

**THE JOURNEY OF THE INDIAN STATE FROM  
EXCLUSIONARY TO INCLUSIONARY FOREST  
CONSERVATION MODEL WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO JFM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In a developing country like India, Community Property Resources (CPR) such as forests play a vital role in the rural economy and more particularly in tribal areas of the country in terms of generating income and employment opportunities and also improving the food security for the poor and marginal households. According to the theory of the tragedy of commons developed by Garret Hardin community property resources will face tragedy in future if these are not judiciously managed. However, some recent literature on CPR management has revealed that the tragedy of commons often results not from any inherent failure of the common property but from institutional failure to control and access resources and to enforce internal decisions for collective use. These critics argue that Hardin's tragedy of commons can be easily ruled out if institutions work perfectly through active participation of the people in the management of CPRs (Hardin, 1968, p. 1245). At present, almost all the countries of Asia and Africa are promoting*

*the idea of the participation of rural communities in the management of natural resources through some form of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) practices. They have now developed or are in the process of developing, changes to national policies and legislation that institutionalize PFM. The main aim of PFM is to engage forest-dwelling communities to maintain healthy forests and improve degraded forests by sharing with them benefits accrued from forest resources. Within this context, this article mainly intends to look into India's journey towards a participatory forest management system from centralised forest management practices. The required information obtained for this study is collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include archival materials in the form of files, and reports housed in the state and district archives and secondary sources are mainly taken from different books, reputed journals, seminar papers, newspapers etc.*

**Keywords:** Forest Dwellers, Forest Rights, Joint Forest Management, Livelihood Security, Participatory Forest Management.

### **Introduction :**

The World Bank report (2006) indicates that forests play a vital role in poverty eradication and rural economic growth in India. In India, a large number of people live close to the forest and depend on forest resources for livelihood needs. Various government reports and research papers reveal that approximately 275 million people in India depend on forest resources for their sustenance. The

forest-dwelling community of India is heterogeneous as it is comprised of different tribes and ethnic groups. Further, these forest-based people are mainly belonging to the marginalized and most disadvantageous section of society. In independent India until the adoption of the second national forest policy of the country, the livelihood security of these people did not get any attention in the forest conservation model adopted by the Indian state. The activities of these communities were considered as 'biotic interference' that must be minimised to protect the forest. The state saw the well-being of forest and forest-dwelling communities as two different things and this idea is based on the premise that the forests can be well protected only if the local forest-using communities are excluded and that the needs of the forest-dependent communities can be met only if the society is ready to lose the forest. However, such attitude of the Indian state towards the forest-dwelling community underwent a sea change with the adoption of the second national forest policy of the country in 1988. To be precise, the second national forest policy of India forms the basis of participatory management practices in the country which attempts to mitigate the challenges of forest conservation and blend the livelihood needs of its forest dwellers with forest conservation goals. It began the process of communication of forest management across the country. However, the saga of the Indian state's journey towards participatory forest management practices will be incomplete if it does not delve into its colonial history. To be precise, it was the British administration, which altered the forest-people relationship in the country and formed the basis of the exclusionary forest conservation model that snatched away the age-old traditional rights of the forest-dwelling community over the forest.

### **Forest Administration in Colonial India: Historical Perspective**

It is to note here that since time immemorial, the forest-dwelling community in India shared a symbiotic relationship with the forest. With few exceptions, the forest dwellers exercised unrestricted rights over forest resources through a fair, equal distribution of forest resources which also helped to reduce conflicts among communities and between rulers and communities. However, the advent of colonial rule marked a major change in the forest-people relationship in India.

through a fair, equal distribution of forest resources which also helped to reduce conflicts among communities and between rulers and communities. However, the advent of colonial rule marked a major change in the forest-people relationship in India. To be precise, with the arrival of the British, the forest-dependent people lost their customary rights over the forest and became alienated from their land.

Interestingly during the initial phase of their rule, the British did not pay much attention to colonial forestry rather they considered these resources as an impediment to agricultural expansion. As a result, the British government vacated large patches of forest land for agricultural activities. However, the ignorant attitude of the British towards colonial forestry gradually changed after they realized the value of teak that was found in India's forest. However, the customary forest rights of the local inhabitants put restrictions on the path of utilizing forest resources according to the will of the colonial masters. Therefore, to achieve monopoly power over Indian forest resources, particularly timber, the British government felt the need to implement strict rules and regulations for curtailing the rights of local inhabitants who depended on forests for their sustenance. Accordingly, the colonial state came up with various forest Acts and policies which were mainly designed to curtail the erstwhile customary rights of forest dwellers over the forest. It is relevant to note here that the whole gamut of British forest policies/Acts are mainly driven by the interest to control people's access to forest resources and centralization of state power (Aravindakham, 2011, p.7). They introduced scientific forestry on the pretext of forest conservation which in reality ensured a sustainable supply of timber to the British Empire (Stephen, 2010, p.49) and kept the forest dwellers outside the purview of the forest. As noted by environmental historian Ramchandra Guha, the British colonial government had established its monopoly over the vast forest tracts to meet their commercial needs with utter disregard for the rights of forest dwellers. On the other side when these deprived forest-dependent people rebelled against the repressive policies of the British administration then they were labelled as 'born criminals' under the criminal tribes Act of 1871. It is to note here that before the British some feudal lords also tried to establish their

control over the forest lands but such practices were very few and they did not affect the customary rights of the forest dwellers. It was the arrival of the British which made a huge change in the forest-people relationship in India.

Interestingly the plight of the forest dwellers under British colonial rule did not come to an end with the end of the colonial rule. The exclusion of these people from entering the forest and using the forest resources continued even after India attained its independence. It is to note here that after gaining independence the Indian state tried to redefine social utility and social welfare functions but so far, the forest management regime is concerned its main emphasis continued to be on the commercial exploitation and exclusion of the local people.

Environmental historians Ramchandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil stated that there are close similarities between the colonial and post-colonial forest policies of the Indian state. That is why the post-colonial forest administration of India is said to be a replica of the British forestry system(Sarma, 2012, p.495). Like its colonial predecessors, the post-independent forest management of India also denied the rights of the tribal community over the forests. In independent India, the first national forest policy was announced in the year of 1952 which was an extension of the colonial forest policy of 1894(Balooni, 2002, p.113). The 1952 forest policy did not pay any attention to the livelihood needs of forest dwellers and stated that the forest should be used to satisfy the developmental goals of the country. This particular policy of 1952 established a state monopoly over the forest resources and completely excluded the forest community from exercising any rights over those resources but this time the exclusion was justified in the name of fulfilling the national interest of the country. To be precise it can be said that the 1952 forest policy of India paved the way for the forest department to keep India's forests firmly under its control and people out of them. This approach towards the forest dwellers continued to be perpetuated in Independent India until the revision of the forest policy in 1988. India got its second national forest policy in the year 1988 and this marked a radical shift in the forest conservation model of the Indian

state from exclusionary to inclusionary. This new policy has accorded the highest priority to sustainable management of forest resources and at the same time gives recognition to the rights of the forest dwellers living within and near the forest areas and depend on forest resources for livelihood needs. It laid the foundations for participatory forestry by facilitating the involvement of local communities in the management of forests in the country. Before NFP 1988, the forest communities were denied any role in forest management activities. They were treated as a threat to forest conservation.

### **Circumstances that led to the Evolution of Participatory Forest Management in Indian Forestry**

In Independent India, until the late 1970's the forest administration mainly emphasised production forestry where no efforts had been taken up to address the livelihood needs of the forest dwellers. Ramchandra Guha also argued that the forest legislations of India during the period from 1864-1972 were mainly designed in such a manner which facilitated the commercial and industrial exploitation of forest resources (Guha, 1994, p.13). Further during that period, the Indian state also did not have any sound conservationist policies which finally led to the depletion of the vast amount of forest resources in the country. However, the scenario gradually changed when as an outcome of some significant national as well as international events the government of India adopted various measures to conserve the forest. At the national level, the Chipko movement of 1973 brought into focus a wide range of issues concerning the forest policies of the country. Such growing awareness finally paved the way for the legislation of many laws relating to forest conservation in the country. It is to be noted here that the conservationist model adopted by the Indian state during that time was mainly influenced by the Western conservation model which believes that the forest should be made people people-free zone. This particular model of forest conservation resulted in the miserable lives of a large number of people living in and around the forest. Particularly the creation of the Protected Areas following the provisions of the Wild Life Protection

Act of 1972 caused the eviction of a large number of forest dwellers across the country. Similarly, another draconian Act, The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 also added more plight to the lives of these people. However, such an exclusion-based forest conservation regime did not go unchallenged and led to violent uprisings and struggles throughout the country. In different forest regions of the country, the forest-dependent people as a sign of protest continued to enter the forest and used to collect the forest products which in turn resulted in the forest depletion at an increasing rate.

Interestingly, in the mid part of the 1980's apart from India, other developing countries also witnessed large-scale forest depletion which finally drew the attention of international policymakers. The issue was finally placed in the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987. In that commission, a report was submitted which had established a link between poverty and environmental degradation. In that report, it has been argued that the poor people are not in a position to use the environment in a sustainable way which leads to environmental degradation and in a cyclical way impoverishment of environmental resources generates more poverty amongst these people (Rangarajan, 2010, p.17). The report further argued that the livelihood needs of forest-dependent people must be secured and protected for forest conservation. Thus, because of that report, the commission has spelt out the need for a new livelihood approach which can cater to the livelihood needs of forest-based people along with forest conservation goals and this new approach has come to be popularly known as the sustainable livelihood approach. It is to note here that apart from the Brundtland Commission Report, the idea of SLA can also be found in a discussion paper co-authored by Robert Chambers and Gordon R. Conway (1991). Both Chambers and Conway argue that sustainable livelihood can maintain, and enhance its capabilities & and assets and improve opportunities for the next generation (Chambers & Conway, 1991, p.5). The sustainability of livelihood can be measured by two indicators i.e., environmental and social. A livelihood is environmentally sustainable when it does not undermine local and global resources. On the other side, a socially sustainable livelihood implies the

capacity of a human unit (individual, household or family) to avoid or recover from outside pressures such as accidents, sudden sickness, the death of a family member, loss of assets through theft etc. In short, a sustainable livelihood approach is a holistic approach which integrates the environmental, social and economic factors while formulating any programme for poverty eradication.

In the forestry sector, the idea of SLA gave birth to the practice of Participatory Forest Management which has now been adopted by almost all the countries of the world including India. The Indian state incorporated the idea of PFM in its second national forest policy which was introduced in the year of 1988. The NFP states that -The life of tribals and other poor living within and near forests revolves around forests. The rights and concessions enjoyed by them should be fully protected. Their domestic requirements of fuel wood, fodder, minor forest produce and construction timber should be the first charge on forest produce. It indicates that the NFP 1988 gives special emphasis on securing and promoting the rights of forest dwellers over forest resources. Further, as a follow-up to the NFP 1988, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change introduced the Joint Forest Management Programme in 1990 which has made the idea of PFM more realistic in the country. JFM is said to be one of the important components of India's natural resource management strategy which mainly aims at poverty eradication, rural development etc. To be precise JFM is the avenue for rural development strategy for sustainable development because the communities are involved in protecting and managing the forest.

### **JFM programme: The Dawn of Participatory Forest Management in India**

The Joint Forest Management Programme of India is a laudable effort towards devolution and decentralization in forest administration. It attempts to achieve the goal of NFP to keep 33% of the total geographical area under the tree cover. The JFM programme has recognized the livelihood and sustenance needs of the people through the principle of care and sharing. In JFM the local communities and government manage the resource and share the cost equally<sup>1</sup>. It mainly

emphasizes empowering the local communities in their livelihood practices through self-sustaining local environmental governance. To be precise, JFM provides a visible role to the forest-dependent communities in the planning, management and prevention of forests and gives them a share in the benefits of the forests. Since its inception, the government of India has been reviewing this particular programme from time to time to make it more effective. The JFM programme has been amended twice in the year 2000 as well as in 2001 to make it more participatory and demand-driven. The JFM guidelines 2000 sought to give importance to women's participation, preparation of micro-plan, legal back up to JFMCs etc. Similarly, the guidelines of 2002 give impetus to the relationship with Panchayats, capacity building for the management of NTFPs etc. The JFM programme comprises all categories of forest land as classified under the Indian Forest Act, of 1927. In Protected Areas, The JFM committees function as eco-development committees. In Addition to JFM activities, these committees aim at protecting wildlife and improving biodiversity.

Surprisingly, the JFM programme had its roots in innovative experiments carried out in the Arabari and Sukhomarji regions of West Bengal and Haryana respectively in the late 1970s. To be precise in 1972 A.K Banerjee, the divisional forest officer carried out an experiment in the Arabari region of Midnapur district where he asked the local people to refrain from grazing in an area of new plantation in return for a share of the final timber harvest and this particular strategy initiated by A.K Banerjee turned out to be a successful one in protecting the new plantation area and thus helped in developing an idea that the involvement of local community could be beneficial for rejuvenating the forest. Again, after this experiment, the strategy of involving the local community in forest protection tasks was also applied in Sukhomajri village of Haryana in 1975 which also became a successful event. However, in addition to these two events of Arabari and Sukhimarji, the importance of some Self-Initiated Forest Protection Groups (SIFPG) must not be overlooked in the rise of the JFM programme. The SIFPGs were established by the local villagers mainly in the states of Orissa, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra

Pradesh, Haryana etc. to protect and conserve the nearby forest areas. In the initial phase, these SIFPGs were poorly documented and did not get adequate attention but in the later period, they received popularity at village, state and national levels. Thus, it can be said that the experience of these successful instances of people's participation in forest regeneration activities across the country encouraged the idea of harnessing people's participation in forest conservation tasks which eventually got institutional recognition in terms of the emergence of JFM.

The JFM programme starts with the formation of a village-level committee of the local people which is popularly known as the Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC). The JFMC is a democratic, decentralized and transparent body of the local forest-dwelling people. In every state, JFMC is formed as per the guidelines of the existing state JFM resolution. The formation of the JFMC involves some significant steps starting from organizing a meeting with the local villagers of the selected forest fringe village. The meeting is mainly facilitated by the local gaon panchayat, forest department staff, NGOs etc. In that particular meeting, the concept of JFM will be explained to the local villagers and if they show their willingness to protect the forest, then they have to write a letter requesting the formation of JFMC addressing the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) with a copy to the local gaon panchayat. Once the request is granted for the formation of JFMC, an ad-hoc committee will be formed to facilitate the process at the village level. Notably, NGOs have played a very significant role in facilitating the implementation of the JFM programme by making people aware of the benefits of the programme and thus motivating them to form a JFMC. In states like Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal the NGOs have done a commendable job in the implementation of the JFM programme (Murali, Rao & Ravindranath, 2000, p.75). Further, they also help in building long-term coordination and understanding between JFMC and the forest department. Apart from this, there exist some NGOs, which also take an interest in forest conservation and collaborate with the JFMC by making use of their financial resources.

As already mentioned above, under the JFM programme the forest areas are protected and managed by the local communities in collaboration with the forest department and for their participation in the forest regeneration tasks the JFM programme allows these people to use and collect the Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). The NTFPs mainly include bark, roots, leaves, fruits, valuable medicinal plants, flowers etc. It is a well-known fact that the NTFP has played a very significant role in the livelihood security of forest dwellers. Various research studies show that in states like Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar etc. over 80% of forest dwellers exclusively depend on NTFPs for their livelihood needs. Earlier the forest dwellers were denied to access these NTFPs but now under the JFM programme, they are legally entitled to collect and use the NTFPs. It is to be mentioned here that apart from the forest regeneration task, various developmental activities are also carried out under the JFM programme to upgrade the socio-economic life of the forest-dwelling people. These activities are popularly termed as entry point activities which mainly include the construction of community halls, drinking water facilities, distribution of biogas plants, conduction of training programmes to generate employment opportunities amongst the youth etc. The aim of these activities is mainly to win the trust of the local people to involve them in forest regeneration tasks.

At present, the JFM programme has been implemented across the country but its outcomes are not uniform as they vary from state to state. Many states consider this particular programme as a top-down approach which further strengthens the control of the forest department over the forest-dependent people. In many states of the northeast part of India, people are reluctant to participate in this programme as they believe that it may snatch away their customary rights over forests. However, in contrast to this in some states like West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh etc., JFM performs a tremendous role in enhancing the livelihood security of the forest-dependent people. According to various research works, the JFM programme has managed to generate employment opportunities in the far-off inaccessible forest fringes. It has also resulted in linking the remote forest villages

to the market for the sale of NTFPs. Apart from this JFM also helps to reduce the illicit felling of trees, reduce the area under illegal encroachment, forest fire prevention and control by community involvement and to enhance the forest cover through the afforestation programme. It is to be noted here that the JFM programme acts as an implementing agency for various afforestation schemes like the Green India Mission, National Afforestation Programme etc. Again, along with this, the government of India is also now attempting to implement the international climate change programme Reduction of Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD Plus) in the country through the mechanism of JFM.

### **Conclusion :**

The forest conservation model of the Indian state has witnessed tremendous change with the implementation of NFP 1988 in the country particularly with the coming of the JFM programme. The JFM has now gradually emerged as a powerful tool for sustainable forestry and recognizing the livelihood needs of forest dwellers. There is no denying that forest conservation is the utmost need of the hour due to its growing importance in climate change. But it also cannot be denied that conservation activities rarely take place in isolation; it has a deep impact on the livelihood needs of forest dwellers. As mentioned earlier in Indian society a huge chunk of the marginalised section lives within and near the forest and depends on the forest resources for their livelihood needs. To be precise, in a country like India, participatory forest management such as JFM bears great significance in improving biodiversity and the livelihood of forest-dependent people. As rightly observed by Vasant K. Saberwal and Rangarajan who assert that it has not yet been proven that the human beings who reside within and nearby the PAs are responsible for the shrinking of wildlife habitats and if it is so then it is also quite unclear that the eviction of those who resides within the PAs will ensure the survival of India's wildlife.

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