

REVISION OF THE NATIONAL FOREST POLICY

By

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I understand, the Union government is contemplating a revision of their forest policy of 1952. When this policy was being drafted I had collaborated (as Secretary of the M.P. Forest Policy Committee) with my revered colleague, late Shri M.D. Chaturvedi who was the Inspector General of Forests, India, at that time. I am, therefore, taking the liberty of offering some suggestions, as to what the revised policy should lay down, in the hope that they will be given the consideration they deserve.

Since 1952, much water has flown down the rivers passing through Indian forests, literally, more turbid and only occasionally clear, and it is desirable to enumerate in some detail, what changes are called for so that the revised policy will definitely arrest further depletion of the forests and place them on the way to progressive improvement, so that eventually they confer the maximum benefits on the nation for all time. Before giving my suggestions I give in brief the genesis of the present policy and its salient features.

The national policy replaced the forest policy of the British government enunciated in 1894. This revision was considered necessary because in the interval changes of far reaching importance had taken place in the economic and, more so, in the political field. The country had become independent and it was naturally thought desirable to change the management from the imperial to national outlook. The population had increased very substantially resulting in excision of large areas of forest for extending cultivation. The two World Wars had shown the dependence of defence on forest resources. The numerous schemes of reconstruction of the Planning Commission such as the river valley projects, development of industries, improvement of communications etc., leaned very heavily on products of the forest.

In view of these radical changes, forests could no longer be treated as the handmaid of agriculture, as recommended by Dr. Volcker in his report on the improvement of Indian agriculture; but because of their increasing importance in promoting national welfare they were to be regarded as the foster mother of agriculture, in as much as they check soil-erosion, regulate flow of underground water and mitigate floods so necessary for the proper growth of crops.

The fundamental principles of ideal forest management, enunciated in the 1894 policy, are truisms and were therefore reiterated. But besides these, the people's government thought it desirable to lay greater stress on a number of points, such as:—

- (a) The role of forests, *protective*, *productive* and *bio-aesthetic*, entitles them to an adequate share in land to promote balanced economy. The total overall area of forests should be one-third of the geographical area, 60% in the hills and at least 20% in the plains;

- (b) Forests should be classified on functional basis;
- (c) A system of balanced and complementary land-use should be evolved under which each type will produce most and deteriorate least ;
- (d) Create Treelands to grow timber and Fuel-cum-Fodder Reserves to save cowdung for manurial purposes and provide fodder grasses to feed the cattle at the stake, by the rural people;
- (e) Prevent indiscriminate excision of forests to extend cultivation on lands which cannot be kept permanently productive under agriculture ;
- (f) Afford protection to wildlife, persuade people to give up shifting cultivation in forests, and make people forest conscious by propaganda;
- (g) Train personnel of all ranks, organise research on forest problems, improve the tone of administration and have adequate forest laws ;
- (h) The notion widely held should be combated that forestry has no intrinsic right on land, but might be permitted on sufferance on residual land, etc.

Adequate attention has not been paid to the sagacious counsel of the 1952 policy, the ill-effects of which have now become glaring and call for immediate remedy.

Today only 23% of the geographical area is under so called forests, which are badly depleted and stocked with inferior, slow-growing species. For proper management, forests need to be reclassified according to the special object of management. Most of the excised forest has become barren as it could not be kept productive under agriculture. Practically no attempts have been made to create Treelands or Fuel-Cum-Fodder Reserves.

Wildlife management has however been put on a sounder footing to save species threatened with extinction. Shifting cultivation, which is ruining the forests, continues unabated, and practically no attempts have been made to bring home to the people the importance of the forests. Training of forest personnel has been properly organised as also research and survey of forest resources. The Indian Forest Act has been amended. Even now some people believe that forests can grow by themselves and are indestructible. Much headway is still needed to convince the people at large, including certain politicians, that to get the best value out of the forests they need to be scientifically protected, tended and regenerated, and only the annual accretion can be removed.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are offered for consideration when the policy is redrafted :—

1. The revised policy should reiterate the importance of forests to the nation, namely that they are a natural asset of immense value. If of adequate extent, ideally dispersed, scientifically managed and judiciously utilised, they can be kept *perpetually productive* and useful, thus conferring many benefits, direct and indirect, on the people. But if neglected or over-exploited and allowed to get depleted, in course of time they are sure to disappear. This will bring untold suffering and misery to the people and it may become economically infeasible to recreate forests.

Directly, forests meet the domestic indispensable needs of the people residing in close proximity to them, in respect of small timber, firewood, and a variety of other forest products and provide facilities for the grazing of their livestock. Forests also yield various products of commercial and industrial value, such as structural timber, fuelwood, charcoal, raw materials for making paper, newsprint, panel products, as also leaves, gums, oils, resin, tan-stuff etc., and a number of other products which have or can have an economic value.

2. All biologically productive land of the country, preferably by catchments of optimum size, should be, once for all time, be allotted for utilisation as either agriculture (including horticulture) or as forests (including pasturage). The overall proportion of land under forests should not be less than one-third of the total geographical area—60% in the hilly regions and at least 20% in the plains; Of this forest area atleast 10% adjoining cultivation, comprising the so-called wastelands or marginally productive agricultural land, should be developed as Community Forests to eventually meet all the indispensable demands of the rural population, including grass and grazing for their essential animals, so that this pressure is removed from the government forests, which could then be developed to meet to the utmost extent the commercial and industrial demand.

All land of the country not utilised for any other purpose should be classed as "forest".

When working out the economics of forestry no allowance should be made for the land value *in lieu* of the many indirect benefits that the forests confer.

3. For purposes of management the government forests should be classified as under:—

- (a) *National Forests*:—To include (i) the technically called *protection* forests which are to be maintained undisturbed except for protective works, to preserve the physical features; (ii) the degraded forests the rehabilitation of which is so expensive that the states cannot meet the cost and the forests are doing damage to other states in the lower regions; and (iii) forests of all-India importance from the defence point of view.
- (b) *Commercial forests*:—Forests which are managed to yield produce of commercial or industrial value. Immediately after exploitation of such forests the felled over area should be restocked completely by planting with site-suitable valuable and fast growing species so that the ecological conditions do not deteriorate;

All existing forests should be aerially surveyed to determine their stocking and then on the basis of these, integrated industries should be set up in suitable locations.

- (c) *Local Supply Forests*:—Forests abutting on cultivation and pre-eminently suited for growing small timber and fuelwood. So long as the suggested Community Forests have not come into bearing these forest should be kept open to grazing with strictly controlled incidence and periodically closed, to enable the young plants of forest species to get established and the grasses to recoup their vigour;

(d) *Other Forests*:—National Parks, Sanctuaries, Preservation Plots, forest Villages, etc.,

4. No forest should be allowed to be disforested without the sanction of the Legislature and only after provision is made to reforest an equivalent area in a suitable locality;

5. Shifting cultivation should be declared illegal and people should be weaned of this baneful habit by persuasion, if necessary by giving them prepared field in suitable localities for fixed agriculture ;

6. Management of *Private* forests should be strictly controlled to ensure that they are being utilised judiciously to prevent their denudation.

7. Agriculture, Veterinary or Geological Services of government are mainly concerned with research, advice and extension work. Besides doing all this the Forest Service actually manages a perpetually renewable valuable asset over 25% of the geographical area of the country. The personnel of the Forest Service has to work in out of the way places without adequate modern amenities or facilities for the education of their children. They should therefore be given special consideration regarding their remuneration to cheerfully manage their "green gold" for promoting the welfare of the people including the future generations.

8. Being a long term enterprise, forestry requires to be protected against the vagaries of the annual budget. When existing forests are felled in excess of the increment of the forests, with a view to quickly replace the decrepit growth by forest crops of valuable fast growing species, the extra revenue obtained should be funded and given to the Forest Department when it is in a position to utilise it for creating extra man-made forests, or for watershed protection, environment conservation, better logging, export promotion, provision of recreational facilities, etc.

9. To carry the message of forests to the people at large, and thus enlist their willing co-operation in protection and tending, audiovisual publicity should be a necessary part of the activities of the Forest Departments.

SUMMARY

Since the enunciation, soon after independence, of the National Forest Policy in 1952, many changes of far reaching consequence have taken place in the country, in the social and the economic field, which necessitate restatement of this Policy. The area under forest has progressively shrunk.

Had the sagacious counsel of the 1952 policy been heeded and adequate Treelands and Fuel-cum-Fodder Reserves created, and grazing in the forest controlled, we would have solved to a great extent, the vexed problem of *Nistar* and saved the accessible forests from depletion.

The best solution for meeting the changed circumstances, and yet safeguarding the future, is to exploit the existing depleted forests of inferior, slow-growing trees, as early as feasible, and then to fully restock the felled over area with superior, faster growing trees before the ecological conditions deteriorate, and thereafter to protect and tend the crops thus obtained till their financial maturity.

The revised policy should also lay down that research should be intensified, better amenities provided to the forest personnel and people made forest-conscious by audio-visual propaganda.

राष्ट्रीय वन नीति का पुनरीक्षण

लेखक कामता प्रसाद सागरीय

सारांश

स्वतंत्रता मिलने के बाद तत्काल 1952 में राष्ट्रीय वन नीति निर्धारित किए जाने के पश्चात् देश के सामाजिक और आर्थिक क्षेत्र में बहुत सारे दूर तक प्रभाव डालने वाले परिवर्तन हुए हैं जिनके कारण इस नीति को पुनः निर्धारित करना अब आवश्यक हो गया है। वन क्षेत्र भी धीरे-धीरे घटता गया है।

यदि 1952 वाली नीति के बुद्धिमत्तापूर्ण उपदेश पर ध्यान दिया गया होता और पर्याप्त वृक्ष भूमियां और ईंधन-चारे के सुरक्षित क्षेत्र बना लिए गए होते, वनों में चराई करने पर नियन्त्रण लगाया गया होता तो हमने निस्तार की परेशान करने वाली समस्या को बहुत दूर तक सुलझा लिया और सुगम क्षेत्रों में लगे हुए वनों को नष्ट होने से बचा लिया होता।

बदली हुई परिस्थितियों का सामना करने तथा भविष्य को सुरक्षित बनाने का सर्वोत्तम उपाय यही होगा कि घटिया, धीरे-धीरे बढ़ने वाले वृक्षों के वर्तमान निःशेष हुए वनों को यथाशीघ्र समुपयोजित कर लिया जाय और पारिस्थितिकीय दशाओं के बिगड़ने से पहले ही पातित किए हुए उस क्षेत्र में बढ़िया, तेजी से बढ़ने वाले वृक्षों का भरपूर वन लगवाया जाए और उसके बाद वित्तीय वयस्कता प्राप्त होने तक उनमें लगी फसल की सुरक्षा और देखभाल की जाय।

संशोधित नीति में यह भी लिखा जाना चाहिए कि अनुसंधान को सघन बनाया जाए, वन अधिकारियों को अधिक सुविधाएं दी जाएं और दृश्य-श्रव्य प्रचार द्वारा जनता को वनों के प्रति जागरूक बनाया जाए।

Revision der nationale Forstpolitik

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Seither der Erklärung der nationale Forstpolitik im 1952, nach der Freiheit, haben viele Veränderungen der weitgehende Resultate im Land, in den gesellige und ökonomische Felder stattgefunden, die eine Wiederdarstellung der Politik nun nötigen. Die Forstfläche hat fortschrittlich geschränkt.

Wenn man den kluge Rat der 1952 Politik geachtet, angemessene Baumländer und Brennstoff-und-Fütter-Reserven gemacht, und die Weide im Forst eingehaltet hatte, würden wir das beklimmernde Nistarproblem meistens gelösen, und die zugängliche Förste bei der Entleerung ersparen.

Zu treffen den veränderte Umstand und auch zu sichern die Zukunft, ist die beste Lösung die gegenwärtige, erschöpfene Förste der minderwertige, langsam-wachsende Bäumen, sobald wie möglich, zu ausbeuten und dann die gehiebene Flächen mit den bessere, schnell-wachsende Bäumen, bevor der Verschlechtung der ecologische Lagen, voll zu wiederaufforsten, und nachder die Ernten, bis ihrer finanzielle Fälligkeit, zu pflegen.

Die revidierte Politik soll auch darlegen daß die Forschung gestiegen, bessere Freundlichkeiten zu den Forstbeamten besorgen und die Leute mit seh-und-hörbare Verbreitung forstbewußt gemacht worden.

Révision de la politique forestière nationale

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Résumé

Depuis l'énonciation de la politique forestière nationale en 1952, bientôt après l'indépendance, plusieurs changements de conséquences importantes ont eu lieu dans le pays. Il s'agit là des changements dans le domaine social et économique, nécessitant ainsi la révision de la politique forestière. La surface boisée a diminué progressivement.

Si l'on avait fait attention au conseil sagace de la politique énoncée en 1952, en plantant des arbres en juste proportion et en créant des réserves, rendant à la fois le bois de chauffage et le fourrage on aurait pu résoudre le problème vexé de "Nistar" et sauver les forêts accessibles.

Pour faire face à l'état actuel des chose, on doit exploiter, le plutôt possible les forêts épuisés actuelles des arbres de qualité inférieure et à croissance lente. La surface de la coupe doit se replanter avec des arbres de qualité supérieure et à croissance rapide avant que les facteurs écologiques ne se détériorent. On devrait ensuite soigner les cultures jusqu'à ce qu'elles soient exploitables.

La nouvelle politique doit également appuyer sur l'intensification de recherche. Aussi doit-elle assurer de meilleures conditions de travail aux personnels forestiers. Il faudra aussi que les gens aient connaissance des forêts par le moyen de la publicité audiovisuelle.
