

From a Correspondent

Since 1946, over 10,000 square miles of forests have been brought under proper scientific management. Eight years ^{It is} too short a period to estimate the results of a forest policy when the normal rotation of our main species, Sal, extends to 120 years. Yet we have evidence that our policy is taking effect. The time has come when a proper appraisal of the achievements in this regard is attempted and Government would draw the attention of ^{The} public to the condition of some of our forests over 70 years ^{before} when they were brought under scientific management. If in those forests, then taken over, convincing results have been achieved it can be safely presumed that our policy is right, and would in its time, bear ample evidence that steps taken ^{Twenty} years ago and followed since, ~~then~~ were the correct measures. It can also be inferred that the forest policy, which is substantially the same as has been pursued during the last 70 years, is even today bearing results. Of course the improvement in the forests is such that it cannot be demonstrated at a distance ^{away} from them.

^{To get} For an idea of ^{these} improvements, we have to compare the state of our reserved forests today with the condition in which they were ^{taken} over. A few extracts from Government reports of these days would be both illuminating and relevant, and therefore, are quoted below. Hunter's Statistical Account for Santal Parganas in 1870 reported

that "although the face of the Country is to a large extent covered with jungle, there are no forests in the Santal Parganas which contain timber of an appreciable value." In 1848-49 the Geological Survey reported that "throughout Santal Parganas and Chotanagpore, trees were not allowed to grow to a large size and that fine trees were occasionally seen, of fifteen inches to two feet in diameter; always solitary, never forming forests, and nowhere more frequently than nine or ten to the square mile." In 1873, Dr. William Schlich reported on ^{the} Kodarma forests as consisting of Sal shoots from old stumps, which were constantly cut back, so that few trees attained a girth of 3 feet. He also reported that in Palamau there were no large or middle-sized large ^{Sal} trees, and that all the more accessible Sal forests had been worked out some time ago and they grew then hardly anything but shoots from old stumps, of a girth up to 2 feet at the utmost. Seedlings were rare, simply owing to the fact that there were no seed-giving trees. He did not expect a single large Sal in a few years from his time.

~~How~~ These conditions extended over the entire area but between 1873 and 1885 about 2,000 square miles ^{were} taken as reserves and in all of them now good ^{quality} ~~big~~ trees ^{of the larger variety} are grown. Natural regeneration, which means replenishment of the forests automatically without any ^{still} expense on planting, has been taking place here and continues.

In examining the forests in relation to human factors; Our forests have to meet three kinds of demands — national, provincial and strictly local. As Bihar, (having about one-ninth of India's total forest area), is one of the major sources of forest produce in the country, it has to meet a fair share of the national demand of timber and raw material for the manufacture of plywood and paper. Some criticism has been voiced on our leasing bamboo jungles, which is in satisfaction of part of the national demand. It is used to supply paper for us and to starve the paper industry of its source of raw materials would not be advisable. We also receive subsidy from the Central Government for the bamboos and for raising plantations of soft woods for the match industry as Government is doing all that is possible to increase production to meet national requirements.

The requirements of the state, as a whole, are not small either; which include a very large number of pit-props for the mining industry, construction timber and firewood for domestic consumption in areas where there are no forests. The purely local demands, that is the requirements of the population near a forest; are also heavy even if no export to meet national or provincial needs was permitted. The average density of population in Chotanagpur is 368 to the square mile; higher than 200 everywhere and over 900 near Ranchi. As the forests cover only

38 per cent of the total forest-area, there is less than an acre of forest per capita and in some areas far less. According to estimates of needs, ten acres of forests for a family of five would satisfy their demands in full; that is two acres per head. That is nowhere available in Bihar and hence results in the persistent clamour that demands of the population are not met with.

Admittedly, there is not enough to go round and if all the demands were ^{met} with the forests would disappear. The Govt. have an afforestation scheme which plans to raise the area under forests to 16 per cent of the total area, (six per cent of the area in North Bihar and 10 per cent of the area in South Bihar), but the pressure of population on the land is such that not much, in regard to afforestation, can be achieved. In countries with a much smaller density of the population than ours, 20 per cent of the total area devoted to forests is considered a minimum necessity.

When there is such a grave shortage, ^{unmet} demands are bound to exist and the facts force us to pursue a policy of austerity in which shortages are not allowed to become acute. Forests are afforded as much protection as is possible under the circumstances, and a rough balance between national, provincial and local demands is achieved. An idea of how much of the local demands is met with is available _____

(See p. 5)

from the fact that produce valued at over a Crore of rupees is given away free or at concession rates to the people living near ~~for~~ forests. A net contribution of Rs 30 lakhs is made to the state's revenues ~~is made~~ annually and all Conservancy works, including a fairly big afforestation scheme, are being undertaken without any cost to the tax-payer.

Of the type which constitute the bulk of forests today, we will need to put at least 35 per cent of Bihar's total land area under forests if we are to meet all the demands. We do not have land ^{enough} for that ~~amplitude~~ but fortunately, the picture is not so dark. Well-managed and ~~a~~ ^{adequately} ~~conserved~~ ^{preserved} forests have higher yields ~~and~~ ^{resulting in} ~~then~~ ^{only} 0.9 acre of forest per head. ~~which is necessary.~~ ^{is over} After a period of development, ^{full} our forests will be adequate to meet all ~~our~~ our demands in ~~perpetuity~~ and still having a residual reserve surplus to enable us to steadily and continually improve them. The shortages therefore are ~~temporary~~ and our efforts should be devoted to shorten the period of transition from poor to good forests. Stricter Scientific management is the ^{only} solution.

There ^{are} frequent complaints that ~~destruction~~ ^{of} forests is taking place. That complaint has to be ^{viewed} ~~seen~~ against the pace of destruction prior to 1946. ~~Since then~~

Chotanagpur News Letter.

(From a Correspondent)

Ranchi

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