

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF SOCIAL FORESTRY

FORESTS IN ANCIENT INDIA

In the pre-British period, the successive waves of invasion and immigration into India inevitably had their effect on the forests. Even as long ago as 2000 B. C., there is evidence of flourishing Dravidian civilisation, but it would appear to have been in consonance with the forests that were then in such abundance. Aryans migrated to India between 2000 B. C. and 1000 B. C. approximately. According to C. D. Chatterjee "there can be no difference of opinion on the fact that systematic deforestation in the Punjab was carried out by Aryans to meet the need of their numerous settlements¹.

Forests in Vedic Period

The various Vedas written about 1500 B. C. described the forests. It is believed that the Rishis had knowledge of poisonous and medicinal values of various trees, shrubs and herbs. The Mahabharata and Ramayana give attractive descriptions of forests like Dandakaranya, Nandavan and Khandavavan. The Ramayana is the oldest and most popular epic of Hindus, and is written by Valmiki Rishi, "In the Balkand of Ramayana, Vishwamitra took Rama and Laxman to different

1] Chatterjee, C. D. : Forestry in Ancient India, West Bengal. Forests Centenary Commemoration, Volume, p. 2.

places starting from Ayodhya to the confluence of Sarayu and Ganga. Vishwamitra took Rama and Laxman into thick forests"².

Mahabharat is written by Ved Vyas. According to Mahabharata, the region around Indraprastha (i.e. Khandwa Pradesh) was a forested locality. There is a mention that Sal Forests abounded along Saraswati river. "The Pandwas escaped from Jatugriha and roamed in dense forests in different parts of India till their marriage with Draupadi"³.

Forests in Maurya Period

Information about forests during this period is available from various sources. These are Kautilya's Arthashastra (321 B. C.), India of Megasthenes (305 B. C.), inscriptions of Ashoka (273 B.C., 236 B.C.), etc. It is known that King Ashoka had regular cadres for the protection and management of forests under well framed rules. In the administration of Chandra Gupta Maurya, there was a regular Forest Department administered by the Kupyadhyaksha (Superintendent of Forest Products). The Kupyadhyaksha was assisted by a number of Vanapalas or Forest Guards. The duties of Kupyadhyaksha as specified in the Arthashastra were to increase the productivity of the forests, to sell trees after fixing their prices. He was also responsible to classify all flowering trees, medicinal herbs and poisonous plants and impose fines on all those who cut down trees in the forests without permission.

2] Valmiki Ramayan : Balkand, A. 24, Sloks 13, 14, 15.

3] Mahabharat Adiparva, Adhyay 149, Sloks 23, p. 449.

Kautilya's Arthashastra mentions three classes of forests in the Mauryan Empire. These were :

- i) Reserved Forests
- ii) Forests donated to eminent Brahmins and
- iii) Forests for the public

Reserved forests were of two categories namely, (a) reserved forest for the King and (b) reserved for the State. Forests for the Kings were mainly for hunting and pleasure. Forests for the State were meant for capture of elephants and supply of timber.

Forests in the Gupta Period

Forests were one of the main sources of revenue in the Gupta Period. There are records of the collection of forest revenue. Plantations of fruit trees were carried out in the forests. Forests were supplying timber, bamboos, canes, rope-making plants, medicinal herbs, etc.

Forests in the Muslim Period

With the muslim invasion, the local people who were defeated sought refuge in the forests which they cleared for settling down. The invaders did not have any special interest in the conservation of the forests either, they cleared them for strategic reasons or even for other purposes. They were however, interested in forests for hunting and in the creation and maintenance of gardens besides planting of trees along

the highways and canals. The great Mughal Emperor Akbar, who evinced interest in the planting of trees along canals directed, "that on both sides of the land down to Hissar, trees of every description, both for shade and blossom be planted so as to make it like the canal under the tree in paradise⁴."

The Ain. E. Akbari records that "elephants roamed in the forests of Narwar, Panna, Malwa, Handia, Chanderi, Raisen, and Hoshangabad, etc"⁵.

Forests in Early British Period

In the early years of their rule, the Britishers also made large indents on the timber wealth of the country. The newly established British Administration in India was not alive to the need for careful husbanding of forest resources and was even under the impression that the forest wealth of India was inexhaustible. The British themselves were new to ideas of systematic forestry, as they had no developed forest organisation than in Britain. As supplies of finest class Oak timber become short in England; large quantities of Teak from India were used for the British Admiralty's fleet.

4] 100 Years of Forestry in India (1861-1961), Vol. I, F. R. I., Dehradun, p. 72.

5] Abdul Fazal-Ain-E-Akbari, (1961; Hindi Translation), 1873, Calcutta, p. 43.

At the close of the 18th Century, the position regarding forests in India was no better than before the advent of the Britishers. Only certain species which were acceptable for export purposes were exploited and that also in an unregulated manner. Apart from timber, the Sandalwood of South India was exploited for its way to different European markets. Infact, all the requirements needed for Governmental activities were then easily procurable from the forests. The people also obtained all their requirements without difficulty. Naturally, the state of affairs could hardly be conducive to forest conservancy. On the other hand, in many localities forests were considered an obstruction for further development of agriculture. Hence, no serious attempt was made to prevent destruction of forests. The general policy was to expand agriculture and to obtain teak and other timber for the Navy and for constructional purposes. But even in the early decades of nineteenth century, the rapid depletion of forests and their likely failure to continue to yield the requirements (especially of selected species) in adequate quantities began to be felt by the administration.

First Step Towards Forest Conservation

The first step in Indian forestry began in the South. In the year 1800, a Commission was appointed to inquire into the availability of teak in the Malabar forests. Regulations followed prohibiting the felling of the teak below 21 inches in girth. In 1805, a Forest Committee was constituted. As a result of the Forest Committee's report, a proclamation was made declaring 'royalty' rights over teak trees in the south, and prohibiting unauthorised felling of the

teak, "on 10-11-1806, the Government of Madras appointed Captain Watson of the police as Conservator of Forest with a view to organise the production of teak and other timber suitable for the Navy for ship building. Watson was thus, the first person in India to be named a conservator of forests"⁶.

In 1855, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General promulgated for the first time an outline of forest conservancy for the whole country by the issue of a Memorandum of the Government of India dated 3-8-1855. This according to Stebbing might well be termed as the "Charter of the Indian Forests". In the year 1856, Brandis was appointed as Superintendent of Forests in Pegu (Burma) and later came to Indian Services. Brandis was a fully qualified, scientifically trained forester. He had received his training in Germany, at that time the only fine training place in forestry, besides Nancy in France. Along with this scientific training, he possessed all the qualities which go to make a great scientific pioneer. His contribution as an Inspector General of Forestry of India, laid the sure foundation on which India's forestry developed so satisfactorily in the last hundred years and is what it is today.

"In 1861, Cleghorn published his book on "Forests and Gardens of South India". It did much to promote forest conservancy in India. In 1862, the Madras Forest Act was passed. On 1st November 1864, a

6] 100 Years of Forestry in India, Vol. I, p. 73.

separate Forest Department was inaugurated under the Government of India and its being placed in the firm and sure hands of Brandis, who played a great part in shaping the forest organisation of the country. Under the guidance of Brandis, the Forest Service proceeded to transform the working of India's forests from the initial practice of exploiting them merely for obtaining supplies of timber to one of treating them as a biological growing entity of much value and handling them in accordance with principles of scientific forestry.

ORGANISATION OF FORESTS UNDER REGULAR MANAGEMENT

By 1870, the foundation of the Forest Department may be said to have been well and truly laid by Brandis. A regular forestry service began to exist and definite progress in forestry was shown. During the period 1871-1900 preparation of working plans commenced and these were brought into operation in different parts of the country. A revised Indian Forest Act (Act VII of 1878) was passed in the year 1878 and it extended to all Provinces of British India with the exception of Madras, Coorg, Burma, Bihar, Hissar district of Punjab, Ajmer and Baluchistan. This Act aimed at improving on the inadequacies of the Indian Forest Act of 1865. The Revised Act provided for the constitution of reserved and protected forests. During the period of 1871-1900, further steps were taken for the technical education and training of persons to fill the controlling and executive branches of the Forest Service.

In 1878, a Forest School was inaugurated at Dehradun. The school turned out trained Forest Rangers for all the provinces. A Provincial Forest Service was established in 1891, with a view to recruit in India itself a suitable cadre of Forest Officers. During the period 1871-1900, considerable progress was also made in Forest Administration. Much work went into construction of buildings and development of communications.

PROGRESS OF FORESTRY IN 1900-1947

The first quarter of the present century would constitute the next stage in the progress of forestry in India. There was general all round progress in different fields of forestry throughout this period. In 1906, the Imperial Forest Research Institute was established with six officers namely, the Silviculturist, Superintendent of Forest Working Plans, Forest Chemist and Forest Economist. In the year 1914, the main building of Forest Research Institute was opened by Lord Curzon at Chandbagh Dehradun. Inevitably World War I (1914-18) had its effects on the forest of the country. The shortage of imported materials caused by the German submarine campaign made it necessary to develop indigenous materials and towards this end the Forest Research Institute undertook different tests regarding the suitability of local materials.

As a result of the movement for Indian Home Rule organised in 1916 and the Non-cooperation Movement that followed, there was a general defiance against forest laws and damage to forests was caused by fire in some places.

The next stage in this history includes the period 1926-1947. In the political changes in 1921 'Forests' became a transferable subject and the administration of its forests came to rest in the Government of the province concerned. In 1926, the Government of India announced the amalgamation of the post of Inspector General of Forests with that of the President of the Forest Research Institute. "In the late twenties of this century, interest first began in wild life conservation. A few sanctuaries were set up in different provinces and pioneers like Milroy in Assam contributed much to stimulate though in favour of the great heritage of the country in its varied wild life"⁷.

With the Indianisation of the Indian Forest Service in 1922 (whereby 40 percent of the vacancies were reserved for Indians) Indian officers became a common part of the Indian Forest Service. With the coming in of the Government of India Act 1935, "Forests" which after great controversy had become a 'Transferable Subject' became entirely the concern of provinces.

Towards the end of the World War II, Howard (as Inspector General of Forests) made out a note on a post-war policy for India, mainly in order to rehabilitate the over-worked forests and improve future forest working. As a result, a number of post-war development schemes were initiated in the last few years of this period, involving large-scale plantation activity, expansion of and improvement in means of communication, construction of staff quarters and other buildings.

7] 100 Years of Forestry in India, Vol. 1, p. 83 (1961).

New forest based industries also began to come into existence in different parts of the country, some of them were big undertakings like the news factory at Nepa Nagar in Madhya Pradesh. Each province devoted greater attention to the preparation and revision of its working plans.

Forestry in India - After Independence

With the attainment of Independence on 15th August, 1947, by far all the British Officers, who had done much to Indian Forestry left India and the Indian Officers assumed charge as in other fields^{of} Govt., of the forest administration in all the sphere at the centre and in the provinces. Many development schemes for forestry were initiated. The Central Board of Forestry was constituted in the year 1948, comprising the State Forest Ministers as members and Minister for Agriculture and of the Indian Union as its Chairman.

CONTROL OF PRIVATE FORESTS

With the abolition of Zamindari, practically in all states of India, large areas of private forests were vested in the Government. A major work of the Forest Services in the early 1950's thus, came about to be the central, organisation and management of the erstwhile private forests. By virtue of the foresight of the State Government and the Forest Service, extensive private forests thus, came under regular

management which would otherwise have been lost. This happened specially in Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and other states.

NATIONAL FOREST POLICY

In 1952, the Government of India enunciated a new National Forest Policy, enlarging on the earlier forest policy of 1894 and making good the omissions noticed in it especially with regard to the protective functions of forests. Much labour was put in by Chaturvedi (the first Inspector General of Forests) in the framing of the new policy. Also in 1950-52, new efforts were undertaken namely,

- a) to adopt a National Festival of Tree Planting (Van-Mahotsava),
- b) to devise measures for "Wild Life Conservation", and
- c) to place "Soil Conservation" on an All India Footing.

The latter has since emerged rapidly as a separate organisation, dealing with the problems of soil conservation on all lands including forest lands. Most of the forests of the country are controlled by respective State Governments in which they are located, because forest has been included in the State list in the Constitution of India.

A new feature in this last period of the forest century of forestry in India is the development of international interest in Forestry under the auspices of the Forestry Division of Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Mention may be made for instance,

of the United States' assistance in setting up a new pilot scale paper plant in the Forest Research Institute and, Food and Agriculture Organisations' assistance in developing logging technique.

India launched its First Five Year Plan in 1951 and since then forestry has progressed but on a slow pace.

RECONSTITUTION OF THE INDIAN FOREST SERVICE

An event of major importance happened in 1966, when after special Parliamentary Legislation, the Indian Forest Service was freshly constituted and an initial recruitment/selection took place for the Indian Forest Service from the existant State Forest Services. This was an important landmark in the histroy of Post-Independance forestry and gave considerable moral boost as well as reasonable opportunities for the serving forest officers, even though the emoluments and the status left a good deal to be desired. Over the course of years, a major expansion of the forest service has taken place to cope with the increased responsibilities of work and the pace of development programme, particularly under the Five Year Plans.

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE

Another important event affecting forestry in recent years was the appointment of the National Commission on Agriculture, in August 1970. The Government resolution setting up the commissiion specifically referred to forestry as one of the items for study and report by the

commission and includes as parts of Terms of Reference the following :

Development of forestry, including farm forestry as a factor in agricultural progress as a source of raw material for industry, export as well as for sustaining the ecological balance in nature and for providing employment opportunities to large section of tribal and other population living in these areas. The report of the commission was presented in January, 1976 and included a full volume on forestry. The commission recommended the following programmes :

- i) Man-made Forests Production Forestry
- ii) Social Forestry
- iii) Forest Research and Education