grew from 8,000 to more than 50,000 (Quammen 2003: 64; Divyabhanusinh 2005: 216).

suitable perches for the Gir's large and diverse bird population. The river is full of fish and the greenery is astounding in comparison with the dull, drab, and dry thorny teak forest to the west. The higher elevation of the area secures a refreshing breeze that cools the skin and rustles the heavy leaves. Up on an embankment, built on and atop the hillside, amidst bougainvillea and fig trees, is the temple for Kankeshwari.

There are daily buses to Kankai from Junagadh which allow morning visits to the temples of Kankai, but during seasonal festivals such as Navaratri (see next page) the number of visitors increases greatly. The larger of two temples stands in honor of Kankai Mata, also known as Kankeshwari Mata, a deity[31] described by Gujarat Tourism to be "the benefactor of the shepherds of Gir forest. "[32] In Ramesh's words, she is "the one who is represented by many as the wives of the gods." The temple is an open structure with a layout that defines a clear central location housing a statue of Kankai/Kankeshwari, the image of her body and face detailed and feminine. To her right is Mataji in her blob glory, but unlike most other representations I've seen in the Gir Forest the blob is outfitted and decorated. Birds fly unmolested into and through the temple, eating *prasad* or crumbs from pilgrims' meals and taking rest in the shade of the altar rooms, surrounded by flower petals and framed images of deities.

[31] Kankeshwari is an avatar of the goddess Durga.
[32] Accessed at http://www.gujarattourism.com/destination/details/10/260

The pilgrimages to Kankai are not made by the Maldhari, and in my time at the Gir Forest no Maldhari ever mentioned Kankai to me.[33] For certain populations living outside the forest Kankai Mata is *kuldevi,*[34] and for that reason it is especially important to seek her blessings and cement their bond to this manifestation of Mataji during Navaratri. Foreigners and tourists are not allowed to visit the site but that limitation to access has only relatively recently been implemented to cut down on the number of people traveling through the PA, and to cut down on traffic accidents involving wildlife its roads are only open from sunrise until sundown[35]. Devotees and temple workers found guests' large cameras and ignorance of proper temple etiquette inappropriate and bothersome. For this reason Ramesh asked that I leave my camera in the car and have the *pandit* guide me through *puja*. Visible trash and plastic items have been thrown in and around the river area from temple visitors; whether the litter came from pilgrims or the recently banned tourists remains a question.

The Gir Forest presents not only places but also, in accordance with vital seasonal changes, *times* for celebration of the gods. One of the largest celebrations takes place in mid-October when locals gather for Navaratri,[36] a

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[33] This is not to say that it is not important to any Maldhari, but at least to note that the Maldhari of my area of study in the Western Gir PA did not expressly name it as being important to them.

[34] The main deity of a family or clan, in this case a goddess but there may be a *kuldeva*, a male deity, instead.

[35] In 2017 the Gujarat State government began allowing late-night stays at the Kankai temple that some wildlife researchers fear will create a loophole for eco-tourists. See Meena Venkataraman's article at https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/the-endangered-asiatic-lion-faces-a-new-threat-wildlife-tourism/article23455067.ece

[36] Taken from the Sanskrit *nava* for nine, and *ratri* for night.

nine-night festival. In other parts of India Navaratri is celebrated up to five times in a year; however, in Sasan it is celebrated twice during the months of April and October. In accordance with the symbolic relationship between the ending of the monsoon season and "the time of new endeavors" (Zimmermann 1987: 58), October is a pivotal month for festival celebrations. The nine nights of Navaratri are followed on the tenth night by a larger festival, Dussehra, which is discussed below. In this part of Saurashtra each night of Navaratri is dedicated to a different avatar of Mataji. The festival commemorates a war that ended a period of great torment for earthly people. In those days, *rakshasas*[37] terrorized and tortured humans, causing many problems for those living in this world. Mataji intervened, battling against the *rakshasas* for "eight to nine" days through her many forms; one account has sixty-four iterations of Parvati fighting at once. After the defeat of the demons, people chose to honor Mataji by playing *garba*[38], a favorite activity of her avatars. *Garba* is a dance performed by women forming a circle and rotating rhythmically in file around a clay lamp, representing Mataji, which is placed at the center. Each night of the festival the people play[39] *garba* or *dandiya* in honor of and to receive the favor of the goddesses. *Dandiya*[40] is similar to *garba* but involves the use of sticks as percussive instruments central to the choreography of the dance.

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[37] Mythological shapeshifters often described as demons. Ravana was a ten-headed *rakshasa*.
[38] The term *garba* translates to "womb" in Sanskrit.
[39] Certain performative religious actions are "played" rather than "done." In this case, *garba* is a dance but one would not say that they were "dancing *garba*" in the way one might say they were "dancing ballet." Similarly, during Holi participants are "playing Holi" by throwing colored powder on one another.
[40] *Dandiya* is a word meaning "stick."

In the village of Sasan, Navaratri commences with the townspeople constructing a large raised stage behind the strip of snack shops that line the main road. Spectators sit on the ground, encircling the stage to watch the festivities. Maldharis and residents of nearby villages come to watch the *garba* in the nighttime, as these acts of worship are carried out by the community rather than the individual or family unit and therefore participation demands seeking out the nearest celebration. The Maldhari cannot travel to Sasan every night, however, and when in the forest participate by visiting the forest-temple of their chosen Mataji to present her *prasad*, a gift of food that is both devotional offering and, once blessed by the Goddess, sanctified comestible to be consumed by the worshipers.

Following the nine days of the festival is a tenth day, Dussehra, a major celebration commemorating the triumph of Rama over the Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, as detailed in the epic *Ramayana*. Initially, I believed Dussehra was simply the tenth day of Navaratri and was therefore confused at its inspiration deriving from the *Ramayana* rather than one of the goddesses. In other parts of India goddesses are the focal honorees of Dussehra, but in Sasan and its surrounding areas Rama and Ravana are the significant mythological players. Although technically a different holiday, Dussehra is celebrated in practice in Sasan Gir as an extension of Navaratri. Dussehra falls on the tenth day of the Hindu lunar month of *Ashwin*, the seventh month in the *Amanta* calendar followed in Gujarat, and demarks the twenty-day countdown until Diwali, one of India's biggest and most important holidays.

During Dussehra in Sasan the holiday is largely commemorated by the sharing and eating of sweets. In larger cities such as Rajkot, Ahmedabad, and Surat, the festivities are more elaborate: a large effigy of Ravana is fashioned and paraded through town until the dark of night envelops the land. In an open patch of town, visible to all revelers, a man shoots a flaming arrow that pierces the demon's form. Dense crowds cheer as the flames grow and, as when Rama rid the world of Ravana, light overtakes the darkness.

There are three sites in the village for *garba* during Navaratri. The primary site where the large stage is built is located near my living quarters and the Forest Colony (forest staff housing). Another is near my assistant's home near the center of Sasan and nearer to the forest, where grown women rather than girls play *dandiya* to music from a DVD player. The final site is near the home of my *dhobi* (washerman) across the main road of the village toward the river. The celebration I observed at the primary site is the largest of the three and commences the latest, typically after 10:30pm.

My presence at the festival was both conspicuous and seemed unnoticed. I was seated a short distance behind the main throng of spectators. The crowd predominantly rested on blankets spread over the earth. Rather than joining them on the ground I was seated in a wooden chair that my assistant Ramesh had secured for my comfort. Women sat on sheets laid out on the ground on the far sides of the stage and at the front were rows of chairs where the men were sitting. As I watched the dancing Ramesh explained that while things are done differently elsewhere, even contemplating the possibility of a free-for-all modern disco

dandiya in larger towns,[41] in the village "we keep the tradition" by playing *garba* in the "classical style." Here in Sasan, the requirement for girls' participation is that they are ideally between the ages of ten and thirteen and must be unmarried. The most important condition for participation is to be in one's "girlhood," so girls between fourteen and eighteen who have not reached menarche may take part if they wish. There is no limit on age, marital status, or even religion for the boys who wish to participate. Young Muslim boys from the village are welcome to and often do join the dance.

It is rhythm rather than content that guides the male dances, whereas while rhythm is important to the female dances it is the devotional content of the songs that is more significant. When the girls play they dance slowly and sing about Mataji, but boys play at a much faster rate, hitting their sticks together to the rhythm of the music, and sing about Shiva, or Krishna, or sometimes Mataji – but above all they need to use a song that matches the rhythm of the dance. The following is an example of a song for girls:

> When the clouds rain down and the lakes are full,
> Then my brother goes to bring the *kadali*[42]
> Mataji is sitting in my temple [waiting],
> So hurry up and get back home.

[41] He suggests it as a possibility, but this phrasing is unclear to me. I cannot say whether he thinks it might happen or knows it does happen. *Garba* has gained a great deal of popularity and is performed throughout the Gujarati diaspora with disco beats rather than folk music or communal singing.
[42] Large bracelets worn for Mataji.

When the clouds rain down and the lakes are full,
Then my brother is going to get the *ghungri*[43]
Mataji is sitting in my temple,
So hurry up and get back home.

Another song repeats the phrase "My *vandaravan* (all the flora of the forest) is fine/beautiful, so I never will [want to] go to heaven." The imagery of lush forests and waterways in these songs corresponds to the season in which Navaratri takes place. In the climate of Saurashtra, October is a month of seasonal transition following the monsoon of June through September and leading into the bountiful wintertime. It is during this time of year that the forest is in its fullest bloom of healthy and vibrant green plant-life. Rivers and lakes are flush with the monsoon rainwaters, an abundance that benefit all forms of life in the forest. Francis Zimmermann has identified how the use of seasonal references in song lyrics such as the above are part of a Sanskritic poetic (and also medicinal and astrological) tradition in which seasons are a fusion of climate and emotion (1987: 71-74). The anxieties of the first song, in which the girl pleads with her brother to hurry home with her ritual garments, correspond to the mood of "separation, of estrangement, and feverish waits" (ibid 72) that prevails over the rainy season. I have only provided one line of the second song, yet in that single line is the mood of the post-rainy season – of fullness, health, order, and beauty.

[43] Jingling anklets used in dance.

Figure 19. The performance stage erected in Sasan during Navaratri.

During nightly celebrations the stage was hung with lights and little flags. I watched a series of children's dances, some younger and some older, around a small object resembling a birdcage decorated with images of Mataji. I thought it would be the orange blob Mataji I saw so often in the forest, but it was instead Khodiyar, a local *devi* who rides a crocodile. Khodiyar is a particularly celebrated '*mata*' in Sasan Gir whose image is often displayed on car decals and stickers. All the people involved in the operation at the primary site were forest staff: singers, musicians, and even the man who gives me my permits at the government office was coaching the children as they danced, or going on stage and encouraging performers to wrap up their performances to make room for the next act.

WHO RESIDES IN THE FOREST

In Kajri Jain's examination of the artistic trajectory of Indian calendar art (2007), a popular and pervasive form of art in India that includes highly stylized depictions of gods and goddesses in natural and supernatural settings, the imagery presented is a dramatic contrast from the folk art representation of Mataji found in the Gir Forest. Mataji in the forest is a small orange mound with no discernable features outside of two eyeballs and the general blob shape of her body. The aesthetics of calendar art developed incrementally, possibly as a way to situate an Indian artistic tradition outside the Westernized art forms that dominated in the twentieth century or as a response to growing markets for these artistic goods whereby new or additional stylistic details were implemented to appeal to varying audiences (Jain 2007: 33). Well-defined corporeal figures are beautiful and colorful, dressed in ornate and romantic fabrics and jewelry. Classical sculpture of godly and human bodies are similarly refined in features, dress, and hairstyle. The shapeless form of Mataji statues at the Gir may be a vestige of ancient, pre-Vedic Indian belief systems, incorporated syncretically by Hindu populations living on the periphery of the dominant urban or rural-agriculturalist cultural spheres. More than simply a relic, however, the amorphousness of Mataji is a visual marker of her own undefinable nature. Mataji is not a character in a narrative, like many of the gods found in calendar art. She is instead conceptually powerful; she is not like a tree or a blade of grass with definite form, but rather is found within the spirit or power within those forms, something essential rather than visible or touchable. The unseen world

teems through the forest, and in the forest we find Mataji, seeing her though she remains unseen.

In the remainder of this dissertation, I examine the three different communities inhabiting the Gir Forest: Asiatic lions, residents of the village of Sasan, and the Maldhari, semi-nomadic pastoralists living in the PA. The following chapters will acknowledge the economic motivations underlying human populations' use of and connection to the Gir Forest, as well as the ecological explanation for why the lions live there as well. Some of what will be presented fits cleanly into Ramachandra Guha's concept of "environmentalism of the poor" (2000), wherein environmental conservation is central to the material economies of the rural poor – rather than the ideological environmentalism of the neoliberal middle class. By contrast, in this chapter I lay the foreground of why this particular landscape matters to these particular communities not on a materialist basis, but in terms of their connection to the land as expressed through traditional song lyrics and the physical incorporation of the land into local sites of worship. These examples communicate an intimacy with the earth that anchors the forest and its natural processes as a meaningful medium to connect to heavenly, or otherwise otherworldly, concerns.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER TWO

DEVALIYA

Near the southwestern edge of the sanctuary is a fenced-off portion of land called the Gir Interpretation Zone, but more commonly referred to as Devaliya Safari Park. Once home to the family now residing at Amrutvel ness, Devaliya is now an eco-tourism destination within the sanctuary advertised as "Gir in a nutshell,"[44] intended to reduce the stress of tourism on the forest by redirecting cars and tourists from the open forest to this contained site.[45] A safari through the sanctuary is a roll of the dice— tourists can spend multiple hours across multiple days traveling through the forest without a single lion sighting. Visitors to Devaliya, on the other hand, are virtually guaranteed to see lions, as well as a wide array of the Gir's fauna, and all for less money and significantly less time than a forest safari. Devaliya is a Gir-within-the-Gir, encompassing animals and landscapes of the forest with one significant difference: the Gir Interpretation Zone has closed borders and, apart from the birds and leopards who defy the limitations of chain-link fences, its inhabitants are trapped. The area is large; unless driving near the boundaries, a visitor could easily forget that they are traveling through an enclosed area.

My first visit to Devaliya was, like many of my experiences in the field, the result of a bureaucratic snafu. Although my project had been approved and my

[44] http://www.girnationalpark.co.in/devaliyasafaripark.html accessed 10/31/2016
[45] Except on Wednesdays, when Devaliya is closed. As a result, Wednesdays are one of the busiest days for the open safari.

status as a researcher was officially recognized, I could not enter the forest until I had the necessary physical credentials— an official ID card. Many attempts to secure such a card were proven unsuccessful, as on each occasion some unknown (on my part) requirement would be unmet (according to the guidelines to which I did not have access) and I was somehow unable to gain knowledge of these requirements in advance of failing to meet them. One February morning I strode to the ID office housed at the DCF-Wildlife headquarters in Sasan. I had finally been assured that my application was completed, accepted, and that my ID card would be ready for pickup on that particular day. It came as a surprise, although it should not have: the office was closed due to a religious holiday. Resigning myself to spend yet another seemingly unproductive day on my own, I went to exit the building. As luck would have it, the DCF did not like to take days off from his work and I happened upon him in his office. After tea and a discussion on my potential housing, he told me I should see Devaliya and had his driver take me there.

When I first learned of Devaliya I imagined something between a zoo and a game ranch. Upon arrival I found it to be a good deal larger than I had envisioned and much less zoo-like. Although the park's literature claims an accurately diverse array of the Gir's animals and landscapes, my first impression was one of a noticeably different landscape from what I had so far experienced. The terrain flatter, with less shrubbery and less coverage by vegetation in general, Devaliya seemed a dusty and bare savanna in this late winter. This was an ideal setting for wildlife sightings. Many chital, nilgai, wild boars, and blackbuck antelope roamed the park, but noticeably fewer langur monkeys than I usually

came across in the forest. Two large lumps of dirt under a tree, upon closer inspection, revealed themselves to be two nearly full-grown male lions dozing in a patch of shade. A drive through Devaliya ensures wildlife encounters very similar to what one would find in the open forest: deer grazing, lions ignoring the loud jeep engines as they nap, a few partridges refusing to the budge from their resting spot in the middle of the road. A rare sight in the forest, leopards are easily spotted in Devaliya at the leopard enclosure, a cage-like structure housing five leopards that is larger than typical zoo enclosures found in the United States but without the toys or environmental variation used to provide interest. Orphaned or abandoned as cubs, the leopards were raised by a park staff member and never learned the necessary skills to survive in the wild. Fed by bottles as infants, they now rely on daily servings of butchered buffalo meat brought in from Junagadh—the same meat used to feed the caged leopards at Sakkerbaug Zoo. The lions of Devaliya also eat this meat.

Some tourists are satisfied with a visit to Devaliya, either as a last resort after unsuccessful lion safaris in the forest, a quick way to check the Gir Forest off a Saurashtra landmarks travel circuit before heading to Somnath or Diu, a cheaper and shorter time commitment while still enjoying the flora and fauna of the forest (and on a more amenable timetable), or simply because they did not secure a permit to enter the sanctuary and have no alternative to experience the Gir. The position of the Forest Service, via the DCF, covers all bases for Gir visitors to emphasize the appeal of the site as an appropriate alternative to a forest safari: first, for those who are not concerned with the "wildness" of the animals and for whom "a lion is a lion," the Gir Interpretation one is a safari park

that is open year-round where people can come see animals; second, for those who are concerned with the “wildness” of the animals they see and for whom Devaliya seems to be a zoo, all the animals in the Gir Interpretation Zone are “wild” regardless of the fact that the lions and leopards are fed by humans and do not hunt. Beyond feeding, I learned the lions also slept in an enclosure during the night and often the lionesses rested there during the daylight hours. The two males I had seen on my first visit could be found sleeping together under trees. The department had tried to get two lionesses and the two lions to form a pride, but they preferred to separate and segregate themselves by sex. Interestingly, this lion sex-segregation has also been observed in the open forest.

CHAPTER 3
THE LIONS OF THE GIR FOREST

Figure 20. A family of Asiatic lions resting under a banyan tree near Dedakdi checkpost.

It was early winter and the sun was setting earlier and earlier, shortening my evening travels through the forest. In the early evening we drove out toward Kamleshwar Dam, into the territory of the Forest Guard Suleiman Bhai. He patrolled this area every day, working alongside the lion tracker Ibrahim and his apprentice Manoj. During the drive we passed a good number of tourists on safari, some coming and some going from a spot further down the path. One of the drivers, a man with a large and lengthy beard sprouting from his face and neck, slowed down to chat with us for a moment and told us all the cars were there to see Raju Bhai. The driver teased Ramesh and he fired back, giggling, by

calling the man Osama bin Laden. We drove on and found a group of cars gathered around a waterpoint. On the ground you could discern a tan lump with a brown shag at one end – it was Raju Bhai, the lion, sleeping soundly with his face and legs facing the waterpoint structure.

We continued down the road and found Suleiman Bhai and Ibrahim along with the driver, Dilip, sitting on a slight hill at the roadside. Across the way and spread throughout a grassy field was a group of nine lions, although I only counted five by my own sight, with three or four cubs nestled further from sight in the patch of land where the forest became more heavily treed, more "foresty." The men invited me to join them on the hill, so Ramesh and I sat with them in the dusty grass facing the lions, also sitting in the dusty grass, on the other side of the road. Small bursts of activity interrupted the peace of the descending dusk: a few safari tour jeeps stopping briefly to photograph the lazing lions and then, after tourist hours had come to an end, a van with Rajasthan plates transporting a butterfly researcher from Jodhpur in her search for Gir Forest pollinators, a beat-up hatchback toting another forest officer and his personal guests, and finally a motorbike bearing a Suleiman Bhai's superior, a jovial Range Forest Officer, smoking a *bidi* (a small, hand-rolled cigarette).

Dilip was called away for a short time, leaving myself, Ramesh, Suleiman Bhai, Ibrahim, and Manoj on the hillside. As we chatted I would glance across the road from time to time, often catching the eyes of one of the lions as they glanced occasionally at us. Darkness and a chill came quickly, and although that was usually the time I would leave the forest this time I stayed longer at the request of the men. With Dilip gone, they informed me, there was only one white jeep –

Ramesh's jeep – parked nearby, and as the trackers' teams always use white jeeps, the lions would stay nearby only as long as the vehicle was present. As the forest became quiet and the air around us pitch-black, the men built a small fire. They were afraid I would be bored in the dark woods that night and were relieved that I took interest in their stories and conversation. Ibrahim asked me what the English word for the little fire they had set was, and I told him: "campfire." I asked them about the lions across the road who had slowly started moving closer toward us as the daylight dimmed.

The trackers knew these lions as Kankati's group, named for a lioness with a cut across her ear that they had last seen during the 1995 census. They have a large territory monitored by two males who tend to wander away from the group during the daytime to conduct their patrol. Suleiman Bhai suggests they change the name of the group to reflect its current members, perhaps "Bent Tail's Group." Ibrahim, the tracker who has known this family of lions for its past three generations, says no to Suleiman Bhai's suggestion. I turned to look at Kankati's group but saw nothing in the darkness. Suleiman Bhai was more concerned that perhaps the lions could not see me since I was wearing a dark sweatshirt, and motioned for me to move closer to the fire to make myself visible. Afterward the fire got bigger, the smoke cleared, and my eyes adjusted to my new vantage point. I could see gleaming eyes in little pairs, even closer than they had been the last time I had looked. Occasionally I would hear the little growls they made while moving around in the field, but their movements were invisible. I could only tell they were moving when a pair of eyes seemed nearer than before.

"They understand what's going on here, us sitting around the fire, and the white car nearby," Suleiman Bhai said to me. "They might be thinking we are going to give them a goat or something – we do that sometimes when we want to tranquilize one of them, not always but sometimes. Either way, they know something is going on so instead of wandering off they sit here, they stay, and they watch us."

ANIMALS IN SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIOUS TRADITION

> "By contrast, the forests or hills or areas of rainfall agriculture are… [situated in an environment that] constitutes a kind of interior frontier for Indian Civilization – a place of exile for princes in disgrace, a wilderness conducive to the meditations of a religious hermit, the homes of forest peoples and wild animals, a place of magic and of danger." Trautmann 2016: 15.

As demonstrated in the mid-twentieth century by anthropologists including Edmund Leach (1964) and Mary Douglas (1966), animal taxonomies provide a key into complex social orderings and relationships. While the analyses of both Douglas and Leach concern the systems of animal categories with respect to ritual and established taboos, they both demonstrate the necessity of understanding the larger cultural system in question to make sense of their particular analytical focus, thereby formulating a suggested sociocultural architecture of a people and/or place.

In this discussion of native animal categories in India, inspired by the work of Leach and Douglas, I rely on textual analysis of classical Hindu and Buddhist religious writings. Contemporary conceptual models of animals in India correspond generally to the binary distinction set forth in the Vedas that classifies

animals as belonging to one of two major types: domestic or wild. In the Vedas these categories are *gramya* ('of the village') and *aranya* ('of the wild') and are layered within other levels of classification including anatomy, mode of reproduction, ritual value, and edibility (Smith 1991: 527-8). In this taxonomy humans are also a part of the animal world, though distinguished from the rest by their bipedalism. This inclusion of humans as a category of animals allows for the identification of conceptual closeness and distance of certain non-human animals to humans, and interspecies relationships that are built upon sameness and difference. The feature of animals in ancient texts are illustrative elements in a mapping of the physical and non-physical world.

Outside of religio-scientific texts, animals feature extensively throughout South Asian literary traditions, particularly in anthropomorphized form for didactic storytelling purposes. Non-human animals featured in these texts and stories think, speak, and act in accordance with the features of anthropogenic thought processes and ethical frameworks. Two major bodies of animal stories in the South Asian canon are *jatakas*, prosaic and versed tales of the Buddha's previous lives when he was born as a non-human animal, and the collected fables making up the *Pancatantra*, a Sanskrit compendium of philosophical allegories told through talking animals.

The *jatakas* feature dozens of animals throughout hundreds of tales in which Buddha's previous animal-self engages with other animals crossing his path, some of whom are endowed with the same conscious awareness as the Buddha-animal, and others who mindlessly fulfill a role in the story's lesson or

narrative. In her analysis of the 547 *jatakas* of the Pali[46] Canon, South Asian Buddhism scholar Reiko Ohnuma documents the animal characters' roles as both "highly varied" across tales and divergent from "standard doctrinal view" in which non-human animals hold "low spiritual potential" (2017: 42). The contradictory portrayals of non-human animal between their characterization in scriptural doctrine and their capacity in *jataka* tales is not anomalous in major South Asian religious traditions. As with Hinduism, widely recognized as consistent in doctrinal inconsistency, Buddhism does not present an ordered cosmologic whole on all levels and a reconciliation of its conflicts is not a necessarily fruitful endeavor; Ohnuma proceeds with her exploration of the *jatakas* only by considering them a separate type of Buddhist text that is "drawn directly from pre-Buddhist Indian folklore and then adapted to Buddhist ends" (2017: 43).

In classical and popular Hindu imagery, animals feature as affiliations to particular deities, linking back to mythological text sources. An apt example for this dissertation is that of Durga: the goddess of strength and power, the destroyer of evil, the invincible warrior whose power is so great and respected that the male gods give her their weapons to brandish in her many hands. Regarded by many as the most important goddess, she is the cosmic female energy *shakti* made manifest. It is true that all Hindu goddesses are Shakti or Devi[47], but the majority are themselves avatars or alternate versions of one of the

[46] Pali is a language derived from Prakrit and Sanskrit. It is the scriptural language of Theravada Buddhism.
[47] *Devi* is Hindi for 'goddess.'

three major goddesses, the *Tridevi*[48] of Durga, Lakshmi (goddess of wealth and fortune, consort or feminine version of Vishnu), and Saraswati (goddess of arts and knowledge, consort or feminine version of Brahma). Each goddess is known by many names and forms; among Durga's other selves are Parvati, Kali, Sati, and Amba. While being the same, they are also different. Each has her own history, strengths and weaknesses, appearance, and each rides her own *vahana* – animal or mythical hybrid-creature serving as its respective goddess's mount or vehicle. Lakshmi's only *vahana* is the owl, but both Durga and Saraswati are associated with two different animal mounts. Although the *vahana* is not always fixed, it is always closely related to its alternative. For example, Saraswati is sometimes depicted mounted on a peacock and sometimes on a swan. Durga's *vahana* is variably the lion or the tiger. Fearsome and powerful, Durga rides a vehicle exhibiting traits reflective of her own and possessing the strength and potency to act as an extension of her; her wild cat is like another armed limb partaking in her fury.

Durga's lion *vahana* plays a critical role in her most celebrated battle, the slaying of *asura*[49] Mahisa/Mahishasura. The story has many variations, beginning with versions in the *Mahabharata*[50] in which Durga is not a character; in these texts, her eventual role is played by war god Kartikeya, who wins the battle by releasing *shakti*. According to religious historian Narendra Nath

[48] The *Tridevi* is the feminine counterpart to the masculine *Trimurti. Tridevi* translates to "three goddesses."
[49] *Asura* translates to 'demon' in Sanskrit.
[50] Ca. 400BCE – 400CE

Figure 21. Durga resting atop her lion, ca. 8th century. Public Domain from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38384

Figure 22. Durga vanquishing buffalo-demon Mahishasura, ca. mid-18th century. Public Domain from http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/88261.html

Bhattacharyya, "the concept of the demon-slaying goddess had not yet developed" during that era of Hinduism and its crafting of mythological lore (2000: 15). The goddess makes her appearance in the later *Puranas*[51] and takes on many forms herself throughout these texts. Certain details – like the number of her arms, sometimes eight and sometimes eighteen – are not consistent in the many versions. Her bloodlust and the lion she sits upon are the critical elements of her role in this myth.

Mahisa, a buffalo demon, was granted a boon that he could not be killed by any man or god. Acting on his immortality Mahisa wreaks havoc upon the three worlds, running the gods out of heaven and massacring the humans of the earth. Fearing the destruction of the heavens and earth, the gods appeal to the *Trimurti*[52] for intervention. Brahma (who had granted Mahisa the boon), Vishnu, and Shiva united their energies into a blinding light, inspiring all the gods to release their light as well. From this unified *shakti* Durga was born, an embodiment and element of Shakti herself.

Hindu gods are not individual entities but rather indivisible from the cosmic pantheon they constitute. The many forms or representations of the divine singularity, the proliferation of gods, goddesses, demons, spirits, superhumans are each like sparkling jewels in Indra's net[53], interdependent

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[51] The *Puranas* are estimated to have originated between ca. 300 – 500CE and continued until ca. 500 – 1300CE.

[52] The unity of the three gods Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma is conveyed through the *Trimurti*, which is Sanskrit for "three forms."

[53] The *Atharvaveda* (ca. 1000 BCE) describes an infinite net used by the god Indra to ensnare his enemies. Later, in Mahayana Buddhism around the 3rd century CE, the description was

components of cosmogenic truth. More than simply an ingredient of the divine mixture, each is fully reflective of the infinite rest even when isolated for analysis; like cooked food, an attempt at dissection can never satisfactorily de-constitute its makeup. In the same vein, each god cannot be himself without his associated aspects; as described by Indologist Louis Renou, "the worship of *particular aspects* of the gods becomes predominant (emphasis mine; 1968: 63), allowing for deification through particularities of attribute rather than consistent character narratives or histories. It is in this way that the many versions of Mataji idolized by the Maldhari – Chamunda, Amba, Khodiyar – are both themselves and Mataji, embodiments of the many possible differences emerging from a form that is not constrained by singularity. Vishnu's avatars are also the multiform of the Supreme Being, and even within the sequence of avatars there are degrees of representation ranging from "partial" to "complete" (Renou 1968: 66). The complete forms are embodied in the image of man while the partial representations follow what some Indic scholars view as a pre-Darwinian Darwinian model of evolution. Although there is no standardized form across all Hindu traditions of the Dashavatara, the ten major avatars of Vishnu, it is only his final three forms that tend to be disputed. According to the avatar evolutionary model dominant across most of northern Indian, Vishnu's ten primary forms manifest as follows:

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elaborated as an infinite net that hangs over Indra's palace. At every vertex of the net is a multifaceted, glittering jewel that reflects the infinite other jewels of the net. Each jewel reflecting back on another reflects not only itself but also its own reflections of the other jewels, resulting in a simultaneous and infinite process of reflection. Indra's net is a metaphor for the infinite universe and the interconnection and interdependence of all things.

Name of Avatar	**Bodily Form of Avatar**
Matsya	Fish
Kurma	Tortoise
Varaha	Boar
Narasimha	Half-man & Half-lion
Vamana	Dwarf
Parashurama	Warrior (Human)
Rama	King (Human)
Krishna	Deity (Human)
Buddha	Teacher (Human
Kalki	Apocalyptic Horseman

Figure 23. Vishnu as Narasimha. 19th century print by Ravi Varma Press. Public domain from https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2010-3032-1

LIONS IN THE WESTERN SCIENTIFIC TRADITION

In scientific nomenclature cats are a single family of carnivores, *Felidae*, that branches into the two extant subfamilies of *Pantherinae* and *Felinae* and two known extinct subfamilies. Most members of the cat family, including domesticated housecats and also larger cats like pumas and cheetahs, are from *Felinae*. The *Felinae* subfamily exhibit significantly different internal and external physical characteristics than the *Pantherinae* subfamily, the most notable of which is the differently shaped larynx; only the square-shaped larynx of a pantherine animal can vocalize a roar (feline larynxes are triangular). The *Pantherinae* subfamily includes the largest and most iconic cat family members in its genus *Panthera*: lions, tigers, leopards, and jaguars. Using binomial nomenclature all lions are classified as *Panthera leo* and then further defined by a category of subspecies. Thought to be a distinct subspecies of lion that once ranged from northern Africa and Greece to India (Breitenmoser et al. 2010), Asiatic lions were classified as *Panthera leo persica* until 2015, when a proposal for subspecies reclassification of lions by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature[54] was accepted by the international scientific and legal community. Much like the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), Siberian tiger (*Panthera tigris altaica*), and Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*) are separate and sometimes genetically distinct members of the same species *tigris*, African lions and the Asiatic lion were previously understood as the same animal

[54] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Listing Two Lion Subspecies, 80 Fed. Reg. 80,000 (Dec. 23, 2015)

but different in important ways. What were once the seven “African lion” subspecies are now simply two “lion” subspecies, subsuming both African and Asiatic lion populations: *Panthera leo leo* of Asia and western, central, and northern Africa, and *Panthera leo melanochaita* of southern and eastern Africa. Currently, Asiatic lions are considered *Panthera leo leo*.

Figure 24. Mid-nineteenth century plate of an Asiatic lion, then classified as Felis leo, by William Jardine. Accessed from the Biodiversity Heritage Library photostream at https://www.flickr.com/photos/biodivlibrary/6505568215 on 2/10/2020.

Figure 25. Mid-nineteenth century plates of lion subspecies by Edwin Henry Landseer and Thomas Landseer. Accessed from the Biodiversity Heritage Library photostream at https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/pageimage/22606779 on 2/10/2020.

The prior diagnostics between lion subspecies did not rest solely on geography, but also on both phenotypical and structural (skeletal) differences. Asiatic lions are smaller than their African counterparts, which is in line with food-chain analysis linking the relationship between the size of an animal and their prey, and how that is co-created along with the type of vegetation and climate of their environment (see Shugart 2014: 223-6).

2012 Lion Subspecies

Lion subspecies	Latin name
North African/Barbary lion	*Panthera leo leo*
Cape lion	*Panthera leo melanochaita*
West African/Senegal lion	*Panthera leo senegalensis*
Congo/Uganda lion	*Panthera leo azandica*
Katanga/Southwest Africa lion	*Panthera leo bleyenberghi*
East African/Masaai lion	*Panthera leo nubica*
Transvaal/Kalahari/Southeast African lion	*Panthera leo krugeri*
Ethiopian/Abyssinian lion	*Panthera leo roosevelti*
Asiatic lion	*Panthera leo persica*

2020 Lion Subspecies

Lion Subspecies	Latin name
Lions: African and Asiatic	*Panthera leo leo*
Cape lion	*Panthera leo melanochaita*

Hair growth is comparatively moderate among Asiatic lions. The ears of male Asiatic lions are more visible than among African lions due to less developed mane growth at the top of the head; similarly, the tuft of hair at the

end of an Asiatic lion's tail is generally smaller than that of an African lion. One of the more defining phenotypical characteristics of Asiatic lions is a prominent abdominal fold, a saggy length of skin that runs longitudinally along the animal's belly. Beyond external physical features, the Asiatic lion presents a unique morphological marker which has set them apart from African lions until recently, when the same morphology was found in some non-Asiatic specimens from museum collections (Yamaguchi, Kitchener, Driscoll, and Macdonald 2009). Asiatic lions were defined as a subspecies by their divided infraorbital foramen (Pocock 1930; Todd 1965; Joslin 1984; O'Brien et al. 1987; Rashid and Reuben 1992; Nowell and Jackson 1996; Srivastav and Srivastav 1997; Divyabhanusinh 2005; Singh 2007) , a small opening in the skull allowing space for the infraorbital artery, vein, and nerve. Undivided and partially-divided infraorbital foramina make up a single opening, whereas divided infraorbital foramina include two openings, a smaller upper portion and a larger lower portion. Although it has been long noted that a divided infraorbital foramen is not always present in Asiatic lions (Pocock 1930), it was considered "one of the most important morphological characteristics distinguishing the skulls of Indian and African lions" (Yamaguchi et al. 2009: 77). Now that sufficient evidence of the same feature in non-Asiatic lions has been found, the question of sameness and difference between the Asiatic and African lions, at least in terms of Linnaean taxonomies, is only identifiable through variables outside zoological classification, through consideration of a lion population's particular histories and habitats.

LIONS AND TIGERS IN THE HUMAN IMAGINARY

Lions and humans share a long and storied history. The most famous examples come predominantly from the vast and open savannas of sub-Saharan Africa. During the nascent flowering of wildlife conservation in the twentieth century and particularly during the 1960s, European and American conservationists and researchers achieved considerable fame promoting the value of their chosen African mammal. Much of this attention was focused on the intelligence and sociality of the great apes, inspired by or extended from the work of Louis and Mary Leakey: for Jane Goodall it was the chimpanzees of Tanzania, while Dian Fossey championed the mountain gorillas of Rwanda. Off the African continent was Koko, the American Sign Language "speaking" western lowland gorilla, whose relationships with her trainer and pet kitten sparked an unprecedented and continuing level of interest in primate research, protection, and liberation. Beyond these apes were the lions. The 1960 publication of Joy Adamson's *Born Free* brought the public a touching account of humans raising and releasing into the wild a lioness called Elsa. At the time, Adamson and her game warden husband George achieved arguably greater acclaim than the apes of the Leakeys due to the popularity of the book, and in 1966 *Born Free* was adapted into an Academy Award winning major motion picture. Today, in comparison with the work of Goodall, Fossey, and their cohort, the Adamson's work has not retained its spot in the landscape of popular memory/cultural consciousness, despite a brief resurgence in 2008 via a viral[55] YouTube video filmed at

[55] The first video of Christian to gain popularity on YouTube was set to a soundtrack of Whitney Houston. Since then, many other versions with different audio have been posted.

Adamson's camp. The video depicts a reunion between a lion named Christian and the men who had purchased him from Harrod's of London and raised him. As Whitney Houston reaches the climax of "I Will Always Love You," Christian appears at first to charge and then lunge at the men, but instead envelops them in a touching embrace. As men and lions walk away, a conspicuous grizzled and shirtless old white man with a cane joins them; this man was George Adamson, whom the men had entrusted with Christian when he grew too big for their London home.

Lions in India have received far less attention than their counterparts in Africa. Within India and internationally lions are not among the particular animals that *are* associated with the subcontinent, such as the mongoose, elephant, cobra, and tiger. Not coincidentally, all feature prominently in the animal tales written by Rudyard Kipling in the late 1800s, most famously in stories revolving around feral-child Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* (1894). Mowgli's arch nemesis in the majority of these stories is perhaps India's most iconic wildlife inhabitant: a Bengal tiger. Kipling names this tiger Shere Khan. *Sher* is the Hindi via Persian word for large cats like lions and tigers, and *Khan* is a common South Asian surname derived from the Mongol-Turkic title signifying political leadership. Shere Khan is undoubtedly the central villain of Mowgli's youth, occupying a position inciting fear in the village and respect, sometimes begrudgingly, in the jungle. Kipling's character framing of the tiger is a clear reflection of the longstanding British policy regarding predatory wildlife up until the turn of the 20th century when the focus shifted toward conservation and protection (see Grove 1996). A classic example of this relationship is found in

Ireland in the late 17th century, when the British waged a battle against Irish wolves which were believed to be threatening the livelihoods of the people by preying on their livestock, by offering a bounty "comparable to that offered for the head of a rebel" (Rangarajan 1996: 144). Around one hundred years later, the Irish wolf population was exterminated, meeting the same fate wolves had met earlier in Scotland and England. The imperative to eradicate large predators extended to colonized lands like India where such animals occupied territories the British sought to convert into economically productive sites.

Contemporaneous with the movement away from large-scale extermination of wildlife to reduce perceived threats and increase industry was the establishment of the Shikar Club as a community for white men to undertake (and relive through memory while socializing) hunting expeditions; "vermin" and "beasts" became "game." Sport hunting was a mainstay of British culture by which men could channel and perform their "masculine energy" (Divyabhanusinh 1995: 83). For these foreigners India teemed with exotic game, and after the introduction of the long-distance rifle in the 17th century participation in hunting required a great deal less skill. Despite the relative ease of finding kills, the spirit of the hunt ensured that each kill embodied individually the potency of the hunter, and collectively the reach of the empire.

As of 2019 none of the major animal characters from *The Jungle Book* have been extirpated in such a fashion. In popular thought, the tiger is no longer a blood-lusty Shere Khan, rather, tigers have become seen as the unfortunate and undeserving victims of ecological destruction brought on by industrial development, human expansion, and climate change, or as prized targets of

poachers. Tiger numbers in India were estimated at around 20,000 in the early 20th century, shortly after Shere Khan made his debut in the literary arena and around the same time as the founding of the Shikar Club. By the early 1970s the tiger population had reduced by more than 90%, with census counts totaling 1,800. Concurrently, India's human population ballooned from 238 million in 1901 to nearly 550 million in 1970[56], an increase of over one hundred percent. These numbers tell a story suggesting human encroachment on historic wildlife habitats, and the transformations of land governance and usage therein, at least contributed to, if not determined, the diminishing health of tiger densities across India. In the final 2017 issue of popular magazine *The Economist*, just such a tale is told, invoking a narrative by which "[f]orests where tigers had lived were cut down and converted to farmland" and "animals which had been the tiger's prey were hunted to meet people's needs—as were the tigers, when they discommoded people, or when there was money to be made from pelts or other parts" ("A tiger's tale", 2017). Tigers spotted outside the invisible, cartographical boundaries of their affiliated wildlife reserve are at "a high risk of being poisoned, electrocuted, or shot" (Ibid).

Notwithstanding the omission of British agency and influence as primary contributors to the decimation of the tiger population in India, the story in *The Economist* is a potent and widely accepted narrative of how the world's favorite

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[56] Census of India. 2011. *Variation in Population Since 1901*. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 07-01-2020. Retrieved from https://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/variation.aspx on 07-01-2020.

animal has become nearly a relic. This account ignores the over 80,000 tigers environmental historian Mahesh Rangarajan has estimated were slaughtered between 1875 and 1925 (2001: 32). The effects of British sport hunting and British-sponsored bounty hunting appear more visible in the case of a different Indian big cat. Asiatic cheetahs, once so favored as hunting companions by Mughal rulers that the emperor Akbar kept one thousand in his stables at all times, underwent a decline from an uncertain population[57] to local extinction during the late 1940s and early 1950s (Divyabhanusinh 1995: 110 for extinction, look elsewhere for other pages). Although Mughals had introduced the British to coursing, the practice of hunting wherein cheetahs perform the kill, they never took to it and were known to send cheetahs back when they were sent as gifts from local rulers (Divyabhanusinh 1995: 83). The British did use dogs[58] as animal companions for hunting in England, but in those expeditions the act of the kill was always in the hands of the human hunter. In the early 20th century publication *The Sportsman's Book for India,* coursing is criticized as a "sport [that] has not… the same charm as shooting, or fishing, or pig-sticking, for one is a spectator merely, but takes no active part in the performance" (Aflalo 1904: 550). The thrill of the hunt culminates in the killing itself, and coursing cheetahs undertook the physical act of killing when they participated in expeditions, robbing the hunting man of the "charm" of doing so himself. It is notable that the

[57] Though not documented, the population has been thought to be so robust that during Akbar's fifty-year reign his administration is said to have captured over nine thousand young adults from across a large swath of present-day India.

[58] One major difference between British hunting dogs and Mughal coursing cheetahs is their sourcing; while the British bred hunting dogs, the Mughals could not successfully breed cheetahs in captivity. Coursing cheetahs were collected from the wild and raised by Mughal handlers.

reasoning behind the British disinterest in hunting with cheetahs had provided Mughal Emperor Jahangir, who would "not…harm any living thing with [his] own hand," an excuse for why he *could* participate in hunts (Rogers and Beveridge 1980: 46). The strangulation of hunted animals by cheetahs seemed uncompassionate to the imperialists, who found shooting to be a more considerate form of killing (Aflalo 1904: 550). During the British Imperial period cheetahs underwent a transition from hunting companion to object of the hunt, providing a pelt equally exotic to the European market and a carcass of equal bounty value as that of a leopard or tiger, but one far easier to obtain: cheetahs are diurnal inhabitants of open habitats, lacking the elusiveness and camouflage of forest-dwelling big cats. By the mid-20th century, they were gone.

Lions may have gone the way of the cheetah in India under other circumstances but did not, due in part to the global growth of environmental protectionism and the conservative stance of local royalty. Though they survived in numbers, they did not succeed in maintaining a position in the Indian public mind, and the use of lions in South Asian iconography, ubiquitous symbols since at least the time of Ashoka, dwindled during the 20th century. The most notable erasure came when the Reserve Bank of India replaced its logo from the image of a lion to one of a tiger in the 1930s in an attempt to dissociate India from Imperial symbols, this despite the fact that the use of lions in South Asian symbolism pre-dates the arrival of the British (Divyabhanusinh 2005: 133). Domestic and international conservation outfits focused their attention on India's more visible and more widely distributed tiger population across the following decades, with tiger visibility peaking in the 1970s when Prime Minister Indira

Gandhi oversaw the implementation of Project Tiger, a conservation program decreeing and enforcing tiger habitat protection. Nationalistic lion imagery has not disappeared entirely, however, as an artistic rendering of the Lion Capital of Ashoka became the Republic of India's official emblem in 1950. The national emblem graces all currency and official federal documents.

HISTORICAL PRESENCE OF LIONS IN INDIA

That so many people do not know there are lions in India while almost everyone knows about India's tigers is due in part to the much greater geographic distribution of tigers across the subcontinent and limited habitat range of lions. Geopolitically, the Gir forest is a part of Monsoon Asia, an international region sharing a climate of seasonal winds and rains that perpetuate a wet environment. Climatically and geographically, and on a national rather than international scale, the Saurashtra peninsula is part of the arid (see Trautmann 2016: 13-4) or semi-arid (see Champion and Seth 1964, 1968) region of India. As such, the tropical monsoon climate of the Gir forest ensures a drier jungle environment than one finds in the elephant and tiger reserves throughout the southern and eastern parts of the country. Despite the massive decrease in habitable environments for tigers in India across the last two centuries, protected populations are scattered across most of the nation, notably absent from the Saurashtra peninsula where the only lion population is found. The small size and isolation of the Asiatic lion along with a dearth of historical or archaeological evidence of their presence has convinced some that the real reason so few people know about the lions in India is because, until recently, there were no lions in India.

In 2013 conservation writer Valmik Thapar published *Exotic Aliens: The Lion & Cheetah in India,* a book premised on the thesis that Asiatic lions and cheetahs were and are not indigenous subspecies[59] but instead "exotic aliens," as the title clearly states. Thapar asserts that cheetahs were imported from Afghanistan and Africa during the reign of the Mughals and questions why lions were not verifiably present in South Asia (via hunting records including documents and photographs) until the late nineteenth century, believing their appearance in the Gir Forest a result of local royalty importing the lions for sport hunting. Thapar's publication stirred controversy in Indian wildlife and conservation circles but he was not the first to interrogate the murky origins of lions and cheetahs in India; in fact, many before him had published on the subject in scientific journals. The question arises in archaeological analyses and environmental/climatic reconstructions of ancient India surrounding the period of the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), a Bronze Age (3300 BCE – 1200 BCE) society located along the Indus river which flourished during its mature phase from 2500 BCE – 1900 BCE (Kenoyer 1998: 17).

Early IVC archaeologist John Marshall posited that the Mature Harappan phase (named for the larger of the two major IVC sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro) experienced a higher amount of rainfall in the Greater Indus region, as evidenced by (1) the high density of settlements in Baluchistan which

[59] Historian Romila Thapar contributed one chapter of this book in which she presents her archival research and notes what was unavailable in the historical record: any evidence indicating the transport of lions into India from any location. Due to this gap of proof, she concludes that "the question of the lion being indigenous [to India] therefore still requires investigation" (Thapar 2013: 60).

he felt was "accounted for only by the existence of a more productive environment," (2) the use of baked bricks in buildings which provide greater protection from rain than sun-dried bricks, (3) an efficient and sophisticated water drainage system in areas known today for poor rainfall, and (4) the assortment of animals represented on Indus seals (Possehl 2002: 9). Other scholars believe that the Indus Valley riverways fostered the growth of dense forested environments which provided timber and housed edible game including gazelle and jungle fowl in addition to predators such as tigers and elephants (McIntosh 2002: 46). In 2014 paleoclimatologists uncovered evidence for climate change during the Indus period through changes to oxygen isotopes from gastropods fossils collected from an ancient lake-bed, revealing a monsoon cycle disturbance lasting two centuries[60] (Dixit, Hodell, and Petrie 2014) that may have significantly contributed to the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization.

The seals remain one of the more intriguing and studied remains of Indus Valley material culture, featuring images of humans, animals, and writings in the undeciphered Indus script. A large variety of animals are depicted on Indus seals including elephants, tigers, and rhinoceroses, with exceptions of many common animals such as the peacock and monkey; to this day, none have been found bearing the image of a lion. In fact, Gregory Possehl has noted that the lion "is conspicuous in its absence from Indus imagery" (2002: 9) in general, which could suggest an absence of lions in South Asia during the IVC period. On the other hand, unicorns are a conspicuously present motif to the point of being the most

[60] This climate event corresponds to a larger Holocene aridification across modern-day southern Europe and the Middle East.

represented animal on Indus seals (Kenoyer 1998: 87). Neither are evidenced in faunal remains.[61]

Valmik Thapar's contention that lions are non-indigenous to India is supported by the fact that the animals featured on Indus seals prefer wetter environments like the alluvial lands constituting the IVC's prime territory, whereas the unfeatured lions tend to inhabit dryer, semi-arid habitats. His suggestion that lions arrived in India across a period of five fairly recent centuries, however, is unsupported and even disputed by one of his *Exotic Aliens* co-authors: his aunt, historian of ancient India Romila Thapar. Although she agrees with her nephew that lions (and cheetahs) are not native to India, her position differs dramatically on a temporal scale; in her chapter she suggests the presence of lions in India "gradually builds up… by the centuries CE" (2013: 60). Although her explanation for *how* lions ended up in India differs, Romila Thapar's estimate of the *timing* of the lion's arrival in India is in line with what has been suggested by geneticists and other researchers who estimate the population arrived and/or became isolated in the Saurashtra peninsula between 2,000 – 3,000 years ago (Driscoll et al. 2002; O'Brien 2003; Divyabhanusinh 2005).

As for the Asiatic cheetah, the Cat Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, est. 1948) took a position in 1981 that "it would be sufficient to conclude" that cheetahs were not native to Rajasthan, a

[61] Domesticated cattle account for at least half of all faunal remains from Indus sites, and the Indus people also raised chickens, goats, sheep, water buffalo, and even house cats and dogs (Possehl 2002: 63)

state encompassing the most apt environment to support a wild cheetah population. Geneticists and biologists have spent decades analyzing the relationship between Asiatic lion ecology and genetics in an effort not only to better conservation management strategies but also to trace and understand the environmental and genetic histories of the lions.

PEOPLE OF THE GIR FOREST ON LIONS

The questioning surrounding the evolutionary timeline and genetic diversity of lions provides important context about the kinds of discussions at the center of scientific and scholarly studies on lions and their extended cat family. In the scientific community legitimacy is assigned to knowledge production, whether or not it corroborates past findings, as long as the methods of its production (and analysis of its findings) conform to the ideal standards of its respective discipline. For the communities residing in and around the Gir Forest, the necessary education and training to be proficient in the language of the Western scientific tradition are not accessible. In this dissertation I privilege the local knowledge, which can include ethnoscience and otherwise emic ideas, beliefs, and understandings, that I encountered during my ethnographic research. I categorize this type of knowledge as something between what Lévi-Strauss termed “the science of the concrete” (1966) and raw, qualitative data frontloaded by the more ethnographically-minded scholars of late.

Animals inform and participate in daily life in and around the Gir Forest, and also throughout South Asia as a whole where wildlife and human populations are sympatric. Knowledge about animals – what they are, what they do, how they

fit into the larger world – is edified through both direct (proximity, interactions, observations) and indirect (stories, associations, depictions) animal interventions into human life. While the latter provide more obvious human-animal connections or comparisons through metaphor, it is the former that lays the groundwork for a vernacular knowledge. When Reiko Ohnuma describes *jatakas* as "a depiction of animals as constituting a kind of *society*, complete with family and kinship relations, distinctions of *jati*, allies and enemies, and features of governance (for example, the lion as king of all beasts)" (2017: 44), these animal character representations are not only allegorical but rather outcomes of native perceptions of "the sensible world in sensible terms" (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16). Local characterizations of human-lion relationships at the Gir Forest resonates with Ohnuma's comment on *jataka* stories, with discourse communicating a general sense that lions have a theory of mind that is not limited to lion society. Instead, a lion's ability to engage with or understand the social world extends, to some extent, to the larger social world encompassing a multispecies community. Such a possibility may follow from the salient position lions hold in native animal conceptions dating back to the *Vedas*, wherein lions and humans are situated relatively closely to one another based on their similarities such as method of reproduction or physical features, including number of digits and the presence of hair. Another example of lion-human closeness is the placement of Narasimha, the theriomorphic avatar of Vishnu who is half-man-half-lion, at the midpoint of the Dashavatara's "evolutionary" model (see pages 84-85). The avatars progress in form from fish, to tortoise, to boar, but before entering the more humanoid bodily phase it presents as a partial divergence from "animal" and partial entry to

"human," neither one nor other and both at the same time.

Outside the PA

In Saurashtra some communities are known to wear lion claws mounted in gold on a necklace. The Maldhari of Gir are not known for engaging in this practice, although that does not preclude the possibility that some Maldhari families or individuals do possess lion claws as ornaments or pendants. The claw serves as a talisman charged with bringing strength and courage to its bearer, and in 2007 could be purchased for a price between five and ten thousand rupees, while replicas carved down from deer antlers cost only one to two thousand rupees (Times of India 2007). The origins and authenticity of lion claws in the market are uncertain but their procurement has been known to take place at the Gir Forest in the past (Singh 2007: 11); these days the Forest Department has declared it collects all Gir lion carcasses in part to prevent the use of lions' bodies in the illegal wildlife trade.

Knowledge and discourse about lions varies between the different populations living in and around the Gir Forest. Everyone in the area knows it is illegal to kill a lion, but not everyone in the area is aware that every dead lion receives a post-mortem examination, for example. For those living outside the forest whose major occupation is tied to the Forest Department and tourism industry, lions are understood in the context of their special status as a protected species, resulting in data that are drawn directly from the kinds of interactions that take place in a field site established as a site of protection, care, and study.

Even those whose experiences with lions pre-date their employment at the forest learn to talk about lions in the language of their professional milieu. In truth, many of those experiences live on only in brief and vague memories of the past, such as the story of a young boy who went into the forest to pick berries, encountered a lion, and screamed. The memory ends with a Maldhari man helping the child out of the situation in some way. That boy, now a young man working in the forest, no longer speaks of lions in terms of face-to-face encounters or fear, but instead uses words like "source-population" and "meta-population" (as lion populations are increasing and groups of lions are breaking away from the protected area and moving off into outlying areas, the Gir population is considered by those tied to conservation work as the source population and the other areas are labeled the developing meta-population). There has also been a significant shift in conservation strategies employed at the Gir Forest during the lifetime of its workers. In its earlier days, the sanctuary configured its tourism around a circus-like atmosphere of spectacle and a guaranteed good time. As a circus-goer expects to see clowns, acrobats, and trained animals performing tricks, a visitor to the sanctuary in the 1970s and 1980s expected to see lions living up to their ferocious reputation and image. Disappointed visitors and locals complained that the lions were not "wild." A current guide, recounting his visits to the "lion shows" that were put on at the Gir Forest during his youth, recalled:

> We could see the lions easily, meaning up close, but it wasn't right… We didn't know much about the forest, but they were giving food to the lions in the lion shows, so at that time we wondered 'Why are they giving the

> lion food?' In our studies we read that the lion is the king of the forest, so… we felt that this lion seems like a pet, just sitting in one place…

The guide's account echoes many former criticisms of international conservation and wildlife management that have resulted in a global shift in conservation goals from "protection" (often resulting in isolation) of charismatic species to the current trend prioritizing biodiversity and landscape conservation. Management at the state level determined that if the goal was sustaining and growing a healthy lion population, the key to achieving that goal was maintaining healthy forest ecology. This included a prey base sizeable enough to eliminate the need to feed the lions butchered meat. During the 1990s the department began developing corridors and satellite population sites outside of the main tract of sanctuary. The guide's employment at the forest illustrates a more recent shift in conservation science to a model that also considers political, cultural, and economic concerns in its schemata.

Trackers, forest officers, and guides identify lions by their sex, age, appearance, and more broadly by membership of social groups. Most of Hindi-speaking India uses the term *sinha*[62] for lions, but at the Gir Forest the Gujarati term *sawaj* is used interchangeably. Male lions are referred to using the Gujarati/Hindi term *nar* (male) and females are *maadaa* (female), while for cubs and sub-adults the Hindi word *bachche* (children) is used. A lion with a full mane is called *kesarin* or *kesarisinh*, formed from the root word *kesar* (saffron). There

[62] The Hindi *sinha* is derived from the Sanskrit *simha*. The etymology of *simha* is uncertain. It has been suggested that it may trace back linguistically to Armenian or Iranian roots (Divyabhanusinh 2008: 68).

is specialized local terminology based on coat color, mane color and density, and other physical characteristics including scarring and the condition of the tail.

The behavior of individual lions that habitually approach humans is explained as the result of these animals' past experiences of receiving medical treatment from forest department workers. One male lion aged about four years had a tendency to sit in the middle of the road rather than retreat into the woods when vehicles were parked nearby. He had received medical care twice in the past, so when he came nearer to an occupied, stationery vehicle the officers present wondered aloud if he had been bitten by another lion that day and was approaching them specifically because he was "wanting to be given treatment."

Inside the PA

In the Saurashtra peninsula, local dialects often substitute *ha-* for *sa-* sounds; those living in the forest typically use the word *hawaj* instead of *sawaj*… For the pastoral Maldhari, a *hawaj* is a central component of the landscape through which they make their homes and livelihoods; they are, as one woman put it, "our [the Maldhari's] company" and protection from bad elements that might otherwise enter the forest. As such, the way the Maldhari talk about lions is based on long-term engagement with their lion neighbors that takes place at any and all hours of the day or night, and through multiple generational life cycles. That animal communities cultivate and adhere to their own socio-cultural (and not solely bio-behavioral) frameworks is an interpretation of animal social worlds that has gained significant ground in anthropological dialogues in recent years,

but has been standard knowledge for communities like the Maldhari for centuries.

Lions are not only the only social big cats, but the only members of the entire cat family to live and hunt in groups.[63] African lion prides are on average made up of four to six adults, while those of the Asiatic lion are typically smaller, consisting on average of only two adult females[64] (Nowell & Jackson 1996). The pride is not only a social unit but also a particular familial configuration: aside from offspring (whether cubs or sub-adults) and their father(s), a pride is comprised mostly of a set of related females. While the female to male ratio is higher among African lions, the lions of the Gir Forest are confined to a smaller area of habitat, producing ample opportunity for repeated observation by the human populations who live or work in the forest. The unequal sex ratio is not simply noticed but indexed in how the Maldhari understand lion sociality and family structures in contrast with their own.

The Maldhari recognize in lion society the importance of successful reproduction through careful mothering. Lioness mothers-to-be are known to leave their groups when they are ready to give birth and stay isolated with their offspring until they have grown big enough to be mobile. In general, lion kinship is conceived by the Maldhari to be centered on female-female relationships. Adult lionesses within a pride are biologically or categorically considered sisters. Each conceives and births her own offspring with either the same lion or, if there are

[63] Some feral domesticated cats live in groups as well.
[64] Nowell and Jackson measure pride size by number of females. African lions seem to be measured by number of adults.

more than one adult males in the pride or a male changeover has taken place and the offspring are not too young, with a different male. Lions are classified by zoologists as cubs for the first year or two, after which (or before, depending on their rate of development) they become sub-adults; after the age of three they are generally considered adults. All young are parented by the lioness irrespective of their biological parentage. If a mother for whatever reason is unable or unavailable to care for her cubs, the other adult females will step in and take over for her. During my first visit to the Gir in February 2010, this behavior was explained to me by a Gir resident: "*massi* will take care of the cubs if the mother can't." *Massi*, the Gujarati cognate of the Hindi *mausi*, is the kinship terminology for one's mother's sister, indicating a consanguinal kin relation rather than the more generalized "auntie" that is typically used for older unrelated women in one's family's social group.

According to the Maldhari ontology lions not only recognize relationships within their own social world, but also have an understanding of interspecies relationships, communications, and expectations. This understanding is co-produced by the Maldhari and the lions in their long-term interactions with one another and is performed when one group acts in ways that take into consideration the interests or desires of the other. For example, the Maldhari generally do not fear being attacked by lions but do know the situations in which attacks are possible, such as when they have recently given birth. It is during those times I was told you cannot "trust" a lioness, because small cubs often approach humans and their mother can become "angry thinking people are trying

to steal her babies." Witnessing cub-rearing behaviors is one way the Maldhari know the lions have *judhi* (sense) in their minds; lionesses keep their cubs hidden during tense situations and call out to them once the danger has passed. As one man from Kadeli ness told me, "Lions have lots of sense in their brains… We [the Maldhari] know all about the lions and know how to behave [with them], by giving them distance, so we don't get attacked much. I don't know about how it works outside the forest, what happens out there." The rules of behavior might be different outside of the Gir Forest, where different lion and human populations may follow different customs, but for the Maldhari and the Gir lions there is an established rapport. When lions are too noisy at night and wake the Maldhari, a Maldhari individual will go to the doorway and cough or make other noises to let the lions know that they woke them up. I was told that the lions, hearing the noise, realize that "his [the Maldhari's] eyes are open" and go away. According to man from Kadeli, the Maldhari's buffalo, too, understand this communication and have learned to emulate the Maldhari's cough to get the lions to leave. In this way the buffalo was "also given some sense [by God]" and know what to do" during interspecies encounters.

The Maldhari's familial perception of lions is not an association that extends neatly onto other members of the larger cat family. The only instance I saw domestic cats at the Gir Forest was at Jambuthala, a Muslim ness of roughly 150 people, where two cats lived off the *undar* (mice) found in and around the ness. The word for cat is *mindli*, but the residents of Jambuthala often referred to the cats as *massi* in reference to cats being a sort of 'sister' to the lions – a term

that indicates lions in a motherly relationship to the speaker. There had been other cats at the ness in the past, but leopards visited Jambuthala more often than other nesses because, as a Muslim ness, there were often fish scraps to feed from, and sometimes leopards would also eat the cats. Leopards, locally called *deepada*, are smaller-sized and solitary denizens of the forest; they have neither the strength nor numbers to pose much of a threat to the Maldhari's livestock, though they do occasionally prey on *padi* (calves). Leopards are described by the Maldhari as "shy" and "untrustworthy" animals with whom they cannot share the kind of relationship they have with lions.

Violent human-animal conflict involving lions and leopards are not uncommon in and around the Gir Forest. Leopards sometimes attack and eat small children living in areas peripheral to the forest, and pairs of mating lions have been known to attack and kill, and sometimes partially eat, humans who come too near during intercourse. Older Maldhari men display scars from their youth spent fighting off lions and leopards that were trying to eat their buffalo, but these days physical confrontation between a Maldhari and big cat is rare. At Khada ness leopards are seen regularly but have had no conflict with humans residing there in the living memory of middle-aged men, indicating to the men of Khada a relationship of *shant deepada*, of peace with leopards. The situation with lions at Khada is more complicated, as the conventions of the human-lion relationship are well-defined, thus creating the possibility of deviance. "Good" lions are sometimes (though not always) afraid of humans. "Good" lions know to keep their distance from the Maldhari just as the Maldhari know to keep their distance from the lions. "Crazy" lions are never afraid of anyone.

Figure 26. A subadult male lion

Figure 27. An older lion who has been pushed out of his pride by younger males.

Chapter 4
WORKERS OF SASAN GIR

The path from mainland India to the Gir Forest traverses an interchanging periphery of cultivated fields, remote factories, and large patches of thorny scrub forest. My way to the forest was typically routed from the single-terminal airport at the city of Rajkot, from which my research assistant Ramesh would pick me up in his Tata Sumo,[65] a large jeep he had purchased with his brother for $2500. The Sumo had no working air conditioner, questionably functioning shocks and brakes, and seats and seatbacks with the give of a wooden plank. The physical discomfort of the car combined with the bumpy, rocky nature of the ride made it difficult to take rest during the journey; although at times I resented the inability to doze off after one or multiple flights had brought me to Rajkot, these seemingly endless wild rides provided a stretch of space and time wherein I was able to inch my way out of the cramped urban life of my place of origin and tumble slowly, though not gently, into the immense forest landscape. This kind of transition begs an awareness and agency that would be lost if the traveler were to wake up at their destination, aware she had taken a journey but unaware of the journey she had taken.

Roadway vigilance in remote environments is occasionally rewarded; emerging from the camouflage of the earthen ground, even the most elusive

[65] My assistant and his brother always referred to the car as a Sumo, a car model by the brand Tata that had served as a status marker for many years. In early conversation I somehow came under the impression that they drove a 1999 Mahindra Scorpio. Rather than the exact make and model, I surmised that he may have wanted to express the type of car he had and communicate its similarity in size and appearance to a Sumo. In the end, it was a Sumo.

forest inhabitants can become conspicuous when they appear on the blank canvass of the pavement. Upon returning from a family obligation in Mumbai one night I was feeling particularly unsure about how I would re-transition into my quiet life in the forest after the amenities and frenetic pace of the city. The feeling increased as we neared our destination of Sasan and the comforting liminality of my voyage was coming to an end. While the Sumo's headlights shone brightly into the heavy darkness it was not unusual for my mind to misinterpret images from the distorted shapes straddling the edge of the stream of light. Fifteen minutes outside of town one of these illusory shapes, at first ghostly, became corporeal as its hunched body crossed the road ahead. It was a striped hyena, emerging from and disappearing back into the night. The sight shocked me out of my rumination and even shocked my assistant out of his listless driver's concentration. I had learned about the hyenas of the Gir Forest from a hyena researcher living in Sasan, a wildlife biologist and doctoral student from Aligarh Muslim University. Unlike the more populous predatory spotted hyenas of Sub-Saharan Africa who live in large social "clans," Indian striped hyenas typically live in groups of only a few individuals and subsist largely by scavenging animal remains. In the Gir Forest, they are predominantly if not completely solitary. Collecting data on these hyenas has proven difficult even with specialized technologies and camera traps used to track their nocturnal habits.

In the nearly four decades of his life Ramesh had rarely, perhaps two or three times he thought, seen a hyena. It was a special occasion, he told me, and I was very lucky.

In this chapter I introduce the village of Sasan, also known as Sasan-Gir, through this short vignette along with profiles of key interlocutors in order to bring this scope of this dissertation's discussion into the social – the multiple spaces and lives constituting a small locality on the edge of the Gir Forest PA.

Sasan

The village of Sasan sits on an inlet in the western end of the Gir Forest's southern perimeter. Traveling directly north, east, or west, one winds up inside the designated boundaries of the sanctuary. There is one road leading into Sasan when traveling from Rajkot or Junagadh. Bisecting the village, it enters at its northwest corner and dead-ends into the forest in the southeast quadrant of the village; before the dead-end is a southerly turn-off with a paved roadway – the Sasan-Talala Highway – that can either lead to a forest checkpost (a guarded entry point into the sanctuary) or, continuing southwest for around 16 kilometers, to the comparatively bustling town of Talala.

Sasan serves as somewhat of a home base for tourists seeking to visit the Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary; with the only official points of entry into the sanctuary and hosting the majority of accommodation options in the area, most visitors to the forest ultimately end up in Sasan. The local economy is dependent upon the business brought in by tourism, largely serving the needs of the predominantly domestic travelers who will stay in Sasan no longer than a few nights.

The main commercial strip outside the forest entry-way is made up of *cha* (tea) stalls and snack shops offering a few fried street food options and a large

selection of single-serving pre-packaged foods: bags of potato chips, tubes of biscuits and cookies, bottles of soda, chocolates and candies, and even a freezer full of ice cream bars. As you walk the strip away from the forest, heading northwest toward the village's main residential zone, the market wares increasingly skew toward the local population. Sasanites know to visit the shop of the *paanwalla* (a vendor of betel leaf) when their phone minutes and texts are running low, as he is not only the *paanwalla* but also the key vendor of cellular services in the area. The final few market stalls offer produce stands catering to village residents. Tucked between the stalls is a small restaurant offering a limited assortment of regional and North Indian cuisine served in the typical spicy-hot Gujarati style. On the wall are images the forest, lions, and a few newspaper clippings of a leopard curled up in the bosom of a cow – photographic evidence of an odd-couple love story from a village on the periphery of the forest. Further past the restaurant are a few small hotels and guesthouses favored by budget travelers and European backpackers, and past these is the residential section of the village.

Across the past decade a number of luxury hotels have been constructed on the outskirts of the village, offering the growing segment of tourists with considerable disposable income an all-inclusive experience that reduces or entirely removes the amount of time and money guests spend in the village. These hotels take on the trouble of arranging safari permits on behalf of guests, thus ensuring this upper class of visitors' exposure to Sasan is limited to the time it takes to drive through on the way into the sanctuary. Managers for these hotels

are well-educated, fluent in English, and generally come from an upper-middle class background. Their employment was secured after training in India's top hospitality management programs, located in urban locales including Mumbai and New Delhi, and offering MBA degree programs at major universities. A place like Sasan is usually not high, if even present, on the list of desirable permanent stations for those seeking to become major players in the hospitality sector, but these hospitality professionals know they must pay their dues before moving on to a more amenable posting.

One such professional is Chaula, a middle-aged single woman raised in Mumbai and educated at an elite university. Chaula is the General Manager of the Taj Gateway Hotel, a recently renovated luxury hotel building that in previous decades had housed the state-run Gujarat Tourism Hotel. Prior to her assignment in Sasan, Chaula managed a Gateway hotel in Gujarat's largest city, Ahmedabad, a metropolis of five and a half million residents. Ahmedabad as a city was, for a woman of Chaula's background, "not a huge place but still pretty good." With its population of just over thirty-two hundred, Sasan is a place that strikes her as smaller than her conventional idea of 'small.' While meeting for tea at her hotel one afternoon, she shared her thoughts on Sasan's size and character as "not a village even, but more like a settlement. It doesn't even have as much [to offer] as a village. The people live here, intermarry, and grow so it keeps expanding [but] it's not so much a village."

For Chaula, the adherence to endogamous marriage practices in Sasan is a symptom of a flawed and old-fashioned political system that ignores what she

sees as the continuing eradication of the caste system throughout India. The highest decision-making power in the village falls to the *sarpanch*, (elected head of village politics) and it would take a progressive *sarpanch* to allow for inter-caste marriage. Chaula asks me, "[and] why would a *sarpanch* be progressive? Because it only dilutes his power if he gives his people more freedom." The *sarpanch* is the first point of authority when there are any disputes in Sasan. Aggrieved parties typically contact the police only after conferring with the *sarpanch* and on his recommendation. A committee of six to seven inter-caste and inter-faith villagers works under the *sarpanch* as the *panchayat*, the village council, with reserved seats to represent underprivileged minorities: one seat for a Harijan, once known as an 'Untouchable,' and one seat for a woman. In Sasan society it is accepted that the woman on the *panchayat* is ceremonial; her husband wields actual control of her seat on the committee.

For these and many other reasons, Chaula does not socialize in Sasan. Most of her non-working hours are spent alone reading in her on-site hotel residence. She keeps a steady stream of books coming in, but the delivery trucks do not come to a remote area like Sasan on such a regular schedule. The books are sent to a location in Junagadh instead and picked up by her employees when making weekly or bi-weekly supply runs for the hotel. This system of ongoing textual engagement substitutes for a social role in Sasan, mitigating the alienation Chaula might feel otherwise.

The description of Sasan as something other or less than a village, particularly coming from a highly educated urbanite hailing from one of the

world's largest and most populated cities, may ring both derisive and presumptive considering Chaula's admission of self-imposed isolation across her tenure at the Taj Gateway Hotel. But more than simply a personal bias, it is also an indexical commentary on the form that has taken shape of the area since its earliest days – quite recent in terms of South Asian history. The federated state containing Sasan and the Gir Forest has been called Gujarat since 1960, following the shuffle of names and state boundary lines that came with India's transition to a sovereign republic. During the period of British Imperial rule that preceded independence, the region was governed as part of the princely state of Junagadh under the rule of the Muslim Babi dynasty. The presiding head of state was a viceroy called the *nawab*, and Sasan found its beginnings in the early 20th century as, in Chaula's words, a kind of "settlement" of workers in service of the *nawab* at his hunting reserve in the Gir Forest. The village was physically organized around the official hunting lodge as an intended area of central administration; the name of Sasan itself is a derivation from the Hindi *shaasan*, which translates to administration.

Sasan was and still is a critical point of transfer between the forest the animals that inhabit it, and those who, by whatever motivations, wish to access them. Whereas once the inhabitants of Sasan were employed catering to a viceroy and his royal guests during their sport hunting expeditions, today the vast

Number	Name of Village	Established	Name of who first settled there
1	Sasan	1904	Kacchi[66] Haja Punja and Kacchi Ausman Vagha
2	Talala	1904	Mistri Lakhman Jivaraj
3	Dhava	1904	Patel Devaraj Vasan and Patel Shamji Bechar
4	Bamanasa	1904	Mistri Hemaraj Kuraji
5	Gundaran	1904	Ahir Punja Arajan
6	Jasapur	1904	Patel Devaraj Khimaji
7	Chitrod	1904	Patel Kala Jetha, Upaletha
8	Javantri	1904	Koli Radhav Mulu
9	Ramalechi	1905	Patel Lala Govind and Patel Dharamshi Ramji
10	Borvav	1905	Patel Uka Jasharaj
11	Galiyavad	1905	Makbulamiyan Chisti[67]
12	Moruka	1905	Patel Keshav Gopal
13	Virpur	1905	Patel Daya Jiva and Miyanji Saudin[68]
14	Hadamatiya	1905	Patel Arajan Dharamshi and Patel Gangadhas Jetha
15	Ghunsiya	1905	Ahir Bhimashi Jiva
16	Jepur	1914	Ahir Amara Menshi

[66] Caste from Kacch. The second caste listed is possibly Muslim, as in Kacch there is a lot of mixing of Hindu and Muslim names.
[67] Chisti is the caste name; a Muslim caste.
[68] Muslim with no caste mentioned

majority of the village work in occupations directly or indirectly supporting forest tourism or forest health. Some are tour guides, some are tour drivers, some work at the official guesthouse (a large accommodation constructed in 1911 as a hunting lodge, and where I stayed until my living quarters were ready) as wage workers. Others are employed by hotels, as cooks, or at the shops on the main road. Some of Sasan's less educated residents are limited in employment options and end up working manual labor in the forest or as laborers in farm fields skirted outside the sanctuary, and a small number of families are actual landowners and focus their attention on the business side of farming. From someone in Chaula's position working at the Gateway is more or less something to be endured, a way to pay her dues before moving on to bigger and better things; on the other hand, a luxury hotel in Sasan is for the local population not only a desirable workplace but also holds a certain prestige for those whose language skills and grasp of service manners aid in securing mid-level client-facing positions such as waitstaff.

It is worth noting that although Gujarat's literacy rate for men and women is higher than the national rate, Sasan literacy numbers are low for Gujarat, averaging lower than even the national baseline.[69]

Surveyed Area	Literacy Rate (Total)	Literacy Rate (Male)	Literacy Rate (Female)
India	74%	82%	65%
Gujarat	79%	87%	71%
Sasan	70%	78%	61%

[69] Data taken from India's 2011 census and accessed at https://mapsofindia.com/census2011/literacy-rate.html

Literacy provides a competitive edge for all but the lowest paying or most physically strenuous job opportunities connected to forest management and tourism. The tiers of prestige in the matrix of Sasan's job market are demarcated both by educational requirements and skill specialization. One cannot apply to work as a guide if he is unable to pass a written exam testing his general knowledge of forest facts and figures, and one cannot pass a written exam if he himself cannot read or write beyond a very basic level. Those who cannot take or pass the test might work as tour drivers, animal caretakers at the Crocodile Rearing Center, or cleaning offices and living quarters like my shack. Often, but not exclusively, the level of education and correlated career path is ordained at birth by caste – not because of the misleading simplification of caste as an organized system explicitly dictating the limitations and allowances of any individual's possibilities in life, but because of the increased exposure to and training in his father's career, whether it is the historical family trade or an occupation adopted more recently. Granted, when it comes to caste occupation among most of India's population there is more opportunity to move down than to move up, but the space itself is multidimensional.

INSIDE

In this section I will profile two Sasan residents whose circumstances illustrate the limitations and opportunities, whether caste-based, socioeconomic, or other, affecting those working in and around the Gir Forest. I have chosen men who occupy very different stations but are connected through life in (and around) the village and the forest tourism industry: Bharat, a cleaner for the Forest

Department, and tour guide Ramesh, who was also my research assistant. Following the profiles their trajectories will meet and be assessed in dialogue with one another.

Profile A: Bharat – Moving Upward and Outward While Staying in the Same Place

During my time in the field I lived alone in a small shack, but I was kept company by the many squatters and visitors who also sought shelter in my residence. The red-eyed and white-pinkish-skinned *chhipkali*, house geckos who traversed the interior walls, zipping away at an alarming speed when we accidentally crossed paths; the droves of tiny black insects who crept under the doorway every day during the summer season, seemingly infinite in number and too small to make a decent repast for the *chhipkali*; the troop of Hanuman langur monkeys who often passed mornings and afternoons jumping and screaming to and fro between my roof and nearby tree branches. My relationships with the lizards and bugs were conducted in the privacy of my living quarters while all my interactions with the monkeys took place outside, in the public realm. Any person in the vicinity, and there were usually a few and sometimes many in the large yard of the shack's lot, could witness visually and aurally the obvious disturbance my appearance produced for the langurs. Langur repose and playtime quickly turned to disgruntled and frightened resistance and relocation during which screams and hisses were directed toward me. I was sometimes embarrassed to be a part of these exchanges but, all in all, when in India to be hissed at by a monkey is socially acceptable.

Bharat handled the less acceptable monkey-related tasks. Hand-selected by my research assistant, Bharat was hired to clean my small residence once a week. Most of his cleaning duties took place inside the shack except for a narrow oblong tiled porch in the form of an extended stoop that required regular mopping. Although it was rare, it was not unheard of for a monkey to defecate on the porch after I had disturbed their peace. In Sasan I was a *Madame*, a woman of vague upper-class association, and for the people of Sasan it would be socially out of turn for a *Madame* to be seen cleaning monkey feces off her porch. The bureaucrats of the Forest Service, on the other hand, feared I would tell powerful relatives about my sub-par treatment—being forced to publicly clean monkey feces—and they would be reprimanded by their superiors. Hiring Bharat avoided these scenarios, provided extra income to a local community member, and also opened a window into certain caste and social relationships within Sasan. Bharat is a member of the Bhangi community, a caste once called Untouchables and generally known as the "sweeper caste." Although one might imagine a sweeper wielding a broom and tidying the ground, sweeping holds a different meaning in this context: Bhangis collect, clean, and clear away human waste.

I eventually learned that Bharat worked a few different cleaning jobs, including the restrooms at the national park reception center in Sasan and other Forest Department cleaning work that required a willingness and availability to work on both a regular and on-call schedule.

Toward the end of my field research period Bharat began to arrive late each week, and sometimes not at all. His unreliability was expected, as everything

and everyone in Sasan is always "late" according to my own American standards, yet I could not always manage my irritation. The padlock on the door to my shack had only one key, requiring my presence during his visits to let him in and to lock up once he finished. Losing daylight hours that could be spent in the forest while waiting on my housecleaner induced an anxiety in me that, on one occasion when expressed to Bharat, produced an ambivalent response. Smiling while half-heartedly apologizing, he often had a good excuse for his tardiness or absence, and one which I could not speak against. He had been called on by the person closes to royalty in Sasan: Sandeep Kumar, the Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF).

I had noticed Bharat's phone going off numerous times as he cleaned my living quarters that day. The ringtone was a loud and repetitive Bollywood song from the 2007 Hindi film *Om Shanti Om*, a blockbuster starring superstar Shah Rukh Khan. The song, *Dard-e-Disco* (roughly translates to "the pain of disco"), was terrible, but more than that I noticed it was crisp, clear, and played seamlessly from his phone's speaker. In October of 2012 Bharat of the Bhangi caste, toilet cleaner of Sasan, got his first smartphone. When I arrived in Sasan most men with better-paying jobs than Bharat, including my assistant who worked as a guide, used basic cellular phone models without touchscreens or high-quality audio and video. During my research period newer and faster technologies began reaching that corner of the region, including improved cellular networks and increased internet speeds and availability. Smartphones were becoming a popular way of performing success and modernity among the

guides and drivers of Sasan, who could now add each other on Facebook and video-chat with friends and relatives. Participation in these consumer activities came at the cost of these phones, the prices for which met or exceeded (and often very significantly exceeded) a guide's typical monthly earnings. Bharat earned significantly less than those already meager salaries. Further, I was aware of his outstanding debts from years earlier, when he had hired (but never paid) my assistant as a driver to ferry his bride and her family from Talala to Sasan for wedding activities.

Up until that day, the phone Bharat had been using was an older and increasingly unreliable model. It was not always a simple task to get in touch with Bharat. If the bathrooms at the reception center were soiled or some other urgent cleaning task came up there was no certainty that Bharat could be secured in a timely manner. Neither was there an easy replacement for him. His family members were also Bhangi but were otherwise occupied or employed, with his wife caring for their children and household and his father working full-time as one of the main caretakers and handlers at the Crocodile Rearing Center. Other Bhangis in Sasan were known to habitually drink country liquor, alcohol either made at home or purchased from someone in the village or nearby town, and therefore were therefore deemed unreliable. The DCF relied on Bharat in particular to fulfill those certain needs. Providing him with a new touch-screen cellular phone forged a direct line of communication while bypassing other potential avenues that might reach the same goal, such as a promotion or pay raise. It indebted Bharat to the DCF without requiring a monetary repayment,

endowing him with a significant marker of wealth with the expectation that he use it to honor the DCF's requests. When *Dard-e-Disco* filled the air it was not always and not even usually signaling a message or phone call from the DCF. Every ring was a reminder, however, to those within earshot and to Bharat himself: this expensive phone came from the top man in Sasan, which suggests this individual is important to the top man in Sasan, which suggests this individual must mind his phone as any ring *might* be the DCF calling. That he would be called on to clean latrines did not detract from the clout of this association, and therefore relationship, with the most powerful man[70] in the village.

A man's position in Sasan and larger society is visibly communicated through his appearance, belongings, and occupational and marital statuses. For Bharat, while his clothing and presentation was basic, his high-tech phone indexed to outsiders an almost-prestige, an adjacent quality or status, while for locals it communicated his relationship to the DCF. While the specifics of his work duties reflected his low position in the community, he performed these duties at the personal behest of the most powerful man in Sasan. Although he could never dissociate from his Bhangi social identity and its concomitant properties of scavenging, of closeness to dirt, of *poorness*, he was nevertheless a socially *whole* man: married and with children. Just like the DCF and his father before him, a suitable arrangement for his betrothal and the production of

[70] One could argue the village *sarpanch* is the most powerful man in Sasan; however, it is recognized that the *sarpanch* is only locally effective whereas the DCF operates within a national network.

offspring was a fact of life and his past. I recall being surprised when my assistant told me the story of Bharat's failure to pay for car service during his wedding, not only because Bharat's comportment seemed to me like a youthful and goofy teenager (and therefore not someone fitting the model of an Indian husband or father), but also because I had – in the context of local society – wrongly conflated the roles of caste and occupation in securing a spouse.

Profile B: Ramesh – Falling Downward: A Brahmin Man

I might not have considered the marriage prospects of a Bhangi man to be poor had my mind not already been prejudiced by the difficulties faced by another man in the village, a frontline staffer in his late thirties called Ramesh. Ramesh was raised in a Brahman household in the Sasan-Junagadh area and has worked as a tour guide for the national park for more than a decade. Although high-casted, Ramesh and his family have struggled to elicit the orthodox respect bestowed on Brahmans from amongst their Sasan neighbors. His father suffers from chronic illness and has been unemployed for the past twenty years, leaving the family in dire financial straits amended only by his mother's occasional odd jobs for nearby households and Ramesh's income. After leaving school he first found employment as a salesman, but later changed professions to his current role as a guide for tourists. Before his father's health deteriorated, Ramesh had intended to enroll in college after he graduated high school. Even though his parents encouraged Ramesh to follow through with those plans, he felt responsible for supporting his family and made that the focus of his energies. Their social support network was not strong and extended family members were either unwilling or unable to provide any form of assistance, financial or

otherwise. During the ideal time period in his life for marriage matchmaking, Ramesh's parents were suffering from illness and decreasing socioeconomic status. It was not a matter of prioritization; they simply were not in a position to secure a bride for their son.

As time passed Ramesh's prospects did not improve. His mother Mandala's physical and mental health has suffered in recent years, rendering the work required to find a wife for her son too taxing. Relatives who could not help the family with housing or finances might have taken over such tasks were they not busy arranging marriages for their own sons. Ramesh remained a bachelor.

I did not know Ramesh's background when I first inquired about his marital status. I had met plenty of unmarried men in Sasan whose affect communicated a somewhat indifference to their situation (this is not to suggest they *were* indifferent, only that they acted in such a way). Ramesh did not necessarily behave any differently than the other men regarding his bachelorhood, but on several occasions I witnessed his particularly enthusiastic manner when engaging with young children—sometimes his cousins, sometimes children in the village, sometimes Maldhari children. At times, when assisting me while visiting the Maldhari in the forest, Ramesh would provide many excuses as to why he would not aid in my attempts to interact with women. The Maldhari often had trouble understanding my accent and I often had trouble understanding their regional dialect, a state of affairs warranting the presence and participation of a third party. They (the Maldhari women) would not like him talking to them, he would tell me, and he assured me once my language skills

improved I would be able to conduct my business woman-to-woman. Leaving me to struggle to communicate he would wander off to joke with the children until I was done with my research. His delicate sensibilities when dealing with women and his proclivity for child's play struck me. Was he shy because he was nervous when talking to women, or because he wanted to maintain a respectable public distance from them? Was he playing with children because it was a way to pass the time when not assisting me or because he was drawn to them out of a personal affinity?

One evening on the drive back to Sasan I asked Ramesh about his feelings on marriage and children. His expression, at first relaxed, became tense, and after a few stuttering attempts to respond he directly requested that we drop the subject. We drove in silence for a few minutes after I apologized for overstepping the boundaries of our relationship. After a short time, Ramesh began to tell me the story of his background that is written above. He told his story in bits and pieces, tearfully expressing the acute pain of his unfulfilled life: the curse of his high caste but low income, the loss of opportunity and success that comes with maintaining high moral and ethical standards, the love for his family who cannot help him, who instead he must help.

Sharing the breadth of his troubles was an unexpected response to my query; whereas I sought a straightforward and likely scripted response, what I was given instead was a maelstrom of frustration and sorrow that illuminated the challenges facing not only Ramesh but so many men in Sasan and throughout the nation. The DCF had implemented a number of changes at the park not long

before I arrived to conduct my research, the more visible of which communicated a certain level of professionalism and sophistication of the front-line staff. The clean khaki uniforms and formation of a union were a *trompe l'oeil* obscuring the low pay and lack of prestige that came with working as a guide.

Ramesh felt particularly alienated by his single status as a Hindu working alongside a large population of Muslims. A large proportion of guides and trackers are Muslim,[71] which Ramesh sees as a key factor in their marriageability. He explained that the Muslims of Sasan arrange their children's marriages early in life and are not bound by the same constraints of caste issues as the Hindus. Many Hindu guides, however, are also married, a fact highlighting Ram's position as a high-caste man living in a mostly lower-caste community. Inter-caste marriage is not common in Sasan, and his already-poor prospects are compounded by his low economic standing. Low-caste men like Bharat are expected to work in low-paying jobs and for Ramesh's coworkers a career as a guide is generally adequate for securing an endogamous partner. Ramesh, on the other hand, has not cultivated the socioeconomic standing necessary for consideration by Brahman matchmakers.

Without the context of life in Sasan and the heterarchical nature of social relations in India, Bharat and Ramesh would appear to inhabit separate worlds in the same village. Although the stereotype of categorical caste separation in Indian society has been shown time and time again in ethnography to be an 'ideal type'

[71] The Muslim trackers are largely of the surname Baloch, tracing back to the Baloch of North India via Balochistan, or Sheikh, a common surname taken during the period of Islamic conversion.

of system institutionalization – more of a conceptual model than a practical living arrangement –

the complex interplay of caste with the dialogic construction of identity proves too cumbersome to finally dismantle the pervasive public notion that, as a rule, a Brahman man and a Bhangi man live separate and rigidly unequal lives. The multiple social and economic structures Sasan and the Gir Forest have layered into Bharat and Ramesh's lives, however, overlap in ways that not only bring them together but also present a reversal of fortune in which the Bhangi has remained indebted to the Brahman for years and the Bhangi has successfully navigated his prescribed life cycle thus far, but the Brahman has not.

Workers of Gir, Residents of Sasan

Workers of West Gir comprise a body of on-the-ground forest staff occupying a set of interrelated roles throughout the sanctuary and its periphery. This body is called the "front-line staff" (FLS), and for the purposes of this dissertation I assign the identifier FLS to include safari guides and drivers, lion trackers, and sometimes state Forest Service officers. Contracted laborers, although a near-constant presence in the forest, are not wholly a part of the front-line staff but rather on a case-by-case basis— the staff work upon and throughout the forest, the laborers mostly work materially with the forest on specialized projects on an as-needed basis. Although trackers and officers do not interact directly with tourists, their patrolling and monitoring of forest activity make them essential to the tourist experience. Each day, guides and drivers are assigned one of seven routes for safaris. Tourists become restless when there is

little visible animal activity on their route, complaining that they paid to see lions, and, “what kind of jungle is this anyway?” Radio calls from trackers and officers alert the guides to where lions are visible from the road, and if it is not too far from his assigned route the driver can make a detour that will ease the tourists’ complaints and hopefully secure a generous tip. Forest officers in particular occupy a more authoritative role than the rest of the front-line staff and have no incentive to aid in the guides’ work. Rank within the Forest Service hierarchy is clearly defined both by code and costume: the higher one’s rank, the more stars they wear on their sleeves. Superiors are quick to show rank until their own superior appears, when they must quickly readjust to the subservient and deferential positioning they otherwise commanded.

Figure 28. Lion tracker Mohammed keeping an eye on a lioness and her newborn cub.

Trackers are the body of workers responsible for monitoring the lions' movements and activities. Trackers are sometimes called *paggi* in Gujarat and shikari elsewhere in India. The simplicity of the occupational title of "trackers" or *paggi* more appropriately communicates the kind of work these men do than the historically loaded shikari. Shikar is hunting for sport, a favorite pastime of the Imperial rulers of the Mughal and British empires. Necessary for these hunting expeditions was the near-mythical shikari, a guide so connected with the natural world whose knowledge of animal behavior and intimacy with local topography ensured big game kills for the royal hunting party. The growth of wildlife conservation across the 20th century transformed the role of the shikari, a job once coupled to hunting, to one of caretaking. They are responsible for keeping an eye on wildlife and using their skills to locate animals for the purpose of monitoring their health and well-being. This secures medical attention for ill or injured animals and provides important data on population sizes and any changes thereof. At the Gir, they are also responsible for providing information about the lions' whereabouts that is relayed to the tourism office and tour guides; forest safaris may be rerouted to areas where tourists are more likely to spot lions.

The trackers working at the Gir are considered "permanent labor" by the local Forest Department. Other labor jobs are more precarious, some seasonal and some dependent on current projects within the forest. The work is physically demanding and the days are long – longer so when critical operations such as animal rescue or releases are taking place. Between eleven and fifteen trackers

monitor the western portion of the Gir, the most experienced of whom are three middle-aged Muslim men from Sasan. Junior trackers train under the most tenured, but only time and experience can wear down the insecurity of those new to the work. The kinds of skills necessary to be a tracker were once passed down through generational lines – one learned the ropes from his father, who learned from his father, and so on. Newer trackers in the Gir Forest are not following a traditional family occupation and are not building upon a lifetime of experiential knowledge and skills. They have not yet naturalized the close physical proximity nor have they amassed enough interactional experiences to feel at complete ease, although typically they have grown up in the area and are at least generally familiar with locally recognized rules of behavior around lions.

Figure 29. A leopard and her cubs were captured in a village near the PA. The tranquilized leopard is placed under heavy brush to keep her safely hidden until she wakes

Serving in the Gujarat Forest Service secures a prestige absent from tourism-driven guide and driver positions, marked clearly in their differing entry requirements and application processes. Eligibility for the Forest Service is unrestricted by race, religion, or sex, as long as the applicant has completed the tenth grade and meets standardized health requirements and physical measurements. There are three months of training including the study of forest regulations, state flora and fauna identification and ecology, and field visits to protected forests and parks throughout the state. Only those who pass the entrance exam continue through the program and receive their first assignment—typically as a Forest Guard but occasionally higher ranking positions as Forester or Range Forest Officer. Joining the front-line staff as a guide or driver is a simpler affair. A driver need only access to a suitable jeep, while a guide must pass an exam administered by the Deputy.

Relationships between the different FLS positions extend into the personal sphere. Although even the lowest-ranked forest officer could exercise a display of power over guides and drivers, though possibly not the senior trackers, abuse of this power is neither practical nor socially sanctioned. The West Gir front-line staff predominantly reside in Sasan. Nearly a dozen trackers, over fifty guides, and a number of Gujarat Forest Staff officers are distributed throughout these households. State government staff housing is provided for officers outside the main village corridors, but much of the staff, raised in Sasan or with extended families settled therein, stay in the village proper. These officers and their guide

Figure 30. Rescued leopard cubs kept in a crate while their tranquilized mother is placed in a safe spot for relocation.

and driver peers are socially intertwined within village politics and relationships; further, they are childhood friends, former schoolmates, neighbors and sometimes kin. The socio-familial obligations, expectations, and goodwill of the village relationship cannot be totally extracted from the professional or bureaucratic relationship when in the forest. To reiterate, the lowest ranked officers, the Forest Guards, do outrank the guides within the forest staff hierarchy and in certain ways do perform that ranking, but many are *socially bound* to the guides and outside the context of their direct work relationship are united by a shared situation of bottom-feeding powerlessness they wish to escape.

When the men of Sasan join the FLS, they enter a space and community that operates largely contemporaneous with but outside of the purview of political and social leaders of the village. While the locally-elected *sarpanch* occupies the highest position of power in Sasan, it is the federally appointed DCF who runs the show for the FLS. The DCF is an outsider in many ways: a doctor of genetics hailing from Bihar, he lives in a grand home furnished with modern amenities and appliances (a home that was located in the village until he had another constructed on a strip of land just outside the border of the village – the same strip of land where my shack was located), he can travel anywhere in the forest at any time and can violate regulations of forest activity without fear of repercussion. Socially, he has no history or commitments in the area. For the FLS, his appointment at the Gir Forest was a boon. With a more cosmopolitan background than previous DCFs, he reimagined the systems of forest management and tourism to impart values he brought from his scientific and bureaucratic background: professionalism, organization, systematization, and a sense of control and orderliness.

"I worked very hard to give the guards and foresters and villagers a sense of pride so that they feel good and do better work. I put order into the guide system and gave them uniforms and better pay. Sasan was the last possible place I wanted to be posted, to be posted here would be like a bad dream…" the DCF said one night as we drank coffee in his newly constructed home. When the bad dream came true he had very little work to do in his office and instead passed most of his time talking with local people and going for drives out into the forest.

As he settled in, over time he began to love the forest, and in loving the forest he determined to overhaul its management and administration. The demographic of applicants for FLS positions would remain the same, so in order to significantly alter Gir tourism practices the DCF relied on an internal transformation: if he could not get more educated and experienced men to fill these roles, he would make the men who fill these roles more educated and experienced. Once an applicant passed the initial exam he would enter employment organized around capacity building through increased access to conservation science and wildlife education. The Management Plan for Gir Protected Areas Vol. 1 outlines the move toward a new educational framework: "[Although] the staff of the Gir Pas (sic) has been involved in the wildlife conservation since long time… the concept of wildlife training/orientation courses for the frontline staff has been relatively new." Previously, "inhouse workshops/field technique exercises held by trained officers and resource persons" were the major site of team training (113).

One of the other major changes to the FLS's job experience was the implementation of special-ordered uniforms for all guides, drivers, and trackers. In the past, the FLS wore their everyday clothes to work. For a guide under the new system, the uniform consists of a dark tan or khaki pair of pants and matching button-up shirt; embroidered letters on the left breast of the shirt read "Gir National Park & Sanctuary" in golden thread, and on the right, in all capital letters, "GUIDE." The tracker uniforms display all the necessary information on the left breast in white embroidery: "TRACKER Wildlife Division Sasan Gir." The aesthetic of the uniforms closely matches the official outfits of the Forest Service

members working alongside the FLS, although differing slightly in color and lacking the distinct accoutrements of state servicemen: the stars on the epaulets indicating rank, the name badge pinned above the left breast pocket, and the beret emblazoned with the insignia of the Indian Forest Service. The visual streamlining extended to the jeeps used to bring tourists on safari, which must be a standardized green color. If you asked the trackers, they would tell you the lions approved of these changes (see Conclusion).

The uniform appearance of the uniformed FLS communicates the establishment of a legitimate operation. The casual street clothing and variety of car colors of the past did not correspond to visitors' expectations of a serious safari park. The standardization the DCF put into effect aligns with wildlife tourists' experiences at other, more established national parks across Asia and Africa. For the FLS themselves, the uniforms provide a demarcation from their village identities. While these men are dressed for work duty, locally constructed hierarchies of difference are symbolically camouflaged by the uniforms just as the uniforms camouflage the men in the forest.

When these men become indistinguishable from one another, they have not lost their individuality but instead gained the possibility of another self. The presence of the caste system in India is revealed to the observer through participation or role in ritual and festivals, through gestures and word choice in public greetings and transactions. The complex inter-caste, inter-religious, and inter-ethnic relationships in Sasan village are further compounded by the growth in recent decades of neoliberal capitalism and its *de rigeur* cleaving of class

distinctions and exaltation of wealth accumulators. Higher casted individuals must contend with the realities of low-caste "wealth," such as a Bhangi like Bharat, a man of the caste of people who clean human waste and handle dead bodies, owning the most expensive smartphone in the village. Whether caste-related or not, the rivalries, grudges, and general discord between community members foster tensions of violent capacity. Here I present two examples of village conflict in Sasan during my time there:

First is a situation involving Babu, a forest guide living with his natal family. They are of on the higher end of the caste spectrum, while their neighbors are of a lower-ranked caste, but are financially insecure. Babu drove a large automobile that he parked in the alleyway near his home. The path in the alley was blocked by a large pile of stones placed there by the neighbors. Babu repeatedly asked them to move the stones, but day after day he found them still piled in the alley. As a last resort, he visited the village council, the *panchayat*, to complain. The *panchayat* is a traditional South Asian local government that often wields greater influence over its constituents than the nation-state and its representatives. After Babu visited the council the *sarpanch* (head of the *panchayat*) brought the neighbors a notice ordering them to move the stones out of the car-path. The notice arrived during the daytime when Babu was at work in the forest, and the neighbors, now angry from their censure, confronted and physically attacked Babu's family members. When Babu returned home from work and learned what had happened, he approached his neighbors. A violent fight again developed between the two families. In the melee Babu was bitten on

his back and shoulder and sustained a cut under his right eye. Stressed from the ordeal, his mother's blood pressure rose and Babu took her to a nearby hospital after filing a police report about the incident. Babu said the neighbors continued to "mentally torture" him, but he decided to keep his mouth shut and stay out of trouble. The stones were eventually moved.

The second conflict occurred when a forest officer wanted to withdraw money from the small local bank of Sasan. The bank was not furnished with an ATM, so all cash withdrawals required service from a bank teller. There was a line of customers ahead of the forest officer, but he believed he should not have to wait to be serviced and walked straight to the teller's desk. When the bank teller informed the officer that he is required to queue in the line, the man became visibly enraged. After slapping the bank teller three times he then lifted the teller's computer and heaved it onto the floor. He then left, but soon returned with a can of gasoline that he sprayed all over the building while loudly threatening to burn the bank down. The police were called, and two days later they arrived to investigate the incident, which had many witnesses. The police roughed up the forest officer and, as punishment for his behavior, directed him to walk across the village on all fours "like a monkey." His route stretched from the bank to to Sinh Sadhan, all the while police were hitting him with a stick and telling him to keep going. Hundreds of people gathered to watch. The forest officer belongs to an ethnic group and caste that is shared by a local politician, a connection which the villagers believed is the reason he was not arrested. He is known for his temper and has previously had physical altercations with his GFS

superior, one time breaking his boss's arm during an argument. That incident did not result in legal consequences, and neither was the officer fired nor demoted.

These conflicts are products of longstanding social relationships in Sasan. As an outsider, the DCF found he had no social role in Sasan society and no valid stake in these disputes. It also was his standing as an outsider, however, through which he was able to transform the organization of the workplace of the FLS into a situational and spatial system that aims to, at least during working hours, circumvent village identity politics. This system does not necessarily abate political and social conflict in Sasan or between Sasanites; what it does is suspend, or encourage suspension of, those complex historical relationships within the context of FLS activities. During tourism hours uniforms present a decharacterization of local differences, eliminating the village persona of each individual by visually unifying their bodies into a body of identical workers.

Tourism in the Gir PA

A group of jeeps crowd around a bend in the road, their occupants peering through binoculars into the same spot in the distance. You don't see anything at first, grumbling passengers voice their frustration and the driver fires up the engine before cutting it off again after moving a few feet to the left or right, forward or backward. The lions do not like the noise from the engines, the drivers explain, as more jeeps come rumbling toward the gathering, inching around for an adequate viewing spot. Every tire rotation kicks up a cloud of swirling brown dusty earth, coating the vehicles, the tourists' sunglasses and telephoto lenses, and imparting a filmy haze they can breathe in and taste. Another reason the

drivers cut the engines is to keep still while the dust settles to eliminate, momentarily, the exhaust that pools when a running vehicle is stationary. At a certain point each jeep must move on either to make room for other jeeps waiting their turn or to get the visitors back outside the sanctuary before their three-hour permit runs out.

The Gir Forest has seen an increase in tourism across the last decade.[72] The tourist demographic runs the gamut from local day-trippers to international sightseers traversing the exotic wildlife circuits across Asia and Africa. Travelers are visibly marked by their attire; some wear street clothes, some western leisurewear, some clad in camouflage and khaki cargo pants and utility vests. Seasoned safari-goers know to keep a hat on hand to shield their faces and scalps from the sun, or that a shawl or jacket guards against the brisk open air. The appearance of high-end photography equipment among tourists is as common as point-and-snap digital cameras, and the Forest department is well aware. The department implemented a fee schedule for forest photography, resulting in extra costs on top of the price of the permit. The more advanced the technology of one's camera, the higher the rate they are required to pay.

No matter their background, nationality, caste, or education level, visitors to the Gir sanctuary share a common goal: to witness, in the flesh, a lion – and

[72] According to numbers released to the Indian media, the Gir sanctuary admitted 343,000 visitors during the 2011-12 season, and 522,000 during the 2016-17 season. 2011-12 information accessed from http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/footfalls-in-gir-up-by-21--this-season/1133451/ on 6/15/2020. 2016-17 information accessed from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/gir-sanctuary-collects-its-highest-ticket-revenue-ever/articleshow/61108927.cms on 6/15/2020.

increasingly in the age of smartphones and digital cameras – to capture a record of the witnessing. The most coveted shot is an adult male in his prime, a full mane and a face not yet too disfigured by battle scars. Park administration encourage guides and drivers to communicate to their charges that there is no guarantee of a lion sighting on any given safari, and the recent overhaul of best practices concerning security and road pollution at the Gir has only bolstered the likelihood of that claim. Guides are no longer allowed to communicate the location of animals in the park to other guides, and particularly not to guides who are working a different route. Streamlining the traffic reduces the occasions of vehicles crowding around each other while angling for a view, thus reducing the concentration of noise pollution and exhaust occurring at a single site. Such disturbances in the forest are known to drive wildlife deeper into forest interior, seeking a refuge that runs counter to the interests of the park's above-the-table tourism sector. Local guides, however, know that the added aspect of "hiddenness" makes animals under forest cover even more valuable to tourists. Signposts in the form of animal encounters, mundane to the tourist but meaningful to the guides and drivers, signal whether that trip into the forest will include a lion sighting and therefore mark a successful journey. Guides believe the presence of hares or peacocks on the road are "bad luck" foreshadowing a lion-less safari. On the other hand, wild boar, jackals, and mongooses on the roadway are an auspicious sight, signifying that lions will make an appearance during the safari.

The guide economy relies heavily on tips – but tips depend heavily on the perceived success of the safari by the visitor. If a guide cannot rely on intelligence from other guides concerning lion whereabouts his income is at risk. Guides and drivers tend to favor European tourists, and particularly the British, not only because they provide generous tips and engage in conversation (often sharing their own scientific knowledge which the guides can use to become better and therefore more in-demand by tourists), but also for tipping even after a lackluster safari experience, i.e., no lion sightings. The British, along with Americans and Australians, are known communicate in a friendly and respectful manner with the guides, whereas the Israeli, French, and German tourists constitute the least desirable foreign customers.

But the vast majority of tourists are domestic, bringing with them a predetermined vision of their expected wildlife encounters. Expectations are largely formed from the imagery presented in the wildlife programs aired on television which are compilations of precisely curated footage edited together to engage viewing audiences. Action, activity, characters, and narrative are typically the bedrock of a well-received nature film. The reality of wildlife daily life at the Gir imparts a sense of underwhelmingness for those visitors. Instead of fast-moving predation on local prey, fights between males competing for dominance or lionesses protecting their newborn cubs, or identifiable family units, visitors who do see lions are most likely to see a scene that became familiar to me during my stay at the forest: a handful or two of lions, sleeping.

Guides are aware of and sensitive to tourist expectations. When wildlife biologist Meena Venkataraman decided to track lion movements through the forest by attaching radio-collars to two individual lions, tourists mistook the devices as an indication the lions were "pets." For some domestic tourists, naming is another marker of a "pet" lion. The issue is touchy enough that guides and trackers were never able to provide any consistency in naming conventions, or whether the lions were named at all. I would be told the lions did not have names, while in the same conversation learn of Vichli, the half-tailed lioness, or Raju, the lovable single lion who is known amongst the trackers to be most tolerant of human activity in his immediate surroundings. Lions in the Gir did not present the behaviors displayed by confined lions at zoos – there was no anxious pacing or systematic vocalization. The rather slow, disinterested presentation in the forest further convinces suspicious tourists that the animals are tame, and maybe tamer even than the lions at the zoo. Emboldened by their discovery, many tourists (and particularly Indian men) break the cardinal rule of a Gir safari and descend from their vehicles to get closer to the animals. Sometimes it is to get a better photograph and others it is to have a chance to interact more personally with the wildlife. Guides are not free to admonish guests, requiring a respectful and delicate pleading to keep wayward tourists in line.

Guides have been known to turn wayward themselves. Bribes are a currency in India, a common and accepted negotiation tactic pervading all levels of commerce and government. If no other vehicles are present, some guides may

accept bribes to either ensure a lion sighting or to allow passengers to exit their vehicles for a short time. The risks to these guides and their accompanying drivers are high. Although other guides, if friendly with the bribe-accepter, may keep his secret for him, the forest routes are not passageways for safari alone. Officers of the Forest Department patrol the forest at all hours to surveil the health of the forest but primarily to detect and report any illegal activities. Guides may be fined and/or suspended if they are caught breaking forest policies, forfeiting any potential earnings during their suspension. Short-term loss of income can prove catastrophic for the socioeconomic class of guides, necessitating food and money lending between friends and family that can instill tensions in those relationships. Nevertheless, as guards are rarely permanently expelled from their employment some believe the reward of under-the-table cash is worth the risk.

Another illicit venture frontline staff workers perform to make extra money (and tourists pursue to get a closer, on-the-ground look at the lions) is taking tourists out on night walks in the forest. Knowing the forest's borders well, guides will bring tourists out to an unguarded point of entry and into the forest to areas lions are known or confirmed to be resting. Local hotel staff or farmers living on the periphery of the forest are also known to conduct night walks. In March of 2012 a forest guard was assigned to a checkpost that, although bordering farmlands, was located fairly deep within the forest beyond the tourist circuits, near Amrutvel ness. Area farmers had been caught multiple times leading tourists on hikes through the sanctuary, resulting in the assignment of

this forest guard to man the checkpost twenty-four hours a day. At night he slept in a tent-like hut raised on stilts.

As such activities are openly discussed and recounted on Internet message boards catering to western travelers, such as IndiaMike.com, international tourists in particular are aware that night walks are possible. Although the tourists may know the walks are illegal, they are also aware that the punishment for such crimes will not fall on their shoulders. My field assistant Ramesh had been caught doing a night walk for some Australian tourists four years earlier, resulting in a fine and lengthy twenty-five-day suspension from his position as a guide. The tourists received no penalty.

Life in the Forest Department and FLS

In this section I will present three short snapshots of men working three pivotal roles in Gir PA tourism, conservation, and management: a wildlife safari tour guide, a lion tracker, and the Deputy Conservator of Forests.

Profile of a Guide: Ramesh

My main interlocutor was also my main intermediator— between me and the Maldhari, me and the other members of the FLS, between me and the forest. My interactions with the DCF and other IFS/GFS executives notwithstanding, there was a constant presence during my field experience in the form of one Ramesh Lakhabani. I have already introduced Ramesh earlier in this chapter and, in profiling him here, will go into deeper detail of his characteristics and past as relevant. Assigned to me by the DCF shortly after I reached the Gir Forest,

Ramesh was my field assistant, personal assistant, driver, and local guide all in one. Our relationship was at times tense. I knew from the beginning that our matching was not my ideal, but the man I had in mind to be my assistant from my visit two years earlier was unavailable and, I ultimately learned, the decision was not up to me. When the DCF chose Ramesh for my assistant he told me it was because Ramesh was "sincere." This confounded me at first, as I thought singling one guide out as sincere suggested that perhaps the others were not. Later I came to understand what the DCF meant and I do not disagree with his assessment. The other major factor in choosing Ramesh was his command of the English language. Although only somewhat proficient, it was workable and provided an additional avenue of communication and translation to the Hindi, Gujarati, and local Saurashtri dialect we would be working with in the Gir.

With the necessity of a field assistant secured, the next hurdle would be finding a suitable vehicle for travel through the forest. I had anticipated the purchase of a field vehicle and had budgeted accordingly, but was presented with a simpler, albeit more expensive, alternative by Ramesh: using savings from his job as a forest guide and his brother as a forest driver, his family had purchased a second vehicle which they rented out to neighbors and forest-dwellers— but for the right price, the car could be reserved exclusively for my research. The deal that was struck prioritized my work over other possible ventures, requiring Ramesh to forgo his work as a guide when it conflicted with my research schedule and to refrain from using the vehicle for any other purposes, and so I paid him a rate that met and even exceeded his maximum monthly guide's pay. Still, it was

not uncommon to be unable to get in touch with him because he took guide shifts or he would ask me to rearrange my schedule so he could take on, with each shift running three hours long and during daylight hours. Despite securing what was for him a respectable and enviable position with an international researcher, the imperative to maximize his income through other ventures did not subside.

Poverty is a condition that permeates the many social worlds of India, and it is complicated. The statistics make clear the widespread economic disparities undergirding "modern" India's social organization: according to the World Bank, in 2012 India held a 21.9% poverty rate accounting for 269 million people living under the threshold of $1.20/Rs.67 per day. The determination of what poverty is, of when and how needs are met, what and why those needs are, and who makes those guidelines are all questions that must be asked. My presentation of Ramesh's story may sometimes point to conditions of poverty, but for the purposes of this dissertation I choose to use his own words to characterize the Lakhabani family's socioeconomic conditions: "Ma'am, I know what it is to be poor, at one time we were eating rice and salt for dinner and then going to bed… even now [after successfully escaping homelessness and purchasing a home for his family], sometimes at night I fight with God."

Ramesh is an unmarried man in his early 30s. His family is Pandit, a high caste, and has struggled with a financial insecurity that drove each member into work in the service industry. Ramesh's father was an autorickshaw driver in Rajkot, the largest city in Saurashtra and fourth largest in Gujarat. During the school year the family resided in Rajkot, and when exams were finished Ramesh

and his younger brother Itesh were sent to Sasan to stay with family and enjoy a break from urban life. Money for school fees and supplies was not always available, and as Ramesh entered high school he began to work during his vacations in Sasan in order to relieve some of the financial burden on his family. When he was in the 10th grade, his father fell ill and became home-bound. Although Ramesh was able to finish schooling through the 12th grade, he could not justify taking the next step in his education. He told me "college was not necessary but taking care of and paying for the house was— the main focus was on money…my parents told me to keep studying. It did not feel right to me so I left school." Within a few years of graduating high school Ramesh's father passed away. With no income and nowhere to live after his father's death, Ramesh and his family could no longer afford to stay in Rajkot and left for Sasan to seek refuge at the home of Ramesh's *mama* (maternal uncle), where he and his brother had vacationed so often in their youth. As a widowed family the Lakhabanis endured physical and psychological mistreatment from their hosts. Eventually they were kicked out of their relatives' home and left to live on the village streets. Finding no alternative, the family took shelter in a small alleyway shanty that a neighbor allowed them to use for sleeping.

The urgency of homelessness and its entailing losses of food, water, safety, and stability necessitated that all three find paying work as soon as possible. Ramesh pursued many avenues but hit roadblocks until he secured a position as a safari tour driver. His brother left for New Delhi to be the personal driver for Mukesh Mehta, owner of the Gir Jungle Lodge, a local hotel, and part-time

resident of Sasan. His mother found work as a cleaner and dishwasher. After a falling out with Mr. Mehta, Ramesh's brother returned to Sasan and began his current position as a safari tour driver. Ramesh left driving behind after he passed the qualifying exam to become a tour guide. The two incomes combined was sufficient money that their mother no longer had "to work for anyone [else]" nor live off the kindness of others; the brothers purchased a home in the village where the two bachelors and their widowed mother still live.

Relations with Ramesh's *mama* remained acrimonious for the following decade. It was in fact my arrival to Sasan that unwittingly brought the two families back in contact. Word had spread around the village that the American researcher had selected an assistant and gossip began to generate about what he would be doing for me and how much he would be paid. News traveled quickly through Sasan, quickly enough that when my father went for tea at Ramesh's home one afternoon, an event that takes no longer than twenty minutes start to finish, Ramesh's *mama* not only was informed but in such haste that he paid a visit while my father was still having tea. Walking into the house without hesitation, he approached my father and thanked him, announcing that only because of my father was he able to drink the tea of his sister after so many years. The *mama* stayed only for a few minutes, enough time to have a cup of tea and have a little chat, before returning to his home. The atmosphere changed dramatically after this, with Ramesh's family openly displaying disgruntlement about their relative's unexpected appearance. My father departed to give the family privacy, not knowing the worst was yet to come. Shortly after, the *mama*

returned to the house in despair: upon arriving home after tea he found his wife dead. Ramesh's mother fell into shock at the news and was taken to the local hospital to be put on bedrest and administered IV fluids. She remained weak and distraught when I visited her the following day. Appearing frail and old to me in her hospital bed I likened her to my grandmother before realizing she was ten years younger than my father.

Experiences like the one described above along with the details of Ramesh's background that trickled into our conversations over time, as we grew to know one another and constantly reframed our take on the other's intentions, exposed the continual flaws in my approach to and interpretation of my relationship with my assistant— flaws I had to continuously fight against during fieldwork despite the legitimate frustrations, disappointments, and failures our working relationship produced. Ramesh was presented to me by the DCF as the height of reliability and sincerity from among the guides working in Sasan. From my perspective, he was overly cautious in conducting our activities, and many times I suffered the irritation of his resistance to or defiance of my requests, his need to double-check with the DCF despite my insistence that permission had already been granted, that we were wasting time, that he worked for *me*. Over time I came to recognize his hesitations as more to do with his assignment to me by the DCF than with his own temperament. His conduct of employment record at the Gir was not unblemished. Four years prior to my arrival to the Gir, Ramesh had been fined and suspended from duty for twenty-five days after he was caught leading tourists on foot through the forest at night. Although he is embarrassed to

remember his public sanctioning, he is proud to say he that while he may have broken rules, unlike other guards he has never lied to or cheated his customers or employers. “You might not see it,” he says to me, “but God always sees it. And I have the fear of God.”

Profile of a Tracker: Raju Kala

“Everyone [working in the forest] is afraid,” says Raju Kala, a tracker with three years’ experience, “even if they don’t say they are.” The fear is not necessarily of the lions, he explains, quickly adding the caveat that yes they are dangerous and yes they might kill you—after all, the park must maintain its mystique and this is probably what all outsiders, including me, want to hear—but because “their wives and families are afraid.” Raju Kala spent his childhood entering the forest often to collect fruits, a history that familiarized him to the forest and diminished the fear that might have prevented pursuing a position as a lion tracker. Now, at twenty-nine, he spends his days quietly watching the lions.

In previous years Raju Kala worked as a cook in a local hotel, followed by a stint as a forest laborer tasked with filling artificial water points throughout his assigned portion of the forest. After his marriage, Raju Kala sought higher-paying and more secure employment to support a future family. He lacked a formal education, however, and there were few opportunities available to him in Sasan outside of service and labor positions. Things changed when, three years earlier, the Forest Department announced it would be hiring six new trackers with no educational requirements, as the necessary skills need to be learned firsthand. The new trackers would be trained under the five pre-existing trackers. Trainees

would receive the newly implemented tracker's uniform, an official ID card granting the ability to travel on foot through the forest without question, and the specialized knowledge of the forest and its lions that only can be learned in practice from those who have achieved mastery. He knows he would leave the forest, even leave Sasan, if he could obtain a higher-paying job, but the absence of that possibility necessitates he succeed in the position available.

Raju Kala's young daughter was conceived around the time that he joined the team of trackers, a change in circumstances elevating the significance of an increased income at the time for he and his wife. Although the danger of working closely with the lions still affects his wife, her fears transfer onto Raju Kala in the form of the economic uncertainty that would befall his family in the event of his death. No compensation plan exists for the families of trackers killed by lions (and to this day only one tracker has been killed by lions at the Gir Forest). [73] I wonder whether the guides' union, brainchild of the DCF, might serve as a model for the trackers to organize against the possible pitfalls they face. There are far more guides than trackers, however, and the success of the union depends on the contributions of its members which increases correspondingly with size of the union's body.

[73] At the time of my fieldwork there were no records of trackers at the Gir Forest who had been killed by a lion attack. In November 2018, Rajnish Keshwala, a tracker filling in for more experienced trackers on leave, was killed by a pair of lions in Devaliya, the fenced Gir Interpretation Zone. Accessed from https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/gujarat-lions-attack-team-of-forest-officials-in-gir-kill-one-5471819/ on 1/25/2020.

Raju Kala smiles as he explains that the FLS are not a well-educated group and do not know how to approach issues like insurance, compensation, or job security. I laugh along as he jokes that "[we] don't have minds that think that way. We are the people who follow animals around, that's what our minds are good for." Days are sometimes spent watching a single group of lions that have splintered off from their family group. The lion family reunites in the nighttime. The day's activities vary: sometimes the group Raju Kala is watching feel restless and wander through the forest while he trails at a distance, other times they find a shady spot under the trees and sleep for hours. He may watch them from 6:30am until 11:00am, when he returns home for lunch and rest, and then again from 2:00pm or 3:00pm until he leaves for the night around 7:00pm. Working days are long and feel particularly so on days when rescue operations are taking place, but it is the endurance of these long hours, day after day, that acts as an apprenticeship for Raju Kala in the practice of tracking. After three years he is still a newcomer in the field, still getting to know the lions – their life cycles, their relationships, their habits, their likes and dislikes.

Raju Kala tells me about one of the groups of lions he watches regularly. The group is made up of fourteen members, a good deal larger than the typical prides found at Gir although average in size for lion prides outside India. A few months back one of the adult males had died (naturally, from sickness or old age), leaving only one to defend the group's territory from infiltrators. They are no longer confident in maintaining their territory, Raju Kala says, and lately a pair of aggressive male lions has been pushing in on them. He has noticed the

group wandering outside the borders of the PA recently. They may relocate or the two outsider lions may push out, or kill, the remaining male. Raju Kala's job is to watch these situations slowly unfold, to notice changes in health or behavior, to know the goings-on, both the quotidian and dramatic, of the lions' lives in the forest. Watching, noticing and most importantly knowing – the familiarity produced in long-term relationships – these are the accumulated, qualitative skills of a tracker.

Unlike other positions of the FLS, with the title of "tracker" comes a certain form of social capital that can be a source of empowerment for young men like Raju Kala. In my time at the Gir Forest I learned that the methods for keeping a lion from attacking are not complicated: hitting a large stick against the ground, grunting or shouting, refraining from running and holding your ground. Knowing to do these things is not the same as capably performing them, however, and only through physically expressing the knowledge does it become embodied and fully known to the learner. Raju Kala's not only ability but also willingness to potentially perform these actions on a daily basis commands respect from those who are not trained to do so—in other words, practically everyone else. By working as a guide he went from socioeconomically low-ranking jobs to one with near-universal cache, changing his life by repositioning his role vis-à-vis respect-giving and respect-receiving within his immediate and distant social networks. Now, Raju Kala tells me, "Even high [ranking] officers ask [me] if they can get out of the car, or if they can go here or there. They always check with the trackers, and the trackers have the right to say 'yes' or 'no'…" That the right to say 'no' is

rarely exercised is immaterial to Raju Kala, it is instead the fact that such a situation *is possible* that elevates his sense of pride. His work has made manifest the re-alignment of certain social interactions between disparately ranked individuals. "I am nothing [in the world]," he says, "but in the forest I get respect."

Profile of the Boss: DCF Sandeep Kumar

One man in Sasan lives apart from the village community both physically and socially. With no familial connection to the area he is an outlier like Chaula, the manager at the Taj Gateway Hotel. Also like Chaula, his posting in Sasan was not by choice but rather an assignment from his superiors. Sandeep Kumar is the Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF) for the western division of Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park. He oversees all forest operations in the tourism zone from his office on the edge of the village, in the same residential lot not far from my living quarters.

As mentioned earlier, the DCF was initially dissatisfied with his placement at the Gir Forest. After he acclimated to both his position and posting he overcame his negative perception of the area. Spending time in the forest brought about this change, as he found himself moved by the beauty and serenity of the quiet woods. As his attachment to the forest grew so did his sense of purpose, channeling into the DCF an energy and vision in which he sought to recharacterize the Gir Forest as a site of scientific inquiry, to transform it into a site of successful, even legendary, wildlife conservation in the international scientific community. During the early years of his tenure, a few years prior to my

arrival for fieldwork, he was able to be, in his words, “more engaged” with the forest, and to even conduct his own research projects on forest wildlife. As tourism to the sanctuary increased and high-level guests including celebrities and politicians began to visit with regularity (and publicity), the DCF’s relationship with the forest shifted toward one of administrative oversight and forecasting; he suggested the effectiveness of his managerial dedication was visible through the ten-year management plan he completed in 2012. Reviewing his plan over coffee one afternoon he beamed at me. “In a hundred years,” he asserted, “people will *still* be talking about Sandeep Kumar’s management plan.” I received a copy of the two-volume management plan after its publication and did find its breadth of data impressive. It is organized and reads more like a dissertation than the blueprints of a government project.

The DCF often invoked his academic background as a geneticist as evidence of commitment to rigorous scientific research; on many occasions he reminded me that it was his support for and intimate understanding of scholarly pursuits that ultimately made my project at the Gir Forest possible. He had been credited with legitimizing the conservation and tourism practices in and around the Gir during his tenure while simultaneously publicizing and raising awareness about the lions throughout India. These efforts were lauded by the FLS who experienced first-hand the transformation of their workplace. The DCF was respected in a manner that extended beyond bureaucratic and hierarchical obligation; both Ramesh and Raju Kala openly acknowledged a small but festering anxiety surrounding the eventual departure of Sandeep Kumar and

subsequent arrival of his replacement. Though revered by his staff, the DCF's power and position did not always sit well with the research and business oriented (and, like the DCF, temporary) residents of Sasan. These other outsiders, all working outside the government sector, expressed a critical view of the DCF, who they felt perpetuated unethical forest management practices and whose actions they perceived as an extension of pervasive corrupt governance patterns in India. Beyond his professional methods they were also highly critical of his lifestyle, bolstering their claims of his disingenuity with his known vices and the trajectory of his non-traditional personal life. The DCF drank alcohol, illegal in the state of Gujarat, with regularity – some thought possibly abusing alcoholic substances as a coping mechanism for his social isolation. That isolation was seen as a self-imposed byproduct of his own power-seeking behaviors. Although he had been married for six or seven years, the DCF had never lived with his wife (another civil servant stationed in another part of the country). When they decided to have a child it was arranged that his wife would stay in Sasan for a few weeks to give enough time for her to get pregnant. Now they have a daughter who is a few years old, but the DCF has only been able to meet her in person two or three times because she lives with her mother. To his critics, the DCF appears a man willing to sacrifice friendship and family in his quest for success. Interestingly, the same judgment extends to his wife, who is seen by these same critics as overly career-oriented and interested in climbing the government power ladder.

While I never discussed the above criticisms with the DCF directly, during our conversations he would occasionally make a knowing remark signaling his

awareness. His alienation in the Sasan initially drove him to spend more time deep in the forest, finding solace in the alternative isolation of a man amidst wildlife. Now, firmly ensconced as a leader in the IFS, GFS, and Sasan itself, he enjoyed having company during his forest sojourns to display both the impact of his leadership through ongoing forest operations and also his intimacy with the forest ecosystem and its inhabitants. In witnessing some of his forest activities it became apparent that the DCF expressed his sense of belonging at the Gir through heightened retellings of animal encounters. Interactions with particular forest wildlife like lions and leopards were sometimes embellished to reposition the DCF from bystander to central character of an extended, meaningful moment between man and jungle creature. A few days after accompanying the DCF to a meeting in a relatively remote location in western Gir, the two of us happened upon a leopard specialist from Aligarh Muslim University back in Sasan.

"Oh," the DCF cried, "you would not believe what an experience we had in the forest just earlier!" He described with great enthusiasm how we had come upon an unsuspecting leopard resting in a heavily leafed tree near an abandoned watch tower: hearing a rustling in the tree, the DCF looked up into the branches only to find two eyes staring back at him, both holding their gaze in a tense and enduring silence, stillness, until the leopard leapt into the field and disappeared. This account of the evening's encounter presented a romantic, intimate moment between two beings in the forest, procuring visuals of striking color and an image of the natural space as a site generative of remarkable, almost magical interspecies interactions. It also did not correspond to my own experience of that afternoon, which included not only the leopard sighting but the five-hour

roundtrip forest visit during which it took place. According to my memory and field notes, when the leopard emerged from the tree the DCF was deep in conversation with a subordinate from the forest department proposing renovations to the watchtower and a small building, both of which were in disrepair. The discussion was lengthy and, for me, indecipherable content-wise, so I spent most of my time surveying the surroundings a short distance from the two men. The rustle of the tree came unexpectedly after twenty or more minutes, drawing our attention to the flailing branches fifty feet away and the serpentine form of the leopard bounding into the tall grasses. The leopard's decision to vacate the premises seemed to me a measured one, with no second-guessing or glancing back, no eye contact or personal recognition, not an inch of stillness, only a resolution to escape our disruptive company and the distinct body moving impossibly quickly out of our sight.

During my field period I made many trips into the forest with the DCF. Sometimes there was a purpose to these outings but I was never informed in advance where or why we were entering the forest. On one occasion, driving south along the western perimeter of the Gir PA where the roadway divided the protected forest lands from the farming fields that begin exactly where the sanctuary ends, I noticed another car trailing ours with a camera crew on board. Turning toward the interior of the PA, we eventually reached a locked gateway blocking the path into the National Park. Some time after entering the park we reached a clearing where an animal rescue unit was stationed. Two men and two women, all outfitted in GFS uniforms, stood outside awaiting the arrival of the DCF. A cage covered with a green tarp sat on the back of the truck. When the

driver shut off the car's engine I heard a series of vocalizations – grumbling, growling, and roaring – emanating from below the tarp. It was unmistakably the voice of a leopard.

The leopard had been recently spotted and captured in a settlement village outside the sanctuary boundary, and that day brought into the heart of the National Park to be released into the forest. All persons present were ordered to stay inside their vehicles while the cage door was lifted, but the leopard did not move. The team employed a few tactics for getting the hesitant leopard out of the cage: initially, they drove the car a short distance; subsequently, the gate was lowered and one of the rescue team members descended from the vehicle to roar and growl at the leopard, hoping to agitate it enough that it would jump out of the cage when the door went back up; when that did not work, the same man poked a stick into the cage to further rile up the cat. I sat in the car with the DCF about fifty feet away, watching through an open window while the leopard crouched back, wild-eyed and clearly frightened. Another moment of hesitation, then with a leap it took off running across the clearing until reaching a slightly denser, scrubbier, bushier patch of land. Once its feet touched the ground there was no more hesitation. In the distance we could see it pacing frantically, searching through the trees for somewhere to go, some semblance of safety. The frightened animal likely had lived its entire life in proximity to human settlements and had likely never ventured so deeply in the forest. The camera crew's footage of the leopard's release will be aired on local news, reported as a success story in re-introducing wild animals back into their "natural habitat."

As we watched the leopard disappear the DCF spoke to me: “They are not only habituated to the village in its environment and their style of hunting, but are also habituated to certain types of foods found there. And they would rather keep eating that.” Hearing this, I consider aloud the possibilities for the leopard. It will either find its way back to a village setting where it knows how to survive, or it will struggle as an outsider in the forest. “All male animals are alone, fighting, and disadvantaged,” he continues, as a way to contextualize the leopard’s and his own fate. “From the deer whose antlers may get stuck and broken off in dense jungle, or the lions who are fighting for territory or family, or leopards who are fighting for a mate – they are all at a loss of sorts.”

Models of Relating to the Forest and Lions

Sasan’s economic reliance on tourism is a co-production of dependent relationships: the people of Sasan need a prosperous and healthy forest to attract visitors, and the forest needs the attentive care of conservation techniques and the enforcement of legal land protection in order to maintain its biodiverse ecosystem(s). The core of Gir Forest protectionism is built around the presence of the Asiatic lions in the region, with the PA situated on and around the territory where most of the lions are concentrated. As the Asiatic lion is currently only found in the Gir Forest, the lions and the forest have themselves become near stand-ins for one another, linked indexically in a closed loop of reference. What informs this referential association for the people of Sasan is constructed through the meaningful and empirical knowledge produced by long-term engagements

with the forest and lions, through relationships of knowing and not knowing, and through intimacy and subjective interpretation.

This chapter profiles individual persons both to illustrate variations of models for how residents of Sasan understand and relate to lions and the forest at large, and also to cumulatively profile Sasan with respect to its diverse and overlapping social hierarchies – highlighting the element of heterarchical possibility introduced into the Sasan social world via employment in the forest. Ramesh once identified the Gir Forest to me as "a good place for someone who wants a job because your caste and religion don't matter." The key positive feature of work at the forest was, for Ramesh and other disadvantaged men like him, the possibility of employment without prejudice, of economic opportunity; lions are what he is selling. For Raju Kala, working in the forest brought about a proximity to lions that, as if through contagion, commanded deference irrespective of social standing. Although the DCF operated outside the levels of power(lessness) and identity so foundational to the experience of the FLS, he too found a way for the forest and lions to provide meaning to his life: a parallel narrative of isolation and struggle and, hopefully, also a parallel international recognition.

Chapter 5
THE MALDHARI OF THE GIR FOREST

I turned the pages of a magazine as I sat in a cushioned armchair, waiting in the low, soothing light of the traveler's lounge at Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport in Mumbai, an oasis from the glaring fluorescence and endless speakerphone drone of the terminal. Flipping through I found familiar branding on the glossy pages: Armani, Dior, Bulgari, but then advertisements from intimidating names like Jaeger-LeCoultre and Vacheron Constantin made clear that this was not the ubiquitous women's-fashion-magazine-purchased-to-bide-the-time-until-a-flight, although there *was* a beautiful model adorning the cover. Touting itself as a "luxury travel magazine," the *Condé Nast Traveller India* in my lap was not my usual reading fare, and the ritzy lounge was not my usual airport hangout. Access to the lounge was fixed on my behalf, unknown to me, by a subordinate of a subordinate of someone who helped arrange my flight to the airport. I was there by chance. The magazine, however, was an intentional purchase from an airport bookstore. A special anniversary issue highlighting India's top travel destinations for the luxury tourist, I had to flip past the Westin and Le Meridien ads in my search through the three hundred-plus pages until I found what I was looking for, on page 286: a black and white photo of Naran Bapa.

Figure 31. Naran Bapa in 2010 at Kadeli ness. Kadeli children in background.

I first met Naran Bapa in 2010, during my first visit to the Gir Forest. At that time I did not know that visitors wishing to engage with Maldharis, whether researchers, journalists, or "special guests,[74]" were almost always sent to the same two nesses: Kadeli or Dudhala. Both in close proximity to Sasan, it seems most efficient to send visitors no further. Beyond location, however, both nesses were under the leadership of approachable, open patriarchs who were unlikely to speak negatively or harshly to anyone, let alone a guest.[75] The disgruntlements,

[74] People who get to break the rules.
[75] I was told by the Maldhari that guests are considered gifts from God. This sentiment is found throughout India, where guests in the home are to be treated as if they were God in

fears, and weariness that were expressed by many Maldhari during my fieldwork never came from Kadeli or Dudhala. It is no wonder that a travel writer assigned to profile the Gir Forest, whose occupation is founded on profiling photogenic locales as accessible and desirable tourist destinations, would be sent to Kadeli to speak with Naran Bapa. The man was a delightful, ancient, sometimes unintelligible *aathaa*,[76] always welcoming and quick to offer a saucer[77] of *cha* (tea) to his visitors. When I arrived at Kadeli for the first time he was wearing a large pair of Terminator-style black sunglasses to protect his eyes after a recent surgery. For this treatment he had traveled to and from Rajkot, the nearest large city at a distance of 160 kilometers from the forest. When I photographed Naran Bapa he initially removed his sunglasses and stared directly into the camera lens; after learning that I was amused by the sunglasses, after a drink of *cha*, and perhaps after the formality of the first act of photographing was in the past, he allowed me to photograph him in more casual poses with his sunglasses. I worried his eyes needed protection from the sun, but he never let that on. We sat on the stoop of his ness for some time. He shows me scars from his youth in the forest, claw and bite marks from fighting with lions, and laughs. His wife was much less outgoing, sitting further down the courtyard with the *padi* (buffalo calves), quietly working on a quilt that will eventually be used to decorate cots, beds, and sitting areas during weddings and religious festivals. Her quiet and

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the home. Accordingly, food and water should be offered without hesitation or limitation. Feeding the guest resembles the feeding of *prasad* to the gods during *puja*.

[76] Elder patriarch of a homestead; *aathaa* is an informal term that can mean grandfather.

[77] In the forest, tea is consumed from a shallow saucer rather than a cup, mug, or bowl.

dedicated stitching contrasted with the brash playfulness of younger women I had met at Dudhala ness, calling me over to take their photograph.

Figure 32. An older Maldhari woman at Kadeli ness working on a quilt.

When I returned to the Gir Forest two years later for my dissertation research, it was of no consequence that Naran Bapa did not remember me-- I was welcomed back into his *ness* without reservation. His family typically shifted to Babra *vidi*[78] in the forest's border area during that time of year but decided to stay to take advantage of that particular season's *saru* (good) grasses (and, they

[78] An open grassy area preferred by cattle and cattle herders; ecogeographically like a savanna.

noted, moving all one's belongings is difficult work). There are lions at Babra as well, so, according to Naran Bapa, if there are adequate grazing lands in the forest and its border areas, a Maldhari has no incentive to relocate.

PERCEPTION OF THE MALDHARI

> "…we should understand India not as a physical entity, a particular landscape, but as a landscape in relation to that society… it has an internal frontier as well as an external one." Trautmann 2016: 7.

When Thomas Trautmann invokes an India situated within and around an inside/outside dichotomy, he is referring not only to physical and geographical boundaries but also, and particularly, the conceptual categories underpinning Indic social thought and structure. The framework for these categories is not of an exclusively binary orientation but it is binary oppositional typologies which provide some illumination onto the foundations of the famously complex set of social structures and networks across South Asia. For an historian like Trautmann, the internal/external positioning speaks to perceptions and relationships identifiable in the earliest written records of the subcontinent. India's colonial history is extensive; its history essentially written by invaders (external peoples) who established 'Indian civilization[79]' whilst subjugating, assimilating, and marginalizing indigenous populations (internal peoples). In this relationship inferiority accompanies the insider status of geographically interior,

[79] In *India: Brief History of a Civilization* (2016), Thomas Trautmann comments on the distinction between India as a nation-state and Indian civilization, which he identifies as territorially spanning across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives.

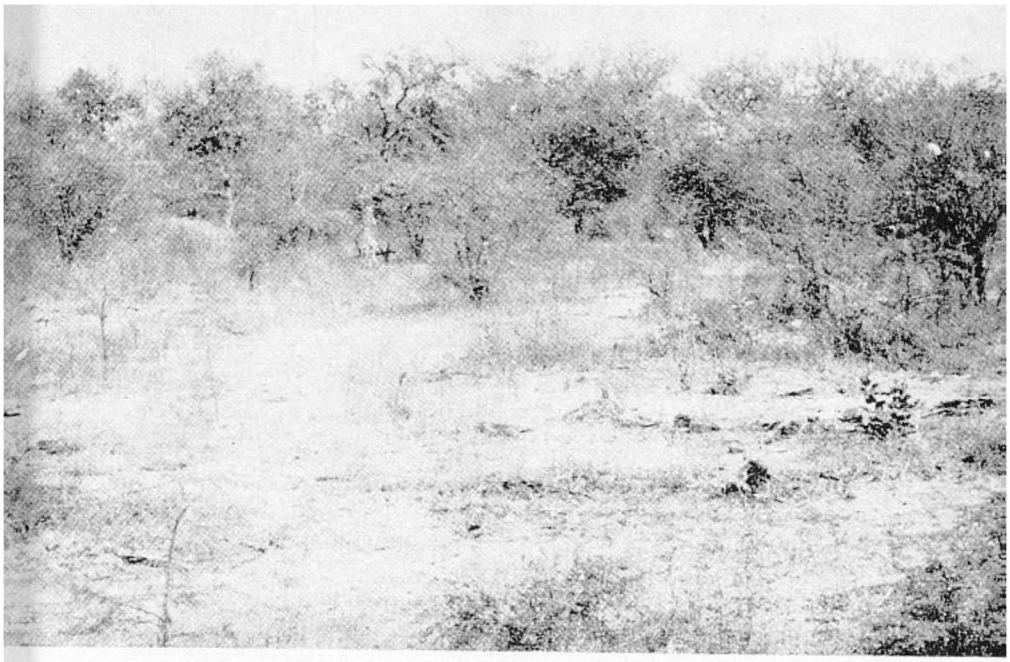
tribal populations, with outsiders possessing the regionally dominant, superior societal characteristics of Indian civilization.

When inverted, the inside/outside dichotomy bears a greater resemblance to common value attributions associated with these concepts: the South Asian Islamo-Hindu citizen is the superior insider because of their sociocultural belonging, and it is the tribal and indigenous populations, outliers to the set of norms guiding insiders, who become thought of as outsiders. These outsiders are geographically located on in the interior of the land, in forest and hill areas; the inverted insiders occupy the more densely populated urban and agriculturally viable (and largely irrigated) lands. Other conceptual binaries correspond to the inside/outside dichotomy in ways that strengthen the oppositional associations between the two values, including a residential arrangement of city/forest and the social categorization of civilized/*jangli*. Non-human classifications, through association, further disassociate each end of these binary spectra, fleshing out the illusion of a polarity rooted in nature itself.

My own experience with outsider perceptions of the Maldhari highlights middle-class uncertainties about the socioeconomic and physical health of a 'traditional' population, questioning the viability of the lifestyle and, in some cases, assuming an underlying condition of total poverty. Indigenous and tribal populations remain largely misunderstood outside the spheres of academia and political and environmental activism, and their portrayal in both state and private media if often an essentialized, contextually reduced image of what the public easily apprehends as a 'traditional' persona. This involves meeting certain

aesthetic requirements of otherness; in the case of the Maldhari this involves fashion markers of difference. The magazine photo of Naran Bapa is similar to the photograph I took on page 167 but differs in its conspicuous inclusion of specific culture-marking accessories – in its performance of Maldhari. In the magazine photo Naran Bapa is posed with a decorated walking staff, wearing a small turban and many necklaces. Even the caption of his photo exoticizes the image of the Maldhari, suggesting the name 'Maldhari' translates to "lion people" (Conde Nast Traveler India 286).

On the following page are two images published in the preface of the 1972 Government of Gujarat Directorate of Information and Tourism publication, *The Gir Lion Sanctuary Project*. The photographs purportedly illustrate "an overgrazed forest patch," indicating deforestation caused by irresponsible Maldhari land usage, against a contrasting image of tall plentiful grasses that have grown "as a result of closure" of those lands to graziers like the Maldhari. The two photographs show two different unidentified locations from the forest but are presented in the manner of a "before and after" comparison, suggesting that closing off the land to the Maldhari's herds necessarily transforms anthropogenic wastelands into healthy, lushly vegetated forest spaces.



An overgrazed forest patch in the Gir

Reboisement as a result of closure

Figure 33. Sourced from the 1972 Government of Gujarat Directorate of Information and Tourism publication "The Gir Lion Sanctuary Project."

The ways in which the use of two different locations for these photographs is problematic illuminate the common conceptions and misconceptions held by both the state and its citizens about the environment, human populations, and the relationship between the two. Pastoral communities have been subject to augmented state persecution with the global movement toward private property across the totality of land masses[80] on this planet. In the classic economic model of "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin 1968), herders are individual agents of self-interest maximalization who willingly deplete shared spaces, the "commons," of valuable resources. Popularized by an ecologist, this warning against unmanaged environments advocates state environmental policy and land management on behalf of eco-scientists but is rooted in 19th century pro-regulation British economic theory. Although famously dispelled by Elinor Ostrom (1990) and countless other ethnographic data, the tragedy of the commons remains a potent referent in popular understandings of how humans, in particular indigenous and uneducated populations, work with and on the earth: that is, that they are incapable of doing so responsibly.

The portrayal of Maldhari as detrimental to the land fits into the socioenvironmental narrative of a pristine, human-less nature that is only possible through the removal or "rehabilitation" – integration into the neoliberal labor force – of native and agropastoral populations. When I first arrived in Sasan I was warned by forest management not to be too sympathetic to the

[80] The issue of ownership is not restricted to land masses, but also includes air spaces and bodies of water.

condition of the Maldhari, as their current grazing patterns and modernizing customs are incompatible with continued forest health. The grasses, while plentiful during monsoon, are not sufficient to feed both large livestock herds and the sixty thousand ungulates the forest supports. The livestock are now fed supplementary foods produced outside the forest, containing chemicals, pesticides, and other undesirable polluting elements that first becomes cattle biomass and then either lion biomass or fecal matter that is absorbed into the ground. In the past, the DCF recounted, the Maldhari lived deep in the forest, drinking only milk and eating only dairy products from their herds. In the past they were subsistence families, whereas now "look at them," he says, "they eat *chapatti*. They are commercialized. They don't even know their own traditions [anymore]".

Visitors to the area expressed assorted curiosities about the forest inhabitants beyond environmental sustainability. Walking across the grounds of Sinh Sadhan one evening I came across a middle-aged couple similarly enjoying an evening stroll. The man was an optometrist, his wife an economist, and they had traveled to Sasan Gir from Delhi to see the forest, its animals, and its peoples. On the day previous to our meeting they had visited with a Maldhari family while out on safari to see their way of life, traditional housing and dress. The economist found them to be much like *adivasis*, a comparison that communicated to me her knowledge that the Maldhari are not actually *adivasis*. The couple had traveled to Africa and found the Maldhari to live similarly to the *adivasis* they had seen there. "Their lives haven't changed in a hundred years,"

the economist commented, adding “the only difference is now they wear proper clothes.”

The optometrist and economist couple were not only interested in the forest’s Maldhari population. After our initial exchanging of pleasantries and discussing the basics of my research project, the wife asked if I had any plans to study the Siddhi community living in the sanctuary. “I heard they came to India to escape the famine in Somalia,” she told me, noting the presence of lions in the area allowed the Africans to feel at home. The history of the Siddhis was not something I ever sorted out. In the *Conde Nast Traveller* article on the Gir Forest, Siddhis are either “brought in from North Africa… to look after the lions” or “brought in as slaves to work on the railway line that passes through Junagadh” (Conde Nast Traveler India 288). A locally produced historical essay claims the Siddhis are Ethiopian and South African in heritage who have lost their native Swahili language since living in Gujarat. According to the DCF, they came from Kenya either because the Nawab of Junagadh married an African princess or, like the Delhi couple had related to me, because they liked living near lions. Observing lions in their natural habitat was the main objective of the couple’s visit to the Gir Forest; if the forest was their zoological park the homesteads of the Siddhi and Maldhari were museum exhibits.

PEOPLE OF THE GIR FOREST

The Maldhari are pastoral peoples living in western India as shepherds or herders. The name ‘Maldhari’ is a compound of the words *mal* and *dhari*, which

together translate to “keeper of livestock.” Originally cow and camel herders, these days their domestic herds are predominantly, although not exclusively, dairy-producing water buffalo. Cows, oxen, camels, and goats may supplement their herds. Historically, the Maldhari followed a transhumant pastoral lifestyle whereby their shifting locations were dictated by seasonal access to adequate grazing areas and water for their herds. Maldhari communities once occupied various homesteads at great distance from one another, though nowadays they typically rotate between relatively closer sites or remain stationary. Dairy products are integral to both the Maldhari economy and diet, a microcosmic reflection of the cultural and material salience of milk in its many forms throughout South Asia. The Maldhari readily consume *doodh* (milk), *chaas* (buttermilk), *makhan* (butter), *ghee* (clarified butter), *cha* (tea cooked with milk), *dahi* (yogurt), and many other forms of dairy both in their pure state and as primary ingredients in their cooking. The Hindu majority maintain a vegetarian diet not dissimilar to standard regional fare – legumes, vegetables, rice, and *rotla* (unleavened flatbread made from millet or sorghum) – while Muslim Maldhari families are known to eat meat and fish.

Following post-Independence changes in land usage and ownership across South Asia many Maldhari moved toward a semi-nomadic or stationary lifestyle. The India-Pakistan partition of 1947 militarization of the land invoked a violent and abrupt end to transhumance for millions of people. Beyond conflicts of emerging nation-states and disgruntled migrant populations, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru came a series of major socioeconomic

transformations that involved major industrial and agricultural development. Although under informal local government protection beginning in the early 20th century, it was during the 1960s that the environment of the Gir forest became an official federally protected area; during the transition from forest to "protected" forest, Maldhari living in the Gir forest began to face legal restrictions on their movements within and around its newly defined boundaries. For the Maldhari communities residing within the area that is now the Gir PA there has been a particular set of limitations to their movement within and outside the park's boundaries. Wildlife conservation and environmental protection are the axes on which the state designed a plan to manage protected swath of land comprising the wildlife sanctuary and national park portions of the Gir forest. The primary pastoral activities of the Maldhari involve extensive use of local natural resources, rendering the fundamental basis of their economy at odds with the protectionist policies of the state. Forest management personnel are openly critical of the Maldhari's impact on the Gir ecosystem, echoing the concerns of the Gir PA's founding management team whose original plans involved the removal and relocation of all Maldhari residents to lands outside the formal boundaries of the newly protected area.

Following Peter Rigby's differentiation between the ideal type of "purely" pastoral societies and the more practiced contemporary "semi-pastoral" societies of mixed economies (1971: 259; 1985: 130-132), Maldhari communities vary on the spectrum with an increasing reliance on supplemental economic activities including cultivation, daily labor work, and agricultural commodity production

and sales. Maldhari sell fertilizer called *desi laant*, made by mixing dessicated cattle dung with dry teak leaves they call *jaajaa*. Pastoral activities are also becoming a direct supplier as part of the expanding neoliberal economy – a few Maldhari families have secured forest entry permits for their business clients, allowing dairy trucks to pick up milk directly from its source.

Dairy pastoralism as a venture holds a significant position in India's division of labor, as the Indian diet is rich in milk-based foods, and *ghee*, while heavily used in cooking, is a necessary element in many Hindu rituals including marriage, funerals, and deity worship. In one creation myth from the *Rigveda* the gods, after man is created, sacrifice all things in return for *ghee* which they use to "[make] into those beasts who live in the air, in the forest, and in villages" (O'Flaherty 1975: 27). In another text of Vedic ritual the combination of *ghee*, milk, and hair results in the birth of plant life, while man is created by pouring *ghee*, produced from the lord of creatures rubbing his hands together, directly into fire (Ibid.: 32-33). While the dairy produced by the Maldhari directly is a vital ingredient in Indian cooking, these life-cycle associations with dairy products demonstrate the indirect ways these products are vital to a larger body of practices, with the burning of *ghee* in ritual a literal and material reenactment of creation.

The Maldhari Today

Figure 34. A Maldhari child poses in the interior of a ness.

There are an estimated 2300 individuals presently residing in the Gir PA. These approximately four-to-five-hundred[81] Maldhari families occupy homestead compounds distributed throughout the whole of the sanctuary. Each compound is a multi-family hamlet of huts constructed predominantly from forest resources like mud, timber, and grasses, and also sometimes from salvaged, bartered, or purchased materials from nearby villages. Individual huts occupy a portion of the compound that includes a courtyard area called a *jokh* and an area for cattle

[81] Exact numbers of Maldhari families residing in the Gir PA are not available. According to a 2016 news report there are over 450 Maldhari families living inside the sanctuary. (Source: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/450-Maldhari-families-living-inside-Gujarats-Gir-sanctuary/articleshow/53164854.cms)

belonging to that specific hut's occupants. Outside the Maldhari community the compound as a total unit is called a ness, while in Maldhari local language a ness is called a *neheda* or *neseda*. Every ness is named, and the names do not necessarily indicate the occupants of the ness which are sometimes mixed between castes. Individual huts within the ness are organized by patriline with huts occupied by related families often clustered near each other.

A Maldhari family typically has between thirty and one hundred buffalo that are kept overnight inside the ness. Ness compounds are demarcated by imposing perimeter fences made of branches of wood, mostly teak, and covered in thorny brambles. These fences serve a greater service than simply keeping the cattle from wandering away overnight. The height and certainty of inflicting pain create a barrier predicated on a need not to fence anyone or anything *in*, but to protect what is inside from the danger in the night, to keep anyone and anything *out*. Security breaches are not a regular occurrence but are also not unheard of; at Kadeli the last time lions jumped the fence was three or four years prior to my visit. Lions having difficulty finding prey and willing to suffer the painful thorns of a fence can find an easy meal in young, tethered cattle. Leopards also occasionally enter the *jokh* to take buffalo or cow calves. Lacking the special status conferred to the lions, Maldhari can apply through the Forest Department to have livestock-killing leopards captured. The Maldhari of Gir West emphasized to me that they do not pursue such revenge on forest animals, for those animals are only doing what is in their nature. Doing what one is meant to do 'naturally' is not an offense – it is a given.

Figure 35. Lion scat.

The loss of calves to forest predators is a loss, but not of the same caliber of losing an adult cow or buffalo, which can produce a potential five liters per day of milk. Leopards are no threat to an animal that size, unlike pack hunters like lions. A herd of cattle traveling through the forest on their daily grazing journey is no obscure sight in the Gir Forest, not to humans and not to lions. Analyses of lion scat indicate buffalo as a mainstay of the Gir lions' diet, constituting an appreciable percent of their food intake.

Today there are 54 active nesses in the Gir PA along with 14 settlement villages[82], a 60% decrease from the 1970s (Singh 2007: 78,80), when the Indian

[82] Laborers working under the Nawab of Junagadh were leased land inside the forest so they could keep up with forest operations such as fire protection, planting, coupe felling, and

government began a relocation project to resettle and reestablish the Maldhari as agriculturalists in settlements within the region.

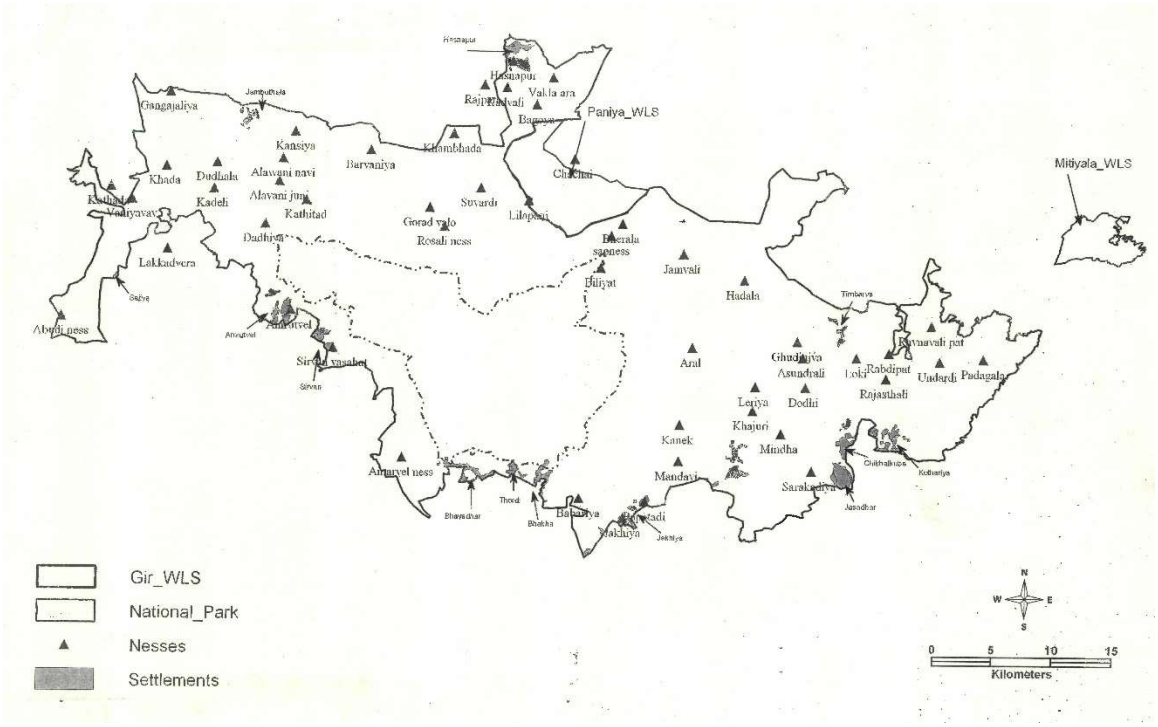


Figure 36. Map illustrating the geographical distribution of Maldhari nesses throughout the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary. Map provided by Gujarat Forest Department.

In the early 1970s nearly five thousand Maldhari lived in the Gir Forest. Between 700 and 845 families living in one of 129 nesses tended to 13,000 - 17,000 livestock within the protected area[83]. Between 1972 and 1987, 592 of these families were relocated which resulted in 55 of the 129 nesses left abandoned

other duties, but also have some land for cultivation. These developments became forest settlement villages.

[83] According to the official *Management Plan for Gir Protected Areas*, published by the Sasan Gir Wildlife Division of the Gujarat Forest Department, the Maldhari population was 717 families with 12,976 domestic livestock (2012: 73). However, R.N. Chudasama's *The Nomads of Gir* reports a population of 845 families and 16,852 cattle (2010: 29), and Divyabhanusinh's *The Story of Asia's Lions* cites similar numbers (2005: 207).

(Chudasama 2010: 29; Gujarat State Forest Department). The rationale in shifting the Maldhari out of the Gir Forest was to not only reduce but entirely eliminate human activities within the protected area; the Gujarat State Forest Department explains its reasoning:

> The maldharis [sic] and their livestock… exerted a negative impact on Gir habitat due to consumptive use of both forest products and fodder. The practices such as cutting and lopping of trees for house construction and fodder for livestock, adversely affected the vegetation; and the practices of mixing up top soil and buffalo dung from one km radius around the 'nesses' for sale to outsiders as manure deprived the forest soil of nutrient recycling vital for rejuvenation of the ecosystem. Also some of the aggrieved maldharis started resorting to poisoning of lions by way of retaliation by sprinkling the carcass with insecticides. Thus, the close kinship and atmosphere of peaceful coexistence which had prevailed between maldharis and the Gir lions was imperilled [sic] and ultimately it became necessary to remove maldharis from the Gir forest to ensure the very survival and well being of the Gir lions. This, in face, became the main plank of the prestigious Gir Lion Project launched by the State Government in 1972. (*Management Plan for Gir Protected Areas* 2012: 72)

Under a scheme of "rehabilitation," nearly six hundred families were resettled outside the official boundaries of the protected area, some in the nearby periphery but many at a significant distance. Distributed across thirty sites, the relocated population was presumed to continue some level of dairy production but was cut off from access to grazing lands inside the protected area, greatly reducing the amount of livestock each family could sustain. A major goal of resettlement was to transition the Maldhari from animal husbandry into

agriculture, a trade in which they have little to no knowledge or experience. Provided with no training and sometimes unsuitable land,[84] conditions deteriorated for the displaced families; presently, only 16 of the 30 sites of relocation are populated (Chudasama 2010: 31). By numbers the rehabilitation has been unsuccessful, yet the Forest Department plans to eventually move forward with the relocation of the remaining Maldhari families in the protected area, citing the desire for "modern amenities like roads, schooling facilities, and use of pump sets for watering, electricity in the nesses…[as] another point of conflict between [the Maldhari] and the forest officials, as these activities cannot be allowed in the long term interests of wildlife and natural ecological processes" (*Management Plan for Gir Protected Areas* 2012: 75). This perspective ignores the benefits of human habitation in the Gir forest, whether in providing information about poaching or illegal tree felling to the Forest Department, providing the livestock which make up a sizeable percentage of lions' diet, or spreading seeds via grazing and thereby aiding the forest vegetation in regeneration. Although the state, the wildlife, and the forest itself rely in myriad ways on the presence of the Maldhari, the state wants to remove them in the name of the wildlife and the forest.

Those who have left the forest are a testament to the countless records documenting the disintegration of communities and families after relocation/displacement, particularly after a population with no agricultural experience are set up to be farmers, an unfamiliar occupation, in their new home,

[84] See also Baviskar (1995) regarding tribal displacement in the Narmada River Valley.

an unfamiliar (and often unsuitable to cultivation) location. No land is tilled in the Gir PA, and there is no time for tilling. Today, the population of cattle in Maldhari nesses is over twelve thousand, with the vast majority being water buffalo. In order to sustain milk-productivity among female cattle the Maldhari operate on a schedule that maximizes the fulfillment of the herds' needs: the necessary grazing, bathing, and feeding requires attentive care from dawn until sundown. The deep, empirical occupational knowledge that is passed through generations of Maldhari is a transmission not only of the intricacies of a pastoral economy via cattle breeding and caretaking; not only of *Indian* pastoralism underpinning the careful production of India's preferred and highly valued high-fat dairy consumables; not only of occupationally crafted histories and identities. Not only these things, but also, and most importantly, the nuances of a pastoral life and livelihood passed alongside lions in, through, and around the Gir Forest.

DAILY LIFE

Daily economic and domestic routines of the Maldhari are sexually segregated. During the daylight hours men graze cattle in the forest, an activity known to locals as *mariyaan* or *chariyaan*. A day's grazing oftentimes involves traveling a range of three to four kilometers from the ness, while in certain cases the range can extend to as much as ten kilometers (Varma 2009: 160-61). During the hottest hours of the afternoon both men and cattle seek a shady refuge, particularly beneficial for the cattle when a water point is nearby providing the opportunity for them to be bathed. While the men are out in the open forest, Maldhari women gather resources such as grasses, wood, and water from the

homestead-adjacent forest, mind the children, and perform household chores like sewing and food preparation. Temples are sprinkled throughout the forest, some makeshift and some relatively more formal in architecture, which are used by people for prayer and by wildlife for shade. These sites are maintained and cared for by the Maldhari. Barring a small population of Muslims, all castes of Maldhari are considered to be especially devout Hindus who worship Mataji, a pre-Vedic figure manifest in many familiar Hindu forms as Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati and others, but to whose larger essence the Maldhari are especially devoted. In this region the celebrated manifestations of Mataji are local goddesses including Kankeshwari (avatar of Amba/Durga; vehicle: lion), Khodiyar (vehicle: crocodile), Umiya (avatar of Parvati; vehicle: cow), Chamunda, Mummai, Palai, and others.

The smaller temple sites in the Gir Forest primarily serve the Maldhari community as places of ritual goddess worship. The incorporation of the temples into the landscape with no structural barrier demarcations are an architectural extension of the widely held belief that the gods reside in the natural world. Beyond nature-divine associations, the temple sites also reflect an intimacy with the natural landscape that connects the Maldhari personally with their immediate environment, the Gir Forest, and its immediate environment, the Greater Gir. This close relationship between the Maldhari and the land is embedded narratively and symbolically in the oral literatures of the area, including the songs performed during Navaratri, cosmological origin stories, and local folk tales. In one such tale pieced together by a local historian and transcribed below,

a Maldhari family turns to the earth as kin as a means to fulfill their societal obligations:

> In the Charan community there was a couple, having no children, they got very old. Aged. Once, the wife of the Charan was crying. Then, after [inaudible] cattle herds, the Maldhari was returning to his house, he seen that his wife was crying and he asked, "Why are you crying?" Then she replied that everyone has children and on occasion of their marriage they are feeding everyone, enjoying, but they have nothing. And we have taken meals at everyone's house but no one has ate at our house because we have no children. Then, he decided to marry these two hills as their son and daughter. Opposite the first hill is called *gantla* and the smaller hill is called *gantli*. They invited all these Maldharis of this Gir area and they stayed overnight in this area. The sweets and the varieties of foods, passed out to the peoples and when the, another Maldhari asked "What are you doing?" [they said] "Marrying these two children." [he replied] "Those are not children, those are hills" but this way, they served all the people, invited to eat, and so that another Maldhari sung this [song]. So, that is the story.

MARRIAGE

Joint-family households have been and continue to be the dominant living arrangement in the Indian subcontinent, notwithstanding the myriad of exceptions and particularities to the "rules" one may find when looking closely. The joint-family system is predicated on patrilineal relations, consisting of two or more "patrilineally related nuclear families living in one household, employing one hearth, and sharing property" (Orenstein 1965: 35). In such an arrangement,

one's identity is assigned initially by sex and secondarily by one's relationship to the men (fathers, brothers) in their immediate family. In the next generation, these identities are marked by titles indicating the person's relationship to one's father or mother— there are differentiating terms for one's father's older and younger brothers (and wives), but a father's sister (and husband) receives the same kinship term regardless of her age in relation to the father. At least one son is expected to reside with the parents along with his wife and children, the eldest brother hierarchically assigned the greatest power which descends across his siblings by age (with this age-power association extending to the sibling's wives, meaning the wife of the youngest brother is the weakest member of the family). Cousins whose fathers are brothers may reside together, but it is unlikely that cousins whose mothers are sisters will be raised in the same household. So, a child might live in a joint-family with their *kaka* (uncle older than one's father) or *nana* (uncle younger than one's father), but not with their *massi* (mother's sister of any age), *mama* (mother's brother of any age), or *foi* (father's sister of any age).

The specificity assigned to male-male relationship terminology and the more general nature of female-female or male-female relationship terminology underscores the privileged, or fundamental, position of the male sex in Indian kinship and society. The practice of daughters relocating to their husband's natal/family homes is central to a social system by which women are exchanged and men are kept. Children may be raised almost communally by an assemblage of caretakers linked by particular affinal or natal connections to a child's father. Affinal and natal relations to a child's mother (her siblings and/or their spouses)

are often associated with more "feminine" aspects of care: affectionate, tender, humorous, and loving relationships are forged through visits with a mother's relations, engendered by the difference in or lack of hierarchical rank and competition compared to a father's relations.

Like the Mer of Saurashtra (Trautmann 2000: 565) the Maldhari are thought to follow Dravidian, or South Indian, kinship practices despite their non-Dravidian linguistic background. In Dravidian kinship, cross-cousins (cousin from a parent's opposite-sex sibling) are classified as cousins while parallel cousins (cousin from a parent's same-sex sibling) are classified as siblings. Classificatory cousins are potential marriage partners while siblings are not. The marriage practice employed by the Maldhari is termed *samsamu* or *hamhamu*, typically understood as a cross-cousin daughter exchange (Chudasama 2010: 70-71) based on familial reciprocity. In the model described by Chudasama, engagements are sometimes arranged prior to birth and marriages often take place when a child is between five and ten years of age (sometimes in a joint ceremony during which entire sets of siblings are married off in order to save on wedding expenses), but girls are eighteen or older before they relocate to their affinal homes, bringing their dowry with them at that time. Unlike the Mer and Yadavas, however, the Maldhari told me their *samsamu* does not involve cousin marriage although it is an exchange-based model. They do, however, show evidence of treating parallel cousins as classificatory siblings. If a family has only sons, the father's elder brother will give his daughters as his brother's own, if he

has extra.[85] The Maldhari estimate that children are engaged around the age of 12 or 13 and are married at 18 or 19 for girls, 20 or 21 for boys. They will not send their daughters out to live in cities unless they will receive a girl to come to the forest in exchange, but city people largely do not want to send their daughters to live in the forest so most marriages are ness-ness or ness-village[86] exchanges.

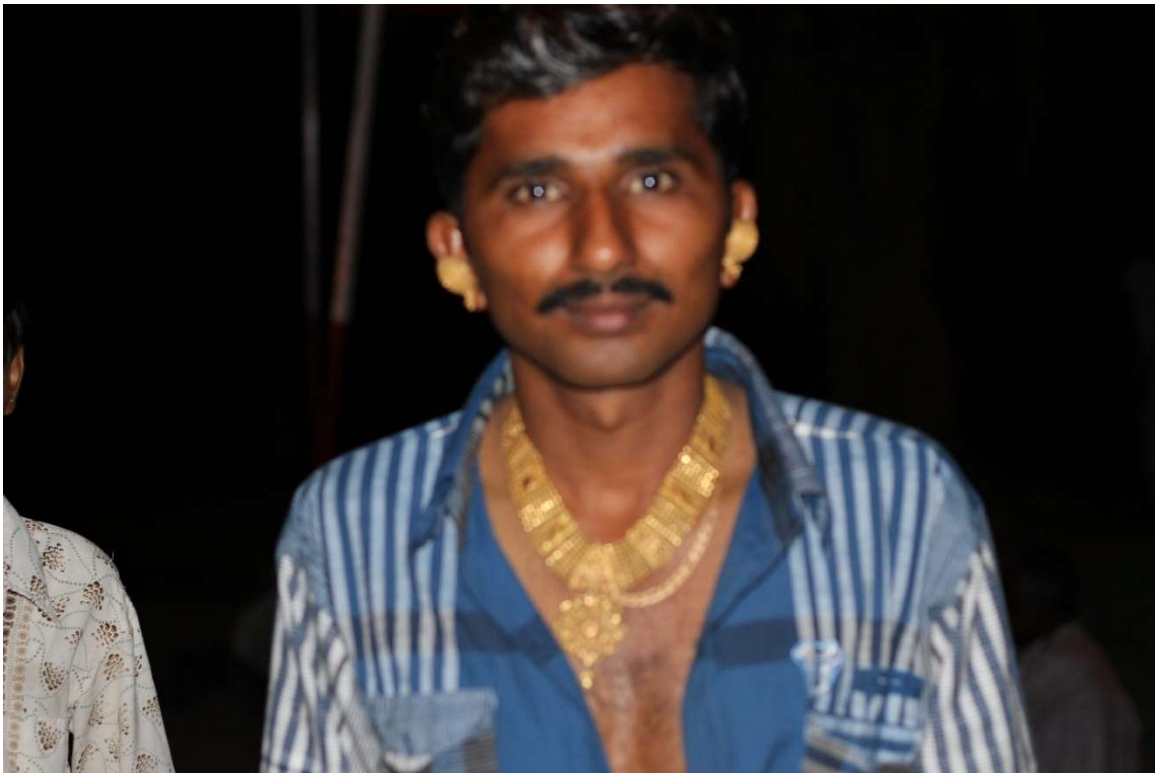


Figure 37. A Rabari man wearing his family gold during a local festival.

I did not collect many variations on Maldhari marriage traditions and was not witness to any marriage ceremonies or celebrations during my time in the Gir Forest. Although my data are limited, I can present a general picture of marriage practices through one example of a *samsamu* exchange in which a Rabari man's

[85] If the father's elder brother has a greater number of daughters than sons.
[86] The villages are in nearby districts and not necessarily in the greater Gir Forest.

sister was married into Bhayavada village in the Jamnagar district, and in exchange his wife came from that village to the forest. By that family's customs, to do *samsamu* one needs a minimum of three *thola* (measurement of gold by which one *thola* is equal to 10 grams). To do a marriage without *samsamu* one needs a minimum of eleven *thola* (110 grams). The rate of gold at that time was 30,000 rupees per gram[87]. The bride must receive at least twenty-two pieces of clothing and her parents must receive one or two lakh rupees.[88] The gold goes to the bride and in that sense never leaves the affinal family, as the bride must come to live with them. Later, that same gold will be used to secure wives for her sons and continue to cycle through the generations. Aside from the gold, the requirement for clothing for the bride and cash for her parents notably deviates from the dominant dowry model found in India, wherein the bride's family must provide cash and goods to the groom's family. While this model requires a family to pay another to take their daughter, the Maldhari model sees the bride's family receiving money in exchange for their daughter and also sets wealth requirements on the groom's family that must be met before marriage.

EDUCATION

All Maldhari families I spoke to expressed a desire for their children or grandchildren to receive a scholastic education. Not all nesses have access to formal schooling, and even some that do have found that the teachers assigned to

[87] The minimum valuation of gold at that time for a *samsamu* marraiage calculates to Rs. 900,000; for a non-*samsamu* marriage the minimum calculates to Rs. 3,300,000.
[88] 1 *lakh* = 100,000.

their ness do not show up to teach their children. I was often misidentified as a Forest Department employee, doctor, or NGO worker during my initial visits to nesses. Believing I had the power to provide resources or facilities, the Maldhari who greeted me would launch quickly into pleas for their primary desire: schools for the children of the ness. In one instance, after determining I was not a medical doctor, an elderly man instantly changed the subject to the need for a school, promising that the children would bless me if I aided them in getting one. I later met the man who was hired to teach the children of that ness. A Gir-born Rabari himself, he had finished school through the tenth grade. Noticing a vacancy for a teaching position in the forest, he applied and was hired at a rate of 3000Rs per class per month. I felt a great deal of sympathy for this young man when he told me "this is the only chance, the only situation that a Rabari could become a teacher, is here in the Gir." His ness, Dadhiya, previously operated on solar power installed by an NGO in the late 1990s. For quite some time now it has been broken but there is no one to come to fix it. They have no well so they fetch river water and complain that they always have to drink dirty water, and how during monsoon in particular the river water is "much too dirty." They settled here because the department gave them clearance here, but he tells me "my father and grandfather have no sense, even before [these recent troubles] it wasn't better." He and his brothers find the area boring and lacking in adequate grazing areas for their cattle. They would like to farm, but know nothing of farming and have no land. As we drive away, my assistant tells me that the man had lied to me. He said he only taught children at Dudhala, but he was also supposed to teach the children at Gangajaliya. I could not verify this but still

thought sympathetically of those children, hoping for an education from a teacher who would not come.

When possible, children are sent to nearby towns and villages to live with relatives or stay at boarding schools; more often, it is the daughters who are sent off to receive an education. Sons who do attend school have to stop studying at an early age to help with cattle grazing and other work at the ness. At one ness, the eldest son attended school through 6th grade, the next son left after ninth, and the youngest (at the time of my fieldwork) was in eleventh and they wanted him to have more—he went to boarding school at Sasan through tenth grade at a school for the Maldhari. Girls also have to leave school early if there is a need for help with housework, cooking, cleaning, or farm work at the ness. If there are not enough sons, they may do the men's work as well: in one family of four daughters and two sons, one daughter was living in Sasan with her uncle, a Forest Department laborer, so she could go to school, one daughter lives with an elder uncle but is considered too old at the age of 10 to start school, one daughter stays home at the ness, and one daughter takes the cattle out to graze in the forest during the day.

The uneven access to education extends in both directions. Some nesses have no schools nearby, others have schools but the teachers rarely show up, some have the fortune of schools and attendant teachers, but only one ness has a school of its own right within the property. This ness, Vaniyavav, is on the outer edge of the protected area and is too far for children from other nesses to reach. Not only a school, Vaniyavav also has wired electricity and a working

refrigerator—something I have not seen in any other ness. When I inquired about this, the patriarch of Vaniyavav, Lala Bhai, stated that he had worked very hard to galvanize support from the forest officers to get these facilities.[89] The department did not see an appropriate location for a school and believed it would require renting space from a local home. Lala Bhai offered a large space available in his home and promised he would not demand rent, so for the last fifteen years his children have had access to schooling up to the seventh grade in their own home. Lala Bhai has asked to increase the curriculum up to the ninth grade but the government will not make that change until it has enough students to justify the extra two years. As of now, only his children and a few children of Forest Department servants attend the school.

MALDHARI AND THE LAND

Even when the forest is flush with greenery or thick with humidity there is a certain dryness that filters the blossoming scene. The climate of the region ensures an aridity required to support the thorny scrub forest and to an extent limit the growth of the abundant teak trees. Although not large and strong like the plantation teak of the Colonial era, the smaller stature of these trees allows an ease of accessibility for forest-dwellers in search of durable but manageable

[89] An Eco-Development project in 1999 brought solar power to nesses in the Gir Forest. During my fieldwork in 2012, Lala Bhai estimated Vaniyavav got electricity 18 years earlier,only 2 years after his family had settled there and at least five years before the other nesses were set up with solar power. Because Vaniyavav already had power in 1999, the Eco-Development project gave the ness 600 stones to rebuild the home, which is far nicer than ness homes and look to me much like a village home. In that project, the government officers came and asked for a meeting during which the Maldhari were told they had to pay 25% of material costs and the Eco-Development project would pay 75%. Lala Bhai estimates this project took place 10-15 years ago. Vaniyavav also wanted a stone wall to be built, but instead of paying 25% they participated in the labor of building it to cover the costs.

lumber for house construction and repair. The river basins of the forest's seven rivers provide enough water for the grasses and trees to stay alive until the monsoon season, a once reliable season that in recent years has become erratic, usually in the direction of drought. During the rest of the year water must regularly be brought in from outside Gir to fill the cement water points sprinkled throughout the forest. The water points are divided between the domestic buffalo of the Maldhari and the wild animals of the forest; it is prohibited for the two categories of animal share a water source. Access to and sources of water are uneven across nesses. Some have access to wells on or near their homestead while others, like those at Dadhiya, must make use of river water. Water from the river is considered dirty year-round, but particularly during the monsoon season the water becomes "much too dirty." Even those who have the option of obtaining well water do not always prefer it. At Kadeli, the local well is only used after the local waterways, creeks and rivers they call *chella*, run dry after a few months post-monsoon. The bucket is usually filled with mud. Like at Dadhiya, for Kadeli *chella* water is unappealing because it is *dodu*, or mixed with dirt. The only time of year that at least satisfactory water is available at Kadeli is the months between the end of the rains, in October or November when the sediments have settled to the bottom of the creekbed, and when the *chella* dries up. This year the water stopped running in January.

Barring the steepest mountains, the forested area remains navigable by foot, a feature necessary not only for the Maldhari cowherds in their daily search for sufficient pasture, but also for successful predation the daily patrol of

conquered territory of the lions. The forest is an endless maze of sameness to my eyes, but to its inhabitants no more complicated than a planned city; they know the land, and they know it intimately. Generations of men have walked their buffalo across the forest and back again; in the daily journey for grasses, the seasonal relocation, in the pilgrimage to family temple sites woven into the landscape, their visual and bodily memories grow thick, embedded with the shape, slope, and fertility of that earth. Even after resettling outside of or elsewhere within the forest, Maldhari know, remember, and value their family temple sites, ranging from the larger Shiva temples to very simple, almost unnoticeable small personal memorial sites. In times of need, devoted Maldhari will travel long distances to reach these locations. During a drive through the forest I came across one such Maldhari, a man living outside the PA whose cow had fallen ill. He was traveling alone, trekking to his historic family temple site. My assistant and I offered him a ride for part of the journey and later dropped him off further in the forest, after which he turned off the demarcated paths and walked into the wooded area beyond. Once he reached his destination he would perform a *mantha*,[90] a type of prayer that is not like performative classical forms of worship one does at a formal temple, such as *puja*, *darshan*, or *havan*. Rather, it is an 'internal prayer' that connects the thoughts of individual praying to the powerful potential residing in the spiritual and ancestral 'net' in which he is situated.

[90] Most likely the local form of the word *mantra*, but pronounced without the 'r' by my informants.

Still, while they may not need them, the state-crafted dirt roadways that meander through the sanctuary are routinely, but not at all exclusively, utilized by the Maldhari and the lions. Other wildlife make use of the roads in different ways: for example, the small brown bird known as the Indian nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) often rest in the middle of the road, motionless until forced to move (or until an edible insect is spotted). But it is only the humans and lions who use these paths as travel routes. Lions typically walk or rest upon the roads in their family groups of mothers and cubs, taking advantage of the clear visibility and obstacle-free movement afforded by the cleared land. The Maldhari, on the other hand, tend to travel the roads only when walking alone. Groups in search of fuel and fodder and cowherds leading their buffalo to good grasses avoid the scanty resources of the roadside, instead traveling to the depths of the forest where only they and the animals of the forest can go.

MALDHARI HISTORY

In accessing the histories of the Gir forest, in either its current juridical or former geographical form, I came across some major hurdles in data collection. The primary obstacle involved confronting my own pre-formed expectations about the kinds of populations I would be working with. Drawing from the ethnographic texts found in the classical anthropological canon, I anticipated recording a trove of personal, social, and even geo-regional oral histories. I suspected the data would not come easy, hoping that forging relationships over the long-term of my field period would eventually allow me access to the data.

Over many visits with many people I slowly worked my way from talking with them about their experiences in the forest to the more intimate topics about their life and family histories; I sought the stories passed down from grandfathers and their grandfathers before, tidbits and narratives that could model the Maldhari social world, calling back to some *habitus* of my informants' predecessors by revealing the social or ecological conditions, the conventions and values of their local communities of the past. At a certain point, if my informant seemed comfortable with me but had not yet shared this kind of information with me, I would ask directly about their families, histories, their stories. Very often the response was a shrug and along with the words "I don't know." Many ethnographic texts had prepared me for this kind of dismissal – the directness of my questioning was discomfiting, the nature of my questioning was unusual, or I was too foreign to their world and worldview to be able to have these conversations.

On one afternoon while expressing these concerns to local amateur historian and retired forester Balkrushna Dave, from whom I had hoped to glean something more of Maldhari history than I had as yet encountered, I lamented one of my other major obstacles: written histories of the forest and its people, if they even existed, were nearly inaccessible. The erasure of populations like the Maldhari from the historical record is a structural violence that compounds itself. After a moment of silent consideration Mr. Dave replied: "You can't find those histories because five thousand years ago no records were kept… You [must] have observed those old peoples [in the forest] are illiterate because they are staying

within the sanctuary… They will not know stories from their grandfathers [because] they have been in Gir since generations." Mr. Dave's response suggested both that the Maldhari's inhabitance of the Gir forest perpetuated their non-literacy, which was universal five thousand years ago but later changed for many societies, but also that their non-literate status indicates an inability to retain historical information, whether because they have never been told such information or because they are not capable of or inclined to remembering what they have been told. Rather than *denying the credibility* of 'living' interpretations of oral histories and elsewhere recorded classical mythologies, the forester's critique of the Maldhari was that such interpretations simply *do not live on* in their communities.[91] Mr. Dave's line of thinking falls in line with the othering of the Maldhari through the insider/outsider and civilized/*jangli* oppositional framing of Indian communities; the Maldhari do not have a place in the realm of the scholastic order.

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[91] Mr. Dave's perception of illiteracy and historical knowing was colored by his own personal history with education. He came from a poor family in a village situated on the border of the Gir, around seven kilometers south of Devaliya. After completing the seventh grade Mr. Dave left school to work a job and contribute to his family's finances. His interest in history, and particularly the local history of his homeland, persisted despite having no access to formal education after the age of thirteen. Using secondhand books he became a self-taught historian of the area, eventually producing a small pamphlet about the Gir and proudly assembling a library worth approximately 40,000Rs. Always cultivating his intellect, he successfully passed the exam to join the Gujarat Forest Department, which today requires a 12th grade education, on his first attempt in March 1974. Mr. Dave worked as a Forest Guard and then Forester during his 37 years of service at the Gir Forest. Upon his retirement in November 2011 he no longer had a full-access permit for entry into the sanctuary. During his working days he would roam freely, typically on his own, while on duty in the forest. Today he must obtain permission to cross the sanctuary's boundaries and is not at liberty to move through the forest unaccompanied. He is now like anyone else who wishes to see the Gir – a non-bureaucrat subject to bureaucratic protocol.

Mr. Dave has constructed his own history of the Maldhari as an integral though not highlighted component of his overall Gir Forest history:

> Five thousand years ago, the Lord Krishna who left Mathura for Dwarka, and at that time in this region particularly the Saurashtra area, the Saurashtra region of the Gujarat State, there was no any other community like the Maldharis – Charans, Bharwads, Rajput, Brahmins. There were only two communities who were original to this part. One is the Bhil community and second is the Kaba. Kaba means today they were called Vagher… with the Lord Krishna, the many *gopalak*, that means animal keeper and particularly cows, no buffaloes, buffaloes [in] that day [were] wild animal[s]… with the cows all these Maldharis communities… all came with Lord Krishna. So the Maldhari, *mal* is the typical word of this area, the *mal* means cattle, the cows and buffalo we call *mal* in local language, and *dhari* means keeper. *Mal-dhari* is a combined word, the animal keeper…

HISTORY FROM THE MOUTH AND *CHOPRA* OF THE MALDHARI

Far from the history-less *jangli* people of Mr. Dave's imagination, the Maldhari understand themselves to be a community or communities that care about history, their own history, in that their own histories are the relevant narrative of linear time from the beginning until now. The historical memory of the Maldhari is recorded in one of two ways, remembered or recorded in both genealogical and cosmo-political forms. In terms of tracing these historical trajectories it is the recorded history of a family's genealogy that is inaccessible to outsiders, while cosmological and political narratives placing the Maldhari are shared openly and even celebrated.

Genealogies

Each Maldhari family name has an affiliated *barot*,[92] a genealogical record-keeper who updates the bound family genealogical record during local festivals and gatherings. The Barot caste are genealogists by trade and tradition. Historical claims made by the Maldhari, whether orally or in print, are nearly always qualified as verifiable by either the *barot*'s *chopra*[93] or by other history books. Upon meeting the *barot* of the Rala family, I was curious to see what the *chopra* contained and asked him to show it to me. He demurred, citing *abharchat*,[94] but quickly relented as he became more interested in answering my questions. He showed me his *chopra*, informing me that it was bound by a leather of rhinoceros skin that he purchased from a vendor near Porbandar, a port city situated on the western coast of Saurashtra. I pressed for more information on how he obtained the skin and where it originated, but all he mentioned further was that the skins are only available in Jamnagar and Veraval, port cities on the northern and southern coasts of the peninsula. Indian rhinoceroses were once present through parts of northern India. Their range is not known to have extended as far west as Saurashtra and current populations are isolated in eastern pockets of the subcontinent. Citing Arabian Sea ports as the only markets for rhinoceros skins was, for me, an implication that the leather was a product of Indian Ocean trade exchanges with East Africa rather than a

[92] There are different names for this caste/position. Here they call him Barot, near Ahmedabad they call him Barot Ji, in Bhavnagar they call him Dev, in Rajasthan they call him Bhatt Ji, but in Udaipur and Jaipur they call him Vahi Vancha – which means either "book reader" or "the one who speaks/reads aloud from the book."
[93] The Barot's genealogical record-book is referred to as his *chopra*.
[94] A taboo requiring the separation of women from men or holy things.

domestic product. He explained that the price per foot for this leather was one hundred seventy-five rupees, an amount which at that time was the equivalent of roughly two dollars and eighty cents in American currency. This seemed to me a great bargain. He told me "all Barots keep their genealogies bound in rhinoceros skin—just as Shankar[95] sits on a leopard skin[96] so is the *chopra* in rhinoceros skin." Trained by his father, the *barot* writes his records in a script they refer to as their *lipi*, the Sanskrit word for 'writing,' that only his caste can read. My assistant claimed he could not read it and when I attempted to the *barot* corrected me. The Maldhari are largely illiterate and therefore unconcerned with the language of their genealogies, but the belief that the records are kept in a secret language adds a layer of mystique to the Barots and their profession that could prevent any outsourcing of their work; finding a genealogist outside the caste would break the continuity of the family record as the past details would be inaccessible.

[95] Another name for Shiva.
[96] Shiva is often depicted either wearing or sitting on a leopard or tiger skin. In this region it is typically a leopard skin.

Figure 38. The chopra *of the Barot.*

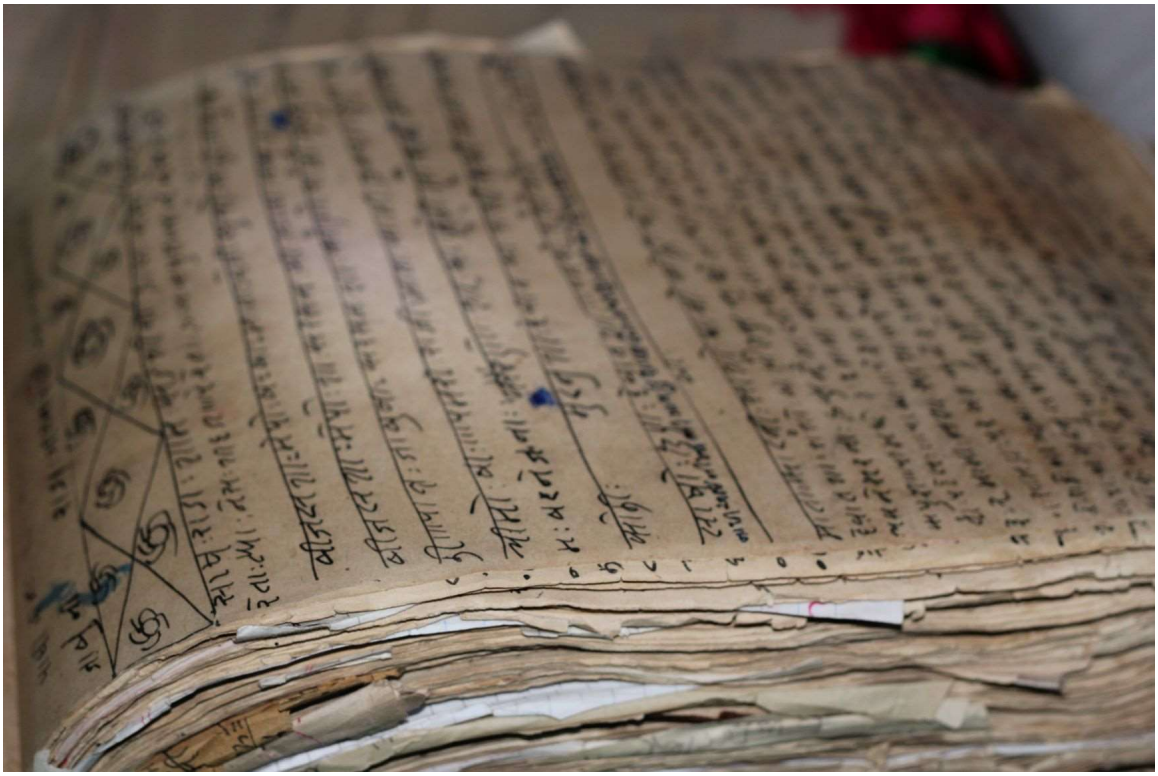

Figure 39. A page from the Barot's chopra.

That is not to say breaks between a family and its *barot* do not occur. Another family, the Ulwa of Dudhala ness, changed their *barot* after growing increasingly dissatisfied with his abilities.[97] He did not keep the history of the family with the precision they expected and often asked for more money than was customary,[98] then spending it on gambling and playing cards. I was unable to ascertain whether or not the original *barot* shared his *chopra* with the new *barot*, nor if the entire Ulwa family partook in the change or just the Ulwa of Dudhala. It is not hard to imagine future generations of the Maldhari, as they are increasingly literate and educated, similarly shifting away from their respective record-keepers; the *barot* of the Rala family showed me a page from his *chopra* that he claimed was from 500 years ago while announcing that before the United States of America invented paper in the year 206, the Barot kept their records on leaves. The *chopra* itself is a mound of papers piled inside a binding with no system of organization discernible to the naked (and foreign) eye. If, as Lévi-Strauss has suggested, "history is subordinated to a system" (1966: 233), the existence and continuity of the record itself is perhaps more important than the layout or accessibility of its contents.

[97] Their original *barot* was the father of the Rala *barot*.
[98] During gatherings the families pay their *barot* as they ask him to record to the new additions to their lineage.

Historical Stories from Old Men

"Yes, [the times of the gods] were truthful [times]." – Bara Aathaa, Dudhala Ness, April 10, 2012

As with all genetic histories, Maldhari genealogies extend further into the past than what can be accessed in the handwritten lists of the *barot*. Beyond the pages of the *chopra*, Maldhari ancestry is rooted in histories of the operatic past of Hindu mythologies. Some of these histories take place at a time when the world was the world of the gods, a world where we can locate the "truthful" timespace of myth. Others are woven into recorded historical events of dynastic India. The following sections contain multiple forms of these histories varying across caste and caste subgroups.

In order to adequately approach the histories and ways of being among the people in my field site, it is necessary to situate the dominant castes of the Gir Forest despite the relative diversity found there. Maldhari as an occupational category is comprised of casted subgroups, and these castes are as well further subdivided into lineage-based family groups. There are multiple and layered levels of social organization as you move from top to bottom. As noted in the Introduction, the dominant castes are the Rabari and the Charan and it is with members of those castes with whom I had greater and more consistent contact during my research period. An attempt to articulate the Gir Maldhari castes requires note of a caveat: castes are not monoliths and cannot be condensed into any ahistorical, cohesive descriptive passage without massively misrepresenting the lived realities of those casted peoples. Although casted subgroups of the Maldhari follow similar lifestyles and practices, recognizing caste differentiation

as being so integral to locating and relating identity in South Asia, I knew the *doing* of the same things could not be conflated with *being* the same thing. The stories that follow illustrate some of the defining differences in oral histories of Rabari and Charan communities in the Gir Forest.

THE RABARI OF THE GIR FOREST

In Judy Frater's longitudinal study of Rabari expressions of identity (2002), she distinguished certain spatial and physical markers that can be used to identify and indicate membership of a Rabari community, subcommunity, or status within those respective bodies. For Frater the analytical marker is embroidered textiles and dress. Other scholars have focused more economically on the ownership of camels as a means of Rabari identification (e.g. Agrawal 1999; Singh 2015). Frater acknowledges that the Rabari excel at maintaining their "distinct cultural identity" while also deftly integrating with neighboring communities (2002: 156), and that each Rabari community negotiates its own degree of distinction from or integration with their neighbors. During my fieldwork, visible markers like textiles and ownership of particular animals were not present among the Rabari families I encountered. In this dissertation I choose to emphasize intangible family histories and origin stories as indicators of how the Rabari see themselves.

The varying versions of Rabari families' histories tend to follow a similar basic narrative. Below I provide two variations on this history provided by two different Rabari lineages: the Khodiyathar and the Karamta. The history of the Rabari who go by the name Khodiyathar was printed on a paper invitation I

received to a temple-raising which was to be held in honor of a deceased uncle of one of my interlocutors from a Rabari ness; the text is a rough translation from its original printing in Gujarati. The history of the Karamta family was orally recounted to me by Najabhai Karamta, a Rabari neighbor of my research assistant working as a driver in Sasan, where he now resides.

Khodiyathar History:

> In the time of all Hindustan[99] in the Sindh province (now in Pakistan) there was a kingdom of the Sumra[100] lineage. In this kingdom there was an appointed general who was our Patha Bapa. Patha Bapa was a man of good character, was charitable, and always spoke the truth. He was so brave that bravery ran through his veins and in his blood. At that time, the Sumra lineage's King, Hamir Sumaro, sat on the throne in Sindh. But Hamir Sumaro had bad thoughts and a bad character. Jahal, daughter of an Ahir Maldhari in that area, had a very beautiful face and also had a good character and good thoughts. After seeing Jahal's beautiful face, Hamir Sumaro lured her [to his palace]. At his palace he put forth a lot of pressure [on her to keep her there]. Jahal's husband wrote a letter to Junagadh's King Ranavaghan[101] asking for his help. Ranavaghan brought his battalion to Sindh for war. At that time Sri Varudi Aai[102][helped] the soldiers get to Sindh. Sri Varudi Aai must have known that Hamir's general, Patha Bapa, was a truthful, ethical, and brave man. [She thought] "If this brave man helps Ranavaghan's army then the fight would be easily won." Thinking this, Sri Varudi Aai explained to Patha Bapa about Hamir Sumra's bad character/behavior/thoughts and about Jahal's character. Patha Bapa said "we eat his food, so how can he be bad?" But with truth

[99] "All Hindustan" refers to the time before partition.
[100] The Sumra dynasty was active during India's Medieval Period.
[101] Who is apparently Jahal's "brother" from a childhood relationship when her parents saved him.
[102] Aai is an alternate term for Mataji. Varudi is the name of this particular form of Mataji.

and bravery Varudi Aai continued to explain [the situation] to Patha Bapa and so his family helped Ranavaghan in winning the war. The war finished and Patha Bapa and his fellows and family members of the Sumra caste came back with King Ranavaghan and his Rajput soldiers. On the road, in the Banni province of Kacch, Patha Bapa died. But even today, it is said that Patha Bapa's grave is there. His body parts are in Bhetakari and Gorana villages, where they were brought, divided, and put in a grave. This story can be found in books.

This story [took place] around Vikram Savanth 1081[103] and *Isvishan*[104] 1025[105]. After that, the Sumra lineage's Rajputs[106] came to Sorath[107]. Ranavaghan gave them five villages to preside over [with no interference in governance from him]. Slowly, these Sumra lineage's Rajputs married with Sorath province's Mer, Rabari, Ahir and Vagher castes' bachelorettes. Starting with them [Rajputs] a relation of eating together [and then exchanging their] daughters, this Sumra lineage's Rajputs are now Odedara[108] Mahers[109], Khodiyathar Rabaris, Sumaniya Vaghers, and Kamaliya Ahirs, [all four] are written in the Barot's book and in history books. All of them are [habitually] brothers. Historians agree that this story is correct. The information accurately states that the Sumra lineage's Rajputs came to this area in Vikram Savanth 1081 and *Isvishan* 1025.

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[103] The year according to the Vikram Savanth (more commonly spelled Vikram Samvat), a lunisolar calendar that runs 56-57 years forward from the Gregorian calendar.
[104] A term meaning "English year."
[105] The rest of the sentence is not being properly translated, something along the lines of "according to the information you can get."
[106] The translation is unclear but suggests the Sumra lineage and King Ranavaghan's Rajput community had intermarried at this point. It is also possible that the Sumra were already Rajputs who had converted to Islam.
[107] Sorath is an old name for Saurashtra.
[108] A last name of the Mer/Maher community. In the couplets that follow the first term is a last name associated with the caste/community named in the second term.
[109] Another spelling of the Mer caste and community.

> So, Patha Bapa is the idol of the Odedara Maher, Khodiyathar Rabari, Sumaniya Vagher, and Kamaliya Ahir. [He was given] the title of Pir[110], and it is said that they live a life of truth, good character, and bravery. Like Sri Ramdevpir, Sri Jesalpir, Sri Devidasbapupir, Sri Rudapir, [and] Sri Karmanpir, our Pathapir is a Hindu Pir. A Pir's life is [that of a] devoted, pious… brave man. This Sri Pathapir Bapa's original name is Gopichand etc., it is written and can be found in history books.

Karamta History:

Another Rabari family, the Karamta, claim the same origins and bravery without the mixing of blood. As told to me by Najabhai Karamta, a Rabari residing in the Sasan Gir village:

> Many years ago we were living in Rajasthan. In Rajasthan we were identified as Rah-bari[111]. In those times there were no vehicle facilities, so for marriage events, when sisters-daughters travel to their affinal[112] home, for their protection we would go with them. Because in these old times there was danger [traveling on] the roads, there were thieves. Sometimes on the road thieves, [we] fought with the thieves. For the sisters-daughters' protection we put our lives in danger, [were] bravely fighting with them, and [we] were good fighters. Like this, one by one we settled in the state [of Gujarat]. Our main occupation was keeping cattle.
>
> After coming from Rajasthan, we first settled in Barda (now Porbandar *jilla*) forest[113]. After, slowly, [we went] where there was grass, water, and good living facilities. Like that [we ended up] in different

[110] Pir is a title for Sufi saints.
[111] Pronounced as raw-buh-ree instead of raw-baw-ri
[112] *Saasariya na gaam* means when the bride goes to the father-in-law's home, not sure about translation of *saasariya* on its own
[113] He uses the term *jangal* which I am translating as forest.

places. As [we] kept on migrating, [we] began to live in the Gir forest[114], [where] there were good grasses, water, and a comfortable area for the Maldhari.

Once, there was a terrible famine. Then the Rabari, Ahir, Charan, with our own Maldhari, left from Panchal Pradesh[115] to go to Sindh Pradesh[116]. In Sindh, Hamir Sumara took the Ahir's daughter Jaasal. Then the Rabari went with them on the road [in] Sindh. The king of Junagadh Ra'navaghan [sent his army] marching to Sindh, but Ra'navaghan didn't know the roads of Sindh. So Ra'navaghan went to the Rabari and the Rabari helped by telling [him about] the roads of Sindh. The prestige of our country's[117] sisters-daughters was in trouble. That way it is understood [that] Rabaris [were] in the war, going alongside Ra'navaghan and fighting ourselves. After winning the war, Rabaris began living in Sorath along with Junagadh's king Ra'navaghan.

Before the National Park was declared there were good grasses, water, in the Maldhari's forest[118]. Like that, there were nesses in the area [and] before summertime we did not have to leave our forest. Inside the forest, where the facilities of good grasses and water were, there [we] were living. And after the monsoon we would come back to our main area.[119]

Najbhai's account does not suggest a blending of Rajput and Rabari bloodlines, but instead asserts Rabari bravery by their inclusion in battle.

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[114] He again uses the term *jangal.*
[115] A particular area near Rajkot including Chotila, site of a temple devoted to the goddess Chamunda.
[116] Sindh is a province of what is now southeastern Pakistan. Major Indus River alluvial plain sites of the Indus Valley Civilization are located in Sindh.
[117] Uses words *desh ni*. The word *desh* means country but in this context could mean community. *Ni* is a suffix indicating possession.
[118] He again uses the term *jangal.*
[119] Meaning that they did not have to go outside the forest, they could go into the national park area to look for more grasses and water back then, and then after monsoon return to wherever their main nesses were located

Additionally, while the Khodiyathar story finds the Rabari residing in Saurashtra, the Karamta version of events begins in Rajasthan, a state largely built by Rajputs and generally thought to be the original home of the Rabari. Migrating throughout the region,[120] a famine eventually leads the Rabari to Sindh where they are able to join forces with Ranavaghan. The link to the warrior caste, although not explicit, remains by way of suggestion of a shared ancestral geography.

The content of the Khodiyathar and Karamta histories above corresponds closely to what Alf Hiltebeitel identifies as a 'regional martial epic,' a subcategory of oral epics dating to the medieval period. As a genre, regional martial epics exhibit shared characteristics including "linkages between regionality, the peripherality of 'little kingdoms,' land, landed dominant castes, and the goddesses of the land" (Hiltebeitel 1999: 6). In both stories the Rabari are allied to and migrate with a Saurashtrian king, eventually marrying into or living alongside the people of his kingdom, and both also illustrate characteristics that Rabari scholar Judy Frater has called an "adaptability" and "synthesis of cultural influences" that has allowed Rabari communities to integrate with other groups while also maintaining a cohesive internal identity (2002: 158). The story of the Karamta family indicates a pre-existing Rabari identity and settlement in the Gir Forest prior to any major martial activities. These key motifs indicate a deeper temporal identification of the Gir Forest as a home to the Rabari than the

[120] Already herders, the migration happens both from the need to find adequate land for cattle and the need for brave men to accompany women sent off to marry in other areas, battling thieves and providing protection along the way.

Khodyathar story, and also allude to the migratory past of the Rabari as rooted in nomadic pastoralism. The Khodiyathar history acknowledges a Rabari identity forged after 1025AD[121] (during the concurrent rule of a Soomra[122] king Humir in Sindh, a part of present-day Pakistan northwest of the Saurashtra peninsula, and the king Ranavaghan[123] of Junagadh, a city 45km from what is now Sasan Gir) and places the Gir Forest as an eventual destination. After a battle during which Humir's general betrays him, leading Ranavaghan to victory, the Soomra are brought from Sindh to the Junagadh region and intermarry with the local Mer, Ahir, Vagher, and Rabari people. The Khodiyathar family, then, differentiates itself from the Karamta family without sacrificing its Rabari identity, but rather claiming it at a later date; they are Rabari, but they claim origins in Rajput[124] blood. The Rabari often describe themselves as brave and fearless, fighting with *bahaadhur* (courage and boldness), but the Khodiyathar family in particular emphasized this character trait in numerous conversations; although they do not identify as mixed or Rajput, the inclusion of a higher-caste warrior bloodline in their family history is a way of perhaps enhancing or legitimizing their ownership of such characteristics.

[121] The year 1081 on the Gujarati calendar.
[122] The Soomra are a Muslim caste of uncertain origins, developing from either the Jat or Rajput castes. In the post-Independence period the Soomra have claimed Arab ancestry.
[123] Ranavaghan is also called Navaghana, and the name the Rabari use may be a portmanteau for *rana* (king in Hindi) or a similar cognate along with the name Navaghana.
[124] A clan of varied status of mainly northern and central India, typically understood as a warrior caste stemming from the Kshatriya *varna*.

Rabari Cosmological History

Going further into the past, for the caste as a whole the Rabari identity begins in the heavens. Their progenitor, whom they refer to as their *utpann* or *utpati*, is parent to a large tree of descendants wherein different branches go by different names, some of which are Raika, Desai, and Rabari. The Rabari are often thought to have taken their name from a close relationship to the Rajput caste; however, the Rabari of the Gir forest claim their name predates the entry of Rajput blood into their lineage, and that in fact the Sumra Rajputs also intermarried with other castes including the Mer, Ahir, and Vagher. The Rabari identity may be bolstered by the association with Rajputs, their "true" beginnings were carved from a celestial encounter long preceding the earthly warring depicted in martial stories of Ranavaghan and Humir Sumaro. According to Bara Aathaa, patriarch of the Ulwa family, "the history of the beginning" commences with a marriage, arranged and ordained by God, between Sambhu and Rai.

One day, in the beginning, the gods Shiva and Parvati created new life. Parvati, feeling lonely and bored, longed for a companion with whom she could play. Numerous stories recount instances when Shiva's long-windedness drove Parvati to distraction, sometimes resulting in his ire. On this occasion he felt benevolent, asking that she gather dirt from her body and then mold it into a small man-like figure. Using his power as not only destroyer, but also transformer and creator, Shiva grants life to the figure and the two decide to name the new friend Sambhu. They also made him a camel of five legs. Sambhu found it difficult to graze his camel and soon tired of its limited mobility in the varied terrain of the jungle. He longed to graze the camel more easily and

throughout different areas. Upon hearing Sambhu's wish for help Shiva rearranged the camel's body, pushing the fifth leg upward until it became a hump. Free to roam the land, Sambhu and his camel grazed contentedly across the years.

In his early adulthood Sambhu was given an order by Parvati, who felt it was time for the young man to marry. She told him to travel to the banks of Lake Manasarovar, near Shiva and Parvati's home on Mount Kailash in the Himalayas, and to steal the clothing he found on the shore. Bathing in the lake was a group of celestial nymphs, cosmic dancers for the gods and inhabitants of the sky and clouds: *apsara*s. Parvati agreed to returning the clothes on one condition: that in exchange for the clothing Sambhu would be enter in marriage to an *apsara*. The proposition was accepted and Sambhu married an *apsara* named Rai. In some versions of this story their progeny procreated with Rajputs and became the Raika, Desai, Rabari, and many other grazing peoples. In search of grazing lands they wandered across the subcontinent; some, traveling west with Krishna from Mathura, eventually settled in Saurashtra. In other versions, like the one I heard from Bara Aathaa, the Rabari had already spread far and wide before they mixed with the Rajputs.

The presence of Rajput blood is afforded a certain primacy in Rabari identity, whether it comes earlier or later in their ancestral lines it is never elided in telling their history. Significantly, however, the *utpann* of the Rabari, the Rajput-preceding progenitor they claim, is not Sambhu the man but instead Rai the *apsara*. Other versions of this story similarly deemphasize the character of

the man, to the point where in certain versions he does not even warrant more than a few sentences. In his study on the Raika of Rajasthan, Arun Agrawal recounts their telling as it centers on first the creation of the camel, with the man, in this instance named Pinda, an afterthought created when the camel proved too unruly for the gods to manage (1999: 26-27). Among their pastoral neighbors the Raika are heavily associated with camel herding and the animal remains a figure undergirding their caste and community identity. Although Pinda is necessary to the establishment of the Raika caste, the extension of Rai's heavenly qualities are ensured by taking a name in her honor; although Pinda is necessary to care for and keep the camel(s), it is the extraordinary creation of the camel that is emphasized as reasoning for the close continued relationship between the Raika and camels.

THE CHARAN OF THE GIR FOREST

Charans are known to be wonderful singers who sing traditional songs to pass the time in the fields while the cattle are grazing. Ethnomusicologist Gordon R. Thompson has noted the difficulty in assigning even commonly accepted descriptors for Charan caste members due to internal disagreements on Charan identity (1991:383-86). Thompson's initial research on the Charan community was informed by English-language historical sources dating to the nineteenth century which identify the Charan caste as bards. In his ethnographic fieldwork, however, he encountered a Charan community divided in two: those who accept or even embrace the characterization of Charans as singers, and those who deny

not only the categorization as ‘singers’ but also the classification of their oral recitations as ‘singing’ (Thompson 1991).

The historical image of Charans as bards is contextual; they were recognized as bards in a particular context of royal patronage. Rulers across western India enjoyed the lyrical quality of Charan oral histories, and through their performances in royal courts the Charans as a caste became closely associated with the ruling classes of feudal India. The unification of a democratic Indian nation brought a geopolitical reorganization that did not allow for the proliferation of princely states and kingdoms of pre-Independence South Asia. Without royal patrons, Charans had fewer opportunities for musical performance and, across time, many have discounted or forgotten the link between royal patronage and ‘singing.’ Although labor specialization is an “ideal type” of caste-society orientation, and particularly so in the age of global neoliberal economies, the traditional occupation of the Charans – herding – remains a significant component of caste identity.

Charan stories, songs, and expressions were recorded on paper by poet and activist Jhaverchand Meghani during the 1940s. He categorizes what he terms their “literature” into thirteen genres, translated from the original Gujarati (1943: 72-73) by Gordon R. Thompson (1991: 382) as follows:

1. “songs” in praise of gods and goddesses
2. “songs” in praise of heroes, saints, and patrons
3. Descriptions of war
4. Rebukes of wavering great kings and evil powerful men
5. Mockery of a standing treachery of heroism

6. Love stories
7. Laments for dead warriors, patrons, and friends
8. Praise of natural beauty
9. Descriptions of weapons
10. "songs" in praise of lions, horses, camels, and buffalo
11. Sayings about didactic and practical cleverness
12. Ancient epics
13. The anguish of people in times of famine and adversity

As with my approach to the Rabari, I analyze Charan identity through the lens of oral histories and origin stories. Compared to the Rabari, the stories I heard of how the Charan came to Saurashtra are fewer and less detailed, and none came in pamphlet format. From what I could gather from one *aathaa*, they are not sure of where they were 'before' the Gir Forest but "the story is" they came to the area with Lord Krishna, divine cow herder and the eighth and final avatar of Vishnu.[125] Another account finds them originating in the Hindu Kush Mountains, from where they migrated to Rajasthan and later to Kutch and Saurashtra during the 15th century, a trajectory very similar to some historical reconstructions of Rabari migratory histories. Alternatively, Charan communities may have settled first in Saurashtra and then spread to Kutch and North India. Some consider Saurashtra their original ancestral home and the site of their creation.

[125] After killing his uncle, Krishna migrated to Dwarka with his Gopalak (cow herders). Dwarka is on the northwest coast of the Saurashtra peninsula.The place of Krishna's departure from this earth is believed to be near Somnath Temple near Veraval, further south on the peninsula.

A major difference between the Charan and other Maldhari, acknowledged by all parties, is the preponderance[126] of goddesses[127] that have been born into their bloodline, which is said to include the blood of Shiva. Other castes of the region pay a great deal of respect to the Charan for this reason.[128] The goddesses are believed to reside within the land; I am told "they are inside, so then [we] don't move around in the world. It is *automatic*[129] in the land, said goodbye to God, that is how the nine lakh [Mata Ji] are. It is in the barot's book." The proof of her[130] presence in the land comes during the times they do *havan*[131] for Mataji: no matter how many visitors come from near and far, they can cook a mere 100 kilograms of grains and yet the supply will never run out.

Another cosmological origin story told to me by Naran Bapa is elaborated but differs in that the Charan are linked to Lord Shiva and a divine mother rather than Krishna. In this version, when the universe was created Shiva and his consort Parvati then created the Maldhari—but this specific connection to the

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[126] According to Naran Bapa of Kadeli, there have been 9 *lakh* (900,000).
[127] Sometimes referred to as *Mataji*, sometimes as *devi*, depending on who was speaking. I chose to use the more general English term. It has been suggested that rather than breeding with *apsaras*, the Rabari procreated with the divine Charan women of ancient times (Singh 2000: 281).
[128] This divine association also allows the Charan to discriminate against the lower castes. In one Charan ness, an elderly lady inquires if I am a Brahmin. She is unfamiliar with my caste and most castes found outside the forest, but accepts my assistant's comparison of my caste to the Rajput or Kshatriya. After we leave, my assistant tells me the Maldhari (or at least, the Charan Maldhari) do not like Harijans (untouchables), and because the woman could not place me caste-wise by appearance she had to ask up front.
[129] This word spoken in English and is used as a way of underscoring a suddenness; a rough re-translation would be "just like that."
[130] Mataji is Mataji. Referred to as singular in this context.
[131] A ritual in which offerings are thrown into a consecrated fire.

gods is reserved for only the Charan caste, the "other Maldhari" are explicitly excluded from these origins. According to this account,

> Lord Shankar did not make many grazers, so he collected a Charan, a lion, a lion cub, [a] buffalo and [a] cow, and [a] calf and made the name Charan, and said 'this is good.' This is a story from long ago, no? Lion and cow and buffalo and all together grazed. In that [time], no one is fighting, this is how the old story goes.

Charans are cattle herders and dairy producers by trade, so it is not surprising that their vocation is interwoven with their creation by and relation to the gods. Peter Rigby (1971) has described how the cattle-herding Gogo people of central Tanzania similarly mythologize the human-lion-cattle relationship, although in one short Gogo myth the role of each animal is more explicit: the lion is a predator whose roar so frightens the wild buffalo that they take shelter in human homesteads, thus becoming domestic cattle (262). The inclusion of lions and buffalo as part of a triad of characters in the Maldhari story, however, does not delineate a similarly definable role for each animal. If Shiva needs grazers for his and Parvati's cattle, a grazer and cattle seem the only necessary actors: what role does the lion play?

As it turns out, God owed lions a debt. In one version of a Hindu creation myth, Lord Vishnu swallows the sea to create a space for two birds to successfully hatch their eggs. What was left was Mother Earth, newly born and unprotected. As Vishnu, tired from his great feat, slept off his weariness, the demon *Asura* (a

form of demi-god possessing supernatural powers) named Hiranyaksha[132] took advantage of the circumstances and attacked the Earth.[133] Vishnu slays the demon in retaliation, prompting Hiranyaksha's older brother Hiranyakashipu[134] to seek revenge. He seeks and receives certain magical properties from Brahma that he believes will bring him immortality by way of technicality: he cannot be killed by any god, neither killed inside nor outside, daytime or nighttime, on the ground or in the sky, by any living or inanimate weapon, human being, animal, demi-god, or demon. Although Hiranyakashipu thinks his blessing leaves no space, place, time, or being by which he can be killed, his categories claim only discrete forms; recognizing the power of liminality, at twilight (neither day nor night) Vishnu assumes the form of Narasimha, a half-man half-lion (a god embodied as part-human and part-animal), places Hiranyakashipu upon his legs (neither the ground nor the sky), and disembowels him with his nails (neither living nor inanimate objects, and not a weapon).

Naran Bapa's story, using the name Haranyakansh as a variant of the classical Hiranyakashipu, bridges the events from the time of all creation with the creation of his particular caste and surname of Gadhavi.[135]

> … when God promised to kill Haranyakansh … God gave food to however many lions. Yes – killed Haranyakansh, this is a very, very long story.

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[132] *Hiran* is a unisex Hindu name meaning 'immortal,' while the Sanskrit *hirany* means 'golden.' A *yaksha* is a supernatural being appearing in Hindu mythology. In the case of Hiranyaksha the *yaksha* is a malevolent being.
[133] The severe beating broke Mother Earth's bones. Her jagged limbs sprawled out in different directions, forming the Himalayas.
[134] As noted in footnote 129, *hirany* is Sanskrit for 'golden.' *Kashipu* means 'pillow' or 'cushion' in Sanskrit.
[135] Gadhavi, last name, which he uses interchangeably with his caste name.

> From then He has given lions food… Meat. God has to give them food. Killed him at sunset, there gave a promise because steel and wood don't die, so he gave the promise then he [Haranyakansh] behaved badly, then in the direction of the sunset, the Sun went inside[the sun set] and [Haranyakansh] kept one leg outside and [God] pushed him and he fell right inside the doorway.[136] [God] said "*Bhai*, [is it] day or night?" [Haranyakansh] said "[It is] nothing, not day and not night." [God said] "Then, the porch or in between the doorway, what is there?" [Haranyakansh] said "there is nowhere." That is how the story is written. Many books tell it like that. This is right, so… so he gave food, they said lions graze. From then, God gave birth to the lion, from then, he made the lion.

"Have you seen where Haranyakansh was killed?" he asks me. Not only does he link his caste to cattle and lions from conception, but he also presents a "spatial anchoring of myth" (Kahn 1990). According to Naran Bapa, the geographical origins of the beginning of time and Earth are local, here in this pocket of Saurashtra: "It is here, in Talala. Sometimes [we/people] do *darshan* in Talala. Haranyakansh and lion, both put there. Did you see? *Arre*, it is worth seeing. There is a big temple at the Hiran riverbank." Talala is a *taluka*[137] 15 kilometers from Sasan Gir. Its main town, also called Talala, is small but bustling in comparison to the sleepy village. I traveled there on occasion, as the market stalls of Talala provide many necessities one cannot find in the village shops—

[136] Meaning he was in between the frame of the door so half was inside and half was outside – using the word *umbhar* that can be the space under/between the door or window, between inside and outside.

[137] A sub-district of a larger area. In this case, Talala is a *taluka* of Junagadh district. The *taluka* consists of the town of Talala and a number of surrounding villages.

furnishings, cleaning supplies, certain groceries. It did not seem a particularly unsuitable place for God to vanquish a demon.

CONCLUSION

Anthropological scholars have explored the ways in which illiterate populations are denied presence and agency in the historical record. Legitimizing oral histories passed through generations as valuable and alternative records of the past has been one of the discipline's major contributions to both academia and non-literate communities. In *Myth and Primitive Psychology* (1926), Malinowski asserted the messy, layered stories once dismissed as mythic non-history are not valuable as literal histories but rather as a mapping of societal realities, a template for social behavior. This directly representational interpretation was rejected by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who found meaningful myth analysis required abandoning the tendency to seek a correspondence between mythical data and historical reality, an approach which then "opens the way for other possibilities; for in abandoning the search for a constantly accurate picture of ethnographic reality in the myth, we gain, on occasions, a means of reaching unconscious categories" (1976: 172-3). By looking at the stories and myths in this chapter we can move closer toward catching a glimpse into elements that contribute to the shape of the Maldhari worldview.

The Charan, although not explicitly related "by blood" to the Rabari, are seen as *gotr* (clan or lineage) brothers[138] descending from another *apsara*, Aaval.

[138] The Rabari see the Charan as sharing the *Dhabar gotr*; meaning the *gotr* of those who wear scarves or blankets on their shoulders.

Both castes' lineages, then, despite the patrilineal nature of the *gotr*, originate from a cosmic nymph, a constituent of feminine divinity at the creation point of Charan and Rabari communities. Similar origins, similar lifestyles, and a shared environment lay the groundwork for a shared Maldhari identity between the Charan and the Rabari. In the contextual space of the Gir Forest these connections coalesce with the Maldhari characteristic of cultural inclusivity, particularly on the side of the Rabari. The Charan origin story prominently features, in fact *requires*, the presence of lions to establish a cosmic directive to a natural balance – the tripartite relationship of humans, cattle, and lions maps out a moral order of earthly life. Alongside the Rabari and their proclivity to the integration of neighboring communities' beliefs and practices into their own, the Maldhari of the Gir Forest are a community constituting a social and environmental whole, but bound ultimately to the social whole, one which incorporates more than humans in the social fabric.

Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

One of my most memorable moments of fieldwork came early on, during one of the first of my daily visits into the Gir PA. A family of lions was scattered across a stretch of land, some escaping the morning sun in the shade of acacia trees, others soaking it up with their bodies partially splayed over the dirt pathway intended for cars and motorbikes. There were seven of them, three adult lionesses and four cubs of varying ages. Thirty feet away, two lion trackers and a Forester had lit a small fire to make tea. They invited me to join them. The three men were uncertain of my recent presence in the forest; they and others had not been informed of my intentions, and assumed I was training to be an officer for the Indian Forest Service. Tensions eased when I revealed I was only interested in learning about the forest, its animals, and its peoples. Murad, one of the most experienced trackers at the Gir, was visibly excited by this news. His job was to ascertain the location of lions from daybreak until nightfall, following pugmarks, animal calls, and relying on his experience-derived mental map of their favorite resting spots. No one, aside from the Maldhari, spends more time on the ground in the forest than Murad and the other trackers. Their accumulated knowledge is almost entirely empirical; they are not zoologists, conservationists, researchers, or students – at least not in the usual sense. Murad himself is illiterate. His decades of experience are invaluable and, like a terminator seed, will expire with his lifetime.

"You should not wear that," he told me, referring to the charcoal grey field jacket I had on that day. "You should not wear black in the forest. The lions will not like it." The other men nodded in agreement, clad in their khaki, army green, and camouflage print uniforms. They told me I should dress more like them to blend in with the forest. The lions across the way were asleep, but if they were awake and I came around wearing my black jacket, the lions would see me and growl in disapproval.

As we sat, Murad began to teach me the Gujarati and Saurashtri terms for the forest animals. His enthusiasm contrasted with the quietude of the other tracker and the Forester's singular focus on the quality of my pen. Murad wanted to get some photographs for me and took my camera close enough to the lions to make me bristle uncomfortably. Noticing my alarm, the quieter tracker piped up: "*wo bhi* lion *hein*," he said as he pointed to the lions, "*wo bhi* lion *hein*," pointing at Murad. While the lions are lions, the trackers are also lions. They know each other, they are the same, they can share physical space because they both belong in that space. As the lions continued to laze, Murad snapped a dozen or so photos of the sleepy cats. The camera had been left on manual focus and the images were blurred. He asked if the photos are to my liking and I told him that they are good. Our conversation eventually winded down and I left the men with my thanks, and left my pen with the Forester.

SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION ARGUMENT

In this dissertation I have examined the relationships enacted and understood by and between humans and lions in the Gir Forest. As increasing

tourism and publicity brings awareness to that pocket of forest in western India, local perceptions of human-lion relationships are under a growing influence of the effects of a neoliberal economy and its desired outcomes, both for those operating within this developing economy– the front-line staff, and those it marginalizes– the Maldhari. Another approach to this research might have been organized around lions as symbolic capital that bring money into the forest and allows the front-line staff to make a living, or how the Maldhari are cosmologically ordained to be nature-loving noble savages living peacefully alongside the lions, or how human-lion conflict and competition between the two for material resources presents threats to local lives and livelihoods. While elements of all these possible narratives are present, to some degree, I consciously avoid framing my research around the identification of 'problems' and 'solutions.' At the heart of this research is the ethnography that details how locals enact and understand relationships between humans and animals, illustrating an alternative take on what it means to live sustainably alongside other beings in this world. The chapters tell different stories, each adding meaningful layers to a larger story of life in and around the western portion of the Gir PA. I pay particular attention to the inter-social relationships and histories of these two communities to illuminate how they conceptualize their standing relative to a defining category or sphere, whether that be in a constellation of people, animals, occupations, or cosmologies.

Human-lion relationships at the Gir Forest are heterarchical, driven by a dynamic interplay of possible social arrangements rather than any one model in particular. For the Maldhari of Gir West in this post-displacement and post-

transhumance period of recent decades, the families who have remained in the forest know lions in particular ways – as their neighbors and counterparts – that speak to their own sense of identity and belonging at the Gir Forest. The nature of this knowing extends backwards through time, allowing the Maldhari to reaffirm who they are (and who the lions are) as permanent features of the overall landscape. The front-line staff know lions in ways that are similarly significant but temporally divergent from the Maldhari-lion relationship. Employment in the conservation and tourism sector is the lynchpin of their direct relationship with the lions; without jobs that bring them into the Gir Forest, these men lack the connections that provide an entrée into the lions' world. In the event of reassignment for the DCF and forest officers, or termination for the guides, drivers, and trackers, access to the forest and lions would be restricted. Excluding high-ranking forest officers who may enjoy forest entry privileges after reassignment or promotion, previous employees wishing to enter the PA would be required to follow the tourist procedural of permits, fees, and available time slots. The impermanence of the FLS-lion relationship manifests in multiple ways that are reflective of the respective actor's position; while the lions allow the Maldhari to know themselves diachronically, lions for the FLS provide an immediate, synchronic possibility of social identity. These two models of human-lion relationships – the permanent communal identity and the temporary individual possibility – demonstrate the powerful and also malleable nature of social knowing and meaning in a cross-species milieu. Animals may be "good to think" or "good to eat" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 89), but they are also good "to live

with" (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010: 552) and to live near – to cohabitate and to coexist.

I will end with a short bit of modern lore I heard from the DCF during one of our outings into the Gir Forest. This story conveys how lions are talked about in the forest as both studied other and, in the words of John Knight, "*parts* of human society rather than just *symbols* of it" (2005: 1). The DCF recounted how a few years back, he thought maybe two years prior, there were two mothers and their babies playing together in the forest. Momentarily escaping their mothers' watchful eyes, a young Maldhari child and a lion cub had found each other in an open patch of grass. The Maldhari mother saw what was happening but watched from a distance frozen in fear; the mother lioness was also watching from another location. The woman knew the danger of approaching a lion cub and felt she could not intervene. The lioness might become angry and come at the mother and child, a risk too great to take. Instead, the woman waited anxiously as the cub and child continued to play and the lioness continued to watch attentively. After a period of time, the lioness approached the youngsters, picked up her cub by the scruff of its neck, and disappeared into the forest.

Embedded in this story is an important rule of behavior in the forest: never approach a lion cub, as protective mother lionesses are quick to show aggression if they feel their cub is threatened (another rule might be to keep an eye on your offspring). Also embedded in this story is a positioning of relationships, both mother-child and human-lion.

The human mother and lioness mother are caught in the same conundrum. Neither feels comfortable approaching the situation, so each wait at

a distance, delaying the unfolding of the situation until something happens to make one of them take action. This standoff is not congruent with convention of the prone-to-attack mother lioness that is supposedly guiding the human mother's action – or in this case, her inaction. The apprehension of the human mother is mirrored in the lioness mother; each is aware of the other, each is uncomfortable with the implications of the situation, and each hesitates at length. In this story, the lioness recognizes that the young child is not a threat to her cub, otherwise she would have acted quickly and aggressively. In this story, the lioness mother, too, is not sure what to do so she watches and waits. She fears the human as the human fears her, she sees the danger of boundary transgression by the two babies, ignorant of the distance required in this cross-species relationship.

In the end, it is the lioness who acts while the human knows she cannot. The hierarchy of power is clear in this story; in the forest, the lion is 'king.' The story ultimately does not deviate from that old standard, it only pauses and considers the two mothers as momentarily structurally equivalent – as capable of being the same.

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