

CLASS VIII

SAVING THE GHARIAL

- JANAKI LENIN

THEME

The article presents a concern towards the environment and its rare few species. It deals with various efforts and projects undertaken by the environmentalists to protect such endangered species.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTER

'Saving The Gharial', is an article written by Janaki Lenin, on the conservation of the endangered species of crocodiles. Here, the gharial is a type of a crocodile with a long snout filled with sharp teeth. Now it is on the verge of extinction, in spite of having such deadly weapons as its strong jaws. The physical and the behavioural features of the gharials are described in detail in this article, as well as attempt to save the gharial families from death. The writer states that saving the gharial has to be part of a larger project – that of saving the rivers that are threatened by urban development, pollution and climate change.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

A)

1. An unusually long, slim
2. An appendage called the 'ghara', a noise that attracts mates and wards off rivals.
3. An underwater territorial jaw – clap
4. the youngsters, then follow the mother into water rather like ducklings
5. Still waters of ponds and lakes, deep rivers, fish.

B)

1(a) A male gharial is being talked about.

1(b) The male gharial surges forward toward the other male who is challenging his territory. The intention is to scare the second gharial away.

1(c) Either the other gharial will retreat or the two males will fight with their slender snouts clashing like swords in the air till one of them prevails over the other.

2(a) The babies of a female gharial are being referred to here. They follow their mother.

2(b) The young gharials went from their buried nests towards the water where their parents waited for them.

2(c) This was unusual because usually crocodiles are known to take hours to help their babies reach the water. The mother cannot exactly see where the babies are buried and in an attempt to tenderly carry their babies to the river, they mistakenly carry rocks, egg shells, clods of dirt and even baby turtles instead of their own youngsters. But the author notes how the gharial mother had a far more efficient way of leading her children to the river. She

would just excavate the nest and move into the water while her babies would follow her trail on their own, thus reducing parental effort and ensuring a quicker result.

c)

1. Whitaker and his team were going to take the gharial's eggs to breed the young and rear them safely in captivity and release them in protected areas when they were old enough to take care of themselves. This was to keep the young gharial safe from predators like jackals, mongooses, hyenas and also from human interference so that their survival could be ensured because their dwindling numbers have become a cause of concern for preservers of biodiversity.

2. Whitaker and his team's work was indeed part of a larger project called 'Project Crocodile.' it was launched in 1974 by the Indian Government with the UN's help. The project was initiated in order to counter the rapid decline of the gharial and related species in the Indian Subcontinent.

3. Whitaker and his team succeeded in breeding a large number of gharials in captivity. But their project received a setback because out of thousands of young gharials released in protected areas, only few survived for long. Threats of human interference in the form of bamboo-rafting and net-fishing affected the project adversely with the snouts of gharials being shut tight because of the fishing nets which eventually starved them to death. Changes in natural environment like river eroding the sandbanks and uprooting the trees and so on had flushed the gharial out of their protected area and sometimes into the sea.

4. Whitaker is optimistic at the end of the text because he feels that the gharial is not in as much danger as it had been before. Though he acknowledged that their 30 – year strategy of captive breeding had not done enough and the species still faced an uncertain future, yet he was hopeful because he thought that people seemed to be at last ready to do what it took to save the gharial. A healthy gharial population indicates a healthy river and people are finally waking up to the need for preserving biodiversity and river ecosystems.

APPRECIATING THE TEXT

1. The writer's intention behind writing 'Saving The Gharial', was perhaps to increase awareness about this particular kind of crocodile called the gharial and tell the masses about its unique features, its way of living, curious method of confronting enemies and efficient way of rearing the young. By rendering the gharial's activities in anthropomorphic terms for example, speaking of the father as a 'devoted parent' when the young are led to the water by the mother, the author tries to arouse empathy for the steadily dwindling gharial population in the hearts of the readers. By providing the readers with this information about the efforts of conservationists and the challenges in conservation posed by continuous human interference, the writer hopes to persuade readers to be more aware of the plight of lives of other animals and attempt to preserve the diverse ecosystems that the Indian Subcontinent is home to. She makes a direct appeal to the readers in paragraph 16 through the line – "..... but we are hopeful that people are at last ready to do what it takes to save the gharial, the finest example of a healthy river".

2(a) The text states facts instead of opinions. The author furnishes real data and interesting facts about the gharial that Whitaker and his team observed up close. The appendage of the adult male gharial called the 'ghara' and the underwater territorial

jaw-clap that they display have been witnessed by the author first hand. The information about 'Project Crocodile' and its fate are also recorded facts. On the basis of facts presented to us, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, the author seeks to awaken the masses to the need for protecting the gharials.

2(b) Yes, writing the piece in first person has made the text more credible as a first-hand account of a conversationalist.

2(c) The writing is quite graphic and interesting. Describing the river as a 'ribbon of cobalt,' the image of the territorial gharial coming forward, 'churning the water into froth with his tail,' and the snouts 'clashing like swords' in air have made the writing interesting.

2(d) The gharial parents' efficient methods of caring for the young draws parallel with the devoted affection that humans render to their children. The increasing pressure on their habitat due to human interference and climate change has posed a threat to their survival. This is similar to the extreme competition that humans must participate in to maintain a home and dietary habits of their choice.

2(e) Yes, I was convinced by the writer's arguments. It deepened my general idea about crocodiles. I could also visualise their fascinating lives through accounts of their techniques of warding off predators or attracting females and their clever ways of rearing young ones. The fact that their natural habitats are threatened because of human interference and climate change is a matter of concern. It made me empathise with them.