CHAPTER - VIII

A DESIGN OF FOREST DEVELOPMENT IN MANIPUR: POLICY PERSPECTIVES

Having examined the pros and cons of the development of forest resources in Manipur, we will attempt in the concluding chapter of the thesis to give an outline of a suitable design of developing the forest resources of the State in the years to come. In particular we will project the role of social forestry is expected to play in the new scheme of forest development.

As discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis a practical proposition for developing the forest resources in the State is to plan and regulate the harvesting of forest produces in such a way that only the annual increment of the growing stock is removed so that the growing stock is conserved perennially. If the growing stock is conserved in this manner and only its annual increase is harvested there will be a perennial flow of forest produces. As noted in the Chapter-III of this thesis, because of limitation of human resources both in terms of trained personnel in the State Forest Department and labour force to work in the forest, it is not possible to introduce any intensive system of forest management in big way in the coming 2/3 decades. The only practical way
is to follow a selection system of forest management consisting in regulated harvesting of the natural growth of forest produces according to a rationally determined felling cycle. We suggested that the Smytheis' Conservation formula may suitably be followed. The details of the formula and its application were given in Chapter-III of this thesis. Here we may simply recall that according to this formula only those trees which have attained a certain minimum girth or diameter limit are selected for felling and that the trees of smaller girth or diameter will have to be conserved until they attain maturity (i.e. the minimum girth or diameter limit). Our estimates of Production potentials of the forests of Manipur were made on the basis of this safeguarding formula.

However we came to know in Chapter-IV that the actual practice of harvesting of the forest resources in the State does not follow any conservation formula except in reserved forests of the State which constitute a small fraction (9.09%) of the total forest areas of the State. Even in the reserved forest Smytheis' Conservation formula is not strictly followed. The felling cycle in the reserved forest is limited to only 10 years against 25-30 years suggested by the formula. It is really doubtful
whether a tree in the class-II girth limit can pass into class-I within 10 years. In the unclassed and protected forests which account for over 90% of the forests of the State, there is indiscriminate felling of all trees of any size classes. Even very young trees of 1" or 2" diameter are harvested for fuel purposes.

Such reckless exploitation of the forest resources in the State arises because the State Government has practically no control over Unclassed and so called Protected forests. The tribal chiefs are the de facto owners of these forests. They sell large block of forests to contractors usually for 3/4 years during which they exploit the forest resources to their maximum advantages without giving even the least thought to the conservation of the forest resources. The Government's role is confined to the collection of royalty at the Forest Gate through which the produces are transported. There is a lot of pilferage, even in the collection of tolls. The indiscriminate exploitation by the contractors is the greatest cause of the damage to the forest resources in the State.

Another major cause which damages the forest resources of Manipur is shifting cultivation which involved
large scale felling and burning of trees and other forest resources. The total area of the current Jhum land (land under shifting cultivation) in the State is estimated at about 1,800 sq.kms and that of flesh annual clearance at about 900 sq.kms which is almost equal to the size of the entire Manipur Valley. Once the forest is burnt for shifting cultivation, it is not possible to regenerate the forest resources within 3/6 years. Therefore, the area of degenerated forests extends every year by almost 1,000 sq.kms. This is really a serious problem.

Any plan for the conservation and regeneration of the forest resources in the State, therefore demands immediate steps for eliminating (minimising if complete elimination is not practically feasible) the destructive practice of indiscriminate exploitation of forest resources by the contractors and shifting cultivation by the tribal people. Once these two causes are removed the natural growth of forest resources will be able to provide the requirements of the State even without resorting to artificial steps.

Two alternative models for regenerating and developing the forest resources of the State may be furnished on two separate assumptions —
1. On the assumption of the existing traditional de facto control of the forest land by the tribal population.

2. On the assumption of introduction of legal measures for settlement of the forest lands in the name of Individual, Village Community and State Forest Department.

The first model has to start by accepting the existing practice of using the forest resources and the forest lands by the tribal population. There are two types of ownership, more appropriately use-right, of the forest lands in the hill areas of Manipur—ownership by the chiefs and ownership by the community. The existing pattern of ownership is traditional and de facto and not de jure because never did any legal authority settle the lands in the hill areas of Manipur in the name of tribal chiefs or village communities. Broadly speaking, the land supposed to be owned by the chiefs in the Kuki villages and the individual villagers are allowed to utilise the land in way permitted by the chiefs. Amongs the Nagas, land is supposed to be owned by the Community and the individual villagers are to use the land on the basis of allocation by the elders' council. If this pattern of control over
the land resources is to be retained intact, the tribal people are to be supposed to be de facto owners of all the lands covered by the Unclassed and Protected forests.

On this assumption, all the areas of Unclassed and Protected forests may be brought under the Social forestry programme. The basic philosophy behind the Social forestry programme is to be inculcated on the tribal people. They have to be assisted by the State Forest Department through an extensive machinery of extension services in the development of the forest resources initially in and around their villages. The areas under Social forestry are to be extended gradually to cover the entire areas of non-reserve forests (State forests) with the growth of the ability of the tribal population to manage larger and larger areas of Social forests. They are to be convinced that the benefits of development of forest resources in their own area will accrue to them. This will generate in the tribal people an incentive to protect and conserve the forest resources. Besides helping the tribal population in the development of forest resources, the help of the State will have to be extended to evolving scientific methods of harvesting and exploration of market possibilities. Further, the State has to provide adequate infra-structure in terms of roads, etc. for removal of forest produces for marketing them in the centres of consumption.
If this model of development is effectively implemented the danger of engaging contractors in the harvesting of forest resources is likely to be reduced. Further, the tribal people will realise that the sale of forest produces is more remunerative than shifting cultivation. This will induce them gradually to give up this shifting cultivation which is highly destructive to the forest wealth. They will increasingly resort to settled cultivation and horticulture.

The beauty of this model is that it is in keeping with the traditional system of control of land and forest resources in the tribal areas and as such the development programme will be free from social tensions. However, this model of development has no legal basis. Moreover, it is unlikely that the tribal population will be able to bear the responsibility of developing and managing vast areas of social forests. The exploration of market possibility and effective harvesting are also likely to be beyond the capabilities of tribal population for many years to come during which the valuable forest resources will be recklessly exploited by strong vested interest groups. Moreover, the benefits arising from the development of forest resources under this model are likely to
accrue to a handful of tribal chiefs who exercise the
de facto control over the forest wealth and, as such,
the common men among the tribals will get very little
of the benefits.

We would, therefore, propose a second model of
development of forest resources which is based on a legal
solution of the question of ownership of forest lands.

While formulating this second model we keep a
fundamental point in mind that forest development is not
a discrete programme but an integral part of the wider
programme of economic development. The development of
forest resources has to be planned in such a manner as to
enable them (forests) to contribute to economic development.
Our forests should be capable of yielding sufficient pro-
duces to meet the current and future demand of the various
categories of users. They should provide a protective
cover to the soil and regulate the surface water so as to
allow adequate seepage and to prevent sudden flood. Besides,
the forests should be able to provide for recreation for
the busy urban people and to prevent pollution in the
thickly populated areas and to meet the day to day require-
ments of the small man. Our study shows that as things
stand to day, the forests of Manipur are not able to
perform these functions effectively for a variety of reasons. To bring about their development, we need a comprehensive package of afforestation, regeneration and harvesting programmes - all framed implemented along scientific line.

A prerequisite for the second model is a permanent solution to the problem of the ownership of forest lands. As the forest lands of Manipur are inhabited by the tribal people and as the tribals freely collect the forest wealth for meeting their needs they feel that all the forest wealth including the lands belong to them and any measure of regulation and control exercised by the State Forest Department is regarded by them as an infringement of their natural rights. Therefore, they oppose to tooth and nail the development plans undertaken by the State Forest Department. But never did any legal authority confer the right of ownership of the land on them. Thus, there is confusion among the tribal people between the user right and ownership right. So long as the question of ownership of the forest land is not clearly settled, conflicts are bound to arise not only between the tribal people and Forest Department, but also between the tribals themselves. Therefore, any plan for the scientific management of forest in
the State must be preceded by a permanent solution of the land ownership question. An appropriate legal framework must be provided for this purpose. Such a framework can be furnished by the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act 1960. At present the jurisdiction of Act is confined to Manipur valley only. If the scope of application of the Act is extended to cover the hill areas also, the entire State will have only one piece of legislation regulating the land ownership question. This is a great advantage.

If the legal framework is provided, three categories of land ownership may be visualised - State, Community and Individual. We should start with the fundamental proposition that all land belong to the State. An individual or institution or a community can be land owner only if a competent legal authority settles a part of the State land in the name of the individual or institution or community, or by the right of purchase of a piece of land so settled earlier by the appropriate authority. Any piece of land within the territorial jurisdiction of the State of Manipur which has not been settled in the name of individual or a group still belongs to the State.
Out of the vast areas of land in the hills of Manipur, blocks of forest lands suitable for development as reserved forest specially those away from the tribal villages should unequivocally be placed under State ownership and developed as reserved forests in which the most modern method of scientific management should be practised. Of the remaining lands, blocks or pieces of land suitable for cultivation should be settled in the name of individual cultivators. The rest of the land specially the areas in and around the tribal villages within the radius of 2/3 km should be left as Community land, preferably settled in the name of hill village authority for producing forest resources to meet the genuine requirements of the tribal villagers. Community forests may be created and developed on the Community lands under the Social forestry programme. It is expected that the tribal villagers will be able to develop intensively the compact areas of forests in and around their villages if they are guided and assisted adequately by the State under the Social forestry programme. If all the genuine requirements of the tribal villagers are obtained from the Social forests, they need not encroach upon the reserved forests under the Government. This will in turn help the State Forest Department in carrying out their development plans unopposed by the local tribal
population. Rather the State Forest Department will be able to get cooperation from the tribal population. The labour force needed for afforestation and harvesting work will be obtained from the tribal villagers. And in return the villagers will get wage employment in the forest development and harvesting in reserved forest under the Government. Further, they are assured of sufficient supplies of forest produces to meet their daily requirements from the Community forests under the Social forestry programme. Here lies the specific role of the Social forestry programme in the overall development of the forest resources of the State.

In the reserved forests, the State Forest Department will have to introduce the latest techniques of scientific management. This will demand the heavy investment and adequate expansion of the trained staffs under the State Forest Department. If more intensive programme of scientific management cannot be introduced in the reserved forests because the resource constraints the Forest Department must try at least to apply Smytheis' Conservation formula which involves only regulated felling which ensure the conservation of the growing stock and a perennial flow of the produces. With the improvement in the resource position, attempt should be made to introduce
the more intensive and scientific method of forest management. Along with the development of production (within the Reserved forests, Social forests and Community forests) attempts should be made to control and minimise shifting cultivation which poses a great threat to the forest wealth of the State. Shifting cultivation is a way of life of the majority of the tribal population, and in some areas it is the only possible form of cultivation under the existing physical conditions. The households depending on shifting cultivation in Manipur is ranged from 69.8% (wholly) in Tamenglong District to 4% (wholly) in Ukhrul District. However, in the interest of forest development this form of cultivation is to be minimised or even completely eliminated. To this end the tribal people are to be encouraged and assisted to take to settled cultivation, horticulture, cultivation of crops like - ginger, turmeric, cardamom, etc. beneath the forest trees. In our on-the-spot studies of the tribal villagers in the forests, we found that the physical condition in some of the hill areas of Manipur are conducive to these alternative forms of cultivation. Plantation crops like - tea and coffee also have good prospects.

But this changeover in the form of cultivation demands for its success the opening up of the tribal areas
through good means of communication to enable the tribal people to exchange their new produces with rice and other things from the valley. Therefore, any plan for development of forest resources will have to be synchronised and built into the wider issue of integration of Hill economy with plain economy and also into the overall plan of economic development of the State.

Once the basic questions of land ownership and shifting cultivation are resolved, the programmes of regeneration and development of forest wealth may be successfully implemented in a phased manner. If the forest lands are brought under the effective control of the Government by bringing the ownership of the forest lands under the Government, the practices of reckless felling of trees can be stopped forthwith and with that, more rational system of harvesting can be introduced.

With regulated harvesting, afforestation work on an extensive scale may be undertaken. All abandoned jhum lands and suitable areas in the "Open forests" and "Grass-blanks" may be planted with fast growing trees of economic values. Along with this, steps will have to be taken to preserve the vegetation in areas susceptible to land-slides.
and soil-erosion, especially those on the hill slopes in the catchment areas of the rivers.

This programme demands for its success the availability of adequate human resources. Accordingly, the staff strength in the State Forest Department will have to be increased. For the supply the labour in the afforestation and harvesting work, the cooperation of the local people will have to be sought. If security of life against hazardous operations in the forests and adequate wage incentives are given, it is likely that local labour will come forward for regeneration and harvesting work. Another step for getting or ensuring the cooperation of local labour is that the local tribal population should not be deprived of their traditional right to collect their day to day requirements of forest produce even if they get wage employment in forest development and harvesting work. If the forests in and around the tribal villages within the radius of say 2/3 kms. are developed as social forests under a comprehensive plan of social forestry, the local population can freely collect their requirements from the social forests even if their movement is restricted in the Production forests controlled by the Government. If the local people can freely get their day to day requirements from the Social forests, there is no doubt that wage
employment can pay for the restriction of their movement in the reserved forests. Therefore, any plan of development of Production forests under State control will have to be synchronised or even preceded by a comprehensive programme of development of Social forests.

The importance of the opening up of forest or tribal areas through cheap means of transport was noted earlier. The need for a network of communication is further re-enforced by the consideration of economic exploitation of forest resources and their regeneration. The availability of forest resources in certain areas should be taken into account in determining the alignment of new roads to be constructed.

So far more concentration are on the development of forest in the hills of Manipur. The pattern of development of forests in the valley areas will have been different. Very little of the natural forests are now left in Manipur valley and sufficient lands are not available in the valley for tree plantation under the social forestry programme. The social forestry plantation in the valley are confined to the sides of roads, rivers, canals and the compounds of educational institutions. The small hillocks scattered in and around the valley may be conveniently brought under
Social forestry programme. However, the social forests in Manipur Valley are not in a position to supply fuel-wood, grasses, etc. to the rural population. Urbanisation is taking place in the valley areas of Manipur and associated problems of urbanisation like - air pollution has become very common. Attempts should be made to plant trees for recreation and environment protection in the valley wherever any piece of land suitable for tree plantation is available. Thus, there is limited scope for producing forest resources for economic purposes. The significance of the valley forest lies mainly in providing recreational facilities and preventing environmental pollution.

Such an integrated programme of forest development demands a huge amount of investible funds. Uptill now plan allocations for Forest Development is very meagre. In view of the importance of the forest wealth as major natural resource in the State, high priority will have to be accorded to their development and a commensurately large amount of resources should be allocated for the purpose.

The development of forest resources along sound lines is not the exclusive responsibility of the Forest Department alone. The general public as well as the sister
departments in the Government will have to extend the fullest possible cooperation to the Forest Department.
To ensure this, a healthy co-ordination between activities of the sister departments has to be effected.

Rational price policy for forest produce is yet another policy plank. The present price of forest produce should be determined not only with reference to the costs of harvesting and regeneration. It should also take into account the high price the society will have to pay in the future in case the resources are excessively exploited for meeting the present requirements. This suggest a considerably higher price of forest produce today. However, the public should not hesitate to pay a little more today to avoid excessively higher prices in future. The price of forest produce should also related to those of their substitutes. For instance if the price of timber is raised relatively to that of steel, steel will be substituted for wood in the construction of items like - panel products, so that more wood is made available for construction of articles for which wood is more suitable.