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Sandesh Kadur talk at festival of ideas

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PANAJI: With a camera in hand and a mind full of wonder, Sandesh Kadur would often cycle to the outskirts of Bengaluru to shoot images of the wilderness.

Back then, little was he aware that on a given night, the sounds of a Nightjar bird and the sawing call of the leopard would soon lead him on a path dedicated to documenting animals for NatGeo, discovering new species and saving the endangered ones.

An award-winning wildlife photojournalist and documentary filmmaker, Kadur, through the use of still images and videos, is known for advocating the need for conservation and protection of the planet's biodiversity.

Speaking on day one of the 10th D D Kosambi Festival of Ideas on Monday, he shed light on the forested valleys and snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas besides commenting on burning issues of Goa's biodiversity.

"Less than 5% of India's land mass is protected forest area, which is very little. We need to stop with the assault on our green areas and start conserving them," he urged.

His tryst with wildlife has led to the discovery of several new species that are endemic to the mountain regions. "Over 564 species were found until 2014 and they are being discovered on a continuous basis in the Himalayas," he said.

This, in turn, has also led to the shattering of myths about certain animals in India. He explained this through his picture of a tiger scavenging on the carcass of a rhino.

"The image has shattered all romantic stories about a tiger being a gentlemanly creature that feeds on his own kill," he explained.

His expeditions also led him to capture peaks of the Western Ghats in light as well as shadow, a rare sight of purple frog, a foot-flagging frog, purple Nilakuranji flowers that bloom once every 12 years, among others; images of which he showcased to the awe-struck audience in the packed auditorium.

A firm believer of free rivers, Kadur stressed on the need to let water bodies flow sans restriction, "Mountains harness the power of monsoon and create rivers. If we stop that by building dams, it will affect the ecosystem. There are countries removing dams therefore and making rivers free again because they realise that hydropower is not as green".

Sharing his thoughts on the Goa-Karnataka battle over the Mhadei issue, he said, "Rivers initially were protected in the birth places by temples but now they're being affected by too much 'love.' During the riots and bandhs in Bengaluru and Chennai due to Mhadei issue, it was estimated that there were losses of over Rs 25,000 crore per day. If that money had just gone to protect these rivers we wouldn't have to fight over rivers and have a positive impact on the environment".

Elaborating further, he said that building dams do more harm than good, "Respecting rivers and allowing them to flow as they are is very important. Damming them or curtailing them or diverting them can affect everything downstream. Stopping the river from flowing into the ocean gradually leads to a multitude of fish species being destroyed as well."

Kadur also commented on the state's potential for hinterland tourism. "Tourism is a very economic one-way game but that's the

shortsighted view. We need to bring about tourism in the most responsible and low-impact manner. If we can bring that about then we can save those places while showcasing them to visitors. We also need education by way of an interpretation centre at the tourist spot so that experts can explain to people the value of the place."

He further pointed out that hinterland tourism should be within a certain limit so as to not cause imbalance in the natural surrounding. "We need to spread out the tourism and have less people in each place instead of too many in one place. Thus keep the density of tourism low and not go beyond the place's carrying capacity."