

Forests for National Welfare

Few sights are more beautiful than trees whether in flower or with their branches laden with fruit or just the countless variety in shape and colour of leaf and of the tree itself. Trees are amongst man's most reliable friends and a country which cares for its future must take good care of its forests. It is indeed sad that in India, hillsides in almost all the parts of the country are becoming bare and brown. During and after the world war the hills were denuded of their cover. This is happening now also. It is human greed which is responsible for the destruction of forests and this has caused a great ecological damage, erosion and floods. Europe is more industrialized than we are but the major cities there have forests either within the city or near the city. India will also have to awaken to the importance of the forests and a new breeze among the forestry professionals has started blowing. Experts have introduced new concepts like high-yielding forestry, intensive management of productive forests, conservation of national ecosystem, urban forestry, mapping of the forests resources, wildlife management and so on.

Forests can survive only if forestry is attuned to the goal of the national development, and long term ecological welfare as well as that of the communities which live nearby. New insights and a sense of urgency combined with responsibility are necessary for our forestry policy and education. Ecological conservation can become a reality when the people in need of fuel and employment are met. As the frontiers are enlarging, foresters should come out of their self-imposed boundaries of reserve forests and think of social forestry and other techniques to involve the community itself. It is also necessary that social forestry should not replace old forestry.

There is no conflict between the two. New forests should be planted and where there is space in old forestry, different types of new trees should be put in. The development of agriculture and industry and the high growth of population are reducing our per capita forest area. This has a spiral effect on forest resources.

The great increase in the price of petroleum products has led to a greater onslaught. Rural people need wood for the production of domestic energy and manufacturers for industries like paper, pulp, plywood, safety matches, etc. For the simultaneous increase in demand for food crops, cash crops and plantation crops like tea, rubber, etc. townships, roadways, hydroelectric projects, make it difficult to extend forests area. But without having a proper balance human life will be in danger because ecological imbalance affect the living conditions as well as the life of living creatures.

Forests are a traditional source of food, herbs, fuel and other essentials for unsophisticated people who have lived in and off the forests. Forests are renewable sources of energy. Many medicines are extracted from the plants or from the flowers of the plants. Naturally if the forests shrink everyone will be affected in one or the other way.

Forestry as a whole will gain with more exposing to forestry in universities. Forests Colleges should admit students from all disciplines. The problems of our people particularly of tribals who are living in forests or villages should be treated sympathetically by the Forests Research Institute and Forests Colleges. We should also take steps to develop rain forests, genetic Forest Engineering. We should know about the breeding of the different species of the animals so that we may plan to reserve ecological balance.

At the same time we must plan so that forests can co-exist with and enlarge side by side with the growth of agriculture and industries and thereby help our people to raise their standard of living. Forests not only beautify the environment they also give us many things which are necessary for the existence of the human being. Till we pay attention to the forests it will not be possible for the people to lead a healthy life and to get medicines, etc. The greatest advantage of the forests is that they regulate the rainfall and check soil erosion. Some people may consider forests nothing but something wild and primitive but they are essential for our civilisation as well as for our existence.