

# Chapter Four

## Militarisation of Chitwan National Park Leads to Human Rights Violations

*“Armies are similar to the villains shown in the movies.”  
Khor Bahadur Majhi, Shergunj*

### Mobilisation of Army in Chitwan National Park

The rationale for the mobilisation of the Royal Nepal Army, RNA, (now the Nepal Army) in protected areas such as Chitwan National Park (CNP), is to provide security to the park authorities (PA) and to curb poaching of valuable wildlife species and illegal logging by forest mafia. Indeed, some commentators have credited the RNA with achieving some of these stated aims (Dixit 2003).

However, the presence of the Nepal Army in the CNP is questioned by the local people and criticised on many grounds. The first issue that local people complain about is the human rights violations perpetrated by the Army on civilians. These violations lead to conflict between the Army and civilians and to alienation. The reduction of Army personnel due to their deployment in the counter-insurgency from 2001 is provided as a feeble rebuttal to more serious complaints. The costs of policing are not commensurate with even the narrowly stated aims of conserving endangered wildlife.



Chitwan National Park Administration

Army Patrol in CNP

The creation of National Parks in the old sense reflects a conservationist ideology that places animals before people, and sees the two as necessarily conflicting. As a result, the link between human beings and nature is severed. Believers in such drastic practices will also applaud the deployment of armed forces inside parks. The perpetrators, after all, are the indigenous communities that depend on the natural resources and are quite often among the poorest members of society.

In Nepal's case, the deployment of armed forces is problematic in different ways. The Army has had close links with the Palace and, in the past, played a role in suppressing the people and ensuring the continuation of the royal hegemony over the state. There are matrimonial and other links between the upper echelons of the Army and the Palace, with the top personnel generally belonging to one of four families/lineages (Rana, Thapa, Shah and Basnet) (Bhatt 2006). The National Park was free to be used by the Palace and privileged class for recreational trips, including hunting trips, but it was not available to local people to eke out a subsistence living from gathering small portions of its bounty.

The first Army post was set up in 1975 and since then the deployment of personnel has only increased. One entire battalion of the RNA has been mobilised for the Chitwan National Park, with an estimated 800 armed troops in four sections, Sauraha, Kasara, Bagai, and Amaltandi, which are then divided into 37 Army posts.<sup>7</sup> The Army has been mobilised at the main entry points to Chitwan National Park (Figure 2 and Table 6).

Table 6: Army mobilisation points		
Eastern Point	Mid-Point	Western Point
Khagendra Malli (next to Bhandara)	Kasara (next to Jagatpur)	Piprahar (next to Gajapur)
Sunachuri (next to Lothar)	Ghatgai (next to Patihani )	Laukhani (next to Sishwar)
	Sauraha (next to Tandi )	Amaltandi (next to Kawasoti)
		Bhimley (next to Meghauri)

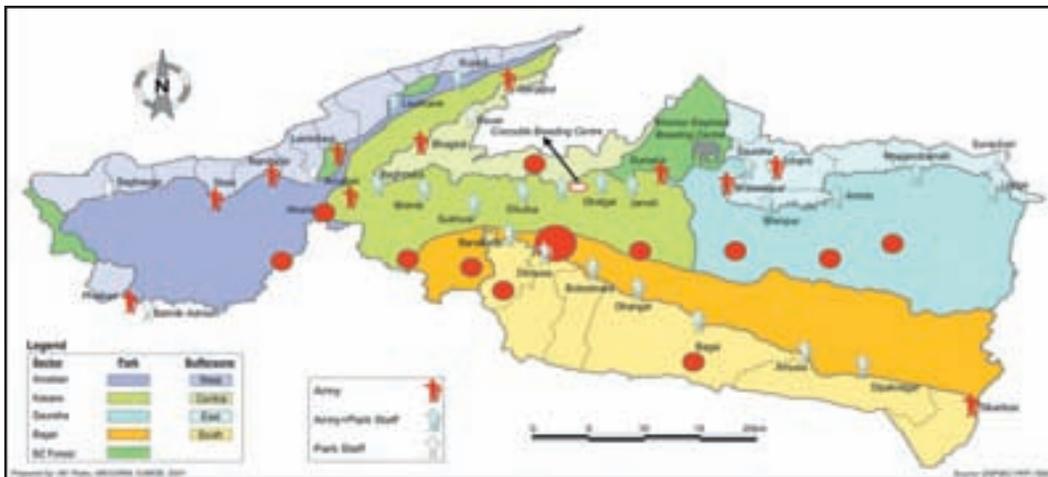


Figure 2: Army and range posts in CNP

<sup>7</sup> Army posts include Valmiki Ashram (Fullbari); Sikarbas; Khoriamohan; Sheri; Nandapur; Amaltandi; Lamichaur; Bhagedi; Gajapur; Dumriya; Bhawanipur; and Icharni. Joint posts of Army and national park administration are Ghatgain; Janaili; Dhruba; Sukhibhar; Bhimley; Bagmara; Badhawa; Laukhani; Kujauli; Bhawanipur; Bhimpur; Amritey; Khagendra Malli; Ligligey; Deepknagar; Amuwa; Bagai; Ghangar; Bote Simara; Dhowa; and Bankatta.

## **Harassment of Local People**

The indigenous communities living within the buffer zone in Chitwan and Nawalparasi identified various forms of harassment and human rights violations perpetrated by the Army, as described below.

### **Seizure of goods**

Army personnel harass local communities by confiscating items such as sickles, axes, fishing nets, dhadiya (baskets), oars, and sometimes even boats. Receipts are not given, nor are charges laid.

### **Seizure of food**

Army personnel are notorious for seizing food items (including meat, fish, vegetables, and fruit) reportedly as punishment for minor infringements of Park laws.

### **Involuntary work**

Members of marginalised communities report being exploited by the Army as unpaid labour. They are forced to do work such as cleaning Army camps, clearing paths, cutting logs, collecting vegetables, and fishing for the Army. Bote-Majhi people are asked to collect and supply firewood. In the recent past, Bote-Majhi from Dibyapuri village supplied one tractor load of firewood to the Army post nearby. If they resist demands for labour or supplies, they are verbally abused, threatened, and even beaten by Army personnel, who also generally belong to more privileged castes/social groups.

### **Verbal abuse**

In the early years of RNA deployment in the CNP, the local people did not fear them. Their main conflict was with the Park authorities, according to local interviewees. This initial perception quickly changed when cases of harassment and abuse became more frequent. The abuse has increased since the fisher communities organised resistance.

### **Physical abuse and torture**

If suspected of violating a Park law (i.e., fishing or collecting), the Army authorities do not allow explanations. Instant judgment and sentencing is commonplace and routine. Torture and physical harassment are the most preferred methods of subduing local people. Beatings with sticks are common. People report being forced to lie on the grass covered in sugar to invite ant bites. In the summer, they are forced to lie on their bare back on a hot rock and beaten under the hot sun. In the winter, they are forcibly submerged in ponds. Interviewees reported that local people have been forced to return from the Park to their villages naked.

### **Sexual harassment**

Many women activists and fisher-folk reported incidences of sexual harassment and rape. One incident that attracted some public attention took place in Daldaley where Army personnel harassed fishing women. Another recent case concerned a group of Kumal women who were harassed by the Army in Meghauri VDC, Chitwan. In 7 buffer zone VDCs in Chitwan, more than 30 women claim that their children have been born of rape. These children face difficulties in acquiring citizenship as the right to citizenship is based on the father's name.