

BOOK REVIEW -1

Richard P. Tucker, *A Forest History of India*, Delhi, India, Sage, 2012, ISBN: 978-81-321-0693-7(HB)

Environmental issues are major concern in 21st century. Many notable environmentalists are trying to improve and save the environment from further deterioration. Environmental historians try to see the various causes for degrading environment. In this 'war to save the Mother earth' Richard P. Tucker's book *A History of Forest in India* is a valuable contribution. This book is a collection of articles by Richard Tucker published in various journals before. Through this book author tries to bring them together in order to trace a history of forest in India from the colonial era to its post-independence legacy. Tucker studies the evolution of forest policy at national level and also shows its management at the provincial and local levels particularly in the Himalayan districts.

In order to understand the evolution of professional forestry, Tucker pointed out two main strains of conflict. First clash between subsistence need and profit (commercial) need. This clash is between the local population and the colonial state. Second clash is between two different sets of colonial authorities and bureaucrats. In other words one who wants to preserve and manage forest versus the other who wanted to expand agriculture and industry in order to enhance revenue income, i.e., forest department vs. revenue department.

Written in 1980s and 90s this collection of ten articles, covering almost whole of India is an important contribution to understand the colonial legacy in order to manage our natural resources after independence.

Book begins with an *Introduction* highlighting the works of eminent environmental historians followed by chapter 1 Forest Management and Imperial Politics: Thana district, Bombay, 1815-1914. This chapter focuses on the tensions between the Government of Bombay and villagers over the control and use of forest resources. Government need for teak to build Railway sleepers and naval ships led to deforestation. Indigenous intelligentsia gave voice to Bombay villagers and tribes through voluntary organizations and municipal government.

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 primarily is a case study of Western Himalayan region. In Chapter 2 and 3 Tucker tries to study the evolution of forest management in British India and its transference to the other parts of British Empire which completely shows their imperial commercial interest in forest. In opposition to above, Chapter 4 shows the initiative taken up by the villagers in organizing social forestry for their subsistence.

Chapter 5 *The Evolution of Transhumant Grazing in the Punjab Himalayas* interestingly focuses on the forest depletion associated with livestock economy. According to Tucker, Government restrictions on Transhumant grazing drastically deteriorated the forest and pastures resources eliminating many plant species and the meadows. This restriction on transhumant also affected their economic condition.

Chapter 6 *The British empire and India's Forest resources: the Timberlands of Assam and Kumaon, 1914-1950*, highlights the dynamics of land policy, economic development, demographic and ethnic movements and setting of landscape and vegetation in Uttar Pradesh and Assam. Followed by a comparison between north and south India's forest, Chapter 7 titled *The Depletion of India's Forest under British Imperialism: Planters, Foresters and Peasants in Assam and Kerala*. In this chapter Tucker discuss that British in India expanded agricultural lands at the expense of forest. European legal institutions and knowledge penetrated deep into the woods turning forest into commodities. In this whole race to earn more, Planters, traders and landlords benefitted most. Peasants too improved a bit but tribal and plantation workers clearly suffered a lot, losing their subsistence need. By 1947, nearly the entire vegetation map of India was determined by the intricate structure of power which had evolved under the British Raj. British almost entirely domesticated the lands of the subcontinent.

Chapter 8 *The Commercial Timber Economy under two colonial regimes in Asia* shifted the study by discussing some aspects of timber contracting and marketing in two contrasting colonial settings: the Himalayan forest of northern India under British rule and the Philippines Islands rainforests during the American occupation. Chapter 9 *Resident Peoples and Wildlife in India: the prehistory of a strategy* shows that how in 20th century British authorities' systematically integrated local people in wildlife planning.

Chapter 10 *Non-Timber Forest Product Policy in the western Himalayas under British Rule* shifts focus from timber forest product to non-timber forest product policy. European foresters also imported new scientific classificatory system which defined 'Minor Forest Products' as all products which did not produce large scale market sales or revenue for Government. This market orientation was one major reason for their failure to comprehend the character and scope of 20th century peasant and tribal resistance movements. Therefore this chapter traces the evolution, scope and limitations in the forest service's non-timber forest product policy and evaluates the extent to which the Forest department attempted to regulate the gathering and sale of Minor Forest Products. It further shows that the need to reconstruct rural people's 'traditional' use of non-timber forest products in the western Himalayas led to the evolution of modern forestry. Thus it tries to see relation between the State, the Market, Villages and forest ecosystems.

This compilation of articles definitely contribute in the historiography of environment history and opens up new questions as well, such as how British forest policy affected the socio-cultural aspects of the people dependent for their subsistence over forest products. How and when British Raj policy of clearing forest change to preserving forest. How commercialization of Forest is different from commercialization of agriculture. How these tensions between the state and peasant and tribal were reflected in literature. Addition of a concluding chapter and Bibliography would have strengthened the book. Somewhere we missed this. Well researched *A forest History of India* is very relevant for students and teachers of History, Environment, Sociology, political science, anthropology, Botany and other discipline.

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