

# “And the Bamboo Flowers in the Indian Forests”

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***And the Bamboo Flowers in the Indian Forests: What did the Pulp and the Paper Industry Do? Vol. I & II* by Manorama Savur, Manohar Publications, Delhi, 2003, pp.715, Rs. 1500 (set).**

## Review by Dr. Vibhuti Patel

Prof. Manorama Savur's painstakingly made effort over last one decade has resulted in these extremely valuable volumes on the political economy of bamboo. This book *And the Bamboo Flowers in the Indian Forests: What did the Pulp and the Paper Industry Do? Vol. I & II* is the outcome of a multi-sourced (archival, library and field based research) and interdisciplinary work to highlight the environmental and socio-economic implications on the forest dwellers and workers as a result of the profit-seeking paper and synthetic fibre industry and the policy concerning bamboo farming, from the colonial times to the present.

Scope of the book is wide not only in terms of in-depth profile of history, geography, geo-politics, labour processes and labour relations, rupture of symbiotic relations between forest and tribal masses living in harmony with nature, cultural heritage of native populations spread over 9 states of India, but also in terms of its analytical vision and sensitivity towards multiple discourses of the subaltern masses, traders and capitalists, administration and policy-makers in the colonial and neo-colonial contexts. Every chapter starts with suitable poem written by the author. This enriches the lucid narrative of the text and the context.

In the first chapter, the author examines the phenomenon of denudation of bamboo forests that started in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, during 1950s the FAO started an advocacy for eucalyptus farming. The author expresses doubts about FAO's involvement in Pulp and Paper Industries and pulpwood plantation. She provides well-documented history of invasion of the fragile tropical forest eco-system by the European mercantile class and grievous onslaught on the Indian forests by the 'enlightened' self-interest of the British 'foresters'. Without considering the science of 'slash & burn' agriculture pursued by the local forest dwellers, the government declared them as ignorant destroyers of forests. The colonial foresters devised their own rules for felling trees to get timber exclusively for colonial, military and commercial purposes. The post independence period did not find any change in the mindset of government.

In the second chapter, the author gives evidences of enclosures of forest to sub-serve the interests of timber merchants. She proves that even the planning commission did not give due attention to the plight of local forest dwellers in response to enclosures serving the interest of traders in wood.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 delineate the genesis of paper industry and the process whereby wealthy industrial class aspiring to be an industrial bourgeois entered the paper industry in 1937. In 1951, FAO mission conducted a preliminary survey of forests of 25 countries. One member of the mission

had expressed serious doubts about regenerative power of eucalyptus species in Asia. FAO initiated eucalyptus plantation in India, first in Madhya Pradesh in 1956. During 1970s, the environment movement began protests against felling of natural forests for planting exotic pulpwood species and denying forest-dwellers the traditional rights to forest produce, especially grass and faggots. It was satellite images of the 1970s that first made India aware of the rapid pace of deforestation.

The state profile of **Orissa** highlights racist biases of the colonial rulers against the forest dwellers. In the post independence period also, the brown sahibs were equally insensitive to the need of the tribal masses. Negative impact of erosion of forests due to supply of 590,000 tonnes of bamboo per annum as a result of encroachment of forests by contractors serving paper mills and furniture industry needs to be highlighted. Colonial legacy of cultivation of timber forests since 1881 in “the high lands” of Central Province alienated the tribal population due to commercialisation of forest produce and forest land. During 1970s, the concept of social forestry was introduced to provide fuel, fodder, fibre and food to the tribal population. Subabul, *acacia auriculiformis* and eucalyptus were promoted for this purpose. But, we must remember that plantations are no substitute for natural mixed forests. The author recommends that sisal is useful alternative to damaging plantations of exotic pulpwoods.

In the 1980s, expansion and modernisation of paper industry generated massive organic waste due to mechanical and cold soda process used in the production of newsprint. It damaged water bodies and environment. In the second part of the state profile of **Madhya Pradesh**, the author provides a case history of Orient Paper Mills at Shadol. In 1907, the colonial administration started leasing forests to contractors on a yearly basis. Out of People from 18 tribes who were part of the eco-system of forest of Rewa/Shadol, people from 10 tribes were employed as forest labour. The author recommends that the government, Forest Research Institute (FRI) and the Orient Paper Mills should fulfil their social obligation by implementing affluent treatment and scientists of FRI in Jabalpur must be permitted to carry out their research dispassionately. Resources of these institutes should not be tied up with production of the larger biomass of pulpable material. Orient paper mills should use its corporate resources to modernise its pulping technology to save the raw material famine and use a type of raw material that does not pollute the rivers.

**Maharashtra** was the first state to set up a Forest Development Corporation as early as in 1974 to facilitate the growth of output of industrial papers. Liberalisation in the post New Economic Policy era has posed massive challenges to the paper industry in Maharashtra as Multi National Corporations( MNCs) are setting up their paper units and also dumping their unsold paper products in the US and Europe. Documentation of environmental damage- acid in wells/ river resulting into deaths of fishes and animals, unsafe drinking water generating variety of illnesses among local population in Ahmednagar and Chandrapur districts has not made any change in the official policy. Centre for Monitoring Indian Industry (CMIE) index for Maharashtra is 169, but for Chandrapur dist. the CMIE index of level of development is only 59. Liberalisation and economic globalisation have posed major threat to small-scale paper industries.

In **Andhra Pradesh**, political economy of forest based paper industry is rooted in the industrial development of Telengana. Major problem with the paper industry is solid waste on the way to Vampalli Catchments area. In A. P., tribal, forest and paper belt is one and the same. The volume succinctly unfolds, , through scrutiny of natural and social history of the forests, the process of death of the bamboo forests that were an abundant source of sustenance. The private sector in the state was interested only in profit, not its responsibility towards environment and safety. The public sector newsprint industry has raw material saving technology and pollution free production process. The study has also made careful examination of systematic destruction of the timber forests by ply and veneer industry.

In the state profile of **Karnataka**, the author asks why eucalyptus and rayon and why not bamboo and paper were promoted. Karnataka Forest Department has been involved in raising eucalyptus since 1950; still it could not fulfil the industrial demand. In 1971, the state Government formed Karnataka Forest Plantation Corporation to encourage industrial plantation like eucalyptus, cocoa, and rubber. At the behest of Birla Groups of Industries, in Nilgiris, several species of eucalyptus were tried. Disciplining Indian industry to conform to environmental safety standards and protecting them from foreign competition is the major agenda of the state.

In **Kerala**, a section of foresters and environmentalists firmly holds the view that bamboos and reeds ochalanda species of bamboo should be totally reserved for basket and mat weavers and all paper producing industrial units should be shut down. The author does not support such “extremist” view. Rural Kerala is dependent on the coconut shell. In this highest literacy state, the newspapers’ demand is also very high. Newsprint production is done by Hindustan Paper Corporation and its subsidiary. Issues at stake are recycling of waste water, solid waste disposal- coal ash lime sludge and clarified sludge, air-pollution control and employment generation for evictees. The author suggests that superfluous commodities like rayon should not be allowed to be produced from pulpwood.

In **Tamilnadu**, the forest based viscose rayon production has become much controversial. GoI and the state government should support farmers in growing appropriate crops which include pulpable agricultural crop and agriculture in arid land. Tamilnadi is rain starved and sugarcane is guzzler of water. The chapter makes a case in favour of ban on use of primary treated effluent for cultivation of cane.

**North-Eastern states** are marked by low level of industrialisation and the region being used for supply of raw material to the industries outside the region. The author tries to address the issues surrounding the late emergence of Hindustan Paper Corporation and its location in the turbulent North- East. Why did not the state governments promote local entrepreneurs as Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh had done? Nagaland Paper Mill was established in Assam. In a region so rich in Bamboo, the author finds it difficult to understand why the industry is demanding land to raise controversial exotics.(p.637). So far the North Eastern states are concerned, the author feels that the GoI must give every support to the paper mills to grow, while the modern pulping techniques should be introduced to save bamboo forests that should be managed by people, not by industry. She also recommends that a CBI inquiry must be carried out to locate and punish (a) Timber industries which have illegally felled the timber trees (b) Those who are responsible for setting up the Nagaland Paper Industry at Tuli.

Policy implications of the study are as follows:

- Rayon units with high consumption of scarce raw material should either be closed down or converted into paper or newsprint producing units.
- Newsprint industry should be protected by protective tariffs.
- Private sector should be compelled to upgrade their pulping technology so that the maximum quantity of cellulosic raw material can be utilised.
- The chemical load in the effluents is much too high for it to be used for cultivation. Till more R & D work is carried out, it should be stopped forthwith.
- Industrial plantation of pulpwood species in the natural forests should be banned-they spell a danger to the complex forest ecosystem.

- Ban on the felling by industry in Karnataka has rejuvenated the bamboo. While management of bamboo forests by the people in the North East has left the bamboo forests in good health, it is the time that policy makers take note of these two facts.
- The state should not forget that the forest dwellers too have right to their traditional homelands and a full right to participate in India's development and share in the gain.
- Investigations must be carried out seriously to find who actually suppressed the FAO 1980 Report and failed to convey its negative findings on eucalyptus tereticornis to various State Forest Department Corporations as well as to Pulp and Paper Industry.

These two volumes are goldmines of valuable information, data-base for policy planning and reference guide for forest departments and corporate world. The volumes will be found useful by the teachers, researchers and students of environmental economics, industrial sociology and geography.

I strongly recommend them for the libraries of the educational and legal institutions, secretariats of the central /state governments and corporate world.

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