

The Elusiveness of Nilgai and Clarity

by [Nikos Akritas](#) (November 2024)



Tigers Fighting over the Carcass of a Nilgai (Wilhelm Friedrich Kuhnert)

Many years ago I had the privilege of travelling around India. One of the places I visited was Bharatpur, home to Keoladeo National Park, known for its migratory bird species. The park is also home to larger animals; there are many deer, monkeys, and a type of antelope known as the nilgai, or to give it its more common name: blue bull—in reality a purplish-grey colour. Although the nilgai is not an endangered species, males, which exhibit the bluish colouring, are very timid, making sightings difficult. Tiger sightings had been reported but, given one

could enter the area on foot and by bicycle, I believe these were just fabricated attempts to increase the number of visitors to the park hoping to see one.

At the time, roughly thirty years ago, guesthouses catering for foreigners were few and far between. The one I stayed at was a very short bike ride from the park, the hosts spoke perfect English and fresh orange juice was sold at a stall just a few metres away from the place. It was perfect.

I enjoyed the park very much, not least because I actually managed to see a blue-bull—much to the surprise of my hosts who had never seen one and wouldn't believe me I had until I shared a photo with them—but more because, being a lesser known park for sighting large animals, it was relatively unvisited.

I was able to position myself in a very quiet spot behind a copse where, waiting patiently for quite some time, deer would come within just a few metres. Unfortunately, attempting to take photos with my cheap camera would startle them and they'd disappear by the time my noisy mechanical contraption had fully zoomed in. However, I realized attempting to achieve a great photo in this way was a bad idea when baboons baring their teeth started approaching.

The home-cooked food was delicious and I would spend my evenings conversing with the hosts. Initially it was information gathering on my part: the best way to get here/there, where to find this/that, how much should I pay for x, etc. Conversation later turned to matters of a more personal nature: backgrounds, jobs, families, the vicissitudes of life. The vicissitudes, even, of running a successful guesthouse.

It transpired my hosts had family living close by, one relative living directly opposite them in a very grand but run-down looking house. I was surprised to discover these

relatives had originally conceived the idea of running guesthouses for park visitors, clearly having the money to build a large, plush property to cater for such needs, because I had never seen anyone enter or leave the property. Conversely, my hosts' accommodation was constantly busy.

My assumption the property opposite was abandoned was corrected by my hosts. Not making a success of the trade it was intended for, they decided to give the guesthouse business a go themselves, opening their much more modest house to visitors. The accommodation was basic but comfortable. Their venture proved successful, enabling them to expand; building extra rooms around the lush garden now at the centre of their own property.

However, with success came resentment. My hosts were accused by their neighbours, their relatives, of stealing their (non-existent) trade and demanded they share some of the wealth from their success. My hosts agreed to recommend the competition to new travelers that turned up.

"Why would you turn away customers, the source of your livelihood," I asked, "to help the competition?"

"It's better to try and help each other in these situations. Some customers we lose in this way but many take one look at the other guesthouses and come back to us. We can't help that. It's ultimately their choice."

"Why do they come back? Are the other places too expensive?"

"It's not that. The accommodation was originally decorated to a high standard but never maintained. The inside looks run-down and there are problems with basic things. For example, showers often don't work. You have to look after these things, you have to take care of your guests but unfortunately all they see is money, not wanting to do the work required."

"Haven't they ever wondered why your place is successful?"

"I've tried to help them. I told them what they needed to do to hold onto visitors but they're not interested. It requires effort but they just want to offer the accommodation as is. That, they think, is enough."

Well it clearly wasn't. Discussing the issue late into the night, one of my hosts eventually disclosed his precarious situation. He had done more than what was reasonable to appease his jealous neighbours but, given they would not help themselves, the situation remained unchanged. My hosts' success went from strength to strength; the neighbouring competition a sorry shambles of what could have been. The festering disgruntlement eventually turned nasty.

Lowering his voice, my host informed me how the owner of the property opposite, his wife's cousin, would regularly get drunk and take pot shots at him from an upstairs room overlooking their house. At first I found this a bit far-fetched; I doubted his story. But then he took me round the property and showed me the bullet holes.

"Have you not reported this to the police?"

"Of course, but here things work with influence and money."

"They did nothing?"

"They spoke to him."

"And?"

"And that was it. Nothing."

"And he stopped?"

"No. He continued. Eventually they came and took his gun but he will get another. I'm mostly worried for my wife and children. It's me he wants to hit but he's a bad shot and he's drunk when he does these things."

“If it’s so easy to get a gun why don’t you get one? Surely this is a question of self-defence.”

“As I said, it doesn’t work that way. If I do something to him, I will end up in prison and where will that leave my family? If he ever did harm one of them, then I will get a gun and the matter will be ended.”

I could not believe the injustice of it all. He and his family were basically under threat of death at any moment; at the mercy of his neighbour’s moods and drunken escapades, envious of others’ success without having made any effort himself—a success the target of his ire had shared the secrets of in order to help him. They had to live like this, even though the authorities were aware of the situation, and he was not allowed to retaliate in kind. He was, basically, being told to live with the situation of his family being targets.

Unfortunately, the plight of my hosts some thirty years ago sounds chillingly familiar today. Imagine you live in a house opposite me. I keep firing a gun at you. You’ve done what you can to protect your family. You’ve provided bullet-proof vests and trained them to run to the safest places in the house whenever I start firing, which is frequently. But you are not allowed to defend them, to fire back, because I refuse to protect my family and you might hit one of them. You have to allow a situation to continue where the lives of your children are constantly endangered because the world says you can only fire back if you can guarantee you don’t hit any members of my family. But the world does nothing to stop me.

Safe in this knowledge, I continue firing at you with my children sitting around me; teaching them people like you are the personification of evil and to die attempting to kill you gives full meaning to life. You are the cause of all our problems. But you must, as I have convinced the world, allow

this situation to continue because if you attempt to defend your family and accidentally kill one of my children, it serves as proof of your depravity. The value of your children's lives is clearly not equal to mine.

There are many in the West expressing moral outrage at events in Gaza but where was their moralizing prior to October 7th, 2023? The atrocities committed that day were not opportunistic. They had been carefully planned over many years and were the culmination of a decades' long situation similar to that described above, except on a much larger scale. A situation the rest of the world turns a blind eye to, at best. What does it mean when everyone else in the world has the right to defend themselves but not Jews?

[Table of Contents](#)

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