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# UNIT 20 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: FORESTS

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## 20.0 INTRODUCTION

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The forest cover in our country has assumed an alarmingly low proportion. From a position of abundance in ancient times to a dismal state today, the long time span has been full of contradictions. Increased population pressure, expanding urbanisation, an ever-pressing need for good standards of living and development in industrial technology have long disturbed the harmonious relationship between the humanity and the greens. In all descriptions of forest resource-use, there has been a tendency to see the colonial rule as an ecological ‘watershed’: the colonial rule working hand in glove with the aggressive values of industrial capitalism did much damage to the native forests. Of late the proponents of the revisionist school have sought to question such stereotypical constructions citing regional evidences. What however goes undisputed is the fact that even if colonial rule, on some occasions, was not directly responsible for the decimation of forests it did create enabling conditions for the same.

In this Unit, we shall learn about the changing patterns of resource-utilisation embedded in the man-forest relationship over a period of time. This description will not only give us a holistic picture of utility patterns of forests as a resource but would also enable us to locate and identify factors and processes that brought about an element of incongruity in sustainable utilisation of the forest wealth. It would help us to comprehend the structure and impact of man’s activities on forests

over a period of time and discern the forces of continuity and change in the period under discussion. For the convenience of the learners the argument in the Unit is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the changing resource values of forests and the second part with the policies and legislations in accordance with the changing notions of resource exploitation.

## PART A

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### 20.1 THE PRE-COLONIAL BACKGROUND

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In order to understand the dynamics and undercurrents of colonial impact on the understanding of forest as a resource, we need to understand the strands of human utilisation of the forests in the preceding period.

The period from about 500 BC to 300 AD saw a big advance of agricultural land over rich forest area both in the northern India and the river valley areas (for example Krishna, Godavari, Cauvery, Vaigai) in the peninsular India. Greater agriculture meant larger availability of surplus. Thus tribal chiefdoms started giving way to large states; Mauryas and Kushanas in northern India, the Chalukyas and Sangam Cholas in south India. The ground for further exploitation of forest resources lay in the logic of the empire building exercise. With technological limitations, the only viable alternative for enhancing surplus lay in bringing more land under cultivation. Of course trade was also coming up in a big way but then the ships and boats had to be built out of the forest wood. Another way out was incorporating other territories, which called for better weapons of war. Elephants assumed significance, and elephant forests started coming up. The number of towns increased and the houses came up that were made of wood. Moreover, timber had to be used for construction of furniture, carts, chariots, wooden bridges etc. The concept of 'hunting reserves' also came up, as hunting became a recreational activity. Chanakya says that Brahmanas should be provided forests for plantations, for religious learning and for performance of penance. We have seen earlier also that many philosophical treatises were written in the forests. *Upanishads* and *Aranyakas* were the major ones. The importance of forests is further borne out by the treatment it receives in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. After the Mauryas, the other important empire builders were the Guptas. But during the Gupta times and more particularly later Gupta times economy began to collapse. There was a manifest decline in trade and towns and the use of monetary system. Inscriptions belonging to the period indicate a trend towards ruralisation of the economy and thus greater pressure on land and consequently on the forest. Amidst all these developments, the forest question lost its prominence and in the later sources lesser attention was given to the forests.

The Delhi Sultanate saw more demands being put up on the forests. The total population (both human and livestock) increased, as did the number of cities and towns. Consequently urban population also increased. All this led to a proportionate quantitative increase in the demand for fuel wood, fruits, food, fodder etc. Demand for quality timber for construction

of boats, bridges, houses, chariots, buildings, carts etc. also went up considerably. The Sultanate rulers did not come out with a positive policy of conservation though of course we see gardens being set up.

On the whole, however, the forest cover did not pose any major problem to the Delhi Sultanate. Though the demand for forest produce increased but the land- man ratio was still very favorable in the Indian context. Land was abundantly available and as such the problem of converting forestland into agricultural land was not so strong. Added to this was the factor of natural regeneration of the forests alive.

The importance of forest increased in Mughal India corresponding with increase in population and urbanisation. According to W.H. Moreland, Indian population at the death of Akbar in 1605 AD was 100 million while R.K. Mukherjee gives the figure of 130 million for the same years (1605AD). Together with the increase in general population, there was also a qualitative and quantitative growth of urban way of life. Thus added to the existing demand of food, fuel, fodder, there was a demand for timber particularly the superior variety. The forest of Bengal, Agra, Allahabad, Sind (Thatta), Lahore, the Western and Eastern Ghats supplied the raw material. Forests served another utilitarian purpose; the forest products formed an important component of the non-agrarian production during the Mughal period. As such the ruling class was keen to encourage the production of many forest products like timber, fruits, fodder, roots, barks, resins, herbs, production of lac, tanning of leather (babul tree), gumlac (red dye, sealing wax), mulberry silk etc. as discussed in Unit 13 of Block 4.

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## 20.2 THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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The colonial period saw a qualitative shift in the man-forest relationship for added to the Indian demands were now the demands of the British Raj.

With the advent of the colonial rule an element of conscious and ruthless exploitation begins to determine the man-forest relationship (The East India Company and later the Viceroy represented the interests of colonial forces). For the first time, the proceeds of forest exploitation accrued to an agency, which had no interest in the development of the Indian subcontinent. India was systematically converted into a colony serving the interest of the mother country. The British came to India as a trading nation. The gradual establishment of political hegemony together with development in the field of transport and communication, colonial trading practices and industrial revolution brought about substantial change in this relationship. Forests now came to be seen as resources to cater to the requirements of the expanding colonial political economy.

Indian teak featured as the permanent source of supply of durable timber for the British ship building industry. It saved England during the war with Napoleon and the later maritime explosion. Ships were built in dockyard in Surat and on the Malabar Coast as well as from teak imported

in to England. The thrust of agrarian policy of the colonial state also worked to the destruction of forests. Forests were considered ‘as an obstruction to agriculture and consequently a bar to prosperity of the Empire’. To enhance the agrarian revenues, cultivation had to be extended; to extend cultivation forests had to be removed. This process was exacerbated with the development of railways after 1853. Major chunks of forest were destroyed to ensure the manufacture of railway sleepers. The sub- Himalayan forests of Garhwal and Kumaon were denuded to meet the early demand. Railways put other demand on forests as well. Before the Raniganj coalmines became operational, the forests also supplied the fuel requirements of the railways. The fuel wood requirements of the railways in the North West Provinces in the 1880’s caused considerable deforestation in the Doab. Forests in Madras region suffered wanton destruction causing alternating cycles of flood and drought in the districts of North Arcot and Chingleput. Railway requirements, as has rightly been pointed out by many scholars, formed ‘the first and by far for the most formidable’ of the forces thinning the forest. Private contractors, both Indian and European, were chiefly responsible for the destruction of the forest cover; even the Indian princes came under their influence and sphere of activity. (Cf. *This Fissured Land*, Delhi, 1992, pp.188-33).

The forest policy of the colonial administration worked within the overall framework of the priorities of the imperial policy. One of the foremost priorities was to generate more and more revenues for a ‘self-supporting’ British rule. This logic suggested that forest products had to be marketed. The colonial rule made constant efforts to find markets for the multiple species of India’s tropical forests. **Table 1** shows the surplus generated on the revenues from the sale of forest products.

**Table 1: Revenue and Surplus of Forest Department 1869-1925**

Yearly average for the period	Revenue (Rs. Million)	Surplus (Rs. Million)	Percent of column 3 to column 2
1869-70 to 1873-74	5.6	1.7	30
1874-75 to 1878-79	6.7	2.1	31
1879-80 to 1883-84	8.8	3.2	36
1884-85 to 1888-89	11.7	4.2	36
1889 -90 to 1893-94	15.9	7.3	46
1894-95 to 1898-99	17.7	7.9	45
1899-1900 to 1903-4	19.7	8.4	43
1904-1905 to 1908-9	25.7	11.6	45
1909-1910 to 1913-14	29.6	13.2	45
1914 –1915 to 1918-19	37.1	16.0	43
1919-1920 to 1923-4	55.2	18.5	34
1924 to 1925	56.7	21.3	38

(*Ibid.*, p.136; The source of the table has been cited as E.P. Stebbing, *The Forests of India*, Vols. III, London 1927, p.620)

Urban centers required forest products for fuel wood, furnitures, building timber etc. The Himalayan forests provided bamboo, sal and several species of conifer for the urban centers of Punjab and the United Provinces and for the military cantonments and hill stations. Apart from the teak export trade, trade in minor forest produce also picked up in the twentieth century. Resins, turpentine tanning materials essential oils and other associated non-timber forest products had a variety of industrial applications and foreign trade in such items showed a steady rise.

The massive importance of the forests reflected itself in other ways particularly during the two war periods. During the First World War, enormous amounts of timber and bamboo were exported to help British military operations in Egypt and Iraq. The Second World War was more devastating for Indian forests. India became the sole supplier of timber to Middle East and later to the Allied forces in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. **Table 2** gives an idea of the relative importance of the forests during the two wars.

**Table 2: India's Forests and Second World War**

Year	Outturn of timber and fuel (m. cuft)	Outturn of MFP (Rs. m)	Revenue of FD	Surplus of FD (Rs m)	Area sanctioned Under working Plans (sq. miles)
1937-38	270	11.9	-	—	62,532
1938-39	299	12.3	29.4*	7.2*	64,789
1939-40	294	12.1	32.0	7.5	64,976
1940-41	386	12.5	37.1	13.3	66,407
1941-42	310	12.7	46.2	19.4	66,583
1942-43	336	12.9	65.0	26.7	51,364
1943-44	374	15.5	101.5	44.4	50,474
1944-45	439	16.5	124.4	48.9	50,440

Note: \* average for the period 1934-35 to 1938-39

MFP – Minor Forest Produce

FD – Forest Department

(*Ibid.*, p.140; Compiled from Indian Forest Statistics, 1939-40 to 1944-45, Delhi, 1949)

Any discussion on the colonial impact on the forest cannot be complete without mentioning one of its most obvious manifestations; the decimation of wildlife. From the middle of nineteenth century, a large-scale slaughter of animals was started by the British. Much of this shooting was motivated by the desire for large 'bags'. Many Indian princes also sought to emulate the shikar exploits of the British, Another related transformation during the colonial period was the deviation of forest lands for the development of tea, coffee and rubber plantations. In fact the state's desire to commercialise the forest went hand in hand with the allotment of vast tracts of forestlands to the planters. The development of road and railway networks to facilitate the export of tea, coffee and rubber hastened the process of deforestation. Besides, the plantation economy itself had a high level of timber demand for fuel and packaging.

The colonial state has been criticised on many other accounts as well. For decline in traditional methods of forest conservation, promotion of single species teak monoculture, socio-economic and cultural marginalisation of tribals and other forest dwellers – all went a long way in bringing in an element of incongruity between forest ‘preservation’ and human existence.

## 20.3 POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

During the post independence period large tracts of forestland continued to be diverted to non-forest purposes in the name of ‘development’. Although this theme has been discussed in many accounts on forests, we shall only seek to familiarise ourselves with the nature of the problem. The phenomenal growth of population and urbanisation and the consequent extension of agriculture, construction activities, increasing industrial proliferation, mining and quarrying activities all took a massive toll on the forested areas. With the development of a large number of multipurpose projects and dams, thousands of acres of forestland were submerged. The villages and habitats of the tribals were also submerged due to impounding water in the reservoirs. The rehabilitation of the displaced also took place at the cost of neighboring forests. The politics of refugee rehabilitation also affected forest covers in many areas. The mushrooming of criminal gangs smugglers and timber mafia together with the increasing prices of timber has led to a ruthless denudation of forestland. In addition, forests have of late, also becomes a haven of many terrorist and insurgent groups. Many forests, in the North East, Jammu and Kashmir, the Terai, Andhra Pradesh have suffered due to these activities. Some of the conventional factors like forest-fires, over grazing, shifting cultivation, careless use of construction timber have had a devastating effect on forest acreage. Besides these certain other factors, neglected on account of playing a relatively small role in degradation of forest cover, have also to be taken into account. These include industrial emissions, air pollution and harmful effects of plant parasites, insects, fungi and wild animals. **Table 3** gives us a relative idea of diversion of forestlands for non-forest uses.

**Table 3: Year-wise diversion of forest land for non-forest use**

Year	Forest land diverted (in ha)
1980	Nil
1981	2672.04
1982	3246.54
1983	5702.01
1984	7837.59
1985	10608.07
1986	11963.11
1987	72780.05
1988	18765.35
1989	20365.05
Total	153939.81

**Source:** N C Saxena, *Forests, People and Profit*

According to some estimates, India is steadily losing about 15 lakh ha of good forestland annually. The number of trees that are felled annually could be almost equal to country's consumption of oil, coal and electricity put together. According to the State of Forest Report, 1995, which is the fifth assessment of the forest cover of India based on visual and digital interpretation of the satellite data pertaining to the period 1991-93, the total forest cover of the country is 639,600 sq. km., which is only 19.45% of the total geographical area of the country. Non-government estimates however differ on the question of the extent of the forest cover in the country and give a figure below even 19%. Clearly forests have suffered even after independence was achieved.

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## 20.4 RECENT DEBATES

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Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, in *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Delhi, 1992 lay down the basic premises of the recent debate. By portraying a rather romanticised notion of man-forest relationship, the authors say that despite the grave inequalities of caste and class, the pre-colonial Indian Society had a considerable degree of coherence and stability. This permitted a rapid turnover of ruling dynasties without major upheavals at the level of the village. The cultural traditions of prudence ensured the long-term viability of production and of the institution of caste, which was its central underpinning. Elaborating their argument, the authors take the position that in pre-colonial India, resource utilisation was in harmony with nature and resource sharing among various strata of the society was very cordial. The different claims of different resources in the caste system led to a state of equilibrium in turn providing the stability to the resource demand and supply. Caste was seen as consisting of endogamous groupings that were each marked by a particular economic activity and a particular ecological niche. The analysis of the various environmental movements have been explained in terms of disruption caused by the British as it argued that in pre-British time 'there was little or no interference with the customary use of forest and forest produce'.

There have been attempts to challenge the stereotypical portrayal of the villainous role played by British. It is argued that it was the 'colonial power' that initiated systematic forest conservation policy in colonies. *Nature and The Orient*, (eds. Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran, Satpal Sangwan, Delhi, 1998) problematises the situation saying that it is an open question, however, as to whether the continuation of supposed customary land uses would have been more successful than the Company forest departments and their post-1857 successors in arresting deforestation for timber and arable cultivation. It is asserted that the evidence from other British colonies that developed forest departments at much later dates suggests that, without exclusionist forest reserve legislation, most surviving forms of 'common property management' would have faded away.

There seems to be a feeling that indigenous people were more responsible for the situation thus either they should have been trained to

modern knowledge or prohibited from those areas. Ravi S. Rajan ('Foresters and the politics of colonial agro ecology: The case of shifting cultivation and soil erosion, 1920-1950', *Studies in History*, Vol 14, No. 2 n.s. 1998) argues that the concerns for greater revenue appropriation (agricultural production) and the growing demand for wood led to 'conflict of interests'. Attempts were thus made to attain a balance between agriculture and forests; some lands were identified as suited for agricultural purposes while the marginal lands were to be developed as forests. The primacy of agriculture was thus quite evident. Antagonism between forest and agriculture was not simple as forest were considered necessary for good rains and at the same time it was believed that forest growth were harmful for ground-water as it sustained itself on the ground water only.

Scholars have also attempted to question the notion of a uniform British policy all across India and recent researches have pointed out that there were serious divergences of views on policies related with the forest/land/agriculture. Sivaramakrishnan ('Conservation and production in private forests: Bengal, 1864-1914', *Studies in History*, Vol 14, No. 2 n.s. 1998) tries to locate the debate in the context of the formulation of the Private Forest Bill in Bengal between 1865 and 1878. He tries to explore conflicting interests vis-a vis natural resources. There were several claimants and the state had to consider several probabilities before arriving at any formal policy. It was not only scientific knowledge (deforestation and desiccation) which contributed in the debate but various self interests also tried to appropriate the issue and mend the policy in one's favour. The underplay of various socio-economic interests and environmental concerns made the whole debate so complex that ultimately the bill could not be formatted.

The major issue involved in this debate was the property rights sanctioned by permanent settlement. These forests were often termed as *Jungle Mahal*, hence accepted as private property. Any attempt to withdraw or curtail the same would lead to greater resentment. This was the period when forests were much sought due to wood required for the railways. This resulted in greater deforestation, another cause of environment degradation. This has also been related with the problem of soil erosion. Although the tea-planters protested on the issue of deforestation as it caused less rainfall, their demand for more land for tea plantation in turn caused further deforestation.

Initially with the implementation of 'permanent settlement' British expected that marginal lands would also be put to better positive use as landlords will try to maximise the agricultural production on better lands and marginal lands shall be utilised for forests. However, it was not the case in eastern India, and later on, with the growing demand for wood we see a demand for a private forest policy to regulate the land-use. The issue became more controversial as the claims of *raiyyat* over the forest produces (which they argued were recognised by tradition) became an issue. The landlords on the other hand argued that it led to degradation in forest cover as also soil erosion. Conversion of private forests to

protected forests would lead to the denial of claims to *raiyat*. The problem further compounded as the demand of wood for railways increased. It became an issue of primacy of right to use – commercial exploitation was important or the traditional claims would take precedence.

Some scholars have also taken the debate into the realm of internal divisions with the colonial perspective. Ravi S. Rajan argues that the so-called colonial policy was not a monolithic structure and that there were quite evident heterogeneous views. He tries to explain the issue with respect to soil erosion and shifting cultivation by examining the deliberations at the Empire Forestry Conference.

The problem of conservation of forest- wild was of immense significance especially in the 1930s. The colonial policy differed on controlled silviculture with the help of shifting cultivation and abandoning cultivation as such. Examples from West Africa were cited to point out the benefits of shifting cultivation, but it was put aside by citing the nature of forests in India. The other related issue was the tussle between the foresters and scientific advisors. 'The political damage caused by shifting cultivation was its inducing nomadic habits on parts of the local population, discouraging agricultural progress and facilitating the evasion of taxes'. The problem caused by shifting cultivation was not only of tax evasion but the larger issue of timber trade\ supply to cater to the needs of British.

The problem of soil erosion on the one hand was caused by the cutting of forests for commercial use and on the other due to clearing of land for agricultural purposes. It was further fuelled by the ever-increasing population pressure and overgrazing. To tackle the problem, scientific studies were encouraged, but, 'given the social roots of the technological experts, it was asserted that the nature of their technical intervention was by no means value neutral'.

Another area of exploration has been the analysis of the various policies having a bearing on the environmental issues. Vasant Saberwal ('Science and the Desiccationist Discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', *Environment and History* 4, 3 (1997)) argues for the growing recognition within the academic ecological community of the complexities of ecosystem functioning and the limits to our predictive and explanatory capabilities with regard to large-scale ecological phenomenon. His explanation brings it out that the concerns for conservation evolved over a long period of time along with the growth in the scientific knowledge about environment. The need to examine the role of state in appropriation of scientific knowledge in support of its claims has been pointed out.

Ajai Skaria ('Being Jangali: The Politics of Wildness', *Studies in History*, Vol 14, No. 2 n.s. 1998, pp. 193-215; Also *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness*, Delhi, 1998) highlights the general negligence of marginal areas and laments the importance of traditional issues. He tries to locate the problems of marginal issues in the context of politics

of growth. The same is very important for the construction of ideas such as jangali/tribal/primitive.

Skaria questions the notion whereby tribals were equated with 'wild' and 'primitive' and settled agriculture (under the patronage of state) with civilisation. 'What the British did not realise was that Baroda officials' attitudes were an acknowledgement of the political rather than criminal nature of the *dhad*, its connection with *giras* and shared sovereignties. So a *dhad* usually called not for retaliation but for a renegotiation of shared Sovereignty'. He also explores the various processes of mutual dependence between state and tribal polities. Revenue rights and authority were shared in a complex web of relationship where weakness of the either side was visible in the terms of resource sharing.

## PART B

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### 20.5 FOREST POLICIES: A POLITICO-LEGAL ANALYSIS

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From a rich source of forest wealth in the pre-independence period, India has been reduced today to a position of minimal forest cover. Reckless exploitation coupled with absence of a comprehensive policy has led to a massive shrinkage in forest resource. As such, the need for a national policy governing all aspects of forest management becomes pertinent. The formulation of a 'suitable' forest policy began in the colonial period itself. From the establishment of the forest department in 1857 to the National Forest Policy, 1988, India has come a long way trying to cope with the problem of declining forest cover. We shall discuss this development in the following sub-sections.

#### 20.5.1 The Colonial Background

Any discussion of the forest question in independent India cannot be complete without a description of colonial forest policies. Motivated ostensibly by exploitative reasons, the British laid the foundations of a forest policy in India. The ever-expanding British Empire was faced with a forest resource crunch. In a pre-industrial society like India, agriculture and forests had to bear the brunt of the burden. We have already discussed avenues of exploitation/colonial onslaught in detail in an earlier Section. In order to rationalise their unbridled exploitation as well as to appease the voices of opposition both within and outside the officialdom, the British took some measures that were given the shape of policy. Let us have a look at the major milestones in the evolution of forest policies under the British rule and in independent India.

- 1 **Establishment of the Forest Department:** Stating forest administration up to the 1857 rebellion a melancholy failure the Governor-General of India Lord Dalhousie called for the establishment of a department. The motive behind such a step was to ensure a sustained supply of timber for the railways. The Imperial Forest Department was formed

in 1865 and Dietrich Brandis, a German botanist was appointed as the first Inspector General of Forests.

- 1 **First Indian Forest Act 1865:** This act empowered the forest officials to issue local rules for conserving Indian Forests. Hurriedly drafted, this act was the first attempt by the state to assert its monopoly. It was primarily passed to facilitate the acquisition of those forest areas that had been earmarked for the railway supplies. It merely sought to establish the claims of the state to the forests it immediately required, subject to the provision, that existing rights were not abridged.
  
- 1 **Indian Forest Act 1878:** The forest act of 1865 had been drafted in a haphazard manner and thus had many shortcomings. Immediately after its enactment therefore the search began for a more comprehensive piece of legislation. A preliminary draft prepared by Brandis was circulated for discussion. A conference of forest officers was convened in 1875 to frame a new act. Three positions cropped up during the deliberations on the proposed act:
  - 1 The *annexationists* wanted total state control over all forest areas.
  - 1 The *pragmatists* argued for state management of ecologically sensitive and strategically valuable forests, allowing others to remain under communal systems of management.
  - 1 The third position often called the *populist* position completely rejected all forms of state intervention holding that tribals and peasants must exercise sovereign rights over woodland.

The matter was finally resolved in favour of the annexationists. The concrete proposals were embodied in Brandis' memorandum of 1875, which, together with Baden-Powel's paper (in the forest conference) formed the basis of 1878 Act. The Act cleared all confusions about the proprietary status of the forests and attempted to obliterate centuries old customary rights of the rural populations and forest dwellers.

It classified the forests into 3 categories:

- a) 'Reserved' Forest: In such forests, which were compact and connected to the towns, a legal separation of rights was aimed at. A permanent settlement either extinguished all private rights or transferred them elsewhere or in exceptional circumstances allowed their limited exercise.
  
- b) 'Protected' Forests: These were also controlled by the state. Here the rights were recorded but not settled. The state control was firmly maintained by outlining detailed provisions for the reservation of a particular tree species as and when they became commercially viable and for closing the forests whenever required for grazing and fuel wood collection.
  
- c) 'Village' Forests: The name itself explains this category. Such forest was under the control of the villages and were used by their inhabitants.

The new legislation greatly enhanced the punitive powers of the forest officials and prescribed a comprehensive set of penalties for violation of the act.

- 1 **Forest Policy 1894:** In 1894, the British government issued a circular which formed the basis of the future forest policy. Once again, while reiterating the propriety right of the state, the policy also sought to administer the forests for the benefit of the taxpayers and the people living in the vicinity of the forests. One very harsh feature of this policy was the fact that forest preservation was placed secondary to agriculture. It said “ wherever an effective demand for culturable land exists and can be supplied by forest area, the land should ordinarily be relinquished without hesitation”. Besides, a fourfold classification of forests was also made:
  - a) Forests (mainly on hill slopes), the preservation of which is important on physical and climatic grounds;
  - b) Forest, which afford a supply of valuable timbers for commercial purpose;
  - c) Minor forests, generally meant to meet the fuel, fodder, and timber requirements of the dependent communities;
  - d) Pasture lands, to cater to the needs of the local population.

Side by side the policy pronouncements, the government also tried to setup institutes to promote better utilisation of forest resources. Thus a forest school was established at Dehradun in 1878 for the training of forest rangers. This school received the status of a State Forest College in 1906 after which forest officers also began to receive training in India.

- 1 **Indian Forest Act of 1927:** This was the first comprehensive piece of legislation on forests under the British rule. Prior to its enactment the general law relating to forest in British India was contained in the Indian Forest Act 1878 and its amendments. It was an act to consolidate the law relating to the forests, the transit of forest produce and the duty leviable on timber and other forest produce. For the present purpose let us discuss some of the basis features of the 1927 Act.
  - a) It enhanced the powers of the state to create reserve forests, village forests and protected forests;
  - b) Provided state regulation of the timber and non-timber forest produce;
  - c) Prescribed penalties for the violation of the act;
  - d) Formalised the duties and powers of forest bureaucracy.

With some amendments in the subsequent years, the Indian Forest Act of 1927 continues to be operational even today.

The British forest policies were conditioned by utilitarian goals. Use

rather than conservation was the keynote of the colonial policy. Thus under the garb of promoting the interests of the people and the welfare of the nation what the British actually did was a ruthless exploitation of the forests. Extraction of timber, both quantitatively and qualitatively, was carried out mercilessly. Expansion of agriculture at the cost of forest cover was a blatant device to maximise revenue for the expanding empire. Further, the policies promulgated by them had several shortcomings. There was no provision for development of forest infrastructure or forest based industries. Unlike Industrial and Agricultural Commission, no commission was setup to promote the forest wealth. While the tribals and rural populations were divested of their customary rights no attempt was made to control or regulate the forests of the native states and the *zamindars*. Wildlife protection was never important for them. Forestry research and education however, was one aspect, which was taken up by the state but no follow up action was taken. It was never followed as a long-term positive policy resulting in an increase in the forest field. Even the recommendations of the Agricultural Commission of India (1928) for better management of the forest or Sir Herbert Howard (1944) were not adhered to.

### 20.5.2 Independent India

India inherited the colonial forest policy (1894) and the Indian Forest Act (1927). However circumstances had changed by then and the spatial and temporal context of the old legislations had been altered. Population had increased substantially and so had the attendant demands of fuel, food, fodder, timber etc. Urbanisation and industrial development had also increased as had the defence requirements. Added to this was the growing realisation of forest as essential to the physical and climatic balance of a country. This assumed particular importance in the context of two factors; firstly rapid deforestation during the two world wars by the colonial state and secondly the reckless exploitation of private forest by native states and *zamindars* during the last years of British rule. The situation called for a change in approach. Forests had to be brought in the realm of planned economic development. It was admitted by the planners that per capita forest area and per capita consumption of ground wood, pulp etc. was poor. A need therefore was felt for an increase in overall coverage and even regional distribution of forest. A change in approach was what was required. A chronological account of the efforts made in this direction follows.

- a) **Central Board of Forestry (1950):** The starting point of the new approach was the constitution of Central Board of Forestry (CBF) to guide the government in the formulation of various policies and programmes. This body became the supreme advisory body for the revision of the old forest policy. The meeting and recommendations of the Central Board resulted in the pronouncement of a new National Forest Policy on May 12, 1952.
- b) **National Forest Policy 1952:** The preamble of the National Forest Policy 1952 spelt out six supreme needs for the formulation of the policy.

- 1 Balanced and complementary land use;
- 1 Checking denudation in the mountainous regions, erosion along big rivers and invasion of the sea-lands on the coastal tracts;
- 1 Balanced physical and climatic conditions;
- 1 Supply of progressively increasing demands of grazing, firewood, small wood for agricultural implements;
- 1 Timber and other forest products for the requirements of defence, communication and the industry; and
- 1 Maximisation of annual revenue in perpetuity consistent with the fulfillment of the six vital needs.

Let us now examine some of the tenets of the National Forest Policy of 1952.

- i) The new policy presented a functional clarification of the state/privately owned forest as follows.
  - Protected forests.
  - National forests.
  - Village forests, and
  - Tree lands

This classification was more comprehensive than the 1894 classification and had no relation whatsoever with the classification of Forests under the Indian Forest Act of 1927.

- ii) The policy also observed that the villagers residing in the vicinity of forests should be permitted to use minor forest products in a restricted way.
- iii) There was to be no diversion of forestland for agricultural purpose anywhere in the country. This was a major departure from the colonial policy.
- iv) The need for controlling sand dunes in Rajasthan was emphasized as was checking of erosion and denudation along susceptible regions.
- v) The policy also expressed the desirability to expand forest/ tree cover on lands owned by government and public as well as by private institutions.
- vi) The policy also advocated that 1/3 of the geographical area of the country should have forest cover and further suggested that mountainous region which was more prone to erosion and denudation should have 60% area under forests whereas the plains can have 20% forested area.

- vii) Called for a sustained supply of raw materials for forest-based industries and other associated enterprises like transport and defence. The importance of research arrangement in various branches of forestry and interaction between research institutions and industries was to be encouraged.
  - viii) Expressed the need to control private forests as well as to check grazing and shifting cultivation.
  - ix) Recommended proper forest legislation in the states and union territories of India where it had not been enacted and also analyzed the importance of awareness in the preservation of forests and education of forest officers and rangers.
  - x) Proper attention was to be paid to the preservation of rare fauna like lion' one horned rhino etc. As such sanctuaries and national parks were to be setup.
- c) **National Forest Policy, 1988:** The inadequacies and shortcomings of the 1952 policy coupled with the realisation that it had been unable to address the multifarious issues of independent India on a long term basis called for a revision in the existing forest policy. Indications of the necessity of a new approach were already coming.

The Estimates Committee (1968-69) of the Fourth Lok Sabha in its 76<sup>th</sup> report, expressed the opinion that a reappraisal of the National Forest Policy (1952) should be made by an adhoc body of experts in the light of experience gained during the years of development plans and the research and technologies advance made in the fields of forestry. Subsequently The National Commission on Agriculture (1976) advocated that there were two important points on which the National Forest Policy should rest:

- 1 Meeting the requirement of industrial wood for forest-based industries, defense, communications and other public purpose as well as fuel wood and fodder for the rural community; and
- 1 Meeting the present and future demands for protective and re-creative functions of forests.

The Commission thus sought to adopt a middle path between utilisation and preservation of forest wealth. It recommended:

- a) A change of strategy from a more conservation oriented forestry to a more dynamic programme of *production forestry*;
- b) The future production programme was to concentrate on clear felling of valuable mixed forests, mixed quality forest and inaccessible hardwood forests and planting these areas with suitable fast growing species yielding higher returns per unit area; and
- c) People's demands (mainly villagers and tribals) had to be accommodated in order to save forests. This it suggested was to be achieved through

social forestry on village and private lands or on growing trees on lands accessible to village people.

The next development was the passage of the Forest Conservation Act 1980. This act was a departure from the existing utilitarian forest policy as it aimed at conservation. For the first time, an act especially aimed at conservation was enacted in independent India. The basic objective of the act was to limit the power of the state governments to de-reserve forests or divert forestlands for non-forest purposes. Under the provisions of the Act, prior approval of the central government was required for diversion of forestlands for non-forest purposes. This act was amended in 1988 and some new provisions were added. In the meanwhile N.D. Tiwari Committee was constituted in February, 1980 to examine the adequacy of the existing administrative, legal and institutional arrangements for protecting environment. The committee noted that the commercial interests and the needs of the poor for essential fuel and fodder contributed to the denudation of forests and regulation. It thus recommended the inclusion of fuel and fodder supply in the Minimum Needs Programme.

Two years later in 1982 a Forest ministers' meeting was called. Two themes were retreated at the meeting — conservation for environmental and ecological needs and for preservation of wild life and genetic resources and development for rehabilitation of forests and wildlife, for enlarging the resource base through afforestation and social and farm forestry programmes. A meeting of the central board of Forestry held in 1987 was presided by prime minister and attended by chief ministers of different states. It was decided that

- 1 Forest lands would be used for preserving soil and water systems and not for generating state incomes;
- 1 All supplies to the market and industry would be met from farm forestry;
- 1 Small and marginal farmers would be especially encouraged to use their degraded lands for meeting commercial requirements.

The new forest was policy announced in December 1988 which was a marked departure from the 1952 National Forest Policy. Henceforth, forests were not to be exploited for industrial and other commercial purposes but were meant to conserve soil and environment and meet the subsistence requirements of the local people. The main features of the 1988 policy are:

- a) Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and restoration of ecological balance;
- b) Conservation of natural heritage by preserving the natural forests and protecting the vast genetic resources for the benefit of the posterity;

- c) Meeting the basic needs of the people, especially fuel wood, fodder and small timber for the rural and tribal people;
- d) Maintaining the intrinsic relationship between forests and the tribal and other poor people living in and around forests by protecting their customary rights and concessions in the forests.

The implementation the policy was facilitated by the Government. of India by issuing a resolution on 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1990. *The June 1990 Guidelines* make it possible for the forest department to involve people in the management of forest.

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## 20.6 SUMMARY

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We have seen that basic texture of man-forest relationship underwent a massive change over a period of time. From a position where the forests were venerated and cared for, to one of conscious exploitation, things have changed dramatically. The fact that this indiscriminate exploitation still goes on is a thing to seriously ponder upon.

In spite of massive changes in scenario, our forests continue to be governed by a law enacted almost 75 years ago. Since 1927, our priorities and demands have changed just on the population pressure. Added to this are the inherent contradictions in our forest policies.

The constant need for suitable forest legislation has led to enactment of many acts and promulgation of many policies during the colonial and postcolonial period. The requirements of forest preservation have not been advanced completely even after the 1988 Forest policy.

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## 20.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Write an essay on the forest resources and their management in Colonial India.
- 2) Summarise the views of the following about forest resources in about 200 words each:
  - i) Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha
  - ii) Ravi S. Rajan
  - iii) Ajai Skaria
- 3) Examine the main thrust of the following in about 300 words each:
  - i) Colonial forest policies
  - ii) National Forest Policy 1952

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## 20.8 SUGGESTED READING

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Madhav Gadgil & Ramchandra Guha, *This Frayed Land: An Ecological History of India*, Delhi, 1992.

Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1800*, Delhi, 1995.

Richard H. Grove, Vinita Damodaran, Satpal Sangwan, eds., *Nature & The Orient, The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*, Delhi, 1998.

Ajai Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wilderness*, Delhi, 1988.