

Dattatri pushes for protection of Western Ghats, transparency in tiger death probes

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Pune: Shekar Dattatri, one of the pioneers of wildlife and conservation filmmaking, on Thursday made a strong case for transparent investigations into the causes of tiger deaths and the urgent need to protect the delicate ecosystem of the Western Ghats.

In the city to inaugurate the Kirloskar Vasundhara International Film Festival, Dattatri also delivered a lecture on the impact films can have on conservation efforts.



(From left) Shekar Dattatri, Abul Kirloskar, Aarti Kirloskar, S Nallamuthu and Sachin Raj at the inauguration of the Kirloskar Vasundhara International Film Festival at Balgandharva Rangmandir on JM Road on Thursday

gets are not immortal and many will die of natural causes every year, including old age and injuries from infighting. What we really need today, however, is increased transparency so that all tiger deaths are properly diagnosed and remedial action is taken if required. Our conservation practices should be mature enough for us to stop covering up the facts," Shekar said.

Having done most of his work in the Western Ghats, he made a very heartfelt appeal for the protection of

the biodiversity hotspot "While all natural habitats in India are under siege and need increased and sustained protection, what is of special concern is the continued destruction of the forests and grasslands in the Western Ghats, which are the birthplace of virtually all the rivers in peninsular India. Without the perennial supply of water they provide, all the southern states will turn into arid landscapes unable to sustain adequate agriculture to feed over 200 million people. Imagine the

social unrest that would ensue if the governments want India to grow economically and prosper over the next decades, they must pay heed to ecology," Dattatri said in a chat with the TOI.

Dattatri had stumbled into filmmaking in the 1980s. He started off assisting an American couple who were making a film on snakebites. Later on, he made natural history films for a number of international television networks, including films on the Silent Valley and Nagarhole. But a decade into that work, he had a change of heart. "I went into these forests and made films that depicted the beauty of nature. But I was also seeing a lot of destruction. The broadcasters did not want that. So I started making films that highlighted these problems, but also provided solutions," Dattatri said.

"I wanted the people who can do something about the problem to watch these films. Like government officials. I made a film called 'Mindless Mining' about iron ore mining in Kudremukh and the damage it was causing. It acted as a catalyst, and the government ended back mining there," he said during a pre-event press conference.



His latest film *From Killer Roads To Humane Highways*, which is being screened at the festival, put the focus on the number of animals mowed down by vehicles when they stray near highways and railway tracks. But accidental deaths aside, he said deaths of tigers all across the country must be properly investigated.

While each death should be investigated to ascertain the cause, we also have to remember that fi-