

# FOREST ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS IN NORTH EAST INDIA

*A. Henia*

## **Introduction**

Environment comprises almost everything around us. It includes humans, plants, animals and invisible micro-organisms. Also it includes water, air, land, soil, oil and other elements available on the earth. The welfare of the human beings and a sound environment are interlinked with each other. Deterioration in the quality of environment affects public health. Environment is crucial in ecology, which is a multidisciplinary science dealing with the inter-relationships existing between organisms (flora, fauna and humans) and their environment. Thus, environment is an all-inclusive and a complex phenomenon which supports life on the earth. It is only because of this the earth is only known living planet in the entire universe where there is life. Its life-supporting environment makes it unique. Environment has emerged as an economic commodity of strategic importance in the present day world. While technological developments in the fields such as medicare, industry, agriculture and transportation have greatly improved the quality of life on one hand, but on the other hand these have also endangered environment

in many ways *e.g.*, environmental pollution, land degradation, deforestation etc.

### **Forest Environment**

Forest environment provides ecological balance and forests are the rich natural resources of the mother earth for mankind. Development on all fronts in the region and in the country depends on forest environment. The environment is deteriorating rapidly which can be seen and experienced in many ways. For example, the destruction of forests of the planet continues unabated resulting in soil erosion (which silts the rivers, lakes, canals, streams and reservoirs); flash floods, droughts, the elimination of many species of animals, plants etc. About 40 per cent of the earth was covered with forest a few decades ago but now it has shrunked greatly. Large forest areas have been cleared for the purpose of cultivation and many other developmental works. On the other hand, over-grazing, forest fires, logging and felling of the trees indiscriminately on a large scale for timber and fuel have further worsened the situation. Rain forests (tropical) are disappearing at an alarming rate which sustain and support a vast number of species of animal and plant life.

### **Forest**

Forests are one of the most striking features of the land surface. They vary greatly in composition and density and stand in marked contrast to meadows and pastures. Certain forests are evergreen, while others are deciduous. Forests are the homes for various plants and animals. Forests provide us with wood, raw materials and protect our environment against pollution. Man has been destroying the forests to meet his needs. The destruction of forests will not only result in vanishing of greenery on earth but the whole ecological balance will be disturbed. Forests are useful in many other ways also, reasons for its importance are as follows:

- i. They prevent floods by controlling the flow of rain water. This increases ground water, while soil erosion is reduced. It also prevents fast evaporation of water on land and increases the humidity of air by transpiration.
- ii. Forests have a direct, intimate and profound relationship with the economy of the people. This is one of those natural wealth which is shared by the rich and poor alike and is virtually indispensable from natural environment. To the village folk, the tribals and their domestic livestock, forests are the main source of sustenance.
- iii. Forests play a vital role in maintaining a balanced ecological system. Forests assist in the essential global cycling of water, oxygen, carbon dioxide and nitrogen. They also influence solar radiation reaching the earth's surface, wind, humidity and temperature and thus moderate the climate, especially the rainfall.
- iv. Forests are a renewable resource and contribute substantially to economic development. They play a major role in enhancing the quality of environment. They provide food, fuel, fodder, medicine (from plant, herbs, fruits and flowers) and timber for development purposes, industrialisation and shelter.
- v. The forest products have been classified under two headings—major products and minor products. Timber, pulp, match wood, firewood and charcoal wood form the major products. Whereas minor forest products comprise of bamboo, cane, fodder, grasses, gums, resins, drugs, tanstuff, dye stuff, seeds, tender leaves and honey.

### **Role of Forests**

Forests have two important roles, they are: long term ecological security, and production of goods and services for the benefit of mankind. With the increasing realisation of the two roles of forests, crash programmes of reforestation,

social forestry, agro forestry or energy forestry have to be organised on non agricultural land.

### **Deforestation**

Increasing population, along with widespread poverty has generated pressure on our natural resources and led to degradation of the environment. The forest resources are threatened due to over grazing and other forms of over exploitation, both for commercial and household needs, and unsustainable activities etc. Thus, creation of deserts is difficult to reverse and a massive effort is required if soil erosion and famine are to be avoided.

### **The Scenario in North East**

Though the region is endowed with immense natural resources, particularly forest resources, but due to the rapid growth of population and smaller industrialisation, the natural resources (forest) are dwindling and several species of wildlife are being endangered too. Unless and until our forest policy is reviewed, revised and reformulated to meet the modern challenges it is feared that a large portion of forests will disappear. Reasonably, community awareness is to be created urgently on such issues. Recently environmental considerations have influenced government policies for development, leading to increase awareness action. The North-Eastern region is faced with deforestation. However, among all the North-Eastern states, Arunachal Pradesh has the largest forest area. In spite of the forest conservation policy, its implementation is not very effective. As a result, over the decades, forest cover has progressively reduced in the region. We have to prevent wanton destruction of the forest resources particularly in the North-Eastern India, which is one of the biodiversity hot spots of the world. In this context, increasing community awareness is the basic and lasting measure for protection, conservation and development of forests in the

region. When community as a whole is made to realise how forest resources contribute towards environment, ecological balance and sustainable development in the region, then, that will make a lasting effect on a forest environment as well. Because local community helps in finding out the resources and also in identifying environmental problems, the community can also start a movement on forest protection and other environmental issues in a more practical way with quick action. Community participation towards forests conservation/protection, management and afforestation programme is urgently needed.

In this context the following suggestions may be considered:

1. Environmental education must be given to the people in various forms through lectures, exhibitions, essay writing, seminars/workshops, discussions, documentaries, film shows on forest, its resources, economy etc.
2. Forest Departments of the respective state governments in the region must develop joint action plan towards such problems. Besides, there must be close collaboration and expertise with the Union Government and international agency on environment.
3. Adequate financial assistance needs to be accorded towards forest departments of the respective state governments so as to regulate and take prompt action.
4. Mass media and satellite mapping system through remote sensing of forest cover in the North-East is essential. Information from media to the Government and the community will be more effective in solving forest problems.
5. Rapid afforestation measures should be adopted by all states in the region as well by the public.

### **Conclusion**

Forests are the rich natural resources. Hence, they need to be given better consideration for sustainable development. Therefore, it is seen that one of the means to maintain

forest environment is through community awareness and participation. Community awareness can strengthen forest management measures undertaken by the Government and the Society.

### REFERENCES

1. Chopra, K., et al. 1990: *Participatory Development: People and Common Property Resources*. Sagar Publication, New Delhi.
2. Khoshoo, T.N. 1986. *Environment Priorities in India and Sustainable Development*. New Delhi.
3. Sharma Acharma. 1987. *Resources and Human Well-Being: Inputs from Science and Technology*, Bangalore.

MEMU LIBRARY  
Acc No... 239373  
Acc By... 8  
Date... 7/7/09  
Class by.....  
Sub.Heading by.....  
Enter by.....