

BOOK REVIEW

By Divya Kilikar

NATURE CONSERVATION IN THE NEW ECONOMY

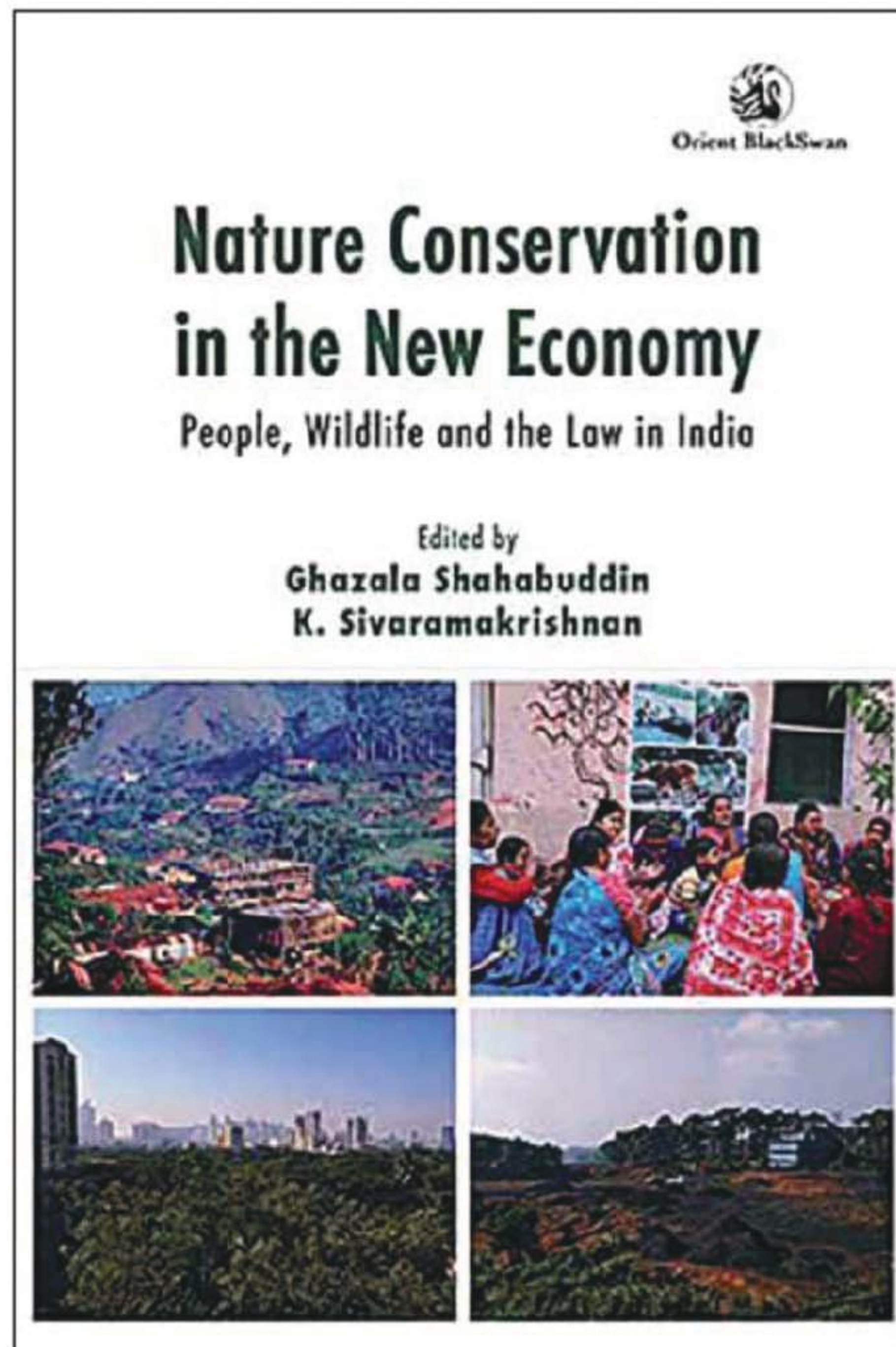
By Ghazala Shahabuddin and
K. Sivaramakrishnan
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This is the 21st century, the era that's torn between two starkly opposing ideals; one of global avarice, economic reforms, convenience and steeply growing consumerism; and another, the realistic though less popular, of conservation as an imperative, the restoration and protection of biodiversity and the mindful extraction of our resources.

Early notions of conservation, back in the 19th century, revolved around hunting regulations. From these emerged the country's first Protected Areas, which were notified even before the advent of the Second World War. Since then, gains from conservation programmes were evident in rising wildlife population figures in the 1980s. However, impacts of uncontrolled development schemes since then have over time negated the success of prior efforts. Manifesting in the form of land use change, forest loss, solid waste proliferation, water contamination and more, India's environmental issues grow graver every day.

This well-researched book examines India's ever-fluctuating conservation efforts, assessing policies, laws and programmes with a critical eye and uses solid research cases to drive its point. Institutional, legal, scientific, political and social obstacles that lie in the path of nature conservation goals in India are thoroughly analysed to build a consolidated picture. The authors believe, rightly so, that the subject of nature conservation encroaches upon every arena, be it cultural, historical or political – this is realised when one looks at the consequences of policies on communities.

The book is a congregation of thoughts, observations and studies undertaken by several experts. Ambika Aiyadurai's contribution focuses on challenges in Northeast India, where despite it being a criminal offence, hunting



is socially accepted by the authorities dealing with indigenous communities. Using the example of the *Idu Mishmis* from the Dibang valley of Arunachal Pradesh, Ambika elaborates on the complex laws, taboos and traditions of the *Mishmis*, the clash of worldviews in a community that fiercely protects the tiger but freely hunts other species, the tricky problem of conserving wildlife, and maintaining hunting laws in this region, while simultaneously leaving indigenous ways of life untouched.

Other chapters explore a variety of issues across Indian landscapes; M. Vikas studies the management of forested areas around the capital city, digging into the roots of conservation during British colonialism and highlighting the need to go beyond haphazard afforestation towards strategising the management of land, air and water. Vikas emphasises the need for such action for the survival of

Delhi, a city already engulfed deep in ecological tragedy. Editor Ghazala Shahabuddin studies the Cheetah Plan in India, an effort to rewild the Asiatic cheetah, musing over its controversies, weaknesses and socio-economic concerns. Multiple authors have focused on biodiversity-rich central India, where abundant wildlife roams outside of Protected Areas, and the threats this vital region faces in the form of severe human-wildlife conflict. Impacts of extraction from forests by neighbouring human settlements and subsequent forest changes throw light on the urgency for further long-term studies and the complexity of conserving this troubled landscape. Other case studies look at wetlands and their abuse, the varied problems of coastal regulation, endemic pine forests in western Himalaya, community forests in Meghalaya's Jaintia hills and the impact of tree preservation in the Western Ghats. It's a serious read but one that is information-rich and impeccably written. Every single chapter is sure to give the reader a sharp, integrated perception of the landscape into which it delves. 🐾