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## **Forest Management and Forest Conservation in Assam**

**Ashim Hazarika**

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science, L.G.B. Girls' College, Tezpur, Assam, India*

### **Abstract**

*Forest is an important natural resource which plays several important roles in nature. It is a store house of biological diversity. Forest management has been defined as the practical applications of the scientific, technical and economic principles of forestry. Forest Management is the way that forests and the trees within them are protected and used to provide forest products and other benefits. In order to manage a forest, the different objectives must be decided upon, and a work plan is made according to this. Now the forest resources are in danger with the encounter of various economic problems and going to decline day by day due to population explosion, soil erosion, ignorance, illegal cutting of trees. The increasing global concern about conservation of the world's natural resources has resulted in the formation of long term perspective plans for conserving forests. Forest conservation in Assam has been practiced time immemorial. Forest conservation is helpful for the gaining of economic development also. Assam is the one of the most important areas in the India for developing a comprehensive network of forest conservation. This paper attempts to examine the trend of forest management and conservation of forest in Assam and further tries to uphold the concept of sustainable management of forest resources by promoting environmentally sound forest conservation measures.*

***Key words: forest management, conservation, economic development, explosion, perspective plans.***

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**Introduction:** The word forest is derived from the Latin word "foris" meaning "out of door". It is large uncultivated tract of land covered with trees and under woods. In other words, forest is an ecosystem of tree-dominated vegetational association. In developing countries like India forests play important role in providing economic wealth, maintaining ecological balance and improving the productivity of agriculture. Forest is the store house of biological diversity. Development and conservation of forest will improve the living standard of people. Man lives in nature and depends on the resources of nature. The progress of mankind depends upon the exploitation of different natural resources. The utilization of soil, water, coal, electricity, oil, gas and nuclear energy is very important for

the development of nation. These resources have changed the level of living standard of man.

Most people already know that the forest gives them many direct and indirect benefits. Daily needs such as fodder, firewood, leaf litter, timber, and various herbal medicines are available in the forest. The forest not only protects and improves the environment around settlements; it even helps to provide us with safe, clean drinking water. This is something that people have come to understand since early days. It is also why forest management has been part of the local community for a long time. But for many reasons, the forest has been disappearing before our eyes. As population has continued to increase, on one hand more forest resources are needed, yet on the other hand, population pressure has decreased the forest area and had a bad affect on the environment. With efficient and appropriate ways of conserving and developing forest products such as trees and medicinal herbs, the well-being and productivity of the family and community can increase, and poverty will decrease for these we must understand about forest management and the importance of forest conservation.

**Forest Management:** Forest management has been defined as the practical application of the scientific, technical and economic principles of forestry. Forest Management is the way that forests and the trees within them are protected and used to provide forest products and other benefits. In order to manage a forest, the different objectives must be decided upon, and a work plan is made according to this. Forest management or forest maintenance is essential to achieve these two objectives one is climatic or protective purposes which are sometimes referred to as indirect objectives and another is productive purposes or economic objectives which are sometimes referred to as direct objectives. The forests have significant role in the improvement of economic condition of the country. Therefore, scientific management, conservation and utilization of forest wealth need special attention of the scientists. Just like any farm management, the work plan to manage a forest means what work to do, where, when, and how. Before starting Forest management, the capacity and working process of those who are to do the work and benefit from it should be considered. This may be a community, family, individual, or other organisation which will work in and benefit from the forest. At the first step the existing forests should be protected and the forest area should be expanded. The National commission for agriculture has taken the problem of deforestation seriously and recommended plantation through social forestry and other programmes. Thus plantation is the best method of conservation of forest. Therefore, considerable attention must be paid for its proper management. National forest policy of 1952 recommended that at least 33 per cent of the land area should be covered by forest but now it's much less than recommendation.

Assam has lost forest cover in recent years. The Assam Forest Regulation Act (AFRA) 1891 provided complete state control in all aspects related with the forest management in Assam. More importantly, since AFRA was designed keeping the commercial value of the forest in its forefront, legislations were also made to regulate transit of any forest produce and all such power was vested upon the State Government. The actual forest cover to the

total geographical area of the state has decreased. There is large scale unabated encroachment in the reserved forests by the new settlers, people displaced by floods and ethnic clashes in the State, immigrants and excessive dependence of the people in the rural areas on the forests leading to deforestation (Assam Forest Policy 2004). The forest survey data reveal that loss of forest cover in the State has been increasing over the years. The encroachment in reserved forests is a major concern in the management and conservation of forests. Approximately 12.77 percent of the total forest area in Assam was under encroachment. The loss of forest cover in the state is attributed to illicit felling of trees in insurgency affected areas of Sonitpur, Darrang and Karbi Anglong while shifting cultivation has been mainly responsible for loss of forest cover in the districts of North Cachar Hills Karbi Anglong, Karimganj and Hailakandi (Government of India 2005).

In Nepal, community forest is a resource of primary importance. That's why it's very important for communities and user groups to learn about forest management. In India scientific management of forests was initiated in 1864. India's first forest policy was framed in 1894 by British administration which gave priority to commercial exploitation of forest and focused more attention on crop cultivation than on forestry, permitting forest areas to be converted into agriculture lands. The forest policies and forest management practices in the post independence era are guided by the policies framed at the National level. The government forest policies in independent India can be divided in to two periods: a) 1947-1980 – period of production/industrial forestry, and b) 1980 onwards period of social forestry with active participation of the people., The National forest policy 1952 laid emphasis on increasing the forest area one-third of the total land area. The 1952 policy classified the forests of India whether State or privately owned into four categories: Protection Forests, National Forests, Village Forests and Tree Lands. The policy also declared that village communities should not be permitted to use forests at the cost of “national interest”. Forest legislation was brought on the concurrent list in 1977. The National Forest Policy since the 1980's envisaged that the rights and concessions from forests were to be primarily for bona-fide use of communities living within and around the forest areas, especially tribal and involvement of such communities in protection and development forests from which they derive their benefits were of crucial importance. The policies also stipulated for protection of rights and concessions relating to forest produce of these communities and involvement of local communities in forest conservation and protection. In 1990, the Government of India adopted the Joint Forest Management (JFM) under the National Afforestation Programme by enlisting the support of the local communities in forest management and the government of Assam notified the Assam Joint (people's participation) Forestry Management Rules, in 1998. The growing realization that mere legislations do not ensure property rights in respect of common pool resources the need for state-society partnerships in management of common resources has been the main thrust in JFM Rules.

### **Objective of Forest Management:**

1. To protect the land, water, plant and animal resources for maximum good to the land and the People
2. To provide a variety of goods to the society on a sustain basis.
3. To meet the needs of the forest and forest fringe dwellers.
4. To ensure continuity of the forest through adequate replacement of old crops and young crops.

### **Aspects of Forest Management:**

The various aspects of forest management are:

- 1. Reserve forestry:** Reserve forests are the most important conservation and scientific management. Conservation forests are also called reserve forests where water reservoirs are present. The major aims of conservation forestry are protection or conservation of existing forests and restoration of the degraded forests.
- 2. Commercial forestry:** The main aim of commercial forestry is to provide and fulfill the requirements of the people and industries.
- 3. Social forestry:** Social forestry means afforestation or developing of forests with the participation and cooperation of public to meet the requirements for self-consumption and cottage industries.

### **Forest Management Programme:**

Forest management programme includes:

(A) Reforestation, (B) Forest protection from encroachment and shifting cultivation, (C) Control of forest fires, (D) Restriction on grazing, (E) Expansion of forest areas, (F) Control of excessive cutting of forest, (G) Cultivation of useful plants, (H) Improvements, (I) Legislation, (j) Control over forest diseases. Etc.

**Finding the resources to manage the forest:** There are various resources needed in the process of forest management. For example, if making a plantation, or other activities, there must be good public participation to form the users' group committee, and agree on the management plan. This can be called the human resource. It costs to produce seedlings to plant, and there are many other visible and invisible costs that the people managing the forest will need to bear. These human, financial and physical resources have a big affect on management work in the forest.

**Conservation:** Man lives in nature and depends on the resources of nature. The progress of mankind depends upon the exploitation of different natural resources. Today however forest is in danger. Conservation is a word which is derived from the Latin words *con* means together and *serves* means to guard. Forests in India have been increasingly subjected to deforestation and degradation. India as well as Assam is facing an ecological crisis and is

degrading her natural resource day by day. One of the most serious aspects of the problem arises from the impact of economic efforts of mankind especially for the purpose of maintaining its existence, protection, survival and betterment of the standard of living. The basic needs which induced the human beings to spoil the natural resources for their welfare have finally led to a situation which threatens to be disastrous. It's important that at least one third of our land must be covered by the forest but now it less than twenty percent. So, the need is that to save the remaining forest and work hard for increasing the area of forest.

**There are two aims of conservation:**

- a) To ensure the preservation of a quality environment that considers aesthetic and recreational as well as product needs and
- b) To ensure a continuous yield of useful plants, animals and materials by establishing a balanced cycle of harvest and renewal.

Thus conservation primarily deals with the proper use, preservation and proper management of natural resources of the biosphere and their protection from destructive elements.

Forest is an important natural resource and it balanced our atmosphere. It's the most important natural habitat for wild life. If a forest is cut down, energy stored in the wood is lost and also most of the nutrients of the system lost. Nowadays the tendency of deforestation is increasing. Man is cutting forest to get temporary benefits but there will be a tremendous loss in due course of time. For all these now it's absolutely necessary to protect and conserve all forms of life on this earth as they are all interdependent and form a chain. Forest conservation is very essential for survival of lives in these planets.

Nature has endowed Assam with rich potential for the development of forest. But due to the works of us only twenty two percent areas covered with forest which is lower than prescribed by the National forest policy. The destruction of forest is one of the burning problems of Assam. During the last one decade the forest cover of the region got depleted at an alarming rate, hence, preservation of forest is a heavy task for the region. So, in the background conservation of forest and wildlife is essential.

**There are three important conservation approaches which should be taken into consideration:**

- (1) To reduce wastes and to minimize demand.
- (2) To change the way of life.
- (3) To increase recycling of materials.

To conserve forest some scientific and technical measures are to be employed. Conservation of forest maximizing for quantity yield involves economy in lumbering and timbering, preservation of forest-fires, control of pests and diseases, monoculture with harvest of single species on short rotation, artificial selected for high fiber producing varieties that depends on high rates of fertilization, preservation of wildlife etc. in India, it has been calculated that two thirds of a tree is wasted between the time it is cut and the time

it is converted into a finished product. Often the better part of the tree is cut into logs leaving the rest to decay. Forest fires also cause depletion of forest. Trees once removed for various purposes should be replaced by planting new species as early as possible.

### **Aims of Conservation:**

1. To maintain essential ecological processes.
2. To ensure a continuous yield of useful plants and animals.
3. To carry on careful and scientific exploitation of natural resources.
4. To preserve the diversity of species.
5. Preservation, perpetuation and judicious control of population of rare species of plants and animals in their natural habitats.

**History of Forest Conservation in Assam:** Assam is one of the most important areas in India for comprehensive development of forest conservation. At the early age Assam is a land of “Jungle” but due to over populated and economic benefit the greenery area of Assam is lost. History tells us that at the early rulers of Assam are very conscious about the conservation of forest. It was proved by the act of “Ahom Ruler” who established a separate set up for forest. During “Ahom” dynasty these separate wing look after the management of timbers, exploitation and timber depots. The surnames carried till today after the title conferred by the “Ahom Kings” to those who are engaging in the profession of forest e.g. “Kath Bharali” ( the person who look after the timber depot.), “Hatibaruah”, (the person who look after the elephants) “Ghurabaruah” (the person who look after the horses) etc.

After “Ahom” British came to Assam and they are also engaging themselves in the conservation of forest in Assam. The Assam Forest Department came into being when British Government appointed Deputy Conservator of forest in the year of 1860. Since then the works of forest conservation increased in Assam. In 1918 the total area of reserved forest in Assam was 13934sq. k.m., and it was increased up to 17084sq. k.m. in 1939 dedicated to the wildlife conservation by constituting sanctuaries. But after Independence the scenario was changed in Assam. Due to immense human population explosion, the areas for the wildlife get reduced for that now we talk and work for conservation. Post independence govt. is now engaging to preserve our forest and wildlife.

**Laws for Conservation of Forest:** Article 51-A(g) has made it the fundamental duty of every citizen of India “to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life”. Government of India enacted different laws relating to forest and its conservation among them the forest conservation acts 1980, which impose restriction on destruction of reserved forest, use of forest land for non-forest purposes by the states. These restrictions are contained in section 2 of the act. The section 2 of the act states that- Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for time being in force in a state, no state government or other authority shall make, except with the prior approval of the central government. India has strengthened its hold on biodiversity conservation by implementing the Indian forest act 1927, the wildlife (protection) act 1972, the forest

(conservation) act 1980, the environment (protection) act 1986, the biodiversity act 2002, the biodiversity rule 2004 etc.

**Importance of Conservation:** The birth and growth of human civilization and culture has been intimately connected with the forest. Forest has a great influence on human thoughts and way of living. Forest are one of the priceless boons of nature, but human consumerism has created such a great pressure on forest that they have almost disappeared in many areas, resulting in soil erosion, floods, pollution, climate change, destruction of our eco system etc. the neglect and destruction of forest has great effect in our lives. There is an urgent need to protect our forest for greater benefit of human beings survival in these planets.

The intimacy with forests has always been a refreshing and a great influence in human life. The “Vedas” and “Upanishads”, the oldest known religious, philosophical, literacy monuments of mankind are the direct products of forest life in ancient India. The part played by the forest in improving the quality of environment and that of life is beyond any doubt. Forest is a great source of renewable energy and contributes great in our economic development.

Forest conservation is the utmost important phenomena in today’s scenario of degradation of forest. Forest conservation conserved forest along with the biodiversity of that ecosystem.

**The importance’s of forest conservation are as follows:**

- 1) Forest conservation conserved the bio-diversity of the ecosystem.
- 2) Forest conservation helps to survive the endangered plant and animal species of that particular ecosystem.
- 3) Forest conservation prevents soil erosion and increase soil fertility.
- 4) Checks air pollution and increase atmospheric oxygen.
- 5) Control moisture and prevents water pollution.
- 6) Provides shelter to birds and nests.
- 7) Increase cloud formation and precipitation.
- 8) Helps to maintain the soil texture.
- 9) Conservation of plants commercially provides economic support to the local people.
- 10) Gives Aesthetic pleasure.

**Peoples Participation and Rule of Govt. in Conservation:** The people are really the custodians and users of the forest resources. So, their participation in relation to forest conservation is highly essential. Steps should be taken to make people aware of the need to plant and protect trees and relevant awareness campaign should be extended to every nook and corner of the state. Spread of environmental education and good campaign among the people is essential to make aware them.

Although the government of Assam is very particular about conservation of its forest resources and have several rules and laws for the protection of forest, but their effective implementation is necessary. Government should take firm steps to stop encroachment and

poaching in the forest. Though there are many government laws namely the Forest Conservation Act, 1990, the Wild life (Protection) Act, 1972 etc for preserving forest resources but unfortunately many people are not aware of these laws nor are these executed with sincerity. Real political will is essential for conservation of forest.

**Conclusion:** The forest is being regarded as source of life. The conservation and protection of forest areas is legally entrusted to the forest department. But in order to protect the forest resources, which are an open treasury, the forest department needs support from the local district administration and political will, which is lacking in these regards. People of the state also play one of the important roles to preserve our forest area. Govt. attitudes towards the conservation must be positive and they must stop blaming game to each other. It means that if there is real will then we can at least protect the minimum area prescribed by the National forest policy. A strong mass awareness is essential and it is good to see that in Assam, the NGOs are coming forward to assist the forest department to protect and conserve the forest areas.

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