

Public Lecture

Nature and Nation: Framing Wildlife Society Relations in an Emerging Economy

by **Mahesh Rangarajan**



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Abstract of the Lecture

The world may be a unified ecological unit, with deep economic links but it is divided into nearly 200 nation states. India is not alone in trying to reconcile the imperative for economic growth with the search for space for nature. The processes of economic growth as also demographic expansion exert new pressures on the soil, water and air as also on the ability of ecological processes to enable repair and renewal.

Yet, the very idea of a nation often coheres around symbols of nature: a mountain, a lake, a river or an iconic animal. The attempt to imagine a people as a nation may be and is contested but it often is about showing that the nation is a product of nature. Over the last century and more, securing nature via protection has often been a project of the nation state, the tiger in India, the panda in China and the bison in the US being exemplars. But as with the bounds of the nation, this is also a deeply ambivalent project with questions of who encloses nature and for whom. Is the nation in enclosing nature protecting it, preserving it or hastening its decline?

This raises a larger issue of how far these iconic symbols of modern nations draw on older lineages of kings and notables who too had exclusive hunting grounds and parks. Much of India too saw princely reserves as well as government forests that enabled elite capture of larger landscapes and waterscapes. How can democracy enable peace with nature but also create conditions for peace among people is a major question bequeathed by history and part of our living present.

About the Speaker

Professor Mahesh Rangarajan completed his BA in History with Honours at Hindu College, University of Delhi and then MA and PhD at the University of Oxford where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He was till recently Professor in Modern Indian History at the University of Delhi and subsequently was Director of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. He has also taught as a Visiting Faculty member at Cornell University, Jadavpur University, Kolkata (Calcutta) and at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru (Bangalore). His most recent works include the co-edited *Environmental History as if Nature Existed* (OUP, 2010), *India's Environmental History* (Permanent Black, 2012), *Nature without Borders* (Orient Blackswan, 2014) and *Shifting Ground* (OUP, 2014). His own collection of essays entitled *Nature and Nation* is now in press with Permanent Black. The paper is part of a larger and continued engagement with animal/human histories in India.

Date and Time

November 2, 2015; 5:00 PM

Venue

Room 101, Lecture Hall Complex, IISER Pune

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