The Controversial Case of Trophy Hunting

What is the issue?

- Trump administration recently proposed the lifting of import bans for elephants
- This is expected to ease the entry of trophy imports from countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia.
- This has brought trophy hunting into the international limelight and the conservationists are divided in their opinions.

What are the conflicting opinions on Trophy hunting?

- Trophy hunting is the legal practice of selectively hunting wild game animals.
- The taxidermied parts of such animal such as the head or carcass are usually taken back home for display as a "trophy,"
- **Negative opinion** - Some fear that trophy hunting can endanger lion populations.
- Animal activists also advocate the ethical angle, where killing as a sport is argued as reprehensive.
- **Positive Opinion** - Countries like Namibia have shown that well-managed hunting programs can help conservation.
- Usually, in these hunts, select individuals, often old & infirm, are sacrificed,
but the species wins due increased funds for its upkeep.

How effective has hunting bans been?

- **Hunting Bans** - Simply banning hunting hasn’t lead to an automatic increase in populations of endangered species.
- In Kenya and India hunting bans exist since the 1970s.
- But the wildlife populations do not seem better than in territories were hunting isn’t banned.
- **Commericalising wildlife** - South Africa and Namibia, where wildlife has been commoditised are doing better in conservation.
- Commoditisation of wildlife means “trophy hunting, wildlife tourism, commercial meat production and local consumption”.
- This has also benefited the local communities by emerging as a employment and business opportunity.

What makes the case for Trophy hunting?

- Trophy hunting has in the past, helped recover species such as the black rhino and the straight-horned markhor (wild goat).
- While it could risk some populations, there is limited evidence to show that it has substantial negative implications at a bigger level.
- **Conservation Funds** - Financial incentives that trophy hunting provides for maintainance of lion habitats is significant.
- If not for this, there is a risk of wildlife parks getting taken over for other uses due to the ever increasing need for land and resources.
Challenges in Eco-tourism - Ecotourism is usually favoured to generate revenue for conservation.

But it might not always be viable due to the difficulties of terrain.

Moreover, some experts claim that compared to ecotourism, high-value trophy hunting has a lower ecological footprint.

What are the challenges Ahead?

Improper Implementation - Lack of proper hunting regulations & corruption can derail the conservation initiative.

Trophy hunting also has the inherent risk of promoting illegal hunting that may have serious negative consequences.

Subsistence Angle - The existing confusion about subsistence hunting with sport hunting also distorts the debate.

While the former is the preserve of the poor who take to hunting for survival, the later is a hobby for rich well off tourists.

These are embedded in different cultural contexts, and need to be evaluated through separate socio-political and economic frames.

Sensationalism - The debate on trophy hunting is taking away the focus from more serious issues such as man-animal conflict and widespread habitat loss & degradation.

Elitist Politics - The real impact of policy debates in the urban spaces of rich countries is felt in rural Africa where animals and people live in close proximity.

Significantly, those directly affected by outcomes have literally no say, which is more or less reminiscent of the colonial era.

Hence, local voices need to be recognised and accommodated.
Source: The Hindu

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