

# CURRENT STATUS AND CHALLENGES FOR CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIODIVERSITY



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CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE  
USE OF BIODIVERSITY**

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## **PREFACE**

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As the human population increases, so does the pressure on ecosystems, since we draw ever more resources from them. Our ecological footprint on the planet is unsustainable and will become unbearable unless we change our consumption patterns and our behavior in general. Use of biological diversity in a sustainable manner means to use of natural resources at a rate that the Earth can renew them. It's a way to ensure that we meet the needs of both present and future generations.

Today our only option is to manage productivity and resources in a sustainable manner, reducing waste wherever possible, using the principles of adaptive management, and taking into account of traditional knowledge which contributes to the maintenance of ecosystem services. Sustainable activities can also be applied in many sectors, including organic farming, environmental impact assessments, certification and eco-labelling, management of protected areas, productivity, etc.

The management and conservation of biodiversity has gained serious social concern during the past few decades both nationally and internationally. Educating youngsters is one of the major steps for conservation as they have to protect nature. In this context an international seminar was organized to highlight the importance of appropriate planning for solutions in some of the burning environmental problems which we face in the century.

This book presents unique information on various aspects of Environmental science, Environment and society, Biodiversity, Entomology, Fishery science, Toxicology, Molecular biology, etc. We sincerely hope that it will be of great asset to researchers, field scientists, policy makers, etc. in the conservation and biodiversity.

Editors

Dr.S. Sheeba.

Dr. N. Ratheesh.



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**CHAPTER 23****BRITISH FOREST POLICY IN INDIA****Jissa S**

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**ABSTRACT**

Conservation of forest formed an integral part of the society from the Vedic period itself. Forest plays a pivotal role in sustaining the balance of country's Ecological systems and the quality of life of its people. Traditionally forest is a dwelling place for tribes, which they judiciously used for their livelihood on the basis of some strong customary beliefs practised - in tune with the wild, the flora and fauna. The British colonial intervention is considered a watershed in the ecological history of India which interrupted the traditional forest rights and thereby restricted the economic, cultural and basic rights of the forest dwellers. The British administration understood the commercial importance of Indian forest resources and in the name of forest conservation they in fact commercially exploited our forest. The Forest Charter of 1855 was the first move towards forest conservation from the part of British rulers. The forest rights of tribes were restricted through the Forest Act of 1865. The classification of forest area was made by the Forest Act, 1878. The Forest Act, 1927 provided elaborate measures for the state control over forests. Though the British colonial interventions in the forest was solely for their commercial interest and eventually killed the forest rights of people, it opened a new vista for coining forest policies in the independent India.

**Key words:** British, conservation, forest, tribals, customary rights

**Introduction**

Forests have been depending by humans for their livelihood from time immemorial. As soon as Homo sapiens appeared on the earth, they started cutting down trees for timber and fuel. Any instability in an ecosystem will cause imbalance to the total ecological set up of a particular zone or region. Forest ecosystem because of their varied functions play important role in global element cycle. Until the beginning of industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the European forest situation remained stable. In India the conservation of forest has a long history. In the pre-colonial

period the development of rights in forest was not of the same order as the development of rights in cultivated land. In traditional period most rights were traditional customary rights, rather than rights which had been specifically granted or defined. The British administrators understood the commercial importance of Indian forest produce and in the name of forest conservation they began to exploit our forest resources. The forest policy in India changed over a period of time. The arrival of British and their perception about forest resources created enormous change in

the forest cover, forest resources and the rights of tribal people in India.

### **Forest conservation in Ancient India**

Conservation of forests formed an integral part of the Vedic tradition of India. Utmost importance was given by the Maurya Kingdom for forest conservation. Kautilya's Arthashastra is well known treatise for statecraft and administration, illustrates environmental awareness. Importance was given on the protection and management of forests in this book. The Arthashastra divided the country between the Himalayas and the ocean regions and forest is one among these. Arthashastra demonstrates Kautilya's perception and concern about the living creatures, domestic and wild animals, plants and vegetations. Penalties and punishments were specified for injuring living creatures. Capture or killing of animals were prohibited in these sanctuaries. As a valuable resource utmost importance was given for the sustainable use of forest. Manusmriti depicts the fact that religion plays diversified role in saving the integrity of the natural environment. Charaka-Samhita and Susruta-Samhita are considered as the significant ancient Indian documents in medical science. Apart from documenting the medical perspectives, they dealt with the ecological and environmental perspectives as well. The Vedas make a distinction between what they call grama and aranya. Rig Veda mentioned that plants had preceded animals, particularly man, in the process of evolution. In Ishopanishad, the concepts of sustainable development and conservation were established. The Tinnai concept of Tamil Sangam texts is a fascinating example of a detailed and early perception of the significance of eco zones. The indigenous conservation of the forest was made in various customary ways. The continuing worship of trees was an integral part of the traditional society. The veneration of

particular trees was practised in the religious shrines of Hindus and Muslims. The frequency of sacred groves is a common theme in Indian scenario. Tribal cohesion and equitable social organisation means better enforcement of norms to ensure the ecological balance. Outside flows of material were largely restricted. Regarding the relationship of tribals with the forest, the Committee on Forests and Tribal in India (1982) stated that "they are not only forest dwellers but also for centuries they have evolved a way of life which, on the one hand, is woven around forest ecology and forest resources, on the other hand, ensures that the forest is protected against the degradation by man and nature" by evolving their own conservative systems. These traditional systems of conservation of resources were ensured through restrictions on using the economically useful species. This meant that the tribal population had a real stake in the security of the resource base of their territory and evolved a number of cultural traditions to ensure its sustenance. Thus, they put various kinds of restrictions such as seasonal restrictions, total protection to certain areas, protection to certain valuable species, which have some religious importance etc. Most tribal communities forbade the cutting or hunting during certain periods in the year and allowed it then only on the annual day of renewal. Restrictions were put also during certain stages of life of different species. Killing of pregnant animals were forbidden by most tribes.

### **Evolution of British Forest Policy**

The transformation of civilization from the habit of food gatherer to food grower, there has been continuous clearance of vegetation for these purposes. The inhabitants of forest, the adivasis depended the forest for their livelihood. Since ancient times the forests played crucial significance in the socio-economic life as well as ritual life of the

adivasis. However, since the second half of the 19th century they were prohibited from unrestricted use of the forest. With the rise of bourgeoisie the concept of forest has changed. They in their profit mentality started converting forest resources into commodities and which arrested the individual forest right as a whole. Hence forest as a source of profit and in the label of enterprise subject to bourgeoisie law of property. When the British arrived in India they carried with them this notion of the forest. The advent of British rule introduced commercialisation of agriculture with new sets of land settlements which intensified the process that evicted the adivasis from their own agricultural land and prevented their easy access to forest resources. While the traditional agrarian system of the adivasis was disintegrating by the alien land revenue systems, the Government introduced policies to protect the forest resources. There was marked exploitative and imperialistic economic policy followed by the British. The demand of wood for railway sleepers caused cutting of forest trees tremendously and this amounted huge profit for British government and British companies.

### **Forest Policy, 1855**

By recognising the ill effects of erroneous land policies of the British administrators their concern was more towards the growing threat of raw materials needed for state goals like expansion of railway networks than the environmental or social impact of deforestation. The first effort to initiate the conservation of forest policies grew out of these concerns. In 1855, governor general Lord Delhousie circulated a memorandum directing that teak should be declared forest property and its trade strictly prohibited. The forest Charter of 1855 changed the status of waste land to government property in India.

### **Indian Forest Act, 1865**

The Imperial Forest Department established in 1864 initiated various legislations with the help of German Forester Dietrich Brandis. The 1865 act was legislated with the objective of asserting state monopoly on forest resources. Brandis argued about the influence of forest on climate, rainfall, and irrigation sources as a strong tool to the imposition of state control over forests. The 1865 act gave undisputable power to the government to regulate the forest and pastures. The main aim of the act was full monopoly of the British over Indian forest land. The act also provided for the protection of a forest only after it was declared a government forest. But for effective control a provision included which empowered the government to protect any forest area in anticipation of its management and demarcation.

As per Section 2 of the Forest Act 1865, the definition of forest is "land covered with trees, brushwood and jungle". It was very much criticised as inhibiting the raising of appropriate plantations on barren land by the state. It was advised that any land falling under it may be designated as forest, thereby bracketed under the stringent provisions of the Act, if the government so decided. Through this first nationwide regulation of Indian forests, the British policy makers sought to reverse the process of indiscriminate land clearance encouraged by their policies over the previous half century. The law allowed officials to manage and preserve forest resources for strategic and development needs by regulating trade and exploitation of forest products. Section 2 of the Act allowed the government to declare as 'Government Forest', "such land covered with trees, brushwood or jungle, as they may define for the purpose by such notification: Provided that such notification shall not abridge or affect any existing rights of

individuals or communities. The government also claimed the right to make rules concerning the preservation of trees, and State Governments were empowered to prescribe punishments for violation as per the provisions of the Act. In India, British rulers transformed the indigenous decentralized forest management systems into a centralized system, created a bureaucratic agency, Forest Department (FD) to meet their timber and revenue demands. The bureaucratic structure of the FD with its hierarchical working practices, though non-responsive to societal needs, was in line with the Colonial Government's requirements

### **Forest Act of 1878**

In India, by the Forest Act of 1878, the British Administration acquired the sovereignty of all wastelands which by definition included forests. This Act also enabled the administration to demarcate reserved and protected forests. The local rights were refused in the case of protected forests while some privileges which were given to the local people by the government which can be taken away are anytime. This Act classified the forests into three – reserved forests, protected forests and village forests. It was attempted to regulate the collection of forest produce by forest dwellers and some activities declared as offence and imprisonment and fines were imposed in this policy to establish the state control over forests.

### **National Forest Policy, 1894**

The Forest Policy 1894, the first formal policy in India gave much importance to commercial exploitation of forest products, state custodianship and permanent cultivation. This policy is primarily based on Dr. Voelcker's recommendations given in a report on 'Improvement of Indian Agriculture', 1893. Land use policies followed after the 1878 act were apparently

having an adverse impact on agricultural production. According to Voelcker, "the tendency of our system of government has, to a considerable extent, been to break up village communities, and now for the most part they are heterogeneous bodies rather than communities". In his report submitted in 1893 Voelcker mentioned that Indian forest policy was having a detrimental impact on rural social structure and should be modified in order to support agricultural production. Through this policy the British Administration encouraged the Zamindars to convert the open forests into agricultural land for enhancing the revenue earning of the state. In 1894 the Government of India issued Circular 22-F which was to become the guiding document of forest policy for the remainder of the colonial period. Among the most significant changes in the new policy was a reorientation with increased attention to the inter-relationship between forestry and agriculture. In particular the restrictive nature of the regulations on forest access and use were singled out. So far as the provision of the forest product needs of the agricultural population was concerned, emphasis on the dependence of agricultural communities on surrounding forests had led in 1894 to a relaxation of earlier restrictions on the access to and use of forest. In this policy, the forests were divided into four classes. The first class generally situated in hill slopes and essential to protect the cultivated plains from landslides and they played a conservation role for the benefit of cultivated plains and assured revenue to the state. The second class of forests consisted of valuable timber trees like devadharu (Cedrus deodara), sal (Shorea robusta) and teak (Tectona grandis), and due to commercial interest, natural regeneration of devadharu and sal are promoted and artificial regeneration of teak was developed. The third class of forests as per the classification under this policy meant for minor forests, which yields low quality

timber, fuel wood and fodder and for meeting the demands of local people. Finally, the fourth class covered the pastures and grazing lands, the local people were allowed to use them with restrictions.

### **Indian Forest Act, 1927**

This Act inversely affected the life of forest dependent communities. The penalties and procedures given in this Act aimed to extend the state's control over forests as well as diminishing the status of people's rights over forest rights. The village communities were alienated from their age-old symbiotic association with forests. Further amendments were also made to restrain the local use of forests mainly by forest dependent communities. There was a steady and considerable increase in revenue obtained from the forests. The passing of Government of India Act 1935 made an important change in the British forest administration in India. A two tiered system was established and forest was included in the provincial list. The last reformulation of Indian forest policy under British colonial auspices was the post-war policy statement issued in 1944 by Sir Herbert Howard the Inspector-General of Indian forests. India was increasingly hit by anti-colonial agitation throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this situation restrictive forest laws were used by the nationalists to resist the colonial administration. Mahatma Gandhi selected forest laws as a target of his 1930 civil disobedience campaign.

### **Conclusion**

Until the Industrial Revolution forest remained stable in Europe. The increasing demand for timber in the construction field was the concern for thinking about forest conservation rather than other impact of deforestation. In the ancient India conservation of forest was made among the inhabitants in a traditional customary way.

Cutting of particular trees and killing of animals were restricted. The British Forest policies deprived the forest dwellers of their forest rights and inversely affected their livelihood. Even though the first forest policy initiated was in connection with supplying timber for the railway network improvement- the vein to transport resources fastly for shipment, the subsequent forest policies implemented helped the British administrators to procure more revenue and it made them introducing more restrictive policies.

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