

The Past and Present Status of Forest in INDIA: A Synoptic Study.

Dr. S. Arun Das

Department of Geography,

Manasagangotri, University of Mysore, Mysore. India.

Dr. B. K. Ravindranath

Department of Linguistic Anthropology,

Manasagangotri, University of Mysore, Mysore.

Dr. V. Mada Suresh

Department of Geography, University of Madras, Chennai, India

Prior to 1864 the Britishers had a negative view about forest. Britishers viewed forest cover as an obstruction to the prosperity of the country and no considerable revenue to the government. To enhance revenue they converted forest into agriculture land. Huge quantity of teak timber was exported to London for ship building. Another major toll of deforestation was at the time of the expansion of Indian Railways from north to south and west to east. Again during the world war period the Forest department supplied 2,28076 tons of timber and bamboo for construction of bridges railway line, ships and for construction of buildings to help the military operation abroad. The British governor general in 1862 first felt of establishing the Forest Department to have whole control and systematic cutting. The first Forest department was established with the assistance of German forester in 1864.

However the first Forest act was passed in 1865, Later in 1875 it was reformed and there by the British Monopolized the right on forest with some relaxation's to the forest dwellers and the villagers. The forest under post independence situation saw protection, conservation and utilization. The forest was protected from the private enterprises. Conservation policies were implemented. The strict conservation act was questioned and argued as a strong obstacle in the development of forest based industries. The policy was revived to suit the forest-based industries, the slow growing species of plants were replaced by fast growing species. The conservation policies were tuned to commercial oriented forest production and management. Too rapid exploitation of forest to meet the industrial requirement called for the installation of 16 Forest Development Corporations in different states by 1979 – 1980. At present the forest cover of the country was estimated to be 678,333 km², which is 20.64% of the geographic area of the country.

This paper emphasis on the forest cover in india prior to independence and the status of forest after independence. Secondly the functional structure of the forest

department and the program s envisaged for afforestation and to conserve forest. Thirldy, it explains the analytical results of the social forest program(1980) and the Joint Forest program(1990). Fourthly the impact of deforestation on the land use, and desertification with special reference to Southern Karnataka.

An elaborative review of literature is the main source of information for the present paper. A few field visits to the Village forest committee sites and the interaction with the forest department are the other source of information.

The forest cover in India has depleted drastically in the past two centuries. But to bring back the forest cover to the previous state is a fact of great debate. Despite the implementation of various forest programs and policies, achieving the minimum target of 33 percent is considered to be the best successful result. The responsibility has to shouldered not only by the forest department. The NGO's, the CBO, the Village communities and the tribal community have to play a key role for the success of the forest conservation and development.

Keywords: Indian Forest, Forest Policy, Joint Forest Management, Desertification