

# Periodic Research

## Evolution of the Colonial forest policy in Oudh: 1860 to 1900

### Abstract

Environmental history, a relatively new branch of historiography, is the study of human interaction with the natural world over time. Forest is a significant discussion of Environmental History. The evolution and implementation of a forest conservation policy inevitably involves decisions about the use of forest resources. This paper focuses on the construction of colonial forest policy in Oudh region. In the period of 1860-1900 Oudh forests had made great progress in the field of forest management and conservation. Colonial state intervention in management of forests was necessitated by the requirements of timber for three sources: railways (Oudh railway company and Rohilkhand railway companies), wood required for various departments such as public work department and military department and finally increase of demand for firewood by the public. To meet the demand from these three sources, forestry as a category of science and technology for enhancing the productiveness of forests was encouraged by the colonial state.

**Keyword** Chronological, Trajectory, Environmental Historians

### Introduction

Environmental history in South Asia mainly focused on colonial forest policies. It is due to the fact that contemporary discourse on environmental conservation perceived forests as most efficient absorbers of green house gases. In this context study of colonial forest policies emerged as most fascinating field of enquiry in history. Though substantial historical literature has been produced in the last two decades, still several regions are not being paid due attention by historians. Oudh is one such region which has not been paid attention by environmental historians. This article attempts to construct a chronological trajectory of colonial forest policies. By so doing the role of political economy and resource hungry colonial economy are given particular attention.

It has been a contentious debate in the historiography of Colonial forest utility on the factor responsible for forest policy. How were these policies beneficial for the forest management and to what extent? Conservation, as Richard Grove argues guided by the incentives of agrarian prosperity and social stability. These are, however, no unanimity on this issue. The histories of Indian forestry written by forest officials argued strongly in favour of the benefits of scientific forestry and scientific supervision and management of forests. They contended the necessity of 'reserved' forests, to protect them from hazardous private interests, although access to the limited tracts of forests was allowed to the villages. Conversely, there are many who have argued that the colonial forest policy led to deforestation and that 'every day beliefs of tribal and peasant society' were smashed by the commitments of the colonial Governments. They manipulate the customary use of forest.....to enable sustained timber production fulfilling their commercial and strategic interest. These systems of forest use a management led to ecological decline and agrarian protest. These scholars also emphasize the conflict between state forestry and peasantry and establish the significance of local perceptions as affected by state policy rather than the perceptions of the forest department. These arguments enforce a pattern of uniformity in the sphere of forestry, while there is sufficient space to pontificate elements of diversity between one region and the other. The state policy- whether of the East India Company or of the earlier Governments- towards the forests changed over time and was constantly evolving. In the case of Oudh, in the late eighteenth early nineteenth centuries, while the commercial and strategic interest were strongly influential, were never so at the cost of conservation of forests or agrarian prosperity.

**Richa Tripathi**

Research Scholar  
BBA University  
Lucknow

# Periodic Research

## Objective

The present paper is an attempt to look in to the evolution of the forest policy in Oudh region (1860-1900). The important motive behind selecting the time period from 1860-1900 for my study is that during this era the colonial Government introduced the concept of forest management and implemented it. The main objective of this paper attempts to construct as chronological trajectory of colonial forest policies and its execution.

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is: The British forest policies depleted the forest cover which distributed the balance between agriculture, pastoralism and forestry.

## Methodology

A precise study of the evolution of the forest policy in Oudh region: 1860-1900 (Colonial period) is completed with help of primary sources and secondary sources. Main primary sources are District Gazetteers and Original Files Record from Archives. Apart from these primary resources, secondary sources are also utilized in this work, these are books and articles. These books and articles have provided views and fine material for completing this article.

## Research Work

In the United Provinces, Awadh was constituted as a separate circle for efficient management of forests. Forestry as a scientific category implemented through separate government department in Awadh region begun after 1865 and by 1880s consolidated as a legitimate branch of government apparatus. Awadh forests were originally administered under the waste land rule, but were declared to be state forests in 1861. Mr. F. Read was appointed conservator of forests in Oudh in 1861. The Secretary of State gave sanction to the appointment of an assistant conservator in Oudh in 1865. Brandis had visited in 1863 and had made a series of valuation surveys in the best stocked forests situated between the Sardah and Koriolly rivers. These forests were demarcated and as surveyed by Reid in 1864 for better management. As a result of Brandis suggestions conservancy had been introduced on systematic lines. The reserved forests had up to that date been confined to areas containing the three species Sal, Sissu and Tun. Wood had reported that there were in addition grass lands within the forests and unculturable tracts containing miscellaneous forest produce which might with advantage be included. Sanction had been given during the year to the inclusion of the latter within the reserves. As regards the former the Chief Commissioner that as the regular survey was now entering these tracts the cost of demarcation would be small. Works of improvement of the forests had been commenced, and one of the most urgent was the operations require to free the sal trees from the destructive creepers, Argynia and Bauhinia vahlii. Brandis had been fixed the limit on the number of trees to be felled annually in the forests 4000. The annual felling was to be determined by two considerations: 1) The natural yield of the forest, 2) The aggregate stock of timber in the

Oudh and Nepal depots. Before 1865-66 Forest Report had been drawn up for the forest year ending 30 September. At the desire of the Government of India the Reports were in future to be drafted for the financial year in order that they could be compared with the figures of the other administrations. The question of village forests, valuation surveys and the opening out of forest roads are points of interest in Cleghorn's summary of the work being undertaken in Oudh. Mr. Read recommends that all timber within forest limit should be considered reserved and placed under departmental control. He objects to the partially authorized entrance of villagers into the reserved forests for the purpose of obtaining timber for domestic purpose and attaches much importance to the isolation of villages from reserved forest lands after the plan followed in Kumaun, viz. the definition of limits by the excavation of a ditch in lieu of boundary posts or pillars. These remarks contain matter for serious consideration this difficulty might be met, as proposed by Mr. Read, by assigning a tract of sufficient extent for the village consumption, measures is always attended with difficulty at first, but with persevering efforts and the careful explanation of the intentions of Government the object will be attained. An illustration of this is given by Mr. Read: "On the introduction of the first step towards conservancy of the forests in Oudh, the felling of Sal saplings was strictly prohibited. The Tharoos at once declared they would leave their villages and go over to Nepal, as the straight Sal sapling was the only kind of wood they could use, and had hitherto used, for fencing their field and roofing their numerous sheds and habitation; but I observe there are now as thickly populated as they then were and their fences, etc., are constructed with less valuable timber than Sal". The importance of valuation surveys on the system proposed by Dr. Brandis is urged in view to the compilation of statistics in the conservator's office; this and the topographical survey being correctly considered as the basis of all Forest Conservancy. The want of communications through the forest is dwelt upon in Mr. Read's report thus: "A point of considerable importance is the construction of roads through our forests not only with a view of facilitating timber operations but to assist the transit of timber from Nepal. I have ascertained that the average distance traversed by an ordinary timber cart is scarcely over three miles a day as the cart tracks followed by the carters in many instances are so bad as to impede their progress." The construction of good forest roads is unquestionably of great importance for facilitating timber operations, and is likely to secure enhanced revenue from the sale of miscellaneous forest produce. The sanctioned forest establishment in 1866 was not large. It consisted of the Conservator and two assistant conservators Mr. C. Chapman and Lieutenant W.R. Martin. It was shown that from the commencement of the forest operations in 1861 up to 30<sup>th</sup> April 1865, the balance in favor of the Department amounted to Rs. 1,06,029 and the net profit for the 1866-67 amounted to Rs. 82,040 a considerable increase on the previous year. Wood held the

# Periodic Research

appointment of officiating conservator throughout the year 1866-7 and prepared the progress report of these forests for the year under the headings already laid down by Brandis for these Reports. During the year the main operations and work had been confined to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions; in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division (Gonda) the settlement and survey officer was engaged in laying down the boundaries between Oudh and the North-West Provinces and therefore had been unable to proceed with the demarcation work in the Gonda District. It was stated, moreover, that "the grazing, etc., contracts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> division still remained in the hands of the Maharaja of Bulrampur." The erection of permanent boundary pillars was in progress in the Kheri and Bahraich divisions, but had not for the above reasons been commenced in Gonda. As a full staff of assistants had been sanctioned for Oudh it was hoped that demarcation work and erection of pillars in the latter division would be undertaken during the ensuing year. The areas of the three divisions still considered approximate only were as follows: 1) Division in Kheri District 263 square miles. 2) Division in Bahraich 269. 3) Division in Gonda 170, Total 702'. Read had suggested that the forest in certain waste lands south of the Sardah River in the Mohumdee District should be included in the Reserved Forests. The conservator also wished to add to the State Forests two forests in the Bahraich District, the Charda sal forest and the Rajghur Singha tract. The inclusion of the first named area was still under consideration, whilst on the latter the Oudh Government had stated that "the claims of private parties to these forests require judicial settlement in the regular courts before further action can be taken". In their review of the Report the Government of India alluded to the description of the forests in three divisions enumerated in the Report, and to the details given of the requirements of the agricultural population in the vicinity, which they had hitherto been in the habit of obtaining from the forests. Brandis had submitted to the Oudh Government detailed proposals for the settlement of these matters. The subject had already been under discussion between the government of India and the former Chief Commissioner of Oudh. The Government of India gave a short review of the present position and recorded an expression of their own opinion on the subject: "The work of demarcating the Oudh Forests commenced in 1862, in what is now called the Kheri District, between the Sardah and Korially Rivers". The then Chief Commissioner considered that all waste lands in that part of Oudh had become the property of the State at the time of annexation, and were thus declared at the settlement of 1858. This view he recorded in a letter to the Government of India of the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1863. Subsequently, government were demarcated in the Bahraich and Gonda Districts, and it is supposed that in these district also the right of Government over the forest lands were at the time considered to be unquestioned. The forest rules which were promulgated in September, 1866, were apparently framed on the supposition that Government held the forest lands that had been

demarcated as state forests, subject to no rights or privileges of other parties. These rules imply that the right to all the produce of the forest is vested in the Government. Thus all interference with trees, timber and forest produce, without the authority of the conservator is prohibited in rules VI, IX, X and XI. Burning grass and jungle clearing the forest for cultivation, burning lime or charcoal, or the grazing of cattle, is prohibited by rule XII. Provision to protect the forest against fire from out side the forest limit is made in rule XIII. And the power of closing existing roads through the forests is assumed in rule XIV. A limited permission to cut unreserved timber for their own bona fide use for domestic and farming purposes is granted in rule VII to villagers living in forests or with in three miles of the Government boundary line but this concession was apparently made as a free gift on the part of Government and not as a matter of rights'. It was reported in letter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1867, that it was intended to enforce the prohibition against the grazing of cattle gradually and that it was proposed, over and above the additional areas of waste land included within the new boundaries of villages, to allot to them certain parts of the forests as fuel allotments, by way of compensation for all the privileges which they may have lost by the introduction of strict conservancy rules. In review of the present report, however, it is said that much difficulty has been experienced in satisfying the talookdars and villagers, and that, though the subject has received unremitting attention, but little progress has yet been made towards its solution. It is gathered from the report on this subject, submitted to you by the Inspector-General, that in a large portion of the forest it will be found difficult to effect the demarcation of fuel allotments, and that the requirements of the surrounding population, and that the arrangements for satisfying them, must be considered in detail, separately with reference to each subdivision of the forest; that, in fact, a detailed enquiry into the circumstances of each village must be made. To make this enquiry in a satisfactory manner the Inspector-General has suggested to you the appointment of a special commission, consisting of an officer of Revenue and one of the Forest Department, whose joint Report, subject to an appeal within six months, would be final when sanctioned by the Chief Commissioner. Regarding these an expression of your views will be awaited. Should you entertain the proposal of entrusting the settlement of this matter to a special commission, it appears right to State that, if the basis on which the Oudh Forest Rules were framed, that is, the assumption of complete rights of the state in these forests can be maintained, there will be no necessity for giving legal force to the decisions of the commission on the part of Government. But if the basis of the existing rules is not tenable, then a clause must be inserted in the Oudh Forest Rules, giving legal force to the decisions of the commission when sanctioned by the Chief Commissioner, and this will require an additional section in the Forest Act. Under all circumstances, His Excellency in Council considers that it will be proper to insert such a section

# Periodic Research

in the Forest Act, to enable local Government to effect a satisfactory settlement of customary or prescriptive rights in the forests'. No progress had yet been made with the important matter of keeping out fires from the forests. The chief commissioner stated that in his opinion the Conservator had not exaggerated the evil done to the forests by fire, but expressed a doubt whether these could be immediately put a stop to, as it would be out of the question entirely to exclude from this part of the country the enormous herds of cattle sent to graze there. The Chief Commissioner in another passage of his review on this subject said that the stoppage of firing the jungles might involve the closing of the forests to all grazing interest, were to be entirely stopped, the dense vegetation which would grow up would so choke up the forests that they would become fitted only for wild animals, and inaccessible to the Forest Department. This was an expression of the opinions commonly held in the country at the period, not only by civilian officers and the native community, but also by many Forest Officers as well. And when it is remembered that the forests had been annually burnt by the people from time immemorial it is scarcely surprising that it should have taken some time before the growth of a country opinion began to make itself felt. In fact, it was only due to the extraordinary energy, resourcefulness and tact of the Forest Officers, backed by a section of shrewd and far-sighted civilians, that the new ideas gained ground in the country as rapidly as was ultimately the case. But already the value, as examples, of the beginnings made elsewhere had not been lost upon the Government of India. On this subject they wrote as follows:

"His Excellency in Council hopes that your apprehensions will not be realised. An attempt might be made to devise measures for satisfying moderate requirements of the agricultural population without serious detriment to the forests. It will, His Excellency in Council trusts, be found possible to regulate the grazing of cattle within the limits of the State forests, without necessitating the emigration of the inhabitants. On the other hand, Reports from the Central Provinces seem to show that the exclusion of fires, while favouring the growth of the arborescent vegetation, rather tends to keep down grass and low jungle. Moreover, division and sub division lines must, under all circumstances be cleared through the forests, which will make them sufficiently accessible for all purposes of protection and management." Already a number of lines had been cut through the forests under the conservator's orders with a view to dividing them up into manageable blocks of about equal size. Some of the main lines were to be converted into fair-weather roads in order to facilitate the export of timber. The conservator correctly enumerated the advantages of these lines, thereby displaying the rapid advance which was being made at the period in forest organization in Oudh; viz, they would render possible the valuation of the growing stock in each block or compartment, facilitate the export of timber and other forest produce. In a report on the Kheri Forests, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1863, Brandis

had given an estimate of the rate of growth of the sal in that division. Wood had carried on the investigation by counting the rings on a number of stumps and logs. The following is a comparison of the two results, which were recognized as being only preliminary ones:

6' Girth	4'6' Girth1
Brandis, 1863	80 years 50 years
Woods, 1863	95 65

From the result of his felling operations it had become apparent that a large proportion of the mature trees in the forests were unsound, Wood considering that only one-third of the trees would, he feared, be sound. In 1863 it had been estimate that the Kheri Forests would be able to supply 4000 mature trees annually. If Wood's analysis were correct it would considerable affect the annual yield, as it was not proposed to commence regular felling operations yet in the other divisions. For the present Wood's estimates had been accepted and a plan of operations for the two following years had been drawn up for Kheri by the conservator and the inspector general, based on the data available at the time. The plan limited the number of trees to be felled during the period to 2900. Including besides sal two other reserved species of tree, "asna" and "haldu", the wood of which was said to be in demand. The plan also laid down the order in which felling operations were come to be commenced and continued. This plan had been approved. The point of interest in connection with the progress made during 1868-69 can only be alluded to briefly. A ditch 850 yards long had been dug in the Bahraich Division to mark one of the boundaries as an experiment to keep cattle out of the forests. The value of this work, in consideration of its cost, was to be carefully watched. The question of commencing the formation of Khair and Sissi plantations as fuel reserves in selected localities was under consideration. Captain Losack and Mr. Dodsworth are first mentioned as Forest Officers. Wood's annual progress report for 1869-70 is an interesting document drawn upon Brandis new model. Wood was now permanent conservator and considerable progress had been made in Oudh. Wood's work and negotiations in connection with the transfer of the waste lands in Kheri, south of the Sardah River, was meeting with success. The area amount to be 285 square miles, of which 19000 acres had already been made over the department and the Government of the Oudh was anxious that the whole of the tract should be managed by the department as it was better suited for the growth of Sal wood than for ordinary cultivation. Wood had suggested a plan of eventually making use of traction engines to do the principle part of the carriage of timber and fuel. The Government of India approved of the suggestion and the Secretary of State (Argyll) had readily given his acquiescence.

Forest Conservancy in Oudh, when compared to many other parts of India, or even the adjoining North-Western Provinces, had made considerable progress by 1870. A good commencement had been made and the revenue was fairly satisfactory in some districts. Fire protection was still, however, in its infancy and

# Periodic Research

forest settlements were giving trouble. There existed few "rights" over large tracts of the forests, the settlement of some areas was incorrectly made and forests were burned with rights which under the law did not exist. Wood had presented his progress report for the year of 1869-70. Wood's work and negotiations in connection with the transfer of the waste lands in Kheri, south of the Sardah River, was meeting with success<sup>13</sup>. The Government Forests of Oudh Circle consisted of the reserves in the Pilibhit and Gorakhpur Districts belonging to the north-west provinces and the reserves in the Kheri, Bahraich and Gonda Districts in Oudh. All these forests were constituted reserves under Section 39 of the Indian Forest Act of 1878 in February 28<sup>th</sup> 1879. In 1886 Ribbentrop had presented the report of the position of the Oudh forests administration and this report, based on an inspection of the Oudh Forest Circle. For meeting the requirement of the construction of Railways, heavy felling took place in the Kheri Forest. And then ordered to framing a working plan for the Kheri forests with out any delay and Ribbentrop was instructed to proceed to Oudh, where he spent a part of March and April 1886. Before dealing with the main points at issue, Ribbentrop has some interesting remarks upon the configuration, soils and sylvicultural requirements of the Sal and one or two other species of the Oudh Forests which may be briefly epitomized. In 1894 the first working plan was prepared for the South Kheri Division. The area of Government Forests in 1886 was as follows: Sal forests, 586 square miles, miscellaneous forests, 89 square miles, Khair and Sissu 245 square miles and grass lands 212 square miles, Total 1132 square miles. In 1890 Eardley Wilmot became Conservator of Forests in Oudh and during the next nine years he undertook the reorganizing of the management of forests. In the Inspector General's "Review of Forest Administration for 1891-92" the backwardness of Oudh in forest organization is commented upon. In 1892-93 the Government of India note the marked progress in the preparation of working plans which had taken place under the guidance of the conservator, and they had also remarked upon the excellent results which had attended in this circle the efforts made to improve during the past four years the organized exploitation of forest produce. The conservator's next task was to make a regular working plan for the area, and part of this work was entrusted to Mr. Keshavanand. He had played excellent work on this field and got good result. And second task taken up by the conservators was the demarcation of the forest boundaries. These boundaries demarcated by the sandstone pillars. The boundary was plainly visible to the public, and prosecution for trespass would lead to conviction in the court. The other problem taken up, which cost an infinity of trouble and labor, was the preparation of the record of rights, a business which had not been settled. All villages within three miles of the boundary and, says Eardley Wilmot, there were many more in the now more populous country, were enumerated, with numbers of houses, cattle, acreage of land, etc., as also their requirements in fuel, grazing etc., from

the forest. Schedules were then prepared recording the annual grants of each to which the people were eligible. In this way the proportion of produce from the forests required for the local community was known and consequently the amount remaining for sale in the open market. This work occupied several years as it required constant reference to the Revenue Officer.

## Findings

The proposed study deals with history of forest policies in Oudh region and the significant finding of the study is Colonial Government tried to explain that they made scientific forest policy for the sustainable development of the forest resources but it was not only aim of the colonial government to intervene into forest management they wants to fulfill their demands for Railway sleepers and firewood. And the core of this study is justifying it.

## Conclusion

The history of forest policy in Oudh province shows the way in which colonial forest policies were implemented in India. While intervention in forests was an imperative for resource requirements of the colonial economy, the colonial state justified its intervention by evolving elaborate governance apparatus for management of forests. This was done to meet the sustained supply of forest resources, especially timber and firewood. The history of forest policy in Oudh also reveals that sustainable development as a discourse originated in the colonial context by renouncing the native Indian practices of forest management. However, this discourse was created and translated in the form of scientific forestry in the context of acceleration of resource exploitation which was imperative for the colonial economy for it created a new paradigm in transforming Indian economy by gaining political control in India. Even contemporary discourse of sustainable development indeed an attempt to do the same thing but with different tone

## Reference

1. David Arnold and Guha Ramachandra, "*Nature, Culture and Imperialism: Essay on the Environmental History of South Asia*", Oxford University Press, 1994, New Delhi
2. Dawan, Dr. Ashok, "*A Textbook of Environmental*", Saurabh Publishing House, 2008, Daryaganj, New Delhi
3. Divan S and Rosencranz A, "*Environmental Law and Policy in India, Cases Materials and Statutes*", Oxford University Press, 2001, New York
4. Erskine G. E., "*Orders of Government, No. 819 of 1881. Resolution*", Revenue (Forest) Department, Dated Camp Lucknow, the 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1881
5. Forest Research Institute Dehradun, "*Indian Forest Records*", Manager of Publication, 1935, Dehradun, India
6. Forest Research Institute Dehradun, "*Indian Forest Bulletin*", Manager of Publication, 1942, Dehradun, India

# Periodic Research

7. Forest Research Institute Dehradun, "100 Years of Indian Forestry 1861-1961", Forest Research Institute, 1961, Dehradun, India
8. Forest Research Institute Dehradun, "Forest", Forest Research Institute, 1941, Dehradun, India
9. Gadgil, M., Prasad S.N. and Ali, R., "Forest Management and Forest Policy in India: A critical Review", Social Action. Vol. 33, no. 2, 1983
10. Gadgil, M. and Guha, Ramachandra, "This Fissured Land: An ecological History of India", New Delhi and Berkeley, 1992
11. Gadgil, M., "Ecology and Equity: the use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India", London and New Delhi, 1995
12. Ghosh, S.K. and Singh, Rita, "Social Forestry and Forest Management Volume-1", Global Vision Publication House, 2002, Delhi
13. Guha, Ramachandra, "The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Changes and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya", University of California press, 2000, Berkeley California
14. Guha, Ramachandra, "Environmentalism: A Global History", Longman publishing group, 1999, UK
15. Guha, Ramachandra, "Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals, and India", Oxford university press, 1999, New Delhi
16. Guha, Ramachandra, "Forestry in British and Post British India: A Historical Analysis", Economic and Political Weekly, 29 October and 5-12 November 1983
17. Guha, Ramachandra, Gadgil, Madhav, "State Forestry and Social Conflict in British India: A study in the Ecological Bases of Agrarian Protest", Past and Present, no. 123, May 1989
18. Grove, Richard H., "Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860", Cambridge University Press, 1995, Melbourne Australia
19. Grove, Richard H., Vinita, Damodaran and Satpal, Sangwan, "Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and South East Asia", New Delhi, 1998
20. Jackson H., "Annual Progress Report of Forest Administration in the Central, Oudh and School Circle of the United Provinces for the Forest year 1905-06", United Provinces Government Press, 1906, Allahabad
21. Kumar Kapil, "Peasants in Revolt. Tenants, Landlords, Congress & the Raj in Oudh 1886-1922", Manohar, 1994, Delhi
22. Kunwar S. S., "Hugging the Himalaya: the Chipko Experience", Gopeshwar, 1982
23. Parkash Ram, "Forest Management", International Book Distributors, 1986, Dehradun India
24. Rangarajan, Mahesh, "Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-1914", 1996, New Delhi
25. Ribbentrop B., "Note on an Inspection of the Forest in Oudh in March and April 1886", Government Central Branch Press, 1886, Simla
26. Sagreiya K.P., "Forest and Forestry", National book trust, 1967, New Delhi
27. Wood E., "Progress Report of Forest Administration in the Province of Oudh during 1877-78", Government Press, 1879, Lucknow