

**REPORT OF COMMITTEE
ON FORESTS AND TRIBALS IN INDIA ***

***DR. B.K. ROY BURMAN COMMITTEE -
SEPTEMBER 1982***

**** Tribal Commissions and Committees in India.
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The Committee was constituted on 9.4.1980 to suggest re-orientation of the forest policy to serve the tribal economy in accordance with the resolution adopted at the Conference of the Ministers in charge of Forests and Tribal Development held in July 1978.

At the conference it was resolved that:

1. The development of forests, instead of being planned in isolation, should form an integral part of the comprehensive plans of Integrated Tribal Development.
2. Forest Department should constitute better organised forest labour co-operative societies within a time-bound programme of 2-3 years to undertake all forestry operations replacing intermediaries.
3. The right of collection of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) by tribals and its marketing for remunerative price to tribals should be ensured.
4. Forest villages should be abolished and be converted into revenue villages.

Guidelines will have to be prepared to enable states to orient these results into practice. For drawing up the guidelines, it has been decided to constitute a Committee having the following composition:

1.	Prof. B.K. Roy Burman	Chairman
2.	Shri S.A. Shaha	Member
3.	Shri N.J. Joshi	Member
4.	Shri Ranjit Singh	Member
5.	Shri J.N. Pande	Member
6.	Shri K.S. Chandrasekharan	Member
7.	Shri Munawar Hussain	Member

8.	Shri D.N. Tiwari	Member
9.	Dr. Bhupinder Singh	Member-Secretary

The following were the terms of reference for the deliberations of the Committee:

1. Appraisal of the nature of rights of tribals in respect of land and forest.
2. Review of integrated forestry development programmes with particular reference to social forestry.
3. Review of horticulture, agro-forestry and other productive programmes with particular reference to satisfaction of the basic consumption needs of tribals, generation of employment and creation of incremental income for the tribal and the non-tribal segments of the indigenous population.
4. Review of the activities of the various bodies concerned with forest and tribal economy with reference to their role in promotion of interests of tribal economy.
5. Concrete suggestions for guidelines to be laid down to re-orient forest policy so that *inter alia* it serves the interests of the tribal economy.

In a forwarding letter the Chairman of the Committee, Prof. B.K. Roy Burman has remarked as follows.

“It gives me great pleasure to submit to you the Report of the Committee on Development of Forestry keeping in view the interests of the tribals. Among the terms of reference of our committee, one was to suggest guidelines for orientation of forest policy in a way that it serves the interests of forests and tribal economy. We felt that there is a symbiotic relationship between the tribal social organisation and forest economy in the specific historical context of our country. The over-

whelming majority of the population living in forests are tribal communities. 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 and, on the other, ensures that the forest is protected against depredation by man and nature. The symbiotic relationship suffered a set-back during the colonial rule when forest was looked upon only as a source of maximization of profit and not as a vital link between human habitat and the larger environment. Fortunately, in recent years there is an all-round recognition among many, including perceptive foresters, that this line of approach requires to be completely changed. There cannot be any development of forest without development of the forest-dwelling tribal communities.”

INTRODUCTION

Directly or indirectly, in the tribal mind, forest symbolises life in its manifold manifestations, i.e., home, worship, food, employment, income, and the entire gamut. Tribals can, in fact, be regarded as children of the forest. It has been possible for tribal communities to subsist for generations with a reasonable standard of health, because forest provided them food such as fruits, tubers, leafy-vegetables, succulent shoots, honey, flowers, juices, gums, game, fish, etc.

The realisation that development of forests and well-being of tribals are interdependent should be deep-rooted for sound management of the eco-system; the relationship should not only be properly understood, but should also be made the bed-rock of the operational policy.

Integrated development of forests and rural (particularly tribal) areas has been a major concern in the recommendations of various bodies and individuals from time to time. The Dhebar Commission (1961), the Hari Singh Committee (1967), the National Commission on Agriculture (1976), the Conference of State Ministers in charge of

Forests and Tribal Development (1978), the Working Group on Tribal Development during 1980-85, and the Central Board of Forestry (1950, 1956 and 1980) emphasised it.

In the background of the aforesaid desiderata, the growing alienation between the forest managers and forest dwellers (the thin wedge of which started dividing the two more than a century ago) has been a disturbing feature. The consensus among the ecologists, planners, administrators, foresters and sociologists, has been that the gulf between the two can be bridged to the benefit of all, if the tribal is involved as an active partner in various forest operations like afforestation, harvesting, collection and processing of MFP, etc. With a view to achieving a co-ordinated policy, the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs felt the need to constitute a committee to suggest guidelines for the re-orientation of forest policy. As will be seen from our recommendations, our main pre-occupation has been with reference to the last term, i.e., guidelines for the re-orientation of the forest policy so that it serves the interest of forest and tribal economy.

We hope that Government of India and the states would give serious thought to the recommendations. We feel these will go a long way in ameliorating the economic condition of tribals, increased production of forest produce, and protection and improvement of environment of the country.

FOREST IN INDIA

Forest have to fulfil three sets of needs:

- (a) Ecological security
- (b) Fuel, fodder, timber and other domestic needs of the population
- (c) Needs of villages, small-scale, medium-scale and large-scale industries.

(a) Ecological Security

The extent of forest cover is a good indicator of the health of the land. The large-scale deforestation in recent decades has rendered the sensitive catchment areas in the Himalayan and other hilly areas particularly vulnerable to soil erosion. The country can hope to achieve ecological security only by increasing the vegetal cover to tackle the following problems of land degradation.

1. According to an estimate made by the Ministry of Agriculture in March 1980, as much as 175 million hectares (mh) out of the country's total land area of 304 mh for which records exist, are subject to environmental problem. The break up is as per Table 1 given below:

Table 1: Land Areas with Environmental Problems

Problem	Area (million hectares)
1. Serious water and wind-erosion	150.00
2. Shifting cultivation	3.00
3. Water-logging	6.00
4. Saline soils	4.50
5. Alkali soils	2.50
6. Diara land	2.40
7. Other culturable wasteland fit for reclamation	6.60
Total	175.00
(57.2% of the Total Land Area)	

2. In a study made in 1972, it was estimated that on an average, India was losing about 6,000 million tonnes of top soil per annum through water erosion and that these represented, in terms of major nutrients N-P-K alone, an annual loss of Rs. 700 crores.

3. Again, according to the Report of the National Commission on Floods (1980), the losses on account of floods in 1976, 1977 and 1978 were Rs. 889 crores, Rs. 1,200 crores and Rs. 1,091 crores, respectively.
4. The Himalayan eco-system has considerably deteriorated, resulting in floods in the Indo-Gangetic plains thereby causing heavy damage to property and crops and untold human misery. Since the run-off of rainwater from denuded areas is far greater than from well-wooded slopes, a great deal of water which would otherwise have been retained as sub-soil and groundwater, is today being lost as surface run-off, often causing further erosion and floods in the process.

(b) People's Needs

Forestry has to provide fuel, human and animal nutrition, medicine and forest produce of daily needs.

1. A significant feature of the Indian energy scene is the important role of non-commercial forms of energy, namely firewood, agricultural waste and animal dung. The contribution from firewood, agricultural waste and animal dung in the total non-commercial energy consumption is 65%, 15% and 20%, respectively. The rural communities will continue to depend heavily on firewood for several decades to come. A large programme of fuel and farm forestry is, therefore, being taken up in the Sixth Plan, the target being set at 13 million hectares of plantation.
2. The rural and urban population also depends on forest for supply of small timber, bamboo, cane, thatching grasses, resins, gums, leaves, oilseeds, tan dyes, fibre, flowers, aromatic products, medicinal plants and various other products.

(c) Industrial Raw Material

A number of villages, small, medium and large-scale industries depend on forests, for supply of raw material.

1. The importance of forest-based industries is being over-whelmingly realised due to their potential for providing large-scale employment mostly in rural areas.
2. Forest-based industries are now finding it extremely difficult to meet their requirement of raw material. The situations are likely to become critical in the next decade. Immediate action is called for increasing the resource-base.

In conformity with the said objectives, the major areas of thrust in forestry development should be the following:

1. Improving the environment by protecting the forests and undertaking massive afforestation programmes in the degraded areas by involving tribals as partners in management and profits.
2. Meeting the requirements of the village and tribal communities as well as those of defence, communications and industry.
3. Undertaking a massive programme of social forestry, farm forestry and village fuel-wood plantation which can yield fuel, fodder, fruit and fertilizer of the soil (through fixation of nitrogen).
4. Providing gainful employment to the weaker sections of the society through harvesting of timber and bamboo and scientific development of MFP.
5. Popularising agro-forestry, silvi-pastoral, etc., mixed systems.
6. Affording strict protection to wildlife and other gene pools which are facing the danger of extinction.

TRIBALS AND FORESTS

The tribal communities in India largely occupy forested regions where for a long period in their history they have lived in isolation but in harmony with nature. They have had symbiotic relationship with the forest which continues undisturbed in the interior areas even now.

The forests not only provide them food, material to build houses, fuel for cooking, light and warmth, fodder for their cattle, but also satisfy the deep-rooted sentiments. Their folk-lore revolves around forest. Tribal life is connected one way or the other with forests, right from birth to death.

The benefits accruing to tribals from forests are various and derived in a variety of ways. The tribals are so accustomed to these benefits that they have become a part of their daily routine. In areas where forests exist, not only the able-bodied worker but also the old and infirm as well as children bring something, however modest it may be, to the household, whereby they have the satisfaction of having contributed their mite. This ensures an inbuilt system of social security in these areas.

Fuel-wood in the context of tribal people is not merely used for cooking, but also for warmth and lighting purposes. The people, by and large, do not have any warm clothes to protect them from the winter cold and the only method by which they keep themselves warm is by being near fire. In fact, the material existence of the people depends on forest to such an extent that they cannot be visualised in the absence of the forests. It appears that tribals and forests are ecologically and economically inseparable. They have co-existed since time immemorial and will continue to co-exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship in future also.

Tribals have always been sentimentally attached to the forests and considered them to be nature's gift. Their folklore is full of references to the forests. There are several rites and

rituals where some forest produce is used some way or another. The local people are conversant with the medicinal plants occurring in these areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

In their 1961 Report, the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission (Dhebar Commission 1961) recommended the following measures to be adopted for linking of forest and tribal development programmes:

- (i) A basic change in forest policy to enable tribal community to have control of forest resources.
- (ii) In forest villages, assurance of security of land tenure. These villages should be made self-sufficient with the basic amenities of life such as wells, schools, dispensaries, etc.
- (iii) Vesting of management of land revenue from village forests in the village panchayats.
- (iv) Full collection and local processing of MFP. Development Corporations should be created for MFP collection.
- (v) Exploitation of major forest produce by engaging Forest Labourers Co-operative Societies.

The Committee on Tribal Economy in Forest Areas (Hari Singh Committee 1967) recommended the following measures for the economic upliftment of tribals:

- (i) Elimination of intermediaries in forests should be given priority and co-operative movement in forestry sector be mobilised.
- (ii) Forest-based industries should be established locally to provide regular employment to tribals.
- (iii) National Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation may be established to look after co-operative programmes in the tribal areas.

The National Commission on Agriculture (1976) bestowed their attention on the inter-relationship of forest economy and tribal economy and urged rationality in forest operations and better utilisation of forest produce. Some of the important recommendations are:

- (i) Fair price shops should be opened for assured supply of essential commodities at reasonable rates to tribals, including opening of Nistar Bhandars (depots) for supply of domestic forest produce requirement of tribals.
- (ii) Tribals should be allotted homestead land, where programmes of afforestation, pasture and grassland development, introduction of horticulture crops, etc., are taken up.
- (iii) Tribals should be trained for absorption in all skilled forestry jobs and in forest-based industries.
- (iv) For tackling shifting cultivation, multi-disciplinary approach should be adopted and institutional arrangements for maintenance of shifting cultivators should be ensured.

The Conference of State Ministers of Forest and Tribal Welfare on the “Role of Forest in Tribal Economy (1978)” recommended that forestry development, instead of being

planned in isolation, should become an integral part of a comprehensive plan for development of the area in which the needs of local economy should get high priority and should, consequently, influence the choice of species for each area. The Conference accepted the need for associating tribals in a big plantation programme giving individual rights on the tree and their usufruct. The Conference underlined the need for establishment of a strong co-operative base by Tribal Development Department in conjunction with the Forest Department. All social and economic development programmes should be expanded to these villages on the same lines as for the residents of other villages, and action should be taken to convert these villages into revenue villages.

The Working Group on Tribal Development during the Sixth Plan (1980-85) urged that increasing the vegetal cover to the extent of covering one-third of the country's area is a colossal programme and Forest Department in States alone cannot achieve it. To tackle the problem, people's participation should be mobilised by involving a "tree army" of Forest Development Corporations, educational institutions, voluntary organisations, communities, panchayats and private individuals.

Further, a comprehensive plan for all those Integrated Tribal Development projects which have sizeable forest area may be prepared in which tribal development and forestry development could become two co-equal goals. In the forest-rich regions, forestry-based programmes may be assigned the central position, agriculture having a secondary and supplementary role. Tribals may be involved in plantation programmes by providing them right on trees and usufruct. Other important recommendations are:

- (i) Item-wise survey of MFP, maximum collection and processing through co-operatives, and research and development programmes should be put through, to aid tribal development.
- (ii) In plantation programmes, there should be a mixture of species which yield fuel, fodder, small timber, fruit, MFP and other items of economic importance and for daily use.

- (iii) Tribals living in forest villages should be given heritable and inalienable rights over the land which they cultivate. These villages should be provided with all facilities.
- (iv) Human resource should be developed through training and extension for conversion of natural resource endowment into ready economic assets.
- (v) Training and orientation of functionaries should be paid special attention.
- (vi) Institutional finance should be attracted for forestry schemes.
- (vii) Measures for regulating shifting cultivation should be carried out within the existing social framework in the best interest of the individual families, the community and the ecology.

RESUME OF STATES' SCENE

The State Governments have taken a number of steps in pursuance of the recommendations made from time to time, particularly after the tribal sub-plans became operative. A brief resume of the action taken item-wise is given hereunder:

The Conference on the “Role of Forest in the Tribal Economy” recommended that forest villages be abolished and the States should take immediate steps to convert them into revenue villages. It was envisaged that this would enable tribals living in the forest villages acquire inalienable rights over the land and obtain benefits of the development plans hitherto denied to them. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa State Governments have converted all forest villages into revenue villages. Forest villages were established with the primary obligation to provide labour even on payment of wage, a condition for residents in the forest villages, held ultra-vires of the Constitution by the Kerala High Court.

Forest Labour Co-operative Societies

Tribal communities provide bulk of the manpower for forestry operations. Employment of forest labourers is generally through contractors. The contractors recruit labour in groups and bring them from outside. However, forest labour is casual and largely seasonal. The relationship of forest labour and employment agencies is, to a large extent, exploitative, the advantage of which is taken by the middlemen or the contractor. The arrangement may also get reflected in lower working expenses of the forest department. To ensure reasonable wage to the forest labourers and to provide them long-range employment, it has been suggested that the working of forests should be organised through co-operatives of forest labour. It has also been said that to save the tribals from exploitation, in case formation of tribal co-operatives is not immediately practicable, the contractor agency may be substituted by departmental agency in the first stage to be later replaced by forest labour co-operative societies.

Minor Forest Produce (MFP)

According to the National Commission on Agriculture, MFP has the potential to bring about an economic revolution for tribals in the country. In fact, before independence the value of MFP items used to be so low that the State Forest Department did not regard them as an important source of revenue. The tribal continued collection and sale of MFP for his sustenance till it gained commercial importance and attracted the attention of the State Governments as a source of revenue.

A large number of MFP items have acquired commercial value due to national and international demand.

In order to have adequate and sustained supply of MFP to villages, small and medium-scale industries and, at the same time, to ensure remunerative rates to the tribals for

collection, trade of a few MFP items in some of the states was nationalised. Through suitable legislation, some states acquired monopoly rights to procure nationalised items. They also fixed collection charges of MFP. Notwithstanding such steps, the economic situation of tribals hardly improved more than marginally. Even after nationalisation, the states have adopted advance purchase system for fixing rates. Since under the law the states alone can procure the nationalised commodities, purchase should be done directly by the Forest Department from tribals. In practice, however, procurement by agents appointed by the Department is more common than direct purchase by the Department. The agents purchase produce formally on behalf of the department, but the collection is channelled to the final purchaser in reality. The state becomes entitled to the difference between the agreed sale price and the collection charges. Thus, the primary objective of removing the middlemen and passing on the maximum benefit to the primary collector is defeated. The system also suffers from the defects of non-collection of material from the more interior areas, over-exploitation of accessible areas, low payment for collection to tribals and declaration of quantities less than actually collected. As a third system, in some states, collection of some of the items of MFP, whether nationalised or not, is being undertaken through co-operative of tribals (LAMPS - Large Sized Multipurpose Societies, etc.) on a monopoly basis or otherwise. In this way, three different practices are in vogue for collection of MFP, viz., through contractors and industrialists, departmental agency and through co-operatives.

Social Forestry

Having regard to the low percentage of afforested area in the country and the big gap between demand and supply of forest produce, it is essential to mount a massive effort at afforestation and involve the maximum number of people therein.

A large fraction of our population is today being forced to eke out subsistence by cultivating marginal land, overgrazing depleted pastures, cutting wood from dwindling forests and destroying the base of our national resource in many other ways. To save the forests, it is necessary to provide an economically viable scheme to such population for

diverting them from their existing activity. In the tribal areas, the sub-marginal land, being used for raising agricultural crops can more profitably be put under forestry crops which incidentally help in restoring the ecological balance. This has now been made possible by the availability of choice of suitable technology and production pattern, so that a piece of land about 1.5 hectares or so, can make a family more or less economically independent. The choice can be as wide-ranging as the capital-intensive coffee plantation at one end, through plantations of fruit-bearing trees, plantation of fodder trees linked with animal husbandry programme, host-trees for tussar, fast-growing plantations linked with forest industries and fuel-wood plantation, at the other. The traditional programmes of forest plantation are too costly and, therefore, need to be suitably modified for raising social forestry plantation involving local people in the venture as partners.

A large programme of coffee plantation has been taken up in Andhra Pradesh with financial support from Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC). Each individual tribal is assigned a piece of land for plantation and he has the right on the crop and the usufruct, but does not have the right of alienation of land. The project is said to be working well.

The Gujarat Forest Department has started social security, afforestation schemes for tribal families. In the absence of sustained employment, landless tribals indulge in illicit felling or migrate to far-off places every year in search of manual work resulting in dislocation of economic and social life for them. The forest department has developed a scheme as per which an assured monthly income is to be provided by permanently engaging a tribal family on forest plantation work earmarking plots of certain size, say of 2.5 hectare. Plantation of suitable forest species is raised in this land by the family under the supervision and guidance of the forest department. The required materials, viz., polyethylene bags, seeds, etc., are supplied by the Forest Department. The family is responsible for all operations for successful raising of the plantation, i.e., digging of pits, soil conservation measures, planting, weeding, fencing and protection of the planted crops. For the labour put in, each family is paid a monthly remuneration of Rs. 250/- for a period of 15 years. The family is also given small-size timber, bamboo, etc., for

constructing a hut near the plantation site and is allowed to cut grasses and collect MFP free of charge. At the end of the rotation period of 15 years, the family is to be given 20% share in the profit derived from the sale of the material making him partner in the profits. The measure is aimed at helping the family to stabilise and, in the process, ensure protection of the new plantation and existing forest, resulting in production of scarce fuel-wood and small timber. The scheme is expected to improve the socio-economic condition of landless tribals.

The State of Rajasthan also, has started a new scheme of social security through forest plantation, on the Gujarat pattern. The scheme is likely to cover 9,000 hectares of such land by extending benefits to 300 tribal families every year.

Forest-Based Industry

At present, forest industries are mostly located outside the tribal areas. Hence, primary forest produce has no direct link with the organised market. The processing of forest produce outside the tribal area adversely affects the tribal economy inasmuch as value addition on forest produce is siphoned off by the trader and industrialist, and no gainful employment is generated locally for the tribals.

The forest-based industries in general, and paper industries in particular, have been obtaining supplies of raw materials from the forest sector by paying unremunerative prices to the State Forest Department. As a consequence, very little investment has been made in production of raw material and regeneration of forest. Additional planned investment in the forest sector for the creation of man-made forest is essential for continued supply of raw material for the existing as well as new forest-based industries. Future expansion of pulp and paper industries will depend upon generation of additional forest resources by raising plantations of fast-growing species suitable for pulping.

Training of Personnel

To achieve integration of forest and tribal development, forestry programmes require suitable modification for which re-orientation of foresters is necessary. Foresters might acquire a good knowledge of the forests and the area, but may not develop appropriate perception and sensitivity to tribal needs and aspirations, with the result that they unwittingly develop programmes which are not in harmony with tribal ethos, culture and way of life. Tribal Development should be introduced as a subject in all the forest colleges and schools.

Rights and Concessions of Tribals

The right of tribals to collect forest produce has been accepted as a policy by a number of states, though in varying form and extent:

- (i) In Madhya Pradesh, nistar concessions and facilities have been granted which cover most of the basic needs of the tribals. They are permitted to remove firewood by headloads, fruits, leaves, bark, roots, thatching grass, medicinal herbs, fencing material free of charge, and collect and remove dry and dead firewood by carts at concessional rates. Small-size timber and bamboo required for construction and agricultural implements are provided through nistar depots at concessional rates. Grazing of cows, bullocks and buffaloes is allowed free of charge.
- (ii) In the hill area of Uttar Pradesh, 10 cft. of marketable timber like pine, kail, sisoo or 30 cft. of non-marketable miscellaneous timber is given as grant to a family every year. For every fifth house, one oak tree is given every year free. Silviculturable available trees of miscellaneous species can be removed without paying any price. Dry trees and stumps can be removed for bonafide use. Free grazing is allowed in the forest situated within a radius of 8 kilometres, for specified number of cattle, beyond which a concessional grazing fee is charged.

- (iii) Other states are gradually recognising the rights and concessions of tribals on different forest produce.

RESUME OF THE NATIONAL SCENE

From time immemorial, the tribal people have enjoyed the freedom to use the fauna and flora of the forest. This has given rise to the belief that the forest belongs to them, a conviction that even today remains rooted in their mind.

Forest Policy

Forest resources gradually came under systematic management of the state from about the middle of the nineteenth century. The state was concerned not only with maintenance of forest resources but also preservation of the environment. The following extract contains the gist of the first forest policy of 1894:

“The sole object with which State forests are administered is the public benefit. In some cases the public to be benefited are the whole body of tax-payers; in others, the people of the tract within which the forest is situated; but in almost all cases the constitution and preservation of a forest involve, in greater or lesser degree, the regulation of rights and the restriction of privileges of users in the forest areas which may have previously been enjoyed by the inhabitants of its immediate neighbourhood. These regulations and restrictions are justified only when the advantage to be gained by the public is great; and the cardinal principle to be observed is that the rights and privileges of individuals must be limited, otherwise than for their own benefit, only in such degree as is absolutely necessary to secure that advantage.”

The national scene remained nearly static during the early part of the twentieth century. However, the pressure of population was gradually increasing and by the mid-twentieth

century, the increase was more than 40%. The two World Wars affected the economy in many important ways and drew heavily on the valuable forest resource-base for meeting defence requirements. After Independence, the national leadership decided to make a determined effort for fast economic development necessitating a second look at the forest policy.

The forest policy was revised in 1952. It laid down the following basic principles for proper management of the forests of the country to derive from them the maximum benefits, direct or indirect:

- (a) Forests are valuable not only in the physical field such as prevention of soil erosion and conservation of moisture, but also in the economic field such as development of agriculture, industry and communications.
- (b) For purposes of management, forests should be classified according to the primary functions, a role a particular forest has to fulfil.
- (c) Uncontrolled and excessive grazing is incompatible with proper growth of trees and fodder grasses and must be regulated.
- (d) It is necessary to evolve a system of balanced and complementary land-use under which each type of land should be allotted to that form of use under which it will produce the most and deteriorate the least.

Soon after Independence, with the abolition of princely states and *zamindars*, action was taken to take over the private forest as government property, resulting in a period of uncertainty causing substantial damage to the standing forest crop. Considerable effort had to be made before the new area was put under systematic administration and control by adopting a uniform forest policy. Even now there are major gaps in forest land statistics in many states.

The National Commission on Agriculture recommended revision of the 1952 forest policy by incorporating significant shifts and stresses in the forest policy arising out of the recommendations of the Central Board of Forestry. The Estimates Committee (1968-69) of the Fourth Lok Sabha in its 76th Report also recommended that the national forest policy should be reappraised so as to make the new policy more purposeful, realistic, effective and operative for the development of forests and forestry in the country.

A new policy resolution is on the anvil.

The NCA has given thought to the principles which should govern revision of forest legislation, and recommended the following to be adopted:

- (a) There should be uniformity in forest law so that incompatibility in forest laws among the states is removed and there is no multiplicity of legally sanctioned authorities concerned with forestry matters.
- (b) It should be possible to tackle specific problems in different parts of the country through subsidiary rules and regulations.
- (c) A developmental approach should be followed.
- (d) There should be stringent preventive and punitive provisions, so that when a resource is allocated for development in a certain direction, it is not wasted.

We agree that there should be an Indian Forest Act enacted by the Parliament applicable throughout the country for the sake of uniformity. It should be possible to frame the Act in such a manner that states are free to make subsidiary rules and regulations under the Act to meet contingencies of local situations.

The nistar rights of tribals on forest produce should be duly recognised and there should be provision for creating 'nistar forests'.

There should be provision in the Act to eliminate the contractor agency from forest working. Forest villagers should be provided tenurial rights on land which they cultivate.

Shifting Cultivation

It is reported that there are about 233 blocks spread over 62 districts in 16 states as the affected area under shifting cultivation to a higher or lesser degree, involving nearly 12% of the tribal population of the country. For settling the shifting cultivators so far, only piece-meal attempts have been made but a comprehensive approach in study, research and application has yet to emerge.

The need for integrated approach involving multi-disciplinary teams as per different models for each separate region has been accepted at the national level. Two pilot projects - one in the Nishi area of Arunachal Pradesh, and another in the Juang area of Orissa, are under preparation. It is intended to regulate shifting cultivation within the existing social framework in the best interest of the individual, family, community and ecology.

SUMMING UP

Background

Forests occupy a central position in the tribal economy. As per FAO Reports, one-third of the world's most deprived (800 million) people live in this country needing immediate help. Forests cater to the basic needs of these people by providing food, fodder, fuel for domestic purposes, timber for construction of dwelling units and agricultural implements, and other saleable products. They also generate rural employment.

With more than 15% of the world's population, India's forest area of 74.74 million hectares (22.7% of total land area of the country) containing less than 1% of the productive forests yielding per capita forest of 0.109 hectares, has made it a forest-poor

country. Low yield from India's forests (only 10% out of 22.7% forested area is well stocked) and steadily-increasing needs of the people and industries, have resulted in high prices and acute shortage of forest commodities.

The rural population, including tribals, shares the hardship of severe firewood, timber and fodder scarcity, land degradation, soil erosion and flood damage. The state-managed and private forests (notified reserve, protected village and others) have been getting depleted under pressure of heavy demand for wood and forest products in the rural areas. Further, the depletion of forests has been instrumental in destruction of the rich fauna and flora which sustained the tribal population, exposing hill-sides to land-slides and erosion, washing away the fertile top soil making agriculture lands unproductive, leading to silting of dams and reservoirs and driving wildlife to the point of extinction. There is immediate need to restore an optional vegetal cover so that the eco-system strikes the balance again and yields the resources so direly needed.

Forest Policy

The official statement of 1894 on forest policy mentioned that regulations and restrictions were justified only when the advantage to be gained by the public is great. But forestry practices during the pre-Independence period were concerned mainly with the supply of raw materials, for industries and defence installations in the colonial set-up and hardly anything was done to ensure continuous supply from the forests of the basic needs of the population. Thus, historically, forestry activities became occupied with meeting the raw material requirements of wood-based industries emerging over a period of time. After Independence, rapid industrialisation made the forest authorities more concerned with financial rate of return, net revenue and such other indices of productivity-efficiency and, in the process, forestry got mainly linked with consumption of the urban society comprising a small fraction of the total population.

After Independence, it was considered necessary to revise the forest policy. It was felt that revolutionary changes which had taken place during the interval in the physical,

economic and political fields called for re-orientation of the old policy. The value of forests was recognised not only in industry and communications, and in the later day in agriculture, but also in the physical field for conservation of moisture and prevention of erosion.

The policy of 1952 accepted as its primary goal the need for evolving a system of balanced and complementary land-use under which each type of land is allotted to that form of use under which it would produce the most and deteriorate the least. The policy also took into consideration other goals, i.e., checking denudation, establishing tree-lands, provision of nistar facilities, defence and industrial uses and maximum revenue consistent with the primary goals. The tribal communities were granted certain concessions like collection of MFP, grazing of cattle, etc.

Developments during the three decades following the enunciation of the policy call for a review. Increase in population has given rise to demands for a variety of forest products on the one hand and pressure on land on the other hand, resulting in substantial loss of forest lands. The economic and social benefits accruing to the community from forests and forest-based industries have come to be better understood.

In their Report (1961), the Dhebar Commission recommended that the policy of 1952 should be reconsidered and that, subject to safeguards, tribals should be allowed forest lands for cultivation, their needs should be met from out-lying areas in the reserve forests and their requirements for grazing and shifting cultivation should be conceded. They were also of the view that the forest department should be deemed to be charged, as a branch of the Government, with the responsibility of participating in the betterment of the tribals side by side with the development of the forest. Enlarging, they desired that a time-schedule should be prepared by the forest department in consultation with agriculture, industries and development departments in each region with the intention of providing work to tribals all the year round. Such work should include services of the forest department like protection, conservation, exploitation, etc. It should include work

on land utilisation schemes, collection of forest produce, exploitation and processing of major and minor forest produce.

The National Commission on Agriculture referred to the inter-relationship of forest economy with rural and tribal economy. In their view, the two should not work in isolation, and the relationship between them should be considered in terms of employment, rights of user and involvement of the local people. Forestry needs strengthening by rationality in operations, larger investments and use of new technology so that it can yield a higher surplus to be shared locally, regionally and nationally as against rapid disappearance of trees and vegetation.

The Underlying Considerations

By and large, forestry operations have been regarded as revenue-earners for the state and private sectors. Tribal economy has figured little among the parameters of a forest policy and, at best, the tribals continue to be wage-earners. Benefits should flow to tribal people by imaginative forestry programmes and conservation and re-organisation of their traditional skills. In other words, the individual tribal, the local tribal community, and national interest, should be regarded as the three corners of a triangular forest policy.

It is conceded that the general subject of forests transcends the limited scope of tribals and forestry. However, it is as well to recognise that while tribal life is profoundly affected by whatever happens to the forest, forest development cannot make much headway without involvement of tribals. While, in a broad sense, forest policy and forest system should be directed towards managing a renewable endowment of vast potential for subserving national, regional as well as local development goals, the intimate complementarity of forest development and tribal development should gain wide recognition in policy and action. Further, instead of relying on policing of forests, the responsibility of their preservation should be cast on the people. The recognition should be subsumed in the understanding “tribals for forests and forests for tribals”. In short,

there needs to be a deliberate, conscious shift in the orientation and approach of the forester towards a public perspective policy.

There is lot to be said for the view that the forests should be managed primarily by the forest-dwellers and backed by technical guidance of the Forest Department. In this context, we cannot help referring to our experience in the North-East where we found a number of villages maintaining their own communal-owned forests. Some of them are well managed. The tribals and the local villagers should be considered as potential allies in the battle for re-afforestation. With it must come a profound re-organisation of the forest department. Its role should be akin to that of the agricultural extension services.

Macro-scale plans tend to blur the perspective of micro-level requirements. It is felt that little attention has so far been paid to grass-root planning. Detailed micro projections in respect of technology to be adopted, areas to be covered, species to be included, time-frame of long-range and short-range objectives should be made and fitted into the state's overall context of afforestation programmes.

In concrete terms, we recommend that:

- (a) For the existing 10% forested area of the country - measures for protection, conservation and regulated working should be stringent.
- (b) Restocking of the existing 13% degraded forest area should be quickened.
- (c) Afforestation of 10% of the country's wasteland scattered as well as in strips alongside roads, railway-lines, canals and river-banks, should be put under forestry with public participation.

The Agencies

The effort involved for (b) and (c) above would be colossal and the State Forest Departments by themselves may not be in a position to mount it, let alone achieve it. Further, the additional areas to make up to the one-third might be comprised for degraded, marginal and sub-marginal lands lying away from the existing operational and habitational areas.

The task may be divided among –

- (i) The State Forest Departments - who should look after the reserve forests.
- (ii) The village community or panchayats or individuals - charged with the responsibility of forestry in and around revenue villages.
- (iii) A “tree army” - to be raised for undertaking silviculture operations in the more distant, degraded, marginal and sub-marginal lands.

The incongruity of the British forest policy followed in India was recognised by the National Commission who made suitable recommendations. In consideration of tribal revolts against the encroachment and destruction of forests by the agents of colonial rule, a special system of forestry-management was introduced in the submontane region of Uttar Pradesh through the Kumaon Forest Panchayat Act, 1924. There have been popular movements like “Chipko” movement in Uttarakhand (U.P.), protests against mass cutting of trees in Singhbhum district (Bihar) and elsewhere in Maharashtra. A climate of participation needs to be created keeping these movements in view. A national forest policy should recognise the positive role of the people in maintaining their forest and environment in unambiguous terms and not merely in its implication.

We are quite convinced that community involvement is the only long-range solution to the question of afforestation, preservation, production and management of lands outside the reserve forest area, particularly in and around human settlements. A framework for

obtaining their interest-identification with a view to community involvement and production orientation should be evolved.

The organisational instrument for community, social and farm forestry is important. In the north-east, the village and district councils have traditionally managed their forests. It is possible that the organisations of tribal communities might in the past, have managed the surrounding forests. It may be worthwhile to revitalise these organisations and vest management of protected and village forests in them for commercial, social and farm forestry purposes. However, the “tree-army” concept would need to be worked out in more details and should at any rate, be a common child of the official and non-official agencies, the exact arrangement emerging differently in different regions. Farm forestry could be promoted individually.

Forestry and Tribal Development Programmes

In this context, we would like to make some specific suggestions. In regions having a substantial area under forest, development of forests instead of being planned in isolation, should form an integral part of the comprehensive plan of integrated tribal development. The needs of the local economy should get the highest priority in forestry programmes and should influence the choice of species to be planted in the area.

For shifting cultivation as such, no satisfactory answer has yet been found from the agricultural, silvicultural, sociological and other points of view. There is need for undertaking intensive surveys, studies, experiments, pilot projects, etc., in the field to understand it in all its variations, ramifications, implications and aspects, to evolve substitutes, remedies, etc.

From a macro point of view, it has been suggested that very broadly the approach should incorporate forestry on hill-tops, horticulture in the intermediate slopes, and terrace-cultivation in the foot-hills. Afforestation through agro-silvicultural method might meet the psychological urge of tribals to practice shifting cultivation. Shifting cultivation may

be provided full-time occupation in relating plantation of crops, development of live-stock, etc. A ten-year perspective plan may be prepared for settlement of shifting cultivation as per this three-tier agro-silviculture pattern. However, each contextual micro-situation needs to be studied to formulate a comprehensive programme of settlement of shifting cultivation in that situation. Thus, a variety of project reports should be formulated responding to each situation encountered, by interdisciplinary teams touching on all facets of tribal life.

Forest Villages

It appears to us that the institution of forest villages needs to be abolished. The forest villages may be converted into normal revenue-villages, enabling tribals living therein to acquire inalienable rights to land and obtain benefits of development plans. Maharashtra has already done this and the villagers have been granted land on permanent basis and inalienable tenure. The states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, etc., might follow suit.

Social Forestry

Basically, social forestry is designed to meet the benefits and primary needs of the tribal and rural population as opposed to the needs of industries and the urban elite. The desiderata are:

- (a) A mixed production system including fruit, fodder, grass, fuel-wood, fibre, small timber, etc.
- (b) Involvement of the beneficiaries right from the planning stage.
- (c) Minimal government control.

- (d) Financial contribution by local bodies, voluntary contributions and government subsidies.
- (e) Use of communal and government lands.

Social forestry envisages creation of wood-lots on government, communal and private marginal, sub-marginal wastelands as per a pre-determined land-use pattern, afforestation of degraded forests, block plantation along road-sides, canal-banks and railways. Thus, it is a complete production system.

In social forestry, the initiative ought to come from the tribal people and other forest-dwellers. Identification of the areas, species to be planted, institutional arrangement for protection and marketing should be done by them. In other words, for its success, the programmes should bear the hall-mark of tribal involvement. The programme would need to be given much higher priority than hitherto, since conceived as geared to tribal needs it will help relieve the pressure on forests.

One of the reasons for tardy progress of social forestry and allied programmes could be that they are being implemented without taking into consideration the corporate rights of tribal communities over lands in many areas. Democratisation of forest management is an essential, overdue step.

There is hardly any inflow of institutional finance for social forestry. By and large, financial institutions, including commercial banks and co-operatives, do not appear to have evolved norms and procedures for extending term-loans for forestry on community lands. We understand that the Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation has under its contemplation some social forestry schemes in Gujarat. In our view, this is an area where mutual co-operation will be to the benefit of both the parties, and, hence should be fully explored.

The co-operative sector too has remained rather aloof when it should have wholeheartedly participated in this essentially community-co-operative venture. We urge that it should emerge out of inhibitions, if any.

Forest-based Industries

It seems that forest-based activities occupy a comparatively minor position in the manufacturing activities in India.

Most of the forest-based industries are situated far away from the source of raw material, involving long haulage. Prima-facie, there is no direct linkage between raw material production and industrial activity. Raw material production has occurred at such places where the industry could not come up and some industries have expanded their production capacity without reference to location of raw material. Non-use of raw material due to the absence of industrial demand and non-supply of raw material due to distant location have led to generation of low employment potential in both sectors. This calls for the closest co-ordination between raw material production and forest-based industries.

We make the following recommendations partly based on those of the Group which was appointed by Government of India to go into the matter:

- (a) As far as possible, a forest-based industry should be a joint venture of the three parties, i.e., the concerned corporation, the entrepreneur and the tribal producer and collector of raw material.
- (b) Tribals should be encouraged in the context of comprehensive land-use planning to grow in the marginal farm and wasteland, raw materials for the forest-based industry, e.g., bamboo, Sabai for paper and pulp. Certain industries are already doing that, as in Bengal. Incentives may be given to tribals for the purpose.

- (c) The industry should assure take-over of the raw materials grown by the tribals as per a schedule, the concerned extension agent should work for adherence of the schedule by the tribals.
- (d) The industry-linked plantations (pine in Bastar) should not be located close to tribal habitation in order not to cause interference in Nistar rights of tribals. Location of the plantation should preferably be determined by the local officers after discussion with the concerned local tribals.
- (e) The corporate body should take up strong extension activities to motivate tribals to raise industrial raw materials on their farms as well as on available community lands.
- (f) Support activities such as establishment of fuel-wood, small timber and bamboo depots, grain-banks, etc., should be undertaken to enable the basic needs of tribals being met at their door-steps.

To our knowledge, financial institutions have not taken kindly to plantations as a resource or even raw material asset for industry. We feel that the time has now come for public lending bodies to play a positive role in providing a fillip to the plantation-industry nexus and for forestry and industry to make use of public finance.

Minor Forest Produce

Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is deemed to include all items of forest produce except timber. The Dhebar Commission (1961), Hari Singh Committee (1967), the National Commission on Agriculture (1976), and several others have laid stress on development of MFP for the benefit of tribals. In fact, the National Commission on Agriculture held that MFP possesses the potential of an economic revolution among tribals.

During drought and adverse climatic conditions, tribals depend mainly on MFP for their sustenance. Further, a study conducted in 1978 by Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, showed that between 10% to 55% of the income budget of a tribal family in the major tribal concentration states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh was obtained through sale of MFP, the rest being derived from agriculture. MFP items are an important source of sustenance and cash income for the tribes and other people living in and around forests. Apart therefrom, they are important raw material for small, village and cottage industries and contribute to national economy through import substitution and export.

Keeping in view the position of MFP in the food and income budgets of a tribal family, the right of collection by tribals of MFP without restrictions, wherever this is lacking, should be ensured. This should be followed by organised collection and marketing of MFP.

Out of more than 21,000 botanical species reported from forest areas, so far less than 3,000 species have been identified yielding MFP of some commercial importance. With dependence of a large segment of the tribal population on MFP, there is need for research and development of the forest items by various bodies like the Indian Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Forest Research Institute (FRI), the State Forest Institutes, etc.

Since the bulk of the MFP remains uncollected due to lack of infrastructural facilities in the interior areas, plans for development of roads, godowns, amenities of labour and trade channels, should be adopted aiming at full exploitation of MFP. As recommended by the National Commission on Agriculture, item-wise survey should be undertaken for a full resource inventory for each state, may be by the newly constituted Forest Survey of India. Project reports, amenable to economic appraisal, for organising collection, procurement transport, storage, grading, local processing and marketing, should be prepared. Tremendous employment potential can be generated and definite impact on tribal

economy can be made through a special drive launched for maximising collection of MFP by formulating item-wise location-specific projects.

The most crucial problem is marketing of MFP. The tribal at the lowest end receives a pitifully low recompense for the produce he collects, while the consumer has to pay an inflated price, the middle-man appropriating the large difference.

A definite procurement strategy for MFP is called for. We would like to cite the recommendations of the workshop on marketing of MFP held on 25-27 May, 1979 at Hyderabad that competitive procurement and marketing by cooperative bodies and other agencies might lead to a better price for the tribals, while keeping the co-operative bodies in trim shape. However, this should occur at the primary level to enable the price impact to be felt by the tribals.

We understand that about 2,500 Large Sized Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS) have been set-up in tribal areas of various States of the country with the three-fold objective of:

- (a) Procurement at remunerative rates from tribals and other population of their surplus farm and forest produce.
- (b) Sale at controlled or reasonable rates to them of their consumer necessities.
- (c) Extension to them of production and consumption credit.

Unscientific and indiscriminate exploitation of MFP has been making serious inroads into our resource base. Various species have been “bled” for gums, resins and medicines, in various parts of the country. Bamboo and Khair forests are facing the danger of extinction over major areas. Elimination of the avaricious contractors is likely to bring in relief. Further, in order to prevent “death-tapping” and instil quality consciousness, the tribals must be trained to collect in the correct way only specific quantities without injuring the resource base.

We find enough attention is not being paid to storage and preservation of MFP with the result that quality deterioration takes place. Improved storage techniques should be employed, using scientific methods and personnel with the requisite technical experience. The storage practices of tribals should be studied for mutual benefit and improvement. Facilities for storage in a state need to be created at primary, intermediate and apex stages.

A large part of MFP is exported from tribal areas in original, raw form. Processing is essential for value-addition and can be done at three stages:

“First-stage processing at the household level, as in respect of hill-broom grading, tamarind deseeding and defibring, Adda-leaf, Kendu (Tendu) leaf, Pipal Modi, stick-lac to seed-lac, extraction of non-edible oils. Processing at the primary society level example being tamarind concentrate, oil-extraction (power Ghani), lac, tussar reeling and spinning, bees-wax. Processing at the apex-level, examples being solvent extraction of Sal, extraction of other edible and non-edible oil, shellac, Sabai-grass, etc”.

We feel that regeneration of MFP has attracted only a token effort so far. It is of critical significance for tribal economy. Plantation of MFP should be taken up on an individual or community basis in individual or communal land by associating tribals in management and protection under the technical guidance and supervision of the forest department; while in Government land it could be taken up on the basis of right of usufruct in favour of tribals. Further, the states' five year and annual working plans should include a distinct and significant finance and implementational component for regeneration of MFP species.

The question of realisation of royalty of MFP by the forest departments from individuals, co-operatives or corporations engaged in the MFP collection should be reviewed in the interest of a suitable price to be made available to the tribal based on the market value of

the community. We would urge exemption of MFP from royalty particularly in respect of these items which fall in the co-operative sphere. But, even if royalty is to be retained, there is evidently a case for its rationalisation.

FOREST LABOURERS' CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES (FLCSs)

FLCSs have a significant role to play in generating employment, countering exploitation, promoting participation of tribals in management of their affairs and creating leadership among them.

A national seminar on economic development of Scheduled Tribes held by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay in 1979, came to the conclusion that while the FLCSs have partly succeeded in eradicating exploitation by forest contractors and in preparing tribals to participate in and manage the affairs of the societies, they have not been successful in creating additional employment. The full benefit of the societies can be obtained if they assure the tribal forest labourers work all the year round in the pursuits like collection of MFP, plantation work, nursery work, fire protection work, etc. We support the recommendation.

Biosphere Reserves

During our visit to Nagaland, we were pleasantly surprised to find dense virgin forests being maintained for generations by the tribal population of Angami and Zeliang areas around Khonoma and Jalube villages. It might be desirable to enter into a dialogue with the villagers for obtaining their concurrence to declare vulnerable parts of the range as a biosphere reserve. There are many more areas in the country which are still virgin or rain forests, e.g., in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Karnataka and Kerala. We would recommend that they should be declared as biosphere reserve for germ-plasm, gene pool and other purposes, and strict observance of their identity as such.

The concept of biosphere reserves has been viewed as an approach for maintaining the integrity in time and space of a complex biological system. It has been urged that the diversity and integrity of biotic communities of plants and animals within natural systems should be conserved for the present and future use, and genetic diversity of species on which continuing evolution depends should be promoted. Such reserves would provide vistas of future evolutionary growth, opening up vast areas of ecological and environmental research. These reserves would need to be demarcated clearly for enabling natural processes to operate without the risk of human interference. Even if the biospheres are located in the national parks/sanctuaries, they will be of exceptional value. We understand that the MAB (Man and Biosphere) Committee has completed reports in respect of two - the Nilgiri and the Namdapha biosphere reserves; and that work of preparation of documents of four biosphere reserves, viz., Nandadevi, Valley of Flowers (Uttarakhand), North Andaman Islands and Mandapam Marine reserves, has been taken up and would be completed soon.

Hence, we recommend speedy establishment of biosphere reserves for which expeditious administrative, legislative and scientific action needs to be taken by the Government of India and the State Governments.

We have come across reports of ouster of tribal families from the sites of national parks, sanctuaries, etc., without providing for an alternative source of their livelihood. These also indicate disregard of tribal interests in preference to those of sanctuaries in the maintenance of the latter. The situation needs to be rectified and the criticism that the needs of the animals have, in such cases, triumphed over that of man should not be allowed to hold validity. Now that the question of establishment of biosphere reserves is in view, the interest of tribal families would need to be borne in mind.

Management System

The crux of the problem of forest management lies in the need for integration of tribal and forest economics. The present atmosphere of confrontation between tribals and foresters should be transformed into one of co-operation and partnership.

If the interface of forestry with development has to undergo metamorphosis in the conditions of today and tomorrow, and further if the conservation-orientation has to yield ground to development orientation, community forestry may have to be accorded a fairly high position in the newly emerging pattern. This necessitates forestry activities to be carried out by many, often local institutions, rather than by a single forest department. In brief, meta-management system would have to be applied rather than super-management.

The course of the management in the progress from narrow departmental production forestry to the broad-based community forestry can be made smoother through public participation.

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