

Drowning Out The Chinkara's Sneeze

The wide-eyed, fragile-looking gazelle, the chinkara has over the years faded from public view, but they are at the heart of a data controversy that could tell if it is fated to survive or die out

CHARU BAHRI, Indiaspend.org

All of 16 years old, a court-weary case is nearing its denouement: On November 5, the Supreme Court reserved its judgement on the infamous Salman Khan poaching case.

In 1998, Salman, one of India's most famous Bollywood stars, was accused of hunting and killing a blackbuck and two chinkaras, a type of gazelle. Suspect partners in crime include fellow celebrities Saif Ali Khan, Sonali Bendre, Tabu and Neelam, all of whom have made visits to the Jodhpur sessions court in the desert state of Rajasthan.

But for all the wide-eyed attention and national headlines that the stars attracted over the years, the chinkara faded from public view. Now, as IndiaSpend has learned, the wide-eyed, fragile-looking gazelle is at the heart of a data controversy that, if deciphered, could tell us if it is fated to survive or die out.

Is the chinkara, helped by the government and traditional protectors, flourishing or—pushed by growing towns and hunted by feral dogs—hurtling towards extinction?



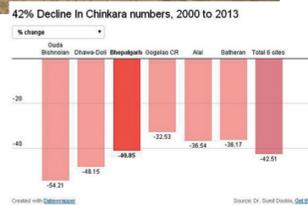
Photo: Dr. Sumit Dookia

The answer depends on whose data you examine.

The Rajasthan forest department's chinkara census shows an 11% rise in the animal's numbers over three years to 2013, while counting done by biologist Dr Sumit Dookia, who has spent about 15 years studying the chinkara, shows a 43% decline in its numbers in six representative sample sites.

Chinkara sightings are most frequent near villages of the Bishnoi and of other communities practicing non-violence against animals, such as the Charans, Jains, Jats, Meghwals, Rajpurohits and Sidhs. Fewer chinkara are seen near Muslim and Rajput villages.

Successive forest department censuses put out wildly fluctuating figures of chinkara numbers. The census pegged the number of chinkara inside protected areas at 5,251 in 2012 and at 4,085 a year later. The chinkara population in the protected Desert National Park plummeted from 2,705 to 1,779 over the



same period. The office of the Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, Jodhpur, attributes this 20% fluctuation to the higher number of waterholes where chinkara were counted in 2012: 110 water holes versus 66. Water pipeline leakages had formed extra waterholes which the herds visited. The state's forest department relies on these traditional waterhole-based counts.

At best, done well, the waterhole-census method can generate surrogates of chinkara — extrapolations from observed animals — and can provide population trends over years. At worst, the method can lead to inaccurate census

data.

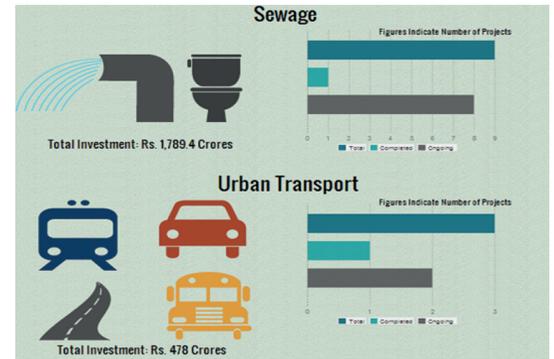
This is what Dr Dookia thinks is happening. He started to study the chinkara at three sites in the districts of Jodhpur and Nagaur in 1999, while pursuing his doctorate in zoology. Between 2006 and 2009, he received support from the Rufford Small Grants Foundation, UK, for three more studies on the chinkara, allowing him to expand sites to six and train volunteers in what is regarded as a more scientific method of counting large animals over a large area: The line-transect method, which involves counting animals along fixed lines and estimating their density from raw counts and probability.

In 2014, a collaborative survey on the chinkara, great Indian bustard and other desert species in Thar, conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India and Rajasthan Forest Department, did use a vehicle-based line transect method for counting these species' numbers across a large landscape (25,000 sq km). r Dutta described the method as "scientific, robust and widely used for wildlife surveys to generate accurate population numbers". Its added advantage over the traditional waterhole-based census method is that it accounts for the fraction of animals that are not detected, he said.

In 2010, Dr Dookia joined Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. In 2012, he received a Young Scientist Fellowship from the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India, as well as funding to continue studying the chinkara in his six chosen sites.

Fourteen years of data on chinkara numbers in three sites and eight years of data on their numbers in three more sites tell a very different story to government census data. All six sites have experienced a decline in chinkara numbers, varying from 32% to 54%.

The chinkara is listed as "Lower Risk/Conservation Dependant" in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red Data List (2014) of threatened species, and as an endangered species in Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972.



Some Good News On Infrastructure

Though traffic, pollution and crime are problems Mumbai is still dealing with, infrastructural projects are doing reasonably well

A STAFF WRITER, Indiaspend.org

Mumbai's citizens may be generally vexed with their megapolis's growing traffic, pollution and crime, but it has actually done reasonably well in one aspect—infrastructure projects under a national scheme. Mumbai has completed 13 of 26 projects, valued at Rs 2,873.4 crore, financed by the Centre under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). It is fourth among all cities with completed projects—Bangalore has the highest number of completed projects, with 24 of 38.

The completed Mumbai projects include: an underground tunnel from the Malabar Hill reservoir in south Mumbai to Cross Maidan (3.6 km), the middle Vaitarna water supply project for Mumbai and an underground tunnel

12-km long, for water supply from Maroshi (in Andheri in north west) to Ruparel College (Matunga in the south central Mumbai).

These projects, of course, are only a fraction of what the city requires. Among the critical projects expected to cost more than Rs 18,660 crore are a new metro line and another sealink from Sewri on the eastern seaboard to Nhava Sheva on the mainland. These projects have made no headway because there are no funds available.

Greater Mumbai (Mumbai and suburban Mumbai) has a population of 12.4 million, but the urban agglomeration of Mumbai stretches into the neighboring districts of Thane, Palghar and Raigad and now accommodates an estimated 26 million people. The infrastructure costs to link all these people to their workplaces are likely to be enormous. The JNNURM is just a start.

How Indian Cities Can Budget For Women's Needs

Photo: Bgopal for Dreamstime.com



NAIM KERUWALA, Indiaspend.org

Gender budgeting was introduced in Maharashtra after a government resolution was issued in 2006. The resolution mandated that after meeting the expenditure committed to by the municipal corporation, 5% of the balance be kept reserved for the work done by women and child welfare committees. This is an extremely important step as investing in gender equality not only helps fight violence against women, but also helps achieve developmental goals such as poverty alleviation, livelihood enhancement and access to education.

Government of Maharashtra adopted the principle that 'Empowerment of women means development of the country' in 1994 and published a 'Women Policy'. A revised policy

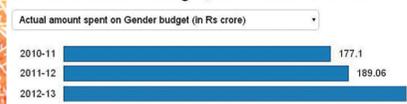
Investing in gender equality not only helps fight violence against women, but also achieve developmental goals such as poverty alleviation, livelihood enhancement and access to education

was announced in 2001 and the third edition of the policy has been published in 2013. It is not a matter of debate that these are very well-intended policy documents but the real question is: do these policies ever get implemented? Can the government "walk the talk", as it were?

Mumbai is among the few cities in the country that has adopted gender budgeting at the local level and constituted a separate section in its budget. Though the government res-

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MCGM's Gender Budget, 2011-12 to 2012-13



olution was passed in 2006, Mumbai Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) introduced gender budgeting only three years later in 2009-10. On MCGM's website, the gender budget chapter can be viewed as a separate document though, and MCGM should be lauded for its efforts. But are these efforts enough to improve the quality of life of our Mahila Mumbai-kars?

Let us not forget that over half of Mumbai's 12.4 million population live in slums, which means that 3.1 million women could be living there, a figure equivalent to the population of Pune, the second most populated city in Maharashtra.

Here are some of the key features of Mumbai's Gender budget according to the 2014-15 budget estimates:

- MCGM has budgeted around Rs584 crore for the 'Gender budget' in 2014-15.
- MCGM's gender budget focuses on four aspects viz. economic and social, educational improvement, health & sanitation and development of children's parks.
- MCGM to spend Rs 0.96 crore through a revolving fundon support

for 4,858 women in the slums of Mumbai. That is 0.16% of Mumbai's female slum dwellers with a per capita support of approximately Rs 164 per month.

- Construction of women's toilets at crowded places in Mumbai gets an allocation of Rs 1 crore whereas training for self defence has been allocated Rs 2 crore.

- Almost 52% of Mumbai's gender budget (Rs 305.5 crore) is allocated for maternal and child care. Mumbai's infant mortality rate—number of baby deaths per thousand live births—stands at 26, much lower than the national average of 44.

- Sanitation gets Rs 37.5 crore under the gender budget with Rs 33.5 crore allocated for building community toilets, but it is not specified if these toilets are meant only for women.

- Scholarship for girl child has been allocated Rs 46.71 crore.
- Administration costs amount to Rs11.5 crore and software development for implementation of gender budget initiatives costs Rs 0.2 crore.

In the year 2012-13, MCGM spent Rs 62 per month per female slum dweller in Mumbai for their economic, social and educational betterment and the provision of improved health and sanitation services. In 2014-15, MCGM proposed to increase this amount from Rs 62 to Rs157 per month per female slum dweller.

All that this serves to show is that an in-depth, multi-layered analysis will be required to assess the impact of 'Gender budget' on the lives of women in Mumbai and, through a participatory approach, present recommendations to MCGM.

(Naim Keruwala is an assistant director at Janwani, a Pune-based NGO working towards the holistic & sustainable development of Pune metropolitan region.)

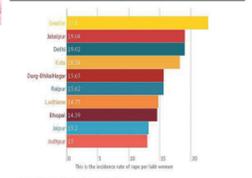
Gwalior, India's rape capital, Delhi is no. 3

Photo: Lalwani, Flickr



With 22.8 rapes per lakh women, Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh accounts for the highest incidence of rape in India

Cities with the highest rate of rape in India (2013)



PRACHI SALVE, Indiaspend.org

The rape of a 26-year-old woman in a Delhi taxi run by Uber has led to a furore on the mainstream and social media and led to a ban on four taxi-booking companies, including Uber.

The latest in a series of widely-publicised rapes raises many questions, on the functioning of the state, legal action and sexual assaults in India.

It appears that the publicity around rape has encouraged more women to report rape. Over the last five years, there has been a 57% rise in reported rapes. Many rapes go unreported.

Statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) showcase the good and not-so-good news. Reported rapes in 2013 were at an all-time high at 31,807, and conviction rates for rapes over five years have also risen.

At 27.1% in 2013, the conviction rate for rapes in India is higher than some Western countries as a Time magazine re-

port pointed out. "That's thanks to the efforts of a lot of good people—police, lawyers, victims and their families—working heroically with limited resources," the report said.

It is also clear that Delhi is not the rape capital of the world or even India. Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh has the highest incidence of rape in India with 22.8 rapes per lakh women. In 2013, Delhi was third in the incidence of rape with

Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh each having three cities in the top 10. Delhi's move up from number 11 in 2012 to number 3 last year, perhaps, reflects an increased reporting of rape by women.

The most important point about rape in India is that it is—and has always been—committed overwhelmingly by men known to the victim, including fathers, brothers, relatives, neighbours, friends and teachers. Over the last five years, the percentage of rapes committed by such men has always accounted for at least 93% of all rapes reported in India.

(Indiaspend.org is a data-driven, public-interest journalism non-profit)