Chapter - VI

CONCLUSION

Over a period of time, the nature of development has had far and wide implications. Demands and conditions generated by the Industrial Revolution forced the agencies of development to venture into a variety of ways of generating resources in different regions of the world. Requirement of raw materials led to the exploitation of mineral wealth. Once the mineral wealth of a particular region was exhausted, people moved to the neighbourhood and then to far flung regions. This paved the way for the development of colonial markets. They not only supplied raw materials for the nations in the process of industrialization, but was also a good market for finished goods. Scramble for
colonies led to competitive exploitation of region under colonial regime.

By the end of the Nineteenth Century, race for colonies had reached such alarming proportions that it became one of the leading causes for the First World War towards the beginning of the Twentieth Century. It in fact, extended right up to the Second World War by which time this phase of exploitation had somewhat subsided. The impacts of the Industrial Revolution are not difficult to visualize. In course of time, it has created wide gulf between nations, economies and societies. Even within the society, there are glaring examples of the evils created by this mode of development. Apart from these, the damages done to the environment and ecology of regions are no less appalling. As a result, there have been large-scale ecological imbalances of dooming proportions the world over. In the past few decades this has become more glaring than ever before. Depleting ozone layer, massive landslides, shifting course of rivers, deteriorating green cover, increasing salinity, delayed and erratic monsoon and other climatic changes etc. are just a few examples. It is in these
contexts that the study of the policies during the British rules becomes significant.

As has been deliberated upon in the earlier chapters, Chotanagpur caught the attention of the colonial administrators right in the beginning. The region was very rich in flora and fauna as well as mineral wealth. It also served as a fertile ground for the missionaries who viewed all Indian practices as ‘corrupt and backward’ and sought their replacement by the ‘superior’ European practices. At the same time, a policy of exclusion was adopted in the tribal areas, which excluded the operation of ordinary laws of British India. These areas were administered by the governor of the province in which such areas lay and not the elected governments (under the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935) and the financial allocations for these areas were not subject to voting in the legislatures.

Furthermore, the concept of protecting the tribal communities from the adverse effects of rapid integration into the economy and polity emanated from the nature of British rule itself. The
policy of direct rule was further reinforced when frequent tribal revolts began as a result of the gradual implementation of direct rule. This necessitated establishment of lines of communication to facilitate administration and rapid deployment of army followed by cantonments, traders and a faster pace of urbanization. The policy of direct rule further compounded higher in-migration of non-tribals into the region. As a result of these mechanisms, the tribal areas were integrated into the new economic and administrative set-up, which ended the relative isolation of the tribes and their political dominance in the region.

Early policy of the British in the tribal areas of Bihar (as elsewhere) included use of military force followed by legislations legitimizing its power in the region. In such areas, colonial intervention began with the concept of maximization of rent and confined itself to material domain and thereby created material structures aimed at greater intervention in the economic life of the region. However, frequent revolts during the mid-Nineteenth Century, forced the colonial administrators to think that the policy of maximization of rent from land through intermediaries could not work. It was now, therefore, prudent to think that the
long lasting benefit from the mineral rich region of Chotanagpur meant legitimization of British intervention. Gradually, therefore, a regular administration and police force were established in the region. In order to facilitate the process of legitimization, a number of laws were enacted such as the Wilkinson Rules, Chotanagpur Tenancy Act and the like. With these processes, the British gradually armed themselves with sufficient legislative as well as administrative powers for an effective exploitation of the region.

The Forest Act of 1865 was the first step towards a better management of the forest resources of the country and more importantly towards a rule of property for the forests of British India. However there were fears among British officials about the nature of involvement or alienation of the local inhabitants and whether or not they were to be affected adversely by the law. The Act, therefore, provided for only a limited degree of state intrusion and control. While the Act did not provide for the total curtailment of user rights, the authorities were faced with several problems and several positions emerged from within the officials ranging from total control of forests by the government to self-
regulation by village communities. B. H. Baden-Powell sought to extend state control over all uncultivated lands. He argued that conservation was only possible if the government had absolute property rights over forested land. He emphasized that "the reckless cutting of trees by the people was an evil that must be suppressed and was akin to sati or small pox." He believed that it was impossible to conserve a forest, 'unless you have an absolute or more or less limited proprietary right in it'. There was a section of people who criticized the very idea of state control. They were especially opposed to one of the major aims of the Bill, which was to 'extinguish all customary forest rights'. D. Brandis, the first Inspector General of Forests favoured a policy of selective annexation of those areas which were vital for commercial, strategic or climatic reasons. He steered a middle course between Baden-Powell and those who supported the rights of village communities. Despite significant differences, there was a broad unity among officials on the need for new legislation.
At the same time, effective conservation required that the government should determine which privileges were to be retained. This was seen as essential for the benefit of the ‘whole community’. There was a significant shift from the ‘rights’ of communities to their ‘privileges’. The ideological premises and material interests of the Raj were closely interwoven in the Forest Act of 1878 although opinions differed on specific issues.

Nevertheless, the Act of 1878 worked only as a broad guideline and in practice, varied from region to region. After all, all government forests were not alike and varied on account of category of forest in a given area, the applicability of the Act to a particular province and the local system of land revenue. At the same time, the amount of land owned by the government and the kinds of user rights could vary from province to province. In ‘reserved forests’, all rights were recorded and settled, but in ‘protected forests’, things were different. User rights were not always set-aside in the latter areas. Further, the division of waste depended on the nature of the land revenue system prevalent in an area. In the permanently settled areas of Bengal and Benaras, the Zamindar owned the waste. In Ryotwari areas, such as most
of Madras Presidency, the government owned all wastelands other than the village grazing grounds. The impact of the new legislation was far from uniform given the diversity in systems of land tenure in the various provinces. Also, the way in which the laws were applied to particular areas could also differ from one province to another. Now forests were taken over by the officials with potentiality of more than being arable land only.

The British began to protect forests systematically to secure timber unlike the previous rulers who used these for strategic reasons or to increase revenue. The creation of an all India Imperial Forest Service and the enactment of legislation marked a major change in the conservationist policy of the British. Finally, now it was possible to exclude rural forest users and promote the growth of commercially valuable species on a larger scale than ever before. It is in these contexts that it became imperative to examine at provincial level to arrive at micro-level assessment of the pros and cons of various legislations from time to time.
The British forest policy towards the forests of Chotanagpur, thus, passed through distinct phases and had certain significant features that make the study of the region interesting. The Chotanagpur region had drawn the attention of the colonial authorities from the very beginning owing to its rich mineral and forest wealth. To begin with, they lay their hands on the rich minerals – iron, copper, bauxite, coal etc. The exploitation of mineral wealth of the region brought with it the railroad, which was necessary for the transportation of these minerals. The expansion of the railways thus marked the beginning of first major onslaught on the forests. This happened in the second half of the 19th century when large-scale destruction of forests took place in order to lay down railway tracks, railway sleepers, yards and stations and railway staff quarters. Chotangpur, which was famous for timbers of many varieties and the sal tree, in particular, was denuded to meet these demands.
The invaluable help rendered by these forests in the early phase of British expansion didn’t go unnoticed and the authorities took effective measures to manage these forests by way of demarcating areas of ‘Reserved’ and ‘Protected’ forests initially, and later by evolving scientific working plans for particular regions. Thus, as early as 1875, the Saranda Pir forests of Singhbhum, which contained the finest variety of sal timber in the country, were declared ‘Reserved’. Gradual attempts were made to bring more and more area under these categories, so that indiscriminate felling could be checked and forest wealth exploited in a planned way. Thus, conservation with cautious exploitation was the guiding principle for the Forest Department in managing the forests. At the same time the forest Acts were modified from time to time as and when the need was felt to secure Imperial interests. The creation of the ‘reserved’ and ‘protected’ forest category, thus forbade the local inhabitants from using these forests and the British authority could exercise unrestricted control over these. The British, however, could do little about the private forests of Chotanagpur that accounted for about 75 percent of the total forests of Chotanagpur, till the Private Forest Act was passed in 1946 by which the Forest...
Department took over the management of these forests. Nevertheless, the owners of these forests – local rajas, zamindars etc. did enough damage. And the forest officials had to struggle very hard to regenerate and replenish the damaged species. The private forests couldn’t be brought under the control of the forest Department mainly because their owners – zamindars, local Rajas and landlords dominated the local bodies as well as the legislatures, and thwarted the attempts of the Department which went against their rights and privileges. The Private Forests Bill, which was introduced in 1939, could be passed only in 1946, because these forests met a substantial proportion of war demands between 1939-45. Imperial needs thus prevailed over conservancy measures.

The real importance of forests was realized during the First World War when a heavy demand for timber was put on the forests. Consequently, all resources were channeled and every possible effort made to substitute indigenous timber for imported ones, to meet the augmented war demands. Chotanagpur forests supplied huge quantity of timber especially Sal, sissoo, Bijasal
etc. from Singhbhum and Bamboo from Palamau. There were unprecedented and unplanned felling in these forests and the damage was more severe because many forest officials were sent to serve in the Army. Significant increase in the revenues from these forests during the First World War indicates to the fact that the forests were now being worked intensively and extensively. Thus, massive exploitation was not matched by corresponding conservancy measures.

The experiences of the First World War and realization of massive destruction caused during the War, resulted in drawing up of Revised Working Plans and experiments conducted in silviculture particularly *Sal, sissoo, semal, salai* etc. at the Forest Research Institute, Dehradoon for the regeneration of damaged species, For a better management of the Chotanagpur forests, three Non- Territorial Divisions were created so that the difficulties faced by the forest officials in extracting timber during the First World War could be done away with. Teak plantation introduced in the region was another significant
feature. This exotic species was of immense economic value and very much in demand.

The Second World War proved to be the biggest stumbling block in the conservation of forests. This time, war demands were heavier than ever before mainly because of the cessation of imports of timber from Europe, U.S.A., and Canada and India being asked to supply timber in the Middle Eastern war theatre. The loss of Burma and the Andamans in early 1942 augmented this demand still further. At the same time, the war came much closer to India than the preceding war. Again, Chotangpur forests were denuded of Sal, Sisoo, Bjasal, Semal, Salai, bamboo etc. As the outturn of timber from these forests rose sharply, the revenues from these forests almost doubled between 1941-42. The establishment of saw mills in the region, Saranda forests in particular, made the supply of special sizes of timber possible easily. Among the minor forest products of the region, Lac had gradually assumed significance mainly on account of being used as insulator in electrical circuits and also in explosives. Thus it assumed a strategic importance particularly during the Second World War.
Another important produce *kath* or catechu, apart from being used in *paan* (betel leaves) was exported to Europe, where it was used as constituent for dye, calico printing and as tanning agent.

Thus, the large-scale destruction of various tree species especially during the World Wars enormously damaged the soil, vegetation and overall, the ecology of the region. Nevertheless, researches conducted in silviculture of several species proved very useful as important substitutes and also, some of the trees were utilized for the first time. Although many reconstruction programmes were taken up in post-Second World War years, the damages already done were incalculable and irreplaceable. Not only was the vegetation of the region destroyed, the very fabric of economic and social life of the tribals, who depended so much on the forests, was broken. The tribal movements, which were a significant feature of the region throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, were in some way or the other, connected with forests.
The economy of the tribals, so interlinked with forests, was sought to be disturbed by the colonial authorities and its structures—moneylenders, contractors, shopkeepers, traders and the like, often termed as ‘Dikus’ by the tribals. The Christian Missionaries who were so numerous in the region and assisted the local inhabitants in education, medical care and other developmental works played a significant role. It was this very Christian population, which played the most important role in the separatist movement in Chotanagpur in the 1940’s in the form of Jharkhand agitation that was preceded by the formation of organizations like the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj and the Adibasi Mahasabha. These organizations, however, could achieve little in the elections of 1937 and 1946 and therefore the movement assumed a regional character in post-independence years with the enlargement of membership to all Chotanagpuris and encompassing a much wider area by including parts of West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh which once formed the Chotanagpur Administrative Division.
The type of contradictions, which gripped the tribal society of Chotanagpur, was reflected in the form of memorandum submitted to the visiting Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Simon Commission by the *Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj*. This document not only tried to break away from the colonial typecasts but also suggested an alternative framework for looking at the problems of tribal Bihar. The memorandum began by portraying the standard bleak picture of the tribal people, their ignorance and their exploitation by outsiders but went on to propose an entirely different set of remedies. It argued for abolition of the prevailing system of laws of tenancy as, according to it, under the existing conditions “to all interns and purposes, the aboriginal people are serfs and village organization is ‘feudalistic’. The Chotanagpur Tenancy Act has only confirmed these unjust divisions of lands and aggravated the lifelong grievances of the aboriginals”. The Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj broke new grounds when it demanded that “each village should have its own Corporation for self-government in civil matters and judicial *panchayat* in certain matters and executive body in dealing with village lands”. It also dealt, at length, with the basis of franchise, divisions of existing provinces, and law
and judiciary. With regard to education, the Society demanded that "compulsory primary education be introduced...[T]he education at primary stage be imparted through the medium of languages spoken in the area". It asked for a local board of education and recurring grants. The Simon Commission, in its main report although did not refer to the rather progressive demands of the *Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj*, this by default implied that the Commission was in agreement with the majority view that tribal people were primitive and backward and required 'protection'. The build-up to the Jharkhand agitation had a lot to do with such an attitude of the British. (Other details on the representation to the Simon Commission along with references has been dealt in the chapter on the Jharkhand movement).

Although the *Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj* was not very successful in mobilizing the masses towards large-scale political activity as can be seen in their analysis on the *Jharkhand* agitation in an earlier chapter, it represents the earliest political organization in the region. The leadership of the organization was unique in the sense that it was composed of a band of educated youth, inspired
by ideas that were radical for their time such as the creation of a new state. The period of activity of these organizations along with their radical and progressive ideas, also saw the emergence of social reform amongst the tribal population on the lines of the socio-religious reform movement of the Nineteenth Century. One serious limitation of the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj and the Kisan Sabha, an off-shoot of the Samaj, formed in 1931, was the fact that until the 1930s, both of them, in practice, were restricted to the Lutheran and Anglican Christians. The non-Christian tribal elements were not involved in their activities. The 1937 elections were to cost dear for both the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj and the Kisan Sabha as the Congress swept the polls. One reason for this debacle was that another breakaway organization, the Catholic Sabha had gained much popularity because of the better-organized Catholic mission and this put the two organizations at a serious disadvantage.

The defeat of the Chotanagpur Unnati Samaj in the 1937 elections perturbed the Christian tribals and resulted in the formation of the Adibasi Mahasabha in 1938. The Samaj also
merged with the *Mahasabha*, which now represented an advance over the *Samaj* and commanded a wider political base and claimed pan-tribal composition and objectives. The *Adibasi Mahasabha* was also supported by factors like Bihari-Bengali controversy and the Muslim League politics. The leader of the *Mahasabha*, Jaipal Singh gave a militant turn to the separatist movement in order to achieve its aim. The *Mahasabha* extended full-fledged support to the British administration. Professional political workers, some of who were highly educated and articulate and employed sophisticated techniques to mobilize people, led the Mahasabha. It became a Chotanagpur movement extending over both rural and urban areas and involved tribals other than Ranchi tribals as well. The *Adibasi Mahasabha* demanded not the formation of a sub-state, but complete separation from Bihar.

Although the *Adibasi Mahasabha* could not achieve much during the British rule and the 1946 elections demonstrated this fact, it had already served its purpose in the sense that the notion of a separate state of *Jharkhand* began to rule the minds of the people
of Chotanagpur. However, it took a very – very long time before the dreams of the leaders of the Jharkhand agitation were realized with the formation of separate state of Jharkhand.

The British forest policy towards Chotanagpur, thus, passed through distinct phases. The British realized the economic potential of the region very early. Therefore systematic attempts were made to make full use of the available resources. However, since the region was prone to recurrent revolts, the British followed a policy of caution so as to minimize these conflicts. But the very nature of imperialism disturbed the socio-economic fabric of the society, which the people had nurtured from time immemorial. Despite the fact that the British left this region and the country way back in 1947, and large-scale developmental works were undertaken by the successive governments, the impact of exploitation can still be witnessed.

Not many works have been undertaken to study the policy of forest management. However, at least two works, one by
Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha (eds.), *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Delhi, 1992 and the other by Mahesh Rangarajan: *Fencing the Forests: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914*, Delhi, 1996, merit attention. In their book, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Gadgil and Guha have tried to outline the ecological History of India and deal, at length, the pre-colonial society in a 'steady state' relationship with the natural world. The division of labour in accordance with the custom enabled people to live in harmony with nature until colonialism misbalanced the same. The book goes on to emphasize the point that even before colonialism, there were changes e.g., shift from one mode of subsistence to another, these did not disturb the overall equilibrium between people and the nature.

However, the pre-colonial period witnessed changes in relations between lowland plains and the hill areas with major consequences for the ecology. By promoting the extension of the cultivated acreage via revenue remissions or retarding it through
high fiscal pressures, rent receivers and revenue collectors played a critical role in changing the landscape.

Mahesh Rangrajan has tried to argue on the significant ecological changes during the colonial period. He suggests that the colonial period saw major changes in the structure of the polity and in the nature of property relations. The British rule directly intervened in the very process of production. At the same time, the imposition of a more absolute notion of property complemented this process. The Forest Department provided a unified focus at an all-India level for a major revolution in styles of land management.

Also, the new rulers (the British) had a more absolute notion of political power than the earlier ones. Indeed, Mahesh Rangrajan has tried to produce a more holistic study of the British forest policy vis-à-vis ecological implications. My work on Chotnagpur region is an attempt to analyze the colonial forest policy in the region and its implied impact on the society which led to the
recurrence of various tribal movements. As has been dealt with, in detail in earlier chapters, in most cases, these upheavals and revolts were directly interlinked with colonial policy. The notion of a separate political entity of Jharkhand, during the colonial period, is a glaring example to suggest the linkages mentioned above.