

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN INDIAN FORESTRY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

The National Forest Policy of 1988, *inter alia*, states that the objectives of environmental stability and forest conservation be achieved by generating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women. Consequently, in 1990 Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, issued guidelines for involving village communities in protection and development of forests. This gave birth to the concept of Joint Forest Management whereby the village communities were to be given an equitable share of usufructs from the forests. However, the involvement of people in forest protection, development and management is not a new phenomenon in India.

Forestry since its inception has had deep inter-relationship with the local community. There has been a traditional relationship between the forests and the forest dwellers that were rendering valuable help for its management and were also deriving benefits from it.

Ancient Period

There is ample evidence to show that community managed forests were in

existence in India even in ancient times, including the system of 'Sacred Groves' in the Himalayas and Indo-Gangetic plains, the 'Kans' in Western Ghats and 'Orans' in Rajasthan. In those days also, attempts were made to involve local communities in managing the forests.

The powerful rulers in India recognized and respected the importance of forests for communities and for environment. During the period of Chandragupta Maurya forests were specially kept for public use. The people could use forest resources freely without any restriction (Aggarwal, 1985).

Kautilya wrote a treatise on forest regulations. Free access to the use of forest resources continued during the Mughal period also. However, the state imposed levy for cutting of trees in certain cases to earn revenue for the kingdom. Shivaji, the dynamic Maratha leader, in his edict of 1670 directed his officers and the subjects to protect trees, especially the fruit trees (Poffenberger and McGean, 1996).

British Period

The first few decades of British rule saw no change in the pattern of free use of forest resources by the people. In fact,

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forests were considered inexhaustible. The Imperial Forest Administration started during the later part of the nineteenth century, began with takeover and reservation of large tract of forest land. The Forest Department brought out a codification of rights and concessions that were permitted to be exercised by the rural people (Guha, 1990).

Sir Dietrich Brandis, during his nineteen years tenure as Inspector General of Forests, laid the foundation that underpinned state forestry in India. Brandis' faith in the role and capacity of local institutions in forest management was perhaps most clearly evident in his larger vision of Indian Forestry. Even as he was consolidating control of the state over valuable forest areas, he was also proposing the creation of an extensive parallel system of communal forests for village use. A series of reports and memoranda illustrate how the Inspector General of Forests tried for more than a decade to persuade the colonial government that a strong system of village forests was indispensable to the long term success of state forestry (Poffenberger and McGean, 1996).

The first major effort by Brandis in this regard can be dated to 1866 when he visited the southern province of Mysore (then under British rule but to revert in 1881 to its Hindu rulers) and wrote a persuasive report recommending the constitution of village forests in that territory. Noting that waste and uncultivable lands comprised more than half of the village area, he offered a detailed theme suggesting that this degraded land could provide the basis for a system of village forests in at least 52 out of the 83 Talukas of Mysore. Crucial to the success of Brandis' scheme was the inclusion of

grazing lands in the village forest tracts. *Each proposed forest pasture unit would be of sufficient area for management on a rotational coppicing system, with freshly cut areas closed to grazing and protected against fire.* Brandis envisioned that such forests would provide numerous goods and services to the villagers.

Brandis drew pointed attention of the government to the flourishing system of community forests in many towns and villages in Italy, France and Germany on the continent. The foresters there trained in forest science, exercised technical supervision over woodlands of villages and small towns and managed these for exclusive benefit and welfare of the inhabitants (Poffenberger and McGean, 1996).

The beginnings of another form of participatory approach in forest management in British India can be traced from 1868 or so when a Burmese forester called Oo Tsan Dun, in charge of Kabaung forest of Burma, planted Teak in the areas where the vegetation was burnt for cultivation of paddy and cotton. The plantations of Teak, thus formed, were small but the results were excellent. In the year 1873-74 the then Conservator in Burma entered into agreement with many of the 'Karens' in Tharawady and induced them to plant Teak, providing them definite 'Taungya' grounds. As a result, some 250 acres of Teak plantations were raised in the year 1873-74. By the end of 1898, an area of 52,000 acres was brought under Taungya (Stebbing, 1923).

In 1922 Mr. L.E.S. Teague, Silviculturist of Bengal mentioned at the Second Silvicultural Conference at Dehra Dun that the 'Taungya' system, started in

Bengal in 1913, was doing well for the regeneration of Sal and Teak. Afterwards the system was extended for the regeneration of mixed forests also.

The provision of participatory management or individuals' involvement in raising forest plantations was also kept in Sec. 38 of Indian Forest Act, 1927. The section provides that any private land owned by one or more than one person can be handed over to the Forest Department for joint management on such terms and conditions as may be mutually agreed upon by both the parties.

This was also contemplated by the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India which suggested that certain areas classified as "cultivable waste" and "land not available for cultivation" might be added to the village forests to be managed by the Panchayats. This implied that the villagers would themselves afforest such areas (Mobbs, 1929). In U.P., as early as in 1931, large forest areas from newly reserved forests from Kumaon and Garhwal were

entrusted to 'Van Panchayats' for management. Even now 'Van Panchayats' cover substantial forest area in the entire Himalayan region.

Conclusion

Thus, the tradition of participatory forest management is well entrenched in Indian Forestry. Although during the twentieth century, the policing of government forest lands by the State Forest Departments took an upper hand, in the present democratic ethos in the country, the traditional participatory approach needs to be revived. The forest dwellers and rural communities, living in the vicinity of the forests have to be more actively involved in decision-making with regards to management of their forest areas. The present legislative mechanism and institutional framework of Joint Forest Management, now adopted by a majority of the States in the country, will go a long way in achieving the objectives of forest conservation envisaged in the National Forest Policy.

SUMMARY

Joint Forest Management is not an entirely new concept in Indian Forestry because rudiments of this approach can be traced backwards to 'Sacred Groves', 'Kans' and 'Orans' etc. Mauryan rulers kept special forests for public use. This continued well through Mughal times till the advent of the British administration. Brandis, the founder of state-managed forestry in India had deep regard for traditional institutions and tried for more than a decade for the establishment of village forests on degenerated and wastelands, which were also to provide for grazing. Such a scheme was launched in Mysore State. A provision for village forests is also included in the Indian Forest Act, 1929. The Royal Commission on Agriculture also suggested utilization of cultivable wastelands, and other degenerated lands for making Village Forests, to be managed by Panchayats. All this has been imbibed by the present Joint Forest Management approach to Indian Forestry.

भारतीय वानिकी में सहभागीता दृष्टि-ऐतिहासिक परिप्रेक्ष्य

जे.के. रावत व राजेश

सारांश

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कोई एकदम नया विचार भारतीय वानिकी में नहीं है क्योंकि इसके छोटे-मोटे आधार बिन्दु पीछे की ओर चलें तो पावन कुंजों, कान और ओरन तक खोजे जा सकते हैं। मौर्य युग में जनता के उपयोग के लिए विशेष वन रखे जाते थे। यह प्रथा मुगल काल से होते हुए ब्रिटिश शासन के आरम्भ तक चलती रही। भारत में राज्य नियन्त्रित वानिकी के संस्थापक डी. ब्राडिस की यहाँ की परम्पारिक संस्थाओं में बड़ी आस्था थी और वह लगभग एक दशक तक व्याहसित और बंजर जमीनों पर ग्राम वन स्थापित कराने के प्रयत्नों में जुटा रहा जिनमें चराई की व्यवस्था भी की जानी थी। ऐसी एक योजना मैसूर राज्य में आरम्भ की गई। भारतीय वन अधिनियम, 1929 में भी ग्राम वनों का प्रावधान रखा गया। राजकीय कृषि आयोग ने भी सुझाव दिया था कि कृषि योग्य बंजर जमीनों और अन्य व्याहसित भूमियों का प्रबन्ध उन पर ग्राम वन बना कर किया जाना चाहिए जिनका प्रबन्ध कार्य पंचायतों के हाथ में रखा जाना चाहिए। यही सब आगे बढ़ता चलकर आज की भारतीय वानिकी के संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध में आकर समाहित हो गया है।

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