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Sumantha Ghosh [00:00:10] Well because that's my, my livelihood is now that, and it started with the fact that, you know that, and I, I like being in [unintelligible] wilderness places and in forested areas. And we are in a landscape which is, you know, which has good forest and beautiful mountains, I mean the highest mountains are right there in the back. So that's why, it's very, you know. So that came came to me naturally, and eventually what happens is that, you know, that as you go along you realize that this will not carry on for long at this pace. So it's important to do something small if not big.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:00:52] Yes, absolutely. I mean, that's how it should have been. You know, if I'm making my livelihood out of skiing I should have ensured that you know that area will always have snow and you know it is, you know it's conserved. The same thing with the forests or the rivers. So that's very, very important. Ironically, what happens is that; the whole sustainability word sometimes does disappear and from ecology it becomes economy. And that's where you got to, to draw a line. It's all a really easy thing you see, I mean as a human being everybody wants to grow and progress and sort of make, I think, more money. You know that's the beauty [unintelligible] if I were to put it in a very straightforward manner. And so that's where the, the problem lies. Is that in many of these fragile so-called landscapes, there are too many of us who come out, you know, some have a sustainable little operation. Whereas others will have a, you know, have a huge sort of resort or something like that. So that's where the other problem is. So yes, you're right that, you know, it should have been, you know, that's how it should have been, that you know that if my, my livelihood, is dependent on the, on the forest I should have been very, very sort of responsible. But that's ya, but that's how it is. But we all know that, and water and fresh air and all that, is so important to us humans. Everybody knows that, isn't it? But, but yeah, but not. So that's the real irony of it. That not much is happening. Worldwide, I suppose.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:02:34] Yeah, you know and, I mean that's where it gets really interesting. Because if you look at, I think India's case study should have been a bit different. You know, we had an entire culture here, an entire, I mean civilization, which was based on the worship of nature. Like any tribes anywhere. So we're really a very ancient tribe that has survived the onslaught till now. You know? So if you'll see that, you know, you will see that the entire philosophy, and which I'm not saying, I mean, it was religion. It was never meant to be religion. It was meant to be a very simple way of life, where the whole ethos was supposed to be based on the so-called sort of worship of everything from the Himalayas, to tigers, to elephants to owls, you know, to Mother Earth or even the, the grass is offered as a, you know, so and to the biggest gods. So that should have been, that's why I'm saying that India as a case study should have been different. But, sadly, what has happened, is that, you know, when you make it into a religion, I think that's a problem, I think, sort of I think, you know, I mean. Religion is that, we often... We worship these symbols but we don't ever realize why we ever worshiped them, you know, what was, how did it get started? Why, why should we have sort of respect for elephants and tigers? They're supposed to be dangerous. Why should we have, you know, and if you look at, at our rivers, if you look at the [unintelligible] we really sort of worshipped rivers, literally. You know, but.. So that's how it is, you know, so that's yeah. So, so that is, it's I suppose a problem everywhere. But as, as to take India as example I feel very ashamed of, I mean sometimes, you know, I mean; that we had all the sort of philosophy. We can't, you know, we didn't go to, you know, we were just here all the time. Five thousand years, we were here, you know? And this, and this very fertile land, this beautiful forest and the mountains and the rivers, it gave us a lot. But I think I, why I'm saying I feel ashamed is

that, somehow, we could not really save all that, you know. Something that should have been our belief, our religion our Bible was the, in the forest you know, like that. So that's how.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:04:52] Oh, it's, I think very, very sad. It's very, very sad. And if you look at, I would say, if you look at the, and the rivers coming from pretty much the entire Himalayas, you know, including some in Nepal-- since you mentioned you'll be going to Nepal. And you know what I mean that, at the rate of destruction of our rivers, it's quite mindless. Starting from dams, and starting from, you know making roads into extreme wilderness areas. Unfortunately, on the other side, you know, they're saying we've got China, which is advancing roads everywhere. Security reasons, you know, I mean sort of national defense, or what have you. You know, so all that so we're actually, sadly, penetrating deep into the very source of what is supposed to be one of the largest deposits of freshwater, I suppose in the world, you know? So that's a big problem. And so that's the story up in the mountains. But as it flows down in the plains, our whole hunger for economy, you know? And to, and to grow. So that's fine. But what happens is then, if you don't put a sort of barrier, or if you don't have any checks, so you will have make a factory by a river, and the fuelants will go down, you know. And there's nobody to check. Even though there are fantastic laws, you know. But there is, implementation really, really suffers. So yeah, I mean, sadly I cannot say that, you know, that we are doing much about our beautiful rivers. You know.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:06:23] Lack of enforcement, completely. And we have a very active, on the Supreme Court, we have a very active Green, sort of wing of the Supreme Court which is, which is N.G.T, The National Green Tribunal. And they do, they play a very proactive role, in spite of big, big pressures from industries, and political lobbies, and all that, you know. But, you know, so that's where it happens. So the laws are often not implemented, if you look at the, at the Ganges project, where they pumped in billions of dollars, literally, I mean endless you know, it's, I mean they could have made, I think another river. And made another mountain out of that. But yeah, but still not. You don't see much of that on the ground. So somewhere I think, you know, like, it's like a value chain. You know, you can't just tell people, "Please this is sacred and guard it," you know. That's there, so that's one aspect of it. You've got to have strict enforcements. You've got to be, you've got to be strict sometimes, it has to be, a solid fines need to be imposed, you know? You should be jailed, you know, for polluting something where the livelihood of thousands of millions is sort of dependent on that. So that's sort of enforcement lax, and hence it, the, and you can go down to any of our, I think rivers, the moment they're out of the mountains into the plains, they become like, pretty much like drains, you know? And yes, we know about cases worldwide where the, and the rivers have made a comeback. I often interact with people from from the UK, and they talk about in the Thames, you know? How The Thames has made a, had a sort of remarkable comeback, you know. In spite, because it was quite similar of a situation with, and with large number of people being on the banks and all that. So we know that it's not that it's ever too late, but it has to begin. It has begun, but we are largely, you know, many people in the conservation thing and all that, we are frustrated that, it's, the pace should have been much faster. Sadly, it's slow and, you know, it's not always very effective.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:08:33] Largely yes ,largely yes. I mean I would say the conservation ones, they want to make a difference. It's not that you know, they are, or we are making a big difference yet. But yeah, that's how it, that that's how the spark begins from there. You know, the spark begins from conservation people, people who are also people who have been interacting with sort of human nature and wild life, you know.

People who have been on, on a trek. People who have seen how glorious the mountains are, how absolutely out of the world those little streams are, you know, and the glacial rivers are in the Himalayas, you know. And the wildlife rich areas, you know. And, yes so they are, obviously, the ones who start this. And so yeah. But then eventually, it seems that we often have to seek the help of courts. In India, the, you know it stops there. I mean the courts eventually, if you sort of, if you go to them, they pass a law, which has to be implemented. You know, it's a, it's a case of, of for example our park, you know. Wherein, they had placed an eco-sensitive zone, because unsustainable tourism structures were coming up in the benefit of the reserve, you know. Because insensitive people were going into, into wildlife tourism, because just for the, and purely on sort of fast gains, commercially. There wasn't much of economy, ecology there. So that's a problem. But then the Supreme Court a few years back, I think 2013, had put an eco-sensitive zone issue. So at least things have slowed down or stopped. The damage that happened is there, you know, but it's slowly being sort of dealt with, but at least then the so, I mean it could have been worse if they hadn't put a stop to it. So, that's how it really helps in India, you know.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:10:25] To be honest, you know, that's. I mean, I understand a bit about that but, I'm yeah, I'm sure that's a, it's something that, I mean, worldwide we are facing, isn't it? And we have seen glaciers in the Himalayas which have sort of receded miles, you know. At the same time, you know if you look at ice caps, they're [unintelligible]. I mean when I speak with people who explore, you know, the poles and they say, if you called the glaciers in the Himalayas is melting by a few kilometers here, you don't see it next year when we go, there's entire huge ice caps. So, yes absolutely, we'll see that. See the first impact will be, I suppose we are still not seeing, you know, that impact, you know? Which we're very very, we're jolted out of our own comfort zone. So we are seeing issues with wildlife with, you know, and the oceans rising and all that. But the real impact is, you know, is, I think yet to come.

James Thull [00:11:20] Yeah.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:11:20] You know it very, very will be. It will be, it will hit us so hard, that we will, you know. So as I was telling you, I'm not too sure the second, third generation is, you know, I don't know what's going to happen to them. But yeah, it's happening at a very fast pace. The other problem that I see, at least, I mean, I can certainly talk in terms of, for India. You know, India, we always had a philosophy of... How could I put it? You know, that you can only take from Earth. You know, only that much, you see. And that's a philosophy which is now going away. It's become very Consumerist, you know. Imagine a landscape of over 1 billion, which becomes that. You know, imagine if we become like The West. Imagine the pressures we'll put on the resources, not just India, I mean Earth's resources, you know. And economy so-called, which is also coming off faster. So I see that as a huge, I mean threat. And it's, you know, because I, I may sit you know, I mean under a, I mean if I may put it that way, you know, in a temple under a Banyan Tree, with a, with all the gods which are elephants and tigers you know? So [unintelligible]. You know. So it's very, it's quite. That when I see how my ancestors lived, how I see how less they took. You see? They were very, they took what, you know, what the little field gave or something. They were dependent on the river. You know, they did.. So there, all that is very, you know, all that has changed dramatically in 20 years I suppose, you know. And that's bad news for the world, you know? Because, finally all this, all the food will have to be, we'll have to bring it from somewhere, all the fancy cars, you know, all that. We've got the big houses, you have heating we've got air conditioning, you see. So all that is going to come from right, from here somewhere, see? So that's, I see

that as a huge, huge problem and as a, yes. And global warming or climate change will just, that, it will just make it even faster. Sort of that, the duration, if I may put it that way.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:13:33] Well, if I were to put the, and the positive things I've seen, I would say that there are much more people who are more aware of things today you know. Uh, you know, they're, I mean much more people who are going out there and doing it. You know. When I was I was young you would not, for example, you would not see too many Indian birdwatchers, today India Bird Club, which is a little organization based out of Delhi, has almost some 100 thousand people as members, you know. Which, I mean, which has just shot up, it is going up like that. You know. If, you know, if you look at, you know, if you look at uh, so that, yes awareness is there much more. And so, but then I would, if I would say that, and my father or my father's father didn't have so much awareness, but they had a way of life. Which was then putting less on pressure. But as my generation is definitely put, putting much more pressure. So, so I don't know really. Is that awareness really helping, ultimately? And you know so, and the other thing I definitely see at least in the in the forest of India that we have. Yes. In terms of as a country we probably are, there is probably no other country in the world as rich in biodiversity, and in large mammals, iconic birds, you know, we've got, you know, most of the world's cat species from small to tigers to snow leopards and on. Here, we've got, I think, bears, we got 30 percent of the world's bear species, and I think the, deer we have, probably the most in the world, you know, we got lions. You know, so we got pretty much all that. So how nature has been very kind to us. But what happens is because of the large, larger, well the population, those pockets of wilderness, unfortunately are now small oasis scattered all over. So I think when I was young, I still see much more open areas, open space, you know. Scrublike landscape you know. So all that has vanished quite rapidly, it has all been taken over by real estate, and all that. Whereas if you ask me, has it affected the wildlife? I would actually say no. Most of the forest that I go to now has much more wildlife than it ever did, you know. I think we have much, if you take tigers, elephants. I mean. You know, the last at least few years, and, and the visibility. Including iconic species like Snow Leopard and the Red Panda and all these things that you are not seeing earlier. Now you have started to see them. So in these isolated pockets, conservation has worked. Hence, this sort of, this impact which you can see right there. You know. Is, you know, so it has, it has made a comeback. So I think that's a, it's a direct fallout of that awareness of and the, you know and people putting sort of pressure onto the.. Our, our forests are not guarded by armed people, by the way. You know? Our forests, because they have to work very closely with the local population. So they're not like, they're not like the Indian Army if I were to put it, they're not well, very well equipped with how to deal with the situation, all that. So, you know, so but, our forests have always been designed in a manner, I suppose, that they could deal with the local population. So they're pretty much an unarmed lot. You know? They have absolutely ancient, I mean, weaponry and all that, because you don't really need that, you know? So how you save wildlife is through intelligence network. How you save, how you would save, especially if you look at our, the proximity to India. To many of the areas where much of the wildlife is consumed, consumed as I would say is the word, I mean literally speaking, is very, it's right out there, you know. So, you know, so I mean that to me, I think some great things have happened quite, quite on a positive. That yes, our, many of the numbers of at least these very rare species are up. But that doesn't mean that that's good news, because eventually wildlife will not start, start living in skyscrapers. You know? You cannot have, I mean we already have reached an optimum of number of tigers we have. I mean, if you have walked around in and around your camp I'm sure at some point you have seen Tiger bug marks, you know.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:17:41] And that's the case everywhere, you know. But a park can only, a 1300 square kilometer reserve, with these few thousand square kilometres off of the forest, can only have so many tigers. And if you look at a species like a tiger, which also, I mean it also breeds well, if the, if the conditions are proper, they will very soon repopulate or they over populate a forest, you know. But then what happens, you know? Once numbers are up, you have to have much more space for them. They need more room. So the room is not there, you know. So you would have. So that's the thing, and we're seeing, and the fallout is quite evident and sort of quite visible already that the, and the conflict is on the rise, it's on the increase. And India dealt with human-wildlife conflict, I mean if you look at India's own figures, it's absolutely mind boggling. You know, how many people are killed off wild animals. It's about, 50,000 plus, 50,000 plus. Largely it's snakes, about 99% of these things. But then we also have close to a thousand people for elephants, we have a few hundred people on tigers, you know, bear and a leopard and things like that take a huge toll, you know. So that's the problem that will happen. What happened was that you know people from my father's generation, or their father's generation, there was something that India has was acceptability, you know. They accepted. If if the tiger killed you? OK, you know. I mean, that's how it was meant to be. But now my generation, or the urban generation is not like that. They will stick them, they will lynch them. They will deal with them the way anywhere in the world a dangerous animal would have been dealt with, you know. And that's the problem I see, because I sometimes see, like you know people lynched a leopard, saw very close to Delhi. Well I tell them, "If you had a leopard in in London or New York, that's what you would have done." You probably would have had fancy guns to take care of it, but that's how it would have been dealt with. We would have eliminated them, you know. And that's something which was, that, that sponge was always there, you know, people accepted these things as a fate, as a karma, you know. But that's now, I see that, I mean, going away. So that's, I'd see that as a, as a threat because when the mindset of people changes, you know? That is not something that you will get back, you know? So you might come into rural India or... Things looking very unruly. Not really the so-called, and they don't look very conservation-like. But their way of life, you know just their psychology, helped wildlife, and that's a reason we have whatever we have. Yeah. So that's a thing, so that that would be a huge loss to us, you know. Because, and you know it's like trying to re-, I mean what is it, if I may say, you know, if you want to like, resummon the Pope, you know? That oh, you know, well they had it, they were doing it, you know, they were fine. But then, you know, now we got things which have come up so fast. Urbanization has happened so rapidly. So called modernization, you know, has happened so rapidly you know. So that bridge is getting um broader, so that I see that as a threat yeah.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:21:05] See, I mean like you can, and a forest is a forest. The forest is born as a forest. And people just die, it will not be another forest. It can't be a plantation. You know, we can't make a forest, we must always keep that in mind. You know, you can plant trees you know, but that doesn't make a forest. A forest has taken ages and ages, you know. Thousands of years from the mosses to the lichen, to those that creep, you know all those little things, you know, so that is what has sort of made the forest. So these are sanctuaries are just a last representation of that so-called old forest, you know. Hence it's very important that ya. So they will host, and that's the reason why that bird which is only seen there, will only be seen there, because that's how it is, you know, it has taken those, it has, it's like evolution has come into play there, you know? So hence they are absolutely important, you know? So we must have these, these last pockets of the wilderness, and if possible to expand them, you know. That's for, sure it's like, you know, there is no other option. I mean we can't really shift tigers from one place and, and put them in a better environment somewhere which will have water or deer or some forest

cover, no. It is not gonna work like that, you know? You know, so I mean we will have to conserve what was originally sort of what was there.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:22:31] Community based all this would, really help you know? You know, if you have, especially when you talk about angling and when you talk about, I think it was. So people would only be able, people who would only say it. Sorry do you want me to tell him to put the phone is it, does it bother...

James Thull [00:22:48] Oh no, that's fine, it'll be fine.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:22:49] So yeah, you know, so I think the. So it would have been, because I've seen this, when people are, you know, when they are, you know when they see. You know, if you go by a river. I think the biggest, I mean sort of like a message, goes by an angler, people, the locals are quite shocked that, you know, that how this, this man came, and he got this fish, and he unhooked it. The conservation decisions is very far reaching you know. And you know, so that's why, so they are at awe at this new practice. It's almost like you made a new religion, and a positive religion, religion is not always very nice, is it? And, you know, so, you know so that is, that's very good, you know. And, and yes, had it been, this whole sport fishing and angling and all that, it should have been all over India's, I think, rivers. And the local villagers should have been a part of this program, because how we are that it would have been next to impossible for a so-called agency to save it. Be it Belize or the Forest Department or anybody you know? You can't just say, "Oh we'll we save a river," because, I mean fish, unlike other things, were always, were often eaten in India, you know. I mean people would have not been, many people are vegetarians and all that, so that was one problem solved, you know? But I think people who largely lived by the rivers did al- you know, they did often take that animal protein from there.

James Thull [00:24:16] Sure.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:24:16] So that's why it was not often very easy. So, you know? So, I mean I suppose that, you know, so that's, so that kind of thing, I think angling really, really helps, you know. So if it could be community based, if the local, I mean sort of villages, were a part of the program, it would have been a win-win situation, you know. So then what happens is angling puts that soft, I mean, barrier for sort of mining, making unsustainable roads in the Himalayas, dams, you know. So that's, I mean though it's small, but imagine if so many people had angling rights, and they were getting something out of the angling economy, you know, they would have been the first barrier who said, "no we will not allow this dam to come up," or we're not allowed to do that. So it would have been a very powerful tool, perhaps the only tool. Otherwise, how do you make something out of a river? How do you make a livelihood out of a river? You can't be rafted everywhere. You can't do that, but I mean, fish would have been there in pretty much most of our river systems. And if you look at many of our old, old records, you know, you would see how, you know. So they were always there. So yeah, I mean it would have been the most ideal, ideal situation.

James Thull [00:25:25] Yeah.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:25:25] One, well sort of, not, the other, the other gurus. A little bit sometimes.

James Thull [00:25:37] Yeah, yeah.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:25:37] I think what took me to angling is the spots where angling takes you, you know. I mean, I've been to many places in northeast and up in the Himilayas, you know. I think the, I mean the good fish spot always takes you to the most amazing landscape, you know. And that's my high.

James Thull [00:25:51] Yeah, yeah.

Sumantha Ghosh [00:25:53] So yeah. So I mean, I have done a bit of angling, I mean nothing like, you know. Yeah, it's always, I think that's, I mean I think the first time I caught, which is probably in '97, '98, or something, maybe a little earlier. So I realized this was only wildlife I could hold now, because India's got very strict regulations in wildlife. Now you've got to be a hands off, sort of you know, all that. So it's a, it was a wonderful feeling to understand, because a fish, by the virtue of their looks or just as a layperson it has always been, it is just, you know, just fish. It's not that you have subspecies of fish, or species of fish you know. So yeah so. So that's the thing, yeah. It would have been the most wonderful tool, you know? And. But when I look at how the government just looks the other way when it comes to angling, I think that's the bigger picture. Is that, you know, that somehow the rivers is now where, you know, that's where you can mine from, that's where you can extract raw material. And I think the river has now sadly become a very a commercial object. So that's why the government ignores these angling things, because somewhere in the federal law, it's like for example, I'll tell you, elephants. Uh, the elephant was supposed to be our National Heritage Animal. Right. So after years of study by the Wildlife Institute, they said we have a national animal. We have this, we have national bird, national... Every state has a national this thing. They wanted to have the elephant, as a part of it. The state, the government never had it, they never took, I mean took it as a, you know? So the elephant, in spite of its huge, I think religious sanctity and, uh, a long association with India. You know, was not taken, because if you had that, you'd have to ensure huge patches of wilderness, you would have to do away with a lot of our railway tracks. You might have to do away with hydroelectricity projects and the canals, so I think that's why sometimes, I think, that the government looks the other way. Because if you had to do that, then you'd have to have rules to ensure that it is done safely, and those rules may not be in, they would not, I think benefit the big guys. The World Bank and the what have you. [laughs]

Sumantha Ghosh [00:28:07] Well I think that's the thing, I think, you know, I think. I mean sort of, one thing is association, you know. It's like, till the time it's your bear is as much mine, as my tiger is yours. You know let's be, you know, that's how simple it is. There is no VISA in all that out there, is it. So it's this is all our heritage. This is all we as a species, humans, need all of this, you see? So I think it's really important that, you know, I mean we have to get together on this. You know? We have to get together. It's almost like we have to make that one army which can really defeat the evil ones, you know, which are all over, which are right in my backyard which are right in your backyard. All over, you know? Because they have, all of us as humans, have a very short term, I think vision. Nobody is enlightened, nobody's educated enough, sadly. And, you know? So I think till the time the ones who have been out there, who have understood why we need to conserve, you know. The outdoors people, and the nature people, the anglers, even the hunters, you know, I think a one hunter is far better than those people who sit in an armchair and just sign. And that's the destruction of thousands and thousands of hectares of miles of rainforest or something. So, you know, so all of them need to get together you know? And, we need to make it as a very I think new or something, you know, because we know this today, that you know if you have a hole somewhere it will be, we all got to jump for

heaven's sake, you know. It's not that it goes wrong in India than Canada is safe, or if Canada goes wrong, you know Australia is safe. I mean, we'll all get affected eventually, and that's a, it's a reality you know? And I think all outdoors people understand that. So I think it's very important that at least these nature people get together, through various means of technology, and all that, you know, and somehow like really speak loudly about it, you know. And just target the fact that, you know, that it's our next generation is the children. So if you're a father, you know I mean it's bad news. I mean I'm sorry. You know it's like that, you know. So I mean I'm a father of, and so I know, so I kind of, I mean, I kind of won't tell them that they're very young and it's a sad when I tell them that, "listen, never have children." It's just that, I have got this urgency to tell them maybe the world is no longer going to be, you know [unintelligible] beautiful you know? And so that's the thing. So I think everybody needs to get together on this.

James Thull [00:30:30] Yeah.