

## CHAPTER 2

### Present Status of Forest Resource in West Bengal VIS-a-VIS - India.

#### 2.1 Estimates of Forest Resources in West Bengal.

The State of West-Bengal, one of the most densely populated States in the country, being located in the eastern region of India has a total geographical area of about 88,752 square Kilometers and supports a population of 6,79,82,732 (as per 1991 provisional census). The density of population is 766 per square Kilometers which is much higher than the national density. The forest area of the State is 11,879 square Kilometers which is only 13.4 percent of the total geographical area whereas for India as a whole it stands at 23.4 per cent. The per capita forest area is 0.02 hectare which is also very low compared to the All-India per capita forest area of 0.09 hectare. The statistical data for India and West Bengal are given in table 2.1.

**TABLE 2.1 LAND DISTRIBUTION IN WEST BENGAL AND INDIA**

Particulars	West Bengal	India
1. Total Geographical area (in sq. km., 1991)	88,752	32,87,263
2. Area Under Forest (in sq. km., 1989)	11,879	7,70,078
3. Percentage of Forest area to geographical area, (1980)	13.4	23.4
4. Population (1991)	6,79,82,732	84,39,30,861
5. Per capita Forest area (in Ha.)*	0.02	0.09
6. Density of Population (per sq. km.)	766	267

Source : 1) State Report on West Bengal Forests 1990-91, Government of West Bengal.

2) The State of Forest Report 1991, Government of India.

3) Census of India, 1991 (Provisional)

The distribution of forest area in West Bengal is very much uneven and even forests are unknown to a vast majority of the population of the State. In one extreme, area under forest in Darjeeling district is 45.57 per cent of the total geographical area whereas on the other extreme it is only 0.97 per cent

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\*The average per capita forest area in the State in 1991 worked out to about 0.01 hectare as compared to All-India average of 0.08 hectare (Singh, 1994).

in Cooch Behar and 10 districts out of the 16 districts of the State have a very low percentage of area under forest. Out of these 10, 7 districts have less than one per cent of geographical area under forests. Table 2.2 indicates the district-wise distribution of forest cover in the State of West Bengal.

**TABLE 2.2 : DISTRICT WISE FOREST COVER ASSESSMENT FIGURES 1991 (Area in sq. kms)**

Serial NO.	Districts	Geographical Area	Total Forest Cover	% of forest cover
1.	Bankura	6882	753	10.94
2.	Birbhum	4545		
3.	Bardhaman	7024		
4.	Calcutta	104		
5.	Hooghly	3149		
6.	Howrah	1467		
7.	Maldah	3733	3681	5.86
8.	Mednipur	14,081		
9.	Murshidabad	5324		
10.	Nadia	3927		
11.	24 Parganas	14136		
12.	West Dinajpur	5358		
13.	Cooch Behar	3387	33	0.97
14.	Darjeeling	3149	1435	45.57
15.	Jalpaiguri	6227	1537	24.68
16.	Purulia	6259	576	9.20
	Total West Bengal	88752	8015	9.03

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Source : The State of Forest Report, 1991, Government of India.

In West Bengal, there is only one district (Darjeeling) which has more than 33 per cent forest cover and there is only one district (Jalpaiguri) which has forest cover between 19-33 per cent and rest of the 14 districts have forest cover 0.1 to 19 per cent only. But in India, there are 105 districts which have forest cover more than 33 per cent, 52 districts have forest cover between 19 to 33 per cent, 217 districts have forest cover ranging from 0.1 to 19 per cent and 39 districts do not have any discernible forests as it is shown in TABLE 2.3.

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**TABLE 2.3 : FOREST COVER DENSITY DISTRICTWISE**

	No. of districts more than 33% forest cover	No. of districts forest cover between 19-33%	No. of districts forest cover 0.1-19%	No. of districts without forest	Total No. Districts
India	105	52	217	39	413
West Bengal	1	1	14	0	16

Source : The State of Forest Report 1991, Government of India.

It is interesting to note that there is a wide gap between recorded forest area and actual vegetation cover for both the State of West Bengal and India. TABLE 2.4 reveals the fact.

**TABLE 2.4 : RECORDED FOREST AREA AND ACTUAL VEGETATION COVER COMPARATIVE Situation (Area in sq. kms.)**

Particulars	West Bengal	India
1. Recorded Forest Area	11,879	7,70,078
2. Actual Vegetation (1991 Assessment),	8,015	6,39,182
3. Percentage (2 to 1)	67.60	82.92

Source : The State of Forest Report 1991, Government of India

Thus TABLE 2.1 shows that the percentage of forest area to geographical area is 13.4 percent and 23.4 percent for the West Bengal and India respectively. However, it is not the reality, actual vegetation cover is much less and is shown in TABLE 2.5.

**TABLE 2.5 : ACTUAL VEGETATION COVER 1991 ASSESSMENT.**

	Geographical area	Actual Forest Cover assessed based on 1987-89 imagery	Actual Forest cover as % of Geographical area
India	32,87263	6,39,182	19.44
West Bengal	88,752	8015	9.0

Source : The State of Forest Report 1991, Government of India.

India placed her in the 9th position regarding forest area in the world as it is shown in TABLE 2.6.

**TABLE 2.6 : FIRST TEN IN THE WORLD**

Serial No.	Country	Forest Area (million hactares)
1.	U.S.S.R.	929
2.	Brazil	553
3.	Canada	436
4.	U.S.A.	298
5.	Zaire	178
6.	China	170
7.	Indonesia	126
8.	Australia	107
9.	India	78
10.	Peru	72

Source : State Report on West Bengal Forests 1990-91, Government of West Bengal.

In India there are different types of forests. They are broadly classified as Moist Tropical Forests, <sup>Dry Deciduous Forest,</sup> Mountain Sub-Tropical Forest, Mountain Temperate Forests, Sub-Alpine Forest, Alpine Scrub (Champion and Seth, 1968). Forests of West Bengal are of different types. Moist Tropical Forests are found mainly in the Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, 24 Paraganas and cooch Behar districts. Dry deciduous Forest are generally found in Midnapur, Bankura, Purulia, Bribhum and Burdwan. Forest types of India and West Bengal is shown in TABLE 2.7. Regionwise, as they exist now, the forests of West Bengal may be classified as: the Northern Montane and sub-Montane; the Gangetic delta; and the laterite tract in South-West-Bengal.

There are various species found in forests of West Bengal. Shorea robusta is the principal species (mainly of capping origin found in the laterite forests of South-West Bengal). Other important species are Pterocarpus marsupium, Diospyros melanoxylon, Madhuca longifoliavar latifolia, Terminalia alata, Terminalia belerica, Terminalia arjuna, Butea monosperma.

It is significant to note that about 4 billion hectares of the total terrestrial land mass is under forests, roughly half of it under tropical forests and of the remainder, temperate and broad-leaved forests account for one-third and two-thirds respectively (Soni et. al., 1992).

According to the World Resource Institute, India has a total forest area of 64.20 million hectare of which 36.54 million hectare is closed forest and the remaining 27.66 million hectare is open forest (W.R.I, 1990).

TABLE 2.7 FOREST TYPES (Area in Million Hectares)

Tropical evergr- een forests	Tropical semi eve- green forests	Tropical moist deciduous forests	Littoral swamp forests	Tropical dry deciduous forests	Tropical thorn forests	Tropical dry evergreen forest	Subtropical broad leaved hill forest	Subtropical pine forests	Subtropical dry ever green forests	Mountains wet tempe- rate forest	Himalayan moist temperate forest	Himalyan dry tempe- rate forest	Subalpine moistalpine dryalpine scrub	Total
Ind. 3.845	1.832	23.245	0.671	29.149	5.236	0.075	0.287	3.740	0.173	0.613	2.725	0.227	1.790	74.608
W.B. -	-	0.459	0.279	0.430	-	-	0.005	-	-	0.005	-	-	0.005	1.18

Ind.=India, W.B.=West Bengal

From the economic point of view Composition of forest is very important. By Composition forest may be classified as coniferous (or soft wood) and non-coniferous (or broad leaved). In the State of West Bengal, forests are under non-coniferous (or broad leaved) category. Stistically it is 11,879 square kilometres (India's Forests, 1987).

On the basis of legal status forestry may be classified as i) Reserved, ii) Protected, iii) Unclassed forests. In West Bengal the total non-coniferous forests (11,879 sq.kms) are divided into i) 7054 sq. kms. as Reserved, ii) 3772 sq. kms. as Protected forests, iii) 1053 sq. kms. as Unclassed forests (The State of Forest Report 1991). TABLE 2.8 Shows the Classification of forest area by Status.

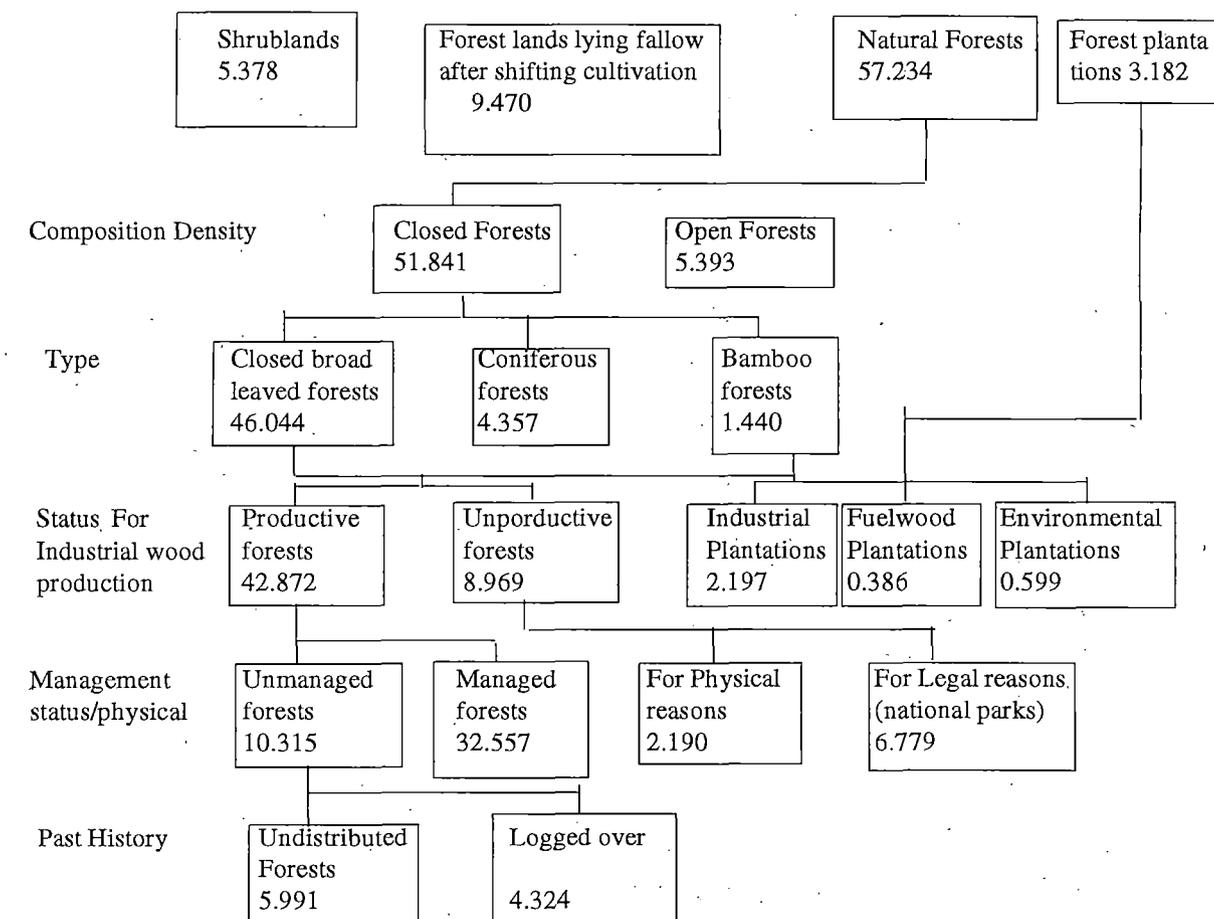
**TABLE 2.8 : Classification of Forest Area By Status in West Bengal**

	Reserved Forests	Protected Forests	Unclassed State forestand others	Total
1.Area (in sq. kms.)	7054	3772	1053	11,879
2. % of total	59%	32%	9%	100%

Source : State Report on West Bengal Forests 1990-91, office of the Principal chief Conservator of Forests, Government of West Bengal.

**Figure 2.1 : STATUS OF FORESTS IN INDIA IN 1980 ( in million hectores)**

Total forest area : 75.268 million hectares



Source : The State of India's Environment 1984-85,

The Second citizens' Report

Centre for Science and Environment.

It may also be classified in terms of exploitability where 7743 sq. kms are potentially exploitable and 4136 sq. kms. fall under other categories out of 11,879 sq. kms. (India's Forest, 1987).

The Status of forests in India, which may provide a better background (though an old one), can be shown schematically as above (Fig. 2.1)

At present, land utilisation position in West Bengal is shown in Table 2.9

**TABLE 2.9 : Land Utilisation Percentage in West Bengal (1988-89)**

1. Net area sown	60.3%
2. Current fallows	4.5%
3. Area Under forests	13.4%
4. Area not available for cultivation	19.4%
5. Other cultivated lands excluding current fallows	2.4%
Total	100%

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Source : Economic Review 1990-91

Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics,

Government of West Bengal.

## 2.2 Causes of Deforestation in West Bengal and Its Impact.

Even after recognising the importance of forests in day to day life, man himself has been the worst enemy of forests. The forests in West Bengal had a complex and chequered history, but suffered a widespread trespass and disintegration. According to the views expressed by experts, a state should maintain a forest area, covering not less than 25% of its total area. The State, taking all sorts of forests in view, has barely 9 percent of its total area under forest cover (GOWB, 1991). Large scale deforestation, mainly in the private forest holding, continued for few decades before the take over by the Government (West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953), for the last time the owners availed themselves of the chance of exploiting the forests as much as they could being threatened by the fear of expropriation. It is apprehended that, actually, within that very short period of time, the State lost forest wealth to an extent that would require quite a long time to get back. However, large scale deforestation in West Bengal has been due to the following facts :

i) Population Pressure : The State of West Bengal suffered

from high population pressure. Density of population is 766 per sq. km.<sup>1</sup>. Mingled with poverty it led to an encroachment on forest land, even mountain slopes are being cleared up to make room for agriculture violating the tenets of land-use planning and capability (Chakraborty, 1991). The extent of forest area under encroachment in the State is about 17,907.56 hectares (GOWB, 1991).

ii) Diversion of forest land : Diversion to alternative uses of forest lands took place due to requirements of land for development projects like water reservoirs industrial estates, roads, airstrips, railway, tracks, army cantonments and the like. Forest land diverted over the period 1981-89 is shown in the following table 2.10:

**TABLE 2.10 : Forest Land Diverted over the period 1981-89**

Year	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	Total
Forest area diverted (hectares)	29.74	617.69	15.325	13.309	-	329.766	16.702	18.905	81.50	1122.957

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Source : State Report on West Bengal Forests 1990-91, Office of the Principal Chief conservator of Forests, West Bengal, Calcutta.

This amount of forest land had been deforested even after the enactment of forest conservation Act, 1980. During the period from 1951 to 1976, West Bengal has lost forest areas to the extent of 3245 square kilometres. This is shown in the following table 2.11 :

**TABLE 2.11 : Loss of Forest Areas from 1951 to 1976 (sq. kms.)**

Purpose Forest	Area
1. River Valley Project	17
2. Agriculture	3137
3. Construction of Roads	26
4. Industries	29
5. Miscellaneous	36
Total	3245

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Source : Forest Statistics, 1984. Government of West Bengal, Calcutta.

iii) Over exploitation : Over exploitation occurred for industrial raw materials, railway sleepers, timber for naval

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In this connection it may be noted that with less than 2 percent of the total forest area of the world, India supports 15 percent of the world's population (Khullar, P., 1992, Indian Forester, Vo. 118, No. 10)

stores, military equipment and for arms and non-industrial uses. Annual consumption of industrial wood is estimated to reach 3.159 million m<sup>3</sup> by the turn of the Century.

iv) Grazing : Increase in human population in an agrarian economy like India leads to increase in Cattle population. These animals indiscriminately graze all over the forest land. Particularly, sheeps and goats are reared by poor because of low investment requirements, their speedy multiplicity, high-feed conversion efficiency and quick pay-off. These are an important (sometimes only) source of income for the rural poor. Table 2.12 reveals the precarious situation of live-stock which is considered to be far in excess of the carrying capacity of the land area of West Bengal. As per livestock census 1984, the total number of livestock is 16.78 millions i.e. in other words, 4 cattle per head (according to 1991 census population) and 189 heads of cattle per square kilometre of the geographical area of the State. Number of unauthorised grazing in the State for the year 1990-91 is 1072 (GOWB, 1991).

TABLE 2.12 : CATTLE POPULATION IN WEST BENGAL 1984 (in million)

Cattle	Buffalo	Total
15.80	0.98	16.78

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Source : Livestock census 1984, Department of Animal Husbandry Government of West Bengal, March, 1988.

v) Insects, Pests and Fire : Insects, pests and fire also had their role in destructing forests in West Bengal.

vi) Energy needs : Energy requirement is another cause of denudation of forest cover in West Bengal. About 70 percent of the people in rural areas of the developing countries like India still depend on the cheap source of energy [i.e. woodfuel consuming about 700 kgs. of dry fuelwood per person annually.] The annual consumption of fuelwood in West Bengal is 12.210 million tonnes and among the consumption of different fuels fuelwood constitute 41.97 percent (GOWB, 1991). In West Bengal, short-run remunerative exploitation of forests, mainly for firewood, contribute to a great extent in this respect. Many poor people of the adjacent areas of forest, indiscriminately cut trees in order to earn a living from the sale of firewood and also for selfconsumption.

vii) Rural Poverty : In spite of sustained efforts over

the last four decades to eradicate poverty the incidence of poverty in the country is high. In 1977-78, about 48 per cent of the people had been living below the poverty line and in the rural areas the percentage had been still higher at about 51 percent (GOI, 1984). Such population includes mainly landless labourers, small and marginal farmers, rural artisans, scheduled caste and tribes. These people have either no asset or asset with low productivity, few relevant skills and no regular full time job or very lowly paid jobs (Bhatia, 1988). The persistence of rural poverty in rural West Bengal exerted pressure on forests due to the fact that felling of trees has become an attractive source of income without any investment as the price of fuelwood is rising day by day. In many cases they are financed and otherwise protected by unscrupulous middlemen or contractors whose profit margin is quite high. Again, the persistence of poverty has reduced the opportunity cost of labour (Mellor, 1988). In the rural areas of West Bengal the actual wages are significantly lower than minimum wages fixed by the Government. Under such circumstances, they are easy to be exploited as a cheaper source of labour for the contractors who employ them for illegal felling of trees in the forests. The number of illegal felling will reveal the seriousness of the fact. According to West Bengal Forest Statistics total number of illegal felling in one year (1990-91) was 14210 (GOWB, 1991). It is a tragedy that 0.75 square kilometres of forests in West Bengal is being denuded every minute and if things go unchallenged or unresisted, the entire forest will vanish in another twenty years (Banabithi, 1988).

viii) Political and Administrative will : Above all, a serious and potentially dangerous cause of wide spread deforestation, in the State has been the prolonged lack of political and administrative will to protect the forests.<sup>1</sup>

ix) Commercialisation : Commercialisation of major and minor forest products through private contractors is held to be a significant cause of deforestation in India. Private contractors, guided by short-run profit motive, carried out their

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The classic example of political and administrative corruption is the recent scandal (though not in West Bengal) in Karnataka where more than 200000 cubic meters of timber, worth Rupees 600 crores, are said to have been illegally created away in Kodagu in 1993 (The Statesman, June 22, 1994).

operation of 'deforestation' with active aid and connivance of the forest department, particularly the lower level functionaries (Singh, K 1994); Guha R. 1983; P.U.D.R, 1982; GOI, 1988; Gadgil, 1991). This is ipso-facto applicable to the State of West Bengal too.

x) Nationalisation : Nationalisation of forests weakened the traditional forest conservation and management system under which the local communities protected their forest resources against exploitation by outsiders. After nationalisation they have no legal right to do so, tending to view the forests as Government property (to be used as a free access resource) rather than their own and thus hastening the process of deforestation (Singh, K, 1994; mitra, A., 1953; Gadgil and Guha, 1992)

As already mentioned, it is widely accepted view that deforestation have many adverse ecological and social impacts. Many species of forest plants and fauna become extinct or are endangered with the destruction of their forest habitats. This diminishes the State's gene-pool which is invaluable for humanity's future. For example, *Diospyros melanoxylon* (Kend) and *Madhuca latifolia* (Mahua) have become almost extinct and major faunal species are endangered with only some hares and kinds of avifauna are to be found fighting for their survival in the laterite tracts of South-West Bengal. Deforestation jeopardises the natural process of food-chain. As a result Royal-Bengal Tiger and Wild-Elephants are coming off and on into human habitats in search of foods.

Absence of forest resource has direct and adverse impact on agriculture. It lowers the productivity of land and makes yields more vulnerable or sensitive to variation in rainfall. Scanty, unusual rainfall and draughts in various parts of the State is considered to be, according to some authorities, the consequence of high rate of deforestation. It leads to fodder scarcities due to loss of soil cover and depletion of soil-moisture. It creates bare and barren land locally known as 'danga'. Drinking water become scarce as deforestation lowers the water-table due to low run-off and insufficient percolation of water. Erosion of soil is also rampant in the State, mainly in the lateritic belt and Sundarban delta. Soil run off is excessive due to bare and sloping lands. Incidence of landslide is also on the rise in the hills of North Bengal. The lives of our dams, canals, and rivers have been jeopardised by

heavy siltation. Floods are occurring in the State due to deforestation in Himalyan head waters of the drainage basins (Rieger, 1976)

Deforestation leads to fuelwood crisis and adversely affects the livelihood of rural poor, particularly women and children who have to procure these things. It is also associated with low wage rate and high incidence of rural poverty. Many rural communities who are living in the vicinity of forests suffer most because forest serve as a kind of 'food bank' to them. Various types of fruits, nuts, leaves, roots, shoots are periodically collected and various types of birds, animals and insects are hunted and consumed by these peoples to supplement their nutrition and health. In West Bengal, for example, mahua (fruits and flowers), Kend (fruits) Valai (Fruits), Kazu (Thalamass), Wild kundri (Fruits), Mu'shroom, Gurur (Bird), Hare (Animal) etc. are very popular source of food from forest. Similarly, forest is an important source of income and employment to them as they have to supplement their subsistence requirements (in lean period) by engaging themselves in activities related to processing, gathering and selling of forest products (FAO, 1989a).

Deforestation leads not only to deterioration in natural environment but also adversely affects the cultural environment of different social groups. Particularly, the cultural heritage of the tribals suffers the most. For example, in South-West Bengal 'Shikar Utsab' (hunting festival) of once forested Ayodhya hill has lost its past glory among the tribal communities. Similarly, life support systems for many other social groups have become increasingly disrupted in the process. (Barraclough and Ghimire, 1990).

### **2.3 Forest Policy and Forest Development.**

Development, conservation and utilisation of any resource depends, to a large extent, upon the policy followed by the State for the purpose. Forest is an unique and vital renewable natural resource. Debates and controversies surround the forest policies enacted by the government of India from time to time. In the early days of British rule, by and large, the British followed a laissez-faire policy regarding forest resource of the country. Upto the middle of nineteenth century, the Raj let loose a "fierce onslaught on India's forests" (Smythies,

1925). They followed such rule primarily for an uninterrupted supply of the teak export trade, supply of the sleepers for the railway network in the country, supply of suitable timber for Royal Navy, supply of shipbuilding timbers etc. on the one hand and to increase revenue on the other. In order to augment revenue "The whole policy of the time was to extend agriculture and the watchword of the time was to destroy the forests with this end in view" (Ribbentrop, 1900; Stebbing, 1926).

A policy shift came in the form of a policy document issued in 1855, known as the charter of Indian Forestry. Important and conflicting features of this policy were to assert State proprietary rights in the one hand and the obligations in the form of privileges and concessions to the local people to be exercised at the mercy of the rulers on the other. The first Forest Act was enacted in 1865, shortly after the forest department was formed, mainly to facilitate the supply of timber smoothly.

In 1874, all the provisions of the 1865 Act, except the one pertaining to arrest, was revised and a new Act was enacted in 1878. The main aim of 1878 Forest Act was to assert the absolute control and ownership right of the State, while at the same time retaining enough flexibility to deal with the diverse socio-political circumstances in which different State Forests were to be managed. Customary 'right' of the villagers over forest resources was replaced by 'privilege' which could be exercised at the mercy of the officer.

The first important shift in forest land use policy came mainly due to exorbitant exploitation of tenants by zamindars and jaigirdars<sup>1</sup>, deindustrialisation of small and Cottage industries, great famine of 1876-78, devaluation of currency etc. On the basis of Dr. Voelcker's report (1893) Government of India declared a new forest policy, known as Indian Forest Policy 1894, where claims of cultivation were stronger than the claims of forest conservation (GoI, 1894). The "Carrot and Stick" approach was called for by the 1894 forest policy which had given rise to serious discontent among the agricultural classes. The 1911 Gazetter report also support the fact. "The forest department instituted in 1855, concentrated its energies

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Zamindars & Jaigirdars - The authorised revenue collectors, holding different ranks bestowed on them by the emperor (Mughals)

on the collection of forest revenue without making any attempt at systematic conservancy. It was in fact nothing but a revenue collecting agency" (Walton, 1911).

Another policy shift occurred in 1921 when the management of forests became vested in the State Governments, while the implementation of Government of India Act 1935 resulted in forests becoming completely vested in the provinces (Sharma et. al., 1990). However, upto 1947, the forest policy of British India was formulated and guided by the imperial interest only, though there was a provision to constitute village forests in reserved forests (rarely exercised in practice) in the Indian.

After independence, control over forest was vested in the Indian State but the colonial institutional framework for forest management did not change materially (Singh, 1994). Where the colonialism collapsed, the slogan of economic development stepped in (Shiva, 1991). Between 1854 and 1952, that is roughly 100 years before independence, forest areas come down from 40 percent to 22 percent of the land area, at the annual rate of about 0.2 per cent (Datt & Sundharam, 1992). After independence, realising the necessity of developing forests, Government of India declared its forest policy in 1952 with some conflicting objectives viz., the people's need for minor forest produce, the industries demand for raw materials, the States' demand for revenue, without assigning any clear priority to them. The traditional 'rights and privileges' in the Resolution of 1894 became 'right and concessions' in the Resolution of 1952 and in actual practice it was regarded only as 'concessions' at the mercy of the forest officials (Kulkarni, 1989). Industry's demand for raw materials and States' demand for revenue took precedence over all other demands. The forest bureaucracy took the opportunity to gratify their own pocket at the cost of national interest through permitting illegal felling of trees. According to Gadgil (1992) in India the forest management practices are largely shaped and administered by a tightly knit bureaucracy, which claims to manage the forest wealth in the broad national interest on a scientific basis. But the national interest is equated to the short-term commercial interests of a narrow segment of Indian Society-the omnivores.

In the changed circumstances Government revised and shifted its policy from 'uneconomic' and 'conservation-oriented' approach to 'economic' and 'production forestry'. This signifi-

cant departure has been supported by the National Commission on Agriculture (N.C.A, 1976). Another significant shift in the post colonial forest policy is evident from its recommendation that the country should make better use of its forest resources by exporting wood and wood products to generate foreign exchange (USAID, 1970). In this context it may be pointed out that NCA recommended intensive development of minor forest product (MFP) noting with satisfaction that it was "already a fairly good net foreign exchange earner" (N.C.A, 1976).

Taking the advantage of the policy, the private contractors and industrialists, made enormous profit out of MFP trade and logging timber operation. Government policy documents and official reports have repeatedly pointed out these facts and different committees were appointed. Quite surprisingly they did not "envisage the need for any changes in the wording of the existing (1952) forest policy" (G.O.I., 1967). As a result, between 1952 and 1988 i.e. only in 36 years, our country witnessed an interesting result-forest cover has been reduced to 12 percent instead of being raised to target of 33 percent of the total geographical area (Datt and Sundharam, 1992).

Due to the inadequacies of the earlier forest policies, the Government of India introduced a new forest policy in 1988. However, it did not depart much from the acts of 1927 and 1952. The notable feature of this policy is that it tried to solve the alienation problem of the earlier policies and recognised the symbiotic relationship between the tribal people and forest, and attempted to protect the interests of the communities living within and around the forests. This new policy tried to get rid of the trap of industrialists and contractors, the twin blade of deforestation. This policy, for the first time, recognised, the conversion of forest land to non-forest uses as cognisable offence. During 1951 to 1983, the official diversion of forest lands to non-forest uses (mainly agriculture) resulted in a loss of 4.3429 million hectares and more than 25 million hectares of tree crops, groves and culturable wastelands have been cleared and brought under plough during the last 30 years (Anon, 1984; Tiwari, 1985).

According to some critics this new forest policy of 1988 is also bound to fail to resolve the inherent contradiction between the three interested parties namely, the people, the forest-based industries and the State. To them, the draft new forest act which is going to be called as "The conservation of

Forests and Natural Ecosystem Act" and proposed by our government is found to be more dangerous than the previous colonial forest law. Because, it again favoured the wildlife conservationist (urban upper and middle class, ex-hunters), 'scientific forester (corrupt foresters)' and 'industrialist (timber harvesters through captive plantations)' and denied the traditional communities' rights and people's participation. The ecological focus combined with a more traditional emphasis on State control over forest areas is the only distinctive feature of this draft. "In some respects this draft act uses 'environmental protection' as a cover or excuse to further deny the rights of local communities" (Guha, 1994). The proposed act is still strongly oriented, towards centralisation, the consolidation of the powers of government at the expense of the ordinary citizens. We may point out at least two possible reasons:

i) There are some forest officers, naturalists, anthropologists and researchers in different government bodies and organisations, who are unaware of a rural poor's love for forest rather aware of the money (mainly foreign aid flowing to the sector),.

ii) The General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) in which our Government is a party also played a role in shaping the fate of the current Indian Forest Policy. Because 'Eligibility for payments under environmental programmes shall be determined as part of a clearly defined government environmental or conservation programme and be dependent on the fulfilment of specific conditions under the government programme, including conditions related to production methods or inputs (GATT, 1994). Thus to frame and enact a good forest policy for forest development where forest resource can be used in an equitable and sustainable manner we have to perceive and accomodate the conflicting demands on the forest resource.